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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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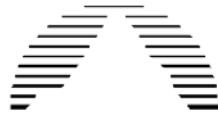
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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BRETHREN, BEWARE! – Part 2

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12). In view of what was pointed out in last month’s cover-pages article, it is of great importance that the reader should have a right and clear conception of what unbelief really consists. It is a far greater evil than many are aware. Unbelief is not a mere negation and passive thing as the prefix of the word might suggest. Unbelief is much more than a *lack of* believing or failure to assent unto the Truth; more than an error of the judgment. It is not simply an infirmity of human nature, but a vicious and culpable thing. Unbelief is a virulent and vicious principle of opposition to God. So far from being passive, it is an operative and active principle. It has a rooted aversion of God: “They did not like to retain God in their knowledge” (Rom 1: 28). It is that which causes the wicked to say unto God, “Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways” (Job 21:14). It has an inveterate hatred against a life of holiness (Pro 1:29; 5:12, etc.).

Take the case of Adam. His unbelief was more than a negative failure to believe the Divine threatening: It was a species of self-will and self-pleasing: “By one man’s *disobedience* many were made sinners” (Rom 5:12). Consider Israel in the wilderness who never entered Canaan “because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19). In their case, it was not only that they failed to accredit the good report of Caleb and Joshua, but as Moses told them, “ye would not go up, but *rebelled* against the commandment of the LORD your God” (Deu 1:26)—their unbelief was a positive thing of self-will and defiance. Examine the condition of the Jewish nation in the days of our Lord. They “received him not” (Joh 1:11). But that was only the negative side of their unbelief—they “will not come to” Him (Joh 5:40), because they “hated” Him (Joh 15:25). His holy demands suited not their carnal desires, and therefore, they declared, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luk 19:14). Unbelief with them, too, consisted of a determination to please their own selves at all costs.

Now, this unbelief operates in various ways and takes different forms in people, according to their several temperaments, training or temptations. But in one and all unbelief consists of and acts itself by a *dislike against* the things of God. We have but to read through the first four books of the N.T. to discover what a common thing this was in those who attended on the ministry of Christ. Some found fault with this or that in His doctrinal preaching, others found His practical teaching distasteful. When He read to them from the opening verses of Isaiah 61 and declared, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luk 4:21), they “bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth” (Luk 4:22), but as soon as He pressed on them the sovereign and discriminating grace of God, they sought to kill Him (Luk 4:28, 29)! The young ruler had such respect for Christ that he came to be instructed by Him, but when faced by His searching requirements, “he went away sorrowful” (Mat 19:22).

This unbelief expresses itself in a dislike against the purity and *simplicity of Gospel worship*. Noticeably was that evidenced by the Jews of the apostles’ time. They greatly admired the pompous worship of the temple, and would not be drawn off from the same to the plainness of evangelical institutions. It was the principal objection of Pagans that the early Christians worshipped God without temples or altars, a ritualistic priesthood or elaborate ceremonies, and therefore, they regarded them as atheists. It was this dislike of the purity and simplicity of Gospel worship which gave rise to and fostered the progress of the Papish apostacy—for fallen human nature preferred the glitter and tinsel of what appeals to their senses. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12) through a dislike of that worship which must be “in spirit and in truth” (Joh 4:23, 24), rather than in outward forms and fleshly display.

This unbelief expresses itself in dislike against *the doctrines* and mysteries of the Gospel. When Paul preached Christ crucified, it was “unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1Co 1:23). Some ridicule the imputed righteousness of Christ, and other mock at the imperative necessity of following the example which He has left us. Others rave against the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty and His predestinating grace, whereby He chose certain ones in Christ unto salvation and passed by all others. Others refuse subjection to God’s moral Law as the believer’s Rule of life, and thereby, display their enmity against Him (Rom 8:7). Some scoff at there being three distinct Persons in the unity of the God-head, while others reject the truth of eternal punishment because it squares not with their idea of the Divine character. We know of a denomination, which long boasted of being “sounder” than any other, now rent

asunder by some of its preachers rejecting the future resurrection of our bodies. Brethren, beware of refusing anything in Scripture because you find it contrary to your reason or humbling to your pride.

This unbelief expresses itself in a dislike against *the precepts* of the Gospel. The flesh likes not to be placed under restraint and rebels against the strictness of Christ's demands. The great work and duty of faith is to influence the soul unto universal obedience and an abstinence from all sin, out of a regard for the precepts, promises, and threatenings of the Gospel. But where faith languishes and its efficacy begins to decay, the power of unbelief sets the soul on self-pleasing. The Gospel requires us to mortify our corruptions and lusts, and while the soul be in communion with God, it desires and resolves to do so; but when communion is severed, indwelling sin endeavours to drag the soul down again into the mire. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb 3:12) by failing to deny self, take up your cross daily, and follow Christ. Refuse to gratify your lusts by opposing their first risings.

Not only is the principle of unbelief still in the Christian, but it is operative, and ever seeking to bring him under its complete dominance. All of God's children are to some degree influenced by "unbelief," and are in danger of yielding more and more unto its potency. It is for that reason God here calls upon them to "take heed" of this menace. To be forewarned is to be forearmed—if we duly attend to the warning. The warning, as we have said, is pointed by the solemn example of that generation of Israel who were delivered from Egypt and yet never entered Canaan. We, too, are still in the Wilderness—and the wilderness is the place of temptation, of testing, of danger! This warning is also pointed by the case of those described in 2 Peter 2:20-22, who "escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," but who afterwards turned from "the holy commandment delivered unto them," and like the dog, "turned to his own vomit again." Brethren, beware! Take heed to thyself! "Keep thy heart with all diligence" (Pro 4:23). Cry mightily unto the Lord, "I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mar 9:24).

A final word on the *execution* of this duty: "Take heed" is a word of caution, calling for circumspection, being alert and watching against the danger warned against. It is a call to be especially on our guard against temptations, opposition, and the difficulties of the way. We are so to "heed" as to avoid being ensnared by this peril. Our distinctive avocation, our personal circumstances, certain times or seasons each has a tendency to occasion unbelief in some particular direction; and since it is there and then, we are most likely to fail, it is at *that* point, we need to exercise the greatest caution and care. We are not only to consider those special occasions and causes when they are about to assault us, but to watch against all the means and ways by which they are likely to do so. And we are to consider these dangers so as to definitely *oppose* them—by being wide awake, by seeking delivering grace, by exercising our graces. The more faith be in exercise, the less power has unbelief over us; the closer we cleave to the path of obedience, the further removed are we from the gins of the Destroyer.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

18. Ephesians 1:15-23 – Part 4

“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18). In our last, we endeavoured to show that the opening clause of this verse is not a separate petition for a distinct blessing, but rather the stating of an essential spiritual *qualification*—we cannot obtain a true and influential knowledge of the grounds, which regeneration gives its subject to hope that he has passed from death unto life, nor realise what confidence God has bidden him to have (for both things are included), unless his eyes be Divinely anointed. It is now to be pointed out that this essential qualification applies with equal force to what follows. The grammatical construction of our passage makes it quite clear that an enlightened understanding is also indispensable for a spiritual knowledge of both “the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” and of “the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward” (Eph 1:18, 19). Thus, that opening clause governs all of the three petitions that follow it.

Having pondered the opening request of this prayer in verse 17 and the first one in verse 18, we turn now to consider its third petition. We propose to concentrate on these three things. First, what is the relation of this petition to what precedes? Second, what is the precise meaning of its terms? Third, what is the use which the Christian is to make of knowing what are “the riches of the glory of God’s inheritance in the saints”?—devoting most of our space to the second. First, the apostle had prayed that the saints might experience and enjoy closer and fuller communion with God. Then he had asked that the grace of hope might be more operative within them, that they should realise it is God’s revealed will for them to “abound in hope” (Rom 15:13) and not live in a state of uncertainty, and that they might perceive how many sure grounds they had for believing they *were* recipients of an effectual call—as when we ask a doctor concerning a loved one who is seriously ill, “What hope is there?” we mean, “What ground is there to expect his recovery?”

No matter how clearly and vividly the landscape appears when the sun be shining, a blind man beholds it not. Christ is manifestly set forth in the Gospel, but the hearer must be given spiritual discernment before he will perceive the absolute suitability of such a Saviour to his own desperate case. Even after regeneration, the Christian is still completely dependent upon Divine illumination in order for him to continue apprehending spiritual things. That was exemplified in the case of Peter. Some time after he had become a disciple of Christ and made his memorable confession of His Deity, the Lord Jesus informed him, “for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Mat 16:17). The same thing is repeatedly illustrated in the experience of every saint: At one time, he will read a portion of Scripture and perceive little in it which impresses his heart or stirs his soul to wonderment; at another time, the same passage appears scintillating with Divine beauty and glory—the difference is to be accounted for by the absence or the presence of his eyes being Divinely anointed.

No reading of commentaries can secure an answer to this petition, and even the searching and study of the Scriptures will not of itself convey to the believer a spiritual and influential knowledge of what is “the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18). Only as and when the eyes of his understanding are *enlightened* will that delightful and wondrous experience be his. Thus, the apostle asked for such illumination to be granted them as not only that they might know the hope of God’s calling, but also the excellency of His inheritance, that they might apprehend more clearly and comprehensively the greatness of that glory which they were persuaded they had a personal interest in—for when the God of all grace quickens His elect, they are “called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus” (1Pe 5:10). The Father hath “begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1Pe 1:3, 4). The one is preparatory unto and ensures the other—begetting and an inheritance, calling and eternal glory.

But some who have been spiritually begotten of the Father are doubtful thereof—yet they should not be. Instead, it is their duty and privilege to *know* what is “the hope of his calling” (Eph 1:18). But now the apostle goes further—that they might enjoy a better apprehension of the hope itself—that is, the *object* of it. This is what we understand the *relation* to be between the second and third petitions That the two things are not to be separated is intimated by their connecting “and,” but that they relate to distinct blessings is clear from the “what is.” It is this consideration which determines the meaning of the word “hope” in the second

petition—namely, that it is not the thing hoped for (which is named in the third); but rather the confidence which God commands His called people to have, and to perceive the clear grounds of assurance, which are theirs to warrant such confidence. The third petition announces what a great and glorious inheritance it is, which they have a personal interest in, and the fourth tells of the exceeding greatness of God's power, which works in those who believe and preserves them unto that glorious inheritance.

As Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) expresses it: "First the apostle prayed in the former verse for communion with God. Now, what is the next thing a good soul would desire after communion with God? To have grounds of his assurance kept continually fresh in his heart, that he may 'know the hope of his calling;' that is the next thing any good soul would pitch upon, to keep himself in perfect peace and comfort; and then know the greatness of that glory which he had an interest in. Link those three things together, and this makes a perfect Christian: Full of comfort, full of peace and joy in believing." And for the Christian to enter into an experimental enjoyment of each and all of those ineffable favours he is dependent upon the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, and of having the eyes of his understanding Divinely enlightened. It utterly transcends the powers of the human mind to so much as conceive of "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him," yet in response to earnest and expectant prayer, real and satisfying views thereof may be obtained even in this life, for "God *hath* revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (1Co 2:10, 11).

When Paul was commissioned to preach unto the Gentiles, it was "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 26:18), and to the Hebrews, he declared that Christ is the Mediator of the New Testament that "they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Heb 9:15). Thus, we see again how closely connected, and yet distinct are the effectual call of God and the inheritance unto which the called are begotten. That "inheritance" is described, in part, in 1 Peter 1:4. But in the verse now before us, it is designated, "*God's* inheritance in the saints"—which at once brings to mind that remarkable statement, "For the LORD'S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance" (Deu 32:9 and compare Psa 78:71 and "my jewels" in Mal 3:17). The one is complementary to the other: God has an inheritance in the saints; and they have an inheritance in and from God—for if His children, then they are also "heirs: heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17).

Now, this inheritance is a *glorious* one. There is nothing in Heaven but what is glorious. The central and all-absorbing Object there is "the God of glory," particularly as He shines forth in the Person of our glorious Redeemer. Our souls and bodies will be glorious (Rom 8:30, Phi 3:20). Our employments will be glorious—praising and glorifying God forever and ever. We shall be surrounded by the glorious angels, and nothing shall ever enter there which can defile. For a brief season, the apostle himself had been caught up into Paradise itself, where he had received "revelations of the Lord" and "heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful [nor 'possible'] for a man [returned to earth] to utter" (2Co 12:1-4). Little wonder, then, that he longed so vehemently that the saints in general might be admitted into a clearer and enlarged apprehension of the things which God has prepared for them that love Him, or that he should here be found labouring for words to express the same unto us: An "inheritance," "his inheritance," "the glory of his inheritance," "the riches of the glory of his inheritance" (Eph 1:18)!

If the apostle found it so difficult to find expressions in human language suited to the transcendent subject before him, what must be the task of the humble expositor, with his far less spiritual ability and attainments, when he seeks to explain those expressions! Our ideas of Heaven, of Glory, of perfection—even after the partial revelation of them in the Scriptures—is at very best defective: Yet sufficient *is* revealed as ought to fill us with admiration, astonishment and adoration; and in proportion, as the eyes of our understanding are enlightened and as faith is exercised on what God has made known unto us thereon in His Word, will our hearts be affected and our lives influenced thereby. It is termed "God's inheritance in the saints," to show the greatness and grandeur of it. It is "his inheritance," because He is the Deviser and Author of it. And let it not be overlooked that it is "his inheritance" as "the Father of glory" (Eph 1:17), which emphasises the surpassing excellency of it.

It is God's inheritance, yet the saints are the "heirs" of it. That it is designated an "inheritance" announces that it is a *free gift* which we can do nothing to earn or merit. It is an inheritance of God's own planning, preparing and bestowing. Such an inheritance must be inexpressibly grand, inconceivably wonderful, unspeakably glorious. It is "the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col 1:12). But let us observe now

the qualities by which it is described in our text: “The *riches* of the glory of his inheritance.” In human speech, that word is applied to things which men value most highly, and to attain which the majority are prepared to sell their souls. In Scripture, when it is employed in connection with spiritual and Divine things, it is for the purpose of emphasising the excellency and copiousness of them. Thus, we read of God being “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4), of “the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7), of “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8), and of “the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom 11:33).

As T. Goodwin expressed it, “God layeth forth all His riches in making the saints happy... Wouldest thou know what Heaven is? Thou shalt have all God’s riches: Not in bullion or in species, for they are incommunicable; but thou shalt have them in use and in comfort.” It should enable us to form a better concept of this rich inheritance by linking up that word, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2Co 8:9). Christ was the Beloved of the Father, the Lord of glory, the Heir of all things, and therefore, “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phi 2:6). Yet He laid aside His glory, became incarnate, was born in a manger, and entered into such poverty that He had not where to lay His head. He voluntarily endured such unspeakable humiliation for the express purpose that His people “might be rich” (2Co 8:9). *How* rich then are they—how rich will they become? Those riches will bear a proportion to the unparalleled shame and beggary into which the Son of God descended for our sakes.

But it is not only “riches” and “*the riches*” but “the riches of his *glory*”—let how little are we capable of entering into the meaning and blessedness of that! As T. Goodwin has pointed out, if “riches” connote excellency, the “glory” of them importeth super-excellency. Thus, we read of “the excellent glory” (2Pe 1:17) or height of excellency, and of “the glory that excelleth” (2Co 3:10). The Hebrew word for glory is “weight,” to which the apostle made allusion when he spoke of “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2Co 4:17). It is put for beauty (2Co 3:7), for dazzling light (Act 22:11), for pomp (Mat 6:29), for power and strength (2Th 1:9), for joy and pleasure (1Pe 1:8), for that which evokes wonderment and admiration (2Th 1:10). That gives perhaps as full a definition as can be furnished. It signifieth all excellencies, and all excellencies in the height, and such a weight as they do oppress, that the ordinary understanding of a man cannot bear. Joy when it excelleth is called “joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1Pe 1:8). Now put the two together: “the riches of his glory”—i.e. of “the Father of glory”! (Eph 3:16, 17).

The two things are combined again in that familiar verse, “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phi 4:19)—not “out of” but “according to,” for it is the standard of measurement, rather than the source of supply. As T. Goodwin said, “God is a rich and glorious God; nor will He have those riches of glory lie by Him. When Abraham had no son, he said, Lord, Thou hast given me these riches, but to me Thou hast given no seed—no son to *inherit*. Therefore, God gave him Isaac, upon whom he might bestow his riches and inheritance (Gen 15:1-4). And so (speaking after the manner of men), God had these riches of glory lying by; and therefore, He chooses His sons to inherit them, and when He bestoweth an inheritance upon them, it is according to that glory of His, in proportion to His riches that lie by Him. It is therefore called *His* inheritance to show the greatness of it from His gift.” When Alexander the Great gave a city to a mean man, he said, “I do not give a city away according to the proportion of the man, but as it is fit for *me* to give” (abbreviated).

In showing how glorious must be the inheritance which the saints shall have, T. Goodwin called attention to Psalm 115:15, 16, where we read, “Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth. The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD’S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.” The earth, and all the good things in it, God has made over to the human family, but heaven and the heaven of heavens, He hath reserved for Himself, as *His* possession. The earth He has given away to the children of men, but the celestial courts are His own inheritance. Now, this be it noted is mentioned in order to show how favoured are *the saints*: “Ye are blessed of the LORD” (Psa 115:15). The earth God prizes not, but gives it away; but the heavens He has set apart for Himself. Then how happy must the saints be that they are taken up to Heaven to share God’s own inheritance! The earth is not good enough for Him, nor does He deem it to be so for them. The Lord is the Possessor of heaven, and blessed indeed must those be who are predestinated to be partakers of God’s own inheritance.

“The riches of the glory of *his inheritance in the saints*” (Eph 1:18). In an allusion to this verse, John Calvin (1509-1564) remarked, “the eyes of our understanding are not truly ‘enlightened’ unless we discover what is the hope of the eternal inheritance to which we are called.” Thomas Manton (1620-1677) understood it of the inheritance “appointed for those who are renewed by the Spirit of God;” and in another

place, “that is, that they might more clearly see and fully believe those good things which they shall enjoy hereafter.” Charles Hodge defined it as “what is the abundance and greatness of that inheritance of which God is the Author.” Whether we regard it as God’s inheritance or the Christian’s, it comes to the same thing in effect—for it is displayed *in* the saints. According as God has glory in the saints, they must be glorious—just as the riches of the master are seen in the costly liveries of his servants, and as the glory of a king is exhibited in the glory of his attendants. The glory which the saints shall have, God regards as “his inheritance.” Moreover, there is a revenue of glory which He receives from them in their worship and thanksgiving.

It remains to be pointed out that the Greek may also be fairly rendered, “what is the riches of the glory of the inheritance *of Him* by the saints,” and then the meaning is that God Himself is the inheritance of the saints. This it is which will constitute the ineffable bliss and blessedness of heaven—that God Himself will be our all-absorbing and eternally satisfying portion and heritage. When the mind soars that high, it finds an all-sufficient resting place: “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be *his God*” (Rev 21:7). O what a marvellous and inconceivable prospect that the saints will possess God Himself; that the Redeemer will yet say unto His people, “enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Mat 25:21, 23)—the joy which is His; and that word, “enter” is couched in the language of this very figure, for a man enters into his inheritance when he actually takes possession of the same. Then will each saint exclaim, “The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance...in thy presence is fulness of joy (Psa 16:5, 11).

Yet so full are the words of Scripture that no single definition can exhaust their scope. Our text not only includes the inheritance which God has provided *for* His saints, and which they have *in* Him, but it also respects what God Himself has *in them*. To paraphrase again from T. Goodwin: In 2 Thessalonians 1:10, it is said that Christ “shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe” (2Th 1:10). How will they be glorified?—why, so that *He* will be admired *in them*. “What if God, willing to...make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory” (Rom 9:22, 23)—bringing vessels of mercy unto glory is but to make known the riches of *His glory*. His glory shall arise out of theirs; and therefore, it is said to be “his inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18). When the saints are glorified and with Him in Heaven, then “he will rejoice over [them] with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over [them] with singing” (Zep 3:17). What glory must that consist of to be an inheritance for God to rest in forever!

Now, it was for a better knowledge of that glorious inheritance, which the apostle prayed the saints might have, and in order thereto that the eyes of their understanding should be enlightened. As a well-trained mind is required in order to grapple with an intricate problem in philosophy, as a musical temperament and ear is needed to fully appreciate a master-production of melody, so spiritual vision and the eyes of faith are indispensable in order to take in spiritual views of heavenly objects. Certainly, Paul had not prayed for this blessing, unless it was of great value and importance. We are bidden to set our affection upon things above—and the more real and glorious they appear to us, the easier will it be to comply with such a precept. And, obviously, the more our hearts be set upon heavenly objects, the less power will the perishing things of time and sense have to enthrall or even influence us.

If we perceived more clearly the riches of the glory of the inheritance to which we are called, we should be well content with “food and raiment” (1Ti 6:8) and a covering over our heads while here. We should be more of the spirit of those who “took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a *better* and an enduring substance” (Heb 10:34). It was “for the joy that was set before him” that the Lord Jesus “endured the cross” and despised (treated with contempt) “the shame” (Heb 12:2), and if we were more occupied with those “pleasures for evermore,” which are at God’s right hand (Psa 16:11), we should “run with patience the race that is set before us (Heb 12:1) and be less cast down by the petty sufferings and sorrows of the way. If Heaven were more real to us, we should be more earnest in seeking to walk as those journeying unto it, and long more ardently for Christ to come and take us there.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

30. His Death

We have no means of ascertaining the exact age of Elisha when he was overtaken by his fatal sickness, for we know not how old he was when called to the prophetic office (though from the analogy of Scripture, he would probably be at least thirty at that time), nor does there appear any way of discovering how long a period he accompanied and ministered to Elijah before his rapture (some writers think it was upwards of ten years); but if we total up the years which the various kings reigned over Israel, who were all outlived by our prophet (beginning with Ahab), it will be seen that he was a very old man. One commentator supposes him to have been “at this time fully one hundred and twenty years of age.” Good it is to be assured that, whether our appointed span be long or short, our “times” are in the hands of the One who gave us being (Psa 31:15). God recovers His people from many sicknesses, but sooner or later comes one from which there is no deliverance—well for us if, when that time arrives, we conduct ourselves as Elisha did and use our remaining strength to the glory of the Lord.

The final incidents in connection with Elisha are in striking keeping with the whole record of his remarkable mission. No commonplace career was his, and most extraordinary are the things which mark its closing scenes. First, we learn that the reigning monarch called upon him during his fatal illness! Kings are not accustomed to visit dying people, least of all the servants of God at such times—it might be good for them if they did. Still more unusual and remarkable was it for the king to weep over the prophet because he was on the eve of leaving the scene. Even more noteworthy was the language used by the king on this occasion. Second, so far was Elisha from considering himself flattered by the presence of such a visitor that he took complete charge of the situation, giving orders to the king, and honoured him by giving a message from Jehovah, which was as striking as any he had delivered on earlier occasions. Third, after his death, God honoured the remains of the prophet by raising to life one who had been cast into his sepulchre.

That which is recorded, in the second half of 2 Kings 13, treats of what was really another miracle in Elisha’s memorable life. This is intimated by the Spirit referring to him there as “the man of God” (2Ki 13:19), which, as we have so frequently pointed out, was used only when he was acting in his official character and discharging his extraordinary office—a fact which seems to have escaped the notice of other writers. Like several others which have been before us, this miracle consisted of a Divine revelation being communicated through him, his uttering a supernatural prophecy. Previous to this incident, nothing is recorded about his activities or how he was employed, yet it must not be concluded therefrom that he was under a cloud, and rusting out. No, that lengthy silence is broken in such a way as to preclude any thought that he had been set aside by his Master, for the Lord here makes signal use of him as He had done formerly. Elisha, like other (though not all) of God’s servants brought forth “fruit” in his old age (Psa 92:14).

“Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died” (2Ki 13:14). “The Spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha, and yet he is not sent for to heaven in a fiery chariot, as Elijah was, but goes the common road out of the world. If God honours some above others, who yet are not inferior in gifts and graces, who should find fault? May He not do what He wills with His own?” (Matthew Henry). God does as He pleases and gives no account of His matters. He asks counsel of none and explains His actions to none. Every page of Holy Writ registers some illustration and exemplification of the exercise of His high sovereignty. “And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated” (Deu 34:7). Whereas of Joshua, who lived ten years less (Jos 24:29), we read that he “waxed old” and was “stricken in age” (Jos 23:1), yet certainly he was not inferior in spirituality, nor did he occupy a less eminent position in the Lord’s service than did his predecessor. So it is still—God preserves the faculties of some unto old age, yet not so with others.

“And Joash the king of Israel [also called ‘Jehoash’—2Ki 13:1, 25; 14:1—the grandson of Jehu, and to be distinguished from ‘Joash king of Judah’ in 2Ki 13:10-13], came down unto him” (2Ki 13:14). This indicates that the prophet had not spent his closing years in isolated seclusion, for the king of Israel—not long come to the throne—knew the place of his abode. But this mention of the king’s visit also informs us that the man of God was held in high esteem, and though the royal house had sadly failed to respond to his teachings, yet they recognised his value to the nation. Israel’s fortunes had fallen to a very low point, for a

little earlier than this, we are told, "In those days the LORD began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel; From Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan" (2Ki 10:32, 33). What would the end be if Elisha were now removed!

"And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2Ki 13:14). While this visit of the king's probably indicated his respect for Elisha, yet his tears are not to be regarded as proof of his affection for him—the second half of the verse really interprets the first. The king was worried over the assaults of Hazael, and greatly feared that upon the death of this man whose counsels and miracles had more than once been of service to the royal house and saved the nation from disaster (2Ki 3:16-25; 6:9; 7:1), would henceforth be left completely at the mercy of their enemies. Joash regarded the prophet as the chief bulwark of the nation, and the prospect of his speedy removal filled him with consternation and sorrow. Thus, there was a strange mingling of esteem and *selfishness* behind those tears—is not that generally the case even in connection with the departure of a loved one?

The practical lesson for us here is plain. In the words of another, "Let us seek so to live that even ungodly men may miss us when we are gone. It is possible for us in a quiet, unobtrusive manner, so to adorn the doctrine of God, our Saviour in all things, that when we die, many shall say, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his,' and men shall drop a tear, and close the shutter, and be silent and solemn for an hour or two when they hear that the servant of God is dead. They laughed at him while he lived, but they weep for him when he dies. They could despise him while he was here, but now that he is gone, they say, 'We could have better missed a less-known man, for he, and such as he, are the pillars of the commonweal—they bring down showers of blessing upon us all.' I would covet this earnestly, not for the honour and esteem of men, but for the honour and glory of God, that even the despisers of Christ may be compelled to see there is a dignity, a respect, about the walk of an upright man."

"And said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2Ki 13:14). This was an acknowledgment that Joash regarded Elisha as the chief security of his kingdom, his best defence against aggressors—as the piety and prayers of God's people are today the nation's best protection in a time of evil, being far more potent than any material weapons. But we must note the striking language used by the king on this occasion, as he gave expression to that truth. In the opening paragraphs of our last article, we dwelt at some length upon the connection which the ministry of Elisha has to that of his predecessor—how that he was raised up to act in his stead and carry forward the work which he began. The final confirmation of the identity of the latter with the former is found in these words of the king, for they make unmistakably clear the unusually intimate relation he sustained to the Tishbite. As he had gazed on the departing form of his master, Elisha had cried, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2Ki 2:12), and now that he was on the eve of taking his departure from this world, another utters the same words over him!

We turn now to consider Elisha's response to the king's visit, his tears, and his acknowledgment. The prophet was very far from acting as a sycophant before Joash on this occasion, but maintained and manifested his official dignity unto the end of his course. He was an ambassador of the King of kings, and conducted himself accordingly. Instead of any indication that he felt himself to be honoured by this visit, or flattered by the monarch's tears, the man of God at once took charge of the situation and gave orders to his earthly sovereign. Let not young ministers today conclude from this incident that they are thereby justified in acting haughtily and high-handedly in the presence of their seniors and superiors. Not so—such an inference would be entirely un-warranted, for they do not occupy the extraordinary office which Elisha did, nor are they endowed with his exceptional gifts and powers. Nevertheless, they *are* to maintain their dignity as the ministers of Christ: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1Ti 4:12).

"And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows" (2Ki 13:15). What follows is virtually a parable in action. It should be remembered that in Eastern lands, instruction by means of *symbolic actions* is much more common than it is with us, and thus, we find the prophets frequently having recourse to this method. When Samuel would intimate unto the self-willed Saul that "The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day" (1Sa 15:28), he "laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent" (1Sa 15:27). When the prophet Ahijah announced that the Lord would "rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee" (1Ki 11:31), he caught hold of the new

garment upon Jeroboam and “rent it in twelve pieces” and bade him “take thee ten pieces” (1Ki 11:29-31). Even the false prophets employed such means—see 1 Kings 22:10, 11. Significant emblems were presented unto the eye to stir up the minds of those who beheld them and evoke a spirit of inquiry—see Jeremiah 27:2 and compare 28:10, 11 and *see* Ezekiel 24:17-19. To this custom, God referred when He said, “I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used *similitudes*, by the ministry of the prophets” (Hos 12:10). For a N.T. example, see Acts 21:10, 11.

When Elisha bade Joash, “Take bow and arrows” (2Ki 13:15), he was making use of a visual “similitude.” The articles selected at once explain it. In response to the king’s lamentation, the prophet said, in effect, Weeping over my departure will avail the nation nothing—“stand fast in the faith, quit you like a man, be strong” (1Co 16:13). Take not the line of least resistance, but assemble your forces, lead your army in person against the enemy. Though I be taken away from the earth, Jehovah still lives and will not fail those who put their confidence in Him. Nevertheless, you must discharge *your* responsibility by making good use of the means to hand. Thus, Joash was informed that he was to be the instrument of Israel’s deliverance by means of his own military efforts, and that if he trusted in the Lord and followed out His servant’s instructions, He would grant him full success. There was no need then for the king to be so distressed: if he acted like a man, God would undertake for him!

“And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king’s hands” (2Ki 13:16). Here again, we see the commanding authority and influence which the prophet had, under God, for Joash made no demur, but meekly did as he was ordered. By placing his hands upon the king’s, Elisha signified his identification with what he should yet do, thereby intimating that he owed it to the prophet’s mission and ministry that Israel was to be spared and that God would again intervene on their behalf. By symbolic action, Elisha was saying to him, “The battle is not yours, but God’s (2Ch 20:15). How little is that recognised today! Yet, thank God we have at least one General who is not ashamed to publicly own that fact, and also that we have a King who realises the value of prayer and urges His people to engage therein. “He teacheth my hands to war” (Psa 18:34) was what Elisha now sought to impress upon his royal master.

“And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD’S deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them” (2Ki 13:17). In those words, the prophet explained to the king the meaning of his symbolic actions, and what should be the outcome of them. It evidenced that Elisha’s mind was still occupied with the welfare of Israel. It demonstrated that he still acted as the servant of Jehovah: It was the final use of his prophetic gift and proof of his prophetic office. “Eastward” was the portion of the land which Hazael had already conquered (2Ki 10:33), and in bidding the king shoot in that direction, Elisha indicated where the fighting would have to be done. Notice the striking conjunction of the Divine and human elements here, and the order in which they were made: It should be “The arrow of the LORD’s deliverance” (2Ki 13:17), yet “*thou* [Joash] shalt smite the Syrians”—God would work, yet by and through him!

“And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed” (2Ki 13:18). In the light of what follows, it is clear that the king’s faith was here being put to the test: The prophet would have him signalize his reaction to the reassuring message he had just heard. “Smite upon the ground” and intimate thereby how far you believe the words which I have spoken and really expect a fulfilment of the same. Did the Lord’s promise sound too good to be true, or would Joash rest upon it with full confidence? Would he lift up his heart and eyes to God and say with David, “Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me” (Psa 18:40), or would he follow the temporizing course, which Ahab had pursued, when, instead of following up his victory by slaying Benhadad whom the Lord had delivered into his hand, spared his life, made a covenant with him, and then sent him away (1Ki 20:29-34).

“And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times” (2Ki 13:19). There are some who teach that a saint should never lose his temper, that all anger is sinful—which shows how little their thoughts are formed by Scripture. In Ephesians 4:26, Christians are thus exhorted: “Be ye angry, and sin not,” though it is at once added, “let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil” (Eph 4:26, 27). There is a holy and spiritual anger—a righteous indignation—as well as a carnal and sinful one. Anger is one of the Divine perfections, and when the Son became incarnate, we read that on one occasion, He “looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the

hardness of their hearts" (Mar 3:5). Elisha was disgusted at the half-hearted response made by the king to his message, and from love for Israel, he was indignant that Joash should stand in their way and deprive them of full deliverance from their foes. And if we had more zeal for God and love for souls, *we* would be angry at those who deprive them of their privileges.

"Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice" (2Ki 13:19). That should present a nice little problem to the hyper-Calvinist. Let us state it in question form. What possible difference to the issue could be made by the number of times the king smote upon the ground? If God had foreordained that the Syrians should be "consumed" (2Ki 13:17), then could any failure on the part of Joash prevent or even modify it? But do not Elisha's words plainly signify that the extent to which the Syrians would be vanquished turned upon the response made by him to the Divine promise? If so, does that oblige us to adopt the Arminian idea and say that such events as these fall not within the compass of the Divine decrees, that such are, rather, contingent upon human conduct? We shall not here give a solution to this problem, and will only add that if Calvinists or Arminians are unable to fit this incident into their scheme, then that is proof there is something wrong with their scheme.

Instead of wasting time on metaphysical subtleties, let us take to ourselves the practical lesson which is here pointed, namely, "According to your *faith* be it unto you" (Mat 9:29), for it was at *that* point Joash failed—he did not thoroughly believe the prophet's words. The majority of God's people today need to realise that the exercise of faith does make a real difference in what they obtain or fail to obtain from God—as real and as great a difference as between Joash "consuming" the Syrians (the Hebrew word is rendered, "to destroy them utterly" in Leviticus 26:44, and "make an utter end of" in Nahum 1:8, 9) and the "three times" he "beat" Hazeal" (2Ki 13:25). Most Christians expect little from God, ask little, and therefore receive little, and are content with little. They are content with little faith, little knowledge of the deep things of God, little growth and fruitfulness in the spiritual life, little joy, peace, and assurance. And the zealous servant of God is justified in being wroth at their pusillanimity and lack of spiritual ambition.

"And Elisha died, and they buried him" (2Ki 13:20). It is to be noted that nothing is said here of any "burial service." Nor is there anywhere in the Scriptures either in the O.T. or the N.T. Funeral obsequies or ceremonies are of Pagan origin, capitalized by Rome and her daughters, and are neither authorised nor warranted by the Word of God. If the body of Christ was tenderly and reverently interred without the mummery of any "service" over His corpse, shall the disciple be above his Master! What slaves many are to "the way of the heathen" (Jer 10:2), and in what bondage do they suffer themselves to be held through fear of public opinion—afraid of what their friends and neighbours would think and say if they should be regulated only by Holy Writ in this matter!

"And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet" (2Ki 13:20, 21). Behold, here once more the sovereignty of God, He honoured Elijah at his departure from this world, but Elisha, in a different way afterwards. It was the Lord's *seal* upon His servant's mission. It indicated that the Lord was his God *after death*, as well as before; and thus, furnished evidence both of the immortality of the soul and the final resurrection of the body. It was an intimation that other miracles would yet be wrought for Israel in response to his prayers, and as the result of his labours. Thus, to the end of the piece, *miracles* are connected with the mission of Elisha.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

9. *Its Means*

After what was set before the reader in our last two articles, it may seem almost superfluous to follow them with others devoted to a presentation of the principal means of spiritual growth. If success in the Christian life really narrows down to our obtaining fresh supplies of grace from God, then why enumerate and describe in detail the various aids which are to be employed for the promotion of personal godliness? Because the expression, "seeking fresh supplies of grace" is a far more extensive one than is commonly supposed: The "means" are really the *channels* through which that grace comes to us. When expounding Matthew 7:7 in our "Sermon on the Mount" series, it was pointed out that, in seeking grace to enable the believer to live a spiritual and supernatural life in this world, though such enablement is to be sought at the Throne of Grace, yet that does not render useless, nor exempt the Christian from diligently employing the additional means and agencies which God has appointed for the blessing of His people. Prayer must not be allowed to induce lethargy in those directions or become a substitute for the putting forth of our energies in other ways. We are called upon to watch, as well as pray, to deny self, strive against sin, take unto us the whole armour of God, and fight the good fight of faith.

In the preceding portions of His sermon, Christ had presented a standard of moral excellency, which is utterly unattainable by mere flesh and blood. He had inculcated one requirement after another that lies not within the power of fallen human nature to meet. He had forbidden an opprobrious word, a malignant wish, an impure desire, a revengeful thought. He had enjoined the most unsparing mortification of our dearest lusts. He had commanded the loving of our enemies, the blessing of those who curse us, the doing good unto those who hate us, and the praying for those who despitefully use and persecute us. In view of which the Christian may well exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things? Such demands of holiness are far beyond my feeble strength—yet the Lord *has* made them, what then am I to do?" Here is His own answer: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Mat 7:7). The Lord Jesus knew that in our own wisdom and strength, we are incapable of keeping His commandments, but He at once informed us that the things which are ordinarily impossible to men can be made possible by God. Divine assistance is imperative if we are to meet the Divine requirements. We need Divine mercy to pardon and cleanse, power to subdue our raging lusts quickening to animate our feeble graces, light on our path that we may avoid the snares of Satan, wisdom from above for the solving of our varied problems. Only God Himself can relieve our distresses and supply all our need. His assistance, then, is to be sought—sought prayerfully, believing, diligently, and expectantly; and if it be *thus* sought, it will not be sought in vain, for the same passage goes on to assure us, "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Mat 7:9-11). What inducement is *that!* Yet, other means besides prayer are to be used by us, if we are to obtain that help and succour which we so sorely need.

There are three principal dangers against which the Christian needs to guard in connection with the various means which God has appointed for his spiritual growth. First, to lay too much stress upon and dependence in them—they are *but* "means" and will avail nothing, unless God bless them to him. Second, going to the opposite extreme, by undervaluing them or imagining he can get above them. There are some who give way to fanaticism or persuade themselves they have been so "baptized by the Spirit" as to be independent of helps. Third, to look for that in them, which can come only from God in Christ. No doubt, there is room for differences of opinion as to what are the particular means which are most conducive unto Christian prosperity, and certainly, there is a considerable variety of method among those who have written on this subject, some throwing their main emphasis on one aspect of it, and some on another. Nor is there any agreement in the *order* in which they set forth the several aids to growth. We shall therefore present them to the reader according as they appear to us in the light of Scripture.

1. *Mortifying of the flesh.* In order to obtain fresh supplies of grace, constant watchfulness needs to be exercised that we do not cut ourselves off from the Source of those supplies. If such a statement jars upon some of our readers, having to them a "legalistic" or Arminian sound in it, we fear it is because their sensi-

bilities are not fully regulated by the teachings of Holy Writ. Would it not be foolish for me to blame the bulb for emitting no light if I had switched off the electrical current? Equally vain is it to attribute any lack of grace in me to the unwillingness of God to bestow it if I have severed communion with Him. Should it be objected that to draw such an analogy is carnal, we reply, our object is simply to illustrate. But does not the Lord Himself distinctly affirm, "But your iniquities have *separated* between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa 59:2)—then how can I draw from the Fountain of grace if I have cut myself off from it!

None but a fanatical enthusiast will argue that a Christian may obtain a fuller knowledge of God's will and increased light on his path while he *neglects* his Bible and books and preaching thereon. Nor will the Holy Spirit open the Word to me while I am indulging in the lusts of the flesh and "allowing" sin in my heart and life. Equally clear is it that no Christian has any Scriptural warrant to expect he will receive wisdom and strength from above while he neglects the Throne of Grace, and should he keep up the *form* of "praying" while following a course of self-will and self-pleasing, answers of peace will be withheld from him. "If I regard [cherish] iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psa 66:18). "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (Jam 4:3). The Holy One will be no lackey unto our carnality. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law [i.e., refuses to tread the path of obedience, in subjection to God's authority], even his prayer shall be abomination" (Pro 28:9)—for under such circumstances, praying would be downright hypocrisy, a mocking of God.

It is therefore apparent that there is something which must take precedence of either prayer or feeding on the Word, if the Christian is to make progress in the spiritual life. Whether or not we have succeeded in making that evident to the reader, Scripture is quite plain on the point. In James 1:21, we are bidden to "receive with meekness the engrafted word," but before we can do so, we must first comply with what immediately precedes—namely, "*lay apart* all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness." Room has to be made in our hearts for the Word—the old lumber has to be cleaned out before the new furnishings can be moved into it. We are exhorted, "As newborn babes, *desire* the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1Pe 2:2). Ah, but there is something else *before* that, and which must needs first be attended to: "Wherefore *laying aside* all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings" (1Pe 2:1). There has to be a purging of our corruptions ere there will be a spiritual appetite for Divine things. The natural man may "study the Bible" to become intellectually informed of its contents, but there has to be a "laying aside" of the things God hates before the soul will really hunger for the Bread of Life.

That to which we have just called attention has not been sufficiently recognised. It is one thing to read the Scriptures and become acquainted with their teaching, it is quite another to really feed upon them and for the life to be transformed thereby. God's Word is a *holy* Word, and it requires holiness of heart from the one who would be profited by it—the soul must be attuned to its message and transmission before there will be any real "reception." And in order to holiness of soul, sin has to be resisted, self denied, corrupt lusts mortified. What we are here insisting upon is illustrated and demonstrated by the *uniform order* of Scripture. We have to "hate the evil" before we "love the good" (Amo 5:15), and "cease to do evil" ere we can "learn to do well" (Isa 1:16, 17). Self has to be denied and the cross taken up, before we can "follow" Christ (Mat 16:24). We have to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," if we would be "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2Co 7:1). We cannot "put on the new man" (Eph 4:24) until we have "put off concerning the former conversation [or "manner of life"] the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph 4:22)!

Sin indwells all Christians and is actively opposed to the principle of grace or "new nature." When they would do good, evil is present with them. Indwelling sin or "the flesh"—corrupt nature—has "no good thing" dwelling in it (Rom 7:18). Its nature is entirely evil. It is beyond reclamation, being incapable of any improvement. It may put on a religious garb, as in the case of the Pharisees, but beneath is nothing but rottenness. As one has truly said, "No good can be educed out of it: fire may as soon be struck out of ice, as good dispositions and motions be produced in the corrupt heart of the regenerate. It will never be prevailed upon to concur with the new principle in any of those acts which it puts forth. Hence, the mind of the believer is at no time wholly spiritual and holy in its acts—there is more or less of a resistance in his soul for what is holy at all seasons." As the "flesh" continually opposes what is good, so it ever disposes the will to what is evil—its desires and motions are constantly towards objects which are vain and carnal. So far as it is permitted to control the Christian, it beclouds his judgment, captivates his affections, and enslaves his will.

Now the principle of grace, “the spirit” has been communicated to the saint for the express purpose of opposing the solicitations of the flesh and for the inclining of him unto holiness. Thus, the whole of his duty may be summed up in these two things: To die unto sin, and to live unto God. And he can only live unto God in exact proportion as he dies unto sin. That should be self-evident, for since sin is hostile to God—entirely and inveterately so—only so far as we rise above its evil influences are we free to act Godwards. Therefore, our progress in the Christian life is to be measured by the degree of our deliverance from the power of indwelling sin; and that, in turn, will be determined by how resolutely, earnestly, and untiringly we set ourselves to this great task of fighting against our corruptions. The weeds must be plucked up before the flowers can grow in the garden, and our lusts must be mortified if our graces are to flourish. Sin and grace each demand the governance of the soul, and it is the Christian’s responsibility to see to it that the former is denied and the latter given the right to reign over him.

“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13). That at once shows us the fundamental and vital importance of this duty—our attendance or non-attendance thereto is a matter of life or death. Mortification is not optional, but imperative. The solemn alternative is plainly stated. Those words are addressed to the saints, and they are faithfully warned, “If ye live after the flesh ye shall *die*”—that is, die spiritually and eternally. To “live after the flesh” is to live as do the unregenerate, who are motivated, actuated, and dominated by nothing but their own fallen nature. To “live after the flesh” refers not to a single action, nor even a whole series of actions in one particular direction, but for the whole man to be regulated by the evil principle. Education and culture may produce a refined exterior; family training or other influences may lead to a “profession of religion”—but the love of God prompts neither, nor is His glory the end. To “live after the flesh” is to allow our fallen nature to govern our character and guide our conduct, and such is the case with all the unregenerate.

“But if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13). Note well the “if ye *do*”—it is a duty assigned the Christian, it is a task which calls for self-effort. Yet, it is not a work for which he is sufficient of himself—it can only be accomplished “through the Spirit.” But care has to be taken at this point, lest we lapse into error. It is *not* “If the Spirit through you,” but “if ye through the Spirit.” The believer is not a cipher in this undertaking. The Spirit is not given to relieve us of the discharge of our responsibility in this all-important matter, but rather to equip us for *our* discharge of the same. The Spirit operates by making us more sensible of indwelling sin, by deepening our aspirations after holiness, by causing the love of Christ to constrain, by strengthening us with His might in the inner man. But *we* are the ones who are required to “*mortify* the deeds of the body”—that is, resist the workings of sin, deny self, put to death our lusts, refuse to “live after the flesh” (Rom 8:12, 13).

We must not, under the guise of “honouring the Spirit,” repudiate our accountability—or under the pretext of “waiting for the Spirit to move us” or “empower us,” lapse into a state of passivity. God has called us to “*cleanse ourselves* from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit” (2Co 7:1), to “put off concerning the former conversation the old man” (Eph 4:22), to “keep yourselves from idols” (1Jo 5:21); and He will not accept the excuse of our inability as a valid plea. If we be His children, He has infused His grace into our hearts, and that grace is to be employed in this very task of mortifying our lusts; and the way to get more grace is to make a more diligent use of what we already have. We do not “honour the Spirit” by inertia—we honour Him and “magnify grace” when we can say with David, “I kept myself from mine iniquity” (Psa 18:23), and with Paul, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1Co 9:27). True, it was by Divine enablement, yet it was not something which God did for them. There was *self-effort*—rendered successful by Divine grace.

Observe it is not, “For if ye *have* through the Spirit mortified the deeds of the body,” but “For if ye through the Spirit do mortify...” (Rom 8:13). It is not something which may be done once for all, but a continuous thing, a lifelong task which is set before the Christian. The term “mortify” is here used figuratively, inasmuch as it is a physical term applied to that which is immaterial; yet its force is easily perceived. Literally, the word signifies “put to death,” which implies it is both a painful and difficult task. The weakest creature may put up some resistance when its life be threatened, and since sin is a most powerful principle, it will make a mighty struggle to preserve its existence. The Christian, then, is called upon to exert a constant and all-out endeavour to subdue his lusts, resist their inclinations, and deny their solicitations, “*striving* against sin” (Heb 12:4)—not only against one particular form of its outbreakings, but against *all* of them, and especially against the root from which they proceed—“the flesh.”

How is the Christian to set about this all-important work? First, by starving his evil nature: “Make not provision for the flesh” (Rom 13:14). There are two ways of causing a fire to go out: To cease feeding it with fuel, and to pour water upon it. God does not require us to macerate our bodies, nor to adopt severe external austerities, but we *are* to abstain from pampering and pleasing them. “To ask meat for our bodies is necessary, a duty; but to ask meat for our lusts is provoking to God—Psalm 78:18” (Matthew Henry). “Provision for” the flesh is anything which has the least tendency to minister unto its appetites—whatever would stir our carnal lusts must be abstained from. There are mental lusts, as well as physical—such as pride, covetousness, envy, malice, and presumption—these too must be starved and denied, for they are “filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2Co 7:1). Avoid all excesses—be temperate in all things. Second, refuse any familiarity with worldings: “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph 5:11). Shun evil companions, for “a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Pro 13:20). “Enter not into the path of the wicked...Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away” (Pro 4:13, 14). Even those “having a form of godliness,” but who in practice are “denying the power thereof,” God says, “from such *turn away*” (2Ti 3:5).

Third, “Keep thy *heart* with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). Take yourself firmly in hand and maintain a strict discipline over your inner man, especially your desires and thoughts. Unlawful desires and evil imaginations need to be nipped in the bud, by sternly resisting them at our first consciousness of the same. As it is much easier to pluck up weeds while they are young, or to quench a fire before it takes a firm hold, so it is much simpler to deal with the initial stirrings of our lusts than after they have “conceived” (*see* Jam 1:15)—refuse to parley with the first temptation, suffer not your mind to cogitate upon anything Scripture disallows. Fourth, keep short accounts with God. As soon as you are conscious of failure, excuse it not, but penitently confess it to Him. Let not sins accumulate on your conscience, but frankly and promptly acknowledge them to the Lord. Bathe daily in the Fountain, which has been “opened...for sin and for uncleanness” (Zec 13:1).

It is strange that so many other writers on this subject place *first* among the means of spiritual growth this work of *mortifying* the flesh, for it should be quite obvious that it must take precedence over everything else. Of what avail can it be to read and study the Word, to spend more time in prayer, to seek to develop my graces, while I ignore and neglect that within me, which will neutralise and mar all other efforts. What would be the use of sprinkling fertilizer on my ground if I allowed the weeds to grow and multiply there? Of what avail would it be my watering and pruning of a rose-bush if I knew there was a pest gnawing at its roots? Settle it then in your mind, dear reader, that no progress can be made by you in the Christian life, until you realise the paramount importance and imperative necessity of waging a ceaseless warfare against indwelling sin—and not only realise the need for the same, but resolutely gird yourself for and engage in the task, and ever seeking the Spirit’s help to give you success therein. The Canaanites must be ruthlessly exterminated if Israel was to occupy the land of milk and honey, and enjoy peace and prosperity therein.

N.B.¹ Personally, we deem this article the most important one of the series to date, and though it may not be so palatable as some of the others, we think the spiritual reader will not be the loser if he gives it a prayerful and careful re-perusal. It is not always those portions of the Truth which are the most pleasing to us which we stand most in need of, as it is not always the tastiest dishes that afford our bodies the most nourishment.

¹ N.B. – *nota bene*, lit. “note well,” used to direct attention to something particularly important.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

7b. Its Meaning

In our last, we pointed out the needs-be for and the importance of making a clear distinction between the Atonement and reconciliation, that the sacrifice of Christ was the cause and means of which reconciliation was the effect and end. Some theologians, and good ones too, have demurred against terming the offering of Christ a “means”—insisting that it was the procuring cause of our salvation. The fact is, it was both a means and a cause, according as we view it in different relations. It was the meritorious cause of reinstating us in the favour of God and of procuring for us the Holy Spirit; it was the means by which God’s mercy is exercised in a way of justice. “Being justified freely by his grace *through* the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). It may rightly be regarded as a mean or medium in respect of the originating cause—hence, grace is presented as the source from which it sprang, the redemptive work of Christ the channel through which it flows. In Hebrews 9:15, Christ’s death is expressly termed the “means.”

Some may be inclined to chafe at the “distinctions” we frequently call attention to, considering we are too prone to confuse the minds of the simple by introducing “theological niceties.” But did not the apostle pray that the Philippian saints might be moved by God to “try things that differ” (margin of Phi 1:10)? We rather fear that such disrelish of these distinctions is a sign of mental slovenliness and spiritual slothfulness. Is it of no significance, or of no importance to us, to take notice of the fact that while the Scriptures speak of “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16) and of the “wrath of God” being upon both the non-elect and elect in a state of nature, they never once make reference to “the wrath of the *Father*”? If any of our readers sneer or shrug their shoulders at *that* as a mere “splitting of hairs,” we are very sorry for them. God’s Word is made up of *words*, and it behooves us to weigh every one of them attentively. If we do not, we shall obtain little more than a blurred impression rather than a clear-cut view of the Truth.

The work of Christ was indeed one and indivisible; nevertheless, it is capable of and requires to be viewed from various angles. For that reason, among others, the typical altar was not round but “foursquare” (Exo 27:1). The *nature* of Christ’s work was fourfold in its character: Being a federal work—as the Representative of His people; a vicarious work—as their Surety and Substitute; a penal work—as He took their Law-place; and a sacrificial work—offering Himself unto God on their behalf. The work of Christ *accomplished* four chief things: It propitiated God Himself, it expiated the sins, it reinstated them in the Divine favour, and it estated them an everlasting inheritance of glory. There is also a fourfold *consequence* of Christ’s work so far as His people are concerned: The guilt of their transgressions is cancelled so that they receive remission of sins; they are delivered from all bondage—redeemed, they are made legally and experimentally righteous; and all enmity between God and them is removed—they are reconciled.

In our last, we also exposed the sophistry of the Socinian contention that if the propitiatory character of Christ’s sacrifice be insisted upon, then we repudiate the uncaused love and free grace of God. We sought to show that while the shedding of Christ’s blood was an appeasement of the Divine wrath against God’s people, it was not an inducement of His love unto them. Thus, in the latter half of our foregoing article, we dealt more with the negative side in showing what the oblation of Christ was *not* designed to accomplish—namely, to procure God’s good will unto sinners. Now we must turn to the positive side and point out what the Atonement was designed to effect. We need to be constantly on our guard against exalting the wondrous love of God to the deprecation of His ineffable holiness. If on the one hand, it is blessed to continually bear in mind that never has there been such love as the love of God—so pure, so intense, so satisfying; it is equally necessary not to forget there has never been a law like unto the Law of God—so spiritual, so holy, so inexorable.

Divine love unto sinners originated reconciliation, but the Divine Law required that love to flow in a righteous channel. The method which it has pleased God to employ is one wherein there is no compromise between love and law, but rather one where each has found full expression. At the cross, we see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the spotless purity of the Law, the unbending character of God’s government, and the righteous outflow of His mercy unto Hell-deserving transgressors. The same conjunction of Divine light and love appears in connection with our receiving blessings in response to Christ’s intercession, as is clear from His words, “I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you” (Joh 16:26, 27)—which was to assure us that we not only have the benefit of Christ’s prayers, but the Father Himself so loves us that, that alone, is sufficient to obtain anything at His hands. Think not that the Father is hard to be exhorted, and that

blessings have to be wrung from Him by My supplications—no, they issue from *His love*, but in an honourable way, and that we may appreciate them the more.

But in our day, it is necessary to consider reconciliation more from the standpoint of God's holiness and justice, for during the last two or three generations, there has been an entirely disproportionate emphasis on His love. While it be true that, at the cross, we behold the highest expression of God's love to sinners; yet, it is equally true that, there, we also witness the supreme manifestation of God's hatred of sin—and the one should never be allowed to crowd out, or obscure, the other. The apostle hesitated not to affirm that God "set forth [His Son] to be a *propitiation* through faith in his blood, to declare [or demonstrate] his righteousness" (Rom 3:25)—observe well how those words, "to declare...his righteousness" are *repeated* in the very next verse! If the question be asked, Why did God give His Son to die for sinners, rather than have them to perish in their sins?—the answer is, Because He loved them. But if the question be, Why did He give His Son to be a propitiation for sinners, rather than save them without one?—the answer is, Because He loved righteousness and hated iniquity.

To any who have followed us closely through these articles up to the present point, it should be quite clear, we think, that they err gravely who contend that reconciliation is entirely one-sided, that it is sinners who need to be reconciled to God, that in nowise did God require reconciling to His people, seeing that He changes not, that He loves them with an everlasting love, and that it was entirely His good-will and benevolence which provided the Atonement for them. Yet, since it is at this very point that so many have departed from the Truth, we must labour it and enter into more detail. It is sin which has caused the breach between the Holy One and His fallen creatures, and since He was the One wronged and injured by sin, surely, it is self-evident that reparation must be made unto Him for that offence and outrage. Why, every passage in which "propitiation" occurs is proof that God needed to be reconciled to sinners, that His wrath must be averted before peace could be made.

It is of first importance to recognise that "reconciliation" necessarily implies alienation, and that both reconciliation and alienation connote a *relationship* between God and us. Alienation signifies that a state of enmity and hostility exists between two parties; reconciliation that the cause and ground of the alienation has been removed, so that amity now obtains between them. It is therefore essential that we define carefully and accurately the *changed relationship* between God and His people, which was brought about by the entrance of sin. Though the everlasting objects of God's eternal favour—having been chosen in Christ from all eternity and blest with all spiritual blessings in Him—nevertheless, the elect (in Adam) *apostatized* from God, and in consequence of the Fall, fell under the curse of His Law. Considered as the Judge of all, God became *antagonistic* to them; considered as fallen creatures (what they were in themselves), they were by nature enmity against Him. The entrance of sin into this world brought the Church into a condition of guilt before the Holy One; yet, because of the Lamb being slain in the purpose of God, the Father's love never ceased unto His people—without any injury unto His justice.

There could be no thought of reconciliation between a holy God and a polluted rebel until full satisfaction had been made to His broken Law. Sin raised a barrier between God and us, which we could in no wise surmount: "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you" (Isa 59:2). Sin resulted in alienation between God and man. This as made unmistakably plain right after the Fall, in Eden itself, for we are told, "So he [God] drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen 3:24). Let it be carefully remembered that God was not there dealing with Adam simply as a private person, but as the *federal head* of the race, as the legal representative of *all* his posterity—both of the elect and the non-elect. The "flaming sword" was emblematic of the vindictive justice of God. The natural man as such was excluded from Paradise, and effectually barred from the tree of life. That it turned "every way" precluded *any* avenue of approach.

The reconciliation must be mutual, because the alienation was mutual—Christ had to remove God's wrath from us, as well as our sins from before God. If God were not reconciled to us, it would avail us nothing to lay aside our enmity against Him. The fact that the flaming sword "turned every way" to bar man's access to the tree of life signified that by no effort of his could the sinner repair the damage which his capital offence had wrought, and declared in the language of the N.T. that "they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God" (Rom 8:8). By nature, we are "the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3), and by practice, "alienated and enemies" in our "mind by wicked works" (Col 1:21), and unless peace be made and reconciliation effected, we should neither have any encouragement to go to Him for mercy, nor any hope for

acceptance with Him. The throwing down of the weapons of our rebellion would avail nothing while we were obnoxious to the curse of the Divine Law. How then shall we be delivered from the wrath to come is thus the all-important question, for His wrath is “revealed from heaven against *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom 1:18).

The fallen sons of men have not only removed themselves to a guilty distance from God, but He has judicially and morally removed Himself from them: “The LORD is far from the wicked” (Pro 15:29). And as men have wickedly departed from Him, God has righteously withdrawn from them; and thus, the distance is *mutual*, and ever increasing. While Adam remained obedient, his Creator admitted him to near communion with Him, as is intimated by His “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen 3:8); but when he transgressed the commandment, He withdrew His favour and thrust him out of Paradise. Had no Atonement been provided, there had never again been any communion with God—any more than there is between Him and the fallen angels. This awful state of distance from God is *still* the condition of all the unregenerate—elect or non-elect, the interposition of Christ availing them not, while they continue rejecting Him, as is made unmistakably plain by “he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (Joh 3:36).

While they remain in a state of nature, the elect—equally with the non-elect—lie under the guilt of sin and the condemnation of the Law; and are therefore, obnoxious to God—considered as the moral Governor and Judge of all. “God hateth sinners as they hate Him, for we are children of wrath from the womb, and that wrath abideth on us till we enter into God’s peace; and the more wicked we are, the more we increase His wrath. ‘He is angry with the wicked every day’ (Psa 7:11); they are under His curse. Whatever be the secret purposes of His grace, yet so they are by the sentence of His Law, and according to *that* we must judge of our condition” (T. Manton, volume 13, p. 257). So too, John Owen (1616-1683): “Reconciliation is the renewing of friendship between parties before at variance—both parties being properly said to be reconciled, even both he that offended, and he that was offended. God and man were set at distance, at enmity, and variance by sin, man was the party offending, God offended, and the alienation was mutual on every side” (*The Death of Death*, chapter 6, 2nd paragraph).

But how may God be said to love or hate believers before their reconciliation since He is the Author of it? Let us give a condensation of Stephen Charnock’s reply (1628-1680): “First, God loves them with a love of *purpose* or election, but till grace be wrought in them, not with a love of *acceptation*. We are within the love of His purpose as we are designed to be the servants of Christ, but not within the love of His acceptance till we are actually His servants—‘he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God’ (Rom 14:18). They are alienated from God while in a state of nature and not accepted by God till in a state of grace. There is in God a love of good-will and a love of delight. The love of good-will is the root, the love of delight is love in the flower. The love of good-will looks upon us as afar off, the love of delight is itself in us, draws near to us. By peace with God, we have access to Him; by His love of delight, He has access to us. God wills well to them before grace, but is not well pleased with them till grace.

“Second, God doth hate His elect in some sense before their actual reconciliation: (a) Not their persons, though He takes no pleasure in them, neither their persons nor services. (b) But He hates their *sins*. Sin is always odious to God, let the person be what it will. God never hated, nor ever could, the person of Christ, yet He hated and testified in the highest measure His hatred of those iniquities He stood charged with as our Surety. He hates the sins of believers, though pardoned and mortified. (c) God hates their *state*. The elect before conversion are in a state of enmity, of darkness, of slavery, and that state is odious to God, and makes them incapable while in that state to ‘inherit the kingdom of God’ (1Co 6:9-11). The state of the elect before actual reconciliation is odious, because it is a state of alienation from God—whatever grows up from the root of the old Adam cannot be delightful to Him. (d) God hates them as to withholding the *effects* of His love—His frown rather than His smile is upon them.”

In Ephesians 2, the apostle informs us how this mutual alienation is removed—namely, by Christ “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph 2:15, 16). As J. Owen pointed out, “It is evident the reconciliation here mentioned consists in slaying the enmity, so making peace. Now, what is the “enmity” intended? Not that in our hearts to God, but the legal enmity that lay against us on the part of God.” This passage will come before us again (D.V.), when we consider the *scope* of reconciliation, suffice it now to point out that while verses 14, 15 refer to that which was effected between believing Jews and Gentiles,

verse 16 has in view that which relates to God Himself, and as J. Owen well pointed out, this “enmity” of God against Jews and Gentiles alike was a legal one—that which the Divine Law entailed.

“And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; . . . And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight” (Col 1:20-22). Since “peace” was made, there must have been enmity or hostility; and since the peace was made “through the blood of his cross,” then the shedding thereof was in order to the *placating of God*, by offering a satisfaction to His outraged Law. Thus, when theologians use the expression, “a reconciled God,” they signify that a change in His relationship and attitude toward us has been effected, from one of wrath to favour—it is the removal of that estrangement which was produced by our offence. In consequence of His atonement, Christ has pacified God toward all who believe and brought them to God. Our reconciliation unto God is the same thing as our *conversion*, when we surrendered to His just claims upon us, and in heart, desired and purposed to forsake all that is opposed to Him.



A REQUEST

The March and April 1941 issues of this magazine to American readers were “lost by enemy action.” If my British friends have these two particular copies and can spare them *without* breaking a whole year’s set, kindly post them to us, and (D.V.), we will forward to those who will value them.