

The Holy Spirit and Christ

In writing upon the Holy Spirit and Christ, it is to be understood that we are not now contemplating our Lord as the second Person of the Trinity, but rather as the God-man *Mediator*, and the Holy Spirit not in His Godhead abstractly, considered, but in His *official* discharge of the work assigned Him in the Everlasting Covenant. This is undoubtedly the most difficult aspect of our subject, yet it is very important that we should prayerfully strive after clear scriptural views thereof. To apprehend aright, even according to our present limited capacity, the relation between the Holy Spirit and the Redeemer, throws much light on some difficult problems, supplies the key to a number of perplexing passages in Holy Writ, and better enables us to understand the work of the Spirit in the saint. May we be mercifully preserved from all error as we endeavour to give our best attention unto the present theme, and be guided to write that which will glorify our Triune God and edify His dear people.

“Come ye near unto Me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord GOD, and His Spirit, hath sent Me” (Isa. 48:16). This remarkable verse presents to us the Lord Jesus speaking of old by the spirit of prophecy. He declares that He had always addressed the Nation in the most open manner, from the time when He appeared unto Moses at the burning bush and called Himself “I am that I am” (Exo. 3); and He was constantly present with Israel as their Lord and Deliverer. And now the Father and the Spirit had sent Him to effect the promised spiritual deliverance of His people: sent Him in the likeness of sin’s flesh, to preach the Gospel, fulfill the Law, and make a perfect satisfaction unto Divine justice for His Church. Here, then, is a glorious testimony unto a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead: the Son of God is sent in human nature and as Mediator; Jehovah the Father *and the Spirit* are the Senders, and so is a proof of Christ’s mission, commission, and authority, who came not of Himself, but was sent of God (John 8:42).

“The LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man” (Jer. 31:22). Here we have one of the prophetic announcements of the wonder of the Divine incarnation, the eternal Word becoming flesh, a human body and soul prepared for Him by the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit. Here the Prophet intimates that the creating power of God was to be put forth under which a woman was to compass a Man. The virgin Mary, under the overshadowing power of the Highest (Luke 1:35) was to conceive and bring forth a Child, without the help or cooperation of man. This transcendent wonder Isaiah calls a “sign” (7:14), Jeremiah “a new thing in the earth”; the New Testament record of which is, “When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 1:18).

“And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:40, 52). Not only was the humanity of Christ supernaturally begotten by the Holy Spirit, but it was “anointed” by Him (cf. Lev. 2:1 for the type), endued with all spiritual graces. All the progress in the Holy Child’s mental and spiritual development, all His advancement in knowledge and holiness, must be ascribed unto the Spirit. “Progress,” in the human nature which He deigned to assume, side by side with His own Divine perfection, is quite compatible, as Hebrews 2:14, 17 plainly intimate. As George

Smeaton has so helpfully pointed out in his book, the Spirit's operations "Formed the link between Christ's deity and humanity, perpetually imparting the full consciousness of His personality, and making Him inwardly aware of His Divine Sonship at all times."

Thus the Spirit, at the incarnation, became the great guiding principle of all Christ's earthly history, and that, according to the order of operation that ever belongs to the Holy Trinity: all proceeds *from* the Father, *through* the Son, and is *by* the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit who formed Christ's human nature, and directed the whole tenor of His earthly life. Nothing was undertaken but by the Spirit's directing, nothing was spoken but by His guidance, nothing executed but by His power. Unless this be steadfastly maintained, we are in grave danger of confounding the two natures of Christ, absorbing the one in the other, instead of keeping them separate and distinct in our thoughts. Had His Deity been absorbed by His humanity, then grief, fear, and compassion had been impossible. The right use of the faculties of His soul owed their exercise to the Holy Spirit who fully controlled Him.

"From birth to baptism the Spirit directed His mental and moral development, and strengthened and kept Him through all the years of preparation and toil. He was in the Carpenter as truly as in the Messiah, and the work at the bench was as perfect as the sacrifice on the cross" (S. Chadwick). At first sight, such a statement may seem to derogate from the *personal* honour of the Lord Jesus, but if we perceive that, according to the *order* of the Trinity, the Spirit exercises His power only to execute the will of the Father and the Son, then the seeming difficulty disappears. So far is the interposition of the Spirit's operations from interfering with the glory of the Son, it rather reveals Him the more conspicuously: that in the work of redemption the activities of the Spirit are next in order to those of the Son. To this we may add another excerpt from G. Smeaton:

"The two natures of our Lord *actively concurred* in every mediatorial act. If He assumed human nature in the true and proper sense of the term into an union with His Divine person, *that* position must be maintained. The Socinian objection that there could be no further need for the Spirit's agency, and, in fact, no room for it,—if the Divine nature was *active* in the whole range of Christ's mediation,—is meant to perplex the question, because these men deny the existence of any Divine nature in Christ's person. That style of reasoning is futile, for the question simply is, What do the Scriptures teach? Do they affirm that *Christ was anointed by the Spirit* (Acts 10:38)? that He was led out into the wilderness by the Spirit? that He returned in the power of the Spirit to begin His public ministry? that He performed His miracles by the Spirit? and that, previously to His ascension, He gave commandments by the Spirit to His disciples whom He had chosen (Acts 1:2)?

"No warrant exists for anything akin to the *Kenotic* or depotentiation theory, which denudes Him of the essential attributes of His Godhead, and puts His humanity on a mere level with that of other men. And as little warrant exists for denying the Spirit's work on Christ's humanity in every mediatorial act which He performed on earth or performs in Heaven. The unction of the Spirit must be traced in all His personal and official gifts. In Christ the Person and office coincide. In His Divine Person He was the substance of all the offices to which He was appointed, and these He was fitted by the Spirit to discharge. The offices would be nothing apart from Himself, and could have neither coherence nor validity without the underlying Person."

If the above still appears to derogate from the glory of our Lord's Person, most

probably the difficulty is created by the objector's failing to realize the *reality* of the Son's humanity. The mystery is indeed great, and our only safeguard is to adhere strictly unto the several statements of Scripture thereon. Three things are to be kept steadily in view. First, in *all* things (sin excepted) the eternal Word was "made like unto His brethren" (Heb. 2:17): all His human faculties developed normally as He passed through infancy, childhood and youth. Second, His Divine nature underwent no change or modification when He became incarnate, yet it was not merged into His humanity, but preserved its own distinctness. Third, He *was* "anointed with the Spirit" (Acts 10:38), nay, He was the absolute receiver of the Spirit, poured on Him in such a plenitude, that it was *not* by measure (John 3:34). —A.W.P.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

67. *The Faith of Isaac*: 11:20.

Though Isaac lived the longest of the four great patriarchs, yet less is recorded about him than any of the others: some twelve chapters are devoted to the biography of Abraham, and a similar number each to Jacob and Joseph, but excepting for one or two brief mentionings before and after, the history of Isaac is condensed into two chapters, Genesis 26 and 27. Contrasting his character with those of his father and of his son, we may assume that there is noted less of Abraham's triumphs of faith, and less of Jacob's failures. Taking it on the whole, the life of Isaac is a disappointing one: it begins brightly, but ends amid the shadows—like that of so many, it failed to fulfill its early promise.

The one act in Isaac's life which the Holy Spirit selected for mention in the Scroll of Faith takes us back to Genesis 27, where, as the Puritan Owen well said, "There is none (other story) in the scripture filled with more intricacies and difficulties as unto a right judgment of the things related, though the matter of fact be clearly and distinctly set down. The whole represents unto us Divine sovereignty, wisdom and faithfulness, working effectually through the frailties, infirmities and sins of all the persons concerned in the matter."

Genesis 27 opens by presenting unto us Isaac in his old age, and declares that "his eyes were dim, so that he could not see" (v. 1). It ought not to need saying that we have there something more than a mere reference to the state of his physical eyes, yet in these days when so many glory in their understanding the Word "literally," God's servants need to dwell upon the most elementary spiritual truths. Everything in Holy Writ has a deeper significance than the "literal," and we are greatly the losers when we limit ourselves to the "letter" of any verse. Let us contrast this statement concerning Isaac's defective vision with what is recorded of another servant of God at the same advanced age: "And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: *his* eye was not dim" (Deut. 34:7).

Genesis 27 shows us the low state into which a child of God may get. Isaac presents unto us a solemn warning of the evil consequences which follow failure to judge and refuse our natural appetites. If we do not mortify our members which are upon the earth, if we do not abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul, then the fine edge of our spiritual life will be blunted, and the fine gold will become dim. If we live to eat, instead of eating to live, our spiritual vision is bound to be defective. Discernment is a by-product, the fruit and result of the denying of self, and following of Christ (John 8:12). It was this self-abnegation which was so conspicuous in Moses: he learned to refuse that which appealed to the flesh—a position of honour as the son of Pharaoh's daughter; that is why *his* "eye was not dim." He saw that the brick-making Hebrews were the people of God, the objects of His sovereign favour, and following his spiritual promptings, threw in his lot with them.

How different was the case with poor Isaac! Instead of keeping his body in subjection, he indulged it. More than a hint of this is given in Genesis 25:28, "And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison": this brought him under the influence of one who could be of no help to him spiritually, and he loved him because he ministered unto his fleshly appetites. And now in Genesis 27, when he thought that the end of his days was near, and he desired to bestow the patriarchal blessing upon his son, instead of giving himself to fasting and prayer, and then acting in accord with the revealed will of God, we

are told that he called for Esau, and said, “Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die” (Gen. 27:3, 4). This is what furnishes the key to the immediate sequel.

“And the LORD said unto her (viz., Rebekah), Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23). This is the Scripture which supplies the second key to the whole incident recorded in Genesis 27 and opens for us in Hebrews 11:20. Here we find God making known the destiny of Jacob and Esau: observe that this revelation was made unto the mother (who had “inquired of the Lord”: Gen. 25:22), and not to their father. That, later on, Isaac himself became acquainted with its terms, is clear, but as to how far he really apprehended their meaning, is not easy to say.

The word that the Lord had spoken unto her, Rebekah believed; yet she failed to exercise full confidence in Him. When she saw Isaac’s marked partiality for Esau, and learned that her husband was about to perform the last religious act of a patriarchal priest and pronounce blessing on his sons, she became fearful. When she heard Isaac bid Esau make him some “savoury meat”—evidently desiring to enkindle or intensify his affections for Esau, so that he might bless him with all his heart—she imagined that the purpose of God was about to be thwarted, and resorted unto measures which ill become a daughter of Jehovah, and which can by no means be justified. We will not dwell upon the deception which she prompted Jacob to adopt, but would point out that it supplies a solemn example of real faith being resolutely fixed on the Divine promises, but employing irregular ways and wrong means for the obtaining of them.

In what follows we see how Isaac was deceived by Jacob posing as Esau. Though uneasy and suspicious at first, his fears were largely allayed by Jacob’s lies: though perceiving the voice was that of the younger son, yet his hands appeared to be those of the elder. Pathetic indeed is it to see the aged patriarch reduced unto the sense of touch in his efforts to identify the one who had now brought him the longed-for venison. It is *this* which should speak loudly to our hearts: he who yields to the lusts of the flesh injures his spiritual instincts, and opens wide the door for the Devil to impose upon him and deceive him with his lies! He who allows natural sentiments and affections to override the requirements of God’s revealed will, is reduced to a humiliated state in the end. How often it proves that a man’s spiritual foes are they of his own household! Isaac loved Esau unwisely.

But now we must face a difficult question: Did Isaac deliberately pit himself against the known counsel of God? Did he defiantly purpose to bestow upon Esau what he was assured the Lord had appointed for Jacob? “Whatever may be spoken in excuse of Isaac, it is certain he failed greatly in two things: First, in his inordinate love to Esau (whom he could not but know to be a profane person), and that on so slight an account as eating of his venison: Genesis 25:28. Second, in that he had not sufficiently enquired into the mind of God, in the oracle that his wife received concerning their sons. There is no question on the one hand, but that he knew of it; nor on the other, that he did not understand it. For if the holy man had known that it was the determinate will of God, he would not have contradicted it. But this arose from want of diligent enquiry by prayer into the mind of God” (John Owen).

We heartily agree with these remarks of the eminent Puritan. While the conduct of Isaac on this occasion was far from becoming a child of God who concluded his earthly pilgrimage was now nearly complete, yet charity forbids us to put the worst possible construction upon his action. While his affection for Esau was misplaced, yet, in the absence of any clear Scriptural proof, we are not warranted in thinking that he sinned presumptuously, by deliberately resisting the revealed will of God; rather must we conclude that he had no clear understanding of the Divine oracle given to Rebekah—his spiritual discernment was dim, as well as his physical vision! As to the unworthy part played by Rebekah and Jacob, their efforts are to be regarded not so much as the feverish energies of the flesh, seeking to force the fulfillment of God’s promise, but as well-meant but misguided intentions to *prevent* the thwarting of God’s purpose. Their fears remind us of Uzzah’s in 2 Samuel 6:6.

The one bright spot in the somber picture which the Holy Spirit has so faithfully painted for us in Genesis 27 is found in verse 33. Right after Isaac had pronounced the major blessing on Jacob, Esau entered the tent, bringing with him the savoury meat which he had prepared for his father. Isaac now realized the deception which had been played upon him, and we are told that he “trembled very exceedingly.” Was he shaking with rage at Jacob’s treachery? No indeed. Was he, as one commentator has suggested, fearful that he might suffer injury at the hands of the hot-headed Esau? No, his next words explode such a theory. Rather was it he now realized that he had been out of harmony with the Divine will, and that God had providentially intervened to effect His own counsels. He was awed to the very depths of his soul.

Blessed indeed is it to behold how the spirit triumphed over the flesh. Instead of bursting out with an angry curse upon the head of Jacob, Isaac said, “I have blessed him, yea, and he *shall be* blessed.” That was the language of faith overcoming his natural partiality for Esau. It was the recognizing and acknowledging of the immutability and invincibility of the Divine decrees. He realized that God is in one mind, and none can turn Him: that though there are many devices in a man’s heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand (Prov. 19:21). Nor could the tears of Esau move the patriarch. Now that the entrance of God’s words had given him light, now that the overruling hand of God had secured His own appointment, Isaac was firm as a rock. The righteous may fall, but they cannot be utterly cast down.

“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come” (Heb. 11:20). Jacob, the younger, had the precedence and principal blessing. Strikingly did this exemplify the high sovereignty of God. To take the younger, and leave the elder to perish in their ways, is a course the Lord has often followed, from the beginning of the world. Abel, the junior, was preferred before Cain. Shem was given the precedence over Japheth the elder (Gen. 10:21). Afterwards, Abraham, the younger, was taken to be God’s favourite. Of Abraham’s two sons, the older one, Ishmael, was passed by, and in Isaac was the Seed called. Later, David, who was the youngest of Jesse’s eight sons, was selected to be the man after God’s own heart. And God still writes, as with a sunbeam in the course of His providence, that He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.

The “blessing” which Isaac pronounced upon Jacob was vastly superior to the portion allotted Esau, though if we look no deeper than the letter of the words which their father used, there appears to be very little difference between them. Unto Jacob Isaac said, “God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and

wine” (Gen. 27:28); what follows in verse 29 chiefly concerned his posterity. Unto Esau Isaac said, “Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother” (Gen. 27:39, 40). Apart from the younger son having the pre-eminence over the elder, wherein lay the peculiar excellence of his portion? If there had been nothing *spiritual* in the promise, it would have been no comfort to Jacob at all, for the temporal things mentioned were not his portion: as he acknowledged to Pharaoh, “few and evil have the days of the years of my life been” (Gen. 47:9).

What has just been before us supplies a notable example of how the Old Testament promises and prophecies are to be interpreted; not carnally, but mystically. That Jacob’s portion far excelled Esau’s, is clear from Hebrews 12:17, where it is denominated, “*the blessing.*” What that is was made clearer when Isaac *repeated* his benediction upon Jacob, saying, “And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed” (Gen. 28:4). Here is the key which we need to unlock its meaning; as Galatians 3:9, 14, 29 clearly enough show, the “blessing of Abraham” (into which elect Gentiles enter, through Christ) is purely a spiritual thing. Further proof that the same spiritual blessing which God promised to Abraham was also made over by Isaac to Jacob, is found in his words, “I have blessed him, yea, and he shall be blessed” (Gen. 27:33), for Jehovah had employed the same language when blessing the father of all believers: “in blessing I will bless thee” (Gen 22:17). To this may be added Isaac’s “Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee” (Gen 27:29), being part of the very words God used to Abraham, see Genesis 12:2, 3.

Now in seeking to rightly understand the language of Isaac’s prophecy, it must be recognized that (oftentimes) in the Old Testament heavenly things were referred to in earthly terms, that spiritual blessings were set forth under the figure of material things. Due attention to this fact will render luminous many a passage. Such is the case here: under the emblems of the “dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth,” three great spiritual blessings were intended. First, that he was to have a real relation to Christ, that he should be one of the progenitors of the Messiah—this was the chief favour and dignity bestowed upon “Abraham.” It is in the light of this that we are to understand Genesis 27:29 as ultimately referring: “let the people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee,” that is, to the top branch which should proceed from him—unto Christ, unto whom all men are commanded to render allegiance (Psa. 2:10-12).

Second, the next great blessing of “Abraham” was that he should be the priest that should continue the worship of God and teach the laws of God (Gen. 26:5). The bowing down of his brethren to Jacob (Gen 27:29), was the owning of his priestly dignity. Herein also lay Jacob’s blessing: to be in the church, and to have the church continued in his line. This was symbolically pointed to in “that thou mayest inherit the land” (Gen. 28:4). “The church is the ark of Noah, which is only preserved in the midst of floods and deep waters. The church is the land of Goshen, which only enjoys the benefits of light, when there is nothing but darkness round about elsewhere. It is the fleece of Gideon, being wet with the dews of heaven, moistened with the influences of grace, when all the ground round about is dry” (T. Manton). As to how high is the honour of having the church continued in our line, the Spirit intimates in Genesis 10:21—Eber being the father of the Hebrews, who worshipped God.

Third, another privilege of Jacob above Esau was this, that he was taken into cove-

nant with God: “the blessing of Abraham shall come upon thee.” And what was that? This, “And I will be a God *unto thee*, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen. 17:7). This is the greatest happiness of any people, to have God for *their* God—to be in covenant with Him. Thus when Noah came to pronounce blessings and curses on his children, by the spirit of prophecy, he said, “Blessed be the LORD God of Shem” (Gen. 9:26). Afterward the same promise was made unto all Israel: “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exo. 20:2). . . So under the new covenant (the present administration of the everlasting covenant), he says, “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people” (Heb. 8:10). To be a “God” to any, is to supply them with all good things, necessary for temporal or spiritual life.

The fulfillment of Isaac’s prophetic blessing upon his sons was mainly in their descendants, rather than in their own persons: Jacob’s spiritual children, Esau’s natural. Concerning the latter, we would note two details. First, Isaac said to him, “thou shalt serve thy brother”; second, “and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck” (Gen. 27:40). For long centuries there seemed no likelihood of the first part of this prediction being fulfilled, but eight hundred years later, David said, “over Edom will I cast out my shoe” (Psa. 60:8), which meant he would bring the haughty descendants of Esau into a low and base state of subjection to him; which was duly accomplished—“all they of Edom became David’s *servants*” (2 Sam. 8:14)! Though their subjugation continued for a lengthy period of time, yet, in the days of Jehosaphat, we read, “In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves” (2 Kings 8:20)!

“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come” (Heb. 11:20). This “blessing” was more than a dying father expressing good-will unto his sons: it was extraordinary: Isaac spoke as a prophet of God, announcing the future of his posterity, and the varied portions each should receive. As the mouthpiece of Jehovah, he did, by the spirit of prophecy, announce beforehand what should be the particular estate of each of his two sons; and so his words have been fulfilled. Though parents today are not thus supernaturally endowed to foretell the future of their children, nevertheless, it is their duty and privilege to search the Scriptures and ascertain what promises God has left to the righteous *and to their seed*, and plead them before Him.

But seeing Isaac thus spake by the immediate impulse of the Spirit, how can it be said that “by faith” he blessed his sons? This brings in the human side, and shows how he discharged his responsibility. He gathered together and rested upon the promises which God had made to him, both directly, and through Abraham and Rebekah. The principle ones we have already considered. He had been present when the Lord said unto his father what is found in Genesis 22:16-18, and he had himself been made the recipient of the Divine promises recorded in Genesis 26:2-4. And now, many years later, we find his heart resting upon what he had heard from God, firmly embracing His promises, and with unshaken confidence announcing the future estates of his distant posterity.

That Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau “concerning things to come,” gives us a striking example of what is said in the opening verse of our chapter. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” “Abraham was now dead, and Isaac was expecting soon to be buried in the grave he had purchased in the Land given to him and his seed. There was nothing to be seen for faith to rest on; nothing that gave the smallest ground for hope; nothing to make it even probable (apart from what he had

heard and believed) that his descendants, either Jacob or Esau, would ever possess the land which had been promised to them” (E.W.B.). There was no human probability at the time Isaac spake which could have been the basis of his calculations: all that he said issued from implicit faith in the bare Word of God.

This is the great practical lesson for us to learn here: the strength of Isaac’s faith should stir us up to cry unto God for an increased measure thereof. With most precious confidence Isaac disposed of Canaan as if he already had the peaceable possession of it. Yet, in fact, he owned not an acre of that Land, and had no human right to anything there save a burying-place. Moreover, at the time he prophesied there was a famine in Canaan, and he was in exile in Gerah, “Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee” (Gen. 27:29), would, to one that viewed only the outward case of Isaac, seem like empty words. Ah, my brethren, we too ought to be as certain of the blessings to come, which God has promised, as if they were present, even though we see no apparent likelihood of them.

It may be objected against what has been said above, that, from the account which is supplied in Genesis 27, Isaac “blessed” Jacob in ignorance rather than “by faith.” To this it may be replied, first, the object of faith is always God Himself, and the ground on which it rests is His revealed will. So in Isaac’s case, his faith was fixed upon the covenant God and was exercised upon His sure Word, and this was by no means negated by his mistaking Jacob for Esau. Second, it illustrates the fact that the faith of God’s people is usually accompanied by some infirmity: in Isaac’s case, his partiality for Esau. Third, after he discovered the deception which had been played upon him, he made no effort to recall the blessing pronounced upon the disguised Jacob—sweetly acquiescing unto the Divine Sovereignty—but confirming it; and though with tears Esau sought to change his mind, he could not.

Here too we behold the strength of Isaac’s faith: as soon as he perceived the providential hand of God crossing his natural affection, instead of murmuring and rebelling, he yielded and submitted to the Lord. This is ever the work of true faith: it makes the soul yield to God’s will against our fleshly inclinations, as also against the bent of our own reason. Faith knows that God is so great, so powerful, so glorious, that His commands must be obeyed. As it was with Abraham, so in the case of Isaac: faith viewed the precepts as well as the promise; it moves us to tread the path of obedience. May our faith be more and more evidenced by walking in those good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. —A.W.P.

The Life of David

19. *His Marriage to Abigail.*

“Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner” (Prov. 11:31). This is a most appropriate verse with which to introduce the passage that is to engage our attention, for each of its clauses receives striking illustration in what is now to be before us. The closing verses of 1 Samuel 25 supply both a blessed and a solemn sequel to what is found earlier in the chapter. There we saw the wicked triumphing, and the righteous being oppressed. There we saw the godly wife of the churl, Nabal, graciously and faithfully befriending the outcast David. Here we behold the hand of God’s judgment falling heavily upon the wicked, and the hand of His grace rewarding the righteous.

“Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.” Of all the hundreds of Solomon’s inspired proverbs this is the only one in which is prefaced by the word, “Behold.” This at once intimates that a subject of great importance is here in view, bidding us fix the eyes of our mind upon the same with close and admiring attention. That subject is the *providential dealings* of God in human affairs, a subject which has fallen sadly into disfavour during the last two or three generations, and one concerning which much ignorance and error now widely prevails. Three things are clearly signified in Proverb 11:31: first, that God disposes the affairs of all His creatures; second, that He pleads the cause of the innocent and vindicates His oppressed people; third, that He plagues and overthrows evil-doers.

Practically all professing Christians believe that there is a *future* day of retribution, when God shall reward the righteous and punish the wicked; but comparatively few believe God *now* does so. Yet the verse with which we have opened expressly declares that “The righteous shall be recompensed *in the earth.*” It is impossible to read the Scriptures with an unprejudiced mind and not see this truth exhibited in the history of individuals, families, and nations. Cain murdered Abel: a mark was set upon him by God, and he cried, “my punishment is greater than I can bear” (Gen. 4:13). Noah was a just man and walked with God: he and his family were preserved from the flood. Pharaoh persecuted the Hebrews, and is drowned at the Red Sea. Saul thirsts for David’s life, and is slain in battle. Of the Lord we must say, “Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth” (Psa. 58:11).

And now comes the “Dispensationalist” with his objection: All that you have said above obtained during the Old Testament dispensation, but in this Christian era it is not so; we are shut up to faith. How ridiculous. Has God vacated His throne? Is He no longer shaping human affairs? Is His governmental justice no longer operative? Why, the most signal example in all history of God’s “recompensing” the wicked and the sinner in the earth has transpired in this *Christian* dispensation! It was in A.D. 70 that God publicly executed judgment upon Jerusalem for the Jews’ rejection and crucifixion of their Messiah, and the condition of that people throughout the earth ever since, has been a perpetual exemplification of this solemn truth. The same principle has been repeatedly manifested in the establishment of Christianity upon the ruins of its oppressors. As to Christians being “shut up to faith,” so were the Old Testament saints just as much as we are: Habakkuk 2:1-4.

But let us note a more formidable objection. Have there not been many righteous souls who were falsely accused, fiercely persecuted, and who were not vindicated on

earth by God? Have there not been many of the wicked who have prospered temporally, and received no retribution in this life? First, let it be pointed out that God does not always respond immediately. The writer (who is not yet fifty) has lived long enough to see more than one or two people who traded on the Sabbath, oppressed widows, and despised all religion, brought to want. Second, there is a happy medium between denying (on the one hand) that God is not now acting at all in the capacity of Judge, and insisting (on the other hand) that *every* man fully reaps in this life what he has sown.

Here, as everywhere, the *truth* lies between two extremes. If God were to visibly reward every righteous act and punish every evil-doer in this life, much of the work pertaining to the great Day of Judgment would be forestalled. But if God never honours in this world those who honour Him, or punishes those who openly defy Him, then we should be without any pre-intimations of that Great Assize, other than what is revealed in those Scriptures of Truth which very few so much as read. Therefore, in His providential government of the world, God wisely gives sufficiently clear manifestation of His love and righteousness and hatred of unrighteousness, as to leave all without excuse concerning what may be expected when we stand before Him to be fully and finally judged. While there are sufficient cases of godliness apparently passing unrewarded and examples of evil-doers prospering, as to leave full room for the exercise of faith that the righteousness of God shall yet be completely vindicated: nevertheless, there are also a sufficient number of clear demonstrations before our eyes of God's vengeance upon the wicked to awe us that *we* sin not.

“And Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light” (1 Sam. 25:36). Recall the circumstances. Only a little while previously Nabal had offered a gross insult to one who was in dire need, and who had several hundred men under his command. Measured by the standards of the world that insult called for retaliation, and so felt the one who had received it. David had sworn to revenge himself by slaying Nabal and every male member of his household, and verse 23 makes it plain that he was on his way to exercise that purpose. But for the timely intervention of his wife, Nabal had been engaged in a hopeless fight to preserve his life; and here we see him feasting and drunken!

As Abigail furnishes a typical illustration of a needy sinner coming to Christ and being saved by Him (see close of last article), so Nabal affords us a solemn portrayal of one who despises Christ and perished in his sins. Let preachers develop the leading points which we here note down in passing. See the false security of sinners when in dire danger: Ecclesiastes 8:11. Observe how one who grudges to give to God or the relief of His poor, will lavishly spend money to satisfy his lusts or make a fair show in the flesh: Luke 16:19-21. O how many there are more concerned about having what they call “a good time,” than they are in making their peace with God: Isaiah 55:2. So sottish are some in the indulging of their appetites that they sink lower than the beasts of the field: Isaiah 1:3. It is adding insult to injury when the sinner not only breaks God's laws but abuses His mercies: Luke 14:18-20. Remember people are intoxicated with other things besides “wine”—worldly fame, worldly riches, worldly pleasures.

Yes, the fool Nabal vividly portrays the case of multitudes all around us. The curse of God's broken law hanging over them, yet, “feasting” as though all is well with their souls for eternity. The sword of Divine justice already drawn to smite them down, yet their

hearts “merry” with “the pleasures of sin for a season.” The Water of Life neglected, but “drunken” with intoxicating things of this perishing world. A grave awaiting them in a few days’ time, but flirting with death during the brief and precious interval. In such a benumbed and giddy state, that it would be the casting of pearls before swine for the godly to speak seriously unto them. O how securely the Devil holds his victims! O the beguiling and paralyzing effects of sin! O the utterly hopeless condition of the unsaved, unless a sovereign God intervenes, works a miracle of grace, and snatches them as brands from the burning!

“But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone” (1 Sam. 25:37). The day of danger had been spent in revelling, the night in intoxicated stupefaction, and now he is called, as it were, to account. The sacred narrative records no reproaches that Abigail made: they were not necessary—the guilty conscience of Nabal would perform its own office. Instead, she merely told her husband of what had transpired. Her words at once dispelled his dreams, shattered his peace, and sank his spirits. Most probably, he was overcome with fright, that, notwithstanding his wife’s kindly overtures, David would swiftly take vengeance upon him. Filled with bitter remorse, now it was too late to repent, giving way to abject despair, Nabal’s heart “became as a stone.” See here a picture of the poor worldling when facing death, and the terrors of the Almighty overwhelming him. See here the deceitfulness of carnal pleasures: overnight his heart merry with wine, now paralyzed with horror and terror. Yes, the “*end* of that mirth is heaviness” (Prov. 14:13); how different the joys which God gives!

“And it came to pass about ten days after, that the LORD smote Nabal, that he died” (v. 38). What a fearfully solemn termination to a wasted life! Nabal’s course was one of folly, his end was that of “the fool.” Here was a man “very great” (v. 2), who had boastfully spoken of “*my bread, my flesh, my shearers*” (v. 11); who had scorned David, and spent his time in excessive self-gratification; now arrived at the close of his earthly journey, with nothing before him but “the blackness of darkness forever.” He seems to have lain in a senseless stupor for ten days, induced either by the effects of his intoxication, or from the horror and anguish of his mind, and this was completed by the immediate stroke of the power and wrath of God, cutting him off out of the land of the living. Such is, my reader, the doom of every one who despises and rejects Christ as Lord and Saviour.

“And it came to pass about ten days after, that the LORD smote Nabal, that he died.” Not only is the case of Nabal a solemn example of a careless, giddy, reckless sinner, suddenly cut off by God whilst giving himself up to the indulgence of the flesh, when the sword of Divine judgment was suspended over his head; but we also see in his death an exhibition of the faithfulness of God, an illustration of Romans 12:19: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” Not only is it sinful for the saint to avenge himself when unjustly insulted and ill treated, but it is quite unnecessary. In due time Another will do it far more effectually for him.

“And when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, Blessed be the LORD, that hath pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and hath kept his servant from evil: for the LORD hath returned the wickedness of Nabal upon his own head” (v. 39). It is not that David was guilty of unholy glee over the wretched end of one who had wronged him, but that he rejoiced in the display of *God’s* glory, of the exercise of Divine

justice, and the triumphing of piety over iniquity. Therein lies the real key to a number of passages which many of our moderns suppose breathe only a vengeful spirit: as though God erected a lower standard of holiness in Old Testament times than is now given to us. Such was not the case: the law, equally with the Gospel, required *love* for the neighbour.

As this subject has been so sadly wrested by “Dispensationalists,” let us add a few words here. Take for example Psalm 58:10, “The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.” Superficial people say, “But *that* is altogether contrary to the spirit of *this* dispensation!” But read on: “So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth” (v. 11). It was not the exercise of a spirit of malice which took delight in seeing the destruction of *their* foes: no indeed: for in the Old Testament the Divine command was, “*Rejoice not* when *thine* enemy falleth” (Prov. 24:17). Instead, it was the heart bowing in worship before the governmental dealings of God, adoring that Justice which gave unto the wicked their due. And where the heart is not completely under the dominion of maudlin sentimentality, there will be rejoicing *today* when some notoriously wicked character is manifestly cut down by the holy hand of God: so it will be at the end of this dispensation: see Revelation 18:20; 19:1, 2.

Ere passing on to the next verses, let us take notice of David’s thankful acknowledgment of God’s restraining grace: “Blessed be the LORD, that hath pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and hath *kept* his servant from evil” (1 Sam. 25:39). If we carefully reviewed the details of each day, we should frequently find occasion to admire the sin-preventing providences of God. We may well adopt the language of the Psalmist at the close of a beautiful illustration of the Divine mercies: “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the LORD” (Psa. 107:43). Let us never miss an opportunity of praising God when He graciously keeps us from committing any evil we had premeditated.

“And David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her to him to wife. And when the servants of David were come to Abigail to Carmel, they spake unto her, saying, David sent us unto thee, to take thee to him to wife” (vv. 39, 40). The stroke of God’s judgment had freed Abigail from a painful situation, and now the workings of His providence rewarded her righteousness. God gave her favour in the eyes of His anointed. David was charmed not only with the beauty of her person and the prudence of her character, but also with her evident piety—the most valuable quality of all in a wife. Abigail being now a widow, and David’s own wife living in adultery, he sent messengers with a proposal of marriage to her. This line in the type is strikingly accurate: the Lord Jesus does not court His wife immediately, but employs the ministers of the Gospel, endued with the Holy Spirit, to woo and win sinners to Himself.

“And she arose, and bowed herself on her face to the earth, and said, Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord” (v. 41). Very beautiful is it to see the great modesty and humility with which such a wealthy woman received the advances of David, deeming herself unworthy of such an honour, yea, having such respect for him that she would gladly be one of the meanest servants of his household. She accepted his proposal, and thereby added still another line to this typical picture of conversion: note how in the margin of 2 Chronicles 30:8 faith is represented as to “give the *hand* unto the Lord”!

“And Abigail hasted, and arose, and rode upon an ass, with five damsels of hers that

went after her; and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife” (v. 42). Most blessed is this. At the time, David was an homeless wanderer, outlawed; yet Abigail was willing not only to forsake her own house and comfortable position, but to share his trials and endure hardships for his sake. Nevertheless, she knew it would be only for a brief season: she married *in faith*, assured of the fulfillment of God’s promises (v. 30) and confident that in due course she would “reign with him”! And this is what true conversion is: a turning of our back upon the old life, willing to suffer the loss of all things for Christ, with faith looking forward to the future.

“David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel; and they were also both of them his wives. But (or “for”) Saul had given Michal his daughter, David’s wife, to Phalti the son of Laish, which was of Gallim” (vv. 43, 44). Polygamy, though not in accord with either the law of nature or the law of God, was a custom which prevailed in those degenerate days, which some good men gave in to, though they are not to be commended for it. In taking Ahinoam of Jezreel to wife (and later several others: 2 Sam. 3), David followed the corruption of the times, but from the beginning it was not so, nor is it permissible now since Christ has ushered in “the times of reformation”: Matthew 19:4-6. —A.W.P.

Dispensationalism

2. *The Church of God (Concluded).*

In the last article we furnished proof that “the Church of God” (in such passages as Acts 20:28) and “God’s elect” (in such passages as Rom. 8:33), comprise identically the same persons; and inasmuch as Abraham (Isa. 51:2), Isaac and Jacob (Rom. 9:7, 13) were among God’s elect, *they* were most certainly members of the Church. Nor has this ever been denied throughout the long centuries of this Christian era (so far as we are aware), until the “dispensationalists” came on the scene and sought to confuse the simple. Both appellations view the saints in their relation *to God*, His chosen and called out people. When the same individuals are designated the Church which is Christ’s body, they are contemplated in relation *to Christ as their Head*, and He is a “Head” of dignity (supremacy), authority, and influence, as the physical head is in the human body.

The Church which is the body of Christ comprises all who are federally and vitally united to Him. As the last Adam, He was the federal Head of the entire Election of Grace, and as such He is a “quickening Spirit” unto them. In Ephesians 5:23 we are told that “Christ is the Head of the Church: and He is the Saviour of the Body,” which unmistakably proves that His Headship and Saviourhood are of equal extent, and that all who are saved by Him out of Adam’s fallen and ruined race, belong to and are members of His Church. If then, Abel, Enoch, and Noah were saved by God (their sins remitted, their persons justified, their souls regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit, and made joint-heirs with Christ—as they most certainly were) on the ground of the retrospective merits of Christ’s satisfaction, then *they* are just as truly members of the body of Christ, as Paul and the Philippian jailer, who were saved by God on the ground of the prospective value of Christ’s atonement.

Not only were the Old Testament saints gathered into and united unto the Church which is the body of Christ, but they themselves *knew* this as truly as do the saints of today. A clear proof of this is furnished in Hebrews 11:24-26. How could Moses “esteem the reproach *of Christ* greater riches than the treasures in Egypt,” if he had been in total ignorance of “Christ”? But what is meant here by “Christ”? or rather “the Christ” as it is in the Greek, and so rendered in Bagster’s International, and margin of the R.V.? We answer, precisely the same as in Galatians 3:16: “the Christ” personal *and* “the Christ” mystical. Moses esteemed the “reproach” which would follow both on account of his faith in the person of Christ, *and* his fellowship with His suffering members, greater riches than the transitory and perishing riches of Egypt, “*for* he had respect unto the recompense of the reward,” that is, the *eternal* reward or “inheritance.”

While allowing the *double* reference to “the Christ” in Hebrews 11:26—for really the Head and the Body cannot be separated, though they may be viewed distinctly—yet *the principal* allusion is undoubtedly unto the *mystical* Christ, the Church which is His body. This is clear from a comparison of verses 25, 26, which are obviously parallel and explanatory of one another. In the former we are told that Moses “chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” Thus, there is a threefold parallelism: the “reproach” of verse 26 agrees with and is interpreted by the “suffering affliction” of verse 25: the “Christ” of verse 26 corresponds with and is defined by “the people of God” in verse 25; and the “treasures in Egypt” balances with the “pleasures of sin”; while the “pleasures of sin *for a season*” (v. 25) is set over against the “recompense of the reward” (v. 26), which consists of those “pleasures” which are at

God's right hand "*forever more*" (Psa. 16:11).

From what has just been before us, no man can fairly deny that the "people of God" of Hebrews 11:25 are, by the Holy Spirit, expressly designated "the Christ" in verse 26, which is the very title given to the Church in 1 Corinthians 12:12! Nor can it be truly gainsaid that the Church or mystical body of Christ is synonymous with "the people of God." Thus, it unequivocally follows that the true (in contrast from the nominal—just as we now distinguish between genuine and nominal "Christians") "people of God" in the entire Old Testament era belong to and were members of the mystical Christ. In perfect accord with this we find Stephen "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5), speaking of "THE CHURCH in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). This is the more striking in view of the immediate context, where Stephen quoted from Deuteronomy 18:15, "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, or your brethren, like unto me, (Moses); Him shall ye hear." This is He that was IN *the church* in the wilderness.

What could be more plain and more certain than what has just been before us? In view of the same, what shall be thought of such a statement as that made by A. C. Gaebelien in his notes on Matthew 16:18—"The Lord's speaking of the church as *to be built* upon this rock, makes it clear that there was no church in existence up to that time. It is therefore all wrong to speak, as it is done so often, of the Old Testament Church. There was no such institution in Old Testament times." Such men (and all who echo their anti-scriptural teaching) will yet have to answer to God for belying His Holy Word.

Another passage which clearly sets forth the relation of *Christ* unto the Old Testament saints is 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." So definite and decisive is the testimony of those verses, we refrain from making any comment upon them, except to urge the reader to prayerfully heed the opening words thereof, and no longer "be ignorant" of that blessed fact.

As to how long *the knowledge of Christ's* relation to them, and their relation to *Christ*, was retained by the Old Testament saints, we may not be able to fully show. False prophets abounded then as they do now; all sorts of novelties were introduced; and at various periods error was rampant. Thus it became necessary for God to raise up man after man, bidding His people inquire for "the *old paths*" (Jer. 6:16); just as it has now become necessary for such articles as these to be written, if the cloud of dust is to be cleared away which the "dispensationalists" have raised, and which has beclouded the vision of so many. But certain it is that the Old Testament *saints* were far from being the ignoramuses which so many of our conceited moderns declare they were. The path of the just has always been "as the shining light" (Prov. 4:18)—not as candle dimness!—though it is admittedly shone "more and more" as the "perfect Day" drew nearer.

We must not fail to notice the particular passages to which the "dispensationalists" appeal, supposing that they support their ridiculous contention that the mystical body of Christ never existed before the day of Pentecost. But before examining those verses, let it be pointed out that the Word of God does not contradict itself: it is impossible that Acts 7:38 should speak of "the Church in the wilderness," and then one of the Epistles declare there *was* no Church in Old Testament times. Let it be further pointed out it is axiomatic

that whenever a truth or fact has been definitely established, no objection can possibly overthrow it. For example, if it be demonstrated that there is a soul dwelling within the body, my inability to show how that which is immaterial can act upon and be counter-influenced by that which is material, does not disprove its existence. Hence, were we unable to satisfactorily explain the verses which are to come before us, this would by no means annul all that which has been so clearly and abundantly proven.

“Upon this rock I will build My Church” (Matt. 16:18). From Christ’s use of the future tense here, it has been inferred that He had no “Church” up to that time. But the difficulty (if “difficulty” it be) is at once removed when the remainder of the sentence be read: “*And* the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. *And* I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: *and* whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: *and* whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Two things are there evident. First, that our Lord was *not* here speaking of His “Church” in its highest character (that is, viewed as His body and bride), but in its economical state here on earth—the Church “militant”: for it would be superfluous to speak about the “gates of hell” not prevailing against the Church “triumphant.”

Second, Christ had before Him the *new constitution* of the membership of His Church upon earth, which the abolishing of Judaism and the institution of Christianity necessarily entailed. “God had a church in the world from the beginning, and it was built upon the promised Seed (Gen. 3:15); but now that promised Seed was come, it was requisite the Church should have a *new charter*, as Christian, and standing in relation to a Christ already come. Now here we have that Charter” (Matthew Henry on Matt. 16:18). That no *new* Church was instituted by the Lord Jesus is very plain from Hebrews 2:12, where the Holy Spirit quotes the Saviour’s words from Psalm 22:22, and designated the “Congregation of the Lord” the “Church”! To this it should be added that, when Christ said, “on this Rock I will *build* My Church,” it is evident He was referring to the Assembly under the figure of the “House” (Heb. 3:6) and “Temple” (2 Cor. 6:16), rather than the “Body”—the “rock” foundation suiting the former, but not the latter. Now the “House” of God was not some new thing begun at Pentecost, as may be seen from such scriptures as Psalm 127:1, Proverbs 9:1, Song of Solomon 2:4, Matthew 10:25.

Further proof that the Church to which the New Testament saints belonged is *not* peculiar to this Christian dispensation, is found in Hebrews 12:22, 23. We cannot now give a detailed examination of the passage, but must defer this until we reach it (D.V.) in the course of our exposition of that Epistle. Suffice it now to point out, in that chapter the Holy Spirit draws a series of contrasts between that which characterized Judaism as such (vv. 18-21), and that which pertained to Christianity (vv. 22-24). The Apostle was assuring the Hebrew saints (3:1) that in refusing to return unto an apostate system which God had now abandoned, and by remaining loyal to Christ, they lost nothing, but gained everything; for under the new covenant they had the substance of all that was shadowed out under the old covenant. By virtue of their union to Christ, they had “come unto Mount Zion, and unto the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem”—three names for Christ’s mystical body, viewed in different relations; and were connected with the whole body of the faithful: they had “come to . . . the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn, which are written in Heaven”—the “General Assembly” obviously denoting the entire Election of Grace, which is confirmed by “which are written in Heaven”: compare Exodus 32:32, Isaiah 4:3, Daniel 12:1, Luke 10:20, Philippians 4:3.

The next passage which is appealed to by those who teach that the “Church” was born on the day of Pentecost is 1 Corinthians 12:13, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” There is nothing whatever in this which favors, to the slightest degree, the absurd notion of the “Dispensationalists.” In that verse the Apostle is simply advancing *proof* of what he had affirmed in verse 12, where he had said, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.” In that 12th verse he illustrates the truth taught in the context: every organism is characterized by diversity and unity; that is, the uniting of different parts so as to form one body.

In the church at Corinth there was a great variety of gifts, such variety as is to be found in the different members of the human body; nevertheless, despite the diversity of its members, the physical body is a unit, an organic whole. Moreover, such diversity is essential unto its unity, for unless the physical organism *has* many members, it would not be a *body*. So also is the “Christ,” the Church: it has many members, among which are marked varieties and gifts but just as one soul animates the entire physical body, so does one Spirit the Church. “*For by one Spirit are we (“were we”) all baptized into one body*”; observe it is *not* said, “all baptized *at the same time*” no “Gentiles” were baptized by the Spirit! The reference is to a common operation of the Spirit upon *all* of God’s elect, from Abel onwards: the “baptized” signifies *regenerated*, by which each saint becomes *manifestatively* a member of the body of Christ; the “drinking into one Spirit” refers to His sanctifying influences and gifts—faith, hope, love.

The third passage which is appealed to by those who deny Christ had any Church before Pentecost, is Ephesians 1:19-23. From these verses it is pointed out that God gave Christ to be “head over all things to the Church which is His body” *after* His ascension. It might just as well be argued that none had their sins remitted before Christ made atonement at the Cross, or that none were regenerated until He was made a “quickening Spirit” consequent upon His resurrection. Or, with as good effect might it be said, that Christ could not make intercession nor act as the Advocate of His people before he sat down at God’s right hand: which is plainly refuted by Zechariah 1:12, 13 and 3:1, 2! In the purpose of the Triune Jehovah, the God-man Mediator was “set up (or “anointed”) from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was” (Prov. 8:23). In their jumbled ideas upon Ephesians 1:19-23 these “rightly dividers” *fail* to “divide” or distinguish between Christ as the *virtual* Head of His people from the beginning, because “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” and Christ as the *actual* Head after He became *historically* incarnate.

But the favorite passage of these heretics which we are now refuting is Ephesians 3:3-9, with which may be linked Romans 16:25 and Colossians 1:26. A very few words may suffice to point out the perfect consistency between these verses and all that has been said above. The “mystery” in all of them has reference to the counsels of Divine grace in the Everlasting Covenant concerning the whole company of the elect. Those counsels of grace *were* “revealed” in the Old Testament, but largely so under types and shadows, by means of hints and obscure prophecies, and not so clearly and fully “*as it is now revealed by the Spirit*” (Eph. 3:5) through the Gospel. Moreover, the earliest and partial revelation found in the Old Testament Scriptures was confined unto one nation, and “not made known unto *the sons of men*” (Eph. 3:5), whereas the New Testament revelation is “made

known until *all* nations” (Rom. 16:26), so that “*all*” may see it (Eph. 3:9).

We have now noticed all the passages (so far as we are aware) appealed to by those who deny that the mystical Body, or Church of Christ, existed in Old Testament times; but none of them give the slightest countenance to any such contention. The margin of Daniel 7:18 expressly refers to “the saints of *the high places*,” which is parallel with Ephesians 1:3, and Hebrews 3:1. Ephesians 2:11-13 and 19-22 plainly declare that God’s elect from the Gentiles, so far from constituting a *new* Body, are now made “fellow-citizens with the saints,” which can *only* mean the Old Testament saints; being “built upon the foundation of the apostles *and prophets*. Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom *all the building* (Old and New Testament saints) fitly framed *together* groweth into a holy temple in the Lord.” We therefore affirm that, in their fatastical efforts to “rightly divide” the Word of God, Dispensationalists have wrongly divided the family of God; and that so far from maintaining the “unity of the Spirit,” have represented Him as being the Author of confusion. The “new Jerusalem” not only has the names of the twelve Apostles in its foundations (Rev. 21:14), but it also has on its gates the names “of the twelve tribes of Israel” (Rev. 21:12)!!—A.W.P.

Heart Work

As well might a poor man expect to be rich in this world without industry, or for a weak man to become strong and healthy without food and exercise, as for a Christian to be rich in faith and strong in the Lord without earnest endeavour and diligent effort. It is true that all our labours amount to nothing unless the Lord bless them (Psa. 127:1), as it also is that apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Nevertheless, God places no premium upon sloth, and has promised that “the soul of the diligent shall be made fat” (Prov. 13:4). A farmer may be fully persuaded of his own helplessness to make his fields productive, he may realize that their fertility is dependent upon the sovereign will of God, and he may also be a firm believer in the efficacy of prayer; but unless he discharges *his own duty* his barns will be empty. So it is spiritually.

God has not called His people to be drones, nor to maintain an attitude of passiveness. No, He bids them work, toil, labour. The sad thing is that so many of them are engaged in the wrong task, or, at least, giving most of their attention to that which is incidental, and neglecting that which is essential and fundamental. “Keep thy heart with all diligence” (Prov. 4:23): *this* is the great task which God has assigned unto each of His children. But O how sadly is the heart neglected! Of all their concerns and possessions, the *least* diligence is used by the vast majority of professing Christians in the keeping of their hearts. So long as they safeguard their other interests—their reputations, their bodies, their positions in the world—the heart may be left to take its own course.

As the heart in our physical body is the center and fountain of life, because from it blood circulates into every part, conveying with it either health or disease, so it is with us spiritually. If our heart be the residence of impiety, pride, avarice, malice, impure lusts, then the whole current of our lives will largely be tainted with these vices. If they are admitted there and prevail for a season, then our character and conduct will be proportionately affected. Therefore the citadel of the heart needs above all things to be well guarded, that it may not be seized by those numerous and watchful assailants which are ever attacking it. This spring needs to be well protected that its waters be not poisoned.

The man is what his heart is. If *this* be dead to God, then nothing in him is alive. If *this* be right with God, all will be right. As the mainspring of a watch sets all its wheels and parts in motion, so as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). If the heart be right, the actions will be. As a man’s heart is, such is his state now and will be hereafter: if it be regenerated and sanctified there will be a life of faith and holiness in this world, and everlasting life will be enjoyed in the world to come. Therefore “Rather look to the cleansing of thine heart, than to the cleansing of thy well; rather look to the feeding of thine heart, than to the feeding of thy flock; rather look to the defending of thy heart, than to the defending of thy house; rather look to the keeping of thine heart, than to the keeping of thy money” (Peter Moffett, 1570).

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). The “heart” is here put for our whole inner being, the “hidden man of the heart” (1 Peter 3:4). It is that which controls and gives character to all that we do. To “keep”—garrison or guard—the heart or soul is the great work which God has assigned us: the enablement is His, but the duty is ours. We are to keep the imagination from vanity, the understanding from error, the will from perverseness, the conscience clear of guilt, the affections from being inordinate and set on evil objects, the mind from being employed on worthless or vile subjects; the whole from being possessed by Satan. This, this is the work to

which God has called us.

Rightly did the Puritan John Flavel say, “The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition is the great business of a Christian’s life.” Now to “keep” the heart right, implies that it has been *set right*. Thus it was at regeneration, when it was given a new spiritual bent. True conversion is the heart turning from Satan’s control to God’s, from sin to holiness, from the world to Christ. To *keep* the heart right signifies the constant care and diligence of the renewed to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace has reduced it, and daily strives to hold it. “Hereupon do all events depend: the heart being kept, the whole course of our life here will be according to the mind of God, and the end of it will be the enjoyment of Him hereafter. This being neglected, life will be lost, both here as unto obedience, and hereafter as to glory” (John Owen in “Causes of Apostasy”).

1. To “keep” the heart means *striving to shut out from it all that is opposed to God.* “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). God is a jealous God and will brook no rival; He claims the throne of our hearts, and requires to be loved by us supremely. When, then, we perceive our affections being inordinately drawn out unto any earthly object, we are to fight against it, and “resist the Devil.” When Paul said, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be *brought under the power* of any” (1 Cor. 6:12), he signifies that he was keeping his heart diligently, that he was jealous lest *things* should gain that esteem and place in his soul which was due alone unto the Lord. A very small object placed immediately before the eye is sufficient to shut out the light of the sun, and trifling things taken up by the affections may soon sever communion with the Holy One.

Before regeneration our hearts were deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9): that was because the evil principle, the “flesh,” had complete dominion over them. But inasmuch as “the flesh” remains in us after conversion, and is constantly striving for the mastery over “the spirit,” the Christian needs to exercise a constant watchful jealousy over his heart, mindful of its readiness to be imposed upon, and its proneness unto a compliance with temptations. All the avenues to the heart need to be carefully guarded so that nothing hurtful enters therein, particularly against vain thoughts and imaginations, and especially in those seasons when they are most apt to gain an advantage. For if injurious thoughts are suffered to gain an inroad into the mind, if we accustom ourselves to give them entertainment, then in vain shall we hope to be “spiritually minded” (Rom. 8:6). All such thoughts are only making provision to fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Thus, for the Christian to “keep” his heart with all diligence, means for him to pay close attention to the direction in which his affections are moving, to discover whether the things of the world are gaining a firmer and fuller hold over him, or whether they are increasingly losing their charm for him. God has exhorted us, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2), and the heeding of this injunction calls for constant examination of the heart to discover whether or not it is becoming more and more dead unto this deceitful and perishing world, and whether heavenly things are those in which we find our chief and greatest delight. “Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart” (Deut. 4:9).

2. To “keep” the heart means *striving to bring it into conformity with the Word.* We

are not to rest content until an actual image of its pure and holy teachings is stamped upon it. Alas, so many today are just *playing* with the solemn realities of God, allowing them to flit across their fancy, but never embracing and making them their own. Why is it, dear reader, that those solemn impressions you had when hearing a searching sermon or reading a searching article, so quickly faded away? Why did not those holy feelings and aspirations which were stirred within you last? Why have they borne no fruit? Was it not because you failed to see that your heart was duly affected by them? You failed to “hold fast” that which you had “received and heard” (Rev. 3:3), and in consequence, your heart became absorbed again in “the cares of this life” or “the deceitfulness of riches,” and thus the Word was choked.

It is not enough to hear or read a powerful message from one of God’s servants, and to be deeply interested and stirred by it. If there be no diligent effort on thy part, then it will be said “your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away” (Hosea 6:4). What, then, is required? This, earnest and persevering prayer that God will fasten the message in your soul as “a nail in a sure place,” so that the devil himself cannot catch it away. What is required? This “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Things which are not duly pondered are soon forgotten: meditation stands to reading as mastication does to eating. What is required? This, that you promptly put into practice what you have learned: walk according to the light God has given, or it will quickly be taken from you: Luke 8:18.

Not only must the outward actions be regulated by the Word, but the heart must also be conformed thereto. It is not enough to abstain from murder, the causeless anger must be put away. It is not enough to abstain from the act of adultery, the inward lust must be mortified too (Matt. 5:28). God not only takes note of and keeps a record of all our external conduct, but He “weigheth the spirits” (Prov. 16:2). Every thing is naked and open before Him with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:13). Not only so, He requires *us* to scrutinize the springs from which our actions proceed, to examine our motives, to ponder *the spirit* in which we act. God requireth truth—that is, sincerity (reality)—in “the inward parts” (Psa. 51:6). Therefore does He command us “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23).

3. To “keep” the heart means *to preserve it tender unto sin*. The unregenerate man makes little or no distinction between sin and crime: so long as he keeps within the law of the land, and maintains a reputation for respectability among his fellows, he is, generally speaking, quite satisfied with himself. But it is far otherwise with one who has been born again: he has been awakened to the fact that he has to do with *God*, and must yet render a full account unto Him. He makes conscience of a hundred things which the unconverted never trouble themselves about. When the Holy Spirit first convicted him, he was made to feel that his whole life had been one of rebellion against God, of pleasing himself. The consciousness of this pierced him to the very quick: his inward anguish far exceeded any pains of body or sorrow occasioned by temporal losses. He saw himself to be a spiritual leper, and hated himself for it, and mourned bitterly before God. He cried, “Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa. 51:9, 10).

Now it is the duty of the Christian, and part of the task which God has set him, to see to it that this sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin be not lost. He is to labour daily that his heart be duly affected by the heinousness of self-will and self-love. He is to stead-

fastly resist every effort of Satan to pity himself, to think lightly of wrong doing, or to excuse himself in the same. He is to live in the constant realization that the eye of God is ever upon him, so that when tempted he will say with Joseph, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). He is to view sin in the light of the Cross, daily reminding himself that it was *his* iniquities which caused the Lord of Glory to be made a curse for him; employing the dying love of Christ as a motive why he must not allow himself in anything that is contrary to the holiness and obedience which the Saviour asks from all His redeemed.

Ah, my Christian reader, it is no child's play to "keep the heart with all diligence." The easy-going religion of our day will never take its devotees (or rather, its *victims!*) to Heaven. The question has been asked, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or *who* shall stand in His holy place?" (Psa. 24:3), and plainly has the question been answered by God Himself: "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" etc. (Psa. 24:4). Equally plain is the teaching of the New Testament, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for *they* shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). A "pure heart" is one that hates sin, which makes conscience of sin, which grieves over it, which strives against it. A "pure heart" is one that seeks to keep undefiled the temple of the Holy Spirit, the dwelling place of Christ (Eph. 3:17).

4. To "keep" the heart means to *look diligently after its cleansing*. Perhaps some of our readers often find themselves sorrowfully crying, "O the vileness of my heart!" Thank God, if He *has* discovered this to you; if such be so, and you really feel it, it is clear proof that He has made you to differ from the multitudes of blindly-indifferent professing Christians all around you. But, dear friend, there is no sufficient reason why your "heart" should *continue* to be vile. You might lament that your garden was overgrown with weeds and filled with rubbish; but need it remain so? We speak now not of your sinful *nature*, the incurable and unchangeable "flesh" which still indwells you; but of your *heart*, which God bids you "keep." You *are* responsible to purge your mind of vain imaginations, your soul of unlawful affections, your conscience of guilt.

But, alas, you say, "I have no control over such things: they come unbidden and I am powerless to prevent them." So the Devil would have you believe! Revert again to the analogy of your garden: do not the weeds spring up unbidden; do not the slugs and other pests seek to prey upon the plants? What, then? Do you merely bewail your helplessness? No, you resist them and take means to keep them under. Thieves enter houses uninvited, but whose fault is it if the doors and windows be left unfastened? O heed not the seductive lullabies of Satan. God says, "purify your hearts, ye double minded" (James 4:8); that is, one mind for Him, and another for self; one for holiness, and another for the pleasures of sin.

But *how* am I to "purify" my heart? By vomiting up the foul things taken into it—shamefacedly owning them before God, repudiating them, turning from them with loathing; and it is written "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). By daily renewing our exercise of repentance, and *such* repentance as is spoken of in 2 Corinthians 7:11: "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." By the daily exercise of faith (Acts 15:9), appropriating afresh the cleansing blood of Christ, bathing every night in that "fountain" which has been

opened “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1). By treading the path of God’s commandments: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1 Peter 1:22).

We close this first article by pointing out, what is obvious to every Christian reader, namely, that such a task calls for Divine aid. Help and grace need to be earnestly and definitely sought of the Holy Spirit each day. We should bow before God, and in all simplicity say, “Lord, Thou requirest me to keep my heart with all diligence, and I feel utterly incompetent for such a task: such a work lies altogether beyond my poor feeble powers; therefore, I humbly ask Thee in the name of Christ to graciously grant unto me supernatural strength to do as Thou hast bidden me. Lord, work in me both to will and to do of Thy good pleasure.” —A.W.P.

The Christian's Armour - Part 1

(Part 2 in July Issue)

Ephesians 6:10-18.

In the passage which is to be before us the Apostle gathers up the whole previous subject of the Epistle into an urgent reminder of the solemn conditions under which the Christian's life is lived. By a graphic figure he shows that the Christian's life is lived on the battlefield, for we are not only pilgrims but soldiers; we are not only in a foreign country, but in the enemy's land. Though the redemption which Christ has purchased for His people be free and full, yet, between the beginning of its application to us and the final consummation of it, there is a terrible and protracted conflict through which we have to pass. This is not merely a figure of speech, but a grim reality. Though salvation is free, yet it is not obtained without great effort. The fight to which God's children are called in this life, is one in which Christians themselves receive many sore wounds, and thousands of professors are slain. Now, as we shall see in the verses which follow, the Apostle warns us that the conflict has to do with more than human foes: the enemies we have to meet are superhuman ones, and therefore in order to successfully fight against them we need supernatural strength.

We must remember that the Christian belongs to the spiritual realm as well as the natural, and so he has spiritual as well as natural foes; and hence he needs spiritual strength as well as physical. Therefore the Apostle begins here by saying, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10). The word "finally" denotes that the Apostle had reached his closing exhortation, and the words "be strong" link up with what immediately proceeds as well as with what now follows. Some of you will remember that the whole of the fifth, and opening verses of the sixth chapters are filled with exhortations: exhortations that pertain to each aspect of the Christian life; exhortations to regulate him in the home, in business, in the world. Those exhortations are addressed to the husband, wife, child, master, servant, and in order for the Christian to obey them he needs to be "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Thus, the call which is given in verse 10 is not only an introduction to what follows, but is also closely related to that which precedes.

"Finally, my brethren"—after all the Christian duties I have set before you in the previous verses, now—"be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." The words "Be strong" mean to muster strength for the conflict, and be strong "in the Lord" signifies we must seek that strength from the only source from which we can obtain it. Note carefully it is not "be strong *from* the Lord," nor is it "be strengthened *by* the Lord." No, it is "be strong *in* the Lord." Perhaps you will get the thought if I use this analogy: just as a thumb that is amputated is useless, and just as a branch cut off from the vine withers, so a Christian whose fellowship with the Lord has been broken, is in a strengthless, fruitless, useless state. Thus, "be strong in the Lord" means first of all, see to it that you maintain a live practical relationship to and remain in constant communion with the Lord. Just as my arm must be a part of, a member, in my body, if it is to be vitalized and fitted to perform its functions, so I must be in real touch with the Lord, in daily communion with Him, in living contact—not in theory, but in *actual* experience. It is deeply important that we should, ere we proceed farther, grasp the exhortation found in verse 10: otherwise there will be no strength for the conflict.

"Be strong in the Lord *and* in the power of His might." At first sight there seems to be

a needless repetition there; but it is not so. A soldier not only needs strength of body for the carrying of his heavy weapons, for the strain of long marches, and for the actual fighting, but he also needs *courage*: a powerful giant who is a coward would make no sort of soldier. The two chief things which are needed for one engaged in fighting, are strength and courage, or vitality and a brave heart; and that is what is in view in verse 10—the last clause brings in the thought of boldness. “Be strong”: in faith, in hope, in wisdom, in patience, in fortitude, in every Christian grace. To be strong in grace, is to be weak in sin. It is vitally essential to remember that we need to have our strength and courage renewed daily. Be strong in the Lord: seek His strength at the beginning of each day—“they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength” (Isa. 40:31). God does not impart strength to us wholesale: He will not give me strength on Monday morning to last through the week. No, there has to be the *renewing* of our strength, and that strength has to be drawn from the Lord by the actings of faith, appropriating from *His* “fullness.” The enemies we have to contend with cannot be overcome by human wisdom and might. Unless we go forth to the conflict continually looking to Christ for all needed supplies of grace, deriving all our vitality from Him, we are sure to be defeated.

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). Our first need is to stir up ourselves to *resist* temptation by a believing reliance upon God’s all-sufficient grace, that is, obtaining from Him the strength which will enable us to go forth and fight against the foe. Our second greatest need is to be *well armed* for the conflict into which we must daily enter. *This* is the relation between verses 10 and 11: “Be strong in the Lord” and “Put on the whole armour of God”: first, stir up yourselves to resist temptation, seeking strength at the beginning of the day for the conflict; then see to it that you take unto yourselves, put on, the whole armour of God.

The Christian is engaged *in a warfare*. There is a fight before him, hence armour is urgently needed. It is impossible for us to stand against the wiles of the devil unless we avail ourselves of the provisions which God has made for enabling us *to* stand. Observe it is called “the armour *of God*”: just as the strength we need, comes not from ourselves, but must be supplied by the Lord; so our means of defense lie not in our own powers and faculties, but only as they are quickened by God. It is called the “armour of God” because *He* both provides and bestows it, for we have none of our own; and yet, while this armour is of God’s providing and bestowing, *we* have to “put it on”! God does not fit it on us; He places it before us; and it is *our* responsibility, duty, task, to *put on* the whole armour of God. I may say that this same figure of “the armour” is used three times in the Epistles of Paul, and I believe we find in them a reference to the Trinity. I think the “armour of righteousness” (2 Cor. 6:7) looks more particularly unto Christ; the “armour of light” (Rom. 13:12) more especially to the Holy Spirit, who is the One that immediately illuminates us: and the “armour of God” unto the the Father, who is the Provider of it.

Now it is very important we should recognise that this term “armour” is a figurative one, a metaphor, and refers not to something which is material or carnal. It is a figurative expression denoting the Christian’s *graces*: the various parts of the armour represent the different spiritual graces which are to protect his varied faculties; and when we are told to “put on” the armour, it simply means we are to call into exercise and action our graces. Notice, “Put on *the whole* armour of God,” that is, avoiding the snares of the devil; or to drop the figure, so exercise all the Christian graces that no part of the soul is exposed

unto the Enemy. Those who wish to approve themselves of being in possession of Grace, must see to it that they have all the graces of a saint. “Put on the whole armour of God, that (in order that) ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). There is no standing against him if we are not armoured: or to drop the figure, there is no success in resisting the devil if our graces be not in exercise. On the other hand, there is no failing and falling before him if our graces are healthy and active.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (v. 12). The opening “For” has the force of “Because”: the Apostle is advancing a reason, which virtually amounts to an argument, so as to enforce the exhortation just given. Because we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, not against puny human enemies no stronger than ourselves, but against powers and rulers of the darkness of this world: therefore the panoply of God is essential. That is brought in to emphasize the terribleness of the conflict before us. It is no imaginary one, and no ordinary foes we have to meet; but spiritual, superhuman, invisible ones. Those enemies seek to destroy faith and produce doubt. They seek to destroy hope and produce despair. They seek to destroy humility and produce pride. They seek to destroy peace and produce bitterness and malice. They seek to prevent our enjoyment of heavenly things by getting us unduly occupied with earthly things. Their attack is not upon the body, but upon the soul.

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (v. 13). The opening “Wherefore” means, in view of the fact that we wrestle against these powerful superhuman, invisible foes, who hate us with a deadly hatred and are seeking to destroy us; therefore appropriate and use the provision which God has made, so that we may stand and withstand. The first clause of verse 13 explains the opening words of verse 11. Verse 11 says “put on,” make use of all proper defensives and weapons for repulsing the attacks and the 13th says “take unto you the whole armour of God”: we “put on” by taking it “unto us,” that is, by appropriation, by making it our own. “That ye may be able to withstand”: to *withstand* is the opposite of yielding, of being tripped up, thrown down, by the devil’s temptations; it means that we stand our ground, strive against and resist the devil. “That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand”: the “*stand*” is the opposite of a slothful sleep or a cowardly flight. We have that illustrated in the case of the Apostles. In Gethsemane *they* did not “stand,” but lay down and slept at the post of duty. No wonder that a little later they all “forsook Him and fled” (Matt. 26:56)!

I want you to notice that we are not here told to *advance*. We are only ordered to “stand.” God has not called His people to an aggressive war upon Satan, to invade his territory, and seek to wrest from him what is his; but He has told us to occupy the ground which He has allotted us. I want you to see what would have been implied had this verse said “take unto you the whole armour of God, and advance upon the devil, storm his strongholds, liberate his prisoners.” But not so: the Lord has given no charge or commission to the rank and file of His people to engage in what is now called “personal work,” soul winning, “rescuing the perishing.” Indeed He has not: the work of preaching the Gospel *belongs alone* unto His own personally called and Divinely equipped servants or ministers. All such feverish activities of the flesh as we now behold in the religious world, find no place in this Divine exhortation “having done all, to *stand*.” This is the third time in these verses the Spirit of God has repeated that word “Stand”—not advance,

not rush hither and thither, like a crazy person. “Stand therefore” is *all* God has told us to do in our conflict with the devil.

“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth” (Eph. 6:14). Now that brings before us the first of the seven pieces of the Christian’s Armour which is mentioned in the passage. First, let me warn you against the carnalization of this word, thinking of something that is external, visible, or tangible. The figure of the “girdle” is taken from a well known custom in Oriental countries, where the people all wear long flowing outer garments reaching to the feet, which would impede their actions when walking, working or fighting. The first thing a person does there when about to be active, is to gird up around his waist that outer garment which trails to the ground. When the garment is not girded and hangs down, it indicates the person is at rest. To “gird up” is therefore the opposite of sloth and ease, following the line of least resistance. Be girded about with a girdle of truth: I believe there is a double reference or meaning here in the word “truth.” But first of all, I want to take up *what it is* that we need to “gird.”

The breastplate is for the heart, the helmet for the head, what, then, is the “girdle” for? In that from which the figure is borrowed, the reference is to *the waist* or loins. But what does that metaphor denote? Plainly, the center or mainspring of all our activities. And what is that? Obviously, it is *the mind*. The mind is the mainspring of action: first the thought, and then the carrying out of it. 1 Peter 1:13 helps us here: “gird up the loins of your mind.” “Having your loins girt about with truth” (Eph. 6:14): it is not so much our embracing the truth, as the truth embracing us. Thus, the spiritual reference is to *the holding in and regulation of the thoughts of the mind*. The mind “girded up,” means a mind which is disciplined; the opposite of one where the thoughts are allowed to run loose and wild. Again; the “loins” are the place of strength, so is the mind. If we allow our thoughts and imaginations to run wild, we will have no communion with God, and no power against Satan. If our thoughts are not brought into captivity, in obedience to Christ, the devil will soon gain a hold over us.

“Having your loins girt about with truth.” I think the word “truth” has reference, in the first place, to the Word of God: “Thy Word is *truth*” (John 17:17): *that* is what must regulate the mind, control the thoughts, subdue the imaginations: there must be a knowledge of, faith in, love for, subjection to, God’s Word. “Stand therefore, having your loins (your mind) girt about with *truth*” (v. 14). Now that suggests to us the characteristic quality of the adversary against whom we are called upon to arm. Satan is a liar, and we can only meet him with the Truth. Satan prevails over ignorance by means of guile or deceit; but he has no power over those whose minds are regulated by the Truth of God. “If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31, 32)—“free” from the toils, the power, the deceptions of Satan.

I think the word “truth” here has a second meaning. Take for example Psalm 51:6, God “desirest truth in the inward parts”: “truth” there signifies reality, sincerity. Truth is the opposite of hypocrisy, pretense, unreality. That is why the girdle of truth comes first, because if *it* be lacking, everything else is vain and useless. The strength of every grace lies in *the sincerity* of it. In 1 Timothy 1:5 we read of “faith unfeigned,” which means true, genuine, real faith; in contrast from a faith which is only theoretical, notional, lifeless, inoperative—a faith which utterly withers before the fires of testing.

“Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ *in sincerity*” (Eph. 6:24). That

is another discriminating verse, distinguishing between a real and false love, a true and faithless love. There are thousands of Protestants who have a similar love for Christ as Romanists have for His mother, Mary: it is merely a natural love, a fleshly sentiment, a carnal emotion. But genuine, spiritual love for Him, strives to *please* Him: it is an intensely practical thing, a principle of holy obedience. O how we need to *examine* our graces and test them by Scripture, to see whether *our* faith and love be genuine. We repeat that, reality and sincerity are the strengths of every Christian grace. That is why the Girdle of Truth comes first in the different pieces of armour.

The Girdle of Truth (corresponding to the military belt of the warrior) signifies, then, the mind being regulated by the Word of God, and guarded by real sincerity; and this alone will protect us against Satan's temptations unto slackness, of guile and hypocrisy. Only as this is "put on" by us, shall we be able to "*stand* against the wiles of the devil": to "stand" is to so "resist" him that he does not throw us down. To "put on" the girdle of truth means applying the Word to the first movements of our minds. This is where Eve failed: she had received the Word, but not in the love of it. Instead of resisting the devil, she parleyed with him. Instead of the truth bridling her imaginations and desires, she cast it from her. How different with Christ! When Satan approached Him, He *was* girded with the girdle of truth: His thoughts were regulated by the Word, and there was an absolute sincerity Godwards. —A.W.P.
(Completed in the JULY issue.)

Welcome Tidings

“For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:15). In the context the Apostle speaks of the Divine power which had so mightily sustained him under afflictions and trials. Here he expresses the fact that in so richly enduing the servants of Christ, God displays His love unto His people at large; and this, that the abundant grace bestowed upon them, may stir up many to praise Him for the benefits received through their ministry. Through His chosen ministers the saints are edified that God may be glorified. We sincerely trust that what follows may evoke Thanksgiving from hundreds of our readers. Following our annual custom we select excerpts from the many letters received.

“I thank you for the Studies. I receive much help and blessing through them, although they are very heart-searching and make me feel how far off I am from what the Lord would have me be. How much I need to watch and pray, and seek grace from Him, to live a life that will glorify Him” (Sister in Pa.). “Most of your writings have been of a searching character, but unless we are willing to be searched and emptied of sin and self, the Lord will not fill and use us. Personally I am thanking the Lord for these messages, and am asking Him that as they are humbling me and driving me to my knees, I may find more of His fullness. May God lead you on, for this is the searching which His people everywhere need just now” (Brother in California). “I receive the Studies regularly, and appreciate them very much. Some of the articles stir me up, such as those on Repentance, Saving Faith, Assurance, Hebrews 10:26, etc. They make one examine himself. I value your strong words, for we need to be stirred up” (Brother in Australia).

“Once again I would like to thank you for the Studies. I read and re-read them, and find much food for meditation and prayer. I can never read much before I have to pray. I have found the Lord very patient with me, and after much examination I am daring to hope I have a little saving faith” (Sister in Australia). “Am writing to tell you that Mrs. — is wonderfully helped by the Studies. She told me that sometimes while she is reading them, she will have to stop and get down on her knees and talk with the Lord; and Miss — says the same” (Sister in New York). “I have never before read the book of Hebrews as I am now understanding it, nor have I ever before spent so much time with my Lord in the holy of holies” (Sister in California).

“What a precious article was that on ‘The Impeccability of Christ’! Not only do I find much soul-strengthening and establishment personally in reading your Studies, but after faith’s mastication, feel impelled to proclaim it to all whom the gracious Lord directs” (Preacher in England). “How I have appreciated the Studies you have given on Saving Faith. How firmly do I believe in what you have written. Maybe people think I am making it too hard to be saved, but I think the trouble is with the people. They just cannot see they must leave the world when they accept Christ. Yes, they want Jesus Christ as Saviour, but not as their Lord; but there is no other way than the Lord’s way” (Preacher in Minn.).

“With profound gratitude to God, and His servant the editor, I have read the discussion of Assurance. Most frankly do I say that it is the only satisfying study of it that I have ever read, and I have read everything I could get my hands on in the years ago. Very truly do you say, ‘we have no access to the Lamb’s book of life,’ and therefore cannot tell by that whether or not our names are written there, and whether the blessed promises of eternal life apply to us. And that, therefore, we must make our ‘calling and elec-

tion sure' by a self-examination as to whether or not we are in the faith to which the promises belong; and furthermore, that we are to determine whether or not we are in *the Faith* by the fruit it bears in our hearts and lives. The whole trouble on that point in this Country has grown out of an over-emphasis upon 'Justification *by faith alone*,' without a clear definition of the faith which was meant—that such faith is the gift of God, and comes alone to the 'broken and contrite heart' in a state of repentance—by which emphasis they have eliminated genuine repentance from the thinking of the people. How much harm has been and will yet be done by this ad-mixture of Fatalism and Arminianism only the Lord can know" (An aged Preacher in the U.S.A.).

"Your expositions are of great help to me. I perfectly agree with you as to the lopsidedness of present-day teaching in many of even the 'awakened' circles. Today the great question of man's responsibility is scarcely touched upon. The current conception of the grace of God, eliminating almost every spiritual liability of His creatures, is altogether unwarranted in Holy Writ" (Missionary in France). How it rejoices our heart to receive such confirmatory testimonies, and to see God is opening the eyes of others to discern that while His salvation *is* by grace alone, it is *not* at the expense of the unchanging requirements of His Righteousness; and that we must not separate the work of the Spirit from the work of Christ.

"We are surely living in a day of spiritual famine: so many books, and yet so few that amount to much spirituality. Conditions are appalling. The more I go into Studies, the more I see the value of the practical side of the Christian life" (Brother in California). "I want to thank you for your kindness in sending the Studies. More than ever I look forward to them, and am eagerly waiting for them by the time the two months come round. Every other book or magazine now seems empty, for the Studies are so full of spiritual food. I am greatly interested in 'the Life of David' series. I often think of the hours you spend indoors searching God's precious Word, seeking food for His hungry people, while others are out enjoying the fresh air. I remember too, dear Mrs. Pink, and the hours she spends in addressing envelopes, etc." (Sister in England). We lived in her town for some months. Brother Preachers: the eyes of people are upon us! watching, whether we toil or loaf!

"Before I began reading Studies I was continually praying for deeper knowledge and a closer walk with Him who is able to keep us from falling, and thus lift us over the snags and pitfalls of life. I do praise His holy name tonight that He ever made it possible for us all to receive the light from His Word which we have through the help of the Studies. Certainly I am grateful to you for sending them to me. I sure wish I was in a position financially to help out a little. I received a great deal of help in reading the articles on Assurance, especially the Dialogues: may the Lord open the way for more such" (Brother in Mich.). "You will never know how much Studies have meant to us, as we never hear any ministry like them. The ministers here in the churches exalt man in place of Christ, and that is not what a hungry Christian needs: we want more and more of the blessed Saviour" (Sister in Nebraska).

"God bless you and your work in the future as He has in the past, is my prayer. I praise God for the Studies: they are wonderful soul-food, and they do me O so much good. I arise about two hours before the rest of the household does, so I can read and study with a clear mind in the presence of my Lord and Saviour, and then I am in shape to go on with my daily duties. I would that we had more men of God like you" (Brother

in Oregon). And we would that more of God's people did as this hard-working man does, and put first things first, thinking of the soul before the body. "The soul of the sluggard *desireth*, and hath nothing" (Prov. 13:4). It is not enough to "desire," there must be determination and diligence. Truth has to be "bought" (Prov. 23:23). It is the *diligent* soul which God promises to make "fat" (Prov. 13:4).

"For some months now I have been receiving Studies, and I am taking this opportunity of expressing my sincere thanks and appreciation to God for having brought them into my hands. This is the teaching I have long been hungering for" (Brother in Australia). The Lord is preparing many hearts for His humbling messages. "I have received a great deal of help and blessing from the Studies: they have cheered me up in many a lonely hour, and given me a deeper appreciation of the things of God, and a greater desire to be here as a witness for our blessed Lord and Saviour" (Sister in Australia). "I cannot express what I feel in sending these lines to let you know how very much I appreciate your Studies. They do indeed supply a great lack in the teaching of today. The 'Obedience of Christ' and 'Wrongs Righted' have been a blessing to my soul" (Sister in England). "I am getting great profit from the Studies, and will be very thankful for sending them to me for 1933" (Brother in Canada).

"I am sending this letter of deep appreciation for the papers you have so kindly sent me. They have been of help to me in the study of the Holy Scriptures: the only thing that burdens me is that I am not able to assist this work financially" (Brother in Wales). "For many days now I have read your magazine with real spiritual profit. When I read your Gleanings in Genesis and in Exodus, I must candidly say they had a definite formative influence on my personal life, and I am finding increasing joy in the addresses on Hebrews" (Brother in Scotland). "I am writing to thank you gratefully for the many copies of Studies you have so kindly sent me, and for which I would love to enclose a gold check as a token of my deep appreciation for the great blessing they have been to me; but I am very sorry I cannot do so" (Missionary in Japan).

"Continue to go forth with weeping, sowing precious Seed in the field of human hearts. You shall doubtless come before the Lord rejoicing, bringing sheaves with you. I cannot express my feelings in English. Your writings reveal the power of the Holy Spirit: glory to Him from whom all blessings flow. The Lord bless thee and keep thee. By His grace I am what I am" (An Ukrainian Brother). "I thank my God for your testimony in the truth, as I see it, on the pages of Studies" (A Russian Brother). "I have regularly received your blessed paper. Thank God, and thank you. I believe it is His grace which enables you to publish Studies under these circumstances and conditions" (A Syrian Brother). "Studies have been a continued source of help, illumination, and exhortation to me. May the Lord richly bless you and your work during the year" (Missionary in El Salvador).

"I have felt for a long time how I should like to tell you what a help the Studies have been to me. I have read and re-read the articles on Assurance with great profit, although many things were not quite plain; but in the 'Humble Heart' (February) I feel you have spoken to me face to face, and I am overjoyed to tell you the Holy Spirit has made everything plain to me through your words written therein. The desire of my heart is that, day by day I may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Sister in England).

"I enjoyed every article in the January issue of Studies, each one being a real feast to

my soul. But that on ‘Dispensationalism’ is the one I desire to comment on, I cried when I read it, but the tears were tears of joy, and I laid the paper down and offered to *HIM* sacrifices of praise, giving thanks to His name for all those whom our blessed Lord has so graciously endowed with such an understanding of His Holy Word” (A Sister in Texas). This dear sister has had to take her stand against ultra-dispensationalism, and (to quote her again) in consequence, “I had to suffer the loss of my family, because it necessitated my moving from home. But the Lord be praised, for He alone is worthy, and I know His presence went with me, and is still with me, and I can say with David ‘He is my Portion’.”

May the above quotations evoke praise from many hearts. In closing, we would say once more—particularly for the benefit of our new readers—this article is *not* to be construed as an indirect appeal for funds. Thank God there is no shortage with us: gifts continue to come in freely; and if they did not, we trust we should be kept from the awful sin of leaning upon the arm of flesh. There are few things we loathe more than to see those professing to be engaged in a work of *faith* soliciting money: though we have more respect for them, than for those who attempt to disguise their unbelief by *making known their needs to man*, and at the same time requesting the “prayers” of their friends. Let the servant of God—and the Christian too—spread his case before the Lord, heeding that word, “My soul, wait thou *only* upon God” (Psa. 62:5). We sincerely trust that many of these bogus “faith” enterprises, which have for so long preyed upon a credulous public, will soon go out of business—the world will be no worse off, and God will be less dishonoured. —A.W.P.