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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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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

THE SOLITARINESS OF GOD

The title of this article is perhaps not sufficiently explicit to indicate its theme. This is partly due to the fact that so few today are accustomed to meditate upon the personal perfections of God. Comparatively few of those who occasionally read the Bible are aware of the awe-inspiring and worship-provoking grandeur of the divine character. That God is great in wisdom, wondrous in power, yet full of mercy, is assumed by many to be almost common knowledge, but to entertain anything approaching an adequate conception of His being, His nature, His attributes, as these are revealed in Holy Scripture, is something which very, very few people, in these degenerate times, have attained unto. God is solitary in His excellency. “Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exo 15:11).

“In the beginning, God” (Gen 1:1). There was a time, if “time” it could be called, when God, in the unity of His nature (though subsisting equally in three divine Persons), dwelt all alone. “In the beginning, God.” There was no heaven, where His glory is now particularly manifested. There was no earth to engage His attention. There were no angels to hymn His praises. There was no universe to be upheld by the word of His power. There was nothing, no one, but God—and that not for a day, a year, or an age, but “from everlasting.” During a past eternity, God was alone; self-contained, self-sufficient, self-satisfied, in need of nothing. Had a universe, had angels, had human beings been necessary to Him in any way, they also had been called into existence from all eternity. The creating of them, when He did, added nothing to God essentially. He changes not (Mal 3:6), therefore, His essential glory can be neither augmented nor diminished.

God was under no constraint, no obligation, no necessity to create. That He chose to do so was purely a sovereign act on His part, caused by nothing outside Himself, determined by nothing but His own good pleasure—for He “worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11). That He did create was simply for His *manifestative* glory. Do some

of our readers imagine that we have gone beyond what Scripture warrants? Then our appeal shall be to the law and the testimony, “Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever; and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted *above all blessing and praise*” (Neh 9:5). God is no gainer even from our worship. He was in no need of that external glory of His grace which arises from His redeemed, for He is glorious enough in Himself without that. What was it that moved Him to predestinate His elect to the praise of the glory of His grace? It was, as Ephesians 1:5 tells us, “According to the good pleasure of His will.”

We are well aware that the high ground we are here treading is new and strange to almost all of our readers, for that reason, it is well to move slowly. Let our appeal again be to the Scriptures. At the end of Romans 11, where the apostle brings to a close his long argument on salvation by pure and sovereign grace, he asks, “For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?” (Rom 11:34-35). The force of this is—It is impossible to bring the Almighty under obligation to the creature. God gains nothing from us. “If thou be righteous, what givest thou *him*? or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man” (Job 35:7-8), but it certainly cannot affect God, who is all-blessed *in Himself*. “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants” (Luk 17:10)—our obedience has profited nothing.

Nay, we go farther: our Lord Jesus Christ added nothing to God in His essential being and glory, either by what He did or suffered. True, blessedly and gloriously true, He *manifested* that glory of God *to us*, but He added naught to God. He Himself expressly declares so, and there is no appeal from His words, “My goodness extendeth not to thee” (Psa 16:2). The whole of that psalm is a psalm of Christ. Christ’s goodness or righteousness reached unto His saints in the earth (Psa 16:3), but God was high above and beyond it all, God only is “the Blessed One” (Mar 14:61, Gr.).

It is perfectly true that God is both honoured and dishonoured by men, not in His essential being, but in His official character. It is equally true that God has been “glorified” by creation, by providence, and by redemption. This we do not and dare not dispute for a moment. But all of this has to do with His manifestative glory and the recognition of it by us. Yet, had God so pleased, He might have continued alone for all eternity, *without making known* His glory unto creatures. Whether He should do so or not was determined solely by His own will. He was perfectly blessed in Himself before the first creature was called into being. And what are all the creatures of His hands *unto Him* even now? Let Scripture again make answer, “Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as *nothing*; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?” (Isa 40:15-18). *That* is the God of Scripture. Alas, He is still “the *unknown* God” (Act 17:23) to the heedless multitudes. “It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers: that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: that bringeth the princes to nothing: he maketh the judges of the

earth as vanity” (Isa 40:22-23). How vastly different is the God of Scripture from the “god” of the average pulpit!

Nor is the testimony of the New Testament any different from that of the Old—how could it be seeing that both have one and the same Author? There too we read, “Which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and *only* potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords: who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see; to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen” (1Ti 6:15-16). Such a One is to be revered, worshipped, adored. He *is* solitary in His majesty, unique in His excellency, peerless in His perfections. He sustains all, but is Himself independent of all. He gives to all, but is enriched by none.

Such a God cannot be found out by searching; He can be known only as He is *revealed* to the heart by the Holy Spirit through the Word. It is true that creation demonstrates a Creator, and that, so plainly, men are “without excuse,” yet we still have to say with Job, “Lo, these are parts of his ways; but *how little* a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?” (Job 26:14). The so-called argument from design, by well-meaning “apologists,” has, we believe, done much more harm than good, for it has attempted to bring down the great God to the level of finite comprehension and thereby has lost sight of His solitary excellence.

Analogy has been drawn between a savage finding a watch upon the sands, and from a close examination of it, he infers a watchmaker. So far so good. But attempt to go farther. Suppose that savage sits down on the sand and endeavours to form to himself a conception of this watchmaker, his personal affections and manners, his disposition, acquirements, and moral character—all that goes to make up a personality. Could he ever think or reason out a real man—the man who made the watch—so that he could say, “I am acquainted with him”? It seems trifling to ask such questions, but is the eternal and infinite God so much more within the grasp of human reason? No, indeed, the God of Scripture can be known only by those to whom He *makes Himself known*.

Nor is God known by the intellect. “God is a Spirit” (Joh 4:24), and therefore can only be known spiritually. But fallen man is not spiritual, he is carnal. He is dead to all that is spiritual. Unless he is born again, supernaturally brought from death unto life, miraculously translated out of darkness into light, he cannot even see the things of God (Joh 3:3), still less apprehend them (1Co 2:14). The Holy Spirit has to shine in our hearts (not intellects) in order to give us “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). And even that spiritual knowledge is but fragmentary. The regenerated soul has to *grow* in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2Pe 3:18).

The principal prayer and aim of Christians should be that we “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and *increasing* in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10).

THE MANNA

Exodus 16

The food which God has provided for His people is His own blessed Word. But “the word” is used both of the Scriptures and of the Lord Jesus Christ. The two are most intimately related. “In the volume of the book,” said Christ, “it is written of me” (Psa 40:7), and again, “Search the scriptures...they are they which testify of me” (Joh 5:39). Almost everything that can be postulated of the one can be predicated of the other. But the chief value of the written Word is to set forth the perfections and bring us into communion with the incarnate Word. It is only as we feed upon *Christ* Himself that we truly feed upon the written Word. Therefore, in this article, we shall confine our attention to the manna typifying the person and perfections of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Beneath many a figure and behind innumerable shadows and symbols, the anointed eye may discern the glories of our blessed Lord. It should be our chief delight, as we read the Old Testament Scriptures prayerfully, to search for that which foreshadows Him of whom, “Moses and the prophets did write” (Joh 1:45). All doubt is removed as to whether or not the manna pointed to the incarnate Son by His own words in John 6:32-33. There we find the Saviour saying, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven...For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” May the Spirit of God now condescend to open our sin-blinded eyes as we earnestly desire to behold “wondrous things” (Psa 119:18) out of His perfect Law.

1. *The glory of the Lord was seen with the giving of the manna.* “And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, *the glory* of the LORD appeared in the cloud” (Exo 16:10). This is very striking indeed. It is the *first time* we read of the appearing of “the glory of the LORD,” not only in connection with Israel, but in Scripture. Marvellously accurate is this detail of our type. Not until the Son of God became incarnate was “the glory of the LORD” fully revealed. But when the eternal Word became flesh and tabernacled among men, then, as the beloved apostle declares, “We beheld his *glory, the glory* as of the only-begotten of the Father” (Joh 1:14). The “glory of God” is seen “*in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2Co 4:6).

2. *The manna came down from heaven.* “Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you” (Exo 16:4). The manna was not a product of this earth. It grew neither in the wilderness nor in Egypt. It was neither produced by human efforts nor manufactured by human skill. It descended from God. It was a gift from heaven come down to earth. So our Lord Jesus was no native product of this earth. As we read in Ephesians 4:10, “He that *descended* is the same also that ascended up far above all

heavens.” The first man (Adam) was of the earth, earthly; but the second Man (Jesus Christ) was “the Lord from heaven” (1Co 15:48).

3. *The manna was a free gift from God.* “And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat” (Exo 16:15). No charge was made for this manna. It was neither a wage to be earned nor a prize to be won, but was a token of God’s grace and love. No payment was demanded for it. It was without money and without price. “For God so loved the world, that *he gave his only begotten Son*, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Joh 3:16). Let us join with the apostle in saying, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2Co 9:15).

4. *The manna came right down where the Israelites were.* The Israelites were in immediate danger of starving to death, but as we have seen, God graciously made provision to supply their need, and now we would notice that no long journey had to be taken in order to secure that which would satisfy their hunger—the manna fell all around the camp. “And in the morning the dew lay *round about the host*. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing” (Exo 16:13-14). Here we have foreshadowed the blessed fact that, to the sinner conscious of his need and anxious to meet the Saviour, God says, “Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? [that is to bring Christ down from above]; or, Who shall descend into the deep? [that is to bring Christ again from the dead]. But what saith it? *The word is nigh thee*” (Rom 10:6-8). And out of this very nearness springs the sinner’s responsibility. All around each tent lay the manna. Something had to be done with it. It must either be gathered or trodden underfoot! Sinner, what are you doing with the Christ of God? Remember His searching words, “He that is not with me is against me” (Mat 12:30).

5. *The manna must be gathered by each individual.* “This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it *every man* according to his eating” (Exo 16:16). It is so spiritually. Receiving Christ (Joh 1:12) is a personal matter. No one can believe for another. There is no salvation by proxy. The Gospel of Christ is, “The power of God unto salvation to *every one that believeth*” (Rom 1:16), and “He that believeth not shall be damned” (Mar 16:16). Saving faith is that act whereby each awakened sinner appropriates Christ unto himself. It is true that Christ loved the Church as a whole, and gave Himself for it (Eph 5:25), but it is also the happy privilege of each member of that Church to say with the apostle Paul, “Who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*” (Gal 2:20). Have you, dear reader, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ?

6. *The manna met a daily need.* “Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate *every day*” (Exo 16:4). The manna which they gathered today would not suffice for tomorrow. They needed to obtain a fresh supply each day. It is just here that so many of the Lord’s people fail. We, too, need to feed upon Christ “*every day.*” Just as in the physical realm, the food which I ate yesterday will not nourish me today, so my past experiences and attainments will not meet the exigencies of the present. Christ must be kept constantly before the heart. “Give us day by day our *daily bread*” should be the prayer of every child of God.

7. *The manna was despised by those who were not the Lord’s people.* “And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting, and the children of Israel also wept again,

and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely: the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: but now our soul is dried away; there is nothing left at all, beside this manna, before our eyes” (Num 11:4-6). How these words remind us of the language of Isaiah 53:2—“And when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men.” The sin-blinded eyes of the natural man are incapable of perceiving the attractiveness of the Lord Jesus, His wondrous perfections, he is unable to discern. So, too, he sees not his deep need and how Christ alone is able to meet that need. Hence, he neither comes to Christ nor desires Him.

8. *The manna fell upon the dew, not upon the dust of the ground.* “And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it” (Num 11:9). Everything in the Scriptures has a spiritual meaning and application. What, then, is the significance of the above? Genesis 3:19 throws light on this passage—“Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” These words were spoken to fallen man and called attention to the corruption which sin had worked in him. “Dust,” here and onwards, speaks of *fallen humanity!* Now the manna *fell* not upon “the dust” but upon the dew. How clearly this foreshadowed the uniqueness and incorruptibility of our Lord’s humanity! The Word became flesh, but in His humanity the Lord Jesus shared not our corrupt nature. He took upon Him the form of a servant, but the body which was prepared for Him (Heb 10:5) belonged not to the “dust” of this earth. Before He was born, the angel announced unto His mother “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that *holy thing* which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luk 1:35).

9. *The manna was white in colour.* We read in Exodus 16:31, “And the house of Israel called the name thereof Manna: and it was like coriander seed, *white.*” This speaks of the spotless purity of our Lord as manifested outwardly in His daily walk. He “knew no sin” (2Co 5:21). “He was without sin” (Heb 4:15). “He did no sin” (1Pe 2:22). He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, *separate from sinners*” (Heb 7:26). In 1 Peter 1:19, we are told that He was a lamb “without blemish and without spot,” the former expression referring to the absence of outward pollution, the latter to the absence of inward defect. In His walk through this scene of corruption, He contracted no defilement. He only could touch the leper without becoming contaminated. He was without “spot,” pure white.

10. *The manna was sweet to the taste.* “And the taste of it was like wafers of honey” (verse 31). We need to go to the Song of Solomon for the interpretation of this. There we read, “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was *sweet* to my taste” (Song 2:3). And again, “His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as *sweet* flowers; his lips like lilies, dropping *sweet* smelling myrrh....His mouth is *most sweet*: yea, he is altogether lovely” (Song 5:13-16). The Lord grant that *our* “meditation of him shall be sweet” (Psa 104:34).

11. *The manna was ground and baked.* “And the people went about, and gathered it, and *ground* it in mills, or *beat* it in a mortar, and *baked* it in the pans, and made cakes of it” (Num 11:8). How this speaks to us of the sufferings of our blessed Lord! Such expressions as, “He groaned for their hardness of heart” (Mar 3:5). He “sighed” (Mar 8:12) because of their unbelief. He “wept” over Jerusalem (Luk 19:41), and many others, tell us of the

grinding of the manna. His treatment at the hands of the Jews and the brutal soldiers in Herod's judgment-hall show us the *beating* of the manna. On the cross, we behold Him subjected to the fierce fires of God's wrath. Thus we learn that the manna ground and beaten speaks of Him who was "*bruised* for our iniquities."

12. *The manna was preserved on the Sabbath.* "And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake today, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you *to be kept unto the morning*. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein" (verses 23-24). On the Sabbath day, the manna was preserved, and in this, too, it speaks of our blessed Lord. He is the only one who was preserved through death. He lay in the tomb on the Sabbath day and was "kept," for God had said, "Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One *to see corruption*" (Psa 16:10).

13. *The manna was laid up before the Lord.* "And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a pot, and put an omer of manna therein, and lay it up before the LORD" (verse 33). Concerning the Antitype, we read, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb 9:24). The golden pot in which manna was preserved tells us how God is glorified in Him whom it foreshadowed. "Although the Son of man is it that gives it to us, although it is humanity here that we know, and humanity in the form in which we shall not find it when we shall reach Him above, yet it is humanity in which God is glorified now, and so He will be glorified in it for ever. We shall find in the One upon the throne in glory, though no longer 'with a face marred more than any man's, and a form more than the sons of men'—the very One whose face was marred—the very One whose heart put Him into the sorrow in which we, of necessity, there learned to know Him thus" (Mr. Grant).

14. *The manna is called angels' food.* We read in Psalm 78:25, "Man did eat *angels' food*: He sent them meat to the full." The reference here is to the giving of the manna to Israel in the wilderness. The antitype of this is brought before us in several passages in the last book of Scripture. Christ not only feeds the souls of those of His people who are upon earth, but He also satisfies the hearts of celestial beings. The unfallen angels find their chief delight in feeding upon Christ. They worship Him, they serve Him, and they tell forth His praises.

15. *The manna was given in the night.* It was during the hours of darkness that the manna was sent to the Israelites. It is while they are asleep (picture of man's helplessness, for men are never so helpless as when asleep) that the bread was given from heaven. So, too, it was when we were in darkness and unbelief, impotent, "without strength" (Rom 5:6), that Christ came to us. Moreover, it will be at the close of this world's night, when, "The darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people" (Isa 60:2), that the Bread of God shall return and give life to the world.

16. *The manna is now hidden.* In Revelation 2:17, we read, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." So, too, Christ, of whom manna continually speaks, is now "hidden." Unseen by the eye of sense, He remains in heaven till the day when He shall be manifested before all the world. "We shall not only 'see' the heavenly

mana, but we shall 'eat' of it again. Fresher than ever will be our realization of His love and the perfection of His grace which is manifested to us. It is then in fact, when we come to be there, that we shall have the full enjoyment of all the experiences, which though they be experiences of the wilderness, yet wait for the land to which we are hastening to find their full interpretation and blessing. The meat *endures* to everlasting life. The meat still endures. We are enjoying that which shall be our joy for eternity" (Mr. Grant).

We are conscious that our treatment of this wonderful and precious type is most inadequate and unworthy. But if it leads our fellow believers to a more careful study of the written Word, and to a deeper longing to become better acquainted with the incarnate Word, our feeble efforts will be well repaid.

PROFITING FROM THE WORD

10. The Scriptures and Love

This article brings to a close the present series. In them, we have sought to point out some of the ways by which we may ascertain whether or not our reading and searching of the Scriptures are really being blessed to our souls. Many are deceived on this matter, mistaking an eagerness to acquire knowledge for a spiritual love of the truth (2Th 2:10), and assuming that addition to their store of learning is the same thing as growth in grace. A great deal depends upon the end or aim we have before us when turning to God's Word. If it be simply to familiarize ourselves with its contents and become better versed in its details, it is likely that the garden of our souls will remain barren. But if with the prayerful desire to be rebuked and corrected by the Word, to be searched by the Spirit, to conform our hearts to its holy requirements, then we may expect a divine blessing.

In the preceding articles, we have endeavoured to single out the vital things by which we may discover what progress we are making in personal godliness. Various criteria have been given, which it becomes both writer and reader honestly to measure himself by. We have pressed such tests as, Am I acquiring a greater hatred of sin, and a practical deliverance from its power and pollution? Am I obtaining a deeper acquaintance with God and His Christ? Is my prayer-life healthier? Are my good works more abundant? Is my obedience fuller and gladder? Am I more separated from the world in my affections and ways? Am I learning to make a right and profitable use of God's promises, and so delighting myself in Him that His joy is my daily strength. Unless I can truthfully say that these are (in some measure) my experience, then, it is greatly to be feared that my study of the Scriptures is profiting me little or nothing.

It hardly seems fitting that these articles should be concluded until one has been devoted to the consideration of Christian love. The extent to which this spiritual grace is, or is not, being cultivated and regulated affords another index to the measure in which my perusal of God's Word is helping me spiritually. No one can read the Scriptures with any measure of attention without discovering how much they have to say about love, and

therefore, it behoves each one of us prayerfully and carefully to ascertain whether or not his or her love be really a spiritual one, and whether it be in a healthy state and is being exercised aright.

The subject of Christian love is far too comprehensive to consider all its varied phases within the compass of a single paper. Properly, we should begin with contemplating the exercise of our love toward God and His Christ, but as this has been at least touched upon in preceding articles, we shall now waive it. Much, too, might be said about the natural love which we owe to our fellow men, who belong to the same family as we do, but there is less need to write thereon than upon what is now before our mind. Here we propose to confine our attention to spiritual love unto the brethren, the brethren of Christ.

1. We profit from the Word when we perceive *the great importance of Christian love.*

Nowhere is this brought out more emphatically than in 1 Corinthians 13. There the Holy Spirit tells us that (1) though a professing Christian can speak fluently and eloquently upon divine things, and has not love, he is like metal, which, though it makes a noise when struck, is lifeless. (2) That though he can prophesy, understand all mysteries and knowledge, and has faith which brings miracles to pass, but be lacking in love, he is spiritually a nonentity. Yea, (3) that though he be so benevolent as to give all his worldly possessions to feed the poor, and yield his body to a martyr's death, and have not love, it profits him nothing. How high a value is here placed upon love, and how essential for me to make sure I possess it!

Said our Lord, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Joh 13:35). By Christ's making it the badge of Christian discipleship, we see again the great importance of love. It is an essential test of the genuineness of our profession. We cannot love Christ unless we love His brethren, for they are all bound up in the same "bundle of life" (1Sa 25:29) with Him. Love to those whom He has redeemed is a sure evidence of spiritual and supernatural love to the Lord Jesus Himself. Where the Holy Spirit has wrought a supernatural birth, He will draw forth that nature into exercise, He will produce in the hearts and lives and conduct of the saints supernatural graces, one of which is loving each other for Christ's sake.

2. We profit from the Word when we learn to detect the *sad perversions of Christian love.*

As water will not rise above its own level, so the natural man is incapable of understanding, still less appreciating, that which is spiritual (1Co 2:14). Therefore, we should not be surprised when unregenerate professors mistake human sentimentality and carnal pleasantries for spiritual love. But sad is it to see some of God's own people living on so low a plane that they confuse human amiability and affability with the queen of the Christian graces. While it is true that spiritual love is characterized by meekness and gentleness, yet is it something very different from and vastly superior to the courtesies and kindnesses of the flesh.

How many a doting father has withheld the rod from his children under the mistaken notion that real affection for them and the chastising of them were incompatible. How many a foolish mother, who disdained all corporal punishment, has boasted that "love"

rules in her home. One of the most trying experiences of the writer, in his extensive travels, has been to spend a season in homes where the children had been completely spoilt. It is a wicked perversion of the word "love" to apply it to such moral laxity and parental looseness. But this same pernicious idea rules the minds of many people in other connections and relations. If a servant of God rebukes their fleshly and worldly ways, if he presses the uncompromising claims of God, he is at once charged with being "lacking in love." Oh, how terribly are multitudes deceived by Satan on this important subject!

3. We profit from the Word when we are taught the *true nature of Christian love*.

Christian love is a spiritual grace abiding in the souls of the saints, alongside of faith and hope (1Co 13:13). It is a holy disposition wrought in them when they are regenerated (1Jo 5:1). It is nothing less than the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). It is a righteous principle which seeks the highest good of others. It is the very reverse of that principle of self-love and self-seeking which is in us by nature. It is not only an affectionate regard of all who bear the image of Christ, but also a powerful desire to promote their welfare. It is not a fickle sentiment which is easily offended, but an abiding dynamic which "many waters" of cold indifference or "floods" of disappreciation can neither quench nor drown (Song 8:7). Though coming far short in degree, it is the same in essence as His of whom we read, "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (Joh 13:1).

There is no safer and surer way of obtaining a right conception of the nature of Christian love than by making thorough study of its perfect exemplification in and by the Lord Jesus. When we say a "thorough study," we mean taking a comprehensive survey of *all* that is recorded of Him in the four Gospels, and not limiting ourselves to a few favourite passages or incidents. As this is done, we discover that His love was not only benevolent and magnanimous, thoughtful and gentle, unselfish and self-sacrificing, patient and unchanging, but many other elements also entered into it. Love could deny an urgent request (Joh 11:6), rebuke His mother (Joh 2:4), use a whip (Joh 2:15), severely upbraid His doubting disciples (Luk 24:25), and denounce hypocrites (Mat 23:13-33). Love can be stern (Mat 16:23), yea, angry (Mar 3:5). Spiritual love is a *holy* thing. It is faithful to God. It is uncompromising toward all that is evil.

4. We profit from the Word when we discover that Christian love is a *divine communication*.

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1Jo 3:14). "Love to the brethren is the fruit and effect of a new and supernatural birth, wrought in our souls by the Holy Spirit, as the blessed evidence of our having been chosen in Christ by the divine Father, before the world was. To love Christ and His, and our brethren in Him, is congenial to that divine nature He hath made us the partakers of by His Holy Spirit....This love of the brethren must be a peculiar love, such as none but the regenerate are the subjects of, and which none but they can exercise, or the apostle would not have so particularly mentioned it. It is such as those who have it not, are in a state of unregeneracy. So it follows, 'He that loveth not his brother abideth in death'" (S. E. Pierce, 1746-1829).

Love for the brethren is far, far more than finding agreeable the society of those whose temperaments are similar to or whose views accord with my own. It pertains not to mere nature, but is a spiritual and supernatural thing. It is the heart being drawn out to those in whom I perceive *something of Christ*. Thus, it is very much more than a party spirit. It embraces all in whom I can see the image of God's Son. It is, therefore, a loving them for Christ's sake, for what I see of Christ in them. It is the Holy Spirit within attracting and alluring me with Christ indwelling my brethren and sisters. Thus, real Christian love is not only a divine gift, but is altogether dependent upon God for its invigoration and exercise. We need to pray daily that the Holy Spirit will call forth into action and manifestation, toward both God and His people, that love which He has shed abroad in our hearts.

5. We profit from the Word when we *rightly exercise* Christian love.

This is done not by seeking to please our brethren and ingratiate ourselves in their esteem, but when we truly seek their highest good. "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments" (1Jo 5:2). What is the real test of my personal love to God Himself? It is my keeping of His commandments (see Joh 14:15, 21, 24; 15:10, 14). The genuineness and strength of my love to God are not to be measured by my words, nor by the lustiness with which I sing His praises, but by my obedience to His Word. The same principle holds good in my relations with my brethren.

"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments." If I am glossing over the faults of my brethren and sisters, if I am walking with them in a course of self-will and self-pleasing, then I am *not* "loving" them. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him" (Lev 19:17). Love is to be exercised in a divine way, and never at the expense of my failing to love God. In fact, it is only when God has His proper place in my heart that spiritual love can be exercised by me toward my brethren. True spiritual love does not consist in gratifying them, but in pleasing God and helping them, and I can only *help* them in the path of God's commandments.

Petting and pampering each other is not brotherly love. Exhorting one another to press forward in the race that is set before us, and speaking words (enforced by example of our daily walk) which will encourage them to "look off unto Jesus," would be much more helpful. Brotherly love is to be a holy thing, and not a fleshly sentiment or a loose indifference as to the path we are treading. God's "commandments" are expressions of His love, as well as of His authority, and to ignore them, even while seeking to be kindly affectioned one to another, is not "love" at all. The *exercise* of love is to be in strict conformity to the revealed will of God. We are to love "in the truth" (3Jo 1).

6. We profit from the Word when we are taught the *varied manifestations of Christian love*.

To love our brethren and manifest the same in all kinds of ways is our bounden duty. But at no point can we do this more truly and effectually, and with less affectation and ostentation, than by having fellowship with them at the throne of grace. There are brethren and sisters in Christ, in the four corners of the earth, about the details of whose trials and conflicts, temptations and sorrows, I know nothing, yet I can express my love for them, and pour out my heart before God on their behalf, by earnest supplication and intercession.

In no other way can the Christian more manifest his affectionate regard toward his fellow pilgrims than by using all his interests in the Lord Jesus in their behalf, intreating His mercies and favours unto them.

“Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1Jo 3:17-18). Many of God’s people are very poor in this world’s goods. Sometimes they wonder why this is. It is a great trial unto them. One reason why the Lord permits this is that others of His saints may have their compassion drawn out and minister to their temporal needs from the abundance with which God has furnished them. Real love is intensely practical. It considers no office too mean, no task too humbling, where the sufferings of a brother can be relieved. When the Lord of love was here upon earth, He had thought for the bodily hunger of the multitude and the comfort of His disciples’ feet!

But there are some of the Lord’s people so poor that they have very little indeed to share with others. What, then, may they do? Why, make the spiritual concerns of all the saints their own. Interest themselves on their behalf at the throne of grace. We know by our own cases and circumstances what the feelings, sorrows, complaints of other saints must be the subjects of. We know from sad experience how easy it is to give way to a spirit of discontent and murmuring. But we also know how, when we have cried unto the Lord for His quieting hand to be laid upon us, and when He has brought some precious promise to our remembrance, what peace and comfort have come to our heart. Then, let us beg Him to be equally gracious to all His distressed saints. Let us seek to make their burdens our own, and weep with them that weep, as well as rejoice with them that rejoice. Thus shall we express real love for their persons in Christ by intreating their Lord and our Lord to remember them with everlasting kindness.

This is how the Lord Jesus is now manifesting *His* love to His saints, “He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). He makes their cause and care His own. He is intreating the Father on their behalf. None is forgotten by Him. Every lone sheep is borne upon the heart of the Good Shepherd. Thus, by expressing our love to the brethren in daily prayers for the supply of their varied needs, we are brought into fellowship with our great High Priest. Not only so, but the saints will be endeared to us thereby. Our very praying for them as the beloved of God will increase our love and esteem for them as such. We cannot carry them on our hearts before the throne of grace without cherishing in our own hearts a real affection for them. The best way of overcoming a bitter spirit to a brother who has offended is to be much in prayer for him.

7. We profit from the Word when we are taught the *proper cultivation of Christian love*.

Space will permit us to suggest only one or two rules for this. First, recognizing at the outset that, just as there is much in you (in me) which will severely try the love of the brethren, so there will be not a little in them to test our love. “*Forbearing* one another in love” (Eph 4:2) is a great admonition on this subject which each of us needs to lay to heart. It is surely striking to note that the very first quality of spiritual love named in 1 Corinthians 13 is that it, “*suffereth* long” (verse 4).

Second, the best way to cultivate any virtue or grace is to *exercise* it. Talking and theorizing about it avails nothing, unless it be carried into action. Many are the complaints heard today about the littleness of the love which is being manifested in many places. That is all the more reason why I should seek to set a better example! Suffer not the coldness and unkindness of others to dampen your love, but “overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21). Prayerfully ponder 1 Corinthians 13 at least once a week.

Third, above all, see to it that your own heart basks in the light and warmth of God’s love. Like begets like. The more you are truly occupied with the unwearying, unfailing, unfathomable love of Christ to you, the more will your heart be drawn out in love to those who are His. A beautiful illustration of this is found in the fact that the particular apostle who wrote most upon brotherly love was he who leaned upon the Master’s bosom. The Lord grant all requisite grace to both reader and writer (than whom none more needs to heed them) to observe these rules, to the praise of the glory of His grace, and to the good of His dear people.

COMING TO CHRIST

Part 3

We trust that sufficient has been said in the previous articles to make clear unto every Christian reader that the saving “coming to Christ” of a poor sinner is neither a physical nor a mental act, but is wholly spiritual and supernatural, that that act springs not from human reason or human will-power, but from the secret and efficacious operations of God the Spirit. We say clear unto “the Christian reader,” for we must not expect the unregenerate to perceive that of which they have no personal experience. The distinction pointed out in the second half of the last article (the whole of which may well be carefully re-read) between a sound intellectual knowledge of Christ and a vital and transforming knowledge of Him, between knowing Christ as He is set forth in the Scriptures and as He is divinely revealed in us (Gal 1:16), is not one which will appeal to the carnal mind. Rather is it one which will be contemptuously rejected. But instead of being surprised at this, we should expect it.

Were our last article sent to the average “fundamentalist” preacher or “Bible teacher,” and a request made for his honest opinion of it, in all probability, he would say that the writer had lapsed into either “mysticism” or “fanaticism.” Just as the religious leaders of Christ’s day rejected His spiritual teaching, so the “champions of orthodoxy,” those who boast so loudly that *they* are faithfully and earnestly contending for the faith, will not receive the humbling and searching messages of Christ’s servants today. The substance of this article would be ridiculed by them. But their very ridicule only serves to demonstrate the solemn truth of 1 Corinthians 2:14, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him.” These words have puzzled some who

have thoughtfully pondered them, for they do not seem to square with the patent facts of observation.

We have personally met the most conscienceless men—untruthful, dishonest, not scrupling to use tactics which many a non-professor would scorn—who, nevertheless, ardently proclaimed the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, the deity of Christ, salvation by grace alone. We have had personal dealings with men whose hearts were filled with covetousness, and whose ways were worldly almost to the last degree, yet who tiraded against “modernism” and “evolutionism,” etc., and “faithfully preached” the virgin birth and the blood of Christ as the sinner’s only hope. That these men are “natural” or “carnal,” that is unregenerate, is plain and unmistakable if we measure them by the infallible rule of Holy Writ; it would be not only a contradiction in terms, but *blasphemy*, to say such had been made by God, “new creatures in Christ.” Nevertheless, so far from the foundation truths of Scripture being “foolishness” unto these unregenerate characters, they warmly endorse and ardently propagate them.

But what has been said above *does not* clash, in the slightest degree, with 1 Corinthians 2:14, when that verse be rightly read and understood. Let it be carefully noted that it does not say the “things of *God* are foolishness” unto the natural man. Had it done so, the writer had been at a complete loss to explain it. No, it declares that the “things of *the Spirit of God*” are foolishness, and what has been said above only serves to illustrate the minute accuracy of this verse. The “things of *God*” these men profess to believe. The “things of *Christ*” they appear valiantly to champion, but the “things of *the Spirit of God*,” they are personal strangers unto. And therefore, when His secret and mysterious work upon the souls of God’s elect is pressed upon them, they appear to be so much “foolishness” unto them—either “mysticism” or “fanaticism.” But to the renewed, it is far otherwise.

The Spirit’s supernatural operations in the implanting of faith in God’s elect (Col 2:12) produce a “new creation.” Salvation by faith is wrought through the Spirit’s working effectually with the Gospel. Then it is that He *forms* Christ in the soul (Gal 4:19), and lets in the Object of faith through the eye of faith, a real “image” of Christ being directly stamped upon the newly quickened soul, which quickening has given ability to discern Christ. Thus, Christ is “formed” in the heart, after the manner that an outward object is formed in the eye. When I say that I have a certain man or object in my eye, I do not mean that this man or object is in my eye *locally*—that is impossible. But they are in my eye *objectively*—I *see* them. So when it is said that Christ is “*formed* in us,” that Christ is “*in* us the hope of glory” (Col 1:27), it is not to be understood that He, who is now corporeally at the right hand of God, is *locally and substantially* formed in us. No, but that Christ at the right hand of God, the substance and *object* of faith, is by the Spirit let in from above, so that the soul sees Him by the eye of faith, exactly as He is represented in the Word. So Christ is “formed” in us, and thus He “dwells in our hearts by faith” (Eph 3:17).

What we have endeavoured to set forth above is beautifully adumbrated in the lower and visible world. It is indeed striking to discover how much of God’s spiritual works are shadowed out in the material realm. If our minds were but more spiritual, and our eyes engaged in a keener lookout, we should find signs and symbols on every side of the invisible realities of God. On a sunshiny day, when a man looks into clear water, he sees

there a face (his own), formed by representation, which directly answers to the face outside and above the water. There are not two faces, but one, original and yet represented. But only one face is seen, casting its own single image upon the water. So it is in the soul's history of God's elect, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, *are changed into the same image* from glory to glory, even *as by the Spirit of the Lord*" (2Co 3:18). Oh, that His image in us may be more evident to others. We are now ready to turn to

III. With our affections

"All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me," (Joh 6:37) declared the Lord Jesus. He who, before the foundation of the world, gave the *persons* of His people unto Christ, now gives them, in regeneration, a *heart* for Christ. The "heart" includes the affections as well as the understanding. In our last article, we pointed out how that no man will (or can) "come to Christ" while ignorant of Him. It is equally true that no man will (or can) "come to Christ" while his affections are alienated from Him. Not only is the understanding of the natural man shrouded in total darkness, but his heart is thoroughly opposed to God. "The carnal mind is enmity (not merely "at enmity," but "enmity itself") against God" (Rom 8:7), and "enmity" is something more than a train of hostile thoughts. It is the hatred of the affections themselves. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit makes a man a "new creature in Christ," He not only renews his understanding, but He radically changes the heart.

When faith gives us a sight of spiritual things, the heart is warmed with love to them. Note the order in Hebrews 11:13, where, in connection with the patriarch's faith in God's promises, we are told, "were persuaded of them, and *embraced* them," which is a term denoting great affection. When the understanding is renewed by the Spirit, then the heart is drawn unto Christ, with a tender desire for Him. When the Holy Spirit is pleased to make known in the soul the wondrous love of Christ to me, then love unto Him is begotten and goes out toward Him in return. Observe the order in 1 John 4:16, "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." The apostle places knowledge (not intellectual, but spiritual) before faith, and both before a union and communion with divine love. The light and knowledge of Christ and heaven which we have by tradition, education, hearing or reading never fires the affections. But when the love of God is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5), what a difference is produced!

Far too little emphasis has been placed upon this aspect of our subject. In proof of this assertion, weigh carefully the following question, Why is it that, "He that *believeth not* shall be damned," (Mar 16:16) is quoted a hundred times more frequently by preachers and tract-writers than, "If any man *love not* the Lord Jesus, let him be accursed" (1Co 16:22)? If we are properly to preserve the balance of truth, we must note carefully the manner in which the Holy Spirit has rung the changes on "believe" and "love" in the New Testament. Consider the following passages, "All things work together for good to them that [not trust, but] *love* God" (Rom 8:28). "Them that [not only believe, but] *love* Him" (1Co 2:9). "If any man *love* God, the same is known [or approved] of Him" (1Co 8:3). "A crown of

righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day: and not to me only, but unto all them that [not believe in, but] *love* His appearing" (2Ti 4:8). "The crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that *love* Him" (Jam 1:12). "Heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that *love* Him" (Jam 2:5). "He that *loveth not* knoweth not God; for God is love" (1Jo 4:8).

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (Joh 6:44). In our last article, we saw that this "drawing" consists, in part, of the Spirit's supernatural enlightenment of the understanding. It also consists in the Spirit's inclining the affections unto Christ. He acts upon sinners agreeably to their nature, not by external force, such as is used on an unwilling animal, but by spiritual influence or power moving their inward faculties. "I drew them with cords of a *man*, with bands of *love*" (Hos 11:4)—by rational conviction of their judgment, by showing them that there is infinitely more goodness and blessedness in Christ than in the creature or the sinful gratification of carnal desires, by winning their hearts to Christ, by communicating to them a powerful sense of His superlative excellency and complete suitability unto all their needs. To them that believe, "He is *precious*" (1Pe 2:7)—so precious that they are willing to part with the world and everything that they may "win Christ" (Phi 3:8).

As was shown at some length in the opening article, the affections of the natural man are alienated from God, wedded to the things of time and sense, so that he will not come to Christ. Though God's servants seek to charm him with the lovely music of the Gospel, like the adder, he closes his ear. It is as the Lord portrayed it in the parable of the great supper, "They all with one consent began to make excuse" (Luk 14:18), one preferring his lands, another his merchandise, another his social recreation. And nothing short of the almighty power and working of the Holy Spirit in the heart can break the spell which sin and Satan have cast over man, and turn his heart from perishing objects to an imperishable one. This He does in God's elect by His secret and invincible operations, sweetly working in and alluring them, by revealing Christ to them in the winsomeness of His persons and the infinite riches of His grace, by letting down His love into their hearts, and by moving them to lay hold of His kind invitations and precious promises.

Most blessedly is this represented to us in, "My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him" (Song 5:4). Here the door of the heart (Act 16:14), or more specifically, the "door of faith" (Act 14:27), is seen shut against Christ, and the object of His love loath and unwilling to rise and open to Him. But, though unwelcome, His love cannot be quenched, and He gently enters (He does not burst the door open!) uninvited. His "hand," opening the "door," is a figure of His efficacious grace removing every obstacle in the heart of His elect (cf. Act 11:21), and winning it to Himself. The effect of His gracious entry, by His Spirit, is seen in the, "and my bowels were moved for him," which is a figure of the stirring of the affections after Him (cf. Isa 63:15; Phile 1:12). For the thoughts of this paragraph, we are indebted to the incomparable commentary of John Gill (1697-1679) on the Song of Solomon.

What a miracle of grace has been wrought when the heart is truly turned from the world unto God, from self unto Christ, from love of sin unto love of holiness! It is this which is the fulfilment of God's covenant promise in Ezekiel 36:26, "A new heart also will

I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” There is no man who loves money so much, but that he is willing to part with it for that which he values more highly than the sum he parts with to purchase it. The natural man esteems material things more highly than he does spiritual, but the regenerated loves Christ more than all other objects besides, and this because he has been made a “new creature.” It is a spiritual love which binds the heart to Christ.

It is not simply a knowledge of the truth which saves, but a *love* of it which is the essential prerequisite. This is clear from 11 Thessalonians 2:10, “Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” Close attention must be paid unto those words or a wrong conclusion may be drawn. It is not a love *for* the truth, but a love *of* the truth. There are those who have the former, but are destitute of the latter. We have met Russellites, and have boarded with Christadelphians, who put many a real Christian to shame. People, who after a long day’s work, spent the whole evening in diligently studying the Bible. Nor was it to satisfy curiosity. Their zeal had lasted for years. Their Bible was as precious to them as “beads” or “rosary” are to a devout Romanist. So too there is a *natural* “love” for Christ, an ardent devotion for Him, which springs not from a renewed heart. Just as one reared among devout Romanists grows up with a deep veneration and genuine affection for the Virgin, so one carefully trained by Protestant parents, told from infancy that Jesus loves him, grows up with a real, but natural, love for Him.

There may be a historical faith in all the doctrines of Scripture where the power of them is never experienced. There may be a fleshly zeal for portions of God’s truth (as there was in the case of the Pharisees) and yet the heart not be renewed. There may be joyous emotions felt by a superficial reception of the Word (as there was in the stony-ground hearers—Mat 13:20), where the “root of the matter” (Job 19:28) be lacking. Tears may flow freely at the pathetic sight of the suffering Saviour (as with the company of women who bewailed Christ as He journeyed to the cross—Luk 23:27-28), and yet the heart be as hard as the nether millstone toward God. There may be a rejoicing in the light of God’s truth (as was the case with Herod—Mar 6:20), and yet hell never be escaped from.

Since, then, there is a love *for* the truth in contradistinction from a love *of* the truth, and a natural love for Christ, in contrast with a spiritual love of Him, how am I to be sure which mine is? We may distinguish between these “loves” thus. First, the one is partial, the other is impartial. The one esteems the doctrines of Scripture, but not the duties it enjoins—the promises of Scripture, but not the precepts—the blessings of Christ, but not His claims—His priestly office, but not His kingly rule. But not so with the spiritual lover! Second, the one is occasional, the other is regular. The former balks when personal interests are crossed, not so the latter. Third, the one is evanescent and weak, the other lasting and powerful. The former quickly wanes when other delights compete, and prevails not to control the other affections. The latter rules the heart and is strong as death. Fourth, the former betters not its possessor. The latter transforms the life.

That a saving “coming to Christ” *is* the affections being turned to and fixed upon Him may be further demonstrated from the nature of backsliding, which begins with the heart’s departure from Christ. Observe how this is traced to its real source in Revelation 2:4,

“Thou hast left [not *lost*] thy first *love*.” The reality and genuineness of our *returning* to Christ are evidenced by the *effects* which the workings of the understanding produce upon the affections. A striking example of this is found in Matthew 26:75, “And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.” That “remembrance” was not merely a historical one, but a gracious one—his heart was melted by it. So it ever is when the Holy Spirit works in and “renews” us. I may recall a past sin without being duly humbled thereby. I may “remember” Christ’s death in a mechanical and speculative way, without the affections being truly moved. It is only as the faculty of our understanding is quickened by the Holy Spirit that the heart is powerfully impressed.

GUIDANCE GUARANTEED

“And he shall direct thy paths” (Pro 3:6)

We come now to what is, in one sense, both the simplest and yet the most difficult clause of Proverbs 3:5-6. Paradoxical as it may sound, it is often the case that the simplest things are the most profound, and the profoundest things the simplest. What is simpler than the Gospel? “Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things” (Act 13:38-39)! And yet what is more profound? Does not the Gospel make known things which even “the angels desire to look into” (1Pe 1:12)? What is more profound than the truth of God’s sovereignty? As we seek to contemplate it, we are made to cry with the Psalmist, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psa 139:6). And yet what is, really, more simple and obvious? If God be *God* then He must be sovereign, high above all, supreme over all.

“And he shall direct thy paths” (Pro 3:6). This *is* the simplest part of our text as a whole, inasmuch as it is a plain and definite assurance given to all who meet and conform to the conditions named in the preceding clauses. This divine promise needs no analyzing or philosophizing about. It is presented for our faith to lay hold of and our hearts to rest upon. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” is plain enough. It needs to be received and obeyed, not discussed or reasoned about. But that is no plainer than if we, (1) “Trust in the LORD with all our hearts.” If we, (2) “Lean not unto our own understanding.” If we, (3) “Acknowledge the LORD in all our ways.” Then, most assuredly, He *shall* direct our paths.

The *need* for being “directed” by the Lord is real and pressing. The children of Adam are fallen and ruined creatures, “Alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18). The natural man is like a rudderless ship or a motor-car without a steering wheel. Scripture emphatically affirms, “The way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). True, it is otherwise with the Christian, for the Spirit of God indwells him, yet the “flesh” is still in him, too, and this world is a “dark place” (2Pe 1:19), a trackless desert. It

is not without reason that the Lord's people are termed "sheep," for no other creature is so apt to stray or has such a propensity to wander. Of old, God said concerning Israel, "Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet" (Jer 14:10). And this is recorded for our learning and warning.

The Hebrew word for "direct" means "to make straight." We are living in a world where everything is crooked. Sin has thrown everything out of joint, and in consequence, confusion worse confounded reigns all around us. Even the natural man, who is thoughtful and serious, is often bewildered by the conflicting opinions and theories concerning present-day life. Old standards are forsaken. The ways of our forefathers are looked upon as the product of an ignorant age. This is true of every realm.

How blessed, how comforting, how reassuring is the language of our text to the child of God! If I really desire to please the Lord, He will not allow me to remain in ignorance of His will, "He *shall* direct my paths." He will make clear to me the course of duty. But remember that this promise is *conditional*. It is given only to those who comply fully with the preceding admonitions. Scripture interprets Scripture. In the New Testament, we have a word parallel to Proverbs 3:5-6, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Joh 8:12). What does it signify to "follow" Christ? First, it means full confidence in Him, for I would not take as guide one I did not trust—trusting Him with all my heart. Second, it means completely resigning myself to His directions—leaning not unto my own understanding. Third, it means unqualified submission to Him—acknowledging Him in all my ways. Then, but only then, have I the divine assurance that I "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

As another has said, "A believer's course indicates where he is in his soul, and sooner or later exposes the motives that control him. It is pretty easy to see when a man has the Lord before him. You find him regulated by divine motives, and ordering his ways with reference to the will of God and the interests of Christ. He will not be occupied with guidance, but his whole course will evidence that his steps are ordered by the Lord. On the other hand, if a man be carnal and worldly, it will come out in his ways. He will have no divine judgment about things—no spiritual sensibilities or tastes—and though he may maintain a certain degree of outward correctness, it will be manifest that he is not guided by the Lord. It is in having to do with the Lord that we are enlightened and our spiritual intelligence is developed, so that we are enabled to discern the path that is pleasing to Him. God would guide us, as a rule, by forming our souls in the intelligence of His will, and thus enabling us to exercise a spiritual judgment about things.

"Many would like to have guidance without any reference to their spiritual condition, but this is never the Lord's way. I have often been amazed at devices to which even converted people will resort in a moment of perplexity. A favourite plan is to open the Bible haphazard or put a pin between the leaves, and read the text which happens to turn up. This savours more of witchcraft and superstition than of godliness. As we go on with the Lord, and become acquainted with His mind, our vision is cleared in a wonderful way" (C. A. Coates, 1862-1945).

Let us seek to add a few more words upon the *conditions* of divine guidance. The word “conditions,” in this connection, would be objected to by some, namely, hyper-Calvinists who deny human responsibility. Restricting themselves to the divine side of things, they have so lost the “balance” of truth that they are really “fatalists.” Confining all their thoughts to the fact that God has, from the beginning, mapped out the whole of our course, they see no need for being *exercised* in heart as to guidance, still less are they aware of “conditions” governing it. On the other hand, some are so much occupied with the *human* side of things, and dwell so exclusively upon Christians themselves being responsible for their walk, that divine fore-ordination has little or no place in their thoughts. These people need reminding of such passages as Proverbs 21:1; Romans 11:36; Ephesians 1:11.

Still others are confused when they hear of *both* sides, and are puzzled to know where the sovereignty of God ends and human responsibility begins in relation to our daily walk. Without attempting now to explore this great deep, let us humbly offer two remarks for prayerful consideration. First, whatever of good there is in our lives, unreservedly give God the glory for it. Whatever there is of sin, we must unqualifiedly take the blame unto ourselves. Second, learn to distinguish sharply between God *ordaining* our course, and God directing our paths. God *has* fore-ordained everything that comes to pass, but He does not, by direct agency, bring everything to pass. God has predestined that we should taste the bitter consequences of self-confidence and reap the awful sowings of self-will, in order to wean us from self and sin. But He does not, personally and immediately, lead us into such things; our own evil lusts are responsible for that.

That there *are* “conditions” which we must meet, if we are to enjoy God’s immediate ordering of our path, is clear not only from Proverbs 3:5-6 and John 8:12, but from many other Scriptures. Take the order of truth brought before us in that familiar twenty-third psalm: “He *leadeth* me beside the still waters,” (verse 2) is preceded by, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” There must be an implicit and complete resting in God’s authoritative Word (of which the “green pastures” are the figure) before I can count upon His “leading me.” So again, in the next verse, “He *leadeth* me in the paths of righteousness,” is preceded by, “He *restoreth* my soul.” Not until His grace brings me into right relationship, experimentally, with Himself is the “leading” given. How solemnly searching is this!

Again, in Psalm 25, which reveals so much on the subject of divine guidance, in verse 9 (where we have God’s response to the prayer of verses 4-5), we are told, “The meek [they who are subject to God’s will] will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.” So in verse 12, “What man is he that *feareth* the LORD? Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.” How searching is the verse which immediately precedes that oft-quoted (frequently lightly quoted, we fear) 105th verse in Psalm 119. It is only when, through God’s “precepts,” we get understanding, and by them, are made to hate “every false way,” that God’s Word becomes to us, experimentally, “a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path.”

“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shall go: I will guide thee with mine eye” (Psa 32:8). Here again, we have what is both blessed and searching. A person cannot guide another with his “eye” unless that other is near to him, and unless the

eyes of that other are steadfastly fixed upon him. The immediate context (Psa 32:6-7) speaks of subjection and confidence in God. If these be lacking, then we become, “as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle” (verse 9). Even then, the Lord, in His mercy, does not give us up. He keeps His hand on the reins, and uses *circumstances* to check, restrain and guide us. But this is a painful experience, when compared with the blessedness of being “guided by his eye.”

Yes, these *are* “*conditions*,” if we are to have God’s immediate guidance, and these “*conditions*” are summed up in Proverbs 3:5-6. If we exercise wholehearted trust in the Lord, lean not unto our own understandings (cease to be controlled or influenced by the dictates of “common sense”), acknowledge Him in *all* our ways (seek His permission, and have before us His glory in everything), then, He *shall* direct our paths. May the Lord, in His abounding grace, work in writer and reader “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13).

THE CHRISTIAN’S ARMOUR

Part 2 – Ephesians 6:10-18

The second part or piece of the Christian’s armour is mentioned in verse 14, “And having on the breastplate of righteousness.” First of all, notice the connecting, “And,” which intimates that there is a very close relation between the mind being girded with truth and the heart protected with the breastplate of righteousness. All of these seven pieces of armour are *not* so connected, but the “And” here, between the first two, denotes that they are inseparably united. Now, obviously, the breastplate of righteousness is that protection which we need for *the heart*. This verse is closely parallel to Proverbs 4:23, “Keep thine heart with all diligence,” understanding by the “heart,” the affections and conscience.

As there was a double reference in the word “truth,” first to the Word of God and second, to sincerity of spirit, so I believe, there is a double reference here in “the breastplate of *righteousness*.” I think it refers both to that righteousness which Christ wrought out for us and that righteousness which the Spirit works in us—both the righteousness which is imputed and the righteousness which is imparted—which is what we need if we are to withstand the attacks of Satan. We might compare 1 Thessalonians 5:8, “Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love.” I have been quite impressed of late in noting how frequently that word “sober” occurs in the epistles, either in its substantive or verbal form. Soberness is that which should characterize and identify the people of God. It is the opposite of that superficial flightiness which is one of the outstanding marks of worldlings today. It is the opposite of levity, and also of that feverish restlessness of the flesh by which so many are intoxicated religiously and every other way.

This second piece of armour, as I have said, is inseparably connected with the girdle of truth, for sincerity of mind and holiness of heart must go together. To put on the

breastplate of righteousness means to maintain the power of holiness over our affections and conscience. A verse that helps us to understand this is Acts 24:16, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and men." There you have an illustration of a man taking unto himself, putting on, the "breastplate of righteousness."

We pass on to the third piece of armour. "And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (Eph 6:15). This is perhaps the most difficult of the seven pieces of armour to understand and define, and yet, if we hold fast the first thought, that the Holy Spirit is using a figure of speech here, that the reference is to that which is internal rather than external, spiritual rather than material, and also that He is following a logical order, there should not be much difficulty in ascertaining what is meant by the sandals of peace. Just as the girdle of truth has to do with the *mind*, the breastplate of righteousness with the *heart*, so the shoes for the feet are a figure of that which concerns the *will*. At first sight, that may sound far-fetched, and yet if we will think for a moment, it should be obvious that what the feet are to the body, the will is to the soul. The feet carry the body from place to place, and the will is that which *directs* the activities of the soul. What the will decides, that is what we *do*.

Now the will is to be regulated by the peace of the Gospel. What is meant by that? This: In becoming reconciled to God and in having good will to our fellows, the Gospel is the means or instrument that God uses. We are told in Psalm 110:3, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." That means far more than that they shall be ready to hearken to and believe the glad tidings of the Gospel. There is brought over into the Gospel substantially everything which was contained in both the moral and ceremonial Law. The Gospel is not only a message of good news, but a divine commandment and rule of conduct. "For the time is come that judgment must [not "shall"—now, not in the future] begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that *obey not* the gospel of God?" (1Pe 4:17).

The Gospel requires us to deny ourselves, take up the cross daily, and follow Christ in the path of unreserved obedience to God. "Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" signifies that you must with alacrity and readiness respond to God's revealed will. The *peace* of "the gospel" comes from walking in subjection to its terms and by fulfilling the duties which it prescribes. Just so far as we are obedient to it, we experimentally enjoy its peace. Thus, this third piece of armour is for fortifying the will against Satan's temptations unto self-will and disobedience, and this, by subjection to the Gospel. Just as the feet are the members which convey the body from place to place, so the will directs the soul. And just as the feet must be adequately shod if we are to walk properly and comfortably, so the will must be brought into subjection unto the revealed will of God if we are to enjoy His peace. Let there be that complete surrender daily, the dedicating of ourselves to God, and then we will be impervious unto Satan's attacks and temptations to disobedience.

You will take notice when we come to the fourth piece of armour that the "and" is lacking. The first three were joined together, for that which is denoted by those figurative terms is inseparably linked together—the mind, the heart, the will. There you have the

complete inner man. "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Eph 6:16). I think the words, "Above all," have a double force. First, literally, understanding them as a preposition of place, meaning over all, shielding as a canopy, protecting the mind, the heart and the will. There must be faith in exercise if those three parts of our inner being are to be guarded. Second, "Above all" may be taken adverbially, signifying chiefly, pre-eminently, supremely. It is *an essential* thing that you should take the shield of faith, for Hebrews 11:6 tells us, "But without faith it is impossible to please him." Yes, even if there were sincerity, love, and a pliable will, yet without faith, we could not please Him. Therefore, "Above all" take unto you the shield of faith.

Faith is all in all in resisting temptation. We must be fully persuaded of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures if we are to be awed by their precepts and cheered by their encouragements. We will never heed properly the divine warnings or consolations unless we have explicit confidence in their divine authorship. The whole victory is here ascribed to *faith "above all."* It is not by the breastplate, helmet or sword, but by the shield of faith that we are enabled to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. It seems to be a general principle in the Spirit's arrangement of things in Scripture to put the most vital one in the centre. We have seven pieces of armour, and the shield of faith is the fourth. So in Hebrews 6:4-6, we have five things mentioned, and in the middle is "made partakers of the Holy Spirit."

Faith is the life of all the graces. If faith be not in exercise, love, hope, patience cannot be. Here we find faith intended for the defence of the whole man. The shield of the soldier is something he grips, and raises or lowers as it is needed. It is for the protection of his entire person. Now the figure which the Holy Spirit uses here in connection with Satan's attacks is taken from one of the devices of the ancients in their warfare, namely, the use of darts which had been dipped in tar and set on fire, in order to blind their foes. *That* is what lies behind the metaphor of "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." It has in view Satan's efforts to prevent our looking upward! When these darts were in the air, the soldiers had to bow their heads to avoid them, holding their shields above. And Satan is constantly seeking to prevent our looking upward.

The attacks of the devil are likened to "fiery darts," first, because of the *wrath* with which he shoots them. There is intense hatred in Satan against the child of God. Again, the very essence of his temptations is to *inflame* the passions and distress the conscience. He aims to kindle covetousness, to excite worldly ambition, to ignite our lusts. In James 3:6, we read, "The tongue is set on fire of hell"—that means the devil's "fiery darts" have affected it. Thirdly, his temptations are likened unto "fiery darts" because of *the end* to which they lead if not quenched. Should Satan's temptations be followed out to the end, they would land us in the lake of fire. The figure of "darts" denotes that his temptations are swift, noiseless, dangerous.

Now, taking the shield of faith means appropriating the Word and acting on it. The shield is to protect *the whole* person, wherever the attack be made, whether on spirit, or soul, or body. And there is that in the Word which is exactly suited unto each, but *faith* must lay hold of and employ it. Now, in order to use the shield of faith effectually, the

Word of Christ needs to dwell in us “richly” (Col 3:16). We must have right to hand a word which is pertinent for the particular temptation presented. For example, if tempted unto covetousness, we must use, “Lay not up for yourselves treasure on earth.” When solicited by evil companions, “If sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” If tempted to harshness, “Be kindly affectioned one to another.” It is because the *details* of Scripture have so little place in our meditations that Satan trips us so frequently.

Like most of the other terms used, “faith” here also has a double signification. The faith which is to be our “shield” is both an objective and a subjective one. It has reference, first, to the Word of God, without the authority of which, is ever binding upon us. It points, secondly, to our confidence in that Word, the heart going out in trustful expectation to the Author of it, and counting upon its efficacy to repulse the devil.

“And take the helmet of salvation” (Eph 6:17). This is the fifth piece of the Christian’s armour. First of all, we may note the link between the fourth and fifth pieces as denoted by the word, “And,” for this helps us to define *what* the “helmet of salvation” is. It is *linked with faith!* Hebrews 11:1 tells us, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for,” and if we compare 1 Thessalonians 5:8, we get a confirmation of that thought, “But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet the *hope* of salvation.” Here in Thessalonians, then, we have “hope” directly connected with “the helmet.” Incidentally, this verse is one of many in the New Testament which puts salvation in the future rather than in the past! Hope always looks forward, having to do with things to come, as Romans 8:25 tells us, “If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” Now faith and hope are inseparable. They are one in birth and one in growth, and we may add, one in decay. If faith languish, hope is listless.

By the helmet of salvation, then, I understand the heart’s expectation of the good things promised, a well-grounded assurance that God *will* make good to His people those things which His Word presents for future accomplishment. We might link up with this 1 John 3:3—Scriptural hope *purifies*. It delivers from discontent and despair. It comforts the heart in the interval of waiting. Satan is unable to get a Christian to commit many of the grosser sins which are common in the world, so he attacks along other lines. Often he seeks to cast a cloud of gloom over the soul or produce anxiety about the future. Despondency is one of his favourite weapons, for he knows well that, “The joy of the Lord” is our “strength” (Neh 8:10), hence, his frequent efforts to dampen our spirits. To repulse these, we are to “Take the helmet of salvation.” That is, we are to exercise *hope*—anticipate the blissful future, look forward unto the eternal rest awaiting us; look away from earth to heaven!

“And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:17). God has provided His people with an offensive weapon as well as defensive ones. At first sight that may seem to clash with what we said about Christians *not* being called upon to be aggressive against Satan, seeking to invade his territory and wrest it from him. But this verse does not clash to the slightest degree. 11 Corinthians 7:1 gives us the thought, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.” *That* is the active, aggressive side of the Christian’s warfare. We are not only to resist our lusts, but to subdue and overcome them.

It is significant to note *how late* the “sword of the Spirit” is mentioned in this list. Some have thought that it should have come first, but it is not mentioned until the sixth. Why? I believe there is a twofold reason. First, because all the other graces that have been mentioned are necessary to make a right use of the Word. If there is not a sincere mind and a holy heart, we shall only handle the Word dishonestly. If there is not practical righteousness, then we shall only be handling the Word theoretically. If there is not faith and hope, we shall only misuse it. All the Christian graces that are figuratively contemplated under the other pieces of armour must be in exercise *before* we can profitably handle the Word of God. Second, it teaches us that even when the Christian has attained unto the highest point possible in this life, he still needs *the Word*. Even when he has upon him the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, his feet shod with the shoes of the preparation of the Gospel of peace, and has taken unto himself the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation, he still needs the Word!

The last piece of armour is given in verse 18, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” *Prayer* is that which alone gives us the necessary strength *to use* the other pieces of armour! After the Christian has taken unto himself those six pieces, before he is thoroughly furnished to go forth unto battle and fitted for victory, he needs the help of his General. For this, the apostle bids us pray “always,” with all supplication in the Spirit. We are to fight upon our knees! Only prayer can keep alive the different spiritual graces which are figured by the various pieces of armour. “Praying always,” in *every* season—in times of joy as well as sorrow, in days of adversity as well as prosperity. Not only so, but “*Watching thereunto* with all perseverance.” That is one of the essential elements in prevailing prayer—persistence. Watch yourself that you do not let up, become slack or discouraged. Keep on! The eighteenth verse is as though the apostle said, “Forget not to seek unto *the God of* this ‘armour’ and make humble supplication for His assistance; for only He who has given us these arms can enable us to make a successful use of them.” Some have called it the, “All verse.” “Praying always with all prayer...with all perseverance, and supplication *for all saints*”—think not only of yourself, but also of your fellow soldiers who are engaged in the same conflict!

