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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

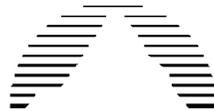
CONTENTS

Go Forward	2
The Prayers of the Apostles	5
<i>37. Colossians 1:9-12, Part 1</i>	
The Life and Times of Joshua.....	9
<i>17. The Ark (3:2-3)</i>	
The Doctrine of Revelation.....	13
<i>1. Introduction</i>	
<i>2. The Existence of God, Part 1</i>	
The Great Change, Part 1	17
Conviction of Sin	21
<i>(By the Holy Spirit, Issuing in Conversion)</i>	

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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow in their influence upon God's people around the world, through their clarity, careful exposition, and Christ-centeredness.

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GO FORWARD

Though the writer has passed the sixtieth milestone of life and completed a quarter of a century's hard but happy work on this magazine, yet he feels that "Go forward" (Exo 14:15) is the Lord's clamant word unto him at this time. If he should have acquired any laurels, he certainly does not wish to rest upon them; nor does he—while health and strength are granted—intend to moderate his own studies or relax in his efforts. It has long been his desire to wear out rather than rust out; or, to express it in Scripture language, to "very gladly spend and be spent" (2Co 12:15) in endeavouring to serve the Lord and minister to His beloved people. Nor could he warrantably look for any measure of realizing that desire if he slackened; rather should he seek to "Go forward" with increased earnestness and diligence—"redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:16). The more evil the days, the grander the opportunity for proving the sufficiency of God's grace, and the greater the privilege in serving His children.

"Go forward." Is not this a timely word for *each* of us as we enter a new year?—a suitable motto for us to keep in mind as we journey through (if God permit) 1947? We need to clearly realize there is no such thing as remaining stationary in the spiritual life: if we do not progress, we inevitably retrograde. How that solemn fact should search our hearts! Christian friend, your history this year will be either one of going forward or backsliding. This new year will mark either an increased fruitfulness in your soul and life to the glory of Him whose name you bear, or increased leanness and barrenness to His reproach. It will witness either a growing in grace or a decline in your spirituality. It will record either an increased love for the Word, use of the Throne of Grace, strictness of walk and closer communion with Christ, or a growing coldness and a following of Him afar off. O Christian reader, before reading any further, will you not now close your eyes and lift up your heart in earnest prayer for yourself and for all your brethren and sisters in Christ?

The historic occasion on which those words were uttered is noteworthy, and a brief consideration of the same the better enables us to make application of them unto ourselves. The situation confronting Israel was a hopeless one so far as they were concerned; and had not the Lord intervened, they had undoubtedly perished. After their exodus from Egypt, Pharaoh at the head of a great military force pursued and overtook them. With impassable obstacles on either side, the Red Sea in front, and the enemy in the rear, that company of ex-slaves with their wives and children were in a truly desperate plight, and death was all they expected (Exo 14:10, 12). Then it was that Moses said, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (Exo 14:13-14).

Those words, "stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD," have been grossly carnalized and grievously wrested by those who foster a fatalistic inertia. "Stand still" obviously has the force here of "be not dismayed, do not panic, keep calm," as the "hold your peace" shows. Then followed, "and see the salvation [deliverance] of the LORD," which signified, Lift up your hearts and eyes in the exercise of *faith*. But faith must have a foundation to rest upon, even the Word of Him that cannot lie; and hence, the sure promise was given, "which he will shew to you to day... The LORD shall fight for you." Previously, they had "lifted up their eyes" and beheld Egyptians (Exo 14:10); and in consequence, were sore afraid. But there was something else and some One else for faith to "see"—namely, the promised salvation or deliverance of Jehovah not yet visible to outward sight! If their faith were steadfastly occupied with *that*, their trembling hearts would be stilled, and strength obtained for the performance of duty or the discharge of their responsibility.

Then came the Divine order to Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Exo 14:15). That was a *challenge to faith*. To carnal reason, compliance appeared suicidal. To "Go forward" meant walking into the Red Sea—which, at that time, presented an unbroken mass of water. Ah, but they had been promised Divine deliverance. Yes, but God required them to lay hold of that promise and act on it. And they did: "By *faith* they passed through the Red sea as by dry land" (Heb 11:29). If "by faith," then certainly not "by sight"—the two things being opposed the one to the other (2Co 5:7). Not until they stepped out with confidence in God's Word did He appear for them and begin to open the waters; and as they continued onward, He continued to open a way for them. It is in response to the actings of faith that God works, for He never sets a premium on unbelief. Here, then, is the first signification of this word for us: "Go forward" with your heart resting on the sure promises of God and with the eyes of faith steadfastly fixed upon Him.

“Go forward.” Second, this was a *call to obedience*—namely, the obedience of “faith” (Rom 1:5). There was a command annexed to the promise: to prove them and show whether or not they had received the promise sincerely. There are certain grand benefits which God gives to His people without imposing any condition—such as the providing of a Redeemer who took our nature, fulfilled the Law, satisfied God’s provoked justice on our behalf, and merited grace sufficient for our salvation. But having laid this glorious foundation, God treats with us as moral agents, propounds to us a covenant which requires *our* cordial consent or agreement. Repentance and faith are required of us in order to the forgiveness of our sins. All through the Christian life, our concurrence is necessary. God requires from us faith in each of His promises and obedience to the commands annexed to them. Obedience is the path He has appointed and in which His blessing is to be found. We must follow the course He has prescribed if we would have Him show Himself strong on our behalf. If we honour His precepts, He will honour us. “Go forward,” then, in complete subjection to His revealed will, and walking according to His Word.

“Go forward.” Third, this was a *command to advance*. It was so to Israel; it is so unto us. Onward Christian soldiers! Steadfastly persevere along the path of duty, walking in that narrow way which the Divine precepts have marked out for us. No matter what be your condition and circumstances, what obstacles may confront you, what Red Sea of difficulty or danger be before you, “Go forward” is your marching orders. Raise no objections. “The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets” (Pro 22:13)—let no such idle excuse issue from your lips. Rather say, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi 4:13). When your heart fails, when your soul is well-nigh overwhelmed by the problem or task facing you, panic not, lift up the eyes of faith unto the Lord, realise He it is who bids you advance, go forward depending on His promise, and you will not be confounded.

Christ’s oft-repeated “follow me” is but another form of “Go forward.” So too is every exhortation for us to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord” (2Pe 3:18). We are ever in need of such a word, for we are prone to relax and take things easy—the more so as old age creeps upon us. Rest not satisfied with your present knowledge and apprehension of the Truth, but seek for a deeper and fuller one. Be not content with your present attainments, for “there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed” (Jos 13:1). The manna you gathered yesterday will not suffice for today. “Be not weary in well doing” (2Th 3:13). “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luk 9:62). Let the prayerful resolve of each of us be: “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phi 3:13-14). Beg God to write this word in your heart.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

37. *Colossians 1:9-12, Part 1*

One chief reason why the Holy Spirit has placed on permanent record so many of the prayers of the apostles is that the saints of all succeeding generations might receive instructions therefrom. The subject-matter of their petitions imply and denote the following things. First, that what they requested for the saints are the particular things which Christians in all ages are to specially desire, prize, and seek an increase of. Second, that God alone can impart, sustain, and promote such blessings and graces. Third, that we too should not only ask for these favours, but must diligently strive after the realisation of them. Prayer was never designed to excuse apathy, nor to relieve us of the discharge of our responsibility. We are insincere if we cry unto God for certain things and do nothing ourselves to seek and secure them. A healthy man who prayed for his daily bread and then remained idle would be mocking God. To ask the Lord not to lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil, and then to carelessly trifle with sin and fellowship with the ungodly, is nothing but hypocrisy. To make request for more light from the Word or a fuller understanding of the Divine will, and not continue diligently searching the Scriptures and meditating on its contents, is reprehensible.

It has been pointed out in the earlier articles that in each instance, the substance of the apostle's prayer was regulated by the particular case or condition of each separate company of saints for which he made supplication—teaching us that one prayer is more pertinent and suitable to a Christian, or a group of Christians, at one time or circumstance than another. While having much in common, the various local churches of which we have any account in the New Testament differed in several respects—in their graces, trials, and failures—as the apostles did from one another. Though alike in essentials, they were dissimilar in circumstantials. The church at Colosse was no exception. Instead of its members being harassed by Judaisers, as were the Corinthians, they were in danger of being corrupted by the Gnostics. False teachers were seeking to rob the former of their *liberty* in Christ, while austere ascetics and subtle philosophers were endeavouring to deprive the latter of that *simplicity* which is in Christ. Indications of this are found in Colossians 2:4, 8, 18, 20-23. Paul therefore prayed here more concerning the practical aspect of the Christian life.

There is no clear and direct Scriptural evidence that the apostle Paul was ever in Colosse, and still less, that he founded the first Christian assembly there. The general testimony of antiquity favours the view that Epaphras, sent by Paul from Ephesus, was the one who carried the Gospel to that city and organized its church. As Matthew Henry well pointed out, “God is sometimes pleased to make use of the ministry of those who are of less note and lower gifts for doing great service to His Church. God uses what hands He pleases and is not tied to those of note, that the “excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2Co 4:7). But the ancient opinion was considerably controverted during the past century, appeal being made to Acts 18:23—Colosse being in Phrygia. But as the point is not one of any practical importance, we shall not enter into any further discussion of it—except to say that we consider the apostle's statement, “For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh” (Col 2:1), as far more decisive than the inference drawn from Acts 18:23.

Though Paul was not the planter of this church yet, he was far from being indifferent to its welfare, nor did he make any difference between it and those which he had personally founded. Those who had been converted under others were as dear to him as were his own converts—O, for more of his large-heartedness. His deep solicitude for the Colossians is evinced by the trouble which he took in writing an epistle unto them. A careful reading of its contents makes it evident that it was penned in view of certain errors which extensively prevailed among the churches of that part of Asia Minor, and some knowledge—a general understanding at least—of those errors is necessary in order to correctly interpret some of the details of this epistle. Those errors consisted of a mixture of Grecian philosophy (Col 2:4-8) and Jewish ceremonialism (Col 2:16)—a type of Gnosticism which was really a Grecianized form of Oriental mysticism. The chief design of the apostle in this epistle was to assert the superior claims of Christianity over all philosophies, and its independence of the peculiar rites and customs of Judaism.

The best summary we have met with of this prayer is that furnished by Thomas Scott (1747-1821): “He especially requested that they might be ‘filled’ or ‘completely endowed with’ the knowledge of the will of God: both in respect of His method of saving sinners and their duties to Him and to all men as His

redeemed servants; that they might understand the import and spiritual extent of His commandments, and how to obey them in the several relationships, situations, and offices which they sustained in the church and in the community, and for the improvement of their different talents. That they might know how to apply general rules to their own particular cases, and so do the work of Christ assigned to each of them in the best manner, from the purest motives and with the happiest effect. Thus, they would proceed 'in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,' with sagacity and prudent discernment of seasons and opportunities, distinguishing between real excellency and all deceitful appearances; wisely attending to their duties in the most inoffensive and engaging manner, without affording their enemies any advantage, or losing opportunities of usefulness out of timidity, or failing of success through want of caution and discretion."

"He was desirous of this especially, that they might habitually behave in a manner worthy of that glorious and holy Lord, whose servants and worshippers they were: not dishonouring Him or His cause by any inconsistency or impropriety of conduct, but acting as became persons so highly favoured and Divinely instructed; and that their conduct might in all respects be well-pleasing to Him, while fruitfulness in every kind of good work was connected with a still further increase in the knowledge of God, and of the glory and harmony of His perfections, and a happy experience of His consolations. The apostle and his helpers prayed also that the Colossians might be most abundantly strengthened in all the graces of the new nature with an energy suited to their utmost need, according to the glorious power of God by which He converted, upheld, and comforted believers; that so they might be enabled to bear all their tribulations and persecutions with patient submission, persevering constancy, meekness of longsuffering, and joy in the Lord. While, amidst all trials, they gave thanks to the Father of our Lord Jesus, whose special grace had made them meet to partake of the inheritance provided for the saints in the world of perfect light, knowledge, holiness, and happiness; at a distance from all ignorance, error, sin, temptation, and sorrow."

Before considering it in detail, let us first give a brief analysis of this prayer. (1) Its *Address*. The majority of writers appear to regard this prayer as being one without an address, but this we consider is a mistake. It is true that none is found at the beginning of Colossians 1:9, but that was not necessary, since verse 3, the apostle had said, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you." (2) Its *Supplicators*. In contrast, with the "I" of Ephesians 1:15, and Philippians 1:9-10, this proceeds from a "we"—Paul himself, Timothy (Col 1:1), Epaphras (Col 1:7) who was with him (Phm :23), and possibly others. (3) Its *Occasion* or spring: "For this cause." Probably the saints at Colosse had sent their minister, Epaphras, to learn the apostle's mind on certain matters, a summary of which is intimated in this prayer. Moreover, the knowledge of their "love in the Spirit" unto them (Col 1:8) had drawn out their affections, which were now expressed in fervent supplications for them. (4) Its *Petitions*, wherein request is made that they might be intelligent Christians, pious, strong, and thankful ones.

In regard to the character of those petitions, we behold once more the breadth or comprehensiveness of the requests which Paul was wont to make for the saints. The "large petitions" which he spread before God were a marked feature in all his approaches unto the Throne of Grace on behalf of God's people; and it is one which we need to take to heart and emulate. For the saints at Rome, he had prayed that God would fill them "with *all* joy and peace in believing, that ye may *abound* in hope" (Rom 15:13). For the Ephesians, that they might be "filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:19). For the Philippians, that their "love may abound yet more and more" and be "filled with the fruits of righteousness" (Phi 1:9-11). So here: not merely that they might have a knowledge of God's will in wisdom, but "be *filled* with the knowledge of his will in *all wisdom*," etc. (Col 1:19); not a bare and general request that their conduct should adorn the Gospel, but rather that they "might walk worthy of the Lord unto *all* pleasing, being fruitful in every good work" (Col 1:10). How different is this large-heartedness of the apostle from that cramped spirit which obtains in those quarters which pride themselves on being so "sound in the faith."

Once more, we would press upon the reader the great importance of paying good heed to the order of their petitions if he would rightly apprehend and duly appreciate these prayers; and usually, this is best accomplished by considering them in their *inverse order*. Let us do this with the one now before us. We are in no fit condition to be "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col 1:12); yea, we lack an essential part of the evidence that we have been "made...meet to be partakers" of it, if we are not exercising "all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness" (Col 1:11) despite the difficulties and trials of the way. Nor will such graces as those be active, except we first be "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power" (Col 1:11). But that, in turn, is dependent upon our "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:10). Yet that will not be our hap-

py experience, except we “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:10). And how can we possibly do *that* unless, previously, we are filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding?

“For this cause [the declaration of their love] we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you [which is the most effective way of reciprocating Christian affection], and to desire [“make request for you”—Revised Version] that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). As just intimated above, in order to discern and appreciate the force of this opening petition, it is necessary to observe the relation which it bears to those that follow: it is related to them as cause to effect. As our being granted “the spirit of wisdom and revelation” in the knowledge of God (Eph 1:17) is required in order to the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, that we may know what is “the hope of his calling” (Eph 1:18); as our being “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16) must precede Christ’s dwelling in our hearts by faith, our being rooted and grounded in love, and our being filled with the fullness of God; and as their “love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” (Phi 1:9) is indispensable, if we are to approve things that are excellent; and that we be “sincere and without offence,” so to be “filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” is essential, if we are to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing being fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:9-10).

“That ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). For the Ephesian saints, the apostle had prayed that they might know “the exceeding greatness” of God’s *power* (Eph 1:19), both as it worked in them and wrought for them; but here, he asks for a knowledge of His *will*. To be without such knowledge is like the captain of a ship starting out on a long voyage without a chart, or for builders to erect a house or factory with no architectural plan to guide them. With rare exceptions, when we read in the Epistles of “the will of God,” the reference is to His revealed and not His secret will, His authoritative and not His providential—His will as made known unto us in the Scripture of Truth. Neither his understanding, conscience, nor “new nature” is sufficient to serve the Christians as the director of his ways. It is in His *Word* that God’s authoritative will is discovered to us: there and there alone do we have an all-sufficient and infallible Guide—a Lamp unto our feet, a Light unto our path. To be filled with a knowledge of the Divine will should not only be the main burden of our daily prayers, but the principal quest of our lives: to obtain a better, closer, fuller knowledge of what God requires from us. Without that, we can neither please nor glorify Him, nor shall we escape the innumerable pitfalls in our path.

At least three things are implied by the wording of this opening petition. First, that by nature, we are *devoid* of such knowledge: before regeneration, we are actuated only by self-will and Satanic suggestions—“we have turned every one to *his own way*” (Isa 53:6). Second, that to become “filled with the knowledge of God’s will” is a gradual process, for the filling of a vessel is accomplished by degrees, by steady increase. And thus, it is with the Christian: “Precept upon precept...line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isa 28:13). Third, that it is our bounden duty to become so furnished, yet that constant recourse must be had to the Throne of Grace for Divine assistance therein. Ignorance is deplorable and inexcusable, yet wisdom cometh from Above and must be diligently sought. To be “filled with the knowledge of his will” (Col 1:9) imports a comprehensive and abundant knowledge, as well as a well-proportioned one. That for which the apostle here made request was something intensely *practical*: not speculations about the Divine nature, prying into the Divine decrees; nor inquisitive explorations of unfulfilled prophecy; but the knowledge of God’s will, as it respects the ordering of our daily walk in this world. As one has said, “The knowledge of our duty is the best knowledge.” “That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good (Pro 19:2).

It is a most serious mistake to suppose that at regeneration, the understanding is enlightened once for all, that it is so completely illumined as to be in no further need of Divine assistance afterwards; as it is to imagine the surrender of our will unto God at conversion was so entire, that it is unnecessary for the saint to daily renew his consecration unto Him. Such errors are manifestly refuted by that prayer of David’s, “With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments” (Psa 119:10). Though he had fully yielded himself unto the Lord and had made more than ordinary progress in godliness, yet he felt himself to be in deep need of perpetual quickening, directing, and upholding, lest he lose the knowledge he already possessed and backslide from that course upon which he had entered. The truth is that the more experience we have of God’s ways, the more sensible do we become of our deplorable proneness to wander from Him. On the other hand, the more we truly seek God with the whole heart, the more will our

spiritual light be increased, for it is by a closer walking with Him that we obtain a clearer and fuller apprehension of His holiness; and that, in turn, makes us more conscious of our defects, for it is in His light we see light.

Such a longing after the knowledge of God's will as this prayer breathes is that of every healthy saint. The more knowledge he obtains of God's will, the more aware does he become of his ignorance. And why is this the case?—because he has acquired a larger concept of his duty. At first, Christian consciousness of duty consists more in the general than in its details, more of the outward walk and the external acts of worship, more of quantity than of quality. But ere long, he discovers that God requires him to regulate the inner man and subdue his soul unto Him; yea, he learns that this is the *principal task* assigned him—about which the majority of professors know nothing and care less, concerned only with the outward adornment of the sepulchre. It is as the believer more and more realizes the breadth of God's commandment (Psa 119:96) and the exceeding spirituality of His Law (Rom 7:14) that he becomes painfully conscious of how far, far short he falls of discharging his responsibilities, and how sadly he has failed in this and that respect. Nevertheless, such a humbling discovery is evidence that his sense of duty has been enlarged, and that his own inability to perform it is the more apparent to him.

As a closer walking with God begets an enlarged sense of duty, so too it produces an increased realization of the difficulties attending the performance of it. As the natural man in his youth is full of vigour and hope, and in his inexperience and impetuosity, rushes into engagements for which he is unqualified and is forward to rashly embark upon ventures which later he is sorry for; so the young Christian, all afire with affection and zeal, attempts tasks for which he is ill-fitted, and then is made to smart for acting presumptuously. But in the school of experience, he discovers something of his ignorance, his weakness, the inconstancy of his heart, and learns to distinguish between the natural energy of the flesh and true spirituality. God has made him to know somewhat of wisdom "in the hidden part" (Psa 51:6), which works in him self-diffidence and a holy fear. He becomes more dependent upon God, more diligent in mortifying his lusts, more humble in his approaches unto the Throne of Grace, more frequent in crying, "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law" (Psa 119:34).

Thus, the babe in Christ will not advance very far along the Christian path before he realises how perfectly suited unto his case is the opening petition of this prayer. To be filled with the knowledge of God's will becomes his ever-deepening desire; and that, "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col 1:9). Those added words intimate, first, the sort of knowledge for which the Christian is to pray and strive: not merely a theoretical, but an experimental; not simply in the letter, but the power of it; an inward, affectionate, operative knowledge wrought in the soul by God. As we saw when examining Philippians 1:9, light is needed to direct our graces—to instruct them that they may act judiciously. Heavenly wisdom is required that love may have a proper sense of the relative worth of objects, and suitable guidance in every instance of its exercise. Holy affections are no more all heat without light than are the rays of the sun, but are induced by some spiritual instruction received into the mind. The child of God is graciously affected when he perceives and understands something more than he did formerly of the character of God, the sufficiency of Christ, the glorious things exhibited in the Gospel. Such knowledge of those Objects is accompanied by and produces in him heavenly wisdom and spiritual understanding.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

17. The Ark (3:2-3)

In our November article, we pointed out that in order to profit from its *practical* teaching—which should ever be our first quest and aim in the reading of God’s Word—we need to view Israel’s crossing of the Jordan as the Christian’s surmounting of any formidable obstacle confronting him. In His providential dealings with us, God brings us into situations from which we are unable to extricate ourselves by any endeavours of our own wit or strength. Nor does He appear immediately for our deliverance, any more than He did for Israel’s, who were required to gaze upon that unfordable river for three days before any solution of their dilemma was vouchsafed them. In like manner, the Lord so orders our affairs that at times, we are brought to the end of our own resources and made conscious of our utter insufficiency. It is by such experiences that our pride is humbled and our faith developed, our own weakness realised, and the sufficiency of Divine grace proved. It is on such occasions we discover that the Lord is “a very present help in trouble” (Psa 46:1) and that the things which are impossible for us present no difficulty unto Him. It is only as we are brought to the end of ourselves that we learn to really look outside of ourselves and turn unto Him who never fails those who fully trust Him.

In our last, we called the reader’s attention to the fact that the Jordan is the symbol of death, and *that* must be passed through before Canaan can be entered—i.e. ere the Christian can experimentally enjoy his spiritual heritage in this life. That is accomplished by the exercise of faith and the operation of the spirit of obedience: faith appropriating the doctrinal declarations of Scripture; obedience being regulated by its precepts. Legally, the saint *has* “passed from death unto life” (Joh 5:24), for in the Person of His Surety, He received the wages of sin at the Cross and came forth from the grave entitled to the reward of the Law. Thus all believers are informed, “For in that he died [as the Surety of His people], he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God”; and therefore they are bidden, “Likewise [by faith] reckon [account] ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:10-11). That legal oneness of the believer with Christ in death and resurrection is to be made good practically; and what *that* entails is summed up in that word of His, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mat 16:24).

Self must be set aside ere Christ can be followed. Lusts have to be mortified ere graces become fruitful. We have to die unto self before we can live unto Christ. But what is meant by dying unto self? Giving it no place, denying it. To deny self is to repudiate our own righteousness, to distrust our own wisdom, to disown our own strength. To deny self is to renounce all self-will and self-pleasing. To “take up his cross” signifies much the same thing—the saint being required to order his life by the principle of self-sacrifice; and both of these are necessary in order to a real “following” of Christ—emulating His example, subject to His will, obeying Him in all things. The same truth is set before us again in 2 Corinthians 5:15: “He died for all, that they which live [legally and federally in Him their Head] should not henceforth live unto themselves [rather denying themselves], but [practically] unto him which died for them, and rose again.” Said Paul, “For to me to live is Christ”: He is my Lord, my Object, my Portion. To be wholly ruled by Him, to be entirely devoted to Him, to promote His glory, is my ambition and endeavour.

It needs to be pointed out that only a regenerate soul is capacitated to meet the requirements of Matthew 16:24. First, because one who is yet dead in trespasses and sins has no love or desire for Christ. Second, because we ourselves must be on resurrection ground in order to “follow” a risen Christ; and before that can be, the soul must—by the supernatural and gracious operations of the Holy Spirit—pass from death unto life experimentally. Observe how this is typed out in Joshua 3: “And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host; And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it” (Jos 3:2-3). The ark was a figure of Christ; Israel’s going after it adumbrated our “following” Him. But it was not until “after three days” they followed the ark dryshod across the Jordan, and “after three days” speaks of *resurrection* (Mat 27:63)!

“The ark” pointed to the Lord Jesus; but as previously intimated, it is important that we should ascertain in what *particular character* Christ was here prefigured. The ark is mentioned first in Exodus 25:10-22, where detailed instructions were given for its manufacture, and concerning the mercy-seat which formed its lid. It was slightly over four and a half feet in length and about two and a half feet in breadth and

height. The deep significance and sanctity of this holy vessel was signified unto Israel (and us) in various ways. When Jehovah gave instructions to Moses about the making of the tabernacle, He began with the ark: it came first in order because it was of the first importance. Before any details were communicated respecting the sanctuary itself—before a word was said about its court and chambers, its priesthood and ritual, its furniture and garniture—minute directions were given regarding the ark. Without the ark, the whole service of the tabernacle had been meaningless and valueless—for it was upon it, as His throne, that God dwelt. The ark was the object to which the brazen altar pointed, the sacrifice of which gave right of access to the worshipper who drew near unto the ark representatively in the person of the high priest.

The ark was the first of the holy vessels to be made and was made by Moses himself (Deu 10:1-5), being the chest in which the tables of the Law were preserved. Its pre-eminence above all the other vessels was shown again in the days of Solomon, for the ark alone was transferred from the tabernacle to the temple: "It was the most sacred of all the instruments of the sanctuary; yea, the whole sanctuary was built for no other end but to be as it were a house, a habitation for the ark (see Exo 26:33). Hence, sanctification proceeded from all the parts of it, for, as Solomon observed, the places were holy whereunto the ark of God came (2Ch 8:11)"—Adolph Saphir (1831-1891). Now this pre-eminence of the ark is explained by the fact that it shadowed out the *Person* of Christ. Each of the other vessels in the tabernacle pointed to some aspect of His work, or its effects; but the ark spoke of the blessed Person of the God-man Mediator: they foreshadowed what He should do; this, what He *is*. The two natures in His theanthropic Person were adumbrated by the two materials of which the ark was made: its gold, His Divine glory; its shittim-wood, His holy and indestructible humanity. It was the ineffable Person of Christ which gave value to His work.

In its emblematic significance, the ark was, first of all, the witness of Jehovah's presence in the midst of His people: "And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony" (Exo 25:22). That was Jehovah's throne, founded upon righteousness and mercy: "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims" was how the Psalmist thought of Him (Psa 80:1). Hence, when Jehovah departed from Israel, the ark was carried into captivity (1Sa 2:32, 4:11; Psa 78:60-61). Second, it was the centre and means of Israel's communion with God, and it made known how He was to be worshipped and the manner in which He was to be approached by them (Lev 16:12-14; Heb 9:11-14). Third, it was the symbol of Jehovah's relations with His people, inasmuch as by the richness of its composition and the supreme importance of its contents; together with its staves and rings (to be used when journeying), it embodied typically to Israel's faith the coming forth from heaven of God manifest in flesh, tabernacling among men. Fourth, it was the embodiment of the Lord's covenant with Israel, which was more especially made manifest in the sight of their enemies.

In the book of Exodus, it is always called "the ark" or "the ark of testimony"; in Leviticus, it is mentioned but once—"the ark." But in Numbers 10:33-35, it is designated "the ark of the covenant"; and like all *first* mentionings, that one is worthy of special attention: "And they departed from the mount of the LORD three days' journey: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them" (Num 10:33). Very beautiful and blessed is that. Lovely type was it of the Good Shepherd going before His sheep (Joh 10:4), leading them into green pastures and making them to lie down beside the still waters (Psa 23:2). Observe the repeated reference unto the "three days' journey," for it is only on resurrection ground that such an experience is enjoyed, just as it is only there—and not in Egypt—that any can worship God acceptably (Exo 3:18). There is no "resting place" for anyone in a world that lieth in the Wicked One and which is under the curse of the holy God: all is turmoil and travail there. None but their Covenant-head can lead God's people into peace, contentment, and joy in this life; and none but He can bring them into their eternal rest—of which they have but an earnest and foretaste here.

But the preciousness of the above type is partly lost upon us, unless we attend to the context in which it is found—the opening "and" of Numbers 10:33 calls to this. First, it should be duly noted that in Numbers 9:18-23, reference is made to that notable instance of Jehovah's grace and faithfulness in having provided Israel with the cloud to guide them in their journey through the wilderness—the cloud pointing out the direction in which they were to go, intimating where they should encamp and when they should go forward again. Second, observe the failure of Moses. Forgetful of the Lord's promise to be their Guide, he desired to lean upon an arm of flesh, saying to his father-in-law, "Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and *thou* mayest be to us instead of eyes" (Num 10:31).

Alas, what is man, even the best of men! Then it was that the Lord intervened to maintain His glory, the ark of the covenant going before them in a three days' journey to search out a resting place for Israel. The keenest human eyes, the most mature human wisdom, is of no avail there.

There is only one other historical reference to "the ark of the *covenant*" in the Pentateuch; and that is in Numbers 14, which chronicles one of the blackest chapters in Israel's chequered history—namely, their fatal unbelief and rebellion at Kadesh-barnea, when they refused to heed the counsel of Caleb and Joshua to go in and possess their inheritance; when they exclaimed, "Would God we had died in this wilderness!" and said one to another, "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt" (Num 14:2, 4). "They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law" (Psa 78:10). For the benefit of new readers, we must repeat what was pointed out in our last: Israel's breaking of the covenant at once released the Lord from making good unto *that* perverse generation His declarations unto Abraham; and therefore He told them, "Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness...And your children shall wander in the wilderness...and ye shall know my breach of promise" (Num 14:29-34). Later, in their self-will, they determined to go up into Canaan, and though told not to do so, they persisted (to their bitter cost): "Nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp" (Num 14:44)!

The forty years' wandering in the wilderness had expired with the death of Moses, and all whose sins occasioned that judgment had also died. It was *the new* and younger generation of Israel over which Joshua was placed, and now a fresh chapter opened in the history of that nation. Joshua had received express promise that the Lord had given Canaan unto that generation (Jos 1:2-5); and he had communicated the same unto the people (Jos 1:11), yet that did not exempt them from the discharge of their duty—any more than the assurance, "my God shall supply all your need" (Phi 4:19) provides a dispensation for us to be indolent or improvident. The guarantee that the Lord will fight for His people is designed to stir them up to be faithful and courageous. His promise to be our Shield and Defence would be grievously perverted if we deliberately trifled with sin and recklessly exposed ourselves to danger. If we would have the Lord show Himself strong in our behalf, then we must keep strictly to His "due order" (1Ch 15:13, and compare Lev 10:1). This comes out plainly in Joshua 3—implicit obedience from Israel was required before Jehovah put forth His mighty power and wrought a miracle for them.

"And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host; And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it" (Jos 3:2-3). They were not left in ignorance nor any uncertainty of what was required from them. No carnal reasoning or scheming on their part was necessary. Definite instruction was given what to do and when to do it. They were bidden to fix their eyes upon the ark and regulate their actions by its movements. But note well the title by which it was here designated: not barely "the ark," but "the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God." *That* enforced their responsibility—for a "covenant" is a compact or engagement entered into between two or more parties (Gen 31:44; Luk 22:4-5). Israel entered into a solemn agreement with the Lord at Sinai (Exo 19:1-6; 24:1-8), which they bound themselves to keep, but which the first generation broke. The ten commandments were the *terms* of that covenant (Deu 4:13), and the ark was the seal and custodian of it.

Israel's being required to steadfastly eye and follow the ark through the Jordan signified, then, their dependence upon and confidence in the Lord, their subjection and obedience to His Law, their keeping of the covenant, and their eyeing of the propitiatory which formed the cover of the ark. Only as such graces were active, and as they were regulated by those principles, could they—by God's intervention and blessing—enter into their heritage. The ark, as its name here connoted, was the token of the covenant, and also the pledge of Jehovah's protection, so long as they walked in obedience to Him. It was not Israel who kept the ark, but the ark—or rather the God of the ark—who preserved them, as is quite clear from Numbers 14:44-45—for as soon as they acted in defiance of His revealed will, the symbol of His presence accompanied them not, and defeat and disaster was the consequence. The Holy One will not be the Patron and Guardian of a sinful people: rather than *that*, He will surrender His manifestative glory into the hands of the enemy (1Sa 3:10-11), as He has suffered the apostate "churches" to become the laughing-stock of the world. So it is individually: I shall experience God's providential frowns, rather than smiles, if I follow a course of self-will and self-pleasing.

In the keeping of God's commandments, "there is great reward" (Psa 19:11). No change of dispensation alters that basic fact: "That it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the LORD our God" (Jer 42:6). "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to

come” (1Ti 4:8). “Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, *because* we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1Jo 3:22). There is no prosperity in his spiritual life and no experimental entering into his spiritual heritage until the Christian makes conscience of ordering his life by the Divine precepts. Unless he continues as he began and maintains that whole-hearted surrender to Christ which marked his conversion, then rest of soul will no longer be enjoyed by him, nor will the Lord put forth His power and subdue his enemies. We may dolefully sing, “Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?” but the answer thereto is not far to seek: there has been no change in Him! If that “blessedness” be no longer mine, it is because I have changed, because I have departed from the Lord. To realise that and mourn over it will get you nowhere; the remedy is, “*Return* unto thy rest, O my soul” (Psa 116:7)—take His yoke upon you afresh, and walk with Him in the paths of righteousness.

Ere proceeding further, we must now do what lack of space prevented in the last two articles—namely, point out how the several details in this incident indicate how we may overcome any formidable obstacle, or secure a passage through any “Jordan” that may confront us: (1) In order thereto we are required to gaze upon it until conscious of our utter insufficiency. (2) We are not to lean unto our own understanding or resort to any carnal expediency, but be regulated only by the Word of God. (3) The path of duty is clearly marked out for us; and if we recognise it not, the fault is ours. (4) We are to move forward in “newness of life” (Rom 6:4) as regenerated persons. (5) Our eye is to be steadfastly fixed upon our covenant—God. (6) We are to act in implicit obedience unto His instructions. (7) We are to walk by faith, counting upon the Lord, expecting Him to put forth His wonder-working power on our behalf. In such case, He will not fail us and victory will be ours.

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

1. Introduction

During the past fifteen years, we have devoted nearly a quarter of this magazine to an expository unfolding of some portion of doctrinal truth, and were it possible to re-live those years, we should not alter that plan. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 mentions some of the principal uses and values, which the sacred Scriptures possess for us; and the first mentioned is that they are “profitable for *doctrine*.” There is an inseparable connection between doctrine and deportment: our convictions mould our characters; what we believe largely determines how we act—“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Pro 23:7). To be soundly indoctrinated and to be well grounded in the Truth is one and the same thing; and nothing but the Truth operating in the soul will preserve from error—either theoretical or practical. Of the primitive Christians, it is said, “They continued steadfastly [1] in the apostles’ doctrine and [2] fellowship, and [3] in breaking of bread, and [4] in prayers” (Act 2:42)—which at once indicates that they esteemed soundness in the Faith as of first importance; and were of a radically different spirit from those who are so indifferent to the fundamentals of Christianity—who insinuate, if not openly say, “It matters little what a man believes if his life be good.”

The relation between sound doctrine and godly deportment is like unto that between the bones and flesh of the body, or between the tree and the fruit which it bears: the latter cannot exist without the former. The first epistle of the New Testament exemplifies our remark: three-fourths of it is occupied with a laying down of the essentials of Christianity; ere the apostle shows what is the requisite for the adornment of the Christian character. The history of Christendom during the last four centuries strikingly illustrates our contention. Examine the writings of the Reformers, and what do you find? Why, that exposition of *doctrine* held the foremost place in their ministry: *that* was the light which God used to deliver so great a part of Europe from the popish ignorance and superstition which characterized “the dark ages”! The moral tendency upon the masses, and the spiritual blessings communicated to God’s people by doctrinal preaching, appear in the time of the Puritans. Since that day—in proportion as the churches have departed from *their* doctrinal fidelity and zeal—has close walking with God, purity and uprightness before men, and morality in the masses declined.

Each of our previous doctrinal discussion has taken one thing for granted—namely, that the Scriptures (to which we constantly appealed) are the inspired Word of God. Until recently, the majority of our readers were residents of the U.S.A.; and since there was available a book which we had published there on that basic and vital subject, there was the less need for us to write thereon in these pages. Moreover, we were fully justified in taking a belief of that truth for granted, for the inerrancy and Divine authority of Holy Writ is a settled axiom with all true Christians, seeing that it constitutes the foundation of all their faith and the ground of all their hope. But since our book on the Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures is not at present obtainable by our British and Australian readers (for we decline to handle it while the disparity between the pound and the dollar persists), and since the tides of scepticism and infidelity continue to advance and constitute such a solemn menace unto the young, we feel moved to make an effort to show how strong and how sure are the foundations on which the faith of the Christian rests.

What we purpose doing in the next few articles of this series—namely, make a serious attempt to assist some of those who have inhaled the poisonous fumes of infidelity and been left in a state of mental indecision concerning sacred things—is something quite different from the course we usually follow in these pages. Yet in view of the bewilderment and uncertainty of many, and the shaken faith of others, it appears our duty to do so; and we trust our friends will make a point of reading these unto those of their children likely to need them, and that preachers will feel free to use portions of them in preparing special sermons or addresses for the young. Our principal object will be to set forth some of the numerous indications that the Bible is something far superior to any human production; but before doing that, we must seek to establish the existence of its Divine Author. The later articles will be designed chiefly for preachers or older students of the Word, presenting as they will, some of the rules which require to be heeded if the Scriptures are to be properly interpreted; and though their scope will go beyond the general title of “Divine revelation,” yet they will complement and complete the earlier ones.

Under our present title, then, we purpose to treat (D.V.) of that revelation which God has given, or that discovery which He makes of Himself unto the sons of men. If we were writing a comprehensive and sys-

tematic treatise on the whole subject, we should devote a proportionate space unto the manifestations which God has made of Himself; first, in creation, or the external world; second, in the moral nature—particularly the conscience—of man; third, in the controlling and shaping of human history by providence; fourth, in His incarnate Son; fifth, in the sacred Scriptures; sixth, in the saving revelation which He makes of Himself unto the souls of His regenerate people; finally, in the beatific vision, when we shall know even as also we are known (1Co 13:12). But, instead, we shall deal more briefly with the first four, and concentrate chiefly upon the Scriptures, presenting some of the evidences of their Divine Authorship; then pointing out some of the principles which govern their right interpretation; and then the application which is to be made of their contents. This is a considerable task to essay, rendered the more difficult because we desire to hold the interest of, and (under God) make these articles profitable unto, a considerable variety of readers—young and old, believers and unbelievers.

The present generation has, for the most part, been reared not only in an atmosphere of negative unbelief, but of hostile unbelief. They live in a world where materialism and scepticism are rampant and dominant. In the great majority of homes, the Sunday newspaper is the only thing read on the Lord's Day. Doubt as to moral and spiritual truth is distilled through a score of channels. Our seats of learning are hotbeds of agnosticism. Our literature, with rare exceptions, makes light of God, and jokes about sacred things. The newspapers, the radio broadcasts, public utterances, and private converse are steadily but surely removing the foundations of righteousness, and destroying what little faith in spiritual things still remains. The vast majority in the English-speaking world are totally ignorant of the contents of the Bible, and know not that it is a Divine revelation; yea, they question whether there be any God at all. Yet modern scepticism is rarely candid, but is rather a refuge in which multitudes are sheltering from an accusing conscience. With such, we are not here concerned, for where a prejudiced mind and a caviling spirit obtain, argument is useless; and we can but leave them unto the sovereign mercy of the Lord.

Even those brought up in Christian homes are being corrupted by the paganism of modern education, are bewildered by the conflicting teachings they receive from parents and the school, and are harassed by doubts. Some of them are honestly seeking a resolving of their doubts; and it has become a pressing duty devolving upon the servant of God to recognize the mental conflict taking place in the minds of his youthful hearers, and seek to meet their more immediate need by presenting some of the "Christian evidences." It is therefore our desire—and will be our endeavour in the earlier articles of this series—to be of some help unto those who may have become entangled in Satan's snares, who have been seriously disturbed by the infidelity of this age, but are willing to carefully examine some of the "strong reasons" by which it is rational to believe in the existence of a living and personal God and to receive the Scriptures as an authoritative and inerrant revelation from Him; and that it is not only the most horrible impiety, but the height of irrationality, to doubt the one or call into question the other.

There are some likely to deem our present procedure as being needless—if not actually wrong—considering that the existence of God and the authority of His Word are matters to be reverently believed and not argued; yet though we respect their conviction, we do not share the same. We fully agree that a rational discussion cannot produce anything but a rational faith, but even *that* should not be despised. Something has been accomplished if we can take away a stumbling block from the path of inquirers: the removal of weeds is necessary to prepare the garden for the seed. Though no external evidence, however weighty, can savingly convert the soul, it can carry conviction to the reason and conscience. Such arguments as we propose to submit are sufficient in themselves to beget in the mind a sober, intelligent, and firm judgment that there is a God and that the Bible is His inspired Word. It is much to be thankful for if we can bring the serious minded to respect and read the Scriptures, waiting for a spiritual confirmation. Intellectual persuasives and motives of credibility are not the ground on which a spiritual faith rests, yet they often prove (under the Divine blessing) a paving of the way thereunto.

Nor is an appeal unto external evidences of the Truth—which address themselves to, and are apprehended by, the reasoning faculty of our minds—without value to the child of God. They are confirmatory of his faith, support it against the oppositions and objections of others, and relieve the mind under temptations to doubt. In such a day as this, the young Christian especially needs all the help he can obtain in order to withstand the assaults of the Enemy. Even older ones are prone to give way to doubting, and cannot be too strongly established in the fundamentals of the Faith. Moreover, such a course serves to exhibit the excellency of our profession and the impregnable rock on which it is founded. It enables us to perceive what good grounds and satisfactory confirmations we have for the Faith which we avow. Wisdom is justified of

her children (Mat 11:19), and it behoves them to be equipped to justify their profession, if for no other reason than to close the mouths of gain-sayers. A Christian should be capable of knowing and giving expression to the distinct and special reasons why he believes in God and reveres His Word—that he has something more substantial and valuable than human “tradition” to appeal unto.

Before entering upon our immediate task, it should be acknowledged that it is not possible to prove the existence of God by mathematical demonstration, for if such proof were procurable, there would be no room left for the exercise of faith. Yet, on the other hand, it must be pointed out that it is equally impossible to demonstrate the non-existence of the Creator. But though we cannot prove to a demonstration that God is, yet we can adduce evidence so clear and weighty as must impel, if not compel, us to accept His existence as a fact. Those evidences, when carefully pondered separately and together, afford the strongest possible ground for believing in the Divine Maker of heaven and earth: the probability actually amounting to the height of moral certainty. There are certain great facts of Nature which call for an explanation, such as the existence of matter, the existence of motion, and the existence of life. The heathen had sufficient perspicuity to realize *Ex nihilo nihil fit*—from nothing, nothing comes—and if we reject the truth that “the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Heb 11:3), then we are left in complete darkness, without any hope of obtaining any satisfactory explanation of either the noumenon or phenomenon of existence.

Most careful consideration ought to be given unto *the alternative offered* by unbelief. The great enigma which has confronted the human race throughout the centuries, and challenged its sages to supply a solution, is the problem of the universe: how it came to be; and within that macrocosm, the microcosm man—his origin, his intelligence, his destiny. Every explanation that has been advanced—save only the one provided by the Bible—fails to carry conviction to the mind, much less meets the longings of the heart. But the Bible supplies a solution of those problems, which has satisfied the reason and conscience of millions of people; yea, which has brought peace and joy to a countless number of souls. Sceptics have indeed rejected its explanation, but what have they offered in its place? Nothing but agnostic doubts and metaphysical vagaries so abstruse that none can understand them; or speculations so incredible and absurd that only those who prefer darkness to light will pay any heed unto them. Ponder well the immeasurable difference there is between Christianity and Infidelity, and despise not the former until you are quite sure the latter has something more solid and valuable to give you in its stead.

There is ample evidence both in the material and moral realm on which to base a rational and intelligent belief in the existence of God; and any one who seriously examines that evidence, and then turns and carefully considers what infidelity has to offer as an alternative, should have no difficulty at all in perceiving which is the more convincing, adequate, and satisfying. As the author of *The Gordian Knot* rightly pointed out, “Scepticism is a restless sea on which any one who sails is tossed up and down and driven to and fro in endless uncertainty. There is *no solid ground* on which to stand until something true is found and believed.” *That* is the alternative, the only one, for those who credit not the Scriptures. The infidel would take from you the Bible, young man, but what does he offer in its place but sneers and doubts! He scouts the idea of a personal Creator, but what explanation can he supply you of Creation? He despises the Lord Jesus Christ, but to what other Redeemer does he point as being able to save you from your sins, and induct you into an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, that fadeth not away, but will endure for all eternity in Heaven?

2. *The Existence of God, Part 1*

First, *as manifest in creation*. The Bible opens with the words, “In the beginning God” (Gen 1:1). He was in the beginning because Himself *without* beginning: the uncaused, self-existent, and self-sufficient One—“from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psa 90:2). But the youthful yet intelligent inquirer will ask, “And do *you* comprehend *that*?” We candidly answer, “Certainly not, for how could one who is finite comprehend the Infinite, a creature of time fully understand the Eternal One?” Nevertheless, we believe it, being logically and rationally *obliged* to do so. There must of necessity be a First Cause; and if a *first* Cause, that Cause is obviously uncaused and self-existent. If that first Cause be the Originator of all other causes and effects, then it follows that Cause is not only self-existent but self-sufficient—or, in other words, all-mighty. Since we may ascertain something—often much—of the *nature* of a cause from the effects it produces, then from the effects perceptible to us in the visible universe, it is clearly evident that the

First Cause must be endowed with life, with intelligence, with will; in a word, with Personality, and one infinitely superior to ours; which First Cause we recognize and own as God.

Though the opening words of the Bible take the existence of God for granted, yet what immediately follows supplies more than a hint where we may find irrefragable evidence that *He is*: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." It has been truly said, "We need no other argument to prove that God made the world than the world itself—it carrieth in it and upon it the infallible tokens of its original" (John Owen, 1616-1683). That is true if we consider it simply in the mass: how came it to be? Three theories have been put forward to account for the existence of matter by those who believe not in its creation. First, that matter is *eternal*. But that solves no difficulty; in fact, it involves one much more perplexing than any which Genesis 1:1 can give rise to. In itself, matter is both inert and unintelligent: whence then its motion and marks of design? Second, by *spontaneous generation*. But not only is there no proof to support such a view, but it is too self-evidently inadequate to merit discussion. Third, by *evolution*: concerning which we will not only point out, Push that hypothesis backward, stage by stage, till you come to the first molecule or protoplasm, and to the question, *How* did it originate? No answer is forthcoming. Something could not evolve from nothing!

Though the universe could not evolve from nothing, it could be created by an eternal and all-mighty Creator! Assuming the existence of God, our difficulty is at once resolved. But with the universe spread before our eyes, we do not have to assume God's existence. "Because the things which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Rom 1:19-20). God may be rationally inferred by reasoning back from effect to cause. Intelligent arrangement, wise contrivement, and marks of design argue an intelligent Designer. There are such palpable and innumerable impressions of Divine wisdom, power, and goodness in the works of God that unprejudiced reason must necessarily conclude a Creator of whose perfections those impressions are the faint adumbrations. So true is this that atheists and all idolaters are left without any excuse. Thus, it is apparent that the doubts of infidels are either affected or arise from the determination to rid themselves of the idea of accountableness. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psa 14:1): it is moral depravity and not mental weakness which prompts such a desire.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Psa 19:1). The universe proclaims God both by its very existence and its wondrous composition. From whence proceeded this vast system, with its exquisite order, its perfect balance, and its enduring strength? Every effect must have an adequate cause. If the heavens do *not* declare the existence of God and scintillate with the reflections of His glory, let the infidel tell us what they *do* bespeak. If the celestial bodies be nothing more than a fortuitous mass of atoms, flung together by unreasoning law or blind chance, then what has preserved them throughout the ages, what regulates their movements with more than clock-like precision? What invested the sun with light and actinic power? To put it on the lowest level, can scepticism furnish any answer to those questions which satisfies reason or appears adequate to common sense? If the thoughtful beholder of the stellar heavens perceives no evidence of a Divine Creator, then are we not obliged to sorrowfully exclaim, "None so blind as those who *will not see*"! It is true that a recognition of the Creator in His creation is no evidence of regeneration, for many who never open the Bible are convinced of the reality of His existence, yet such mental perception is much to be preferred to the stupidity of atheism or the darkness of agnosticism.

THE GREAT CHANGE

Part I

Those who have carefully read this magazine, if for only one year, must recognize that whatever be its faults and failings, it cannot fairly be charged with presenting a toned-down picture of a genuine Christian, or that we hail as “Brother and Sister” all who style themselves such. More and more during the last ten years have we sought to expose windy professors and sweep away the sandy foundations on which so many of them rest their worthless hopes. Yet that does not warrant us going to the opposite extreme and cutting off those who are entitled to enjoy a Scriptural assurance; and when we see some doing so themselves, we deem it a duty to stretch forth a helping hand. It was in that spirit we wrote the three articles which have already appeared under our present title, for we know some who have concluded that the language of 2 Corinthians 5:17 prohibits them from regarding themselves as regenerated souls; and though others of God’s little ones do not go so far as that, yet its terms have much perplexed their minds.

Having endeavoured to remove a stumbling-stone from the path of conscientious souls by showing that 2 Corinthians 5:13-21 does not describe the work of the Holy Spirit within God’s people, but rather that which results legally from what Christ did for them, it seems needful that we should now seek to probe and search out a different class by considering what does take place in one who is supernaturally quickened. In other words, having dealt with the great *dispensational* change which the death and resurrection of Christ effected, we turn now to contemplate the great *experimental* change which, in due time, is wrought in each one of those for whom the Redeemer shed His precious blood. There are many in Christendom today who give no evidence that they have been made the subjects of such a change, who nevertheless are fully persuaded they are journeying heavenwards; while there are not a few souls perplexed because uncertain of what this great change consists of.

That which we now propose to treat of may perhaps be best designated “the miracle of grace.” First, because it is produced by the supernatural operations of God. Second, because those operations are wholly of His sovereign benignity, and not because of any worthiness in those who are the favoured subjects of it. Third, because those operations are profoundly mysterious to human ken.¹ Furthermore, that expression, “a miracle of grace,” is sufficiently abstract and general as to include all such terms as being “born again,” “converted,” etc.—which really refer to only *one* phase or aspect of it. Moreover, it possesses the advantage of placing the emphasis where it properly belongs and ascribes the glory unto Him to whom alone it is due, for God is the sole and unassisted Author—whatever instruments or means He may or may not be pleased to use in the effectuation of the same—in a sinner’s salvation. “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom 9:16). By “a miracle of grace,” we include *the whole* of God’s work in His people, and not simply His initial act of quickening them.

Nothing short of a miracle of grace can change a “natural man” (1Co 2:14) into a “spiritual” one (1Co 2:15). Only the might of Omnipotence is able to emancipate a serf of Satan’s and translate him into the kingdom of Christ. Anything less than the operations of the Holy Spirit is incapable of transforming a child of disobedience (Eph 2:2) into a child of obedience (1Pe 1:14). To bring one whose carnal mind is enmity against God into loving and loyal subjection to Him is beyond all the powers of human persuasion. Yet being *supernatural*, it necessarily transcends our powers to fully understand. Even those who have actually experienced it can only obtain a right conception thereof by viewing it in the light of those hints upon it, which God has scattered throughout His Word; and even then, but a partial and incomplete concept. As our eyes are too weak for a prolonged gazing upon the sun, so our minds are too gross to take in more than a few scattered rays of the Truth. We see through a glass darkly, and know but in part (1Co 13:12). Well for us when we are made conscious of our ignorance.

The very fact that the great change, of which we are here treating, is produced by the miracle-working power of God implies that it is one which is more or less inscrutable. All God’s works are shrouded in impenetrable mystery, even when cognizable by our senses. Life, natural life, in its origin, its nature, its processes, baffle the most able and careful investigator. Much more is this the case with spiritual life. The existence and being of God immeasurably transcend the grasp of the finite mind; how then can we expect to fully comprehend the process by which we become His children? Our Lord Himself declared that the

¹ **ken** – knowledge.

new birth was a thing of mystery: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: *so* is every one that is born of the Spirit" (Joh 3:8). The wind is something about which the most learned scientist knows next to nothing. Its nature, the laws which govern it, its causation, all lie beyond the purview of human inquiry. Thus it is with the new birth: it is profoundly mysterious, defying proud reason's diagnosis, unsusceptible of theological analysis.

The one who supposes he has a clear and adequate comprehension of what takes place in a soul when God plucks him as a brand from the burning is greatly mistaken: "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1Co 8:2). To the very end of his earthly pilgrimage, the best instructed Christian has read on to pray, "That which I see not teach thou me" (Job 34:32). Even the theologian and the Bible-teacher is but a learner and—like all his companions in the school of Christ—acquires his knowledge of the Truth gradually: "Here a little, and there a little" (Isa 28:10). He too advances slowly, as one great theme after another is studied by him and opened up to him, requiring him to revise or correct his earlier apprehensions and adjust his views on other portions of the Truth, as fuller light is granted him on any one branch thereof. Necessarily so, for Truth is a unit; and if we err in our understanding of one part of it, that affects our perception of other parts of it.

None should take exception to, nor be surprised at, our saying that even the theologian or Bible-teacher is but a learner and acquires his knowledge of the Truth gradually. "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Pro 4:18). Like the rising of the sun, spiritual light breaks forth upon both preacher and hearer by degrees. The men who have been the most used of God in the feeding and building up of His people were not thoroughly furnished for their work at the outset of their careers, but only by dint of prolonged study did they make progress in their own apprehension of the Truth. Each preacher who experiences any real spiritual growth views most of his first sermons as those of a novice; and he will have cause for shame as he perceives their crudity and the relative ignorance which marked the production of them—for even if he was mercifully preserved from serious error, yet he will probably find many mistakes in his expositions of Scripture, various inconsistencies and contradictions in the views he then held, and which a fuller knowledge and maturer experience now enables him to rectify.

What has just been pointed out explains why the later writings of a servant of God are preferable to his earlier ones; and why in a second or third edition of his works, he finds it necessary to correct, or at least modify, some of his original statements. Certainly this writer is no exception. Were he to re-write today some of his earlier articles and pieces, he would make a number of changes in them. Though it may be humiliating unto pride to have to make corrections, yet it is also ground for thanksgiving unto God for the fuller light vouchsafed which enables him to do so. During our first pastorate, we were much engaged in combating the error of salvation by personal culture and reformation; and therefore, we threw our main emphasis on the truth contained in our Lord's words, "Ye must be *born again*" (Joh 3:3, 5, 7), showing that something far more potent and radical than any efforts of our own were required in order to give admission into the kingdom of God; that no education, mortification, or religious adorning of the natural man could possibly fit him to dwell for ever in a holy heaven.

But in seeking to refute one error, great care needs to be taken lest we land ourselves into another at the opposite extreme—for in most instances, error is Truth perverted rather than repudiated, Truth distorted by failure to preserve the balance. Being "born again" is not the only way in which Scripture describes the great change effected by the miracle of grace: other expressions are used; and unless they be taken into due consideration, an inadequate and faulty conception of what that miracle consists of and effects will be formed. Our second pastorate was located in a community where the teaching of "Entire Sanctification" or sinless perfectionism was rife; and in combating it, we stressed the fact that sin is not eradicated from any man's being in this life, that even after he is born again, the "old nature" still remains within him. We were fully warranted by God's Word in so doing, though if we were engaged in the same task today, we should be more careful in defining what we meant by "the old *nature*" and more insistent that a regenerate person has a radically different disposition sinwards from what he had formerly.

That a great change is wrought upon and within a person when God regenerates him is acknowledged by all His people—a change very different from that which is conceived of by many who have never personally experienced it. For example, it goes much deeper than a mere change of creed. One may have been brought up an Arminian, and later be intellectually convinced that such tenets are untenable; but his subsequent conversion to the Calvinistic system is no proof whatever that he is no longer dead in trespasses and sins. Again, it is something more radical than a change of inclination or taste. Many a giddy worldling have

become so satiated with its pleasures as to lose all relish for the same, voluntarily abandoning them and welcoming the peace which he or she supposes is to be found in a covenant or monastery. So too it is something more vital than a change of conduct. Some notorious drunkards have signed the pledge and remained total abstainers the rest of their days, and yet never even made a profession of being Christians. One may completely alter his mode of living and yet be thoroughly carnal; forsake a life of vice and crime for one of moral respectability, and be no more spiritual than he was previously. Many are deceived at this point.

Let not the reader infer from what has just been said that one may be the subject of a miracle of grace, and yet it be unaccompanied by an enlightening of his understanding, a refining of his affections, or a reforming of his conduct. That is not at all our meaning. What we desire to make clear is that, that miracle of grace consists of something far superior to those superficial and merely *natural* changes which many undergo. Nor does that "something far superior" consist only in the communication of a new nature which leaves everything else in its recipient just as it was before: it is *the person* (and not simply a nature) who is regenerated or born again. "Except *a man* be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:3) is an altogether different thing from saying, "Except a new nature be born *in* a man, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Any deviation from Scripture is fraught with mischief, and if we reduce that which is personal to something abstract and impersonal, we are certain to form a most inadequate—if not erroneous—conception of regeneration.

Those who have written upon God's work of grace in the soul, especially when treating of His initial act therein, have used a wide variety of terms—generally those most in vogue among the particular party to which they belonged. Each denomination has its own more or less distinctive nomenclature—determined by the portions of Truth, it is wont to emphasize—and even when dealing with doctrine which is held by all the orthodox, does so with a certain characteristic pronunciation or emphasis. Thus, in some circles, one would find, "effectual calling" the term most frequently employed; in other places, where "the new birth" is substituted, few would understand what is meant by "an effectual call"; while "a change of heart" is how a third group would describe it. Others, who are looser in their terminology, speak of "being saved," by which some signify one thing, and others something quite different. As a matter of fact, each of those expressions is justifiable, and all of them need to be *combined* if we are to form anything approaching an adequate concept of the experience itself.

The better to enable our feeble understandings to grasp something of the nature of the great change which takes place in each of God's people, the Holy Spirit has employed a considerable variety of terms—figurative in character, yet expressing spiritual realities—and it behoves us to diligently collate or collect the same, carefully ponder each one, and regard *all of them* as being included in "the miracle of grace." Probably we are not capable of furnishing a full list, but the following are some of the principal verses in which experimental salvation is described. "The LORD thy God will *circumcise* thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, *to love* the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul" (Deu 30:6): an operation painful to the soul, in removing its filth and folly—its love of sin—is necessary before the heart is brought to truly love God! This figure of circumcising the heart is found also in the New Testament: Romans 2:29; Philippians 3:3. "Thy people shall *be willing* in the day of thy power" (Psa 110:3): omnipotence must be exercised ere the elect will voluntarily deny self and freely take Christ's yoke upon them.

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Eze 36:25-26). We are not concerned here with the prophetic or dispensational bearing of this statement, but with its doctrinal import. Nor can we here attempt a full exposition of it. In our judgment, those verses describe an essential aspect of that "miracle of grace" which God performs in His people. The "clean water" with which He sprinkles and cleanses them within is an emblem of His holy Word, as John 15:3 and Ephesians 5:26 make quite clear. The heart of the natural man is likened to one of "stone"—lifeless, insensible, obstinate. When he is regenerated, the heart of man becomes one "of flesh"—quickened into newness of life, warm, full of feeling, capable of receiving impressions from the Spirit. The change effected by regeneration is no superficial or partial one, but a great, vital transforming, complete one.

"Make the tree good, and his fruit good" (Mat 12:33): the Husbandman's method of accomplishing this is shown in Romans 11:17. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mat 18:3): to "be converted" is to experience a radical change, for pride to be turned into humility, and self-sufficiency into clinging dependence. "Of his fulness have all we received,

and grace for grace” (Joh 1:16): the life of the Head is communicated to His members, and every spiritual grace that is found in Him is, in measure, reproduced in them. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44): to come to Christ is to receive Him as our Lord and Saviour—to abandon our idols and repudiate our own righteousness, to surrender to His government and trust in His sacrifice; and none can do that except by the power of God. “Purifying their hearts by faith” (Act 15:9, and compare 1Pe 1:23—“Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth”): the Christian does not have two hearts, but one which has been “purified”! “Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken” (Act 16:14): the door of fallen man’s heart is fast closed against God until He opens it.

“I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness... To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Act 26:16, 18). Here, we have still another description of that miracle of grace which God performs within His people, and wherein He is pleased to make use of the ministerial instrumentality of His servants. The faithful preaching of His Word is given an important place therein, though that preaching is only rendered effectual by the powerful operations of the Spirit. That miracle is here spoken of as the opening of our eyes, the reference being to the eyes of our understanding, so that we are enabled to perceive something of the spiritual meaning of the Gospel message and its bearing upon our own deep need. The soul which hitherto was engulfed in spiritual darkness is brought forth into God’s marvellous light (1Pe 2:9), so that we now discover the perfect suitability of Christ unto our desperate case. At the same time, the soul is delivered from the captivity of Satan, who is “the power of darkness” (Luk 22:53), and brought into a new relation with and knowledge of God, which produces faith in Him and issues in the forgiveness of sins.

CONVICTION OF SIN

(By the Holy Spirit, issuing in Conversion)

1. It is not the mere smiting of the natural conscience. Although man be utterly fallen, yet God has left natural conscience behind in every heart to speak for Him. Some men, by continual sinning, sear even the conscience as with a hot iron, so that it becomes past feeling; but most men have so much natural conscience remaining that they cannot commit open sin without their conscience smiting them. When a man commits murder or theft, no eye may have seen him, and yet conscience makes a coward of him. He trembles, fearing that God will take vengeance. Now that is a natural work which takes place in every heart, but conviction of sin is a supernatural work of the Spirit of God. If you have had nothing more than the ordinary smiting of conscience, then you have never been convicted of sin.

2. It is not any impression upon the imagination. Sometimes, when men have committed great sin, they have awful impressions of God's vengeance made upon their imaginations. In the night-time, they almost fancy they see the flames of Hell burning beneath them; or they seem to hear doleful cries in their ears telling of coming woe; or they have terrible dreams, when they sleep, of coming vengeance. Now this is not the conviction of sin which the Spirit gives: it is altogether a natural work upon the natural faculties.

3. It is not a mere head knowledge of what the Bible says against sin. Many unconverted men read their Bibles, and have a clear knowledge that their case is laid down there. They know very well that they are in sin, and they know just as well that the wages of sin is death. One man lives a swearer, and he reads the words, and understands them perfectly: "The LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Exo 20:7; Deu 5:11). Another man lives in the lusts of the flesh, and he reads the Bible and understands those words perfectly: "No...unclean person...hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph 5:5). Another man lives in habitual forgetfulness of God—never thinks of Him, and yet he reads: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psa 9:17). Now in this way, most men have a head knowledge of their sin and of its wages, yet this is far from conviction of sin.

4. It is not to feel the loathsomeness of sin. This is what a child of God feels. A child of God has seen the beauty and excellency of God; and therefore, sin is loathsome in his eyes. But no unconverted person has seen the beauty and excellency of God; and therefore, sin cannot appear dark and loathsome in his eyes.

What, then, is this conviction of sin? It is a just sense of *the dreadfulness* of sin. It is not mere knowledge that we have many sins and that God's anger is revealed against them all; but it is a heart-feeling that we are under sin. It is a sense of the dishonour it does to God, and of the wrath to which it exposes the soul. Conviction of sin is no slight natural work upon the heart. It is all in vain that you read your Bibles and hear us preach, unless the Spirit uses the words to give feeling to your dead hearts. If we could prove to you with the plainness of arithmetic that the wrath of God is abiding on you, still, you would sit unmoved. The Spirit alone can impress your heart.—*Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843)*

