

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

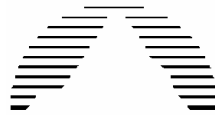
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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THE WORD OF TRUTH

One of the many titles given to the Holy Scriptures is “the Word of Truth” (2Ti 2:15). They are such because a communication from “the God of Truth” (Isa 65:16), a revelation from Him “that cannot lie” (Tit 1:2). O the privilege of possessing such a boon! Do we definitely and thankfully realize when we take up the Bible to read that it is nothing less than a message from Heaven, reliably translated into our mother tongue? What a priceless treasure! “The Word of Truth”: no errors or fables in it, nothing to mislead or deceive; but inerrant and absolutely trustworthy. How grateful is this writer that from the cradle he was trained to receive the Sacred Scriptures as the Word of Truth, and that his parents in their turn had received the same pious teaching in their infancy. True, that training had been lost upon him unless God had been pleased to sanctify the same and in His appointed time to grant him a personal and saving knowledge of the Truth. Yet it is His way to honour those who honour Him (1Sa 2:30), though He reserves to Himself the sovereign right to do so in whatever manner pleases Him.

The Word of Truth: what a peerless and priceless treasure is this! Not a production of the Church nor even the composition of the holy angels, but the Word of *God Himself*. It is a “light that shineth in a dark place” (2Pe 1:19). It is a life-giving Stream for parched pilgrims as they journey through this “wilderness of sin.” It is the Word of Truth in pointed contrast from all “science falsely so-called” (1 Tim 6:20) and “philosophy and vain deceit” (Col 2:8). Living as we are in a world of shams and make-beliefs, of exaggeration and prevarication, of fiction and falsity, how inestimably valuable is this “Thus saith the Lord”! Well may we say of the Scriptures “More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold” (Psa 19:10). In the midst of so much conflicting opinion, speculation and uncertainty, where should we be if the Word of Truth had not been vouchsafed to us? We should be mariners upon the sea of life without chart or compass. We should be ignorant alike of our origin, our duty, and our destiny.

What a blessing it is when all doubt as to their Divine Authorship is removed and we are favoured with a definite assurance that the Holy Scriptures *are* “the Word of Truth”! One of the chief elements in “the faith of God’s elect” (Tit 1:1) is a deep conviction, an unshakable confidence, that the Bible is a Divine revelation. Neither the arguments of men nor the assaults of Satan can move its possessor from what has been rightly termed this “impregnable rock.” The Christian *knows* it is the Word of God for it has spoken to his heart in a way nothing else has or can. It would make no difference to him if every one else on earth was a sceptic or infidel, for his faith stands not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God, and neither human sophistry nor Satanic malice can destroy it. How could they, when God has given him to “know *the certainty* of the words of Truth” (Pro 22:21). Hence it is that he can exclaim with one of old “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer 15:16).

What an unspeakable mercy it is when we are given a *love* of the Truth! By nature both writer and reader are liars. “The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (Psa 58:3). No child has to be taught to lie—it comes naturally to him; nor does he have to be corrupted by contact with others—he is born corrupt at the core of his being. This is the just entail of the Fall. Our first parents preferred the Devil’s lie to God’s Truth, and all of their descendants inherit the poisonous virus which then entered into them. In consequence “the whole world lieth in the wicked one” (1Jo 5:19) and he is “a liar and the father of it” (Joh 8:44). Thus by nature we have no love for the Truth, but instead a strong antipathy and resistance against it. The unregenerate do not want to know the truth about themselves: no, they wish to be flattered and encouraged to entertain a good opinion of themselves. Hence, the Lord Jesus declared “Because I tell you the Truth, ye believe not” (Joh 8:45)—had He told them lies they had welcomed Him.

Since the whole world lieth in the wicked one and he is the arch-liar, we should not be surprised at the world being so full of pretence and hum-buggery and that the Truth of God is so bitterly hated. A striking illustration of this solemn feature, now spread before us on a lower plane, appears in the outlook of most of our fellows toward the war. The great majority do not want to know the truth but wish to hear fairy tales. The popular speaker or writer is the one who airily announces that victory is just round the corner and who heralds each minor success as proof that the end of the awful conflict is near at hand. Such a statement is likely to be hotly challenged, yet while many say and probably think they want to be told the real facts and know the worst, deep down in their hearts they do not. They pride themselves on being optimists and denounce as pessimists any who differ from them. Since this be the case in connection with temporal things,

who is likely to tolerate the truth concerning Eternity! The fact is that "Truth is fallen in the street" (Isa 59:14) and is now being ruthlessly trampled on on every side.

How thankful we should be if we can honestly say "I have *chosen the way of Truth*" (Psa 119:30). The religious realm is a veritable "babel" or confusion of tongues, wherein are innumerable controversies and doubtful disputations, all varnished with specious pretence, until many are at their wit's end and the "unlearned and unstable" are in despair. But not so the one who is resolved to be directed by the Word of God and who brings all he hears and reads to the touchstone of the Truth, proving all things and holding fast that which is good (1Th 5:21). One reason why God permits so much disputing and doctrinal differences is that His own people may be stirred up to the more diligent search for Truth itself. Even though I have chosen the way of Truth I shall still need to pray, "Remove from me the way of lying" (Psa 119:29), to which the flesh is ever prone. "Lead me in Thy Truth" (Psa 25:5), must be my daily cry.

Best of all is it when we are found "*walking in the Truth*" (2Jo 4), for it is then God is most glorified. His Word is given to us for this very purpose: to be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path—to direct our conduct and regulate our deportment. In proportion as our daily life is ordered by the Word do we evince the sincerity and reality of our profession. The extent to which we actually walk in the Truth will determine the measure of our enjoyment of God's approbation: "If a man love me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him" (Joh 14:23). "His Truth shall be thy shield and buckler" (Psa 91:4): our defence and protection—panoplied in "the whole armour of God" the Christian is safe in the day of battle. By walking in the Truth we find rest unto our souls (Jer 6:16). —AWP

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

26g. Profession Tested: Matthew 7:26, 27.

“And everyone that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it” (vv 26,27). It is scarcely necessary to point out that our Lord was here using parabolic language, but what is the force of the figure He employed? what is signified by this building a house upon the sand? Clearly He had in view those who claim to be His followers, but whose profession has no reality behind it: a class of people who expect to go to Heaven, but whose hopes rest upon a faulty foundation; those who trust in something which will fail them in the hour of testing. Unspeakably solemn, then, are these verses, containing that which should cause every reader who values his or her soul to tremble at them, and to re-examine himself with sevenfold thoroughness, to discover whether or no they describe his own perilous condition.

For the last time in this Sermon our Lord enforced the text on which it is based: “For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (5:20). Wherein lay the defectiveness of their “righteousness”? First, there was a total neglect of their internal condition: “Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones and of all uncleanness” (Mat 23:27)—there was no mortification of their lusts. Second, they failed to put first things first: “Ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the Law—judgment, mercy and faith” (23:23). Third, they wrought for their own glory, from a principle of self-interest: “but all their works they do for to be seen of men” (23:5) and not for the purpose of obeying and honouring God. Fourth, they practiced not what they preached: “they say, and do not” (23:3)—their talk was all right, but their walk was all wrong.

Spirituality of soul, purity of heart, integrity of conduct, the scribes and Pharisees had no regard for. They were forward in fasting, praying at street corners, and giving of alms ostentatiously, but it was all done with the object of enhancing their reputation among men. And in *their* religion we have an exemplification of what is the natural persuasion of men the world over namely, that a religion of external performances will suffice to ensure a blissful eternity. Undoubtedly there are many who would in words deny this, but who in their works substantiate it. They bring their bodies to the house of prayer, but not their souls; they worship with their mouths, but not “in spirit and in truth.” They are sticklers for immersion or early morning communion, yet take no thought about keeping their hearts with all diligence. They boast of their orthodoxy, but disregard the precepts of Christ. Multitudes of professing Christians abstain from external acts of violence, yet hesitate not to rob their neighbours of a good name by spreading evil reports against them. They contribute regularly to the “pastor’s salary,” but shrink not from misrepresenting their goods and cheating their customers, persuading themselves that “business is business.” They have more regard for the laws of man than those of God, for *His* fear is not before their eyes.

After dwelling at such length in the previous articles on the “wise” build there should be little difficulty in identifying the various groups which are commonly classified as the “foolish.” They are all those, no matter what their profession and pretensions, who *do not* the “sayings” of Christ. Even F. W. Grant in his brief notes on this passage said, “He who puts His sayings livingly into practice shall build a house that will endure the storm. No one else and nothing else will”: though we are very much afraid that scarcely two out of a hundred of those wont to read his “Numerical Bible” really believe any such thing. In Luke’s account of the “wise” builder an additional item is added: “Whosoever cometh to Me, and heareth My sayings, and doeth them I will show you to whom he is like. He is like a man which built a house and *digged deep*, and laid the foundation on a rock” (6:47,48). The “foolish ones” *failed* to “dig deep.” As this is the vital point which distinguishes the two classes let us endeavour to show what is signified by this “digging deep.”

If ever there was a time when these words “digged deep” needed to be pressed upon the notice of professing Christians it is to-day. We are living in an age which is characterized by superficiality and shallowness, when religion itself has degenerated into a mere surface thing. There is no deep ploughing, no spade work, no foundation exercises, no brokenness of heart. If I have never mourned over my waywardness, I have no solid ground for rejoicing. “Want of depth, want of sincerity, want of zeal in religion—this is the way of our times. Want of an eye to God in religion, lack of sincere dealing with one’s soul, neglect of using the lancet with our hearts, neglect of the searing warrant which God gives out against sin, care-

lessness concerning living upon Christ; much reading about Him, much talking about Him, but too little feeding upon His flesh and drinking of His blood—these are the causes of tottering professions and baseless hopes.” If Spurgeon found occasion of making such complaint as far back as 1870 how sadly conditions have worsened since then!

A saving apprehension or laying hold of Christ is not the simple thing so many suppose. Man must be humbled into the dust before he will, as a beggar, betake himself to the Redeemer. The Divine Law is the appointed school-master to drive sinners to Christ, but so many people play truant—run away from school. Not a few attempt to build upon Christ but there has been no proper foundation-work, and so in the day of testing the floods of opposition and persecution come in between their hearts and Christ, and temptations part them to the overthrow of their profession. By nature our hearts are so filled with self-love and self-pity there is no room for Christ. Many are willing to receive Him for His benefits who have no love for His person and no resolution to bow to his Lordship, which is like a woman marrying a man solely for his money. Observe Paul’s order: “For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him; not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phi 3:8,9)—first Christ Himself and then His righteousness!

1. He “digs deep” who does not enter upon a Christian profession hurriedly and lightly, but instead “sits down and counts the cost” (Luk 14:28). There are some who say they are saved before they have any feeling sense that they are lost. There are others who profess to receive Christ who yet have no realisation of the claims of His scepter. There are those who present themselves for baptism who know nothing about the terms of Christian discipleship. Such people rush into a profession of religion, and in most cases rush out of it again. They receive the Word “with joy” rather than with painful convictions of sin, but they have “not root in themselves” and so “dureth for awhile only” (Mat 13:20,21). Hence it was that when one said unto Him “I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest” Christ told him that he had not “where to lay His head”; and when another lightly said “I will follow Thee” He answered “No man, having put his hand to the plough [and ploughing is no easy work!] and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luk 9:58-62); while to His apostles He gave the warning “remember Lot’s wife” (Luk 17:32).

2. He “digs deep” who labours to be emptied of self-righteousness, self-esteem, and self-sufficiency. The sinner needs first to be convicted of his utter inability *to come* to Christ—that God must give him a heart which is willing to receive Him as King to rule over him. Observe how the Lord Himself pressed this fact upon His hearers: “No man can come to Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (Joh 6:44)—but who believes that to-day when the “free will” of man is so much cried up! “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Mat 9:12). Why should I seek unto the great Physician for strength when I have no consciousness of my weakness, for cleansing while I am quite unaware of my foulness? Only God can subdue our innate pride and self-complacency, and in order thereto there must needs be ardent wrestlings of soul with Him that He would graciously put forth His power and overcome that in me which rises up against Him.

3. He “digs deep” who strives after an experimental and inward knowledge of the Truth. A mere notional or theoretical acquaintance with it will not suffice him. He longs to have a practical knowledge of the Truth so that it becomes deeply rooted within him, so that it finds a home in the “hidden parts” (Psa 51:6). Truth has to be bought (Pro 23:23), and the wise builder is quite willing to pay the necessary price—sacrificing worldly interests so to do. As Spurgeon said, “seek an inwrought experience of Divine Truth. Ask to have it burnt into you. Why is it that people give up the doctrines of grace if they fall in with eloquent advocates of free will? Why is it they renounce the orthodox creed if they meet with smart reasoners who contradict it? Because they have never received the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit so as to have it sealed in their hearts...It is one thing to have a creed it is quite another thing to have the Truth graven upon the tables of the heart. Many fail here because Truth was never made experimentally their own.”

4. He “digs deep” who baulks not at the work of mortification, who follows Christ as the grand Exemplar of mortification. What the Saviour suffered in His pure flesh by way of expiation, those who would be saved must suffer in their corrupt flesh by way of mortification. It is true the flesh in us is reluctant, as was the holy humanity of Christ, saying “let this cup pass from Me,” but the spirit is willing, crying “Father, Thy will be done” even in the crucifixion of my dearest lusts. Christ died a violent death, and sin must not die an easy and comfortable one. His body was nailed to the tree till His soul was separated from it, and the body of sin must be so nailed till the soul of sin—the will and love of it—depart. Christ died a tormenting death, in pains and agonies, and we must so die to sin that we “suffer in the flesh” (1Pe 4:1). Christ died a

lingering death, and so does sin languish little by little, mortification upon mortification, dying “daily.” Alas how few dig deep enough to come to the denying of self!

5. He “digs deep” who endeavours to hide God’s Word in his heart so that he may be kept from sinning against Him (Psa 119:11). By “hiding” is not here meant concealing but treasuring, so that it may be preserved. To so “hide” means first, to obtain a spiritual understanding of it—and for that diligence and labour are required (Pro 2:1-4). Only then does “wisdom” enter the heart and knowledge become pleasant unto the soul (Pro 2:10). Second, when it is assented unto by faith, otherwise it will quickly vanish. “The Word preached did not profit them not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Heb 4:2). Third, when it is kindly entertained: Christ complained to the Jews “ye seek to kill Me because My word has no place in you” (Joh 8:37). Fourth, when it is deeply rooted, settled in the affections, so that it becomes the “ingrafted Word” (Jam 1:21). The Word must not be studied out of curiosity, or for the object of teaching others, nor for our comfort, but with this prime end in view: that it may deliver us from sin—storing our minds with what is holy, resisting Satan’s temptations with an “It is written,” its promises sustaining us in times of trial.

6. He “digs deep” who sincerely endeavours to have his heart sensibly affected by the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Since sin be that abominable thing which God hates, that which occasioned the death of Christ, and that which is the cause of all his own misery, the believer seeks to obtain a deep horror for and hatred of sin. To this end he frequently reminds himself and meditates upon the fearful tragedy which the first sin introduced into Eden, how that it corrupted at its source the stream of human nature. He constantly ponders the fact that all the sorrow and suffering in the world are the immediate effects of sin. He essays to view sin in the light of eternal punishment. “When I meet with professors who talk lightly of sin, I feel sure that they have built without a foundation. If they had ever felt the Spirit’s wounding and killing sword of conviction, they would flee from sin as from a lion. True forgiven sinners dread the appearance of evil as burnt children dread the fire. Superficial repentance always leads to careless living. Pray earnestly for a broken heart” (Spurgeon).

7. He “digs deep” who makes diligent search and thorough examination within to make sure that God has written His Word on his heart (2Co 13:5; 2Pe 1:10). He is so concerned about his eternal welfare, so aware of the deceitfulness of the human heart, that he dare not take anything for granted. He is determined to “prove” his own self, that a supernatural work of grace has been truly wrought within him. He spares no pains to measure himself by the Word to see whether the fruits of regeneration are really being brought forth in the garden of his soul. He earnestly seeks the Divine assistance in this all-important matter, crying to God, “Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart” (Psa 26:2): let me not be mistaken, but graciously make known to me my real condition, and if I be one of Thy redeemed cause Thy blessed Spirit to bear witness with my spirit that I am a child of Thine. And if the seeker be sincere and importunate his quest will not be in vain, neither will his request fall upon deaf ears.

Let us now describe several kinds of “foolish” builders. First, they build on the “sand” whose hope is based upon a round of religious performances. The one who counts upon church-membership, church-attendance, the saying of prayers and the reading of the Bible, as being all that is needed to ensure for him an entrance into the Everlasting Kingdom is resting on a broken reed. That was the case with the pharisees. They fasted and tithed, made long prayers and were most punctilious in attending to ceremonial rites, but they were outside the pale of God’s mercy. “Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3) no matter how zealous he be in attending “communions,” how liberal in supporting “missionaries,” or how “faithful to the cause.” Until I have a heart which receives Christ as my Prophet, Priest and King, which unfeignedly loves Him, which obeys Him, there is no hope for me.

Second, they build on “the sand” whose hope is based on visions, dreams and happy feelings. There is a class in Christendom, larger than some suppose, whose trust reposes in those very things. Ask them to tell you their experience, inquire what ground they have for concluding that God has met with them in saving grace, and they will relate to you some mysterious vision, some remarkable dream, some voice which spoke to them, many years ago, saying “thy sins be forgiven thee,” which produced an ecstasy of joy and assurance which nothing can shake. Now we will not positively affirm that they were deluded into imagining such things, yet we would point out that Satan transforms himself as an “angel of light” and can produce remarkable impressions. Whatever remarkable experience you met with in the past, unless you are *now* trusting in the blood and righteousness of Christ and sincerely endeavouring to *perform* His precepts, you are trusting in what will fail you in the Day to come.

Third, they build “on the sand” whose hope is based on a “faith in Christ” which produces no obedience to Him. Unto such He searchingly says, “Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I

say?" (Luk 6:46). A mere intellectual assent to the Gospel or a belief in the historical Christ is worthless, for it brings forth no spiritual fruits. To hear and acquiesce and then perform not is a mocking of God. As there were many who "believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did" to whom the Saviour "*did not* commit Himself" (Joh 2:23,24), so there are thousands to-day who non-sav-ingly "believe in Christ" yet have not "the root of the matter" (Job 19:28) within them. The faith of God's elect is one which in a vital and practical way is "the acknowledging the Truth which is after godliness" (Tit 1:1), which issues in "purifying the heart" (Act 15:9), which "worketh by love" (Gal 5:6) and which "overcometh the world" (1Jo 5:4). Only *such* a faith will suffice for time and eternity.

Fourth, they build "on the sand" whose hope rests on a merely intellectual knowledge of the Truth. The difference between theoretical and practical knowledge is one both of kind and of degree. Theoretical knowledge is fluctuating and evanescent, constantly subject to alteration; but practical knowledge is deep-rooted and permanent. Once I have experienced the burning effects of fire no sophistical arguments can persuade me it is harmless. Once I have tasted that the Lord is gracious none can convince me that He is not. The difference between the two is apparent also from the effects produced. Pilate had a theoretical knowledge that it was contrary to the evidence before him to condemn Christ to death, but when the issue of his own interests with Caesar was raised (Joh 19:12) his practical judgment determined him to save his prestige. One who has a theoretical acquaintance with the precepts may talk well about them, but only one with a practical knowledge will walk according to them. One with a theoretical knowledge of the Truth may admire it, but only one with a practical knowledge thereof would die for it.

Fifth, they build "on the sand" who make not conscience of confessing sin. There is a radical difference between the unregenerate and the regenerate in this matter. The former, being dead toward God and having but light thoughts upon sin, are not weighed down by it; but to the latter it is their heaviest burden, and therefore are they thankful to unbosom themselves unto the Lord. Christ has bidden them pray to their Father "forgive us our sins" (Luk 11:4). Scripture warns them "he that covereth his sins shall not prosper" (Pro 28:13), and so David proved: "When I kept silence; my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long"; but eventually he said "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psa 32:3,5). After his sad fall, Peter went out and "wept bitterly." Read through the second half of Romans 7 and observe how keenly distressed Paul was by indwelling corruption. The believer has a sensitive conscience and keeps short accounts with God; but the conscience of the unbeliever is calloused, and he neither mourns over nor confesses his sins.

To sum up. No matter what experience I have had, or what be the character and strength of my faith, or how deep and steady be my assurance, or how eminent my gifts, unless any or all of these issue in a life of practical obedience to Christ they will avail nothing when death overtakes me. And that is no harsh verdict of ours, but the decision of the Son of God: "Everyone that heareth these sayings of Mine, and *doeth them not*, shall be likened unto a foolish man who built his house upon the sand." Not that the Christian will "do" them perfectly—"for in many things we all offend" (Jam 3:2)—though he ought to, and must not excuse but rather mourn over and confess his failure. No, the obedience of the Christian is not a faultless one, yet it is real and actual. It is not flawless, yet it is sincere. It is the genuine desire, resolution and endeavour of the Christian to please Christ in *all* things, and it is his greatest grief when he displeases Him. Lord, "*Make me to go* in the path of Thy commandments, for therein do I delight" (Psa 119:35). —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

10. Seventh Miracle

“And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life” (2Ki 4:17). As Matthew Henry pointed out, “We may well suppose, after the birth of this son, that the prophet was doubly welcome to the good Shunammite: he had thought himself indebted to her, but from henceforth, as long as she lives, she will think herself in his debt, and that she can never do too much for him. We may also suppose that, the child was very dear to the prophet, as the son of his prayers, and very dear to the parents as the son of their old age.” What is more attractive than a properly trained and well behaved child! And what is more objectionable than a spoilt and naughty one? From all that is revealed of this “great woman” we cannot doubt that she brought up her boy wisely and well, that he added to the delightfulness of her home, that he was a pleasure and not a trial to visitors. Alas that there are so few of her type now left. Godly and well-conducted homes are the choicest asset which any nation possesses.

“And when the child was grown, it fell on a day that he went out to his father to the reapers” (v 18). The opening clause does not signify that he was now a fully-developed youth, but that he had passed out of infancy into childhood. This is quite obvious from a number of things in the sequel. When he was taken ill, a “lad” carried him back home (v 19); for some time he “sat on her knees” (v 20), and later she—apparently unaided—carried him upstairs and laid him on the prophet’s bed (v 21). Yet the child had grown sufficiently so as to be able to run about and be allowed to visit his father in the harvest field. While there he was suddenly stricken with an ailment, for “he said unto his father, My head, my head!” (v 19). It is hardly likely that this was caused by a sunstroke, for it occurred in the morning, a while before noon. Seemingly the father did not suspect anything serious, for instead of carrying him home in his own arms, he sent him back by one of his younger workers. How incapable we are of foreseeing what even the next hour may bring forth!

“And when he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon” (v 20). What a lovely picture of maternal devotion! How thankful should each one be who cherishes the tender memories of a mother’s love, for there are tens of thousands in this country who were born of parents devoid of natural affection, who cared more for the public house and the movies than for their offspring. But powerful as true mother love is, it is impotent when the grim reaper draws near, for our verse adds “and then died.” Death strikes down the young as well as the old, as the tombstones in our cemeteries bear ample witness. Sometimes he gives more or less protracted notice of his gruesome approach, at others, as here, he smites with scarcely any warning. How this fact ought to influence each of us!—to put it on its lowest ground, how foolish to make an idol of one who may be snatched away at any moment. With what a light hand should we grasp all earthly objects. Here, then, is first, *the occasion* of this miracle: the death of the child.

Second, a word upon *its mystery*. How often the Lord’s dealings seem to us as passing strange. Hopes suddenly blighted, prospects swiftly changed, loved ones snatched away. “All flesh is grass” (Isa 40:6), and that “today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven” (Mat 6:30). Thus it was here. The babe had survived the dangers incident to infancy, only to be cut down in childhood. That morning apparently full of life and health, trotting merrily off to the harvest field: at noon a corpse on his mother’s knee. But in her case such a visitation was additionally inexplicable. The boy had been given to her by the Divine bounty because of the kindness she had shown to one of God’s servants, and now, to carnal reason, it looked as though He was dealing most unkindly with her. A miracle had been wrought in bestowing the child and now that miracle is neutralized. Yes, God’s ways are frequently “a great deep” unto human intelligence: yet let the Christian never forget, those ways are ever ordered by infinite love and wisdom.

It is indeed most blessed to observe how this stricken mother conducted herself under her unexpected and severe trial. Here, as throughout the whole of this chapter, her moral and spiritual greatness shines forth. There was no wringing her hands in despair, no giving way to inordinate grief. Nor was there any murmuring at Providence, any complaint that God had ceased to be gracious unto her. It is in such crises and by their demeanour under them that the children of God and the children of the Devil are manifest. We do not say that the former always conduct themselves as the great woman, yet they sorrow not as do others who have no hope. They may be staggered and stunned by a crushing affliction, but they do not give way to an evil heart of unbelief and become avowed infidels. There may be stirrings of rebellion within, and Satan

will seek to foster hard thoughts against God, but he cannot induce them to curse Him and commit suicide. Divine grace is a glorious reality, and in his measure every Christian is given to prove the sufficiency of it in times of stress and trial.

Third, *its expectation*. "And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out" (v 21). This must be pondered in the light of her subsequent actions if we are to perceive the meaning of her conduct here. There was definite purpose on her part, and in view of what immediately follows it seems clear that these were the actions of faith. She cherished the hope that the prophet would restore her son unto her. She made no preparations for the burial of the child, but anticipated his resurrection by laying him upon Elisha's bed. Her faith clung to the original blessing God, by the prophet's promise and prayers, had given him unto her, and now she takes the dead child to God (as it were) and goes to seek the prophet. Her faith might be tried even to the straining point, but in that extremity she interpreted the inexplicable dealings of God by those dealings she was sure of, reasoning from the past to the future, from the known to the unknown. The child had been given unto her unasked, and she refused to believe it had now been irrecoverably taken away from her.

Her faith was indeed put to a severe test, for not only was her child dead but at the very time she seemed to need him the most, Elisha was many miles away! Ah, that was no "accident" but wisely and graciously ordered by God. How so? That there might be fuller opportunity for bringing forth the evidences and fruits of faith: a faith which does not triumph over discouragement and difficulties is not worth much. The Lord often causes our 'circumstances' to be most 'unfavourable' in order that faith may have the freer play and rise above them. Such was the case here. Elisha might be absent, but she could go to him. Most probably she had heard of the raising of the widow's son, Zarephath (1Ki 17:23) by Elijah, and she knew that the spirit of Elijah now rested on Elisha (2Ki 2:15), and therefore with steadfast confidence she determined to seek him. That she *did* act in faith is clear from Hebrews 11:35, for that chapter which chronicles the achievements of faith of the OT saints says "through *faith*...women received their dead raised to life again"—there were but two who did so, and the "great woman" of Shunem was one of them.

"And she called unto her husband and said, send me I pray thee one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again" (v 22). While faith triumphs over difficulties, it does not act unbecomingly by forcing a way through them and setting aside the requirements of propriety. Urgent as the situation was, yet she did not rush away without informing her husband of her intention. The wife should have no secrets from her partner, but take him fully into her confidence: failure at this point leads to suspicions, and where they exist love is soon chilled. Nor did this stricken mother content herself with scribbling a hurried note, telling her husband to expect her return within a day or so. No, once again she took her proper place and owned her subjection to him: though she made known to him her desire, she demanded nothing, but respectfully sought his permission, as her "I pray thee" plainly shows. Faith is bold and venturesome, but it does not act unseemly and insubordinately.

"It is happy and comely when harmony prevails in domestic life: when the husband's authority is tempered with affection, and unsuspecting confidence; when the wife answers that confidence with deference and submission, as well as fidelity, and when each party consults the other's inclinations, and both unite in attending on the ordinances of God and supporting His cause" (Thomas Scott). But such happiness and harmony is attainable and obtainable only as both husband and wife seek grace from God to walk in obedience to His precepts, and as family worship is duly maintained. If the wife suffers herself to be influenced by the very *un-feminine* spirit which is now so rife in the world and refuses to own the lordship of her husband (1Pe 3:6), or if the husband acts as a tyrant and bully, failing to love, nourish and cherish his wife (Eph 5:25,29) and "giving honour unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel" (1Pe 3:7), then the smile of God will be forfeited, their prayers will be "hindered," and strife and misery will prevail in the home.

"And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day? it is neither new moon nor Sabbath. And she said, It shall be well" (v 23). While admiring *her* virtues, her husband appears in a much less favourable light. His question might suggest that he was still ignorant of the death of his son, yet that scarcely seems likely. If he had made no inquiry about the child he must have been strangely lacking in tender regard for him, and his wife's desire to undertake an arduous journey at such a time ought to have informed him that some serious emergency had arisen. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that his language was more an expression of irritability, that he resented being left alone in his grief. At any rate, his words served to throw light upon another praiseworthy trait in his wife: that it was her custom to attend the prophet's services on the feast days and the Sabbath. Though a "great woman" she did not disdain those unpretentious meetings on mount Carmel. No genuine Christian, however wealthy or high his station, will consider it beneath him to meet with his poorer brethren and sisters.

Those words of her husband's may be considered from another angle, namely, as a further testing of her faith. Even where the deepest affection obtains between husband and wife there is not always spiritual equality, no, not even where they are one in the Lord. One may steadily grow in grace, while the other makes little or no progress. One may enter more deeply into an experimental acquaintance with the Truth, which the other is incapable of understanding and discussing. One may be given a much increased measure of faith without the other being similarly blest. None can walk by the faith of another, and it is well for those of strong faith to remember that. Certainly there was no co-operation of faith in this instance: rather did the husband of our "great woman" seem to discourage than encourage her. She might have reasoned with herself, perhaps this is an intimation from God that I should not seek unto Elisha: but faith would argue, this is but a further testing of me, and since my reliance is in the Lord I will neither be daunted nor deterred. It is by our reactions to such testings that the reality and strength of our faith is made evident. Faith must not expect a smooth and easy path.

"And she said, It shall be well": that was the language of firm and unshaken confidence. "Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive and go forward, slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee" (v 24). Her husband certainly does not shine here. Had he discharged the duties of love *he* had undertaken this tiring journey instead of his wife, or at the very least offered to accompany her. But he would not exert himself enough to saddle the ass for her, but left her to do that. How selfish many husbands are! how slack in bearing or at least sharing their wives' burdens! Marriage is a partnership or it is nothing except in name, and the man who allows his wife to become a drudge and does little or nothing to make her lot lighter and brighter in the home, is not worthy to be called "husband." Nor is it any sufficient reply to say, It is only lack of thought on his part: inconsiderateness and selfishness are synonymous terms, for unselfishness consists largely in thoughtfulness of others. The best that can be said for this man is that he did not actually forbid his wife starting out for Carmel.

We know not how far distant Shunem was from Carmel, but it appears that the journey was a considerable and hard one—in a mountainous country. But love is not quenched by hardships and faith is not rendered inoperative by difficulties, and in the case of this mother both of these graces were operative within her. Love can brook no delay and thinks not of personal discomfort as her language to the servant shows. It is also the nature of faith to be speedy and look for quick results—patience is a distinct virtue which is only developed by much hard schooling. An intense earnestness possessed the soul of this woman, and where such earnestness is joined with faith it refuses a denial. While our faith remains a merely mental and mechanical thing it achieves nothing, but when it is intense and fervent it will produce results. True, it requires a deep sense of need, often the pressure of an urgent situation to evoke this earnestness, and that is why faith flourishes most in times of stress and trial, for it then has its most suitable opportunity to declare itself.

"So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite" (v 25). There are several things of importance to be noticed here. First, like his predecessor, Elisha was the man of the mount: 2:25—symbolical of his spiritual elevation, his affections set upon things above. Second, but mark how he conducts himself not in haughty pride of fancied self-superiority: he waited not for the woman to reach him, but dispatched his servant to meet her, thereby evidencing his solicitude. Third, was it not a gracious token from the Lord to cheer her heart near the close of a trying journey: how "tender" are God's mercies. Fourth, "that Sunammite" denotes either that she was the only pious person in that place or that she so over-towered her brethren and sisters in spirituality that such an appellation was quite sufficient for the purpose of identification.

"Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well" (v 26). Incidentally, this shows that younger men engaged in the Lord's service and occupying lowlier positions are required to execute commissions from their seniors: compare 2 Timothy 4:11-13. We do not regard the woman's "it is well" as expressing her resignation to the sovereign will of God, but rather as the language of trustful expectation. She seems to have had no doubt whatever about the outcome of her errand. It appears to us that, throughout the whole of this incident, the "great woman" regarded the death of her child as a trial of faith. Her "it is well" looked beyond the clouds and anticipated the happy issue. Surely we must exclaim, O woman, great is thy faith. Yes, and great too was its reward, for God never puts to confusion those who really count upon Him showing Himself strong on their behalf. Let us not forget that this incident is recorded for *our* learning and encouragement.

“And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone, for her soul is vexed within her, and the Lord hath hid it from me and hath not told me” (v 27). Our minds at once revert to the two women who visited the Lord’s sepulchre and when He eventually met them saying, All hail “came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him” (Mat 28:9). In the case before us, the “great woman” appears to have (rightly) viewed Elisha as the ambassador of God, and to have humbly signified that she had a favour to ask of him. In the rebuffing from Gehazi we see how her faith met with yet another trial. And then the Lord tenderly interposed through His servant and rebuked the officious attendant. The Lord was accustomed to reveal His secrets unto the prophets (Amo 3:7), but until He did so *they* were as ignorant and as dependent upon Him as others, as this incident plainly shows.

Here was still a further test of faith: the prophet himself was in the dark, unprepared for her startling request. But the Lord has just as good a reason for concealing as for revealing. In the case before us it is not difficult to perceive why He had withheld from Elisha all knowledge of the child’s death: He would have him learn from the mother herself, and that, that she might avow her faith. “Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?” (v 28). Those were powerful arguments to move Elisha to act on her behalf. “As she did not impatiently desire children, she could not think that her son had been given her, without solicitation, merely to become the occasion of her far deeper distress” (T. Scott). The second question evidenced that her dependence was entirely upon the word of God through His servant: “However the providence of God may disappoint us, we may be sure the promise of God never did, nor ever will deceive us: hope in *that* will not make us ashamed” (Matthew Henry). And here we must pause.
—AWP

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE

9b. Its Opposition

4. By declaring it *neutralises the force of exhortations*. The argument used by Arminians on this point may be fairly stated thus: if it be absolutely certain that all regenerated souls will reach Heaven then there can be no real need to bid them tread the path that leads thither, that in such case it is meaningless to urge them to run with patience the race set before them; but since God *has* uttered such calls to His people, then it follows that their final perseverance is by no means sure, the less so seeing that failure to heed those calls is threatened with eternal death. It is insisted upon that exhortations to effort, watchfulness, diligence etc., clearly imply the contingency of the believer's salvation, that all such calls to the discharge of these duties signify that security is conditional upon his own fidelity, upon the response which he makes unto these demands of God upon him. It should be a sufficient reply to point out that if this objection were really valid then no Christian could have any firm persuasion of his everlasting bliss so long as he was left upon earth: hence the inference drawn by Arminians from the exhortations must be an erroneous one.

What strange logic is this: because I am persuaded that God loves me with an unchanging and unquenchable love therefore I feel free to trample upon His revealed will, and have no concern whether my conduct pleases or displeases Him. Because I am assured that Christ, at the cost of unparalleled shame and suffering, purchased for me eternal redemption, an inalienable inheritance, therefore I am encouraged to forsake instead of to follow Him, vilify rather than glorify Him. That might be the theology of devils, and those they possess, but it would be repudiated and abhorred by any one renewed by the Holy Spirit. How preposterous to argue that because a person believes he shall persevere to the end, that he will therefore despise and neglect everything that promotes such perseverance. Such an argument as the above is tantamount to saying that because God has regenerated a soul He now requires no obedience from him, whereas one of the chief ends for which he is renewed is to capacitate him for obedience, that he may be conformed to the image of His son.

So far from the absolute promises of God concerning the everlasting safety of His people weakening the force of motives to righteousness, they are the very means made use of by the Spirit to stir up the saints, and to encourage them in the practice of righteousness and engage them in the continuance thereof. Most certainly the apostles perceived no inconsistency or incongruity between the Divine promises and the precepts. They did not judge it meaningless to argue from such blessed assurances to the performance of the duties of holiness. One of them said "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2Co 7:1). Those promises were, "I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be My people: I will be a Father unto you and ye shall be My sons and daughters"(6:16, 18), and on them he based his exhortation. After saying, ye "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" another apostle proceeded to urge, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end...And if ye call on the Father...possess the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1Pe 1:5, 13, 17)—apparently it never occurred to him that such exhortations had been neutralised or even weakened by the doctrine before advanced.

5. *By appealing to cases* and examples which, though plausible, are quite inconclusive. In order to prove their contention that a real child of God may so backslide as to lose all relish for spiritual things, renounce his profession and die an infidel, Arminians are fond of referring to alleged illustrations of this very thing. They will point to certain men and women who have come before their own observation, people who were genuinely and deeply convicted of sin, who earnestly sought relief from a burdened conscience, who eventually believed the Gospel, put their faith in the atoning blood of Christ and found rest unto their souls. They will tell of the bright profession made by these people, of the peace and joy which was theirs, of the radical change made in their lives, and how they united with the church, had blessed fellowship with the saints, lifted up their voices in praise and petition at the prayer meetings, were diligent in speaking to their companions of their eternal welfare, how they walked in the paths of righteousness and caused the saints to thank God for such transformed lives. But alas these bright meteors in the religious firmament soon faded out.

It is at this point that the Arminian seeks to make capital out of such cases. He tells of how, perhaps in a few months, the religious ardour of these "converts" cooled off. He relates how the temptations of the world and lusts of the flesh proved too strong for them, and how like dogs they returned to their vomit. The Arminian then alleges that such cases are actual examples of men and women who have "fallen from

grace," who have apostatized from the faith, and by appealing to such he imagines he has succeeded in overthrowing the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. In reality, he has done nothing of the sort. He has merely shown how easily Christians may be mistaken, and thus pointed a warning for us not to be too ready to indulge in wishful thinking and imagining all is gold which glitters. Scripture plainly warns us there is a class whose "goodness is as a morning cloud and as the early dew it goeth away" (Hos 6:4). Christ has told us of those who received the Word with joy, yet had not root in themselves (Mat 13:20,21). The foolish virgins carried the lamp of their profession, but they had no oil in their vessels. One may come "near" to the kingdom yet never enter it (Mar 12:34).

In order to make good his objection the Arminian must do something more than point to those who made a credible profession and afterwards falsified and renounced it: he must prove that a person who is truly regenerated, born from above, made a new creature in Christ, then apostatised and died an apostate. This he cannot possibly do, for none such ever existed or ever will. The fact is that while there are many who, in varying degrees, adopt the Christian religion, there are very few indeed who are ever born of the Spirit, and the *only* way in which we may *identify* the latter is by their *continuance in holiness*. He who does not persevere to the end was never begotten by God. Nor is that statement a begging of the question at issue: it is insisting upon the teaching of Holy Writ. "The righteous also shall hold on his way" (Job 17:9): observe that it is not "he ought to" nor merely that "he may do so," but a positive and unqualified "shall." Therefore any one who fails to "hold on his way," be he a religious enthusiast, a professing Christian, or zealous church-member, was never "righteous" in the sight of God.

We will labour this point a little further because it is probably the one which has presented more difficulty to our readers than any other. Yet it should not, for when resolved by the Word all is clear as a sunbeam. "I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be *forever*: nothing can be put to it nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before Him" (Ecc 3:14). This is one of the distinctive marks of the Divine handiwork: its indestructibility, its permanency, and therefore it is by *this* mark we must test both ourselves and our fellows. "The orthodox doctrine does not affirm the certainty of salvation because we once believed, but certainty of perseverance in holiness if we have truly believed, which perseverance in holiness, therefore, in opposition to all weaknesses and temptations, is the only sure evidence of the genuineness of past experience or of the validity of our confidence as to our future salvation" (A. A. Hodge). "Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die" (Joh 11:26) said Christ, for the life that He giveth is an "eternal" one, which the Devil himself cannot destroy (see Job 2:6!). Thus, unless we acknowledge our mistake in concluding the apostates were once regenerate, we give the lie to the Word of God.

6. By asserting that this doctrine *makes all warnings and threatenings pointless*. Arminians argue that if the believer be eternally secure in Christ he cannot be in any peril, and that to caution him against danger is a meaningless performance. First, let it be said that we have no quarrel with those who insist that most solemn warnings and awful threatenings *are* addressed immediately to the children of God, nor have we the least accord with those who seek to blunt the point of those warnings and explain away those threatenings: so far from it, in both the June and August articles of this series we have shown that God Himself has safeguarded the truth of the final perseverance of His people by these very measures, and have insisted there are very real dangers they must guard against and genuine threatenings they are required to heed. So long as the Christian is left in this world he is beset by deadly dangers, both from within and from without, and it would be the part of madness to ignore and trifle with them. It is faith's recognition of the same which causes him to cry out "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe" (Psa 119:117).

Yet what we have just admitted above in no way concedes that there is any conflict between the promises and warnings of God: that the one assures of preservation while the other forecasts destruction. For what is it that God has promised unto His people? This: that they "shall not depart from Him" (Jer 32:40), that they shall "hold on their way" (Job 17:9), and that to this end He will "work in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phi 2:13), granting unto them all-sufficient grace (2Co 12:9), and supplying all their need (Phi 4:19). In perfect accord with these promises are the warnings and threatenings addressed to them, by which God has made known the inseparable connection there is, by His appointment, between a course of evil and the punishment attending the same. Those very threatenings are used by the Spirit to produce in Christians a holy circumspection and caution, so that they are made the means of preventing their apostacy. Those warnings have their proper use, and efficacy in respect of the saints, for they cause them to take heed to their ways, avoid the snares laid for them, and serve to establish their souls in the practice of obedience.

Whether or not we can perceive the consistency between the assurances God has made His people and the grounds He has given them to tremble at His Word, between the comforting promises and the stirring

exhortations, between the witnesses to their safety and the warnings of their danger, certain it is that Scripture abounds with the one as much as with the other. If on the one hand the Christian is warranted in being fully persuaded that “neither principalities nor powers” shall be able to separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus, and that God shall tread Satan under his feet shortly (Rom 8:38,39; 16:20): on the other hand, he is bidden to “put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers” (Eph 6:12,13), and “Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour” (1Pe 5:8). Yet though the believer is warned “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,” it is immediately followed by the declaration “but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able” (1Co 10:12,13). Then let us beware of being wise in our own conceit and charging the Almighty with folly.

Because the enemies of the Christian are inveterate, subtle, and powerful, and the exercise of his graces inconstant, it is salutary that he should live under a continual remembrance of his weakness, fickleness and danger. He needs to be ever watchful and prayerful lest he enter into temptation, recalling what befell the self-confident Peter. Because indwelling corruption remains a part of himself, while he is left in this scene, it behooves him to keep his heart with all diligence, for he who trusteth in his own heart is a fool (Pro 28:26), unmindful of his best interests. We are only preserved from presumption while a real sense of our own insufficiency is retained. The consciousness of indwelling sin should cause every child of God to bend the suppliant knee with the utmost frequency, humility and fervour. Let not the Christian mistake the field of battle for a bed of rest. Let him not indulge in a slothful profession or carnal delights, while his implacable foes, the flesh, the world, and the devil are ever seeking to encompass his ruin. Let him heed the warnings of a faithful God and he will prove Him to be an unerring Guide and invincible Guard.

7. *By drawing a false inference from the Divine righteousness.* Arminians are fond of quoting that “God is no respecter of persons,” from which they argue that His justice requires Him to apportion the same retribution unto sinning Christians as He does unto non-Christians who transgress; and since our doctrine gives no place to the eternal punishment of a saint, it is said we charge God with partiality and injustice. That the Lord “is righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works” (Psa 145:17) is contended for as earnestly for by us as by our opponents; but what the Arminian denies is maintained by the Calvinist, and that is, the absolute sovereignty of God. That the Most High is obliged to apportion equal punishment to equal faults and equal rewards to equal deservings, cannot be allowed for a moment. Being above all law, the Framer and not the subject of it, God’s will is supreme, and He doeth whatsoever pleaseth Him. If God bestows free grace and pardoning mercy to those in Christ and withholds it from those out of Christ, who shall say unto Him, What doest Thou? Has He not the right to do what He chooses with His own: to give a penny to him who labors all day and the same to him that works but one hour (Mat 20:12-15)!

To argue that because God is no respecter of persons that therefore He must deal with Christians and non-Christians alike is to ignore the special case of the former. They sustain a nearer relation to Him than do the latter. Shall a parent treat a refractory child as he would an insubordinate employee—he would dismiss the one from his service, must he turn the other out of his home? The Scriptures teach that God the Father is tender to His own dear children, recovering them from their sins and healing their backslidings, while He suffers aliens to lie wallowing in their rebellions and pollutions all their lives. Furthermore a Surety stood for them and endured in their stead the utmost rigor of the Law’s sentence, so that God is perfectly righteous in remitting their sins. Nevertheless, so that they may know He does not look lightly upon their disobedience, He “visits their transgressions with the rod and their iniquity with stripes” (Psa 89:32). Finally, they are brought to sincere repentance, confession, and forsaking of their sins, and thereby they obtain the relief provided for them, which is never the case with the children of the Devil.

8. *By alleging our doctrine makes its believers proud and presumptuous.* That the carnal may wrest this doctrine, like other portions of the Truth, to their own destruction, is freely admitted (2 Peter 3:16); but that any article of the Faith which God has delivered unto His saints has the least tendency unto evil, we indignantly deny. In reality, the doctrine of the saints’ perseverance in holiness, in humble dependence upon God for supplies of grace, lays the axe at the very root of the proud and presumptuous conceits of men, for it casts down their high thoughts and towering imaginations concerning their own native ability to believe the Gospel, obey its precepts, and continue in the faith and practice thereof. We rest wholly on the goodness and faithfulness of God, the merits of Christ’s blood and the efficacy of His intercession, the power and operations of the Spirit, having “no confidence in the flesh” (Phi 3:3). Only the Day to come will reveal how many who “trusted in themselves” and were persuaded of their inherent power to turn unto God and keep His commandments, were thereby hardened and hastened to their eternal ruin.

Let any candid reader ponder the following question. Which is the more likely to promote pride and presumption: extolling the virtues and sufficiency of man's "freewill," or emphasizing our utter dependence upon God's free grace? Which is more apt to foster self-confidence and self-righteousness: the Arminian tenet that fallen man has the power within himself to turn unto God when he chooses and do those things which are pleasing in His sight, or the Calvinist's insistence upon the declarations of Scripture that even the Christian has no strength of his own, that apart from Christ he can "do nothing" (Joh 15:5), that we are "not sufficient of ourselves" to so much as "think anything as of ourselves" (2Co 3:5), that "all our springs" are in God (Psa 87:7), and that because of our felt weakness and acknowledged helplessness, God graciously keeps our feet and preserves us from destruction? It is just because our doctrine is so flesh-abasing and pride-mortifying that it is so bitterly detested and decried by the pharisees.

9. By pretending our doctrine *renders the use of means superfluous*. If Christians are secure in the hand of God and He empowers them by His Spirit, why should they put forth their energies to preserve themselves? But such reasoning leaves out of account that, throughout, God deals with His people as moral agents and accountable creatures. Rightly did Calvin point out, "He who has fixed the limits of our life, has also entrusted us with the care of it; has furnished us with means and supplies for its preservation; has also made us provident of dangers, and, that they may not oppress us unawares, has furnished us with cautions and remedies. Thus it is evident what is our duty." Grace is not given to render our efforts needless but to make them effectual. To say that assurance of final salvation cuts the nerve of enterprise is contrary to all experience: who will work the harder, the man without hope or even a half-expectation, or one who is sure that success will crown his labors.

10. By arguing that our doctrine *makes "rewards" meaningless*. If it be God who preserves us, then there is no room left for the recognition of our fidelity or owning of our efforts. If there be no possibility of the saint falling away finally, then is his perseverance incapable of reward by God. Answer: Heaven is not something which the Christian earns by his obedience or merits by his fidelity, nevertheless, everlasting felicity is held before him as a gracious encouragement, as the goal of his obedience. Let it be recognized that the reward is not a legal one but rather one of bounty, in accord with the tenor of the Covenant of Grace, and all difficulty should vanish. Let this point be decided in the light of our Surety's experience: was it not impossible that Christ should fail of His obedience? yet did not God reward Him (Phi 2:9-11)! So, in our tiny measure, because of the "joy set before us" we despise our cross and endure suffering for Christ's sake.

And now a word by way of application. Since this article of Faith be so much criticised and condemned as a thing fraught with evil tendencies, let the Christian make it his studied business that his conduct gives the lie to the Arminian's objections. Let him make it his constant concern to "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things" (Tit 2:10), by taking heed to his ways, giving no licence to the flesh, attending to the Divine warnings, and rendering glad and full response to His exhortations. Let him show forth by his daily life that this preservation is a continuance in faith, in obedience, in holiness. Let him see to it that he evidences the reality of his profession and the spirituality of his creed by growing in grace and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. Let him earnestly endeavour to keep himself in the love of God, and to that end avoid everything calculated to chill the same, and thereby he will most effectually "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1Pe 2:15). —AWP

REWARDS

To the infidel much in the Scriptures seems so inconsistent and inharmonious that he charges them with “abounding in contradictions.” That there should be no variableness or shadow of turning with God, yet that He is frequently said to “repent”; that He claims to be omnipotent and invincible, yet complains “ye have set at nought all My counsel” (Pro 1:25); that He is love, yet abhors the wicked (Psa 5:6); that He is of tender mercy, yet has appointed an eternity of torment for all those whose names are not written in the book of life—to mention no others—appear to the sceptic as irreconcilable teachings. To the natural man the Christian life appears to be a mass of bewildering paradoxes. That the poor in spirit and those who mourn should be pronounced happy, that we have to be made fools in order to become wise, that it is when we are weak we are strong, that we must lose our life in order to save it (Mat 16:25), and that we are bidden to “rejoice with trembling” (Psa 2:11) transcend his comprehension. Yet none of these things present any insuperable difficulty unto those who are taught of God.

In like manner there is not a little in the teaching of Holy Writ which perplexes the theologian. As he studies and ponders its declarations, one doctrine—for a time, at least—seems to clash with another. If God has predestinated whatsoever cometh to pass, then what room is left for the discharge of human responsibility and free agency? If the Fall has deprived man of all spiritual strength, then how can he be held blameworthy for failing to perform spiritual duties? If Christ died for the elect only, then how can He be offered freely to “every creature”? If the believer be Christ’s “freeman,” then why is he required to take upon him His “yoke”? If he has been set at “liberty” (Gal 5:1) then how can he be “under the Law” (1Co 9:21). If the believer be preserved by God, then how can his own perseverance be necessary in order to the attainment of everlasting bliss? if he be secure, how can he be in danger? If he has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, why does he so often have occasion to cry “O wretched man that I am”? If sin does not have dominion over him, why do “iniquities prevail against” him (Psa 65:3)? Real problems are these.

We have commenced this article thus because the subject which is here to engage our attention seems to many to clash with other articles of the Faith. In ordinary speech the word “reward” signifies the recognition and requital of a meritorious performance, the bestowment of something to which a person is justly entitled. But what can the creature merit at the hands of the Creator, to what—save disapprobation and punishment—is a sinful creature entitled from a holy God? If salvation be “by grace” and eternal life is a “free gift” then what place is left for the recompensing of human effort? Yet whatever difficulties may be involved, the fact remains that Scripture has not a little to say about God’s rewarding the obedient and crowning the overcomer. The Dispensationalists (among them most of the so-called “Fundamentalists”) have realized there is a knot here, but instead of patiently seeking to untie they have summarily cut it, by asserting that rewards have a place only under the Legal Dispensation and are entirely excluded from the Age of Grace; yet the very Epistles which, as they allow, belong to the present Era, contain many passages postulating “rewards.” Verily, “the legs of the lame are not equal” (Pro 26:7).

Our present subject is by no means a simple one, and certainly it is not suited for a novice to take up and descant upon. Not that the teaching of Scripture thereon is at all obscure or hard to be understood, but rather that much wisdom is needed in the *handling of it*, so as to avoid conveying false impressions, weakening the force of other articles of the Faith, and failing to preserve the balance of the Truth. Very little attention was given to the subject of Divine rewards either by the Reformers or the Puritans (less by the latter than the former)—probably they felt that most of their energies needed to be devoted unto counteracting the evil leaven of Romanism, with its strong emphasis upon creature “merits” and salvation by works. Yet in avoiding one error there is always the danger of going to the opposite, and even where that is avoided, it is usually at the price of depriving God’s children of some portion of their needed and Divinely-provided Bread. Whatever be the explanation, the fact remains that our present theme is a much-neglected one for comparatively little has been said or written upon it. We are therefore the more cast back upon God for help.

The servant of God must not suffer the fear of man to muzzle him, as he will if he deems it wisest to remain silent on the subject lest he be charged with “leanings towards Romanism”: *their* very perversion of this truth renders it all the more necessary and urgent that *he* should give a plain and positive exposition of the same. On the other hand, the fact that Papists have so grievously wrested it should warn him that great care needs to be exercised in the way he presents it. He needs to make it crystal clear that it is utterly impossible to bring God under obligation to us or make Him in any wise our Debtor. In like manner it must be

shown that the creature cannot acquire any merit by the most self-sacrificing or benevolent deeds he performs. By so doing he will preclude the laying of any foundation for pharisaic pride. Nevertheless, he must see to it that he does not so whittle away the passages holding up "rewards" to believers, as to render them meaningless and valueless, for they are among the motives, encouragements, incentives, and consolations which God sets before His people.

In a brief and incidental statement upon this doctrine Calvin beautifully preserved the balance when in his "Institutes" (bk. 3, chap. 15) he said: "The Scripture shows *what* all our works are capable of meriting, when it represents them as unable to bear the Divine scrutiny, because they are full of impurity; and in the next place, what would be merited by the perfect observance of the Law, if this could anywhere be found, when it directs us 'when ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants' (Luk 17:10), because we shall not have conferred any favour on God, but only have performed the duties incumbent on us, for which no thanks are due. Nevertheless, the good works which the Lord has conferred on us, He denominates our own, and declares that He will not only accept, but also reward them. It is our duty to be animated by so great a promise, and to stir up our minds that we 'be not weary in well doing' (2Th 3:13) and to be truly grateful for so great an instance of Divine goodness.

"It is beyond a doubt, that whatever is laudable in our works proceeds from the grace of God, and that we cannot properly ascribe the least portion of it to ourselves. If we truly and seriously acknowledge this truth, not only all confidence, but likewise all idea of merit, immediately vanishes. We, I say, do not, like the sophists, divide the praise of good works between God and man, but we preserve it to the Lord complete, entire, and uncontaminated. All that we attribute to man is, that those works which were otherwise good are tainted and polluted by impurity. For nothing proceeds from the most perfect man which is wholly immaculate. Therefore let the Lord sit in judgment on the best of human actions, and He will indeed recognize in them His own righteousness, but man's disgrace and shame. Good works, therefore, are pleasing to God, and not unprofitable to the authors of them; and they will moreover receive the most ample blessings from God as their reward: not because they merit them, but because the Divine goodness has freely appointed them this reward." Let us attempt to offer some amplification of these excellent remarks.

First, no creature is rewarded by God because he justly deserves what is bestowed upon him, as a hired labourer who has performed his duty is entitled to the wage he receives. For, in this sense, even the angels in heaven are incapable of a reward: according to strict justice, they merit no favour. They are no hirelings, for God has a natural, original, undisputed right in them, as much as He has in the sun, moon and stars; and these, therefore, deserve to be paid for their shining, as much as the angels do for their service. If the angels love God it is no more than He infinitely deserves. Moreover, the angels do not profit God, and so lay Him under no obligation, any more than the birds profit the risen sun by their morning songs or render that luminary under obligation to shine all day upon them. "Can a man be profitable unto God as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous? or is it gain to Him that thou makest thy ways perfect?" (Job 22:2, 3).

It is most essential that this should be insisted upon, more especially in these days, that the Most High may be accorded His due place in our thoughts, His awful majesty, exalted independency and self-sufficiency preserved in their integrity. That the creature may be allotted his proper place: as being not only a creature, but as less than nothing in the sight of Him that gave him being and is pleased to maintain his existence. That the axe may be laid at the very root of self-righteousness. Papists are far from being alone in indulging the flesh-pleasing conceit that even a fallen and sinful creature is capable of performing meritorious deeds, which entitle him to favourable regard by the Lord God. Unless Divine grace has given our pride its death-wound, every one of us secretly cherishes the belief—though we may not be honest enough to openly avow it—that we deserve a reward for our good works; and hence we are apt to think that God would be very hard and severe, if not cruel and unjust, were He to take no notice of our *best* endeavours and damn us because of our sins. "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and Thou seest not?" (Isa 58:3).

But, second, The fact remains that Scripture abounds in declarations that God has promised to reward the fidelity of His people and compensate them for the sufferings they have endured in His service. "The recompense of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him" (Pro 12:14). "Whoso despiseth the Word shall be destroyed, but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded" (Pro 13:13). "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Mat 5:11,12). "His Lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many" (Mat 25:23). "When thou makest a feast call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee, for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just"

(Luk 14:13,14). "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1Co 3:8). "Whatsoever good things any man doeth the same shall he receive of the Lord" (Eph 6:8). Now these, and all similar passages, must be allowed their legitimate force and given a due place in our minds and hearts.

The principal difficulty which this subject presents to the thoughtful Christian is, What have I done which is meet for reward? and even though I had, how could reward consist with free grace? The solution to this problem is found in noting the grounds on which God bestows rewards. First, in order to manifest His own excellencies. It is in His office as moral Governor that He exercises this function, in which office He evidences His holiness, goodness and benevolence, as well as His sovereignty and justice. As the Ruler of all it becomes Him to manifest His approbation of righteousness, to put honour upon virtue, and to display the bountifulness of His nature. Though according to strict justice the angels in Heaven deserve nothing at His hands, yet God is pleased to reward their sinless obedience in testimony of His approbation of their persons and service. God rewards them not because they do Him any good, nor because they are entitled to anything from him, but because He delights in that which is amiable and because He would demonstrate to the universe that He is a Friend of all that are morally excellent, He liberally recompenses them. Since they love Him with all their hearts and strength, He deems it fitting that they should be made eternally blessed in the enjoyment of Himself.

Second, in the case of His people who fell in Adam and who have also themselves sinned and come short of the glory of God, they neither merit anything good at His hands, nor is it fitting that their persons and conduct—considered merely as they are in themselves—should be approved; nay, so much corruption still indwells them and so much impurity is attached to all that proceeds from them, that the Divine Law condemns them. Thus it must be on quite a different ground that God considers them suited to reward. What that is, the Gospel of the grace of God makes known. It is on account of the believer's interest in the righteousness and worthiness of *Christ* that his person and performances are accepted and peculiar favours are shown unto and bestowed upon him. He is "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph 1:6), and his consecration (Rom 12:1), his gifts or benevolences (Phi 4:18) and his worship are "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1Pe 2:5); yea, his prayers ascend up before God only because the "much incense" of Christ's merits is added to them (Rev 8:3,4).

Third, in showing His approval of the service of His saints God is, at the same time, owning the Spirit's work in them, for it is by His gracious operations and power that they are enabled to perform such service. Thus far all is plain and simple: it is when the good works which God rewards are viewed as the saints' own that many are likely to encounter difficulty. But that difficulty is greatly relieved if it be definitely understood that God's rewarding of our efforts is solely a matter of *bounty* on His part, and not in any wise because we have rendered a *quid pro quo* and have earned the recompense. The reward bestowed upon us is not an acknowledgement that the same was due us by way of debt, but rather is the reward itself given out of pure and free grace. If an earthly parent promises his child the gift of a new Bible when he has correctly memorized the Ten Commandments, that child did not bring his parent under obligation nor did he merit the book: the book is freely given by way of bounty, yet by constituting it a "reward" or "prize" for an effort of memory it became an incentive and inducement to the child to succeed in his task.

Scripture itself makes the distinction between rewards of justice and rewards of bounty, yea it shows how a thing may be, at the same time, *both* a "free gift" and a "reward." "Now to him that worketh [i.e. earns, so that he has ground to be self-complacent, see v 2] is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (Rom 4:4), which certainly signifies there are two very different kinds of reward, or rather, that they are bestowed on radically different grounds. That a thing may be at the same time both a free gift and a reward appears by a comparison of Matthew 5:46 and Luke 6:32. In the former Christ asks, "For if ye love them which love you, what *reward* have you?" but in the latter "For if ye love them that love you, what *thank* have you?"—the Greek word ("charis") here rendered "thank" signifies "favour," being translated "grace" more than one hundred times. Clearer still is Colossians 3:22-24: "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh...fearing God...knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance"—what can be freer or more unearned than an "inheritance"? yet the eternal inheritance is here styled a "reward" as an incentive to obedience unto God.

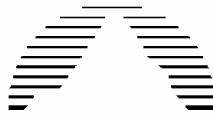
The same inheritance which is called a reward in Colossians 3:24 is designated "the purchased possession" in Ephesians 1:14—purchased for the saints by Christ. In like manner, in Romans 6:22 we read "Being now made free from sin and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the end [that at which you aim, that which will abundantly compensate your serving of God] everlasting life," yet in the very next verse that everlasting life is said to be "the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Just as the Saviour exhorted the Jews to "labour—not for the meat which perisheth, but—for that which en-

dureth unto everlasting life," yet He at once added "which the Son of man shall *give* unto you" (Joh 6:27). The same apostle who taught that the saints are "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph 1:6), hesitated not to say "wherefore we labour [or "endeavour"], whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him" (2Co 5:9); and though he insisted that "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8,9), he also exhorted his hearers to "labour therefore to enter into" the rest God has promised His people (Heb 4:11).

J. Owen said, "I grant that eternal life may be called the reward of perseverance, in the sense that Scripture uses that word." After stating it is procured neither as the deserving cause, nor proportioned unto the obedience of them by whom it is attained, but withal the free gift of God and an inheritance purchased by Jesus Christ, Owen declared it is "a reward by being a gracious encouragement as the end of our obedience." That the reward is not a proportioned remuneration or return for the duties performed and service rendered is clear from the words of Christ, when He declared that "whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (Mat 10:42). So also when Abraham had made enemies of the kings of Canaan by rescuing Lot out of their hands, and then refused to be enriched by the king of Sodom, what proportion was there between his actions and Jehovah's response, when He said to him "Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great Reward" (Gen 15:1)? There was a *connection* between the two things, but *no proportion*.

"Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal 6:7,8). The sorrows and joys of the future life bear a similar relation to what is wrought in this as the harvest does to the sowing, one being the consequence, the fruit, or reward of the other. There is a definite relation subsisting between sowing to the spirit and reaping everlasting life, between what is done unto Christ in this life and the joys of the life to come. This relation is just as *real* as that between sowing to the flesh and reaping corruption, despising and defying Christ and the torments of Hell, though it is not in all respects the same. —AWP

(D.V. to be continued.)



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