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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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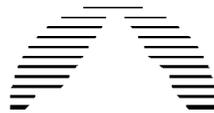
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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SUBMISSION TO GOD

“The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). When some painful loss or severe calamity befalls them, there are many who bemoan the fact that they do not have the resignation which was the patriarch’s—even under more extreme circumstances—but it is to be feared that few make any serious attempt to ascertain why they are so lacking, or that the right explanation would be arrived at if they did. Probably the majority of the professing Christians would say: “It is because the Lord has not been pleased to give me the necessary grace.” Pious as that may sound, in many cases, it would be the language of insincerity—if not of something worse. If that were said by way of excuse or self-extenuation for a spirit of murmuring, it is a wicked slander upon the Divine character. Let it be clearly recognised that the real reason—and the only reason, so far as we are concerned—why God grants us not more grace is because we have failed to use that which He has already bestowed upon us: Luke 8:18.

Acquiescence in the Divine providence when God takes from us that which is near and dear is not some high spiritual attainment which is reached on special occasions. Just as one who is not accustomed to the regular use of certain muscles is incapable of any strenuous exercise of them when put to a real test, so it is with the employment of our graces. The average man who constantly drives around in his car, or the one who sits most for the day in his office and rides on the bus or tram to and from his work, would be weary if he walked five miles on a stretch, quite exhausted if it were ten, and utterly unable to hold out for twenty. But a shepherd or farmer who spent most of his life on his feet crossing the moors or walking in his fields, would find it no undue strain to cover a single journey of twenty miles. One who has allowed his mind to wander here and there while engaged in ordinary reading cannot suddenly concentrate on a good book when he wishes to do so. The same principle obtains in the spiritual realm: There is no such thing as putting forth an extraordinary effort of any grace if it be not *in regular exercise*.

Returning to our next text: What was the character of the man who gave expression to those God-honouring words? It is very important to weigh carefully the question, for character and conduct are as inseparably connected as are cause and effect. Answer thereto is supplied in the context. Those words issued from the heart of one who was “perfect [sincere] and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1), which is but an amplified way of saying that he was a pious man. Now, the first characteristic and evidence of genuine piety is an obedient walk; and obedience is doing the will of God from the heart—or in other words, it is a *submission* to His authority, a conducting of myself according to the rules He has prescribed for me. If, then, I have formed the habit of conforming to God’s preceptive will (which necessarily presupposes denying the lusts of the flesh), there will be little difficulty in submitting myself to His providential will. If I am faithful in doing the former, I shall be uncomplaining in acquiescing with the latter. But if I flout the one, I shall rebel against the other.

“The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” That was the language of one who was accustomed to own the authority of God, as his threefold “the LORD” intimates. It was the language of one who had surrendered to His righteous claims and the throne of whose heart was really occupied by Him. It was not the sudden outburst of one who had hitherto followed his own desires and devices, but rather of a genuine saint who had truly been subject to the Divine will. It was the language of one who recognised and owned that God had a perfect right to order his lot and life as seemed good in His sight. It was the language of one who held everything in subjection to the will of Him with whom he had to do. It was not an exceptional spasm of piety, but rather that which made manifest the *general tenor* of his spirituality. The crises of life neither make, nor mar us, my reader; but instead, they demonstrate what is in us, what we really are: They make manifest the hidden things of the heart.

There is a will of God which we are required to perform, and there is also a will of God in which we should thankfully acquiesce. The former is His preceptive will, which is made known in His commandments; the latter in His providential will, which regulates all our affairs. And the more we perform the former, the easier shall we find it to accept and conform our hearts unto the latter. Christian submission is, therefore, a twofold thing; or rather, it has respect to two aspects of our duty and has to do with two different relationships which God sustains to us as our King and our Provider. The first aspect of submission is to take the Divine yoke upon us, to be in subjection to the Divine authority, to have all our ways regulated by the Divine statutes. The second aspect of submission is to receive as from God’s hand whatever comes to

me in a providential way, with the recognition of His absolute right to take the same away when He deems that will be most for His glory and my good.

When we pray, as we are bidden to do, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mat 6:10), the emphasis is to be placed on the word “done.” It is, first, a request that the Divine will may be wrought *in us*, for we can only work out our “own salvation with fear and trembling,” as God is pleased to work in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:12-13)—for it is thus that God writes His law on our hearts. Only as His will is wrought in us are our wayward wills brought into accord with God’s. Second, it is a request that the Divine will may be performed *by us*. The first is in order to the second. God’s will is done by us when we consciously and voluntarily abstain from and avoid those things He has prohibited, and when we practice those things which He has enjoined upon us. Third, it is a request that the Divine will may be acceptable *unto us*, that we may be pleased with whatever pleases Him: That so far from repining, we may thankfully receive whatever God is pleased to send or give us—His chastisements not excepted.

The perfect exemplification of what we have sought to bring out above is found in our blessed Redeemer. First, there was nothing whatever within Him which was contrary to God, which was capable of resisting His will. He was essentially holy both in His Divine Person and in His human nature; and as the God-man, He declared, “Thy law is within my heart” (Psa 40:8). Second, when He entered this world, it was with the averment, “Lo, I come...to do thy will, O God” (Heb 10:7); and so completely did He make that good, He could say, “I *do always* those things that please him” (Joh 8:29). Third, He never uttered the slightest murmur against the Divine providence; but instead, declared, “Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in *pleasant* places” (Psa 16:5-6); and when the supreme test came, He meekly bowed, saying, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (Joh 18:11). When in Gethsemane, He prayed, “Thy will be done” (Mat 26:42), He included all three things: Be wrought in Me, performed by Me, be well-pleasing unto Me.

If, then, we are to be able to say as Job did when so severely tested, we must emulate his *previous conduct* and regularly tread the path of obedience. Furthermore, we must “learn to sit loose to all worldly comforts and stand ready prepared to part with everything when God shall require it at our hands. Some of you may perhaps have friends who are to you as your own souls; and others may have children in whose lives your own lives are bound up: All have their Isaacs, their particular delights. Labour for Christ’s sake, labour ye sons and daughters of Abraham to resign them hourly in affection to God, that when He shall require you really to sacrifice them, you may not confer with flesh and blood any more than the blessed patriarch did”—George Whitefield (1714-1770), closing paragraph of sermon on Abraham offering up his son.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

23. Ephesians 1:15-23, part 9

Those Christians are greatly the losers whose thoughts about Christ are almost confined to the manger of Bethlehem and the cross of Calvary. While we cannot be sufficiently thankful for His death, for our salvation and everlasting bliss hinged thereon; yet, it must be borne in mind that His expiry at Golgotha was not the termination of His history. Important instructions and spiritual advantages are derived by directing our attention to His resurrection also—for that blessed event not only bore conclusive testimony to the Divinity of His mission and supplies the most solid ground for our faith in Him, but it is likewise the pledge and assurance that we, too, shall be raised from the dead. Then the Word of Truth goes on to inform us that, after continuing on earth for forty days, the risen Saviour ascended to Heaven, that He is now seated at the right hand of God, where He intercedes for His people. In the Epistles, our gaze is frequently directed to the glorified and exalted state of our Saviour, and it is the privilege and duty of faith to follow Him into the Father's presence, view Him within the veil, and eye Him as the King of kings.

In the closing portion of the apostle's prayer in Ephesians 1, we are reminded that the risen Redeemer has been invested with all power, authority, and dominion. That was part of His reward and triumph (Phi 2:9). It was as the God-man Mediator that He was thus invested and given the scepter of the universe. It was also as the Head of the Church Christ passed within the veil: "Whither the forerunner is *for us* entered" (Heb 6:20). How that ought to strengthen the faith and encourage the hearts of all who have put their trust in Him! No room is left for doubt or uncertainty of the value and acceptableness to God of Christ's obedience and death. The Father has given to the very One who bore the sins and curse of His people the supreme place of honour in Heaven. How that intimates the place which the salvation of His saints occupies in God's counsels and government! The position to which the Saviour has been elevated demonstrates beyond any peradventure the degree of importance which God Himself attaches to the redemption of His Church. The position which Christ now occupies and the power which has been given to Him are for the sake of His blood-bought ones.

"That ye may know...what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward...Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:18-20). The whole emphasis is here thrown upon the mighty and wondrous operations of the Father, and not upon the exercise of the Son's Divine attributes—as in John 10:18 and Ephesians 4:8. That power of God in the raising, exalting, and glorifying of Christ was not according to or directed by the ordinary course of nature, but was special, extraordinary, supernatural—contrary to "nature" and beyond the power of any creature to effect. So also is the regeneration and sanctification of all the members of Christ's mystical Body. Their faith is "of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Col 2:12). Therefore, the transitive "and set" or "caused to sit" is here used, rather than the intransitive "to sit on his throne" as in Acts 2:30—because God is seen bestowing upon the Mediator His well-earned reward, as well as expressing His love unto the Son.

This expression of Christ's sitting at God's right hand is not to be carnalized, as though it were a literal form of speech depicting His present posture in Heaven; rather, it is to be understood as a metaphorical or similitude, and interpreted by its use elsewhere. That Christ is not actually and permanently seated is quite clear from such statements as "the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Act 7:56) and the One "who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks" (Rev 2:1), and "in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb" (Rev 5:6). The passages just quoted also make it plain that Christ's being "seated" is far from importing that He is now in a state of inactivity; rather, He is constantly engaged on behalf of His Church, employing His power and honours in promoting its interests, until His work of mediation is carried forward to a perfect consummation.

At least four things are connoted by Christ's being "seated." First, it is emblematic of *rest from a finished work*. We cannot contemplate aright the present state of our Lord without calling to mind the circumstances of His being there: "When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3). His sacrificial service and sufferings are ended; His work of expiation is completed. "It is finished" (Joh 19:30): He cried from the cross, and proof thereof is His being seated on high. "Every priest [of Judaism] *standeth*, daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (Heb 10:11). Among the furniture of the tabernacle and temple, there was

no chair! "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, *sat down* on the right hand of God" (Heb 10:12). Israel's priests never accomplished the design of their office, but Christ's perfect oblation fully satisfied justice, and God bore testimony to the same by translating Him to Heaven.

Second, it marks *the beginning of a new work*. This is taught us in Acts 2 where we are told that, on the day of Pentecost, "there appeared unto them [i.e. the apostles of 1:26, the "them" of 2:1-2 and *compare* 2:14] cloven tongues like as of fire, and it *sat* upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Act 2:3-4). For three years, the apostles had companied with Christ and been trained by Him; but now, their apprenticeship was over, and their real mission as the ambassadors of the King was about to commence. To equip them for their honourous task, they were anointed by the Spirit. Thus, it was with Christ: His work of expiation was completed, but His enthronement on high marked the *beginning* of His administration of His kingdom. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ simply laid the foundation upon which His royal conquests are now being achieved. His work as the King-Priest only began when He was invested with "all power." He is now "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Heb 1:3), wielding His scepter to good effect.

Third, it is indicative of *honour and dignity*. When used officially, to "sit" denotes dignity and exaltation: a superior raised above his inferiors, as of a king upon his throne, the judge on the bench. Thus, that Old Testament expression to "sit in the gate" (Ruth 4:1-2 and *compare* Deu 16:18) signified the holding of a judicial court. It was to that which Job alluded when he said, "When I went out to the *gate* through the city, when I prepared my [magisterial] *seat* in the street! The young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up" (Job 29:7-8). When the Most High is pictured as holding session, the august scene is portrayed thus: "The Ancient of days did sit...his throne was like the fiery flame...thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the *judgment* was set, and the books were opened" (Dan 7:9-11). For other examples of this third meaning, see Matthew 25:31, Revelation 20:11.

Fourth, it signifies *a state of continuance*. Christ's humiliation was only temporary, but His exaltation and enthronement is permanent. In his prophecy of Joseph's suffering and then his glory, Jacob said, "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength" (Gen 49:23-24)—the Hebrew verb is literally "sat," but fittingly rendered, "abode." So, too, "Therefore shall ye abide [sit] at the door of the tabernacle" (Lev 8:35). The position of highest honour belonging to Christ is a perpetual one: He is "seated" surely and durably. "In mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David" (Isa 16:5): To have Christ sit upon it and to have the throne established is all one. "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan 7:14).

Being incorporeal, God has no physical members; and when mention is made of them, they are to be understood metaphorically. His seating of Christ at "his own right hand" (Eph 1:20) intimates *His love for Him*. It is strange that the commentators have missed the first occurrence in Scripture of that figurative expression. It is found in the marginal rendering of Gen 35:18. When his beloved Rachel gave birth to her second son, Jacob called him "Benjamin," which signifies "the son of the right hand"—a name of endearment. He was the last of the aged patriarch's sons; and in styling him "the son of his right hand," he was expressing his deep affection for him and as inheriting the tender place which his mother had formerly possessed in his heart. Such we believe is the basic idea here. As God had "spared not his *own* Son" (Rom 8:32) when He was propitiating His judicial wrath, so on the completion of that work, He placed Him "at his *own* right hand" (Eph 1:20). If the Father loved Him "because He laid down His life" (Joh 10:17), would not His love be prompted to stronger manifestations of it after He had laid it down?

Christ's being at "the right hand of God" signifies *His enjoyment of all blessedness*. This is brought out in Psalm 16:11. It is to be carefully noted that its words are those of the Messiah and spoken by Him expressly with a view to His exaltation. After saying, "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption," He went on to declare, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psa 16:10-11). It denotes, then, the intimacy of His fellowship with the Father in the full light of His countenance. "It is spoken assuredly of such pleasures as Jesus Christ by way of prerogative enjoyeth beyond all the saints and angels, He being at God's right hand as none of them are. It was that peculiar encouragement that He had, not to be in heaven only as a common saint, but to be in heaven at God's right hand and to have pleasures answer-

able, far above all the pleasures of men and angels, imparting to Him to the utmost, all His own happiness, so far as His human nature is capable of" (Thomas Goodwin, 1600-1680).

Christ's being "at God's right hand" tells of *His dignity, honour, and glory*. When kings would express their respect unto those whom they favoured, they did so by setting them at their "right hand." An illustration of that is found in 1 Kings 2:19, where Solomon bestowed this honour upon his mother; and the same thought was in the mind of the wife of Zebedee when she made request that in the day to come, her sons might sit one of Christ's right hand and the other at His left (Mat 20:20-21). So of the Church: It shall yet be said, "upon thy [Christ's] right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir" (Psa 45:9). God's placing of Christ at His right hand signified the conferring of supreme honour upon Him—the place of eminence and glory. God translated Enoch and Elijah to Heaven, but they are nowhere said to sit at His right hand. "But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand" (Heb 1:13)—that is a dignity peculiar to Christ Himself.

To be seated "at God's right hand" announces *Christ's supreme power and dominion*. "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power" (Mat 26:64). It was the investing of Christ with supreme authority. As T. Goodwin pointed out, "Kings oftentimes make no other use of their kingdoms but to enjoy pleasure, state, and glory; but for their *rule*, they leave it to others; as Pharaoh did to Joseph—'only in the throne will I be greater than thou' (Gen 41:40)." But upon Christ has been conferred no inferior authority; He sits "on the right hand of the Majesty on high" and is personally "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Heb 1:3). "All power is given unto *me in heaven* and in earth" (Mat 28:18) is His own ringing averment. The throne over the whole universe is "the throne of God *and* of the Lamb" (Rev 22:3); "That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father" (Joh 5:23).

It requires to be pointed out that, if on the one hand, it was the Father who bestowed this blessedness, honour, and authority upon the God-man Mediator; yet, on the other hand, He had a full right thereto. Things are so carried out between the Father and the Son that Each is distinctly magnified. Christ's exaltation is the Father's gift, and therein He is owned; likewise, it is the Son's due, and so He is recognised. All power is given to Him, yet He said plainly to His apostles, "*I* appoint unto you a kingdom" (Luk 22:29). "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will" (Joh 5:21)! Therein there is perfect oneness of accord: Christ exercises sovereignty of will—for it is His right to do so—yet He does nothing but what pleases the Father. As the man Christ Jesus was united to the Son of God, He had *the right*—not simply as a reward for His work, but because of His Godhead—to all that has been bestowed upon Him. As Jehovah's "Fellow," nothing less befits Him.

We do not agree with those writers who say it was the humanity of Christ alone that was exalted. It was the Son of God Himself, though in our nature, who was accorded the highest throne in Heaven—"and set him [not "it"] at his own right hand" (Eph 1:20). It was a Person who was thus magnified. As T. Goodwin points out, it was a "whole Christ who rose and a whole Christ sitteth at God's right hand." We may not be able—nay, indeed are not—to comprehend this mystery; yet faith gladly receives it. Faith has to do with what is written, not in reasoning, nor answering the objections of the carnal mind. If we abide by what is recorded in Holy Writ, we cannot err, and Scripture declares: "The LORD said unto my Lord [not simply to "the Son of man"], Sit thou at my right hand" (Psa 110:1)—quoted more frequently in the New Testament than any other verse. Now, the foundation of Christ's being David's "Lord" lay in His being the Son of God; and it was the second Person in the Trinity who had taken human nature into union with Himself that Jehovah the Father invited to sit at His own right hand. The throne belongs to Him both as God and as man: See Psalm 45:6 and John 5:27.

The human nature of Christ, subsisting in His Divine Person, has been exalted above all creatures in dignity, glory, and authority. That evinces the infinite love of the Father unto Him and His ineffable delight in Him. It should greatly delight our hearts and be constantly contemplated—not by fancy and imagination, but by faith and in adoring worship. As we pointed out in the preceding article, Christ's change of place (from earth to Heaven) was at once followed by a change of state, His human nature then being glorified and its capacity enlarged. Personally, we are strongly inclined to believe there is a reference to that in "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, *seen of angels*, preached unto the Gentiles" (1Ti 3:16)—the position of that clause intimating as much. Nor are we alone in that view. So cautious and conservative a commentator as Charles John Ellicott (1819-1905) interpreted it thus: "The angels now for the first time saw, gazed upon, and rejoiced in the vision of the Godhead in the glorified humanity of the Son; and what

the angels gained in the beatific vision, the nations of the world obtained through the preaching of the Gospel; namely, a knowledge of the endless love of God and the surpassing glory of Christ.”

“We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary” (Heb 8:1-2). Here, an additional aspect is emphasized; namely, that it is as our great High Priest Christ is exalted. *His* is a royal priesthood: He is endowed with regal, as well as sacerdotal authority. Note well this verse comes immediately after Hebrews 7 where we have Christ set forth as the antitypical Melchizedek or Priest-King. It is as such He ministers in the heavenly tabernacle: A “priest upon his throne” (Zec 6:13); that is, a Priest in kingly state, invested with royal dominion. Christ awaits no future “millennium” to enter upon His kingly office, but exercises it *now*. “Majesty” signifies the kingly power of God, and Christ is seated at the “right hand” of that very Majesty (Heb 1:3)! The One who, when here, had not where to lay His head is now “*crowned* with glory and honour” (Heb 2:9). The One whom men spat upon and smote is now the Lord Sovereign of Heaven and earth. All Heaven owns His scepter and renders homage to Him.

“And set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power” (Eph 1:20-21). Here is the place where Christ now dwelleth: in Heaven itself. Acts 7:48-49 tell us that Heaven is the court of the great God, where His throne is—and it is there that God hath appointed Jesus Christ to be honoured. His advancement corresponds to His abasement. As He descended into unparalleled depths of shame and woe, so He has been elevated to surpassing heights of honour and bliss. As 1 Peter 3:22 tells us, He “is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God.” It is there in “the ivory palaces” (Psa 45:8) our Redeemer abides. Though by His Deity, He be omnipresent—in the midst of every two or three who are gathered together in His name—yet in His theanthropic person, He is localized—for His humanity is not ubiquitous (everywhere) as the Lutherans erroneously suppose. Hence, when He judges the wicked, because they cannot be suffered to enter Heaven, He comes down to them—though bringing Heaven with Him, for He “shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels” (Mat 16:27).

“And set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power” (Eph 1:20-21). That tells of the *eminence* of His elevation. God has not only exalted, but “highly exalted him” (Phi 2:9), not only “above” but “far above all principality, and power;” or as Hebrews 7:26 expresses it, “made higher than the heavens.” That One who glorified the Father so superlatively on earth has been exalted to the highest conceivable honour and glory. Christ has been raised above the celestial hosts not only as their “Head,” but of vastly superior rank or dignity. There are ranks or grades among the angels, though precisely what those differences are, we know not. There is no uniformity among the creatures of God, no equality of status even in Heaven. There is “principality, and power, and might, and dominion,” but Christ is advanced high above them all, being set in authority over them all. This is dwelt upon in Hebrews 1:4, “Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they”—*i.e.* the glory He entered into upon His ascension was proportionate and consonant to the name which is His by essential right.

Ephesians 1:21 gives us a detailed account of our Lord’s supremacy. He passed by the dignitaries of Heaven when, in love, He descended to assume the form and name of a “Servant” for our sakes. But when God exalted Him, He “glorified his *Son* Jesus” (Act 3:13), as well as openly confirmed His Son (Heb 1:4-5). That supremacy of Christ is not only an eminent, but a *universal* one: “Angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1Pe 3:22). “And every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph 1:21), *i.e.* both on earth and in Heaven, here and hereafter. Christ has been advanced above every “excellency” and “honourable” no matter what be his rank or title. Not only has supremacy of position, but also of *Name* been conferred upon Him. His Name is accorded the worship due unto God alone, not only by the Church below, but the angels above (Heb 1:11). In His name, every knee shall yet bow (Phi 2:10). Then, what is Christ due *from us*? Our hearts, our lives, our all.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

3. A General Survey

As Moses sent forth the twelve spies to “search the land of Canaan” (Num 13:2) before Israel sought to enter into occupation of the same, so we propose to now take a bird’s eye view of that book which bears the name of Joshua, before examining it in close detail. We shall not give a chapter-by-chapter summary of its contents, but rather, essay a comprehensive sketch of those contents as a whole, by pointing out the main design of the book and some of its leading features. It has already been stated in our Introductory article, that this portion of Scripture treats of the period of Israel’s estate as a nation in that land which Jehovah gave unto their fathers, and that it forms both the capstone of the Pentateuch and the foundation of the Historical books which follow. The design of its penman—under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit—was to describe the conquest of Canaan by the Hebrews and the apportionment of it among their twelve tribes.

It was not Joshua’s intention to give an account of his own life, nor even to undertake a description of his principal exploits and achievements; rather was it his purpose to show how the Lord had made good His promises unto the patriarchs. If that dominant fact be kept steadily in mind, it will explain fully and satisfactorily the principle of selection and the arrangement of the materials he was guided to use. We can then the better perceive why Joshua recorded what he did, why he related certain incidents in fulness of detail and merely glanced at others, and why whole years are passed over in silence. He was writing with a *definite plan* before his mind; and therefore, he related only what was pertinent to his scheme and design, omitting everything which was not relevant thereto. The same principle of selection regulated all the sacred penmen, and it is only as we are able to discern the particular plan of each book that we can properly appreciate what is brought into the picture and what is left out.

It has been far too little realised that the historians of Scripture were much more than journalists narrating interesting events, more than mere chroniclers writing for the sake of gratifying the curiosity of those who should live in a future age, or even of detailing memorable incidents to please their contemporaries. They were *theocratic* historians (a theocracy is a government in which the chiefs of state are the immediate servants of God—there has never been but one) whose object was to trace the progress and development of the kingdom of God on earth: To mark its great epochs and record those events which were, from a *religious* standpoint, of deep importance to their own and future generations. Thus it is with the book that is now to be before us—and equally so with those that follow—for they give not merely the history of Israel, but the history of *God’s kingdom in Israel*: discover its plan or theme, and the choice or rejection of certain materials becomes patent.

The book opens with the Lord’s directions to Joshua, who had already been designated as the successor of Moses, to go over Jordan and take possession of the land which He had sworn to their fathers and to divide it among the people as their inheritance, with the promise that if he faithfully observed the laws given by Moses that God would be with him, and “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life” (Jos 1:5). Those opening verses supply the key to the whole book. Joshua’s execution of his commission in strict obedience to the Divine directions and God’s gracious fulfilment of His promised assistance are the sum of all it contains. The first twelve chapters treat of the conquest of Canaan. They do not contain a detailed account of all the marches and the battles of each campaign. Instead, only the outstanding particulars are narrated—those which marked the progress of events, those which brought out most clearly God’s miraculous help, and those which demonstrated the necessity and inseparable connection between their obedience and that miraculous help.

Many other things belonging to the Conquest—such as battles, capture of cities, and even long expeditions which had nothing remarkable about them—are therefore mentioned only summarily, so as to give a general view of the whole line of operations with its ultimate success. The time occupied in the conquest was much briefer, everything considered, than might be supposed. Though we cannot calculate the exact length of it, we may its approximate duration. *After* Canaan had been subdued and upon the division of its territory, we find Caleb saying, “And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness” (Jos 14:10). From that forty-five years, we have to deduct the thirty-eight years spent in the Wilderness (Deu 2:14), so that the whole campaign lasted less than seven years.

In chapters 13-21, we have the Dividing of the Land among the several tribes, concerning which it is difficult for a commentator to write profitably at any length. In chapter 22, the two and a half tribes who had assisted their brethren in the Conquest and stood by them in the allotting of Canaan, return to their own possession across the Jordan. Then an interval of several years is passed over, during which Israel was settled in the Land—an interval which fell not within the scope for the writer to take notice of, for it furnished nothing suited to his particular theme. Finally, we come to the closing scene of Joshua's life, when he gathered around him the responsible heads of the Nation, rehearsed what God had gathered around him the responsible heads of the Nation, rehearsed what God had done for them in giving them such a goodly heritage, and engaged them to renewed pledges of obedience unto Him. Thus, the book closes with a recapitulation of Jehovah's fulfilment of the promise with which it opens and a public covenant-engagement of the people to serve the Lord who had driven out the Amorites and the other nations from before them.

After Joshua had received his orders to go up and possess the Land, he at once sent forth two spies. The experiences they met with are described with considerable detail: not because of the interest attaching to their hazardous undertaking and their remarkable escape from a perilous situation, but because what occurred vividly exemplified the promise which the Lord had given to Moses: "There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you" (Deu 11:25)—a promise, which, as we have seen, was repeated in substance to Joshua himself. Hence, we find in striking and full accord therewith, Rahab acknowledging to the spies, "I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you" (Jos 2:9). The anxious preparations of the king, his vigorous pursuit of the spies, and their language to Joshua upon the accomplishment of their mission (Jos 2:24), all served to forcibly illustrate that fact.

Next follows the passage of the Jordan. Its waters, though unusually high, were supernaturally divided, so that the people of God passed over dry shod. Let us pause and ask, "What was the design of that remarkable event?" God works no trifling miracles: He does not suspend the established order of nature without good reason, nor unless some important end is to be answered by so doing. Wherein lay the necessity for this prodigy? Israel could have crossed the Jordan by natural means, without the intervention of Omnipotence. Though the river was then too high for fording, especially for the women and children, yet boats could have been built or bridges thrown across it, for the Jordan is neither swift nor very wide, and such a delay had been but a brief one. The reason for this miracle was the same as of all others recorded in Holy Writ: The necessity for it was not physical, but moral. The object of all miracles is to reveal the power and grace of God.

The laws of nature which God established at the beginning were amply sufficient to accomplish every physical end: It is only to meet our moral and spiritual needs that they are ever interfered with. Israel might have taken Canaan without any miracle, but in such a case, there had been no glorious display unto them of God's all-mightiness, His loving-kindness, His nearness to them. The stupendous marvels—which He wrought in Egypt, at the Red sea, in the Wilderness, and now in Canaan—were designed to teach the covenant people (and the surrounding nations, too) that the gods of the heathen were no gods and could neither do good nor evil. Jehovah was the living and true God: "The Lord of all the earth" (Jos 3:11, 13)! Those miracles were intended to make them more sensible of the infinite perfections of the One with whom they had to do, and of their complete dependence upon Him. Consequently, they were brought into situations from which they could not extricate themselves in order to learn it was the Lord their God who delivered them.

In a variety of ways, Israel were made to see that it was not their own valour and strength which delivered them, but rather, Jehovah's right hand and mighty arm, which secured the victory for them. Canaan did not become theirs so much by their own prowess and conquest as by Divine gift. But there was a special reason why the Lord intervened for them in the extraordinary manner He did at the Jordan—for it was as though He then opened to them the door of that land which He had promised, and personally conducted them into it. By that memorable act, the Lord pledged to them the subjugation of the whole country. At the same time, there was in connection therewith the public act of Joshua in his new capacity as leader of the people; and thus, it gave Divine authority and confirmation to his office in their eyes, and was—in comparison with his predecessor at the Red Sea—a striking verification of that word to Him, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee" (Jos 1:5).

The circumcising of the people and their celebration of the Passover comes next (chapter 5). There should be no difficulty in perceiving the relevancy and significance of these events at this stage in the book we are now reviewing. They belonged to the Conquest, inasmuch as that very conquest was conditioned upon Israel's punctilious compliance with all that Moses had commanded. After the appearing unto Joshua of the "Captain of the LORD'S host" (Jos 5:15), there follows an account of the capture of Jericho. In connection therewith, there stand out plainly the same two features which mark the passage of the Jordan: that an unquestioning obedience to God's orders was required from them, and that the victory was His and not theirs. In the conquest of Ai, the same lesson is taught, though in reverse: There, they were made to taste the bitter consequences which followed upon their disobedience to the Divine injunctions. But we will not now further anticipate what we hope to consider in the articles which are to follow.

At this point, a word needs to be said, perhaps, in reply to the attacks made now upon this book by the enemies of the Lord. The ethical character of the contacts of Joshua has been viciously criticised by infidels and agnostics. The Israelites have been regarded as a horde of fierce nomads, falling upon and murdering the Canaanites, and stealing the land of a peaceful people. These critics have asserted it is unworthy of the Divine character to represent Him as sanctioning such injustice and ferocity. In reply, it needs to be pointed out that, Canaan was Israel's by Divine appointment and gift long before (Gen 15)—a promise repeated to Abraham's immediate descendants; and it was in fulfilment thereof that they now received the land. They entered and took possession of Canaan by immediate command from God, who has an absolute right to interfere in human affairs as He pleases. Moreover, it was in the exercise of His righteousness (as well as of His sovereignty) that God now took from the Canaanites the land which they had forfeited by their sins, and by His grace, gave to Israel with the distinct understanding that they, too, would be deprived of it if they proved unfaithful and disobedient stewards.

But why should God give instructions for the utter destruction of the Canaanites? Because of their horrible depravity and gross idolatry: Let the reader turn to Leviticus 18:3, 27, 28, and then, see the verses between 3 and 27 for a description of those "abominations;" and also, remember God did not act in judgment upon them until "the iniquity of the Amorites" had come to the "full" (Gen 15:16). God now glorified His justice by destroying those who refused to glorify Him by a willing obedience. Israel acted not under the impulse of a lust of conquest, but as the executioners of Divine wrath—just as the flood, the pestilence, the earthquake are commissioned by Him to cut off those who provoke His holiness. When He is pleased to do so, He makes use of men as His instruments, rather than the elements. "The Assyrian" was the rod of God's anger to cut off nations, though he knew not he was being so employed (Isa 10:5-7). Why, then, might He not use an elect and godly nation as the conscious instrument of His just vengeance!

Israel was manifestly under God's guidance, and their success must be attributed to His presence and might. Miraculous power attended them and proved that the commission and commands they had received were no fanatical delusions, but the mandates of the Judge of all the earth. He opened a way for them through the Jordan, threw down the walls of Jericho, smote their enemies with hailstones, and even stayed the sun in its course. There could be no mistaking the fact that the living God was in their midst. But there was also a special reason why Israel should be the particular executioner of God's vengeance in this instance, rather than that the land should be totally depopulated by, say, pestilence. In that case, they could not have felt so sensibly their own weakness and entire dependency on the power of God. In such a case, they had soon forgotten *His* agency in giving them the land, and attributed it to secondary causes; nor would the residue of the Canaanites been left as a continual trial to test their faithfulness in the service of the Lord.

But why should only the Canaanites be singled out for this summary judgment? Were there not many other idolatrous nations?—why, then, should they be exempted? The righteous government of God extends over all nations, and each is punished when its iniquities are come to the full: not by the same means or to the same extent, but punished as God deems best. But the Canaanites were not only idolaters, but they were guilty of practices which the heathen themselves regarded with abhorrence. Let it also be remembered that this generation of Israel under Joshua was the most pious one in all their history as a nation, and that they burned with the same holy zeal against Achan as against the degenerate Canaanites; and that later, God sorely punished Israel, too, when they turned away from Him. Most important, then, are the lessons contained in this book. It shows how God intervenes in the affairs of human history. It reveals that He deals with nations, as well as individuals—deals with them in mercy or judgment, according as they honour or displease Him.

The contents of this book, and the lessons which are designed to teach us, are greatly needed by our own generation: First, in counteracting the on-sided “evangelism” of our day, which tells the sinner that all he has to do is to accept Christ as his personal Saviour, and Heaven is then his certain portion—ignoring the fact that there is a fight which must be fought and a race to be run before he can be crowned. Second, in rebutting that doleful view that the Christian should expect nothing, but frequent and well nigh constant defeat in his warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil—overlooking the truth that if he meets the required conditions, he may “do all things through Christ which strengtheneth” him (Phi 4:13). Third, in setting before us, by clear exemplifications and striking illustrations, the rules and requirements upon which success is conditioned. Here, as nowhere else in Scripture, are we shown *how* we may be “overcomers.” Fourth, in making known the blessed fact—so little apprehended by Christians today—that it is both their privilege and birthright to enter into a present possession and enjoyment of their Inheritance. O that more of us may do so.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

8c. Its Scope

“And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col 1:20). In the final paragraphs of our last, we touched upon this aspect of our subject, pointing out that the mediatory work of Christ not only effected a reconciliation between God and the whole election of grace, but also closed the breach which existed between the celestial hosts and the Church. But our remarks thereon were all too brief for a subject so blessed, so important, so honouring to Christ, yet so little understood. The relation which exists between the holy angels and the Church—which is the mystical body of Christ—has not received the attention that it deserves; and failure to perceive that the basis of this fellowship lies in the person and work of Christ obscures one of the distinctive honours which God has placed upon His beloved Son, and loses sight of one of His mediatorial glories. “On his head were many crowns” (Rev 19:12), and that which is now engaging our attention is by no means the least of them.

According to the principle of “the progress of doctrine”—or the orderly unfolding of the Truth (first the blade, then the ear, etc.)—in the earlier epistles of Paul (Thessalonians, Romans, Corinthians, Galatians), we see more the *individual* effects and blessings of Redemption. The truth of justification, so prominent therein, brings each person face to face with his *own* sin and salvation. In that supreme crisis of the soul, the crisis of spiritual life and death, there is consciousness of but two existences—God and self. But when we come to the prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, etc.), it is no longer the individual, as such, which is prominent, but rather, as he is part of a greater whole—a member of the body of Christ. True, in the earlier epistles, the Church is recognised; as in later epistles, the individual believer is never for a moment ignored, but the proportion of the two aspects is changed: What is prominent in the first becomes secondary in the other. This is the natural order in the development of Truth. The Christian unity is directly the unity of each soul with Christ, the Head—and indirectly, the unity of the various members in the one Body.

When the Gospel of salvation speaks, it must speak to the individual, but when the Saviour has been found by each soul as the Christ who “liveth in *me*” (Gal 2:20), then the question arises, “What is my relation to *other* believers?” The answer to which is: Fellow-members of the Church, fellow-members of the family of God. Accordingly, when taking up the doctrine of reconciliation, the apostle first placed the emphasis upon “be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20); though even there, he indicated the basis on which the call is made. But it was reserved for his later epistles to bring out the reconciliation or unity which Christ has effected between believing Jews and Gentiles—which he shows at some length in Ephesian 2; while in Colossians, he goes still further and presents Christ as the Head of all created beings, and the new relation which He has established between the Church and the celestial hosts. It is much to their loss that so many Christians advance no further than the epistle to the Romans in their apprehension of the Truth; I must beware of being so wrapped up in what Christ has done for *me*, that I fail to glory in the *wider* results of His work.

There was a particular reason why this reference to the larger scope of reconciliation was made in the epistle to the Colossians (rather than in Ephesians or Philippians), for as the Judaisers were corrupting the Galatians, so the Gnostics were seeking to seduce the saints at Colosse. The word “Gnostic” means “one who knows” (the opposite of “agnostic”), and that which characterized this sect (which, to a considerable extent, exerted a powerful and pernicious influence upon early Christianity) was an Orientalized form of Grecian philosophy—a modern, though more Buddhistic, species of which is “Theosophy.” Gnosticism was an attempt of carnal reason to show the relation between the Infinite and the finite, the Absolute and the phenomenal, the “first Cause” and the universe. They argued that the gulf could only be bridged by a series of creatures rising in the scale of being—the highest of them being semi-personal emanations, of which Christ was the first (yet only a creature), and then many orders of angels which intervened between God and men.

Hence, it was that in the Colossian epistle the apostle insisted that by Christ “were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col 1:16-17), that he bids the saints there, “Beware lest any man spoil you through

philosophy and vain deceit" (Col 2:8). Hence, too, he insisted that "in him [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," (Col 2:9), and again warned them: "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind" (Col 2:18). Having stated in Colossians 1:16 that the angels were created by Christ, he then went on to show how they were also the gainers by the blood of His cross, for that blood had "made peace" not only with God, but it had also restored to amicable relationship the two great branches of His family—the angelic hosts and the Church.

There was originally a union between the holy angels and unfallen men, for they existed as fellow-citizens in the kingdom of God, but upon Adam's apostasy, that union was broken. Sin is rebellion, and the holy angels could have no fellowship with rebels against their God. "Things in earth" and "things in heaven" (Col 1:20) became at variance through sin. When men became the enemies of God, they became at the same time, the enemies of all His faithful subjects. Take this analogy on a lower plane. Suppose that one county in England should cast off allegiance to King George and disown his government at Westminster—then all lawful communion between the inhabitants of that county, and the loyal subjects of the crown in all other parts of the country, would be at an end. A line of moral and patriotic separation would at once be drawn between the two companies, and all friendly intercourse would be forbidden. Nor would it less accord with their inclination that the duty of all the friends of the throne to withdraw their communion and connection from those who were in revolt against the supreme authority and the general good.

But now, suppose one possessing the necessary dignity and qualifications—say, a member of the royal house—should voluntarily undertake to make adequate reparation unto his majesty for the injury done him by the rebellious county, and that he was pleased to acknowledge that reparation as a full satisfaction to his honour. And suppose that his plenipotentiary succeeded in removing all enmity against their king from the members of that county, so that they sincerely repented of their insubordination and threw down the weapons of their hostility against the throne and government; as soon as it became generally known that company had been restored to fealty, would not the remainder of the country rejoice and all the loyal subjects of the crown be ready to resume fellowship with them again? That is as close a parallel as we can think of. Having made peace between God and the Church by the blood of His cross, Christ has also united the Church unto all who love God throughout the whole extent of creation: Things or creatures on earth have been reconciled to things or creatures in Heaven.

Ephesians 1:9-10 makes known to us the entire range of God's eternal purpose of grace. It was to gather together in Christ not only the elect from the sons of men on earth, but also the elect from among the angels in Heaven, uniting all into one harmonious whole; and this with the grand design of making more manifest the glory of the God-man Mediator. Under His eternal foreview of the entrance of sin, God purposed the reunion of the two great portions of the moral universe, bringing them into one holy and happy commonwealth under Christ as their glorious Sovereign. If it be asked, "Why are the persons of angels and men referred to as 'things'?" The answer is, "This is the Scriptural form of expressing them: As when the apostle said, 'Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas' (1Co 3:21-22), or, 'the scripture hath concluded [shut up] all under sin' (Gal 3:22), which is explained by 'God hath shut them all up in unbelief' (Rom 11:32)." As the "all men" of 1 Timothy 2:1-2 signifies men of all stations, so the "all things in heaven" of Ephesians 1:10 means angels of all ranks—"thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers," etc. (Col 1:16).

The word for "dispensation" (*oikonomia*) contains no time element and has no reference to an age or era. Literally, it means "the arrangement of a house" (Young's Concordance)—or as we should say today, "the administration or management of a household." Its force may be clearly ascertained from its first occurrence in the New Testament: "Give an account of thy stewardship" (Luk 16:2), *i.e.* of thy administration of my household—the same Greek word is again translated "stewardship" in the next two verses. Thus, the "Dispensationalists" have no warrant whatever for their arbitrary partitioning of the Scriptures. When Paul said, "a dispensation of the Gospel is committed unto me" (1Co 9:17), obviously, he is to be understood as meaning that an administration or dispensing of the Gospel is entrusted to me in my apostolic labours. The "fulness of times" (Eph 1:10) (compare "the fulness of the Gentiles" Rom 11:25) signifies the termination of the times or "seasons"—namely, this *final* Christian season, which is the culmination and termination of all preceding ones—as Hebrews 1:1-2, 1 John 2:18 make evident.

The "gathering together in one" is a single (compound) word in the Greek occurring nowhere else in the New Testament except Romans 13:9, where it is rendered "briefly comprehended." There, after quoting

several of the Commandments—"Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, etc., etc.—the apostle added "and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," *i.e.*, all these precepts of the second table are summed up in that single injunction. It is an arithmetical term, where many items are added together in one total sum. It is also a rhetorical term, to *recapitulate*, as an orator does at the close of his discourse. Thus, it contains (in its prefix) the idea of repetition: as "gathering together" implies an original unity, and then a scattering before the unity is restored. In Christ, God has re-gathered and re-established in a new condition of stability and blessedness the previously disrupted elements, forming them into one kingdom, under one Head, having restored to harmony and mutual love the alienated portions of His empire.

Christ is not only "the head of the church" (Eph 5:23), but He is also "the head of all principality and power" (Col 2:10), "angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" (1Pe 3:22)—thus, He is "the head over *all*" (Eph 1:22). Christ is the gathering Centre of all holy creatures—they being united into one great commonwealth under His sovereignty. Elect angels and elect men make up one household. This is clearly brought out in, "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom *the whole family* in heaven and earth is named" (Eph 3:14-15). Since Christ is the Head of all (Eph 1:22), the whole family receives its name from Him: They all own Him, and He owns them all. So too, together they make up *one City*, the new Jerusalem, of which Christ is the Governor and King. "Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem..." (Heb 12:22): There is the general description, but who are the inhabitants? The same verse goes on to tell us, "...and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn" (Heb 12:22-23). They all make up one united company of worshippers, for the angels worship Christ as the redeemed do.

As Thomas Goodwin showed at length in his masterly exposition of Ephesians 1:10, this honour was *due Christ*. First as the God-man and "heir of all things" (Heb 1:2), it was meet that He should be the Head over the highest of God's creatures—of the celestial hosts as well as the Church. Second, this unity of the holy angels with the redeemed into one family and commonwealth is greatly to the honour and splendour of the Church. Third, angels and men are capable of being thus knit together under one Head—for they each have an understanding, affection, will, and spiritual nature, and therefore, are suited to the same happiness, dwelling together in the same place: As Matthew 22:30 tells us, "In the resurrection they...are as the angels of God in heaven"! Fourth, by this arrangement, there is constituted a complete parallel in opposition to Satan, who is the head both of wicked men and demons. The Devil is the head of the evil angels (Rev 12:7), called "the prince of the devils" (Mat 12:24), and he is the head of the wicked (1Jo 5:19) and termed, "the prince of this world" (Joh 12:31). Answerably to this, God has made Christ the Head of the Church and of angels.

"Ye are *come unto*...an innumerable company of angels" (Heb 12:22). We are come to them as our fellow-citizens, in consequence of our faith in Christ. Our access to them is spiritual. We come to them now, while we are on earth, and they, in Heaven. But we come to them not with our prayers, which is the dotting superstition of Rome and utterly destructive of the communion here asserted. For although there be a difference and distinction between their persons and ours as to dignity and power, yet as to this fellowship, we are equal in it with them; as one of them expressly declared to the apostle John, "I am thy fellowservant, and of *thy brethren* that have the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 19:10). Upon which John Owen said, "Nothing could be more groundless than that fellow-servants should worship one another"—nor absurd. We have access to all of them, not simply to this or that tutelary angel, but to the whole company of them. We are come to them by virtue of the recapitulation of them and us in Christ—they and we being members of the same heavenly family and associated together in a common worship.

"What was the reason that the tabernacle was so full of 'cherubim'? Read Exodus 25:19 and observe there were two of them over the mercy-seat in the holy of holies. Read Exodus 26:1 and mark how all the curtains of the tabernacle had cherubim wrought on them. Cherubim are angels (1Pe 1:12). Go from thence to the temple of Solomon: There you have the cherubim again—on the mercy-seat, all the walls of the house, and its very doors (1Ki 6:23, 29, 32). All this betokened that angels still fill the temple, as well as men. Little do we think it, but the angels—as well as human beings—fill our churches and are present in our assemblies. Therefore, are the women bidden to be modest and have their heads covered—the sign of their subordination—not only because of men, but because of the angels (1Co 11:10), for surely that is the meaning of it. Because we are to be with them hereafter and to worship God together, therefore they come down and are present at the worship of God here with us" (T. Goodwin—slightly changed).

In Revelation 5, under the representative emblem of “the four and twenty elders,” we behold the Church worshipping, singing a new song: “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.” Immediately after which the apostle tells us, “And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many *angels* round about the throne and the beasts and the elders...saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Rev 5:9-12). The ascription of praise from the angels is mingled with the praise of the Church, so as to comprise one entire worship. Thus, the “gather together in one” of Ephesians 1:10 also includes one great *Choir* or company of worshippers.

The holy angels are the adversaries of the wicked, for since such are the enemies of God, they are their enemies too. Thus, we read of the angel of the Lord standing in the way of perverse Balaam as “an adversary against him” (Num 22:22). They were sent to destroy wicked Sodom (Gen 19:1, 13). One of them smote the camp of the Assyrians and slew nearly two hundred thousand of them in a night (2Ki 19:35). Another slew the blasphemous Herod (Act 12:23) in New Testament times. Observe how prominently they figure in the Apocalypse as the agents of God’s judgments and the executioners of His vengeance: See Revelation 8:7-13; 15:1; 16:1-12. So also at the day of judgment, “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire” (Mat 13:41-42).

How blessed the contrast to behold the ministrations of the angels unto the saints! “He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways” (Psa 91:11)—a promise not only to Christ personally, but also to all the members of His mystical body. When the beggar died, his soul was “carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom” (Luk 16:22). An angel delivered Peter from prison (Act 12:7-10). In the Day to come, Christ “shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds” (Mat 24:31). In an earlier paragraph, we called attention to the cherubim with the flaming sword barring our first parents from “the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). But, in consequence of Colossians 1:20 and Ephesians 1:10, they now stand at the entrance of Paradise to *admit* the redeemed into it! The holy Jerusalem has “twelve gates, and at the gates twelve *angels*” (Rev 21:12), and in that city is “the tree of life” (Rev 22:2).

“And behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it” (Gen 28:12). “Hereafter ye shall see [with the eyes of faith—enlightened from the Scriptures] heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (Joh 1:51). Here, we are shown plainly the grand Medium for uniting Heaven and earth, the Foundation on which rests the intercourse between the angels and the redeemed. “The Son of man” views Christ as the last Adam, and is the Mediator’s title of humiliation, while bearing sin. It is brought in here to emphasise the fact that it is His atonement, “the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20) which is the meritorious ground of the restoration of the long-forfeited fellowship between the two branches of the one family in Christ. “If the partition wall between Jews and Gentiles is removed by the cross, and the enmity slain thereby, the same thing holds true in reference to angels and men” (George Smeaton, 1814-1889).

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

10b. Its Decline

In our last, we pointed out the deep importance of ascertaining the causes from which spiritual decays proceed, in order to a due compliance with the injunctions of Revelation 2:5. We cannot turn from that which is injurious and avail ourselves of the remedy until we are conscious of and sensibly affected by those things which have robbed of spiritual health. But let not the young Christian assume a defeatist attitude and conclude that ere long, he, too, will suffer a decline. Prevention is better than cure. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Let, then, our articles on this aspect of the theme serve a dual purpose: A warning against such a calamity, and as furnishing instruction for those whose graces have already begun to languish. Thus far, we have dwelt only on what will be the inevitable consequences if the believer fails to make a diligent and full use of the chief aids to spiritual growth, mentioned in our division of "Its Means." Now, we proceed to point out other things which are among the causes of decline.

A slackening in the prayer life will soon lower the level of one's spiritual health. This is so generally recognised among Christians that there is the less need for us to say much thereon. Prayer is an ordinance of Divine appointment, being instituted both for God's glory and our good. It is an owning of His supremacy and an acknowledgement of our dependency. On the one hand, the Lord requires to be waited on, to be asked for those things which will minister unto our wellbeing; and on the other hand, it is by means of prayer that our hearts are prepared to receive or be denied those things which we desire—for it is essentially a holy exercise in which our wills are brought into harmony with the Divine. A considerable part of our religious life consists in praying—either in public or in private, either orally or mentally; and our spiritual prosperity ever bears a close proportion to the degree of fervour and constancy with which this important duty is attended to. Prayer has been rightly termed, "the breath of the new creature," and if our breathing be impeded, then the whole system suffers—true alike spiritually and naturally.

But prayer is more than a duty: It is also one of the two principal means of grace—and without it, the other (the Word) profits us little or nothing. Since prayer be the breath of the new creature, we need to live in its own element—the atmosphere of Heaven. In order thereto a new and living way has been opened unto the throne of grace, whither we may come with boldness and confidence, and there, find help. Help for what? For everything needed in the Christian life—more particularly, for enablement to comply with the Divine precepts. That which God requires from us may be summed up in one word: *obedience*; and it is only through prayer we obtain strength for the performance thereof. That is partly the meaning of "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Joh 1:17). The law reveals man's duty, but it conveys no power for the discharge of it. But *grace* (as well as truth) comes to us by Jesus Christ—as the previous verse tells us—yet there is no other way of receiving out of His fulness except by the prayer of faith.

Prayer is even more than a means of grace: It is a holy privilege, an unspeakable boon, and inestimable favour, and it should be the most delightful of all spiritual exercises. It is by prayer we have access to God and converse with Him, whereby He becomes more and more a living Reality unto the soul. It is then that we draw near to Him and He draws near to us, and there is a sacred converse the one with the other. Thereby, we commune with and delight ourselves in Him. It is while we are thus engaged that the Spirit graciously fulfills His office work as "the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father"! (Rom 8:15). We then find He is more ready to hear than we are to speak. Pleading the merits of Christ, we enjoy most blessed fellowship with Him and obtain fresh foretastes of the everlasting bliss awaiting us on high. It is to a reconciled Father we come, and as "His dear children." If we approach in the spirit of the prodigal son, the same welcome awaits us and the same tokens of love are received by us. It is then we are made to exclaim, "thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over" (Psa 23:5), and that we pour out our hearts before Him in praise and adoration.

Now contemplate a slackening of the prayer life in the light of the three things pointed out above, and what must be the inevitable consequences! How can I prosper if I shirk my duty? How can the blessing of God rest upon me if I largely refuse that which He requires from me? If prayer also be one of the chief means of grace, and I neglect it, am I not "forsaking my own mercies"? If it be the alone channel through

which I obtain fresh supplies of grace from Christ, shall I not necessarily be feeble and sickly? If my strength be not renewed, how can I successfully resist my spiritual foes? If no power from on high be received, how shall I be able to tread the path of obedience? And if prayer be the principal channel of communion and converse with God, and that holy privilege be lightly esteemed, will not God soon become less real, my heart grow cold, my faith languish and my joy vanish? Yes, a slackening in the prayer life most certainly entails spiritual decline, with all that accompanies the same.

Sitting under an unedifying ministry. God has appointed and equipped certain men to act as His shepherds to feed His sheep. He speaks of them as “pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jer 3:15). In the ordinary course of events, it is His method to employ human instrumentality; and therefore, He has provided gifted servants “for the perfecting of the saints” (Eph 4:11-12). Satan knows that; and hence, he raises up false prophets to deceive and destroy. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 warns us that “for such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.” Nor should we be surprised at this—“for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness.” Those ministers of his have long held most of the professors’ chairs in the seminaries, thousands have occupied the pulpits of almost every denomination, and the great majority of those who sat under them were corrupted and fatally deluded by a specious mixture of truth and lies; and real Christians who attended, injuriously affected.

It is because of the presence of these disguised ministers of Satan that God bids His people: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the [professing] world” (1Jo 4:1). “Try” them by the unerring standard of Holy Writ: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:20). God holds you responsible to “prove all things” (1Th 5:21) and *commends* those who *have* “tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars” (Rev 2:2). His urgent command unto each of His children is, “*Cease*, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge” (Pro 19:27). That is not optional, but obligatory; and we disregard it at our peril. Listening to false doctrine is highly injurious, for it causes to err from right beliefs and right practices. The ministry we sit under affects us for good or evil; and therefore, our Master enjoins us, “Take heed what ye hear” (Mar 4:24).

It is of far greater moment than young Christians realise that they *heed* what has just been pointed out. The reading matter we peruse, and the religious instruction we imbibe, has as real an influence and effect upon the mind and the soul as what we eat and drink does on the body: If it be corrupt and poisonous, its effects will be identical in each case. Proof of that is found in the history of the Galatians. To them, the apostle said, “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?” (Gal 5:7); and the answer was heretics, Judaizers, who perverted the Gospel. And the saint today is hindered (“driven back,” margin) if he attends the preaching of error. Therefore, “*shun* profane *and* vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker” (2Ti 2:16-17). The teaching of heretics diffuses a noisome influence, till it eats away the life and power of piety, as a gangrene spreads through a limb.

But one may sit under what is termed a “sound” ministry and—through no fault of his own—derive no benefit from the same. There is a “dead orthodoxy” now widely prevalent, where the Truth is preached, yet in an unctionless manner; and if there be no life in the pulpit, there is not likely to be much in the pew. Unless the message comes fresh from God, issues warmly and earnestly from the preacher’s heart, and be delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit, it will neither reach the heart of the hearer, nor minister that which will cause him to grow in grace. There is many a place in Christendom where a living, refreshing, soul-edifying ministry once obtained, but the Spirit of God was grieved and quenched, and a visit there is like entering a morgue—everything is cold, cheerless, lifeless. The officers and members seem petrified, and to attend such services is to be chilled and become partaker of that deadening influence. A ministry which does not lift the soul Godwards, produce joy in the Lord, and stimulate to grateful obedience, casts the soul down and soon brings it into the slough of despond.

Only the Day to come will reveal how many a babe in Christ had his growth arrested through sitting under a ministry which supplied him not with the sincere milk of the Word. Only that Day will show how many a young believer—in the warmth and glow of his first love—was discouraged and dismayed by the coldness and deadness of the place where he went to worship. No wonder that God so rarely regenerates

any under such a ministry—those places would not prove at all suitable as nurseries for His little ones. Many a spiritual decline is to be attributed to this very cause. Then take heed, young Christian, where you attend. If you cannot find a place where Christ is magnified, where His presence is felt, where the Word is ministered in the power of the Spirit, where your soul is actually fed, but where you come away as empty as when you went—then far better to remain at home and spend the time on your knees, feeding directly from God's Word, and reading that which you *do* find helpful unto your spiritual life.

Companionship with unbelievers. “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men” (Pro 4:14). “I have written unto you not to keep company” (1Co 5:10-11)—with the world. The word for “company” there means “*to mingle*”: We cannot avoid contact with the unregenerate, but we must see to it that our hearts become not attracted to them. The Christian is indeed to have good will toward all he encounters, seeking their best interests (Gal 6:10); but he is to have no pleasure in our complacency toward those who despise his Master. It is forbidden to walk with the profane in a way of friendship. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2Co 6:14), for familiarity with them will speedily dull the edge of your spirituality. “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1Co 15:33). We cannot disregard these Divine precepts with impunity. “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” (Jam 4:4). “A companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Pro 13:20).

But it is not only the *openly* profane and lawless who are to be shunned by the saint—he needs especially to avoid *empty professors*. By which we mean, those who claim to be Christians, but who do not *live* the Christian life; those who are “church members” or “in fellowship” with some assembly, but whose conduct is careless and carnal; those who attend service on Sunday, but who may be found at the football match, the movies, the dance-hall during the week. The empty professor is far more dangerous as a close acquaintance than one who makes no profession: The Christian is less on his guard with the former, and having some confidence in him is more easily influenced by him. Beware of those who say one thing, but do another; whose talk is pious, but whose walk is worldly. The Word of God is plain and positive on this point: “Having a form of godliness [in action], but denying the power [reality] thereof: *from such turn away*” (2Ti 3:5). If you do not, they will soon drag you down with themselves into the mire.

O young Christian, your “companions”—those with whom you most closely associate—exert a powerful influence upon you for either good or evil. Far better that you should tread a lonely path with Christ, than that you offend Him by cultivating friendship with religious worldlings. “He that liveth in a mill, the flour will stick upon his clothes. Man receiveth an insensible taint from the company he keepeth. He that liveth in a shop of perfumes and is often handling of them carrieth away some of their fragrantcy: so by converse with the godly we are made like them” (A Puritan). “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise” (Pro 13:20). In selecting your closest friend, let not a pleasing personality allure: There are many wolves in sheep's clothing (Mat 7:15). Be most careful in seeing to it that what draws you to and makes you desire the Christian companionship of another is his or her love and likeness to Christ, and not his love and likeness to yourself.

“I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts” (Psa 119:63) should be the aim and endeavour of the child of God—though such characters indeed are very scarce these evil days. They are the only companions worth having, for they alone will encourage you to press forward along the “narrow way.” It is not those who profess to “believe in the Lord,” but those who give evidence they *revere* Him; not those who merely profess to “stand for” His precepts, but who actually perform them, that you need to seek unto. So far from sneering at your “strictness,” they will strengthen you therein, give salutary counsel, be fellow-helpers in prayer and piety: The godly will quicken you unto more godliness. Their converse is on sacred topics, and that will draw out your affection unto things above. If you be unable to locate any of these characters, then make it your earnest prayer: “Let those that fear thee *turn unto me*, and those that have known thy testimonies” (Psa 119:79).

An undue absorption with worldly things. “Worldly” is a term that means very different things in the minds and mouths of different people. Some Christians complain that their minds are “worldly” when they simply mean that, for the time being (and often rightly so), their thoughts are entirely occupied with temporal matters. We do not propose to enter into a close defining of the term, but would point out that the performing of those duties which God has assigned us in the world—or the availing ourselves of its conveniences (such as trains, the telegraph, the printing press), or even enjoying the comforts which it provides (food, clothing, housing)—are certainly not “worldly” in any evil sense. That which *is* injurious to the spiritual life is time wasted in worldly pleasures, the heart absorbed in worldly pursuits, the mind op-

pressed by worldly cares. It is the *love of the world* and its things which is forbidden, and very close watch needs to be kept upon the heart; otherwise, it will glide insensibly into this snare.

The case of Lot supplies a most solemn warning against this evil. He yielded to a spirit of covetousness and so consulted temporal advantages that the spiritual welfare of his family was disregarded. When Abraham invited him to make choice of a portion of Canaan for himself and his herds, instead of remaining in the vicinity of his uncle, upon whom the blessing of the Most High rested, he “lifted up his eyes [acting by sight rather than by faith], and beheld all the plain of Jordan that it was well watered every where...then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan and Lot journeyed east” (Gen 13:8-11). Thus, he even went outside the land itself, for we are told Abraham dwelt in the land of Canaan and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent toward Sodom (Gen 13:12). Nor did that content him: He became an alderman in Sodom (Gen 19:1) and discarded the pilgrim’s “tent” for a “house” (Gen 19:3). How disastrous the sequel was both to himself and his family is well known.

One form of worldliness which has spoilt the life and testimony of many a Christian is *politics*. We will not now discuss the question whether or not the saint ought to take *any* interest in politics, but simply point out what should be evident to all with spiritual discernment—namely, that to take an eager and deep concern in politics must remove the edge from any spiritual appetite. Clearly, politics are concerned only with the affairs of *this* world; and therefore, to become deeply absorbed in them, and have the heart engaged in the pursuit thereof, will inevitably turn attention away from eternal things. Any worldly matter—no matter how lawful in itself—which engages our attention inordinately becomes a snare and saps our spiritual vitality. We greatly fear that those saints who spent several hours a day in listening to the speeches of candidates, reading the newspapers upon them, and discussing party politics with their fellows during the recent election, lost—to a considerable extent—their relish for the Bread of Life.

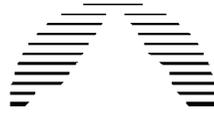
SPIRITUAL UPS AND DOWNS

By Isaac Watts (1674-1748), written in 1726 to a distressed soul.

It is at the request of your excellent brother that I take the freedom to offer my sentiments in order to restore that comfort to your soul which you have many years enjoyed, and which has been of late a little interrupted. To this end, I entreat you to take these few inquiries into your own heart.

1. Have you seen yourself a sinful, guilty creature before the great God? Have you not acknowledged this guilt before the throne of grace and humbly sought to be restored to His favour, and to partake of pardoning love?
2. Are you not willing to have your sinful nature made holy? Have you not found the workings of sin a burden and grief to you? And cannot you join with the apostle in complaining of the flesh and the workings of indwelling sin? (Rom 7:16, 25). Are you not desirous to love God with fervency, and to serve Him with zeal? Is it not your highest ambition to please God in all things?—to be much with God on earth, and to be forever with Him in Heaven? Be assured no power but that of God could raise such desires, and He will satisfy them.
3. Have you not seen Christ as an all-sufficient Mediator, who has died to provide pardon for guilty creatures, and who lives in Heaven to intercede for sinners on earth? Have you not committed your soul into His hand, that you might be introduced into the favour of God?—that you might be pardoned for the sake of His sufferings and death?—that you might be accepted in His name? (Act 4:12, Joh 14:6). Are you not persuaded He is the true and living way, and that He is able to keep what you have committed to Him, till He present you before the Father's and His own glory? (1Ti 1:12, Eph 5:26-27). And have you not given up yourself to His conduct, to be influenced and assisted by His Spirit, to carry you on your way Heavenward? This is a full and large account of faith in Christ; and if you have found these things in your heart and life, you may assuredly pronounce yourself a believer in Jesus, to all the ends and purposes of salvation.
4. Have you not experienced the blessed fruits of faith, in having your love drawn out to Christ, in being enabled to mortify corrupt affections? And has not the love of God wrought in your love to man for God's sake? I would not multiply inquiries of this kind, as I have reason to believe you will find most of these characters and principles in your soul. I persuade myself you will apply the following words of Gospel consolation to yourself, and rejoice in them through the aid of the comforting Spirit: 1 John 1:7, John 6:37, Matthew 11:28-29. Can you ever believe God will reject your soul, and abandon you in age and death? Can you entertain such dishonourable thoughts of Christ? Surely the Divine Shepherd has more compassion for His sheep. But there are three things which have been the occasion of grief and darkness to many pious souls, and I would caution you against them:
 - a. Let not your expectations of holiness be too high. The Law of God requires a perfect obedience, but never anyone obeyed it in perfection, but the God-man, Christ Jesus. There will be sins working in the heart, wishes of corrupt nature, defects in our best duties, too much indifference in our love to God, too much earthly-mindedness, too many wanderings of heart from God, and this flesh will be often leading us astray. These things should be matter of complaint and humiliation before God, but should not discourage our faith and hope. A pain at the heart under a sense of sin, a delight in the law of the Lord after the inner man, and a diligent labour after complete holiness, are the highest degrees of perfection attainable in this life.
 - b. Be not fond of extraordinary witnesses of the Spirit: God feeds very few of His people with extraordinary ecstasies and Divine transports of soul.
 - c. Let not your hopes be so inconstant and fickle as the temperature of your blood may be, but rather rejoice with David in the language of faith: "For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth" (Psa 71:5); "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth" (Psa 71:9); "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (Psa 23:4).

May the Spirit of God seal these comfortable truths upon your heart, and give you peace and joy in believing.



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