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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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Arthur W. Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886, and born again by God's Spirit in 1908. He studied briefly at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago before his pastoral work in Colorado, California, Kentucky, and South Carolina, USA, and in Sydney, Australia. In 1934, he returned to his native England, taking his final residence on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, in 1940, where he remained until his death in 1952.

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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CONFORMITY

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). What an amazing statement is that!—certainly one which no mortal mind had ever thought of inventing. That some out of the fallen descendants of Adam should be not only saved from their sins and delivered from the wrath to come, but decreed by God to be made like that blessed One in whom His soul delighteth. That is the climax of grace, for it is not possible to confer a greater or higher favour upon its chosen subjects. That depraved creatures should yet become replicas of the Holy One—that worms of the earth should be fashioned after the Lord of glory—passes finite comprehension, yet faith receives and love adores. But mark the perfect accuracy of this statement: not predestinated “to be conformed to the image of his Son”—for that would have involved our deification (which is impossible)—but unto His “image.”

What does this “conformity” consist of? Summarizing the teaching of the New Testament thereon, we may say it is a spiritual, a practical, an experiential, and a physical one. A line must not be drawn too sharply between those distinctions, for they shade off the one into the other. The first begins at our regeneration; the second has to do with our sanctification; the third concerns our mortification; and the fourth will not be effected until our glorification. Before there can be any real conformity to Christ outwardly, there must be an inward one of nature, as we must first “live in the Spirit” before we can “walk in the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). At regeneration, the spiritual image of Christ is stamped upon the soul, and He is “formed” in the heart—the “new man” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10) being created after His likeness. The members are of the same nature as the head: the life of Christ must be imparted to us before there can be any communion with or conformity to Him. “And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (Joh 1:16)—i.e. grace communicated to us corresponding in nature to the grace of which He is full.

That initial conformity is continued throughout the Christian’s life on earth: he is renewed in the inner man day by day (2Co 4:16). It is both his privilege and duty to become increasingly Christlike in his character and conduct: that ye “may grow up into him in all things” (Eph 4:15) is to be our ceaseless aim and endeavour. We are enjoined, “put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 13:14)—as the soldier does his uniform—evidencing by our daily deportment that we serve under his banner. We are required to express or “shew forth” His virtues (1Pe 2:9, margin), making it manifest that He indwells us. Said the apostle, “Be ye followers [or ‘imitators’] of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1Co 11:1). Our bearing the *name* of Christ is justified only so far as we display His *perfections*. Christ not only lives for His people, but in them (Gal 2:20); and *He* cannot “be hid” (Mar 7:24). Christ died for them, and they are to die unto sin, self, the world. It is by their conformity unto Christ that His followers are distinguished from empty professors.

This spiritual and inward conformity to Christ is promoted by our regular use of appropriate means. “But we all [regenerate souls], with open face [in contrast with the veiled Jews—verses 13-16] 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). The “glass” in which the “glory of the Lord” is seen is the Scriptures. That glory is “beheld” by faith, for faith is the eye of the spirit—as it is by our physical eyes, we take in light from the sun. As the regenerated soul is believably and adoringly occupied with that wondrous “glory,” he is “changed into the same image”: not completely so in a moment, but gradually and progressively “from glory to glory.” Not by any effort or striving of ours, but “by the Spirit,” whose office it is first to unite us to Christ and then to make us like Him. The closer communion we have with the Lord Jesus, the nearer affiliation shall we have to Him. As faith feeds upon Him who gives us His own flesh to eat, we become assimilated to Him spiritually. The more we are affected by His love, the more we shall strive to please Him.

“Beholding as in a glass [Greek—‘mirror’] the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image.” The figure is taken from the mirrors used by the ancients, which, unlike ours, were made of highly polished metal. For their use, a brilliant light was required; and as it fell upon the mirror, not only did the person holding it see in it his countenance, but upon his face was reflected the glow from the metal: if the mirror was of brass or gold, the reflection would be yellow; if silver, white. And as faith is occupied with the person of Christ and the Spirit shines upon our hearts, His perfections are reproduced in us. We cannot bask long in the presence of the “Sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2) without our reflecting His beams. As Moses

descended from the mount after forty days' converse with Jehovah, "the skin of his face shone" (Exo 34:30). The more the saint is in Christ's company, the more is he assimilated unto His likeness.

Practical conformity to Christ, in our conduct, is furthered by our following the example He has left us (1Pe 2:21). One of the great ends for which God sent His Son into the world in our nature was that He might reveal to us through His life in this scene how we should conduct ourselves acceptably unto God. In Christ, the divine ideal of manhood has been realized. All the original goodness (Gen 1:31) of human nature has been exercised and exemplified to the glory of God in the perfect life of Christ. As all colours meet in the rainbow, so all virtues and excellencies meet in Christ. He is a perfect and glorious pattern of all graces. Not so the most eminent saints. The best of their graces and the highest of their attainments were marred by blots and failures. Christ is "altogether lovely" (Song 5:16) the Lamb "without blemish and without spot" (1Pe 1:19). In His life, we behold the Law translated into concrete terms and its requirements set before us by personal representation. In His deportment, we have a clear display of what practical holiness consists of.

In His life, Christ has exhibited what He requires from His followers: "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1Jo 2:6). As one of the lesser-known Puritans expressed it, "Christ is the sun, and all the watches of our lives should be set by the dial of His motions." A Christian is one who has renounced his own will and wisdom as the rule of his actions, and has surrendered to the sceptre of Christ to be governed by Him, and He teaches both by precept and example. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me" (Mat 11:29) is His requirement, and compliance therewith is to be the business of our lives. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phi 2:5). We are to learn from Christ's conduct as well as His counsels, that holy obedience to God's will may mark us in all things. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John [not their 'sweetness,' but their uncompromising fidelity, their loyalty at all costs]...they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Act 4:13)!

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mat 16:24). The "cross" stands for self-sacrifice, a life yielded up to God; and it is not laid upon the disciple, but voluntarily "taken up" by him, so that he may be "made conformable unto his death" (Phi 3:10)—dying daily unto sin. There must be an experimental conformity unto Christ *in suffering*. The members of Christ's body share, in their measure, the experiences of their Head; and they do so in proportion as they follow the example which He has left them. As the world hated Christ, so it hates those who bear His image. It was the unregenerate religious world which most fiercely opposed Him, and sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master. The closer we follow Him, the more shall we bring down upon ourselves the hostility of Satan: "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of *Christ's* sufferings" (1Pe 4:13).

"But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1Jo 3:2): *there* is the blessed consummation. Chosen in Christ, called to Christ, communing with Christ, fully conformed to Christ! As God has predestinated His people to be conformed to the image of His Son spiritually, practically, and experientially, so also physically: for at His return, Christ "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phi 3:21). Nothing short of *entire* conformity will satisfy the desires of God for His elect! "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1Co 15:49). But conformity to Christ will not be consummated in heaven, unless it has been commenced on earth: there must be regeneration, sanctification, and mortification, before there is glorification. Christ was humiliated on earth before He was exalted in heaven; so with us the cross precedes the crown.



THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

66. 1 Peter 5:10-11, Part 2

“But the God of all grace, who hath called us” (1Pe 5:10). In our last—availing ourself of Thomas Goodwin’s (1600-1680) analysis—we pointed out that this most blessed title respects what God is in Himself, in His eternal purpose, and in His actings unto His people. Here, in the words just quoted, we see the three things joined together—God’s effectual *call*, whereby He brings a soul out of nature’s “darkness into his [own] marvellous light” (1Pe 2:9), is the *first* evident or outward proof that person receives that He is unto him “the God of all grace” (1Pe 5:10). Yet that was not the first outgoing of God’s heart unto him, but instead, the *proof* that His love had been set upon him from all eternity: “Whom he did predestinate, them he also called” (Rom 8:30). God has “from the beginning” chosen His people unto salvation, and in due time effects the same by the invincible operations of the Spirit, who capacitates and causes them to believe the Gospel (2Th 2:13-14). They “believed through grace” (Act 18:27), for faith is the gift of divine grace (Eph 2:8), and it was given them because they belonged unto “the election of grace” (Rom 11:5); and they belonged to that favoured election, because the God of all grace singled them out to be the everlasting monuments of His grace.

That it was the grace which was in the heart of God that moved Him to call us is clear from 2 Timothy 1:9: “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” Regeneration (or effectual calling) is the consequence, and not the cause, of divine predestination. God resolved to love us with an unchangeable love, and that love designed we should be partakers of His eternal glory. His good will toward us moves Him infallibly to carry out all the resolutions of His free grace unto us, so that nothing can thwart the same, though acting consistently with His other perfections. None magnified the grace of God more than T. Goodwin, yet when asked, “Does the divine prerogative of grace mean that God saves men, continue they what they will?” answered, “God forbid.” We deny such a sovereignty so understood, as if it saved any man without rule, much less against rule. The very verse which speaks of God as ‘the God of all grace’ in relation to our salvation adds, ‘who hath called us,’ and our calling is a *holy* one (2Ti 1:9).

It helps us to a better understanding of this divine title if we compare it with another found in 2 Corinthians 1:3, “the God of all comfort”—except that it is more restricted to the dispensing aspect, as the words which follow show: “who comforteth us in all our tribulation.” As “the God of *all* comfort,” He is not only the Bestower of all real consolation and the Sustainer under all trials, but also the Giver of all temporal comforts or mercies, for whatever natural refreshment or benefit we derive from the creature is due alone to His blessing the same unto us. In like manner, He is “the God of *all* grace”: seeking grace, quickening grace, pardoning grace, cleansing grace, providing grace, recovering grace, preserving grace, glorifying grace—grace of every kind, and of full measure. Yet though that expression, “the God of all comfort,” serves to illustrate the One we are here considering, nevertheless, it falls short of it, for God’s dispensations of grace are *wider* than those of His comfort. In certain cases, God gives grace where He does not comfort—as His illuminating grace brings with it the pangs of conviction, which sometimes last a lengthy season before any relief is granted; and as under His chastening rod, sustaining grace is vouchsafed where comfort is withheld.

Not only is there every conceivable kind of grace available for us in God, but He gives it forth as our wants require, for then is the occasion for grace to show itself. We are freely invited to come boldly unto the Throne of Grace that we may “find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16), or, as Solomon expressed it, that the LORD God would maintain the cause of His people Israel “at all times, as the matter shall require” (1Ki 8:59). Such is our gracious God: ministering to us at all times as well as in all matters. So again, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man [i.e. is human, for the sin against the Holy Spirit is the devil’s sin]: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1Co 10:13). As Christ declared, “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men” (Mat 12:31), for the God of all grace works repentance and forgives all sorts of sins, after conversion, as well as before—as the cases of David and Peter show. Saith He, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely” (Hos 14:4). Full cause has each of us to feelingly say from experience, “And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant” (1Ti 1:14).

“But the God of all grace, who hath called us *unto his eternal glory*.” Here is the greatest and grandest proof that He is such unto His people. No more convincing and blessed evidence are needed to make manifest the good will which he bears them. The abundant grace which is in His heart toward them and the beneficent design He has unto them are made clearly evident therein. They are “the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28), namely, that “eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:11). That effectual call which brings from death unto life is the first open breaking forth of God’s electing grace, and is the foundation of all the actings of His grace unto them afterwards. It is then He commences His “good work” in them, which He completes “until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phi 1:6). By it, they are called unto a life of holiness here, and a life of glory hereafter. What the latter consists of, we endeavour to show in our articles under the doctrine of divine revelation: here, we are told that those who were by nature the children of wrath will be sharers of God’s own eternal glory. Though God’s effectual call does not bring them into the actual possession of it at once, yet it fully qualifies and fits them for the same: “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12).

But let us look beyond the most delightful of the streams of grace unto the Fountain. It is the infinite grace which is in the nature of God that engages itself to make good His beneficent purpose, and continually supplies those streams. It is to be well noted that when God uttered that great charter of grace, “I...will be gracious to whom I will be gracious,” He prefaced it with: “I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee” (Exo 33:19). All of that grace and mercy which is in Jehovah Himself, and which is to be made known unto His people, was to engage the attention of Moses *before* his mind turned to consider the sum of His decrees or purposing grace. That ocean of goodness which is in God is engaged in promoting the good of His people; and that goodness He caused to pass before His servant’s eyes, that he might be heartened by beholding such an illimitable wealth of benevolence, that he should be fully assured the God of all grace would indeed “be gracious” unto them He chose in Christ before the foundation of the world. It is the essential grace which is rooted in the very being of God which is to be the first object of faith; and the more faith be acted upon the same, the more will our souls be upheld in the hour of trial, persuaded that such a One cannot fail us.

Fourth, its *plea*: “Who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus” (1Pe 5:10). While that clause is undoubtedly brought in to magnify God and to exemplify His wondrous grace, yet considered separately, in relation to the prayer as a whole, we personally regard it as the plea made by the apostle in support of the petition that follows. He was making request that God would perfect, settle, strengthen, stablish His saints, and it was tantamount to asking: “Since Thou hast already done the greater, grant them the lesser; seeing that they are to be sharers of Thy eternal glory in Christ, give them what they need while left in this time state.” If our hearts were more engaged with *Who* it is that has called us, and to *what* He has appointed us, not only would our mouths be opened wider, but we should be more confident of their being filled. It is none other than Jehovah, who sits resplendent on His Throne, surrounded by the adoring celestial hosts, who will shortly say unto each of us: “Come unto Me and feast thyself on My perfections.” Think you that He will withhold anything that will be for your good? If He has called me to heaven, is there anything needful on earth He will deny me?

A most powerful and prevalent plea is this. First, it is as though the apostle said: “Have Thou respect unto the works of Thy hand. Thou hast indeed called them out of darkness into light, but they are still fearfully ignorant. It is Thy gracious pleasure that they should spend eternity in Thy immediate presence on high, but they are here in the wilderness, and are compassed with infirmities. Then, in view of both the one and the other, carry on all those other workings of grace unto and in them which are needful in order to bring them to glory.” What God has already done for us should not only be a ground of confident expectation of what He will yet do (2Co 1:10), but be used as an argument when making our requests unto God. Since Thou has regenerated me, make me now to grow in grace. Since Thou hast put into my heart a hatred of sin and a hunger after righteousness, intensify the same. Since Thou hast made me a branch of the Vine, make me a very fruitful one. Since Thou hast united me to Thy dear Son, enable me to show forth His praises, honour Him in my daily life, and thus commend Him to those who know Him not. But we are somewhat anticipating our next division.

In that one work of calling, God has shown Himself to be the God of all grace unto you, and that should greatly strengthen and confirm your faith in Him. “Whom he called, them he also *justified*” (Rom 8:30), which consists of two things: forgiveness and pronouncing sentence of righteousness. To estimate

the plenitude of His grace in forgiveness, thou must calculate the number and heinousness of thy sins. They were more than the hairs of thy head, for thou wast born as a wild ass's colt and from the first dawns of reason, "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). As for their criminality, most of them were committed against the voice of conscience, and consisted of privileges despised and mercies abused. Nevertheless, His Word declares: "Having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col 2:13). How that should melt your heart, and move you to adore "the God of all grace." How it should make you fully persuaded that He will continue dealing with you not according to your deserts, but according to His own goodness and benignity. True, He has not yet rid thee of indwelling corruption, but that affords further occasion for Him to display His longsuffering grace unto thee.

But wonderful as is such a favour, yet the forgiveness of sins is only *half* of even the legal side of salvation, and the negative and inferior part of it at that. Though everything recorded against me on the debit side has been blotted out, still there stands not a single item to my credit on the other side. From the hour of my birth to the moment of my conversion, not one good deed has been registered to my account, for none of my actions proceeded from a pure principle, nor were they performed for God's glory: issuing from a filthy fountain, the streams were polluted. How then could God *justify* me, or pronounce me up to the required standard? That standard is a perfect and perpetual conformity to the divine Law, for nothing less secures its award. Here again the wondrous riches of divine grace appear; God has not only blotted out all my iniquities, but has placed to my account a full and flawless righteousness, having imputed to me the perfect obedience of His incarnate Son: "Much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the *gift of righteousness* shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)...by the obedience of one shall many be made [i.e. legally constituted] righteous" (Rom 5:17, 19). When God effectually called thee, He clothed thee "with the robe of [Christ's] righteousness" (Isa 61:10), and that supplied an inalienable right to the inheritance.

What has just been pointed out is only another way of saying that He "hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus," or rather, is part exposition of those words. When God regenerates a soul, He gives him faith; and through its exercise on Christ, that which disqualified him for eternal glory (his guilt and pollution) is removed, and a sure title to heaven is bestowed. God's effectual call is both our qualification for and an earnest of glory. Our glorification was the grand end which God had in view from the beginning; and all that He does for us and works in us here are but means and prerequisites unto the same. Next unto His own glory therein, our glorification is God's supreme design in electing and calling us: "God hath from the beginning chosen you...to the obtaining of *the glory* of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2Th 2:13-14). "Moreover whom he did predestinate...them he also glorified" (Rom 8:30). "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luk 12:32). "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mat 25:34)—that is, heaven, His eternal glory. Nothing less than that was what the God of all grace set His heart upon as the portion of His dear children. Hence, when our election is first made manifest by the effectual call, God is so intent upon this glory that He then gives us a title thereto.

Thomas Goodwin gave a striking illustration of what we have just said from God's dealings with David. While he was but a mere shepherd-boy, God sent Samuel to anoint him king in the open view of his father and brethren (1Sa 16:13), and by that solemn act, invested him with a visible and irrevocable *right* of the kingdom of Judah and Israel. His actual possession thereof God delayed for years; nevertheless, his divine title thereto was then bestowed, and God engaged Himself to make the same good unto him, and swore not to repent of it; and then suffered Saul (the figure of Satan!) and all the power of his kingdom, and almost the whole of his subjects, to do their worst—to demonstrate that no counsel of His can be thwarted. Though for a season, David was exposed like a partridge on the mountains, and had to flee from place to place; nevertheless, he was miraculously preserved by God and ultimately brought to the Throne. So at regeneration, God anoints us with His Spirit, sets us apart, and gives a title to everlasting glory; and though afterwards, He lets loose fierce enemies upon us, and leaves us to the hardest of wrestlings and fightings with them, yet His mighty hand is over us, succouring and strengthening, or restoring if we be temporarily overcome and taken captive.

God has not called us unto any evanescent, but unto an *eternal* glory, estating us into the same at the new birth. At that time, a spiritual life is communicated to the soul: a life which is indestructible, incorruptible, and therefore everlasting. More, we then received "the spirit of glory" (1Pe 4:14) as "the earnest of our inheritance" (Eph 1:13-14). Further, the image of Christ is progressively wrought in our hearts during this life, and that is styled "glory" (2Co 3:18). Not only are we thereby "made...meet to be partakers of

the inheritance of the saints in light,” but we are then put into an eternal *right* of glory, for by regeneration or effectual calling, God begets us unto the inheritance (1Pe 1:3-4): a title thereto is given us at that moment which holds good for ever. That title is ours both by the covenant-stipulation of God and the testamentary bequest of the Mediator (Heb 9:15). “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God” (Rom 8:17). “Put these three things together: first, that that glory we are called unto is in itself eternal; second, that that person who is called hath a degree of that glory begun in him that shall never die or perish; third, that he hath a right unto the eternity of it, and that from the time of his calling, and the argument is complete” (T. Goodwin). That “eternal glory” is “the exceeding riches of his grace” which He will lavish upon His people in the endless ages to come (Eph 2:6-7); and as those verses tell us, even now we are—legally and federal—“[seated] together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

“Who hath called us unto his eternal glory” (1Pe 5:10). God has not only called us into a state of grace—“this grace wherein we stand”—but unto a state of glory, eternal glory, *His* eternal glory, so that we “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2). The two things are inseparably connected: “The LORD will give grace and glory” (Psa 84:11). Although we are the persons to be glorified by it, it is His glory which is put upon us. Obviously so, for we are wholly poor empty creatures, whom God will fill with the riches of His glory. Truly, it is “the God of all grace” (1Pe 5:10) who does this for us. Neither creation or providence—nor even His actings unto the elect in this life—fully display the abundance of His grace: only in heaven will its utmost height be seen and enjoyed. It is there the ultimate manifestation of God’s glory will be made, and which we shall behold for ever—the very honour and ineffable splendour with which Deity invests Himself. That glory is to be communicated to His people, so that “then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mat 13:43)—the glory of God will so completely fill and irradiate their souls that it will break forth from their bodies. Then will the eternal purpose of God be fully accomplished. Then will all our fondest hopes be perfectly realized. Then will God be “all in all” (1Co 15:28).

“Who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus”; or better, “*in* Christ Jesus”—that is, by virtue of our union with Him. The glory pertains to Him as He is our Head, and is communicated to us only as we are His members. Christ is the first and grand Proprietary of it, and He shares it with those whom the Father gave to Him (Joh 17:22, 24). Christ Jesus is the Centre of all the divine counsels, for His eternal counsel “he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:11). “For all the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen” (2Co 1:20). God has “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3). We are heirs of God because we are “joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). As all the divine purposes of grace were made in Christ, so they are effectually performed and established by Him, as is clear from the words of Zacharias, for when he blessed God for having “raised up an horn of salvation,” he added: “To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant” (Luk 1:68-72). We are “preserved in Jesus Christ” (Jude :1). As God has “called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1Co 1:9)—that is, to be partakers (in our proportion) of all that He is partaker of Himself, so has He entered into possession of the same in our names to keep it for us (Heb 6:20).

Does it seem too good to be true that “the God of all grace” is *your* God? Are there times when you doubt if he *has* personally called you? Does it surpass your faith, Christian reader, that God has actually called you unto His eternal glory? Then let us leave this closing thought with you: it is by and in *Christ Jesus!* His grace is stored up in Christ (Joh 1:14, 16), the effectual call comes by Christ (Rom 1:6), the eternal glory is reached through Him. Was not *His* blood sufficient to purchase everlasting blessings for the hell-deserving? Then look not at your unworthiness, but at the infinite worthiness and merits of Him who is the Friend of publicans and sinners. Whether our faith takes it in or not, infallibly certain it is that His prayer will be answered, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory” (Joh 17:24). That beholding will not be a transient one such as the apostles enjoyed on the mount of transfiguration, but for *evermore*. As it has often been pointed out, when the queen of Sheba contrasted her brief visit to Solomon’s court with the privilege of those who resided there, she exclaimed: “Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand *continually* before thee” (1Ki 10:8; 2Ch 9:7). Such will be our *blissful* lot throughout the endless ages.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

46. Strategy, Part 3

“And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, that ye shall set the city on fire: according to the commandment of the LORD shall ye do. See, I have commanded you” (Jos 8:8). In those words, Joshua completed the orders given to thirty thousand of his men who were to lie in ambush behind Ai. He had already assigned the position they were to occupy. He had bidden them to be all of them ready to strike the blow while the iron was hot. He had explained the part which the major portion of his army would play, making their own task much easier. He had assured them the LORD God would deliver the city into their hands. And now he informed them how they must make a thorough job of and complete the task allotted them. Only half of it was accomplished when the city was captured: it must be reduced to ashes. This teaches us that there is to be no relaxing in the performance of duty when God has granted our efforts a measure of success, but a continuing to render full obedience unto *all* His commandments. Much easier said than done, declares the reader. True, we reply, but enabling grace is available if we seek it wholeheartedly. When the LORD is leased to prosper our labours, instead of a complacent slackening on our part, it should serve as a spur and encouragement to attempt yet greater things in His name.

Observe the time-mark again: “*When* ye have taken the city, that ye shall set the city on fire.” There was to be no tardiness in executing the orders given them. Each of us should be able, by divine grace, to aver, “I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments” (Psa 119:60). When our duty is clear, it should be performed with alacrity. The more unpleasant it be, the sooner it is done, the better. Least of all can we afford to trifle with sin or indulge our evil lusts: no quarter must be shown our enemies—Ai must be completely destroyed! The revealed will of God is to be complied with without any reservation on our part. As full obedience was here required from Joshua’s men, not only to take the city, but to destroy it, nothing less is required from the soldiers of the Lord Jesus. There was a needs be for these men to carry out their part of the plan promptly, for the sight of the smoking houses would not only dismay and panic the king of Ai and his forces (Jos 8:20), but was to serve as a signal to Joshua that his “ambush” had made themselves masters of the city, and therefore, that he and his company might turn round and fall upon their pursuers. Thus we see that tardiness on our part acts as a hindrance to our brethren!

“Joshua therefore sent them forth: and they went to lie in ambush, and abode between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai” (Jos 8:9). It speaks well for the spirit and loyalty of these men that they made no objection to their leader’s orders: that in view of the disaster which overtook their brethren on a former occasion (Jos 7:4-5), they raised no demur. Nor did they complain at being deprived of their rest through being sent away “by night” (Jos 8:3). It is also to be recognized that the position assigned unto *them* was the real post of danger, for, isolated as they would be from the main body of Israel’s army, they ran the imminent hazard (humanly speaking) of being discovered by the enemy, and cut off and annihilated by them. It therefore says much for their courage, too, that they promptly complied with Joshua’s orders. From the divine side of things, we may perceive again that when God works, He always works at *both* ends of the line: having assured Joshua of the certainty of victory, the LORD also wrought in these men “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13), by inclining them to fulfil their mission faithfully. Incidentally, we may observe the minute accuracy of Scripture, as seen in the topographical harmony between this verse and Genesis 12:8, Bethel and Ai being in close proximity.

“But Joshua lodged that night among the people” (Jos 8:9). He did not accompany the thirty thousand, for there was other important work to engage his attention. It was his evident duty to be with the principal body of his force, that he might maintain their morale, for only a day or two previously, “the hearts of the people melted, and became as water” when tidings of the initial failure reached them (Jos 7:4-5). He would therefore seek to inspire them with confidence and courage, and turn their minds from the defeat unto the LORD’s promise. Not only must discipline be enforced, but there were duties to be discharged which he could not suitably delegate to others, for he had to supervise all the arrangements which needed to be made for the morrow. Yet there is something more here. There is no reason to believe that Joshua had ever done otherwise: nowhere else is such a statement made. Why, then, this particular emphasis: “Joshua lodged *that* night among the people” (Jos 8:9)? We believe it is because the Holy Spirit looked forward to the Antitype. The Lord Jesus was the homeless Stranger here, and had “not where to lay his head” (Mat 8:20; Luk 9:58); spending His nights upon the mountain side (Joh 7:53 and 8:1). So far as we are aware, the Gospels record

but one exception: the last night but one before His crucifixion, Christ lodged with His friends at Bethany (Mar 14:3 and compare 14:10 with Joh 13:2)!

“And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and numbered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai” (Jos 8:10). As there was to be no slackness on the part of those whom he had sent away to ambush Ai, so there was no lazing or giving way to self-indulgence by their commander, but the setting before his men a pattern of alacrity and intensesness. “Those who would maintain their spiritual conflicts must not love their ease”—Matthew Henry (1662-1714). The pastor should set his members an example of earnestness, diligence, and zeal. There was no neglecting of his duty on Joshua’s part, no treating casually the approaching engagement. All was done decently and in order, in preparation for the forthcoming march. By his “numbering of the people,” we understand his marshalling of the host in their proper ranks, seeing to it that each man was in his correct place under his own tribal standard. Then he *and* the tribal heads took the positions of command. Pastors must have the co-operation and support of their church officers; and they in turn inspire the rank and file with courage and unselfishness. It is to be observed that the “elders” were here accorded a position of *honour*, for those who humble themselves before God (Jos 7:6) are in due time exalted by Him.

“And all the people, even the people of war that were with him, went up, and drew nigh, and came before the city, and pitched on the north side of Ai: now there was a valley between them and Ai” (Jos 8:11). The whole fighting force of Israel, having been duly mustered, left the camp at Gilgal, where the women, children, and other non-combatants would remain until the return of the army. Once again, we mark the geographical accord of the statement that they “went *up*” with Genesis 12:8, where, quite incidentally, we are told that Bethel and Ai were situate in a mountainous region. They “drew nigh, and came before the city,” which was in fulfillment of the agreement Joshua had entered into with the thirty thousand (Jos 8:5)—foreshadowing the fidelity of the Captain of our salvation to fulfil His engagements and make good His promises. It is blessed to see how the LORD overcame the fears of Joshua’s followers (Jos 7:5) and wrought in them a willingness to accompany their leader—which is to be regarded as a part of His gracious answer to the prayer of Joshua 7:7-12! The statement that “there was a valley between them and Ai” (Jos 8:11) is not without spiritual significance—they lined up their forces on *high* ground, and Christians must regard themselves as “partakers of the *heavenly* calling” (Heb 3:1) and conduct themselves accordingly if they would be successful in the good fight of faith.

“And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city” (Jos 8:12). No hurried assault was made upon the enemy by Joshua, but first an orderly disposition of his forces was arranged. It seems strange that some of the commentators should boggle over this verse and be in doubt as to whether or not the five thousand men here spoken of were drawn from the thirty thousand, or were another company, for to us the narrative makes it quite plain that they were a separate force which was now assigned to another position. Joshua’s design therein was evident, for his project served a twofold purpose: it cut off Bethel sending any reinforcements to Ai, and it prevented the forces of Ai escaping in that direction when Joshua turned round and fell upon them. It was what strategists would term a flanking movement. Therein we behold the *thoroughness* of Joshua’s preparations, notwithstanding the divine promise which he had received—“I have given into thy hand the king of Ai,” etc. (Jos 8:1)—he took every possible precaution and spared no effort on his part to ensure victory. In other words, he made the fullest possible use of all the means at his disposal. And we are required to do likewise.

“And when they had set the people, even all the host that was on the north of the city, and their liers in wait on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley” (Jos 8:13). After their uphill march from Gilgal, Joshua decided that his forces should remain stationary until the morning—another illustration of the important principle, “he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16). But though he had risen up early that morning, there was no taking of his ease by Joshua that night. No furloughs are granted the soldiers of Jesus Christ, for their enemies take none. Our spiritual warfare calls for incessant alertness. How Joshua spent that night we are not told. Some think it was to make a reconnaissance—to ascertain the lay of the land, its roads, etc.—but that was hardly likely by night. Others suppose he spent the time in prayer, asking God’s blessing on the forthcoming fight, yet advance no reason why he should leave the camp in order to do so. In any case, it was a bold act on his part to venture alone so near unto Ai—an act in accord with the LORD’s words to him in Joshua 1:9. Turning from the type to the Antitype, we have here what confirms our remarks on verse 9. Our Lord’s last night before the great conflict was spent alone in “the valley” of *humiliation*—from Gethsemane to Pilate’s judgment hall!

“And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw it, that they hastened and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he wist not that there were liers in ambush against him behind the city” (Jos 8:14). From the opening words of this verse, it seems clear that whatever Joshua had done that night in the valley, it was now *visible* to those in Ai as soon as day broke, and that it at once attracted their attention: something which appears to have constituted a challenge to them—reminding us again of our Lord, who so far from hiding from His enemies, boldly “went forth” to meet those who had come to apprehend Him (Joh 18:4). Their “[rising] up early” indicates their bloodthirstiness and eagerness for the fray, doubting not that an easy conquest would be theirs; possibly they thought to spring a surprise upon Israel by a dawn attack. Alas, how often *are we* surprised and overcome through failure to be constantly upon our guard. It is while Christ’s servants “sleep” that the enemy sows his tares (Mat 13:25). There is some difficulty in determining the meaning of “went out against Israel to battle...at a time appointed” (Jos 8:14): possibly it signifies the same hour as when they were successful against Israel on a former occasion (Jos 7:5), deeming it a “lucky” one.

“But he wist not that there were liers in ambush against him behind the city.” That appears quite a commonplace statement, yet in reality, it is far otherwise. The success of Israel’s strategy depended upon their men in ambush being undetected; and that, in turn, depended upon the secret operations of God upon and within the king of Ai. It seems well-nigh impossible that no less than thirty thousand should remain concealed within so short a distance of the city, and not merely for a few minutes, but for forty-eight hours. It was a *miracle*, as truly so as the sun’s remaining stationary at the command of Joshua—the tenth chapter. It was due to the power of Jehovah, who prevented the king of Ai from sending out scouts and discovering the hostile force in his rear. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Pro 21:1)—sometimes to act wisely; at others, foolishly; sometimes to deal kindly with His people (Ezr 6:22); at others, to hate them, as in the case of Pharaoh. What is before us in our present passage supplies a striking illustration of the dominion of God over all and His full control of the wicked, preventing this heathen monarch from taking the most elementary precautions for the safeguarding of his city and people.

What has just been pointed out is far too little attended unto today even by the people of God, that the almighty Governor of the world exerts a *restraining influence* upon the wicked, and that for the good of His people. Yet Scripture records many specific examples of the same. Thus when Abraham sojourned in Gerah, and from fear denied that Sarah was his wife, her honour was (humanly speaking) placed in the utmost jeopardy—for the king of that place sent and “took her,” yet “had not come near her,” for, as God said to him, “for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her” (Gen 20:1-6). Had not the LORD—secretly but effectually—interposed, Abimelech had grievously wronged Sarah. Ah, my reader, how often hath thy gracious God withheld the wicked from touching thee—burglars from breaking into thy house, etc. Again we say, the restraining operations of the Most High are all too little perceived by us. Another notable instance is that of Balaam. He was hired by the king of Moab to curse Israel; and it is clear from the divine narrative that he was anxious to do so, that he might earn “the wages of unrighteousness” (2Pe 2:15). But the LORD prevented him, so that he had to acknowledge, “How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed?...he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it” (Num 23:8, 20).

When Jacob was recounting the wrongs he had suffered at the hands of Laban, his father-in-law, who had deceived him and changed his wages ten times, he added, “But God suffered him not to hurt me” (Gen 31:7), and received a further proof thereof in the immediate sequel (Gen 31:29), when the LORD again held Laban back from venting his anger upon him. The brethren of Joseph hated him, and “conspired against him to slay him” (Gen 37:18), but Jehovah interposed and thwarted their designs. Nor is this restraining power of God limited to individuals, but is exerted upon whole communities and nations. Thus we are told: “The terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob” (Gen 35:5). Centuries later, the Psalmist was moved to make reference to that phenomenon, “When they were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it. When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people; He suffered no man to do them wrong” (Psa 105:12-14), bridling their lusts and causing the wolf to dwell with the lamb and the leopard to lie down with the kid. “Neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year” (Exo 34:24). When the menfolk were no longer present to defend their farms, God restrained the covetous desires and designs of the surrounding heathen.

We consider that what has been alluded to in the last two paragraphs casts much light upon the incident which is here before us, that it was due to the restraining operations of God that the king of Ai failed to send out scouts in all directions ere he led forth the whole of his army from the city, and left it defenceless. Instead, "they hastened and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle" (Jos 8:14). Infatuated by his previous success, filled with self-confidence, he rushed forward to complete disaster. Thus it was with Pharaoh and his hosts when they pursued the Israelites through the Red Sea and perished therein. Before God destroys the wicked, He first gives them up to a spirit of madness. Should these lines be read by a Christless soul who is yet in his sins, we beg him to pause and heed the solemn warning which is here presented to him. Let not his previous immunity from divine judgment fill him with a false sense of security: "They are most in danger who are least aware of it"—M. Henry. The king of Ai was blind to his own interests—are not *you* the same? He failed to take the most obvious precautions—are not *you* guilty of similar folly: hastening unto eternity and utterly unprepared to meet your God? O "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa 55:6). "To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness" (Heb 3:7-8).



THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

30. *In Glory, Part 3*

Though our specific subject be that revelation with which God favours His people in heaven, yet because the great majority of them pass thereto through the door of *death*, and since quite a number of our readers have been denied the comforting teaching of Scripture thereon, we have taken the opportunity to write upon the same. We come now to consider some of the *accompaniments* of a Christian's death. Among these first place must be given unto *the presence of the Lord* with him at that time. While it is blessedly true that He never leaves nor forsakes them, being with them "alway" (Mat 28:20), yet He is with them in a *special manner* at certain crucial times. This idea seems to be clearly borne out by the statement that God is "a *very present help in trouble*" (Psa 46:1), as though He draws nearest of all to us in the seasons of acutest need. Do we not have an illustration and exemplification of that fact when the three Hebrews were cast alive into Babylon's furnace, and the king beheld Another walking with them in the midst of the fire, "and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" said he (Dan 3:25)?

Again, has not the LORD declared: "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" (Isa 43:1-2). How blessedly that was demonstrated at the Red Sea, where God so gloriously showed Himself strong on behalf of His people; and again at the Jordan, which was more definitely a figure of the safe passage of believers through death. Was not the passing of Israel dry shod through Jordan into Canaan a blessed adumbration of the saints' harmless exit from this world and entrance into their everlasting inheritance? As Jehovah manifested Himself most conspicuously on those occasions, so—whether perceived by them or not—He is in a most particular sense present with His beloved ones as they walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Said the Psalmist, "I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psa 23:4). Thy rod and Thy staff: "by which Thou governest and rulest Thy flock—the emblems of Thy sovereignty and of Thy gracious care"—Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892).

The meaning of those figures is plain: it is by His Word and Spirit that the good Shepherd governs and cares for His sheep, and which are their "comfort" in the hour of their supreme crisis. That the believer is *granted* a special supply of the divine Comforter at that hour can scarcely be doubted. "The Spirit was given us for that purpose, as a brother is said to be 'born for adversity' (Pro 17:17). Certainly, He who was given for a comfort to thee all through thy life long, and hath delivered thee out of all thy distresses and fears, will carry thee through this; and though thy heart should for a while fail thee, together with thy flesh, yet God and His Spirit will not fail thee (Psa 73:26). The interest of the Spirit's own glory moves Him. No captain rejoices more to bring his vessel home into harbour, after he has sailed it safely through so many storms, than the Holy Spirit doth rejoice to bring a soul He hath wrought upon and who was committed to His trust, safe to heaven"—Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680). Let it be noted that "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" is given not only in life, but also in death (Phi 1:19-20)!

2. *The soul rid of sin.* There shall in no wise enter into the new Jerusalem "any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination" (Rev 21:27). No serpent shall find admittance into the celestial paradise, nor will any who are still polluted by him. Not only the holiness of God, but the happiness of the saints also requires that they be freed from all evil ere they enter heaven, or otherwise their bliss would be marred. Their communion with and delighting themselves in the Lord is hindered down here by the sin which still cleaves to them. From the moment of the new birth until the moment a regenerated person leaves this world, "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh," and since those two principles of action are "contrary the one to the other," it follows that he "cannot do the things that [he] would" (Gal 5:17); and daily has he occasion to lament, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom 7:24). Even when the power of God subdues the ragings of sin within His children, they are not delivered from its inbeing. But when the divine summons to the soul comes to depart hence, it is entirely delivered from inbred corruption. The conflict is then ended; the victory over sin is complete. No propensity to evil remains, no guilt of conscience or defilement shall ever again be contracted.

"Although the whole troop of evils, like the army of Egypt, will pursue me (as it did Israel) to the borders of the sea, death ends the warfare—'The Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever' (Exo 14:13). O the inconceivable blessedness which immediately opens at death to every

redeemed and regenerated child of God!”—Robert Hawker (1753-1827). Yet it is not death itself which effects this blessed purification of the soul. That is evident not only from the cases of Enoch and Elijah, who were caught up to heaven without dying, but of those saints, too, who will be alive on earth at the personal return of Christ (1Co 15:51; 1Th 4:17). No, it is produced by the supernatural operation of God. It is the Lord Himself fitting His “temple” (2Co 6:16) for His fuller and final possession. It is to be noted that Christ cleansed the temple at Jerusalem *twice*: at the beginning of His ministry (Joh 2:13-17) and again, near the close thereof (Luk 19:45), which adumbrated His twofold cleansing of the hearts of His redeemed. At conversion, they are purged from the love, the guilt, and the dominion of sin; at death, they are delivered from its very inbeing and presence.

3. *Enlarging of their faculties.* We regard that expression, “The spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23), as denoting not only their being purged of all evil and misery, but also of their being capacitated to take in immeasurably more good and happiness than ever they did previously. Sin has not only greatly impaired the vitality and functions of the body, but it has considerably injured the health and defiled and limited the faculties of the soul; and therefore, the latter will experience a grand elevation when rid of the incubus of sin. As the resurrected body will be possessed of powers far transcending its present ones, so when the soul is glorified, its faculties will be much greater: the understanding no longer beclouded, the affections purified, the will emancipated. In its present state, the soul—even when engaged in spiritual acts—is sadly cramped and hampered; but upon its dismissal from the body, the Holy Spirit will strengthen, enlarge, and elevate the faculties of the soul, raising them up to a suitability and harmony with their new life in heaven. Then will the believer “know even as [he is] known” (1Co 13:12).

It was, we believe, to this gracious operation of the Spirit that David referred in Psalm 23:5, where, after describing his passage “through the valley of the shadow of death” and before mentioning his dwelling “in the house of the LORD for ever” (Psa 23:4, 6), he declared: “Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.” In Old Testament typology, “oil” was the outstanding emblem of the Holy Spirit (compare 1Jo 2:27); and as the Lord Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at the beginning of His ministry (Act 10:38) and again at the completion of it (Psa 45:7; Act 2:33), so the believer is anointed by Him first at conversion (2Co 1:21-22), and then receives a fuller infusion of Him at death. Then it is that mortality is “swallowed up of life” (2Co 5:4)—words which are “as applicable unto the condition of the soul then, as at the resurrection, they are applicable to the condition of the body”—T. Goodwin. As that eminent expositor pointed out: “In 1 Corinthians 15, where the change of the body is insisted on, Paul says, ‘For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality’ (verses 53-54), but here he says, ‘swallowed up of life’ (2Co 5:4), which is the proper happiness of the soul.” We will condense below the rest of his remarks thereon.

“Though the soul in the substance of it be immortal, yet take the condition of life which it now leads, and it may be most truly said to have a ‘mortality’ adhering to it; yea, inhering in it as the adjunct of it. There is a mortal state the person is in. There is an animal life, as one calls it; there is a dying life, a life of death, in which as to a great part the soul now lives; and it is this present state, or this dying life of the soul, which causes believers to ‘groan, being burdened’ (2Co 5:4), and which the apostle here terms ‘mortality,’ but which he assures us, at its dismissal from the body, will be ‘swallowed up of life’—that which is life only, and only deserves the name of *life*: the true and eternal life, life indeed. For what is life? ‘And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent’ (Joh 17:3). It is a peculiar life of living in God, as knowing Him and seeing Him face to face.” The soul which hitherto had been so trammelled by sin shall then be taken into a life so rich, so full, so overflowingly abundant, as to rid it in a moment of all misery and imperfection, freeing and perfecting all its faculties.

4. *Perfuming of their persons.* This, too, is intimated in Psalm 23—a part of which we have somewhat anticipated. It seems to us that each experience described in verses 4-6 receives a general fulfillment throughout the life of a saint, and a particular one at his death. Thus, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” well expresses his journey through the wilderness, for though men term this world “the land of the living,” it would be far more accurate to designate it, “the land of the dying,” for the shadow of the grave is cast heavily across it; nevertheless, such language also suitably describes the believer’s passage through the article of death. “I will fear no evil”; why should he? A “valley,” in contrast with a “mountain,” suggests *easy* travel; and a “shadow” cannot harm him! Moreover, the “shadow” necessarily presupposes the presence of *light*. Unbelief may talk of “the dark valley of death”; not so David. It was far

otherwise with him: "The light of life" (Joh 8:12) was there, as his words acknowledge, "For *thou* art with me"—to support, to guard, to comfort, to rejoice. "With me" now in a peculiarly intimate and special way.

The one present was Jehovah, whom David knew and owned as "*my* shepherd" (Psa 23:1) in the opening verse. But observe a striking alteration in his language in the latter part of the Psalm. In the first three verses, all the pronouns referring to the LORD are in the third person: "*He* maketh me to lie down in green pastures: *he* leadeth me...*He* restoreth my soul." But in the last three verses, David changes to the second person: "*Thou* art with me; *thy* rod [not 'His' rod] and thy staff...*Thou* preparest a table before me...*thou* anointest my head." Why the variation? Ah, there is something inexpressibly blessed in that change. During life, the believer speaks *of* the LORD—"he leadeth me" (Psa 23:2-3); but as he enters the valley of the shadow, he speaks *to* the LORD, for He is there by his side. How much we miss through our careless and hurried reading of God's Word! How we need to weigh and ponder every jot and tittle in it. Sometimes the tense of the verb—at others, the number of the noun—marks that which is most important for us to observe; here, the change of pronouns brings out a precious line of truth.

Having acknowledged the presence of the good Shepherd in the valley, and the comfort derived from His gracious care, the Psalmist next went on to say: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies" (Psa 23:5). In Scripture, the "table" always speaks of *fellowship*, and that of the most intimate kind (Luk 22:21); and here, it tells of the Lord's communion with the dying saint, and the loving and full provision He has made to supply his every need. His "enemies" may refer to the forces of evil, who would make their final assault upon him if they could. But they are prevented from doing so, for God has promised "the end of that man *is peace*" (Psa 37:37). His enemies are not only thwarted, but mocked by the LORD in this "table." Then as he emerges from the valley, the believer exclaims, "Thou anointest my head with oil" (Psa 23:5)—as Moses did the heads of the priests as they were on the point of entering upon their tabernacle privileges and duties (Exo 28:41; 29:7), thereby preparing them for the presence of God. Thus the Redeemer puts upon the soul His own blessed fragrance as it enters into the courts above. Then David exultantly declared, "and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Psa 23:6). Thus, this remarkable psalm portrays the saint's happy life (verses 1-3), comfortable death (verses 4-5), and blissful eternity (verse 6).

5. *An angelic convoy.* This is clear from our Lord's statement in Luke 16:22: "And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." Abraham is "the father of all them that believe" (Rom 4:11), and is here shown to be in paradise. His "bosom" speaks of the place of peculiar privilege (Joh 1:18; 13:23): the once-despised beggar—counted unworthy of a seat at the rich man's table on earth—is accorded a position of honour on high, placed next to the eminent patriarch. The same gracious provision has God made for the safe conduct of each of His people in their journey from earth to heaven: "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in *all* thy ways" (Psa 91:11). Angelic ministry occupies, most probably, a far more extensive place in the lives of believers than any of them realize. "These encamp about them in the time of their life, and surely will not depart in the day of their death. These happy ministering spirits are attendants on the Lord's bride, and will doubtless carry her safely home to His house. The Captain of the saints' salvation is the Captain of this holy guard: He was their Guide even unto death, and He will be their Guide through it too"—Thomas Boston (1676-1732).

What we are now considering presents another most blessed, though little-known, contrast between the death of the righteous and the death of the unrighteous. The souls of the former are carried to heaven by the holy angels; the souls of the latter are seized by demons and taken to hell. In Luke 12:20, Christ declared that God would say to the rich boaster, "Thou fool, this night do *they* require thy soul" (margin, and see Greek). Upon which, after affirming "the devils take others' souls away," T. Goodwin the Puritan, asked: "Who are they?" And made answer, "Hell is a prison" (1Pe 3:19), and the Judge delivers to the officer, and the officer casts into prison (Luk 12:58). This 'officer' is the devil that hales souls to that prison." In this convoy or guard of angels for the redeemed, saints are conformed to their Head, when He was "carried up to heaven" (Luk 24:51). "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them...Thou hast ascended on high" (Psa 68:17-18). "Angels were the chariots in which Christ rode, and these the guard that attends believers"—John Gill (1697-1771). Thus, the soul of the saint is conducted *in state* from his earthly house to his heavenly abode.

Immediately after death, without any interval of waiting either long or short, the ransomed soul is inducted into paradise. The heir of glory enters at once upon his eternal inheritance: "Absent from the body, and...present with the Lord" (2Co 5:8). This needs emphasizing in certain quarters, where the idea seems

to obtain that the glorification of the saint's soul awaits the time of the glorification of his body. We do not like to see Protestants employing the term "intermediate state" (in contrast with "the eternal state"), for it savours too much of the imaginary "limbo" of the Romanists; greatly preferring the "disembodied" and the "resurrection state." Immediately at death, "the spirits of just men [are] made perfect" (Heb 12:23) in knowledge, in holiness, in blessedness. Mortality is then "swallowed up of life" (2Co 5:4): as T. Goodwin expressed it, the soul "is now all life and joy in God the Fountain of life." As we shall yet seek to show, the request of Christ in John 17:24, receives its fulfillment in the experience of His redeemed as soon as they leave this earth—the beatific vision is then theirs.

In the very moment of his dismissal from the body, the Saviour receives His redeemed into the actual possession of that eternal heritage which He has purchased for him. It was this reception for which the expiring Stephen made request when he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Act 7:59), and as T. Goodwin pointed out: "He not only receives it into His own bosom, but He brings it to God and presents it to Him with a joy infinitely more abounding than can be in us. Then it is that Christ is glorified and rejoiceth in us, and so we may be said rather to die to the Lord and His interest than to ours." Then it is that He "sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied." While at a later date, Christ will present the entire company of His people to Himself "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph 5:27), yet He does so to each individual member of it at death, as His words to the dying thief clearly implied. Oh, what praise is due unto Him for having extracted the sting from death and robbed it of all its terrors! What cause have we to exclaim, "Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Co 15:57)!

What has been before us should surely make it easier to bear the trials through which a Christian may now be passing: at longest, they are but for a moment in comparison with the eternity of bliss awaiting him. How faith should feed upon and hope anticipate the same! With what contentment should such a prospect fill us. What little reason have we to envy the deluded worshippers of Mammon, even though such now be clothed in purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day. How the contemplation of what God has prepared for them that love Him should wean their hearts from the perishing baubles of this world. How the certainty of being "with Christ" for ever should make them desire to depart from this scene. How the knowledge that at death, they will be for ever done with sin and sorrow should make them willing to die. Why should any believer be backward in longing to go unto the eternal Lover of his soul, especially when he learns from Scripture what full provision God has made for his passage to Him to be an easy and pleasant one? Oh, that all our ambitions and longings may be swallowed up in that of the Psalmist's: "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD" (Psa 27:4).



GLORIOUS SINAI

How long the honoured leaders and official representatives of Israel were privileged to continue eating and drinking before the LORD, we know not; but after a while, Moses was required to detach himself from them and resume his mediatorial position. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them" (Exo 24:12). Apparently, Moses was here called to ascend to a higher level on glorious Sinai, and receive from Jehovah the Ten Commandments which He had first spoken in the hearing of the people, and which He had now recorded with His own finger in more permanent form. A special honour was thereby placed upon the Moral Law which was not accorded the "judgments" or statutory enactments mentioned in chapters 21 to 23, nor to the ritual institutions which were given subsequently. Rightly did Thomas Scott (1747-1821) point out, "This intimated that the Rule of duty remains unchangeably the same, though the covenant of works is broken." In other words, the Moral Law is lastingly binding upon unregenerate and regenerate alike, notwithstanding the violation of the covenant made with Adam as the federal head of his race.

"And Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God" (Exo 24:13). Moses complied promptly, hesitating not—after the recent favour the LORD had so signally shown His people—to approach still nearer the divine presence. This time, he took with him Joshua his minister, whom God had chosen to be his successor. He had previously been singled out for special favour (Exo 17:9-14); and here, he is granted a further privilege above his fellows. It is to be noted that Sinai is designated, "the mount of God," because it was here that He vouchsafed His people such glorious manifestations of Himself and revelations of His will for them. "And he said unto the elders, Tarry ye here for us, until we come again unto you: and, behold, Aaron and Hur are with you: if any man have any matters to do, let him come unto them" (Exo 24:14). Thus, the two men who had supported him by upholding his hands in Exodus 17:12 were now appointed by Moses to see to the ordering of the congregation during his absence from them, and being held responsible for the maintenance of its government and peace.

"And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the LORD abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel" (Exo 24:15-17). Well might we denominate this unique and glowing scene the Old Testament mount of transfiguration, for one who was upon the New Testament mount of transfiguration spoke of it as "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," being "eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2Pe 1:16); and did not the glorious power and majesty of Jehovah appear here at Sinai when He set up His Throne in Israel's midst and organized them into His kingdom? For six days Moses, accompanied by Joshua, continued in this elevated station, ere the mediator himself was bidden to approach the summit of the mount. During that time, the divine Shekinah or visible token of the LORD's presence rested like a crown of glory on the apex of Sinai—the nation at its base beholding its blazing splendour. In appearance, it was "like devouring fire" (Exo 24:17) intensely bright and scintillating, awe-inspiring, yet a magnificent sight.

"And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights" (Exo 24:18). Nor are we left in ignorance of how that time was spent: he was favoured with further gracious communications from the LORD which had in view the blessing and good of His dear people. Part at least of those communications is recorded in the next seven chapters—Exodus 25-31. From them, we learn that God made known unto His servant that He purposed to take up His abode in Israel's midst, and therefore, that He would have them provide a habitation for Him: "And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exo 25:8). Full directions were given concerning its structure, dimensions, furnishing, etc. We do not propose to digress and comment upon the same, but merely make three brief remarks. First, the materials for the tabernacle were to be *voluntarily* supplied by the people. No levy was made upon them, no tax demanded from them; instead, an offering was to be brought unto the LORD "of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart" (Exo 25:2)! Let *that* be duly noted by those who are so fond of drawing contrasts between the Mosaic and Christian eras.

What crass ignorance is it which affirms that God dealt with the Hebrews on radically different principles from those which regulate His dealings with His people in the present "dispensation." They who so

aver do err, “not knowing the scriptures” (Mat 22:29). There was no “legal” compulsion for the children of Israel to contribute supplies for the tabernacle: rather were their offerings to proceed from gratitude and love, as an unconstrained expression of their devotion unto and delight in the LORD. What clearer proof could be given that under His government the people of the theocracy were dealt with *in grace*—yet a grace which ever reigns “through righteousness” (Rom 5:21) and produces holiness (Ti 2:11-12). Thus it was here: the grace of God working in the hearts of His redeemed, moving them to willingly provide the required materials. How blessedly divine grace wrought in this matter we learn from Exodus 35:21 and 36:5, where we are told, “the people bring much more than enough,” so that they had to be “restrained from bringing” (verse 6), so spontaneously and freely did they contribute.

Second, a word upon the divine appointment of *the priesthood*: “And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons” (Exo 28:1). Here again we behold the goodness of God, making provision not only for the upholding of His own honour, but the supply of their spiritual needs. They were still a people compassed with infirmity and offending in many things, but the selfsame grace which had *brought* them nigh unto the Holy One, here made provision for the *keeping* of them nigh. The priesthood was never designed to procure Israel’s relationship to God, but to *maintain* the privileged one previously established. Typically, Aaron pointed to Christ as the great High Priest over the House of God (Heb 10:21), and his sons—“who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things” (Heb 8:5)—to the children of Christ as offerers to God of spiritual sacrifices (1Pe 2:5). Very striking is the “take thou unto thee Aaron...and his sons with him...that *he* [not “they”] may minister unto me” (Exo 28:1)—a blessed foreshadowing of the *union* between our great High Priest and the members of His House (Heb 3:6).

That the appointment of the Levitical priesthood was not a burden which the LORD laid upon Israel, but rather a special mark of His favour and a provision of love for the blessing of His people, is clear from the closing verses of Exodus 29. For immediately after the LORD’s declaration: “And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest’s office.” He added: “And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall *know* that I am the LORD their God”—“by His presence among them, by the blessings He had bestowed upon them, by His care of and kindness to them”—John Gill (1697-1771). “That brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the LORD their God” (verses 44-46): “That they might be a free people, under the protection of their King and their God, all of which was a great encouragement to them, and an obligation on them to attend the service of the sanctuary and to obey the LORD in whatever He had enjoined or should command them”—John Gill.

Third, a “pattern” was set before Moses, after which the tabernacle and “all the instruments thereof, even so shall [be made]” (Exo 25:9). Full and minute instructions were supplied concerning the materials to be used, the size of each vessel, where it was to be placed; every board and pin was defined and even the colours of its curtains described. Nothing whatever was left to the wit or will of man. No less than seven times are we informed in the Word that Moses was to make this sanctuary for the LORD and everything in it in exact conformity to the model shown him (Act 7:44; Heb 8:5, etc.), because everything prefigured the person and perfections of *Christ*, and intimated that He would infallibly perform “the [eternal] purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11). Let it be pointed out, however, that nowhere in the Gospels did Christ promise to supply any such “pattern” after which His *local churches* were to be organized and regulated, and that there is no hint in the Epistles that such a pattern has been given. Had such *been* supplied, it would have been as clearly recognizable as the model set before Moses, and all who truly desired to please the LORD had conformed uniformly thereunto, leaving no place for the diversity or variety now obtaining.

While Moses was at the summit of Sinai with the LORD, the nation was acting most horribly at its base. Moses was absent from them for forty days, and that is the number of probation and *testing* (Mar 1:13). How the congregation conducted themselves during that interval is made known in Exodus 32. The key to what is recorded there is found in Acts 7:38-40: “This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness...whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us.” It was not only that they resented the lengthy absence of Moses, but had cast off their allegiance to Jehovah. Less than six weeks before they had heard Jehovah saying, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any grav-

en image" (Exo 20:3-4); and they had solemnly promised, "All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Exo 24:7): and now they had blatantly trampled both of those commandments under their feet. The LORD acquainted His servant with this sad fact, and said: "Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them" (Exo 32:10).

It is clear from what follows that those words of God were a *testing* of Moses. And what a test! If ever an apparently hopeless situation confronted a servant of God, it was here. And, my reader, had God been dealing with Israel on the ground of nothing but "Law" (as the dispensationalists assert), strictly enforcing its demand and penalty according to unrelieved justice, the situation had been *utterly hopeless*. But Moses was better taught than our moderns, and at once betook himself to intercession. First, he appealed to the redeeming grace of God which had delivered His people from Egypt (Exo 32:11), then to the honour of His name (verse 12 and compare Joshua 7:9), and then to His covenant faithfulness (verse 13). And his intercession prevailed: "And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people" (verse 14). Those words are not to be understood absolutely, but as a divine condescension—God's deigning to express Himself in *our* language: they signify that He had graciously answered the prayer of Moses. But such a thing was impossible had Israel been "under the law" in the sense that some imagine. In fact, it was a clear case of "mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (Jam 2:13)!

But how are we to explain what immediately follows Exodus 32:14? Is it not entirely inconsistent? No, complementary: though mercy be shown, the claims of holiness are not ignored. God forgave the penal consequences of their sin, but "thou tookest vengeance of their inventions" (Psalm 99:8). The sequel brings out more fully the perfections exercised by God in His governmental dealings with His people, and shows that, in this life, they are made to reap what they have sown. The typical mediator is now seen acting as the typical *judge*: not in consuming wrath, but in holy zeal correcting and chastening, as Christ is beheld in Revelation 1:13-16, with eyes "as a flame of fire" and His feet like burnished brass, inspecting and governing His churches. "And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount" (Exo 32:19). In holy indignation he acted, just as Christ with "a scourge of small cords" (Joh 2:15) in His hand overthrew the tables of the money-changers who had defiled His Father's House.

Next, he took the golden calf, burnt it in the fire, ground it to powder, strewed it upon the water, and made the people drink it (Exo 32:20). After interrogating Aaron, he bade those who were "on the LORD'S side" to come unto him at the gate of the camp; and, when all the sons of Levi responded, bade them take their swords and go through the camp and slay every man his brother, so that there fell that day three thousand men (Exo 32:26-28). God had been openly and grievously dishonoured, and a solemn demonstration must be made of His displeasure, the claims of holiness overriding all natural and sentimental considerations. That which is flagrantly dishonouring to God must be dealt with unsparingly. Yet righteousness *and mercy* met together even here: but a remnant was slain, that the nation at large might be brought to repentance. We cannot now trace out the process, but must look at the result. As the LORD had tested Moses (Exo 32:10), so the nation was put to the proof by His threat: "For I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people" (Exo 33:3). When they heard that, "they *mourned*" (verse 4).

The offending Israelites were moved to deep contrition; and in token of their humbling themselves before the LORD, "stripped themselves" of all outward adornments (verse 6). Next, Moses "took the [tent of meeting—for the tabernacle was not yet erected], and pitched it without the camp" and "every one which sought the LORD went out unto [it]" (verse 7). Very blessed was that: holiness forbade that Jehovah should enter the defiled camp, but grace provided a way for them to seek Him outside the camp. Next, Moses entered into the tent and "it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses" (verse 9). That "cloudy pillar was the visible symbol of the LORD's presence (Exo 13:21), and its appearance *here* betokened His good will unto them. The effect of that upon the people was very blessed: "And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door" (Exo 33:10). The LORD was once more accorded His proper place. The false god (the golden calf) was repudiated; the true and living God was now worshipped. Thus were they, in infinite grace, brought back from their wandering, and made to bow in adoring gratitude before the manifested presence of Jehovah.

The immediate sequel is yet more wonderful and blessed: "And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto *his* friend" (verse 11). Those words must not be interpreted so as to clash with verse 23, but are to be understood as signifying the intimate communion with God to which His servant

was now admitted. Moses then made request, “If I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way” (verse 13 and compare Psa 27:11), adding, “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence” (Exo 33:15). He knew that without Jehovah’s presence, all would be in vain. Then he added, “For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have *found grace* in thy sight? Is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth” (verse 16)—thus, will it be made manifest that we are restored again to Thy special favour. It was to God’s sovereign and illimitable grace that Moses appealed. *That* was all to which he could appeal—for there was nothing whatever in Israel’s favour to plead—but that was all-sufficient, as the next verse shows.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight” (verse 17). The mediation of Moses had completely prevailed. Here was the blessed response to his request, and nothing more was needed for the assuring of his heart, and to guarantee Israel’s safe conduct across the wilderness. It was *grace* pure and simple, sovereign and amazing grace. Grace vouchsafed to a people who had by their abominable conduct forfeited every claim upon God. Grace granted in response to the intercession of their mediator. Reference to this was made long after by Jehovah through one of His prophets: “Thus saith the LORD, The people which were left of the sword [Exo 32:27-28] found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest” (Jer 31:2). How unspeakably blessed, dear Christian reader, to know that Israel’s God is *our* God; that the God of Sinai, the Holy One, the Lawgiver—yet *also* the longsuffering and merciful One—is our God, and that *we* have this same precious assurance while journeying through this wilderness-world: “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest” (Exo 33:14)! Oh for faith to realize and enjoy His all-sufficient presence.



LOVE TO ALL THE SAINTS

“How should I regard Christians who ‘follow not with us’? a young believer may ask, Well, how would that great-heart, the apostle Paul, have regarded them? Are they not children of God? Hearts may agree, although heads differ; and God sees grace where we see none. If you think that these people have less light than you, their need is a claim upon your help; and, believe it or not, they can teach *you* something! Be on your guard against viewing them with suspicion or contempt. You are made of exactly the same flesh and blood as they are, and the same grace is at work in them as in you. God loves persons rather than places.

“You may not find every believer very approachable; but try to cultivate spiritual fellowship with *all* God’s people by dwelling upon the big things that all true Christians hold in common. In this way, you will help to ‘keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Eph 4:3). Be a living link of fellowship between believers. Sympathy is better than criticism. Disbelieve those who have no faith in their fellow Christians. Do not take the world’s side against God’s people.

“Each group or school of thought has its own emphasis, and sometimes, its own phraseology. Do not attach too much importance to pious phrase; the same truth can be expressed in different ways. We should learn to welcome *all* the truth, through whatever channel it may come to us. And the gifts of Christ are for *all* His people.”—*E. Adams*

[N.B. The above emphasizes one aspect of the truth which some extremists need to take to heart. There is a happy medium between refusing to walk with “those in error,” and declining to have fellowship with any who fail to pronounce all our shibboleths.—*Arthur W. Pink*]

