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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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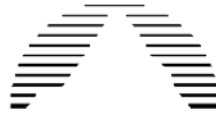
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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IDENTIFICATION OF THE GODLY

In a day like the present, when—because of the abounding of iniquity the love of many has waxed cold—it might be thought that it is no easy matter to distinguish the genuine from the spurious, the living Christian from the lifeless professor. But that is a mistaken notion. The very opposite is the case, as a little reflection should intimate to those favoured with spiritual understanding. It is in times of revival, when the Spirit of God is working mightily in a community, that many are temporarily awakened, convicted of their sins and have their emotions deeply stirred. Though not regenerated, impressions are made upon them, and fearing the wrath to come, they exercise a natural and temporary faith in Christ and find peace therein. Such are they who “receive the word with joy” (Luk 8:13)—yet have they “no root in themselves” (Mar 4:17; Mat 13:20). They float with the tide of revival and are carried into companies of God’s people; but as Matthew 13:21 goes on to say, they last “for a while” only, for their goodness is “as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away” (Hos 6:4).

What we have pointed out above—unpalatable as it may be to those who like to think that all which glitters is real gold—is illustrated and demonstrated all through religious history. We are plainly told that the Lord “called him [Abraham] *alone*” (Isa 51:2) when He bade him leave Chaldea and go forth unto a better inheritance: Yet Genesis 11:31 tells us that Terah his, father, accompanied him “to go into the land of Canaan;” but he never arrived there, dying at Haran (verse 32) which means, “Half-way.” When the Lord put forth His mighty hand and delivered the Hebrews from the house of bondage, we are told that, “a mixed multitude went up also with them” (Exo 12:38)! That mixed multitude soon became a thorn in Israel’s side, for *they* were the ones who “fell a lusting” for the fleshpots of Egypt and evilly influenced God’s people to become dissatisfied with the manna (Num 11:4, 5). Just as surely as Israel’s exodus from Egypt was a Divinely-designed type of the redemption of God’s elect, so that “mixed multitude” who joined themselves unto them foreshadowed the crowd of empty professors who have ever associated with them.

At a later date, when God wrought so wondrously through Joshua, we read of the Gibeonites who determined to throw in their lot with Israel, and so cleverly did they pose as “strangers and pilgrims” that God’s servant was deceived by them. They came to him with the language of piety, saying, “And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt,” etc. (Jos 9:9, 10)—which serves to illustrate the same principle and fact. We all know how it was with Christ during the days of His earthly ministry: Speaking as never men spake, going about doing good, working miracles, great multitudes flocked to Him, many “believed in his name,” yet with a non-saving faith (Joh 2:23, 24) and “walked with” Him as His “disciples” for a season, but later deserted Him (Joh 6:66). While they “walked with” Him, suppose you that it was easy to perceive their real character? No indeed, as our Lord’s next words to the apostles indicate: “Will ye also go away?” (Joh 6:67). It was only when the hour of testing came that their real character was revealed.

And thus it has been all through the centuries of this Christian era: When the Holy Spirit has wrought in power, regenerating and reviving the elect, a “mixed multitude” has always joined their ranks, and while the revival continued, it was rarely possible for human judgment to distinguish the tares from the wheat. Thus, it was in the blessed days of the Reformers and the early Puritans. Thus, it was under the preaching of George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles H. Spurgeon. But such is very far from being the case now or for many years past. Our lot is cast in a day when the Spirit is “grieved,” and His power withheld, when in most places, He has been “quenched” and His presence *withdrawn*. Over the great majority of “churches” and “chapels,” the sentence is written, “your house is left unto you desolate,” and though the services be continued, they are lifeless and ununctionless; and though new members are still added, they are but barren branches as their fruitless lives evidence; and thus, they are easily distinguished from the genuine saint, and so are very different in calibre from the professors of earlier and better times.

It is the Spirit’s holy presence and gracious operations which make all the difference not only to the regenerate but also to the unregenerate. There are His general operations, as well as particular—the former being His work *upon* the many, while the latter is His quickening work *within* only a few. Even the ungodly who attend services where the power of an ungrieved Spirit is felt are at least sobered and awed, many moved unto a reformation of life, and not a few to make a profession and unite with God’s people; and if their profession is to be credited, their walk *must* be orderly. But in a day when the Spirit is “quenched,”

His powerful operations more or less cease, and then the whole tone of things is rapidly lowered, and professors with a disorderly walk can still maintain their standing; nevertheless, they are much more *easily recognised!*

There is no good reason why any child of God should be mistaken about empty professors: He has but to measure them, as he should himself also, by the unerring standard of God's Word. In it, the Lord has plainly described His people by many different marks, by which they may be identified. We will look at one now which is less known and about which far less is written and said than about many others. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2Ti 3:12). Observe how searching that assertion is: Not "some" but *all*; not "may" but *shall* "suffer persecution," if they will (are determined) to "live godly." *What is godly living?* It is giving God His due place in our hearts and lives. It is to spurn the customs of this world, to lean not unto our own understanding, but to have our character and conduct formed and regulated by the Word. It is sincerely and earnestly seeking to please God in all things. It is for the graces of faith, hope and love to be constantly exercised upon Him, so that they bring forth their appropriate fruits.

Now those that will "live godly"—*all* of them who do so—"shall suffer *persecution*." They have always done so, and they always will in this world. Godly Abel was persecuted by Cain, Isaac by Ishmael, David by Saul, the prophets by the apostates, Christ by the Jews. And both Scripture and history show that persecution has always come most from nominal saints, from the professing Christian world. True, there are various degrees of persecution: From the sneer and cold shoulder, to being dis-fellowshipped by the church; from being dubbed "puritanical," to being placed in the stocks. So also persecution takes different forms: As it exists in the heart, issues from the tongue, or by actions; but generally, it is done under the cloak of religion. Now, a professing Christian may *escape* "persecution"—by compromising. But he will not call it that; rather, does he say, "he is avoiding extremes," "acting prudently," etc. But real Christians refuse to trim their sails; and therefore, they will, do, and must, suffer persecution. Reader, if you are not being persecuted in some form or other, you are not entitled to regard yourself as living a godly life.

There are those who believe that "persecution" in a more pronounced form is soon to be the lot of Christendom. Personally, we emphatically dissent. Most certainly what is known as "organized Christianity" is not on the eve of being persecuted as in earlier ages. Why are we so dogmatic? Because Satan is the author of persecution, and *he* will not stir up opposition against the "churches" as they now are. He is only too well pleased to leave them alone in their heterodoxy or dead formality. There is far too little of godliness prevailing in them today to cause Satan any uneasiness! The strong man armed has full possession of the hearts of windy professors; and therefore, he lets them rest in a false peace. But if the Spirit should again work in an unmistakable manner—outside in "the wilderness"—then the Devil would rage and stir up his ecclesiastical agents to do everything in their power to put a stop to it. But he *is* still opposing *godly lives*, and by his opposition, we may identify them.

"When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace" (Luk 11:21). The "strong man" here is Satan, as the context shows. His "palace" has a double reference: Individually, it signifies the sinner's heart, in which the Devil resides and rules; collectively, it is an apostate Christendom, where he presides as "god" of the religious world (2Co 4:4). His "goods" are the faculties of the individual soul and his deluded victims in the corporate company. But what we would specially observe is that Satan preserves his goods "in *peace*." There is no ceaseless conflict within the one whom Satan "keepeth," but rather, the sleep of *death*. So in his "synagogue" (Rev 2:9), he keeps its members at peace with each other. It is the saints—those who are determined by grace to "live godly"—that are the objects of his malice, and against whom he stirs up persecution, using when he can, professing Christians as his instruments.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

15. Ephesians 1:15-23

In the first half of Ephesians 1, we have what is probably the profoundest and most comprehensive doctrinal summary to be found in Holy Writ; in the second half of the chapter, we are shown, by implication, what should be our response thereto. In view of the wondrous spiritual blessings with which God has blest His people in Christ, they should betake themselves unto Him in praise and prayer. Those duties are clearly suggested by the example which the apostle here sets before us. His prayer on this occasion is the longest one recorded in the N.T. It reaches depths and points to heights which faith alone can sound and scale. For the purpose of analysis, we may outline it thus. First, the occasion of it, which was the tidings the apostle had received of the faith and love of the Ephesian saints (verse 15). Second, the nature of it; namely, praise and petition (verses 15, 16). Third, the Object of it: "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory" (verse 17). Fourth, its requests (verses 17-19), which we take to be four in number, some though reduce them to three, while others extend to five. Fifth, its revelation concerning Christ and the Church (verse 20-23).

First, *its occasion*. "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Eph 1:15, 16). It is the opening "Wherefore" which intimates to us why the apostle here prayed as he did. Most writers restrict it to what immediately follows: Paul had received tidings of their spiritual prosperity, and that caused him to bless God for His goodness to them and to seek further favours for them. While that is undoubtedly to be included, yet we see no reason why the "wherefore" should be severed from what precedes. In the previous verses, a description is given of the inestimable benefits which had been conferred upon them, and as Paul considered how God had chosen, predestinated, redeemed them by the blood of His Son, given them faith, sealed them by His Spirit, he could not forbear to give thanks for them, and ceased not to do so. After a most precise doctrinal enumeration of the rich blessings, which God's people have in and from Christ, the apostle rejoiced as he was assured these Ephesians had a personal interest and participation in those blessings.

More immediately still, in the verse preceding, the apostle had pointed out that the climax of those blessings lay in the Holy Spirit of promise, wherewith they had been "sealed" (identified and secured), being "the earnest of our [their] inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession," which said he is all "unto the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:14). This is the grand end of God in all the blessings of His "so-great salvation": That *He* should be glorified by and for them. It had been mentioned in verse 6: "To the praise of the glory of His grace." And in verse 12, in its application to the Jews: "That we should be to the praise of his glory, who *first* trusted in Christ" (Eph 1:12). And it is mentioned again here, in its application to all the Gentiles: "In whom *ye also* trusted...unto the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:13, 14). *Wherefore* says the apostle, "I...cease not to give thanks for you": God is not to lose the revenue of praise due Him: It is therefore my duty to glorify Him on your behalf. If God glorify us, the least we can do is to act and live unto His glory.

It is to be remembered that at the time Paul offered up this prayer, he was in detention by the Romans, but it is most blessed to mark how he viewed his incarceration: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord" (Eph 4:1). Note that well my reader: Not "the prisoner of Caesar" but "of *the Lord*." Paul knew full well that none could lay hands upon him except as it was ordered by the One who regulates every creature and every event, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom 11:36). Equally blessed is it to behold how this "ambassador in bonds" (Eph 6:20) occupied himself: Not in repining at the unkindness of Providence, asking, "What have I done to deserve such treatment?" but rather in praising and petitioning God. And think you not there is an intimate connection between the two things. Most assuredly: There can be no peace for the mind, and still less any joy of heart, if we fail to recognise that our lot, our circumstances, our condition, is fully ordered by a sovereign and gracious God.

The "I *also*...give thanks" means: In addition to the Ephesian believers themselves and those who had communicated to Paul the latest tidings of their case. Doubtless those saints were full of gratitude unto God for His having brought them out of darkness into His marvellous light; and here, the apostle assures them that he joined with them in fervent thanksgiving for that glorious event. And not only so, but that he continued to bless God as he received word that their lives gave evidence of the genuineness of their

conversion. Nothing affords the servant of Christ such happiness as hearing of the salvation of sinners and the accompanying transformation in their lives: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3Jo 1:4). Paul was himself the founder of the Ephesian assembly (Act 19:1, 10; 20:17-38), but he had been away from them now for several years; and therefore the statement, "after I *heard* of your faith" (Eph 1:15), etc, is not to be understood as meaning for the first time, but that he continued to receive most favourable reports of their spiritual healing and prosperity.

By making known unto them *his* thanksgiving to God on their behalf, the apostle also intimated their own privilege and duty—especially his "cease not to": He would by his example stir up their hearts unto the renewed praising of God for His sovereign and amazing goodness unto them. Nothing is more acceptable to Him— "whoso offereth praise glorifieth me" (Psa 50:23); nothing is more becoming in us— "Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright" (Psa 33:1). Nothing is more conducive unto stirring us up to this God-honouring and delightful exercise than to consider the greatness of His benefits unto us, such as are named in the verses preceding this prayer. If the Christian take a believing view of all his blessings in Christ, labours to see his own personal interest in the same, and then considers how God has ordered this not only for his salvation, but for "the praise of *His* glory," then the heart cannot but be moved to pour out itself in adoration and gratitude. Nor is such thanksgiving to be confined to his own case, but rendered for all who give evidence that they are new creatures in Christ.

"After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints." *Those* are the best evidences of a genuine conversion, for they are the fruits brought forth by the two principal graces communicated to us at the new birth. Faith is known by what it effects and produces. It was not their first believing in Christ that the apostle alludes to, for he had witnessed that for himself, but rather the working and constancy of their faith of which he had "heard"—the influence it had on their daily walk. The faith of God's elect is one which is active in "purifying the heart" (Act 15:9)—and this it does by engaging it with holy objects. The faith of God's elect is "the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness" (Tit 1:1). It is one which nourishes reverence for God and obedience to Him. The faith of God's elect is one which brings forth good works (Jam 2:14-22), such works as those described in Hebrews 11. It is one "that overcometh the world" (1Jo 5:4), enabling its possessor to resist its seductions, scorn its principles, and policy, and be "not of it" in his affections and ways.

Another mark of the faith of God's elect is that it "worketh by love" (Gal 5:6): Love unto the Truth, unto Christ, and unto His redeemed. Faith is but an empty name if it does not fructify in love. Faith in Christ is only a delusion if it issues not in love for those who are His. Scripture is too plain on this point to admit of any uncertainty: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1Jo 4:20). Saving faith in Christ and spiritual love for *all* whom *He* loves are inseparably connected—see Colossians 1:4, Philemon 1:5, 1 John 3:23. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren": If we love one saint *as* a "saint"—for what we see of Christ in him—we shall love *all* saints. Faith in Christ and love for His people are inseparable, and as one waxes or wanes, so does the other. If my love for Christians is cooling (if I pray less for them and am less active in seeking to promote their highest good), then my faith in Christ is declining.

Second, its *nature*. The character of this particular prayer was twofold: It consisted of thanksgiving and requests—praise for what God had done for them and wrought in and through them, petitions for further blessings unto them. The order of these two things is something we need to lay carefully to heart, for there is much failure at this very point. Scripture is very explicit thereon: "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phi 4:6); "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col 4:2). Here we see how the apostle sets us an example. It is praise which gives wings to our petitions. The more my heart is occupied with God's goodness, the more thankful I am for the favours already bestowed on me, the more will my soul be stirred up in seeking further mercies, the more liberty shall I experience in making requests for them, and the more expectation shall I have to receive the same. Cultivate the habit of gratitude, my reader, if you would be more successful at the throne of grace. "I sought the LORD, and he heard me" is *preceded* by "I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Psa 34:1, 4)!

Not only should we return thanksgiving unto God for His mercies unto us personally, but also for His grace unto *fellow saints*, which is more especially in view in our present passage. Said Paul on another occasion, "But we are bound (as a matter of duty) to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of

the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation" (2Th 2:13), upon which Thomas Goodwin remarked: "Here lieth much of the communion of saints: this is one great and high part of it. This is the angel's grace—to rejoice at the conversion of sinners; this will be one great exercise of our grace in Heaven—that we should be thankful to God for His having chosen and saved every soul there. This will make up one great part of happiness in Heaven, that each saint will rejoice in the salvation of all and every-one as in his own." "For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God" (1Th 3:9). Alas, that there is so little of this disinterested affection in our day.

But Paul did more than give thanks for what God had done for them and wrought in them: He requested *further* blessings on their behalf. Carnal wisdom had drawn the very opposite conclusion from that opening, "Wherefore": It would have inferred that since they were so highly favoured of the Lord, there was no need to seek additional mercies for them. But the spiritual mind sees in the smile of God upon a people an *encouragement* to ask for further benefits to be vouchsafed them. Similarly should we argue in our own case, regarding each fresh token of love from God as an earnest of more. It is to be duly noted that Paul did not pray that God would exempt them from persecution, or give them a smooth passage through this world. Nor did he beg God to make them eminent winners of souls. Nor did he ask that they might be given a deep insight into the mysteries of Prophecy or skill in "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2Ti 2:15), as might be expected if many of our moderns were right. What he *did* pray for, we hope to consider in due course.

Third, its Object: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory" (verse 17). As we dwelt at some length upon God as "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" in our last, when expounding Ephesians 1:3, we will confine ourselves now to "the Father of glory," with which should be compared "the Lord of glory" (1Co 2:8) and "the spirit of glory" (1Pe 4:14), which bring out the co-equality of the three Persons in the Godhead. "The Father of glory"—Ah, who is competent to write thereon! To describe or even define the meaning of that ineffable title transcends the power of any mortal tongue or pen: At most, we can but offer a few notes thereon. We are told that He is "glorious in holiness" (Exo 15:11), that "His work is honourable and glorious" (Psa 111:3), that He is seated upon "a glorious high throne" (Jer 17:12). We read of "his glorious voice" (Isa 30:30), His "glorious... apparel" (Isa 63:1), His "glorious arm" (Isa 63:12), of "the glorious honour of thy majesty," and of "the glorious majesty of his kingdom" (Psa 145:5, 12). Well, may we exclaim, "blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise" (Neh 9:5); for "his glory is above the earth and heaven" (Psa 148:13).

When we have affirmed that, "the glory of God is the excellency of His being or character, that it is the sum of His perfections, or the outshining of all His attributes in resplendent combination," we are conscious of the paucity of human language and of the incapability of the finite to comprehend the Infinite. But if we have experimentally tasted of "the glory of his grace" (Eph 1:6), if we have felt in our souls "his glorious power" (Col 1:11), if our sin-blinded eyes have been opened to see Him "glorious in holiness" (Exo 15:11), then we *know* He is a glorious God, even though we can only lisp out what He has made known to our hearts. Such a knowledge (though only a "foretaste") have all the regenerate. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Co 4:6). By supernatural illumination and inward revelation (compare Mat 16:17; Gal 1:16), the saints are given a spiritual discernment and view of the Divine glory, such as no creature can communicate to another, and which no mere mental acumen can ever attain unto. They know without any uncertainty that He *is* "the Father of glory" (Eph 1:17).

"He is called 'the Father of glory.' First, by way of eminency *eminency of fatherhood*: There is no such father as He is. He is a glorious Father, and so by a Hebrewism, He is a Father of glory: That is, a glorious Father, such as no father else is. He is called 'the King of glory': There are other kings, but He only is the glorious king. There are other fathers: He only is the Father of glory; He is therefore called the 'Heavenly Father'...Heaven and glory are the highest things we can conceive of; and therefore, when He would put forth how great a God, how glorious a Father He is, He calleth Himself the heavenly Father, the Father of glory, in distinction from all fatherhoods. The use of this is: Never be ashamed of your Father, you that are the Sons of God, for you are the highest born in the world—no nobility rises up to *glory*. Therefore, walk worthy of Him, and let our light so shine before men that you may glorify your Father, the Father of glory, which is in Heaven" (T. Goodwin). It was as "the God of glory" that He first appeared to the father of the

faithful, when He called him to leave Chaldea and go forth unto Canaan (Act 7:2); and it is as a most glorious God He reveals Himself to the newly-born soul.

Second, He is designated, “the Father of glory” not only because He is infinitely glorious in Himself, but also because He is *the Bestower* of glory on His dear children: “the LORD will give grace and glory” (Psa 84:11). He is the Author of all the glory with which His saints are or ever will be invested. There is what we may call (for want of a better term) the *official* glory of God, which is incommunicable; and there is His *moral* glory, of which makes His people partakers. That distinction is observed in those words of Christ’s, “And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them;” on the other hand, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory [Mediator and incommunicable], which thou hast given me” (Joh 17:22, 24). A measure of His moral glory is communicated to us in this life: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Co 3:18). Utterly unable we are to explain the mystery of that spiritual alchemy; yet, the fact is clearly stated, and the fact receives verification in the experience of the saints, for as faith is exercised that Divine glory has a transforming efficacy on their souls.

Third, there was a particular propriety in addressing God on this occasion as “the Father of glory.” As we have pointed out in former articles, the titles given to Deity when approaching Him in prayer were not selected at random, nor were different ones used merely for the sake of variety. Rather was the particular character in which God was viewed most in accord with the special exercises of the apostle’s heart, and the specific nature of the requests he was about to make. Such was, again, the case here, he was about to pray for spiritual knowledge of *glorious things*, an apprehension of the riches of the glory of God’s inheritance in the saints, and of the exceeding greatness of His power; and therefore, suitably thereto, he called upon the Father of glory; just as he addressed Him as “the God of hope” when making request that the saints might “abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost” (Rom 15:13).

We must not anticipate too much that which immediately follows in this prayer, but we may at least point out that each of its petitions are closely related to the particular title which is here ascribed to the Father. In asking that He would give unto His people, “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him,” it is a knowledge of Him as the Glorious One. In requesting that they might know, “what is the hope of his calling,” we learn from 1 Peter 5:10 that, among other things, it is a calling “unto his eternal glory;” yea, we are called to “glory” itself (2Pe 1:3). The “riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” signifies a glorious inheritance, an inheritance in the Glory. While in making request that we might know “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward,” something more than the bare exercise of Omnipotence is included; namely, the putting forth, in an especial manner, of “His glorious power” (Col 1:11). Thus, we may the better perceive why the apostle here addressed Deity as “the Father of glory”—being most consonant to the particular favours he was about to ask for.

THE MIRACLES AND MISSION OF ELISHA

27. *Sixteenth Miracle*

First, *its reality*. The first six verses of 2 Kings 8 chronicle an incident which is rather difficult to classify in connection with the ministry of Elisha. By which we mean, it is perhaps an open question whether we are to regard it as properly belonging to the *miracles* which were wrought through his instrumentality. Undoubtedly, the majority of Christian writers would look upon this episode rather as an example of the gracious and wondrous operations of Divine *providence*, rather than a supernatural happening: With them, we shall have no quarrel, for it is mainly a matter of terms—some define a “miracle” in one way; and some, in another. No question of importance is involved, either doctrinal or practical: It is simply a matter of personal opinion whether this series of events are to be viewed as among the ordinary ways of the Divine government as God orders the lives of each of His creatures, and in a more particular manner undertakes and provides for each of His dear children, or whether we are to contemplate what is here narrated as something over and above the workings of providence.

The signal deliverances which the Lord’s people experience under the workings of His special providence are just as truly manifestations of the wisdom and power of God as are what many theologians would technically term His “miracles,” and are so to be regarded by us. While strongly deprecating the modern tendency to deny and decry the supernatural, we shall not now enter into a discussion as to whether or not “the day of miracles be past;” but this we do emphatically insist upon, that the day of Divine intervention is certainly *not past*. God is as ready to hear the cry of the righteous now as He was in the time of Moses and the Prophets, and to so graciously and definitely answer the prayer of faith as cannot be explained by so called “natural laws”—as this writer, and no doubt many of our readers, can bear witness. Whether you term His interpositions “miracles” or no, this is sure, the Lord still shows Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect (upright, sincere) toward Him (2Ch 16:9).

Second, *its connection*. This is intimated by the opening word of our narrative. That “then,” which occurs so frequently in the Scriptures, should never be hurried over carelessly. There is nothing meaningless, nor superfluous in God’s Word, and every syllable in it should be given its due force and weight. “Then” is a time-mark, emphasising the season or occasion when some particular event happened. To ascertain its significance, we should always pause and ask, “When?” and in order to find the answer, refer back to the immediate context—often obliging us to ignore a chapter division. By so doing, we are the better enabled to perceive the connection between two things or incidents; and often, the moral relation the one sustains to the other, not only of cause and effect, but of antecedent and consequent. In passing, we may point out that, “Then” is one of the key words of Matthew’s Gospel, with which should be linked, “when” and “from that time”—see Mat 4:1, 17; 15:1, 21; 25, 1; 26:14. The deeper significance of many an incident is discovered by observing this simple rule: Asking the “then”—when?

In our present instance, the miracle we are about to contemplate is immediately linked to the one preceding it by this introductory, “Then.” There is, therefore, a close connection between them; yea, the one is the sequel to the other. When considering 2 Kings 7, we saw how wondrously Jehovah wrought in coming to the relief of the famished Samaritans, furnishing them with an abundant supply of food at no trouble or cost to themselves, causing their enemies to supply their needs by leaving their own huge stores behind them. But, as we pointed out, there was no recognition of the Hand that had so kindly ministered unto them, no acknowledgement of His goodness, no praising Him for such mercies. He had no place in their thoughts, for they had grievously departed from Him and given themselves up to idolatry. Consequently, here as everywhere, we find inseparably linked together “unthankful, unholy” (2Ti 3:2). Where there is no true piety, there is no genuine gratitude; and where there is no thankfulness, it is a sure sign of the absence of holiness. This is a criterion by which we may test *our* hearts: Are we truly appreciative of the Divine favours, or do we accept them as a matter of course?

It may seem a small matter unto men, whether they are thankful or unthankful for the bounties of their Maker and Provider, but *He* takes note of their response, and sooner or later regulates His governmental dealings with them accordingly: He will not be slighted with impunity. Whether He acts in judgment or in mercy, God requires us to acknowledge His hand in the same: Bowing in penitence beneath His rod, or

offering to Him the praise of our hearts. When Moses demanded of Pharaoh that he should let the Hebrews go a three days' journey into the wilderness to hold a feast unto the Lord, he haughtily answered, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Exo 5:2). But before God's plagues were finished, the magicians owned, "This is the finger of God" (Exo 8:19), and the king confessed himself, "I have sinned against the LORD your God" (Exo 10:16). We are expressly bidden, "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good" (Psa 136:1), but if men break that commandment, God will visit His displeasure upon them. One of the reasons why He gave up the heathen to uncleanness was because they were unthankful (Rom 1:21, 24).

Third, *its nature*. God employs various methods and means in chastening an ungrateful people. Chief among His scourges are His "four sore judgments" (Eze 14:21); namely, "the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast" (see verse 15) and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast" (Eze 14:21). In the present instance, it was the second of these judgments. "Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years" (2Ki 8:1). This, we regard as a miracle, and as connected with Elisha. First, because this pronouncement was a prophecy, a supernatural revelation which he had received from God, and then communicated to the woman. Second, because his announcement here is expressly said to be, "the saying of the man of God" (verse 2)—indicating he was acting in his official character. Third, because both in verses 1 and 5, this incident was definitely linked with an earlier miracle—the restoring of her dead son to life.

But our present miracle is by no means confined to the famine which the Lord here sent upon Samaria, nor to the prophet's knowledge and announcement of the same: We should also contemplate the gracious provision which the Lord made in exempting the woman from the horrors of it. A "famine" is usually the outcome of a prolonged drought with the resultant failure of the crops, and the drying up of all vegetation; though in some cases, it follows incessant rains, which prevent the farmers from harvesting their grain. Now had the Lord so pleased, He could have supplied this woman's land with rain, though it was withheld from her adjoining neighbours (see Amo 4:7), or He could have prevented her fields from being flooded, so that her crops might be garnered; or in some mysterious way, He could have maintained her meal and oil that it failed not (1Ki 17:16). Yet, though the Lord did none of those extraordinary things; nevertheless, He undertook for her just as effectually by His providences.

Fourth, *its duration*. This particular "famine" lasted no less than "seven years," which was double the length of time of the one God sent on Samaria in the days of Elijah (Jam 5:17). When men refuse to humble themselves beneath the mighty hand of God, He lays His rod more heavily upon them, as the successive plagues which He sent upon Egypt increased in their severity, and as the judgments mentioned in the Revelation are more and more distressing in nature. Of old God called upon Israel "consider your ways" and complained that His House was neglected, while they were occupied only with rebuilding and attending to their own. But they heeded Him not, and accordingly He told them, "Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands" (Hag 1:10, 11). Thus, it was now upon the rebellious and idolatrous Samaritans.

Fifth, *its beneficiary*. This was "the woman, whose son he [Elisha] had restored to life" (2Ki 8:1). She was before us in 2 Kings 4. There we saw that she was one who had a heart for the servant of God, not only inviting him into her house for a meal whenever he passed by her place, but built and furnished for him the "prophet's chamber" (2Ki 4:8-10). Then we beheld her remarkable faith, for instead of wringing her hands in despair upon the sudden death of her child, she promptly rode to mount Carmel where Elisha then was, with the evident expectation that God would undertake for her in that extremity through His servant. Nor was her hope disappointed: A miracle was wrought, and her dead son quickened. But now that the seven years' famine was imminent, Elisha did not keep to himself the knowledge he had received of the Lord, but put it to a good use, bethinking himself of the family, which had shown him kindness in his earlier days, warning her of the sore judgment that was about to fall upon the land of Samaria.

The prophet's action contains important instruction for us, especially for those who are the ministers of God. First, we are shown that we are not to selfishly keep to ourselves the spiritual light God vouchsafes to us, but pass it onto those capacitated to receive it. Second, the servant of God is not to lose interest in those unto whom God made him a blessing in the past, but seek opportunities to further help them in spiritual

things, particularly endeavouring to express his gratitude to those who befriended him in earlier days—often, this can be most effectually accomplished by prayer for them, or by sending them a special word of greeting—see 2 Timothy 1:16; Romans 16:6. Elisha did not consider he had already discharged his indebtedness to this woman by restoring her son to life, but as a fresh emergency had arisen, he gave timely counsel. Third, here too, we see God honouring those who honoured Him: In the past, she had ministered to the temporal needs of His servant, and He had not forgotten this: Having received a prophet in the name of a prophet, she now received the prophet's reward—light on her path.

“Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn” (2Ki 8:1). As there is no mention of her husband throughout the whole of this narrative, it is likely he had died in the interval between chapters 4 and 8, and that she was now a widow: If so, it illustrates the special care the Lord has for widows and orphans. But let us observe the exercise of His sovereignty on this occasion, for He does not always act uniformly. In an earlier famine, He had miraculously sustained the widow of Zarephath by maintaining her meal and oil: He could have done the same in this instance, but was pleased to use other means; yet, just as real and effective in supplying her every need. Learn: We must never prescribe to the Lord, nor limit Him in our thoughts to any particular form or avenue of deliverance, but trustfully leave ourselves in His hands, and meekly submit to His imperial, but all-wise ordering of our lot.

“Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn.” How frequently are we reminded that here have we no continuing city, which should cause us to hold all earthly things with a very light hand. This incident also reminds us that the righteous are occasioned many inconveniences, because of the conduct of the wicked; nevertheless, the Lord evidences His particular care of His own when His judgments fall upon a nation. Observe to what a severe test this woman's faith was now submitted. It was no small matter to leave her home and property, and journey with her household into another land—the inhabitants of which had for so long time been hostile to the Israelites. It called for implicit confidence in the veracity of God's servant. Ah, my reader, nothing but a genuine faith in God and His Word is sufficient for the human heart in such an emergency; but the mind of one who trusts Him will be kept in perfect peace.

“And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God (2Ki 8:2). Note well how that is phrased: She regarded Elisha's instruction as something more than the kindly advice of a personal friend, viewing him as the messenger of God unto her. In other words, she looked above the prophet to his Master, and accepted the counsel as from Him. Thus, she acted in *faith*, which was in entire accord with what was previously recorded of her. There is no hint that she murmured at her lot or complained at the severity of her trial. No, when faith is in exercise, the spirit of murmuring is quelled. Contrariwise, when we grumble at our lot, it is sure proof that unbelief is dominant within us. Nor did she yield to a fatalistic inertia and say, If God has called for a famine, I must bow to it; and if I perish, I perish. Instead, she acted as a rational creature, discharged her responsibility, forsook the place of danger, and took refuge in a temporary haven of shelter.

“And she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years” (2Ki 8:2). Not in the adjoining territory of Judah, be it noted, for probably even at that date, the Jews had “no dealings with the Samaritans” (Joh 4:9)—it is sad, yet true, that a Christian will often receive kinder treatment at the hands of strangers than from those who profess to be the people of God. This Israelitish woman had not been warranted in taking refuge among the Philistines without Divine permission, for God had said unto Israel, “Ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine” (Lev 20:26); and therefore, did He declare, “The people shall dwell *alone*, and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Num 23:9). But note well that it is not said that she and her household “settled down in the land of the Philistines,” but only that she “sojourned” therein—which means that she did not make herself one with them, but lived as a stranger in their midst (compare Gen 23:4, Lev 25: 23).

“And sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years.” That is surely remarkable, and very blessed. The Philistines had long been the enemies of Israel, and had recently made war the one with the other: Yet, here was this Israelitish woman and her household permitted to live peacefully in their midst, and her temporal needs supplied by them! In that, we must see the secret power of God working on her behalf and giving her favour in their eyes. The Lord never confounds those who truly trust Him, and as this woman had honoured His word through His prophet, so now He honoured her faith. Her ways pleased the Lord; and therefore, He made her enemies to be at peace with her. “And it came to pass at the seven years' end,

that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines” (2Ki 8:3). This, too, is equally blessed. She had not found the society of the Philistines so congenial that she wished to spend the remainder of her days with them. But observe how it is worded: *Not* “when the famine was over” she returned to Samaria, but “at the seven years’ end,” mentioned by the prophet—the word of God through His servant was what regulated her!

“And she went forth *to* cry unto the king for her house and for her land” (2Ki 8:3). It is not clear whether her property had reverted to the crown upon her emigration, or whether some one had unlawfully seized it and now refused to relinquish the same; but whichever it was, she did not shirk her duty, but actively discharged her responsibility. She was neither a believer in ‘passive resistance’ nor of looking to God to undertake for her while she shelved her duty—which had been highly presumptuous. T. Scott has pointed out how this verse illustrates “the benefit of magistracy,” and rightly added in connection therewith, “Believers may, on important occasions, avail themselves of their privileges as members of the community: Provided they are not actuated by covetousness or resentment, do not manifest a contentious spirit, and make no appeal in a doubtful or suspicious cause; and rulers should award justice without respect of persons, and compel the injurious to restitution.” Had not this woman now appealed to the king for the restoration of her own property, she had condoned a wrong and refused to uphold the principles of righteousness.

Sixth, *its sequel*. This is equally striking, for the anointed eye will clearly perceive the power of the Lord working on behalf of His handmaid. “And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done. And it came to pass, *as* he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life. And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now” (2Ki 8:4-6). Who can fail to see the superintending hand of God in the king’s desire to hear of Elisha’s miracles, the presence of one well qualified to inform him, the *timing* of such an occurrence, the interest in this woman which would be awakened in the king, and his willingness to grant her full restitution!

Seventh, *its lesson*. In the course of our remarks, we have called attention to many details of this incident which we may profitably take to heart, but there is one outstanding thing in it which specially claims our notice; namely, the wonder-working providences of God on behalf of the woman—through Elisha, the Philistines, Gehazi, and the king of Israel. And thus, it is that He still acts on behalf of His own, making gracious provision for them in an evil day. Whatever be the means or the instruments He makes use of in providing a refuge for us in a time of trouble, it is as truly “*the LORD’s* doing,” and it should be just as “marvellous in our eyes” (Psa 118:23)—especially when God constrains the wicked to deal kindly with us, as if He openly worked for us what are technically called “miracles.” At the close of the 107th Psalm, after recounting the various deliverances the Lord wrought for those who cried unto Him, this comment is made: “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD” (Psa 107:43). The greater pains we take to observe God’s hand undertaking for us by His providences, the better shall we understand His “lovingkindness,” and the more confidence shall we have in Him.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

6c. Its Effectuation

In our last, we showed, first, that in order to satisfy the requirements of Divine justice, the incarnate Son was “made under the law” (Gal 4:4), and that the work He did and the sufferings He endured in order to heal the breach between an offended God and His offending people was performed and undergone by Him while acting as their *Substitute*. Then, second, in the concluding paragraphs, we briefly pointed out that in order to be the Substitute of His people, Christ had taken upon Him the office of *Suretyship*. It is of great importance that we should be quite clear upon the latter, for much harm has been done by novices who have grievously misrepresented the Atonement by their crude and carnal conceptions, and the cause of Truth has been much injured by their unwarrantable attempts to illustrate the central fact of the Gospel from supposed analogies in human relations. It cannot be insisted upon too emphatically that the plan of redemption, the office sustained by Christ, and the satisfaction which He rendered to the claims of Justice against us, have no parallel in the relations of men to one another.

But how often has a popular preacher pictured a criminal, in whose character was no relieving feature, condemned to death for his aggravated crimes. While lying in the condemned cell, or perhaps as he stands upon the scaffold itself, the reigning monarch is supposed to send his or her own son and heir to die in the villain’s stead, and then turn him loose on society. Such a monstrous supposition has frequently been offered as an illustration of the amazing fact that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Not only is that imaginary illustration a gross misrepresentation of the Truth, but it is utterly revolting to serious minds and those who love righteousness. It is, too, a horrible degrading of the Gospel and a denial of the uniqueness of the Atonement. The Atonement carries us far above the sphere of the highest relations of created beings into the august counsels of the eternal and incomprehensible God, and it is nothing but a species of impiety for us to bring our petty line to measure counsels in which the “manifold wisdom” of Omniscience is contained.

Here, as everywhere, in connection with the things of God, spiritual things of God, spiritual things must be compared “with spiritual things” (1Co 2:13), and not with carnal: One part of the Truth must be interpreted by—not drawing upon our imagination, but—by another part of the Truth. It is only in the light of the Word itself—our hearts being opened to receive the same—that we can see light. It is only as “we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth” (1Co 2:13) that we can accurately express the grand mysteries of our Faith. Now the term “*Surety*” is one of the words the Holy Spirit has used of Christ Himself to enable us to understand the better the *relation* He sustained toward those on whose behalf He transacted, and the special *office* He discharged for their sakes. Now a “surety” is one who is legally obligated to answer for another. A “surety” is one who undertakes for another or for others, and who thereby makes himself responsible to render what is due from them, or to suffer what is due to them.

“I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors. Be *surety* for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me” (Psa 119:121, 122). In like manner, we find the godly Hezekiah praying, “O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me” (Isa 38:14)—the Hebrew rendered “undertake for me” is the same as translated “be surety for me” in Psalm 119:122. Thus, in each instance, believers made a request that the Lord would not barely bestow some favour or confer some privilege on them, but do so under the particular character of a “surety.” By addressing themselves unto their Deliverer under that character, it is clear they had knowledge that He had agreed to act in this office for His people. Since the O.T. saints, equally with the N.T. ones, were to benefit from the mediatorial work of the incarnate Son, they were not left in ignorance of the grand truth that He was appointed by the Father, and by His own consent, to serve as the Surety of His people.

On Psalm 119:122, John Gill pointed out: “What David prays to God *to be* for him, that Christ *is* for all His people. He drew near to God, struck hands with Him, gave His word and bond to pay the debts of His people; put Himself in their law-place and stead and became responsible to Law and Justice for them; engaged Himself to make satisfaction for their sins and bring in everlasting righteousness for their justification, and to preserve and keep them and bring them safe to eternal glory and happiness; and thus, was being a ‘Surety for good’ for them.” It is worthy of special notice that this particular verse wherein the Lord is besought to act as “Surety” is the only one in the 176 of this Psalm wherein the Word of God is *not*

mentioned under the name of "Law," "commandments," "statutes," "judgments," etc.—thereby intimating that Christ as the Surety of His people met all their obligations; and thereby, fulfilled the Law in their stead.

In the O.T. is found a most striking and blessed type of N.T. teaching on this subject, and, as we might expect, it is found in connection with its initial occurrence. It is an almost, if not, an entirely unvarying rule that the *first* mention of anything in Scripture more or less defines its meaning and scope—from the way in which it is employed and the connections in which it is found—and forecasts its subsequent significance. Such is the case here. When seeking to persuade Jacob to allow his beloved Benjamin to accompany his brethren on their journey into Egypt, Judah said, "Send the lad with me...I will be *surety* for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever" (Gen 43:8, 9). That was no idle boast on the part of Jacob's son, as the sequel shows—he remained true to his promise, though God intervened and spared him from actually fulfilling his trust.

The reader will remember how that Joseph's cup was found in Benjamin's sack while they were returning home with the sorely-needed grain, and how the whole company went back to Egypt and were brought before its governor. Joseph said, "The man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, get you up in peace unto your father." Whereupon Judah interposed, and after explaining the situation in a most touching way, declared, "And he [Joseph] said, God forbid that I should do so: but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, get you up in peace unto your father. Then Judah came near unto him, and said, Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh. For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide *instead* of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren" (Gen 44:17, 18, 32, 33). Equally beautiful is the sequel, and equally striking in completing the type: "*Then* Joseph could not refrain himself...he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that, his brethren talked with him" (Gen 45:1, 15).

It seems strange that no writer—of the many we are acquainted with—has made any attempt to "develop" this blessed evangelical picture and bring out the wondrous details of the type. First, observe the *occasion* of this incident: It was a matter of life and death, when Jacob and his household were faced with the prospect of starvation, that this proposal was made (Gen 43:1-8). In like manner, unless Christ had interposed as the Surety of His people, they had received the wages of sin. Second, it was not Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, but *Judah* who offered to act as "bondman" for Benjamin; and surely, it is not without Divine design that in the only chapter in the N.T., where Christ is specifically designated "surety," we are therein reminded that "our Lord sprang out of Juda" (Heb 7:14, 22). Third, it is to be particularly noted that this office was not compulsorily thrust upon Judah, but that he *freely* and voluntarily assumed it, as did the antitypical Surety.

Fourth, let it also be duly observed that it was not for one unrelated to him, but for his own *brother* that Judah proposed to serve—with which should be linked, "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it" (Pro 11:15). Fifth, it was in order to satisfy his *father* that Judah proposed to act. This at once refutes the error of the Socinians on Hebrews 7:22: Christ was not God's Surety unto us; rather, did He serve as the Surety of His people to satisfy the justice of His Father. This is made very clear in the type: "Thy servant became surety *for* the lad *unto my father*." Sixth, the *nature* of suretyship is here clearly defined; namely, serving as a bondman in the room of another, discharging his obligations: "Let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord" (Gen 44:33). Seventh, the result of this typical suretyship was that *reconciliation* was effected between Joseph and his estranged brethren: so the antitypical Surety secured reconciliation between an estranged God and His alienated people.

How very much better, then, is it to take our illustrations of any aspect of Divine Truth from the Word itself, rather than draw upon our imagination or stoop to human history for incidents which supply no analogy! They must indeed be devoid of spiritual vision who fail to see in what has been brought out above a truly remarkable foreshadowment of the Suretyship of Christ. If any regard as 'far fetched' the seven details to which we have called attention, they are to be pitied. It is true that at the last moment, God intervened on Judah's behalf, as He did on Isaac's when his father had bound him to the altar and took the knife to slay him—God accepting the will for the deed; yet just as surely as Abraham "received him [Isaac] in a figure" from the dead (Heb 11:19), so did Judah in a "figure"—and literally so in intention—serve as surety for Benjamin. That God interposed both in Abraham's and Judah's case, exempting them from finalising their intentions, only serves to emphasise the contrast that He "*spared not* his own Son" (Rom 8:32).

That which is most revelant to our present subject is the result obtained by Judah's suretyship; namely, healing the breach which had for so long obtained between Joseph and his brethren—the type turning from Judah's relation to his father and the bringing in of Joseph and its effect upon him, being parallel to the type in Genesis 22 turning from Isaac, the willing victim on the altar, to the “ram” caught in the thicket and being slain in his stead. For many years, Joseph had been separated from his brethren, and they alienated in spirit from him. When they came into his presence the first time, he “made himself strange” to them and “and spake roughly unto them” (Gen 42:7)—as God did to us through His Law prior to our conversion; and though the heart of Joseph yearned toward them, he made not himself known to them. It was not until Judah stepped forward as the surety of Benjamin that everything was changed: “*Then* Joseph could not refrain himself” (Gen 45:1), and reconciliation was at once effected!

Now it is in the light of all that has been before us above that we are to interpret that blessed declaration, “By so much [as the Melchisedec priesthood excelled the Levitical] was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.” or “covenant” (Heb 7:22)—the contrast being not between an inferior “surety” and Christ, but the more excellent covenant. Christ is the Surety provided by the Everlasting Covenant, which was administered under the O. T. era (the “old covenant”) beneath shadows and figures, but now (in this N.T. era) under the “new covenant,” His Suretyship is fully revealed in its actual and historical fulfilment. The typical case of Judah exhibits every essential feature of the Suretyship of Christ, and the more clearly it is fixed in our minds, the better shall we be able to understand the Antitype. As the Surety of His people, Christ undertook to yield that obedience to the Law which they owed and to make reparation to Divine justice for their sins—to discharge their *whole* debt, both of obedience and suffering.

“God did not mince the matter and say, Son, if Thou wilt take flesh and die by the hands of wicked men, I will pardon all Thou diest for, for Thy sake, and Thou shalt have an easy task of it: It shall be only enduring the corporeal pains of death, which thousands have undergone in a more terrible manner. But God saith as this: ‘If Thou wilt be their Saviour, Thou must be their Surety. Thou must pay all the debt of doing the Law and suffering for the breach of the Law. Thou must bear all their sins: Thou must suffer all their direful pains of body and soul, all the terrors and horrors due to them for sin from the wrath of God. I will make their sins fall on Thee with all the weight which would press all the elect into the vengeance of Hell-fire forever. Those are the terms: Hard enough indeed; but if sinners be saved by My free grace in giving Thee for them, My righteousness and holiness must be satisfied and glorified. Hast Thou such a love to My glory and to their poor souls as to undergo all that for them?’ ‘Yes,’ said our blessed Lord: ‘I am content; Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God’” (S. Crisp, 1691).

Third, we have seen that in order to be our Saviour, Christ had to be our Substitute; we have shown that to legally act as our Substitute, He had to take upon Him the office of Surety; we now push our inquiry still further back, and ask, *What was it* that justified the Holy One serving as our Surety, and the government of a righteous God taking vengeance upon Him for our sins? Not until we obtain the Scriptural answer to this question do we arrive at bed-rock and find a sure foundation for faith to rest upon—such a foundation as none of the sophistical reasonings of the carnal mind can shake; and against which the objections of scepticism are shattered into nothing, like the spray of the sea as its proud waves spend themselves upon the granite cliff. Nor do we have far to seek if we attend closely to Hebrews 7:22; federal relationship or *covenant oneness* is what makes manifest the righteousness of the Great Transaction. There is reciprocal identification between the covenant-Head and the covenantees: Christ transacted *for* His people because He was *one with* them.

That Christ acted as the covenant-Head or federal Representative of His people is clear from 1 Corinthians 15:45 and 47, where He is designated, “the last Adam” and “the second man”—the one expression explaining the other. Christ was not “the second man” in order of time and number, for such was Cain; but He was in the sense that He sustained the same relation to His people as the first man did to the whole of his posterity. As the margin of Hosea 6:7 shows, God made a “covenant” with the first Adam, in which he acted and transacted for all his natural seed as their legal head and representative; and therein, was “the figure of him that was to come” (Rom 5:14), for Christ acted and transacted for all His spiritual seed as their legal Head and Representative. Thus in that sense, there have been but two men who have sustained this special relation to others before the Divine Law: That each served as a public person; and that thereby, a foundation was laid for the judicial consequences of the acts of each to be righteously charged to the account of all for whom each stood—see our May 1944 article for the first Adam.

It has been well said that, “The Atonement is founded upon the *unity* of Christ and His people, with whom He took part in flesh and blood” (James Haldane). It is indeed true that all mankind are partakers of flesh and blood, but Christ “took part” only with the children whom God had given Him. This is brought out very clearly in the language of Hebrews 2: “For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are *all of one*: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren” (verse 11). And again, “Behold I and the children which God hath given me. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same...He took on him the seed of Abraham”—not of Adam. “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren (verses 13, 14, 16, 17). It was that unity between the Sanctifier and the sanctified which laid the foundation for Christ to “make reconciliation [or rather “propitiation”] for the sins of the people” (verse 17).

Under human governments, there may be expedients by which the innocent are penalized in order that the guilty may escape, but such a device and arrangement is impossible under the righteous government of God. “Such is the perfection of the Divine government, that, under it, no innocent person ever suffered and no guilty person ever escaped” (J. Haldane, 1847). It was not that a stranger, *unrelated to* the elect, had imposed upon Him their obligations but that the Head of the body of which they are members—and the unity of the head and the members of our physical body (when any member suffers, it is registered in the brain, and when the head is severed, all the members at once die) is no closer than that of Christ and His people (see Ephesians 5:32). Just as every member of the human race has been made responsible for the original offence of the first Adam, so Christ is made responsible for the offences of His people and suffered accordingly; furthermore, they themselves (legally considered) suffered in Him and with Him.

Were it not for the unity of Christ and His people, justice, instead of being magnified, would have been violated in His substitution. However, great the dignity of the sufferer—however deep his voluntary humiliation—it would have been no atonement for us. In order to purge our sins, in order to ransom His Church, Christ must so entirely unite Himself with His people, that their sins should become His sins, that His sufferings should be their sufferings, and His death, their death” (“The Atonement” by J. Haldane). And this is indeed what took place. Christ not only bore our sins in His own body on the tree, but each believer can say, “I am crucified *with* Christ” (Gal 2:20). Christ not only suffered for us, but we suffered *in* Him, for we were legally one with Him. He was substituted for us, because He was and is one with us, and we are one with Him. And here, again, we must (reluctantly) stop.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

7c. Its Stages

In Ephesians 4:13, there is a “stature of the fulness of Christ” spoken of; namely, that of “a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” It would lead us too far astray from the present aspect of our subject, which is the spiritual growth of individual Christians, to enter into a full analysis and discussion of the passage in which this verse occurs (Eph 4:11-16), suffice it now to point out that it treats of the *corporate growth* of the Church and its ultimate perfection. Verses eleven, twelve, state the appointment of the Christian ministry, verse 13 announces its goal, while verses 14-16 makes known the *process* by which that goal is reached. There is a “unity of the faith” among believers now, as to its “first principles,” as truly as there is a saving “knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph 4:13) possessed by them in this life; but that which this passage contemplates is the consummation of the same in the Body corporate, when there will be perfect unity of faith, as there will yet be perfect knowledge and perfect holiness (Heb 12:23)—for all the saints will then be fully conformed unto the image of Christ. When the “perfect man” is openly revealed, it will consist of a glorified Head with a glorified Body.

“The measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:13) is that unto which the whole of the Church is predestinated, and the accomplishment thereof will be seen at the second advent of our Lord, “When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe” (2Th 1:10). But during this present life, there are different stages of spiritual development reached by Christians, different forms in the school of Christ to which they belong, different measures of progress made by them. Broadly speaking, there are three degrees of “the stature of Christ” reached by believers in this life—though the highest of them falls very far short of that which shall pertain to them in the life to come. Those three degrees are most clearly specified in 1 John 2:12-14, where the apostle grades the members of God’s family into the “babes,” the “young men,” and the “fathers.” In the preceding articles, we sought to describe the principal features of the first and second; and now we are to consider what is more characteristic of and pre-eminent in the third class, the “fathers.”

Note carefully how we worded the closing part of the last sentence: It is not that which is peculiar to; but rather, that which is distinctive of the third class. This needs to be emphasised, or at least plainly stated, in order to prevent readers from drawing a wrong conclusion. What is predicated of each separate class is also common to the whole, though not to the same degree. In their measure, the “babes” overcome the Wicked one and have a real and saving knowledge of “him that is from the beginning” (1Jo 2:13, 14); yet, they do not “overcome” to the same extent as the “young men,” nor “know” Christ so well or extensively as do the “fathers.” In like manner, the “fathers” rejoice in the knowledge of sins forgiven, and “know” the Father even better than they did in the days of their spiritual infancy; so too, they are not only as “strong” as they were in the time of their spiritual youth, through the Word of God abiding in them, but they have progressed “from strength to strength” (Psa 84:7), for the Word now dwells in them “richly” (Col 3:16).

Let us remind the reader once more that in 1 John 2:12-14, believers are not graded according to their natural ages, nor even according to the length of time they have been Christians, but according to the spiritual growth and progress they have made in the Christian life. Some of God’s elect are converted very late in life and are left in this world for but a short season at most; and though they give clear evidence of a work of grace wrought in them, and bring forth fruit to the glory of God; yet, they attain not to the spiritual vigour of “young men,” and still less to the spiritual intelligence and maturity of the “fathers.” On the other hand, there are those who are regenerated in their youth and some of them make steady and constant progress, adorning the doctrine they profess and becoming useful to their fellow-Christians; while others, after a promising beginning, backslide, and are a grief to their brethren. It is with individual Christians as with corporate companies of them: Of the saints at Rome, Paul could say, “your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom 1:8); while to the Galatians, he complained, “ye did run well; who did hinder you?” (Gal 5:7). To the Thessalonians, he could say, “your faith groweth exceedingly” (2Th 1:3); but of the Ephesians, it is recorded, “thou hast left thy first love” (Rev 2:4).

While it be true that the longer a person has been a Christian, the more mature his spiritual character should be, the more growth in grace ought to mark him, the more intelligence he should have in the things

of God; yet, in many instances, this is far from being actualised in experience. In only too many growth is stunted and progress is retarded, and some Christians of twenty years' standing advance no further in the school of Christ, than those who entered it a few months before. We have a type of this in the contrast presented between Elihu and the aged men who took it upon themselves to counsel and criticise Job. "I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom"—*they* were given the floor first, only to exhibit their incompetency. "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding. Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment. Therefore, I said, Hearken to me" (Job 32:7-10). The "hoary head is a crown of glory, *if* it be found in the way of righteousness" (Pro 16:31).

Note well, my reader, that statement in the above passage: "The inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding" (Job 32:8). Gracious ability comes not from the passing of the years, but by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. That gives us the Divine side: But there is also a human side—that of our responsibility. Said David, "I understand more than the ancients, because I *keep* thy precepts" (Psa 119:100). Though study of and meditation upon the Word are indeed means of grace and of growth; yet spiritual understanding is obtained chiefly from personal submission to God—He will not grant light on the "mysteries" of Scripture if we forsake the path of obedience. The young Christian who walks according to the Divine precepts will have more spiritual discernment and better judgment, than a much older one who is lax in his "ways." "If any man will *do* his will, he *shall know* of the doctrine" (Joh 7:17). The world says 'Experience is the best teacher,' but it errs: The child who subjects himself wholly to the Divine Rule has an all-sufficient Guide and is independent of experience. Understanding obtained through keeping God's precepts is infinitely better than knowledge secured by painful experience.

"I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning" (1Jo 2:14). The one thing which is here predicated of mature Christians is their *knowledge of Christ*, for the reference is to the Son of God as incarnate. They have attained unto a fuller, higher, and more experimental knowledge of Christ. They are now more occupied with who He is than what He did for them. They delight in viewing Him as the One who magnified the Divine Law and made it honourable, who satisfied all the requirements of Divine holiness and justice, who glorified the Father. They have a deep insight into the mystery of His wondrous Person. They have a clearer understanding of His covenant engagements, and of His prophetic, priestly, and kingly functions. They have a more intimate acquaintance with Him through personal fellowship. They have a fuller experience of His love, His grace, His patience. They have obtained experimental verification of His teachings, the value of His commandments, and the certainty of His promises.

The "knowledge" which is here ascribed unto the "fathers" is far more than a speculative and historical one, with which the majority of professing Christians are content. There are several degrees of this merely theoretical knowledge. With some, it is nothing more than *memorative*, as the Jews are said to have had "the form of knowledge" (Rom 2:20), like a map of it in their brains—acquired by retaining in their minds what they have read or heard about Divine things. With others, it is an *opinionative* knowledge, so that they have not only a mental acquaintance with parts of the Truth, but a kind of conscience and judgment about those things, which causes them to regard themselves as "orthodox;" and yet wisdom enters not into their hearts (Pro 1:20). A few have a yet higher degree of this knowledge, which in measure, affects their hearts and leads to reformation of life, so that they "escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of *the* [not 'their'!] Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"—yet its hold on their affections is too weak to withstand strong temptations; and hence, they apostatize from the Faith and return to their "wallowing in the mire" (2Pe 2:20, 22).

In contrast from nominal professors, every regenerated soul has a supernatural and spiritual knowledge of God, of Christ, and the Gospel; and as he grows in grace, it increases. The kind of knowledge possessed by each of us may be determined by the *effects* it produces: Whether it be only a bare, non-influential knowledge—or whether it be a spiritual and saving one—is discovered by the *fruits* it bears. A Divinely-imparted one leads its possessor to put his trust in the Lord (Psa 9:10), to esteem Christ superlatively (Phi 3:8, 9), to obey Him (1Jo 2:3, 4). It is such as causes us to receive the Truth—not only in the light of it—but in the love of it (2Th 2:10); and thus, it is an intimate, permanent, heart-affecting, and life-transforming knowledge. It is what the apostle terms "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ," and that is one which causes its possessor to count all other things but dung, and moves him to pant after a yet fuller

acquaintance with Christ, a more unbroken communion with Him, a more complete conformity unto His image.

The knowledge of Christ with which the “fathers” are blest is such as fills their souls with holy awe, astonishment and admiration. They know Him through the revelation of the Gospel as the One who was “set up from everlasting, from the beginning,” who was “daily his [the Father’s] delight” (Pro 8:23, 30). Thus, they know Him as the One who took into union with His divine person a holy humanity. They know Him as the Image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), as the One who has fully told out the Father. They are led into a knowledge of His Divine majesty, His Headship of the Church, as the Mediator of union and communion, which floods their hearts with delight. They know Him as their Lord, their Redeemer, their Hope, their All in all. He is the grand Subject and Object of their contemplations, so that they are more and more absorbed with Him. Such knowledge finds expression in speaking well of Him to fellow-saints, by endeavouring to please Him in all things, by diligently following the example He has left us.

It must not be concluded from 1 John 2:13, 14 that this deeper and fuller knowledge of the Person, offices and work of Christ is the only distinguishing mark which eminently characterises the “fathers.” Hebrews 5:11-14 shows otherwise: They “teach” others, both by example and precept, giving counsel and admonition, encouragements and comfort, to their younger brethren. In that same passage, they are termed, “them that are of full age,” and the marks of such are described as “those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” and being capacitated to masticate “strong meat,” which—according to the scope of that epistle—has reference to the official glories of Christ, particularly His priestly. While those who cannot digest such food—who find neither savour nor nourishment therein—are termed, “babes,” who can relish naught but milk that is the simpler and more elementary aspects of the Gospel.

Just as the natural infant possesses the very same faculties as the adult, but has not learned to employ them so the babe in Christ has all the “senses” or spiritual graces of the “fathers,” but has not learned to use them to the same advantage. As the natural infant is incapable of distinguishing between wholesome and injurious food so the spiritual infant has not the ability to form a correct judgment and distinguish between preachers who minister only the letter of the Word from those who are enabled to open it up spiritually. It is by “reason of use” that the spiritual senses are developed. As the muscles of the athlete, or the fingers of the craftsman, become fit or skillful through constant exercise, so the spiritual graces of the new man are developed by regularly calling them into play. It is by using the light we have, by practicing what we already know, which fits the soul for further disclosures of the Truth and for closer communion with Christ, and which the better enables us to “discern both good and evil.” Thus, a further mark of the “fathers” is wisdom, sound judgment, keen discernment.

The old Christian has more solid, judicious, and connected views of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the glories of His redeeming love: Hence, his hope is more established, his dependence more simple, his peace and strength more abiding and uniform than is the case of the young convert. Though his sensible feelings may not be so warm as when he was in the state of spiritual infancy, his judgment is more solid, his mind more fixed, his thoughts more habitually exercised upon the things within the veil. His great business is to behold the glory of God in Christ, and by beholding, he is changed into the same image, and brings forth in an eminent and uniform manner the fruits of righteousness. His contemplations are not bare speculations, but have a real influence, and enable him to exemplify the Christian character to more advantage and with more consistency than can, in the present state of things, be expected from the babes’ or ‘young men’” (John Newton, 1725-1807, “Grace in the Full Ear”).

The “fathers” are such as are more diligently employed in the exercises of godliness for having proved for themselves that obedience to God is true liberty, their practice of piety is not performed only from a sense of duty, but with joy. They more wisely manage the affairs of this life, for they have a greater measure of spiritual prudence and circumspection. They discharge their duties with increasing diligence and care, knowing that God esteems quality rather than quantity; the heart engaged therein, rather than the length or measure of the performance. They are more weaned from the delights of sense, for their assurance is now based upon knowledge, rather than feelings. They are more conscious than they formerly were of their frailty and ignorance; and therefore, lean harder on the everlasting arms and more frequently seek wisdom from above. They are more submissive under the varying dispensations of Providence, for the trying of their faith has wrought patience (Jam 1:3); and therefore, they are more content to meekly and trustfully leave themselves and their affairs in the hands of Him that doeth “all things well.”

The “fathers” are such as have been greatly favoured with light from the Spirit by His gracious opening of their understandings to perceive, and their hearts to receive the teachings of Holy Writ; and they have learned that they can no more enter into the spiritual meaning of any verse in the Word without the Spirit’s assistance than create a world; and therefore, their daily prayer is, “Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law.” Through deep acquaintance with God, their characters are more mellowed, and their lives are more fruitful to His praise—not necessarily in outward activities, but by the exercise of their graces, thanksgiving, and adoration. Having had made to them many discoveries of the glories of Christ, received innumerable proofs of His forbearance, been partakers of countless love-tokens from Him, their testimony is, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25). Their minds are largely taken up with and exercised upon the wondrous perfections of Christ, both personal and official.

“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the *aged men be* sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience” (Tit 2:1, 2). Here, we are informed what are the particular graces which should characterise the “fathers” in God’s family. First, “be sober”—or as the margin preferably has it—“be vigilant.” They must not suffer increasing years to induce spiritual lethargy; rather should they issue in increasing watchfulness and alertness to danger. “Grave”—not garrulous and excitable, but thoughtful and serious: Less allowance will be made for *them* than younger brethren if they indulge in levity and vanity. “Temperate” or moderate in all things: The Greek word signifies, “self-restrained,” having their tempers and affections under control. “Sound in faith”: Sincere and steadfast in their profession. “In love” to Christ and their brethren. “And patience,” not peevish and fretful: Persevering in good works, meekly enduring trials and persecutions. “Those who are full of years should be full of grace and goodness” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

Not only does the N.T. maintain the distinction between spiritual infants and mature Christians, but it reveals how God provides *servants* of His who are specially suited unto each: “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many *fathers*” (1Co 4:15). The “fathers” among the ministers of Christ are not only characterised by their disinterested, affectionate, faithful and prudent instructions, so that they are entitled to the love and respect shown unto a parent; but are Divinely and experimentally fitted to open up “the deep things of God” (1Co 2:10), and edify the older, as well as the young saints: Though all the true servants of Christ are commissioned by Him; yet all are not equally qualified, gifted, or useful to the Church. Many are “instructors in Christ” (1Co 4:15), but can go no further—being neither designed, nor fitted, for any thing beyond that. But a few are greatly superior to them and have more lasting importance to the flock. All are useful in their several stations, but all are not useful in the same way.

In concluding this aspect of our subject, we cannot do better than call attention to the analogy between the spiritual growth of the children of God, and that in the incarnate Son. Beautiful indeed is it to behold how this line of truth was exemplified in Him. The humanity of Christ was perfectly natural in its ordinary development and everything was “beautiful in his time” (Ecc 3:11) in Him. First, we see Him as a “babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luk 2:12). Then we behold His progress from infancy to childhood, and as a Boy of twelve, His moral perfections shone forth in being “subject to His parents,” and we are told that “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luk 2:51,52). When He became Man, His glory found other expressions—working at the carpenter’s bench (Mar 6:3), followed by His public ministry. Supremely was *He* the “tree planted by the rivers of water,” which brought forth “his fruit in his season” (Psa 1:3).

