

Vol. XXIII

September, 1944

No. 9

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

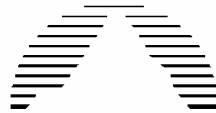
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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TO THE UNSAVED

As one who has been called to declare “all the counsel of God,” it is our bounden duty to keep back nothing which may prove profitable. We dare not assume that all of our readers have actually passed from death unto life; and therefore, we are required to address ourselves, occasionally at least, to those who are yet under the condemnation and wrath of a sin-hating God, especially unto such as mistakenly suppose they have been reconciled to Him. Though our chief design and effort is to provide spiritual nourishment for those who are in Christ; yet, we cannot altogether ignore the ones who are yet strangers to Him. The more so that, in this generation, there are so few who are seriously attempting to expose empty professors unto themselves, and make it plain that many of those who fondly believe they are journeying Heavenwards are entertaining a false hope—that instead of their hope being fixed upon the Rock, it rests upon nothing but a foundation of sand. Is that the case with *you*, dear friend?

“Ye cannot serve the LORD: for HE is an holy God; He is a jealous God; He will *not forgive* your transgressions nor your sins” (Jos 24:19). Those words bring before us an essential and fundamental aspect of the Truth, which is rarely proclaimed today, and which multitudes who sit under modern “evangelism” (?) are quite unacquainted with. The view which now so widely obtains is, that nothing is easier and simpler than the obtaining of the forgiveness of our sins. Millions of people have been assured by the blind leaders of the blind, that all which is required from them is that they believe the Gospel and receive Christ as their personal Saviour. It matters nothing what be the state of their hearts, what be their concept of God’s character, what be their attitude to His Law. It matters not that they regard sin as trifle, are thoroughly carnal and in love with the world, and have no realisation of their deep need: so long as they “accept Christ” all is well with them. Nor does it matter how unchanged are their future lives—all is now well with them forever. So Satan would have them think.

“Ye cannot serve the LORD.” What is signified by *servicing* the Lord? It means that I recognise His claims upon me, that I own His authority, that I unreservedly submit myself to His will. It means that I take the place and discharge the obligations of a servant, and a servant is one who is at the disposal of his master, who does as he tells him, who seeks to please him and promote his interests. Perhaps the reader is saying in his heart, “But I have no desire to be a ‘servant’ of the Lord in that sense, all I want is to be assured that my sins are pardoned and that I am secured from Hell.” If so, you are wanting something you will never obtain, for serving the Lord and obtaining His forgiveness of transgressions are inseparably connected. But do you realise what is implied by your assertion that you have no desire to serve the Lord? It signifies you are quite satisfied with your present master and decline to leave his service. Your present master is Satan and *his* servant you are. There are but two Masters over the sons of men: the Lord and the Devil—and if we are not serving the former, we are the latter.

“Ye *cannot* serve the LORD.” Why? “For He is an *holy* God; He is a jealous God” (Jos 24:19). That presents a view of the Divine character, which only too many pulpits guiltily conceal. God is not only good and ready to pardon, but He is ineffably pure and cannot look on sin without displeasure. He is not only merciful and gracious, but He will tolerate no rivals, and requires that we love *Him* with all our heart and strength. Nor is that aspect of the Divine character restricted to the revelation, which He made of Himself at Sinai: the earth quaked at Calvary, thick darkness overshadowed the Cross, and the holiness of God was evidenced as He “spared not His own Son” (Rom 8:32). In the N.T.,¹ the call goes forth, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:28, 29). Ah, my reader, the glib manner and easy complacency with which so many talk of pardon and their assurance of it, proceeds from dullness of conscience rather than from strength of faith. They have never felt in their souls the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the holiness of Him with whom they have to do. Had they done so, their cry would be, “Behold, I am vile;” (Job 40:4) “Woe is me! for I am undone” (Isa 6:5).

“Ye cannot serve the LORD: for He is an holy God.” Serving God is a very different matter from what the world thinks. The natural man imagines that he may devote the greater part of his time to the pleasing of himself, and then that he may appease God by assuming a pious air on the Sabbath. But He will not be imposed upon by any such mockery. To all such He says, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that

¹ N.T. – New Testament.

the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jam 4:4)—spiritual adultery is illicit intercourse, setting our affections upon the creature rather than the Creator, devoting to them what belongs only to Him: our lusts, inveigling the soul from God. God will not accept the homage of a *divided heart*. That was made crystal clear by the Lord Jesus: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other" (Mat 6:24). There we learn that service must proceed from *love*. God will not accept a legal service, which is rendered from dread, nor from a mercenary spirit, which seeks gain therefrom. He must be served freely and gladly.

The Devil deceives many into being satisfied with a superficial change and half reformation. They make a religious profession, persuading themselves they are trusting in the finished work of Christ, and yet continue in love with the world and to indulge the flesh. It is a fatal mistake to think we can divide our hearts between God and the world, to serve Him and our lusts. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Mat 6:24; Luk 16:13). No one has any difficulty in understanding what it signifies to "*serve* mammon." It is to make material riches my dominant quest, to make the acquirement of them my supreme aim, to devote all my powers to the securing of them. Equally plain is what is included in the "*servicing* of God." It means putting Him first in our hearts and lives. It means for all our faculties and energies to be devoted to an ascertaining and then a *doing* of whatever He requires. It means the rendering to Him of an unqualified and loving obedience. And that necessarily involves the renunciation of all objects which are opposed to Him and abstaining from whatever He has forbidden. To allow any lust to reign in us is to depose God from the heart.

"He will *not forgive* your transgressions nor your sins." Solemn, unspeakably solemn words. How faintly any of us realise what it means for one to pass out of time into eternity with his transgressions *unforgiven*. "Ye shall die in your sins" (Joh 8:24) said Christ—not to avowed infidels—but the religious professors of His day. And why? Because they refused to take His "yoke" upon them, because they declared, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luk 19:14). Nor does death purge away sins, for after death, "the judgment" (Heb 9:27). Yes, eternal, inexorable, unbearable judgment—suffering the wrath of a holy and jealous God. Then "Beware of Him, and obey His voice, provoke Him not; for He will *not pardon* your transgressions" (Exo 23:21). Something more than believing is necessary: Christ is "the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey* Him" (Heb 5:9). And how and where is the obedience of a sinner to begin? Just here: "Let the wicked forsake his way [of self-pleasing] and the unrighteous man his thoughts [of being saved in any other manner]: and let him return unto the LORD [from whom he revolted in Adam], and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Isa 55:7).

What we have set forth above is not the Gospel, but it *is* the necessary background of it. The Divine Law reveals my duty and condemns me for my utter failure in discharging it. The Law makes known the just demands of God upon me and my woeful falling short of meeting the same. Not until I am personally convicted of my sinful failure, not until my heart sincerely repents for that failure, am I experimentally fit for the Gospel. But more so, there must be wrought in me a genuine desire to serve God, to give up myself wholly to His righteous requirements, and accompanying this must be the realisation of my own insufficiency, that I "cannot." Then, and only then, will the Gospel be music to my soul, for it tells first of how my awful guilt may be blotted out, and second, of how strength may be obtained for the discharge of duty. The Gospel exempts not the believer from the service of God, but binds him to it, for when we savingly believe the Gospel, we not only receive from God, but we "give ourselves" to Him (2Co 8:11, 12). Have *you* done so, my reader? Have you *really*, or is Satan deceiving you into thinking you have? —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

9. 1 Corinthians 1: 4-7

The original Corinth was the chief city of ancient Greece, not only in authority, but in wealth and grandeur, and, we may add, in luxury and licentiousness—the temple of Venus being situated there. It was entirely destroyed by the Roman consul Mummius, 120 B.C., and as one writer expresses it, “its inhabitants were dispersed, and the conqueror carried with him to Rome the richest spoils that ever graced the triumphs of a Roman general.” For a century after that, it lay desolate in ruins. But Julius Caesar perceiving the military importance and commercial possibilities of its location determined to rebuild it, and for that purpose sent thither a colony, consisting chiefly of freed men. Justus (Act 18:7), Crispus and Gaius (1Co 1:14), Fortunatus and Achaicus (1Co 16:17) are all names of Roman origin. That colony, however, was little more than the nucleus of the new city. Merchants flocked thither from all parts, and many Jews were drawn to it by the lure of commerce. Art, literature, and luxury revived. The Isthmian games were again celebrated there.

The new Corinth was made the capital of Achaia. Under the fostering care of Augustus Caesar, Corinth regained much of its ancient splendour, and by A.D. 50 had reached a pre-eminence, which made it the glory of Greece. But it was a material and carnal glory, for it was a centre of voluptuousness. Yet, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, for God had ordained that this place of gross wickedness should witness some of the grandest triumphs of the cross of Christ. From that viewpoint, it is easy to perceive how well situated Corinth was to be a centre from which the Gospel might be diffused. Not only was it the political capital of Greece, the seat of its commercial and intellectual life, a place of concourse of many citizens and nations, but it was a place from which influences of many kinds emanated in all directions. To the city, Paul was sent. Though an ambassador of the King of kings, he was attended by no retinue, and his approach was entirely unheralded and unaccompanied.

A complete stranger to the place, Paul sought out two of his own countrymen who were employed in the same craft in which he was proficient—Aquila and his wife Priscilla—lodging and working with them in tent making (Act 18:1-3). On the Sabbaths, he went to the synagogue, where he reasoned with and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. A little later, his hands were strengthened by Silas and Timothy joining him, and he testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But they opposed and blasphemed. Nothing daunted Paul, as he shook his raiment and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads: I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” (Act 18:6). The Lord honoured his decision, first saving Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue and all his house, and the “many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized” (Act 18:8). But they were only the firstfruits: a larger harvest was to be gathered. “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for *I have* much people in this city.” (Act 18:9, 10).

They were the Lord’s people, be it noted, even though yet in a state of nature, dead in trespasses and sins—His, by sovereign and eternal election. “And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them.” (Act 18:11). Richly were his labours blest, and the many monuments of Divine grace that were raised up constituted the foundation—members of the Church of God at Corinth. After the apostle’s departure, trouble arose in the assembly and various evils broke out. It must be remembered that the membership of this church was a heterogeneous one, that many of them had been reared in heathendom, that they were surrounded by all the incentives to see indulgence, plied on every hand by vain philosophers, and that at this time, part of the N.T. was in circulation. Judaisers had propagated error and sowed the seeds of dissension and a strong party spirit was at work, threatening breach in their ranks. Not only was a schismatic spirit at work, but considerable carnality prevailed and serious moral disorders were marring their Christian testimony.

Among the evils which obtained in the Corinthian church were cliques and factions, the violation of the seventh commandment in various forms and the remissness of the assembly to exercise discipline in such matters; a disorderly and unbrotherly spirit in their meetings—women being allowed to enter the congregation with uncovered heads and to speak in public; exercising the gifts of prophesy and speaking in tongues without regard to order and edification; the debasing of the Lord’s Supper into a common meal; brother going to law against brother before heathen magistrates, and some of them having become disaffected unto himself. Tidings of these things had reached the apostle’s ears, and though this epistle was

written in answer to certain more specific inquiries, he had received from them (1Co 7:1), he improved the opportunity in reply to take up all those things which needed correction. Though there were some things in this epistle, which concerned local, evanescent and special matters, yet fundamental doctrine and much that is of lasting importance was as interweaved.

It is most blessed to see how the apostle commenced his letter to them. He had much more to say of blame than of praise, yet after the opening address and salutation, he tells them, "I thank my God always on your behalf" (1Co 1:4). Before directly charging them with their disorderly conduct, he first assured them of the place which they had in his affections. Though now absent from them, yet they held a warm place in his heart, being constantly remembered before the throne of grace—a lesson here for those engaged in the pastoral office, that when called of God to occupy another place in His vineyard, they are not to forget those they left in their former field of service. The "thank my God *always* on your behalf" tells us that Paul did not regard prayer as a spiritual luxury, to be enjoyed only on rare and special occasions, but rather that it was a regular practice with him, a duty which he constantly discharged; and that, not only in seeking fresh supplies of grace for himself, but on the behalf of others also. Prayer has rightly been termed, "the pulse of the Christian's life," intimating as it does his health or sickness.

Once more, we find the apostle referring to the One unto whom he returned thanks as "my God." Though we sought to bring out the force of that expression on a former occasion, yet it may be well for us to summarise the same here. Paul did not regard Deity as absolute and infinitely removed, but as a living and personal reality, to Whom he was intimately related. "My God" was an avowal of His *covenant* relationship, for the grand Covenant promise was, "I will be to them a God and they shall be to Me a people." "My God" was expressive of *personal* relationship: He was his God by eternal election, by redemption and by regenerating power, when He communicated life to him and stamped the Divine image upon his heart, thereby making him manifestatively His own dear child. "My God" was an acknowledgement of his own personal *choice*, for he had consciously and voluntarily taken God to be his absolute Lord, supreme Good, and everlasting Portion. "My God" was a confession of *practical* relationship; "whose I am and whom I serve"—the One who has shown me such abundant mercy, who will keep that which I have committed unto Him, who will supply all my need, to whose glory all my talents and energies are devoted.

Such a God was an Object of fervent adoration. His goodness must be acknowledged, and Paul was continuously engaged in that holy exercise: "I thank my God always *on your behalf* for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ" (1Co 1:4). In this, the apostle has set all of us an example: "Be ye followers of me" (1Co 11:1). If we do not emulate him in this blessed practice, then most certainly we shall suffer loss. Yea, is not their failure at this particular point one reason why some of the Lord's people find it so difficult to obtain assurance that "the grace of God" has been given *them* by Jesus Christ? Is it not because they were not, and are not, truly thankful when they have reason to believe He has bestowed His grace *others*? Is there no tendency to be too much occupied with our own spiritual interests? God will not prosper self-centeredness. It is not without reason that the Lord has bidden His people "look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phi 2:4). There is such a thing as spiritual selfishness, as well as natural. Then let us seek to heed that exhortation, "rejoice with them that do rejoice..." (Rom 12:15).

"I thank my God always on your behalf." That word "always" is very blessed when we call to mind the attendant circumstances: it points an important practical lesson for us. There had been various changes in the Corinthian assembly during the apostle's absence, and none of those changes had been for the better, but there had been no alteration or lessening of Paul's affections *for them*. There had been that among them which must have dampened his joy, but he had not allowed it to chill his love. He gave thanks for them now as frequently as he had done formerly: yes, even though some of these had become disaffected unto him. And does not the writer and the reader need to keep close watch over his heart that he suffers not any change in the condition of his brethren to diminish his love for them? True, it may call for a variation of the expression (as in Paul's case: see 1Co 4:21), for love must ever be faithful and the form taken by its outward manifestation is to be regulated by what the good of its object requires, yet there is to be no lessening of its fervour.

Though Paul could not assure the Corinthians, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Rom 1:8), yet he did adore Him for having effectually called them, "I thank my God always on your behalf *for the grace* of God, which is given you by Jesus Christ" (1Co 1:4). And does not that inculcate another important lesson for us, namely, that we are not to

despise the bruised reed, nor the smoking flax. True, we shall thank God most ardently for those who most evidently resemble His Son, yet we must not fail to thank Him *also* for those in whom (as yet) we can but faintly discern Him. If the name of Christ be fragrant to us, we shall rejoice wherever it is poured forth, and if His image be precious to us, we should own it in whomsoever we behold it—just as if His Gospel be prized by us, we shall be glad by whomsoever it be preached. Though as yet Christ's image can only be faintly detected in His babes, yet if we see it at all, we have infallible assurance that He who has begun a good work in them will assuredly complete the same (Phi 1:6).

It was that particular truth which sustained the apostle's heart at this very time (1Co 1:8). At least three years had passed since he had left Corinth, during which time he had laboured hard in other fields, but he recalls with gratitude and joy how graciously and wondrously God had wrought in their notoriously wicked city. That was what upheld him when he learned of the sad disorderly among them. "I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God, which is given you by Jesus Christ"—his memory went back to the "day of the espousals." Instead of being wholly absorbed with and weighted down of their sad failures, Paul held fast to the fact and kept foremost in his mind the truth that they had been both the objects and recipients of the sovereign and invincible grace of God. Since that grace had not been earned by them, but "given by Jesus Christ," he knew it could not be forfeited; yea, that they would "grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour," and careful reading of the second epistle which he, later, sent to this same church shows how blessedly his confidence was justified and his hope realised.

The apostle then did not begin this epistle by rebuking the Corinthians for their waywardness, but instead, by enumerating certain things, which evidenced them to be the special objects of Divine favour. We are to see in this not only a lovely exemplification of the apostle's own magnanimity and graciousness, but also important instruction as to how any servant of God is to proceed in his dealings with those—particularly his own children in the Gospel who have wandered out of the way. He must first seek to reach and melt their hearts with a renewed sense of God's goodness to them, for only then will they be capable of perceiving the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the dishonour done Him by a disorderly walk on the part of those who bear His name. By calling to remembrance the "day of their espousals," Paul not only sought to recall them to the marvel of Divine mercy in bringing them out of darkness into the marvellous light, but also to remind them that *he* had been the favoured instrument used by God to their conversion. And therefore, as he was their spiritual "father" (1Co 4:15), they should the more readily attend to the message he was about to give them.

The "grace of God" has reference first to His free and sovereign favour, and then to the blessings which issue therefrom—as we speak of "receiving favours" from a person. It was in this second sense the apostle used the term when he thanked God for the grace which had been given to the Corinthians. Observe how careful he was to honour the Saviour by according Him His due place as Mediator: "the grace of God which is given you *by Jesus Christ*." God's grace was first given to His elect *in* Christ before the foundation of the world (2Ti 1:9), and then it is given them *by* Christ at their regeneration and throughout their Christian course (Joh 1:14-16)—all the grace of God flows to us through the Redeemer. It was, first, for the grace of God by Jesus Christ that had been bestowed on the Corinthians at their conversion, then "That in every thing ye are enriched *by Him*, in all utterance and in all knowledge" (1Co 1:5). The same truth is emphasised here, gifts and attainments being expressly ascribed to Christ. Thus, all ground for self-gratulation and boasting was removed, and the honour was placed where it rightfully belonged. There was no pandering to the creature here, but an humbling of him.

"Enriched by Him in all utterance, and in all knowledge." The order of those two things may strike us strange: if so, it is through failure to understand the particular kind of utterance and knowledge to which the apostle alluded. The reference was not to what is ordinary, but extraordinary, not to the graces which the Spirit imparts, but to His gifts. At the beginning of this dispensation, there were not only officers extraordinary (apostles and prophets), but there were gifts extraordinary, and as successors were not appointed for the former, so a continuance of the latter was never intended. In the early days of this era, the Holy Spirit made His presence evident by sensible signs: Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-46; extraordinary gifts and signs being given in fulfillment of Christ's promise (Mar 16:17, 18) for the establishing of Christianity and the infantile state of the Church, certifying the truth of the Gospel (Heb 2:4), Divinely attesting the doctrine taught by the apostles and evidencing God's approval of the same. We term these miraculous works of the Spirit extraordinary so as to distinguish them from His ordinary ones or those gifts and graces, which He has communicated to Christians all through this age.

Those supernatural gifts were designed to arrest the attention of outsiders (1Co 14:22), to command a hearing for the apostles, to authenticate the Gospel in heathen countries. Of all the churches of God that we read of in the N.T., that at Corinth seems to have abounded most in these gifts, and to have abused them most—despising those of their number who had not their particular gift, and those without envying those who had them. The gift of “utterance” included “prophesying” or speaking by Divine afflatus, but more especially referred to a miraculous endowment, which enabled its possessor to speak in divers languages (1Co 12:10; 14:4, 5). The gift of “knowledge” was a supernatural endowment for interpreting the prophecies and strange tongues (1Co 12:10; 14:26). In the body of the epistle, Paul acquainted them with the excellency of those gifts and how they were to be used. They were from the Spirit (1Co 12:4, 8), they were given for mutual profit (1Co 12:7), they were to be exercised in an orderly manner for edification (1Co 14:26-33); while he also pointed out to them something still more desirable and excellent—the “way” to exercise *love* (1Co 13).

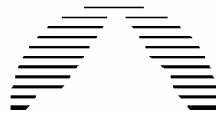
Though these gifts were to render them more serviceable, they were not sanctifying ones (1Co 13:2). Though the Corinthians had been plenteously endowed therewith, yet spiritually, they were only babes (1Co 3:1). Though through their pride and forwardness, those gifts had been much abused, yet the apostle adores God for the communicating of them. They were the purchase of Christ (Eph 4:8) and the fruit of His ascension (Act 2:33). Though the apostle could not (as yet) rejoice at the fruits of the Spirit being borne by them, yet he lets them know he returned thanks for the extraordinary gifts bestowed on them. That too was calculated to have a conciliatory effect on the Corinthians and dispose them to heed what followed. So far from depreciating those gifts as valueless, because they had not made a better use of them, Paul traces them to God as their Source, and Jesus Christ as their Bestower. Thus, there was no flattering of them, because they were in possession of the same, but a magnifying of Him to whom they were indebted—compare 1 Corinthians 4:7!

Though these extraordinary gifts no longer obtain, yet there are others distinguishable from spiritual graces—natural endowments, intellectual capacity, readiness of speech, etc. While those special gifts and the natural talents we have mentioned are far inferior to spiritual graces, yet from the example of the apostle here with reference to the former, we may learn valuable lessons concerning the latter. First, the one as much as the other, is the gift of God and is to be thankfully acknowledged as such. Grace is the most excellent thing of all, yet add gifts thereto, and it becomes more excellent. I was the temple, which sanctified the gold, nevertheless, the gold beautified the temple. It is grace which sanctifies gifts, yet gifts adorn and render its possessors more useful. Second, the possessors of them have no reason to be puffed up thereby, nor to look down upon those who have them not, for it is God who maketh one to differ from another. Third, we should not disparagingly contrast gifts with graces: Paul did not. If there be a danger on the one hand, there is no less so on the other: one may be as proud of his faith or love, as another with his utterance or knowledge.

After all that has been brought out above on 1 Corinthians 1:4 and 5, there is the less need for us to say much on what follows. “Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in (or “among”) you” (1Co 1:5). The “Testimony” of Christ signifies the Gospel; in 1 Corinthians 2:1, it is termed “the Testimony of God”—the former referring to its grand Object; the latter, to its gracious Author. Mention is made of this Testimony being “confirmed,” as a proof it did not come to them in the letter only, but also in Divine power. In other words, it was an evidence they had savingly received the Gospel (compare Col 1:6). The Gospel had been accepted by a God-given faith and was firmly established in their conviction and affections. If we translate “confirmed *among* you,” then the allusion is to the miraculous gifts, which had been imparted to them (compare Heb 2:4). The opening “even as” looks back to both verses 4 and 5: as your conversion and as your endowment with these gifts proceeded from the grace of God by Jesus Christ, equally so did this “confirmation.”

“So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Co 1:7). This confirms the *double* meaning we have given to the previous verse. The Gospel had been so confirmed “among” them that no church was more plenteously endowed with gifts. It had been so confirmed “in” them that it produced this blessed fruit—they were eagerly awaiting the Redeemer’s return. The reference is to the expectation they cherished of Christ’s second advent, the promise of which was connected with the resurrection, His people, and the consummation of His kingdom. So generally was Christ’s return the “blessed hope” of all the early Christians, they were characterised as those “who loved His appearing” (2Ti 4:8)—how much more so should *we*, now that this glorious event is two thousand years nearer! The gifts

and graces of the Spirit are but the “firstfruits” (Rom 8:23), and they should make us yearn for the coming of Christ when we shall enter fully into the inheritance He purchased for us. —AWP



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THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

21. *Thirteenth Miracle*

In the incident which is to be before us, we behold Elisha discharging a different line of duty. No longer do we see him engaged in ministering to the young prophets, but instead, we find him faithfully rendering valuable assistance to his sovereign. Once more the lust of blood or booty moved the king of Syria to war against Israel. Following the advice of his military counsellors, he decided to encamp in a certain place through which the king of Israel was wont to pass, expecting to catch him and his retainers. God acquainted Elisha with his master's peril, and accordingly the prophet went and warned him thereof; and heeding the same, the king was preserved from the snare set for him. It is required of us that, as we have opportunity, we "do good unto all men" (Gal 6:10). True, the Christian is not endowed with the extraordinary gifts of an Elisha; nevertheless, he has a responsibility toward his king or ruler. Not only is he Divinely commanded to "Honour the King" (1Pe 2:17), but "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority" (1Ti 2:1, 2). Coming now to our miracle.

First, its *connection*. "Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp" (2Ki 6:8). Clearly, the opening "Then" bids us pay attention to the connection. From a literary viewpoint, we regard our present incident as the sequel to what is mentioned in 2 Kings chapter 5, taking chapter 6 verses 1 to 7 as a parenthesis, thereby emphasising the base ingratitude of the Syrian monarch for the miraculous healing of his commander-in-chief in the land of Israel. There he had written a personal letter to Israel's king (2Ki 5:5, 6) to recover Naaman from his leprosy; but here he has evil designs upon him. That he should invade the land of Samaria so soon after such a signal favour had been rendered to him, aggravated his offence and made the more manifest his wicked character. It is wrong for us to return evil for evil, for vengeance belongeth alone unto the Lord; but to return evil for good is a sin of double-dyed enormity—yet how often have we treated God thus!

But there is another way in which this opening "Then" may be regarded; namely, by linking it unto the typical significance of what is recorded in 2 Kings 6:1-7. We suggested a threefold application of that miracle. First, as supplying a picture of the sinner's redemption. Viewing it thus, what is the next thing we should expect to meet with? Why, the rage of the Enemy, and this is adumbrated by the attack of the king of Syria. Second, that miracle may also be regarded as showing the Christian how a lost blessing is to be retrieved. And when the believer has peace, joy, assurance restored to him, what is sure to follow? This, "Then the king of Syria warred against Israel." Nothing so maddens Satan as the sight of a happy saint—blessed is it to see in what follows how his evil designs were thwarted. Third, that miracle can also be viewed as portraying how the Christian may grow in grace—by mortifying his members which are upon the earth. And if he does, and enters into an enlarged spiritual experience, then he may expect to be an object of the Enemy's renewed assaults; yet he shall not be overcome by him.

"Then the king of Syria warred against Israel." Yes my reader, there were *wars* in those days: human nature has been the same in each generation and in all countries. So far from war being a new thing, the history of nations—both ancient and modern, civilized and uncivilized—is little more than a record of animosities, intrigues, and fightings. "Their feet are swift to shed blood" (Rom 3:15), is one of the solemn indictments which God has made against the whole human family. There is no hint anywhere that Benhadad had received any provocation from Israel: it was just his own wicked greed and bloodthirstiness which moved him. And this, in spite of a serious defeat he had suffered on a previous occasion (1Ki 20:1, 26-30). "The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc 8:11) and nothing can stop them from executing their desires and devices, but the restraining hand of God. Neither solemn warnings nor kindly favours—as this man had recently received—will soften their hearts, unless the Lord is pleased to sanctify the same unto them.

"Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants"—not asked counsel of the Lord, for he was a stranger to Him. We are glad to see no mention is made here of Naaman: it was with his "servants" rather than "the captain of the host" (2Ki 5:1) he now conferred. Fain would we hope that it was *against* the remonstrance of Naaman, rather than with his approval the king now acted. Yet what

daring impiety to attack a people whose God wrought such marvels! If he was impressed by the healing of the general, the impression speedily faded. "Saying, in such and such a place shall be my camp." From the sequel, it would appear that this particular "place" was one through which the king of Israel had occasion to frequently pass; thus, he evidently laid a careful ambush for him there. Thus, it is with the great Enemy of our souls: he knows both our ways and our weaknesses always, and where he is most likely to gain an advantage over us. But carefully as he made his plans, this king reckoned without the Most High.

Second, its *occasion*. "And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down" (2Ki 6:9). Yes, the king of Syria had left the living God out of his calculations: He is fully acquainted with the thoughts and intention of His enemies and, with the utmost ease, can bring them to naught. The methods which He employs in providence are as varied as His works in creation. On this occasion, He did not employ the forces of nature, as He did at the Red Sea when He overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts. Nor did He bid the king of Israel engage his enemy in battle and enable him to vanquish him. Instead, He prompted His servant to give his royal master warning and made the same effectual unto him. The lesson for us is important. God does not always use the same method in His interpositions on our behalf. The fact that He came to my relief for deliverance in a certain manner in the past is no guarantee that He will follow the same course or use the same means now—this is to lift our eyes above all secondary causes to the Lord Himself.

Observe that it was "the man of God"—not merely "Elisha"—who were with this warning: "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (Amo 3:7). Thus it was in his official character that he went to the king with this Divine message. Just previously, he had used his extraordinary powers to help one of his students; here, he befriended his sovereign. Whatever gift God has bestowed on His servants, it is to be used for the good of others—one of their principal duties is to employ the spiritual knowledge they have received in *warning* those in peril. How merciful God is in warning both sinners and saints of the place of danger! How thankful we should be when a man of God puts *us* on our guard against an evil which we suspected not! How many disastrous experiences shall we be spared if we heed the cautions given us by the faithful messengers of Christ. It is at our peril and to our certain loss if—in our pride and self-will—we disregard their timely, "*Beware* that thou pass not such a place" (2Ki 6:9).

The course which the Lord took in delivering the king of Israel from the ambush set for him may not have flattered his self-esteem, any more than Timothy's was when Paul bade him "*flee* youthful lusts;" yet, we may perceive the wisdom of it. God was enforcing the king's responsibility: He gave him fair warning of his danger; if he disregarded it, then his blood was on his own head. So it is with us. The particular locality of peril is not named. The Syrian had said, "In such and such a place shall be my camp," and "Beware that thou pass not such a place" was the prophet's warning. That the king would identify it in his mind is clear from the sequel; yet, as there is nothing meaningless in Scripture, there must be a lesson for us in its *not* being specifically named. We are plainly informed in the Word that our arch-foe lies in wait to ensnare us (1Pe 5:8). Sometimes a particular danger is definitely described, at others it is (as here) more generally mentioned—that we may ever be on our guard, pondering "the path of *our* feet" (Pro 4:26).

Though Satan may propose, God will both oppose and dispose. Ere passing on to the sequel, let us link up what has just been before us with the typical teaching of the previous miracle—as the opening "Then" of 2 Kings 6:8 and the connecting "And" of verse 9 require—and complete the line of thought set out in our third paragraph above. When a sinner has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, he at once becomes the object of the Devil's enmity; but God has graciously made provision for his security and prevents the Enemy from ever completely vanquishing him. Likewise, when a believer has been enabled to regain his peace and joy, Satan will renew his efforts to encompass his downfall; but his attempts will be foiled, for since the believer is now in communion with God, he has light on his path and clearly perceives the place to be avoided. So also when by means of mortification, the Christian enjoys an enlarged spiritual experience, Satan will lay a fresh snare for him; but it will be in vain, for such an one will receive and *heed* Divine warning.

"And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God (not "Elisha"!) told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice" (2Ki 6:10). Here we see the king's skepticism (compare 2Ki 5:7): he had some respect for the prophet's message or he had disregarded it; yet, he had not full confidence therein or he had not "sent" to investigate. It was well for him that he went to that trouble, for thereby, he obtained definite corroboration and found the caution he had received was no groundless one.

Ah, my reader, the warnings of God's servants are not idle ones, and it is our wisdom to pay the most serious heed to them. But alas, while most of our fellows will pay attention to warnings against physical and temporal dangers, they are deaf concerning their spiritual and eternal perils. There is a real sense in which *we* are required to emulate Israel's king here: we are to follow no preacher blindly, but *test* his warnings, investigating them in the light of Scriptures, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1Th 5:21) and thereby we shall obtain Divine corroboration.

"Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?" (2Ki 6:11). It never crossed his mind that it was the Lord who was thwarting him. Being a stranger to Him, God had no place in his thoughts, and therefore, he sought a natural explanation. Instead of recognising that God was on the side of Israel, and blaming himself, he was chagrined at the failure of his plan, suspected there was a traitor in his camp, and sought a scapegoat.

"And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha the prophet that is in Israel telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber" (2Ki 6:12). Even the heathen are not in entire ignorance of God: they have sufficient light and knowledge of Him to render them "without excuse" (Rom 1:19, 20; 2:14, 15)—much more so is this the case with unbelievers in Christendom. This verse also shows how the spirituality and power of a true servant of God is recognised even by his enemies. The spokesman here may have been one of those who formed the retinue of Naaman when he came to Elisha and was healed of his leprosy. Yet observe there was no recognition and owning of *God* here. There was no acknowledgement that He was the One who revealed such secrets unto His servants, no terming of Elisha "the man of God," but simply "the prophet that is in Israel"—he was regarded merely as a "*seer*" possessing magical powers. Neither God nor His servant is accorded His rightful place by any, save His own people.

Third, its *location*, namely, Dothan, which was to the west of Jordan, in the north-east portion of Samaria. Significantly enough, Dothan means "double feast" and from Genesis 37:16 and 17, we learn it was the place where the flocks were fed. "And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold he is in Dothan" (2Ki 6:13). Even now the Syrian monarch was unwilling to recognise that he was fighting against Jehovah, but determined to remove this obstacle in the way of a successful carrying out of his campaign—even though that obstacle was a "prophet." God allowed him to have his own way up to this point, that he might discover he was vainly flinging himself against the bosses of His buckler and made him feel his own impotency. Typically, this verse illustrates the persistency of our great Adversary, who will not readily accept defeat. As the Syrian now sought to secure the one who had come between him and his desired victim, the Devil makes special efforts to silence those who successfully warn the one he would fain take captive.

"Therefore sent he thither horses and chariots, and a great host [of infantry]: and they came by night, and compassed the city about" (2Ki 6:14). That he had some realisation of the power Elisha wielded is evident by the strength and silence of the force, he now sent forth to take him prisoner; yet, that he did not deem him to be invincible is shown by the plan he put into operation. Though the wicked are rendered uneasy by the stirrings of conscience and their conviction that they are doing wrong and following a course of madness; yet, they silence the one and treat the other as vain superstitions, and continue in their sin career. The surrounding of Dothan "by night" illustrates the truth that the natural man prefers the darkness to the light, and typically signifies that our Adversary follows a policy of stealth and secrecy, ever seeking to take us unawares—especially when we are *asleep*.

Fourth, its *subject*. "And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?" (2Ki 6:15). Notice its subject is termed a servant—not of "Elisha," but "of the man of God." It is in such small, but perfect details that the devout student loves to see the handiwork of the Holy Spirit, evidencing as it does the *verbal* inspiration of the Scriptures—God guiding each penman in the selection of every word He employed. This man, the successor of Gehazi, was new in the prophet's service, and therefore, was he now tested and taught. When a young believer throws in his lot with the people of God, he will soon discover they are hated by the world; but he is called upon to share their reproach. Let not his older brethren expect too much from him while he is young and inexperienced: not until he has learned to walk by faith will he be undaunted by the difficulties and perils of the way.

“Alas my master! how shall we do?” See here a picture of a young, weak, timid, distracted believer. Is not the picture true to life? Cannot all of us recall its exact replica in our own past experience? How often have we been nonplussed by the trials of the way and the opposition we have encountered. Quite likely, this “young man” (see 2Ki 6:17) thought he would have a smooth path in the company of the man of God, and yet here was a situation that affrighted him. And did we never entertain a similar hope? and when our hope was not realised, did we never give utterance to an unbelieving “Alas! how shall we do?”—shutting God completely out of our view, with no hope of deliverance, no expectation of His showing Himself strong on our behalf? If memory enables us to see here a past representation of our self, then let compassion cause us to deal leniently and gently with others who are similarly weak and fearful.

It should be borne in mind that the young believer has become, constitutionally, more fearful than unbelievers. Why so? Because his self-confidence and self-sufficiency has been shattered. He has become as “a little child,” conscious of his own weakness. So far so good: the great thing now is for him to learn *where* his strength lies. It should also be pointed out that Christians are menaced by more numerous and more formidable foes than was Elisha’s servant, “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.” (Eph 6:12). Well might we tremble and be more distrustful of ourselves were we more conscious of the supernatural beings opposing us. “And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2Ki 6:16). A realisation of *that* will dispel our doubts and quieten our fears. “Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1Jo 4:4).

Fifth, its *means*. “And Elisha *prayed*, and said, LORD, I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see” (2Ki 6:17). How blessed is this! “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee” (Isa 26:3). There was no trepidation on the part of Elisha: perfect peace was his, and therefore could he say, “Fear not” to his trembling companion. Note there is no scolding of his affrighted servant, but instead, a turning to the Lord on his behalf. At first, the writer was puzzled at the “*Elisha prayed*” rather than the “man of God;” but pondering the same brought out a precious lesson. It was not in his official character that he prayed, but simply as a personal believer—to show *us* that God is ready to grant the petition of a child of His who asks in simple faith and unselfish concern for another.

Sixth, its *marvel*. “And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” (2Ki 6:17). Proof was this of his “they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2Ki 6:16): the invisible guard was now made visible in the eyes of his servant. Blessed illustration is this, that “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them (Psa 34:7) and of “Are they [the “angels” of the previous verse] not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb 1:14)! Doubtless, the angels took the form of “horses and chariots” on that occasion because of the Syrian horses and chariots which “encompassed Dothan” (2Ki 6:14)—what could horses of flesh and material chariots do against celestial ones of fire! That they were personal beings is clear from the “they” of verse 14; that they were angels may also be gathered from a comparison with Hebrews 1:7 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7,8.

Seventh, its *meaning*. Here we are shown how to deal with a young and fearing Christian. “The strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak” (Rom 15:1). Many of God’s little ones are living far below their privileges, failing to apprehend the wondrous provisions which God has made for them. They are walking far too much by sight, occupied with the difficulties of the world and those opposing them. First, such are not to be browbeaten or upbraided; that will do no good, for unbelief is not removed by such a method. Second, their alarm is to be quieted with a calm and confident “Fear not,” backed with “for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” and “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31)!—showing their fears are needless. Third, definite prayer is to be made for the shrinking one, that the Lord will operate on and in him—for God alone can open his spiritual eyes to see the sufficiency of His provision for him. —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

5. *Its Analogy*

An “analogy” is an agreement or correspondence in certain respects between things which otherwise differ. And just as it is often an aid to obtaining the force of a word by considering its synonyms, so it frequently helps us to a better understanding of a subject or object to compare it with another, and ascertain the analogy between them. This method was frequently used by our Lord in His public teaching, when He likened the “Kingdom of heaven” to considerable variety of things. The same principle is illustrated by the figurative names which Scripture gives to the people of God. For example, they are called “sheep”—and that not only because of the relation which they sustain to Christ as their Shepherd, but also because there are many resemblances between the one and the other—God having designed that in different respects this animal more than any other should shadow forth the nature and character of a Christian. Much valuable instruction is obtained by tracing out those resemblances. The same Divine wisdom which designated our Saviour both “the Lamb” and “the Lion” was exercised in selecting the various objects and creatures after which His children are figuratively named, and it behoves us to follow out the analogy between them and learn the lessons they are intended to impart.

“That they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified” (Isa 61:3). Both in the O.T.² and in the New, this similitude is used of the saints. The Psalmist declared, “I [*am*] like a green olive tree in the house of God” (Psa 52:8) and affirmed “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.” (Psa 92:12, 13). Our Saviour employed the same figure when He said, “Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit” (Mat 7:17) and again, “Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit” (Mat 12:33)—thus, every passage where “fruit” is mentioned is also an extension of the same emblem. In Romans 11, the apostle Paul likened the nation of Israel unto “a good olive tree” and Christendom unto “a wild olive tree” (verses 24, 17) in connection with their testimony before the world. The Saviour Himself was termed “the Branch of the Lord” and as One who should grow before Him “as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground” (Isa 4:2; 53:2), while He resembled Himself and His people in communion with Him unto “the true Vine” (Joh 15:1).

Now it should be obvious from the frequency with which this similitude is used in the Scriptures that it must be a peculiarly instructive one. Some of the more prominent resemblances are quickly apparent. For example, their *attractiveness*. How the countryside and the mountain slopes are beautified by the trees! And what so lovely in the human realm as those who bear the image of Christ and show forth His praises! They may be despised by the unregenerate, but to an anointed eye, God’s children are “the excellent” of all the earth (Isa 4:2), and how they be regarded by Him whose workmanship they are is revealed in those words, “his *beauty* shall be as the olive tree” (Hos 14:6). So too their *usefulness*. Trees provide a habitation for the birds, shade for the earth, nourishment for the creature, material for building, fuel for the relief of man against the cold. Many too are the uses, which God makes of His people in this world. Among other things predicated of them, they are “the salt of the earth” (Mat 5:13)—preserving the body politic from going to utter putrefaction.

Before turning to that which bears most closely upon our present theme, it should be particularly noted that it is not wild, but cultivated trees, which is the similitude used. “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD...For he shall be as a tree *planted* by the waters” (Jer 17:7,8). Observe how frequently this word “planted” occurs: “which the LORD hath planted” (Num 24:6), and compare Psalm 92:13, 14; 104:16; Isaiah 61:3. They are the property of the Heavenly Husbandman (Joh 15:1; 1Co 3:7-9) and the objects of His care. This it is which gives such solemn force to our Lord’s words, “Every plant, which My heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Mat 15:13). This figure of the saints being “planted” by God—transferred from one soil or position to another—has at least a threefold reference. First, to God’s eternal decree, when He took them out of the creature mass and chose them in Christ (Eph 1:3-5). Second, to their

² O.T. – Old Testament.

regeneration, when He lifts them out of the realm of death and makes them “new creatures in Christ” (2Co 5:17). Third, to their translation, when they are removed from earth and planted in His celestial Paradise. But it is the *growth* of “trees” we must now consider.

1. They have the principle of growth *within themselves*. Trees do not grow spontaneously and immediately from external furtherances, but from their own seminal virtue and radical sap. And it is thus with the spiritual growth of the Christian. At regeneration, a Divine “seed” is planted in his heart (1Pe 1:23; 1Jo 3:9), and that “seed” contains within itself a living principle of growth. We cannot define that “seed” more closely than to say that the new life or spiritual nature which has been communicated to the one born again, is that which distinguishes the living children of God from the lifeless profession all around them. The latter may from external influences—such as the appeals and exhortations of preachers, the example of Christians, the natural convictions produced from reading the Word—be induced to perform all the outward duties of Christianity, but since their works issue not from a principle of spiritual life in the soul, they are not the fruits of holiness. That spiritual principle or Divine grace imparted is described by Christ as “the water” which He gives and which becomes within its possessor “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Joh 4:14). Thus it is the nature of Christians to grow, as it is trees with the seminal principle within them to do likewise. “The tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself” (Gen 1:12)—first reference to “trees”!

2. They must be *watered from above*. Though trees have within themselves a vital principle, yet they are not independent of provision from the Creator, being far from self-sustaining. Their growth is not something inevitable by virtue of their own seminal power—for in a protracted drought, they wither and decay. Hence, when Scripture speaks of the growth of trees, it is careful to ascribe it unto God’s watering of them. “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground,” which is interpreted by: “I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses” (Isa 44:3, 4); “I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon” (Hos 14:5). Only as God waters vegetation will it thrive or even survive. It is so, spiritually. The Christian is not self-sufficient and independent of God. Though he has a nature capable of growth, if left to itself that nature would die, for it is only a *creature* even though a “new creature.” Hence the believer needs to be “renewed in the inner man day by day” (2Co 4:16).

3. They grow *silently and imperceptibly*. The development of the small sapling into the towering tree is a process veiled in secrecy. “So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how (Mar 4:26, 27). The growing of the tree cannot be discerned by the keen eye, except by the consequences and effects of it. It is equally thus with spiritual growth: it is unrecognisable to either ourselves or others. No matter how closely we observe the workings of our hearts, or how introspective becomes our viewpoint, we cannot perceive the actual process. It is seen only by Him of whom it is wrought. Nevertheless, it is made manifest by its effects and fruits—in the case of some, more clearly than others. But though the process be secret, the *means* are plain: in the case of trees—nourishment from the soil, moisture from the clouds, light and heat from the sun. So with the Christian: “Meditate on these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting *may appear* to all” (1Ti 4:15)—that thy spiritual growth may be evident to those about thee.

4. They grow *gradually*. In the case of some trees, it is a very sad experience; with others, maturity is reached more quickly. Hence, in the passage, the growth of believers is likened unto that of “a cedar” (Psa 92:12); whereas in another—where a recovered backslider is in view—it is said, “he shall grow as the lily” (Hos 14:5). But in the majority of cases, the development of spiritual life in the saints is a protracted process, being carried on by degrees, or as the prophet expressed it, “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isa 28:10). Our spiritual growth is produced and promoted by the gracious, wise, patient, and faithful operations of the Holy Spirit. No real Christian is ever satisfied with his growth: far from it, for he is painfully conscious of what little progress he has made and how far short of God’s standard he comes. Nevertheless, if he uses the appointed means and avoids the hindrances, he *will* grow. But let us now endeavour to present the analogy more closely.

First, the growth of a tree is *upward*. The vital principle within it is drawn out unto the sun above, attracted by its rays. Though rooted in the earth, its nature is to move toward heaven, slowly but surely lifting its head higher and higher. Thus, the growth of a tree is ascertained first and may be measured by its *upward progress*. And does not the analogy hold good in the spiritual realm? Is it not thus with the saint? It is the very nature of that new life which he received at regeneration to turn unto its Giver. The first evidence

of that life being imparted to the soul is his seeking unto God in Christ. The need of Him is now felt; His suitability is now perceived, and the heart is drawn out unto Him. As yet, he may not be able to intelligently articulate the newborn desire in his heart, yet if that desire were put into Scriptural language, it would be expressed thus: "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks so panteth my soul after Thee, O God" (Psa 42:1), for none else can now satisfy the newly-created thirst within him. In view of our last two articles, there is the less need for us to develop this point at length.

The higher the top of the tree reaches toward heaven, the further from the earth does it move. Ponder that, my reader, for it is a parable in action. Before regeneration, thy heart was wholly set upon this world and what it provides for its devotees. But when your heart was supernaturally illumined, and you beheld "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Co 4:6), the spell was broken, and you could no longer be content with the perishing baubles which hitherto enthralled you. True, the "flesh" may still lust after them, and if you yield to their solicitations, your peace and joy will be dampened; and for a season, disappointment and sorrow will be your portion. Yet there is that within you now that is no longer contented with childish toys and that seeks after the One who bestowed that new nature. It is the normal thing for that spiritual life to grow, and if it does not, you are living far below your privileges. Such upward growth will consist of stronger yearnings after God, more constant and frequent seekings unto Him, a closer acquaintance of Him, a warmer love for Him, more intimate communion with Him, fuller conformity to Him, and a deeper joy in Him.

As the believer grows Godward, His glory becomes more and more his concern, and the pleasing of Him in all his ways the main business of his life—so that he performs even common duties with an eye increasingly upon Him. Our personal experimental knowledge of God increases by our "following on" to know Him (Hos 6:3), for the more we seek to *do* His will, the better we come to understand (Joh 7:17), and admire the same. Truth is then sealed on the mind, the understanding is more quickened in the fear of the Lord, and our relish of God's ways is intensified. Holy acts become holy habits, and what at first was difficult and irksome, becomes easy and pleasant. The more we "exercise ourselves unto godliness" (1Ti 4:7), the more are we admitted into its secrets. From a dim perception of spiritual mysteries, we gradually attain unto "all riches of full assurance of understanding" (Col 2:2) of them. The more we are weaned from the world, the keener relish do we have for spiritual things and the sweeter do they become to our taste. As God is better known, our love for Him increases, and we set a higher esteem on Him, a greater delight in Him is experienced, and more and more the heart pants after a full fruition of Him in glory.

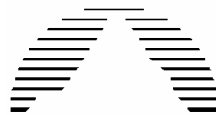
Not that the believer ever reaches a point where he is satisfied with his knowledge of God or pleased with his love for Him. There could be no more lamentable proof of spiritual deadness and fatal self-deception than a set complacent view of our love for God. On the other hand, equally unwarrantable is it to conclude we are not children of God at all, because our love for Him is so feeble and faulty. It is not the love of a natural son for his father which constitutes him his child—though filial love is the proper effect of that relationship. An exalted conception of the character of a parent and of the sacredness of the relationship will render an affectionate child dissatisfied with himself and cause him to declare, "I reproach myself daily that I love my father so little, and I can never repay him as I ought." That would be the language of filial relation. Yet he would not be warranted in arguing, "Because I do not love him as I ought, I cannot be his child; or because I love him so little, I question it very much if he loves me at all." Then why reason thus in connection with a heavenly Father! Summing up this aspect, we may say that the upward growth of a believer is expressed in his heavenly-mindedness and the measure in which his affections are set upon things above.

Second, the growth of a tree is *downward*. It takes a firmer hold of soil. More particularly is that the case in hot countries—for there, the taproot of a tree has to penetrate deeper and deeper into the earth in order to find needed moisture. An allusion to this aspect of our analogy is found in Hosea 14:5 where the Lord promises Israel that He shall "cast forth (or, better, "strike"—see margin) his roots as Lebanon"—that is, as the cedars of Lebanon struck their roots deeper into the mountain slopes—compare "his smell as Lebanon" in the next verse, where the obvious reference is to the fragrant aroma of cedars. The spiritual counterpart of this is found in such expressions as, "being rooted and grounded in love" (Eph 3:17), and "continue in the faith, grounded and settled" (Col 1:23), the two things being brought together in "rooted and built up in him and stablished in the faith" (Col 2:7)—which all speak in language of our present similitude.

As the believer grows spiritually, he takes a firmer grip upon Christ: "*Lays hold on eternal life*" (1Ti 6:12), no longer touching merely "the hem of His garment" (Mat 14:36). He becomes more settled in his knowledge and enjoyment of the Saviour's love and is established more securely in the Faith, so that he is less liable to be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph 4:21). The young sapling has but a shallow and feeble grip on the ground and, therefore, is in greater danger of being uprooted by storms and gales; the older tree, which has survived the hostile winds, has taken deep root and is more secure. So it is spiritually: the young Christian is susceptible to erroneous teachings, but those who are mature and established in the Truth discern and refuse human fables. The more we are rooted in the love of Christ, governed by the fear of God, and have His Word dwell richly in us, the less shall we be swayed by the fear of man, the customs of the world, or the assaults of Satan.

But more specifically: the downward growth of a Christian consists of increasing *humility*, or becoming more and more out of love with himself. And this of necessity, for in exact ratio to his real growth Godward, will be his growth downward. The more we grow upward—that is, the more we take into our renewed minds spiritual apprehensions of the perfections of God, the excellency of the Mediator and the merits of His work—the more are we made conscious of what is due the One and the Other, and the more deeply do we feel what a poor return we have made unto Them. If it be something deeper and more influential than a merely speculative or theoretical knowledge of the Father and the Son, if instead we be granted an experimental, vital and affecting knowledge of Them, then shall we be made thoroughly ashamed of ourselves, wholly dissatisfied with our love, our devotion, our conformity to Their image. Such knowledge will humble us into the dust, making us painfully sensible of the coldness of our hearts, the feebleness of our graces, the leanness of our souls, and the corruptions which still indwell us.

The more a tree grows downward, the deeper its roots become embedded in the earth; the more firmly is it fixed and the stronger it becomes, having a greater power to resist the force of the tempest. It is neither the height nor the girth of the tree, but the depth of its roots and its clinging to the ground which gives it stability and security. So it is, spiritually. For the believer to grow downward is for him to have less and less confidence in and dependence upon himself: "When I am weak, then am I strong" (2Co 12:10); for a consciousness of my weakness causes me to turn more and more unto God and cling to Him. "O our God wilt Thou not judge them? for *we have no might* against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes *are upon Thee*" (2Ch 20:12)—that was the language of one who had grown downward! —AWP



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THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

5. *Its Arrangement*

In our last, we dwelt upon God's decision to redeem and reconcile fallen rebels: His love originating, His will determining, and His wisdom planning the outworking of the same. In illustrating how the Divine wisdom found a solution to all the formidable problems which stood in the way, we unavoidably anticipated somewhat the ground which we hoped to cover in future articles. That Divine decision and scheme was "eternally purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:11)—for God's purpose to reconcile and His provision for the same are inseparable. That purpose respected not simply the exercise of mercy unto His lapsed people, but also the exercise of it in such a way that His Law was honoured. Yet it must not be supposed that God was under any moral necessity of saving His people, or that redemption was an expedient to deliver the Divine character from reproach on account of the strictness of the Law in condemning *all* transgressors—no atonement was provided for the fallen angels! Rather has redemption vindicated the Law, and that in such a way that *no* transgressor is exempted from suffering its curse—either in himself or in a Substitute.

Reconciliation has been procured by the incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the grand and all-sufficient Provision of God for the accomplishing of His purpose. But it was effected by the Lord Jesus in fulfilment of a *Covenant agreement*: unless *that* be clearly perceived, we are without the principal knowledge to the understanding of this stupendous undertaking. There was a time when Christians generally were well instructed in Covenant truth; but alas, a generation has grown up the great majority of which have heard nothing or next to nothing thereon. It will therefore be necessary for us to proceed slowly in connection with this fundamental aspect of our subject and enter into considerable detail—for we do not ask the reader to receive ought from our pen, until clearly convinced it is in full accord with, and has the definite backing of, God's Word. A few of our readers are more or less familiar with what we shall advance, yet it will do them no harm to have brought before them again the foundation on which faith should rest, and to ponder the proofs which we now bring forward.

The great majority of our readers know that "it is the blood [and that alone, plussed by nothing from us] that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev 17:11), but we wonder how many of them have pondered and grasped the purport of that blessed and remarkable statement, "The God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through *the blood of the everlasting covenant*" (Heb 13:20). That implies first, that there was a covenant-agreement between God and our Lord Jesus; second, that it was a covenant made with Him as the Head of His people, "that great Shepherd of the sheep;" third, that Christ performed the condition of the covenant; fourth, that it was as the One propitiated and reconciled to God that Christ here acted; fifth, that it was in fulfilment of covenant promise that God raised Christ; sixth, that Christ's blood was the meritorious ground on which He (and all the saints in Him) was delivered from the prison of the grave; seventh, that hereby the Church has Divine assurance of its complete redemption and salvation. We cannot dwell upon these points, but would request careful weighing of them as introductory to what follows.

Three things are necessary in order to make a "covenant": the parties, the terms, the agreement. A "covenant" is a solemn pact or contract in which there are certain "articles" or conditions to be performed, in return for which performance an agreed reward is promised and assured. It is a mutual agreement in which one party guarantees a stipulated return for the other's fulfillment of the work he has pledged himself to undertake; it is an agreement entered into voluntarily by both parties (see Mat 26:15). The two parties in "the everlasting covenant" were the Father and the Son—the Holy Spirit concurring therein, being the Witness thereto, and agreeing to co-operate the same. In Scripture, the Father is represented as taking the initiative in this matter, proposing to His Son the terms of the covenant. The Father posed a federal transaction, in which the Son should take upon Him the Mediatorial office and serve as the Head of His people, thereby assuming and charging their liabilities and bringing in an everlasting righteousness for them. The Son is represented as freely and gladly consenting thereto.

It needs to be pointed out and emphatically insisted upon that there was not so circumstanced and antecedently to His susception of the Mediatorial office that He could not have avoided the humiliation and sufferings which He endured. We shall explain later the precise meaning of His words, "My Father is greater than I" (Joh 14:28); "Neither came I of myself, but He sent me (Joh 8:42); "This commandment [to

lay down His life] have I received of my Father” (Joh 10:18)—sufficient now to point out they have no reference, ever to His condition and position prior to the Covenant, for He then enjoyed absolute equality with the Father in every way. The Son might have resigned the whole human race to the dire consequences of their apostasy and have remained Himself everlastingly blessed and glorious. It was by His own voluntary consent that He entered into covenant engagement with the Father: in that free consent lay the excellency of it. It was His willing obedience and personal merits, which gave infinite value to His oblation. Behind that willingness lay His love for the Father and His love for the Church.

On the other hand, it is equally true that though the Son had pitied, yea so loved the elect (foreviewed as fallen), that He was willing to become their Surety and Substitute, yet He could not have redeemed them without the Father’s acceptance of His sacrifice: the Father, too, must consent to such an undertaking. Thus, there must be a mutual agreement between them. The relation which Christ assumed to His people and the work He did for them presupposes the Father’s willingness therein. Ere passing on it must also be pointed out that in consenting to become Mediator and Servant—and as such, in subjection to the Father—the Son did not surrender any of His perfections, nor relinquish any of His Divine rights; but He agreed to assume an inferior office, and for a season, to be subordinate to the Father’s will—and this, for the glory of the whole Godhead and the salvation of His people. After He became incarnate, He was still in possession of His essential glory, though He was pleased to veil it in large measure from men and make Himself of “no reputation” in the world.

Before adducing proof-texts of the covenant made between the Father and the Son, let us call attention to a number of passages, which clearly *imply it* and which otherwise are not fully intelligible. Take Christ’s very first recorded utterance after He became incarnate: “wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luk 2:49)—did not that intimate He had entered this world with a clearly defined and Divinely designed task before Him? “I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (Joh 6:38) is even more explicit: such subordination of one Divine person to another argues a mutual agreement between Them—and that, for some unique end. “Say ye of Him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” (Joh 10:36): observe carefully the *order* of the two verbs: Christ was “sanctified” by the Father—that is, set apart and consecrated to His Mediatorial office—*before* He was “sent” into the world! “Other sheep I have...them also I *must* bring” (Joh 10:16)—why “must” unless He was under definite engagement so to do?

That Christ went to the cross in fulfillment of a covenant-agreement may be gathered from His own words: “truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined” (Luk 22:22), with which should be linked, “Of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel *determined before* to be done” (Act 4:27,28). When you stand before the cross and gaze by faith upon its august sufferer, recognise that He was there fulfilling the compact into which He entered with the Father before the world was. His blood shedding was necessary—“ought not Christ to have suffered these things?” (Luk 24:26). He asked—because of the relation He sustained to His people and their Surety. He was pledged to secure their salvation in such a way as glorified God and magnified His Law, for that had been Divinely “determined” and mutually agreed upon in the everlasting Covenant. Had not Christ died, there had been no atonement, no reconciliation to God; equally true is it that, had there been no covenant, Christ had never died!

Every passage where Christ owns the Father as *His* “God” witnesses to the same truth. When Jehovah established His covenant with Abraham, He promised “I will...be a *God* unto thee, and to thy seed” (Gen 17:7); and therefore, when He “remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob” (Exo 2:24) and revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush preparatory to delivering His people from Egypt, He declared Himself to be, “The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...this is My name for ever, and this is My memorial to all generations” (Exo 3:15)—this is My covenant title and the guarantee of My covenant faithfulness. So too, the grand promise of the new covenant is, “I...will be their God” (Jer 31:33 and compare Heb 8:10). If then the Father had entered into covenant with His Son, we should expect to find Him owning Him as *His God* during the days of His flesh. And this is exactly what we *do* find, “My *God*, My *God*, why hast Thou forsaken Me” (Mat 27:46; Mar 15:34) was not only a cry of agony, but an acknowledgement of covenant relationship. “I ascend to My Father, and your Father, and to My God, and your God” (Joh 20:17). So also after His ascension, He de-

clared, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the Temple of *my God*...and I will write upon Him the Name of my God, and the name of the city of my God" (Rev 3:12).

Turning to the Epistles, we find many passages which presuppose the Father's covenant with Christ before creation on behalf of His people. "Who hath saved us...according to His own purpose and grace, which was *given us in Christ Jesus* before the world began" (2Ti 1:9). Even at that time, if time it may be called, there was a federal relationship subsisting between Christ and the Church—though it was not made fully manifest until He became incarnate. That subsisting relationship formed the basis of the whole economy of Divine grace toward them after the Fall, as it was the ground on which God pardoned the O.T. saints and bestowed spiritual blessings upon them. "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Tit 1:2). Does not that "promised" imply an agreement? that God made promise to Christ as the Covenant Head and to His people in Him! Christ was "*faithful* to Him that appointed Him" (Heb 3:2): as "obedience" implies a precept, so "faithfulness" connotes a *trust*, and a trust wherein only has engaged himself to perform that trust according to directions given him.

Passing now from indirect allusions to what is more specific, we begin with Psalm 89:3. "I have made a covenant with My Chosen, I have sworn unto David My Servant." The immediate allusion is to the historical David, but the spiritual reference is to David's Son and Lord. This is clear from many considerations. First, the striking and lofty manner in which this Psalm opens, intimates that its leading theme must be one of great weight and value. "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever: with my mouth will I make known Thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: Thy faithfulness shalt Thou establish in the very heavens (Psa 89:1,2). Such language denotes that no ordinary or common "mercies" are in view, but those which, when apprehended, fill the hearts of the redeemed with holy songs and cause them to magnify the fidelity of Jehovah as nothing ever does. Thus, such an introduction should prepare us to expect a Divine revelation of extreme importance and blessedness.

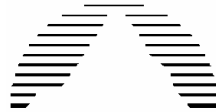
Second, "I have made a covenant with my chosen" [same word as 'mine elect' in Isa 42:1], I have sworn unto David (which means 'beloved') my servant" (Psa 89:3). In the following passages, it may be seen that Christ is expressly referred to as "David" by the prophets: Jeremiah 30:9; Ezeziel 34:23; 37:24; Hosea 3:5—and let it be duly borne in mind that all those predictions were made long after the historical David had passed away from this scene. "Thou spakest in vision to thy Holy One, and saidest, I have laid help upon One that is mighty, I have exalted One chosen out of the people [compare Deu 18:15]. I have found David my Servant, with my holy oil have I anointed him" (Psa 89:19,20). Who can doubt that a greater than the son of Jesse is here before us? But more: God goes on to say, "I will make him my first born, higher than the kings of the earth...My covenant shall stand fast with him" (Psa 89:27,28)—does not that establish beyond a doubt the identity of the One with whom Jehovah made the covenant! Such declarations pertain to no merely human being.

Third, the covenant *promises* here made establish the same fact. "His seed will I make to endure for ever, and His throne as the days of heaven" (Psa 89:29)—the throne of the historical David perished over two thousand years ago! That this promise was to be fulfilled in Christ is clear from Luke 1:31-33, where it was said to Mary, thou "shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the [spiritual] house of Jacob for ever and of his kingdom, there shall be no end." Another proof that it is not the typical David who is viewed in this Psalm appears in, "If his children forsake my Law...then will I visit their transgression with the rod" (Psa 89:30, 32). Had it been the successor of Saul who was the subject of this Psalm, it had said "If *he* shall break my Law...I will visit *his* transgression with the rod"—as he *was* sorely chastised for so grievously wronging Uriah. No, it is Christ and His spiritual children who are referred to, and it is because of God's covenant with Him that He casts them not off (see Psalm 89:33-36).

Fourth, in Acts 13:34, Paul proved the resurrection of Christ thus: "As concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David." But wherein did that quotation from Isaiah 55:3 provide proof? By the resurrection of Christ, the "sure mercies of David" are confirmed unto His children: if they are in possession of them, then Christ must have risen! That word of Paul's looks back beyond Isaiah 55 to Psalm 89, which, as we have seen, begins thus: "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever." The principal mercies are, "I have made a covenant with my Chosen...Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations" (Psa 89:3,4). Here then are "the sure mercies of David": that God has covenanted to raise up Christ and set

Him at His own right hand from whence, on His Mediatorial throne, He communicates those mercies to His seed. All doubt on this point is removed by Peter's avowal that through David, God had sworn that "Of the fruit of his loins...He would raise up Christ to sit on His throne" (Act 2:30 and see verse 33).

On Psalm 89:3, 4, the immortal Toplady said, "Do you suppose that this was spoken to David in his own person only? No, indeed; but to David as the type, figure, and forerunner of Jesus Christ. 'I have sworn unto David my servant'—unto the Messiah, who was typified by David, unto My co-equal Son, who stipulated to take upon Himself 'the form of a servant.' 'Thy seed'—all those that I have given unto Thee in the decree of election; all those whom Thou shalt live and die to redeem. Those 'will I establish forever,' so as to render their salvation irreversible and not inadmissible. And build up Thy Throne'—Thy Mediatorial throne, as King of saints and covenant Head of the elect. 'To all generations'—there shall always be a succession of favoured sinners to be called and sanctified, in consequence of Thy federal 'obedience unto death,' and every period of time shall recompense Thy covenant sufferings with an increasing revenue of converted souls, until as many as were ordained to eternal life shall be gathered in." (Author of that precious hymn, "Rock of Ages".) —AWP



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