

Volume 17—Studies in the Scriptures—No. 1
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Private Prayer—Part 1

“But *thou*, when thou prayest, enter into *thy* closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward *thee* openly” (Matt. 6:6). Eight times in the space of this verse is the pronoun used in the singular number and the second person—a thing unique in all Scripture—as though to emphasize the indispensability, importance and value of private prayer. We are to pray in the closet as well as in the church: in fact if the former be neglected, it is not at all likely that the latter will be of much avail. He that is an attendee at the prayer meetings in order to be seen of men, and is not seen alone in his closet by God, is an hypocrite. Private prayer is the test of our sincerity, the index to our spirituality, the principle means of growing in grace. Private prayer is the one thing, above all others, that Satan seeks to prevent, for he knows full well that if he can succeed at this point, the Christian will fail at every other.

Alas, how remiss we have been, how sadly we have failed to discharge this duty, and what irreparable losers are we by this sinful neglect. Is it not high time that some of us heeded that word, “Consider your ways” (Hag. 1:5, 7)?! Shall this year witness a repetition of the sad failures of the past? Can we go on robbing God of His due, and our souls of the blessedness of communion with Him? The secret place of the Most High is one of vision, peace, joy. The closet is where strength is renewed, faith is quickened, graces are revived. It is not always the cares or pleasures of this world which are the hindering cause—some allow the discharge of public duties to prevent the performance of private ones. Beware, my reader, of being so busy in running from one meeting to another that personal dealings with God *in secret* are crowded out. Some are so busily engaged in reading, and preparing sermons, that private communion with God is prevented.

Not a few are puzzling their brains over prophecy when they should be on their knees before God. “The Devil knows he is no loser, and the curious soul but a little gainer, if he can but persuade him to spend most of his precious time in pouring over the mysteries and hidden things of God. He that affects to read the Revelation of John more than his plain Epistles, or Daniel’s prophecies more than David’s Psalms, and is more busy about reconciling different Scriptures than he is about mortifying of unruly lusts, or is set more upon vain speculation than upon things that make for edification—he is not the man that is cut out for closet prayer. Such as affect sublime notions, obscure expressions, and are men of abstract conceits, are but a company of wise fools, that will never take any delight to be with God in a corner. O how holy, happy, heavenly, and humble might many men have been, had they but spent half the time in closet prayer that they have spent in searching after those things that are hard to be understood” (Thomas Brooks, Puritan).

The most eminent saints, in Old and New Testament times, applied themselves to private prayer. “And Abram planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God” (Gen. 21:33). Why did Abram plant that grove, but that he could have a secluded spot where he might pour out his soul before his Maker. “And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide” (Gen. 24:63): the Hebrew word for “meditate” also signifies *to pray*, and is elsewhere rendered “commune” and “pray.” So, too, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah, Hezekiah, etc., were men whose private devotions are recorded in Holy Writ. Concerning Daniel, we read, “he kneeled upon his knees

three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God" (6:10)—busy as he must have been, he allowed not public duties to crowd out private devotions.

Christ Himself, when upon earth, did much exercise Himself *in private prayer*: ponder such passages as Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35, 6:46, Luke 5:16, where it will be found that He retired "into a mountain," "into a solitary place," "into the wilderness" that He might be alone with God, free from disturbance and distraction. But why was *He* so much in private prayer? Another has suggested the following reasons. First, to put a very high honour and value upon the same: to enhance and magnify this duty. Second, that He might avoid all shows and appearances of ostentation and popular applause: He was very shy of the mere shadow of pride and vainglory. Third, to set us such a blessed pattern and gracious example that we should not content ourselves with public prayers only, nor with family prayers only, but that we should also apply ourselves to *secret* prayer. Fourth, that He might approve Himself to our understandings and consciences to be a merciful and faithful High Priest "who ever liveth to make intercession for us."

It is the exercising of ourselves in secret prayer which distinguishes us from hypocrites, who go through their religious exercises merely to be seen of men: Matthew 6:1, 2, 5, 16. The hypocrite places a far higher value upon the applause of his fellows than he does upon the approbation of his Maker. The praise of men is his meat and drink. The outstanding mark of a hypocrite is that he is one thing in public, but quite another in private. But the genuine Christian makes conscience of his prayer life, knows that God sees and hears him in secret, and cultivates communion with Him in the closet. The diligence with which we perform our *private* devotions is the criterion of our sincerity. We never read in Scripture that Pharaoh, King Saul, Judas, Demas, Simon Magus, and the scribes and Pharisees ever poured out their souls before the Lord in secret! The hypocrite is more concerned about a good name than a good life, of a reputation for piety than a clear conscience—not so God's children. In secret we may more freely, fully, and safely, unbosom our souls to God than we can in the presence of our fellows. There is no danger in opening our heart and confessing in detail our vilest sins before God in a corner, but there might be a considerable hazard in doing so even before our fellow Christians. No one with wisdom and refinement would think of exposing his bodily ailments and diseases to any but his bosom friend or physician; neither should he make known his weaknesses and wickedness to any but to his best Friend, the Great Physician. There need be no restraint or reserve in confession when we are apart with God. It was when David was alone in the cave (see the Psalm heading) that he poured out his complaint and "showed Him his trouble" (Psa. 142:2). Observe carefully the repeated "every family *apart*" and "their wives *apart*" of Zechariah 12:12-14—to manifest not only the soundness of their sorrow, but to show their sincerity.

It is striking to note that God has often granted the freest communications of Himself to those who were before Him in secret. It was so with Moses on the mount, when Jehovah gave him the Law—and again when He gave him the pattern for the tabernacle. It was while Daniel was engaged in private prayer that God sent His angel to reveal to him the secrets of His counsel concerning the restoration of Jerusalem and the duration thereof even unto the Messiah (9:3, 21-27); as it was also during a season when he was alone before the Throne of Grace that God assured him he was "a man greatly beloved" (10:11, 19). It is in the closet that God usually bestows His sweetest and choicest blessings. Cornelius was highly commended and graciously rewarded upon the account of his

private prayer (Acts 10:1-4). Peter was granted that wondrous vision concerning the Gentiles while praying alone (Acts 10:9-13).

Scripture records much to illustrate and demonstrate the great prevalence of private prayer. O the wonders that followed secret wrestling with God, the grand mercies that have been obtained, the judgments that have been diverted, the deliverances that have been secured! When Isaac was all alone entreating with God for a good wife, he met Rebekah (Gen. 24:63, 64). While Hezekiah was weeping and praying in private, God sent the prophet Isaiah to assure him that He would add unto his days fifteen years (Isa. 38:5). When Jonah was shut up in the whale's belly, he was delivered in answer to his supplication (2:1-10). O the power of private prayer: it has issued in the dead being raised to life—1 Kings 17:18-22, 2 Kings 4:32-35. May the Holy Spirit graciously use these considerations to stir up writer and reader.—A.W.P.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

121. *A Good Conscience*: 13:18, 19.

Hebrews 13:18, 19 is closely connected with the verse which immediately precedes. In our present portion the Apostle mentions another duty which believers owe to those who minister unto them in spiritual things, and this is that they should earnestly remember them before the Throne of Grace. The writer of this Epistle besought the prayers of the Hebrews, supporting his plea with a declaration of the sincerity and fidelity with which he had sought to discharge his office. The very fact that the true servants of Christ are so conscientious in the performance of their work, should so endear them to those they minister unto, that a spirit of prayer for them ought to be kindled in their hearts. They are the instruments through which we receive the most good, and therefore the least we can do in return is to seek to bear them up before God in the arms of our faith and love.

Before we consider this special need of Christ's servants, and our privilege and duty in ministering unto the same, we propose to devote the remainder of this article unto a careful consideration of the particular reason here advanced by the Apostle in support of his request, namely, "for we trust we have a good conscience in all things willing to live honestly." This expression "a good conscience" occurs in several other passages in the New Testament, and because of its deep importance it calls for our closest attention. Much is said in the Word about conscience, and much depends upon our having and preserving a good one, and therefore it behooves us to give our best consideration to this weighty subject. Not only is it one of great practical moment, but it is especially timely in view of the conscienceless day in which we live. What, then, is the conscience? What is a *good* conscience, and how is it obtained and maintained? May the Spirit of Truth be our Teacher as we seek to ponder these vital questions.

Conscience is that faculty of the soul which enables us to perceive of conduct in reference to right and wrong, that inward principle which decides upon the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our desires and deeds. Conscience has well been termed the moral *sense*, because it corresponds to those physical faculties whereby we have communion with the outward world, namely, the five senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. Man has an ethical instinct, a faculty or moral sensibility informing and impressing him. "It is far higher in the scale and keener in its perceptions than any mere bodily sense. There is an inner eye, that sees into the nature of right and wrong; an inner ear, sensitive to the faintest whisper of moral obligation; an inner touch, that feels the pressure of duty, and responds to it sympathetically" (A. T. Pierson).

Conscience is that mysterious principle which bears its witness within us for good or evil, and therefore it is the very center of human accountability, for it greatly adds to his condemnation that man continues sinning against the dictates of this internal sentinel. Conscience supplies us with self-knowledge and self-judgment, resulting in self-approbation or self-condemnation according to our measure of light. It is a part of the understanding in all rational creatures which passes judgment on all actions for or against them. It bears witness of our thoughts, affections, and actions, for it reflects upon and weighs whatever is proposed to and by the mind. That it bears witness of *emotions* is clear from, "My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart" (Rom. 9:1, 2). So again we read, "Take no heed unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee; for oftentimes also thine own heart (conscience) knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast (inwardly)

cursed others: (Eccl. 7:21, 22). Its voice is heard by the soul secretly acquainting us with the right and wrong of things.

That conscience exists in the unregenerate is clear from Paul's statement concerning the Gentiles: "Which show the work of the law written in their hearts; their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. 2:15). Though the heathen never received the Scriptures, as Israel did, yet they had within them that which accused or excused them. There is within every man (save the idiot) that which reproved him for his sins, yea, for those most secret sins to which none are privy but themselves. Wicked men seek to stifle those inward chidings, but are rarely if ever successful. "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites" (Isa. 33:14). Unregenerate men are without faith, yet not without fear: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth" (Prov. 28:1). There is that within man which appalls the stoutest sinner after the committal of any gross evil: his own heart re-proves him.

The Creator has gifted the human soul with various faculties, such as the understanding, affections, and will; and He has also bestowed upon it this power of considering its own state and actions, both inward and outward, constituting conscience both a monitor and judge within man's own bosom—a monitor to warn of duty, a judge to condemn for neglect of the same. It is an impartial judge within us, that cannot be suspected of either undue severity or ill-will, for it is an intrinsic part of our very own selves. Conscience anticipates the Grand Assize in the Day to come, for it forces man to pass verdict upon himself, as he is subject to the judgment of God. It is resident in the understanding, as is clear from 1 Corinthians 2:11, where the conscience is termed our "spirit."

The presence of conscience within man supplies one of the clearest demonstrations of the existence of God. To this fact the Holy Spirit appeals in Psalm 53. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (v.1). Now how does he prove there is a God? Thus, "There were they in great fear, where no fear was" (v. 5). Though there was no outward cause for fear, none seeking to hurt them, yet even those who lived most atheistically were under a fear. An illustration is seen in the case of Joseph's brethren, who accused themselves when there was none other to accuse them: "They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother" (Gen. 42:21). Though a man should hide himself from all the world, he cannot get away from himself—his heart will pursue and condemn him. Now the very fact that there is such a hidden fear in man after sinning, that their hearts smite them for crimes done in secret, argues there is a God.

This fear is found in the most obstinate sinners, and in those who, because of their high station and power are exempt from human justice. History records how kings and emperors have followed their wickedness without interference, yet even the infamous Caligula trembled when it thundered. It was not a fear that they might be found out by man and punished by him, for in some notable instances this fear prevailed to such an extent that human punishment had been a welcome relief, and failing which they perforce laid violent hands upon themselves. What can be the reason for this, but that they feared a Judge and Avenger, who would call them to account? As the Apostle said of the heathen, "They *know* the judgment of God" (Rom. 1:32): there is a witness in their own souls that they are liable to His justice. Mark the fearful consternation of Belshazzar: the paling of his countenance, smiting of his knees, loosing of his joints, when he read the sentence on the palace walls (Dan. 5).

“There is nothing in man that more challenges and demands adequate explanation than his moral sense. Conscience is a court always in session and imperative in its summons. No man can evade it or silence its accusations. It is a complete assize. It has a judge on its bench, and that judge will not be bribed into a lax decision. It has its witness-stand, and can bring witnesses from the whole territory of the past life. It has its jury, ready to give a verdict, ‘guilty’ or ‘not guilty,’ in strict accordance with the evidence; and it has its sheriff, *remorse*, with his whip of scorpions, ready to lash the convicted soul. The nearest thing in this world to the bar of God, is the court of conscience. And though it be for a time drugged into a partial apathy, or intoxicated with worldly pleasure, the time comes when in all the majesty of its imperial authority this court calls to its bar every transgressor and holds him to a strict account” (A. T. Pierson).

But though the presence of conscience in us bears witness to the existence of a holy, righteous, sin-hating and sin-avenging God, it is scarcely correct to say (as numbers have done) that the conscience is the voice of God speaking in the soul—rather is it that faculty which *responds* to what He says. When Christ declared “he that hath ears to hear let him hear,” He signified him that has a conscience attuned to the Most High, who desires to know His will and submit to His authority. Conscience sits upon the bench of the heart as God’s vice-regent, acquitting or accusing. It acts thus in the natural man, but in the regenerate it is a godly conscience, guided in its operations by the Holy Spirit, bearing its testimony for or against the believer according to his character and conduct, Godwards and manwards.

The actual term “conscience” is derived from “scio” to know, and “con” with. There is some difference of opinion as to the precise application of the prefix, whether it be a knowledge we have in common with God, or a knowledge according to His Law. Really, it is a distinction with very little difference. The “knowledge” is of one individual alone by himself, but this “knowledge *with*” is where two at least share the same secret, either of them knowing it together with the other. Conscience, then, is that faculty which *combines two together*, and makes them partners in knowledge; it is between man and God. God knows perfectly all the doings of a man, no matter how carefully concealed; and man, by this faculty, also knows together with God the same things of himself. Hence we read of “conscience toward God” (1 Peter 2:19), or as the Greek may also be rendered (see margin of R.V.) “the conscience of God”—having Him for its Author and Object. Conscience is God’s vice-regent, acting for and under Him.

Thus, as the very term implies, conscience must have *a rule* to work by: “knowledge together with.” It is not only a knowledge, but a knowledge coupled with *a standard*, according to which a process of inward judgment is carried on. Now our only proper rule is the Word, or revealed will of God. That is divided into two parts: what God speaks to man in His holy Law, and what He says to him in His blessed Gospel. If conscience departs from that Rule, then it is a rebellious one, it has ceased to speak and judge for God, and then the light in man is turned into darkness, for the (inward) eye has become evil (Matt. 6:23). In his primitive condition man had only the Law, and the proper work of conscience then was to speak warningly and condemningly in strict accordance with that Rule, and to allow none other. But our first parents listened to Satan’s lie, broke the Law, and came under its condemnation.

Wherever we go conscience accompanies us, whatever we think or do it records and registers in order to the Day of account. “When all friends forsake thee, yea, when thy

soul forsakes the body, conscience will not, cannot, forsake thee. When thy body is weakest and dullest, the conscience is most vigorous and active. Never more life in the conscience than when death makes its nearest approach to the body. When it smiles, acquits, and comforts, what a Heaven doth it create within a man! But when it frowns, condemns and terrifies, how does it becloud, yea, benight all the pleasures, joys and delights of this world" (John Flavell). Conscience, then, is the best of friends or the worst of enemies in the whole creation.

Much of our peace of mind and liberty of spirit in this world will be according to the favourable testimony of conscience, and much of our spiritual bondage, fear, and distress of mind will be according to the charges of wrong-doing which conscience brings against us. When the gnawings of conscience are intensified, they become unendurable, as was the case with Cain, Judas and Spira, for they supply a real foretaste of the internal torments of Hell. Most probably this is that "worm that dieth not" (Mark 9:44) which preys upon the lost. As a worm in the body is bred of the corruption that is therein, so the accusations and condemnations of conscience are bred in the soul by the corruptions and guilt that are therein; and as the worm preys upon the tender and invisible parts of the body, so does conscience touch the very quick of the soul.

But notwithstanding what has been predicated of the conscience above, it is, nevertheless, *defiled* (Titus 1:15). In the natural man it is exceeding partial in its office, winking at and indulging favourite sins, whilst being strict and severe upon other sins to which a person is not constitutionally prone. Thus we find the conscience of king Saul exceedingly punctilious in a matter of the ceremonial law (1 Sam. 14:34), yet he scrupled not to slay eighty-five of God's priests! The reason why the conscience is so uneven is because it has been corrupted by the Fall: it is out of order, just as a foul stomach craves certain articles of diet while loathing others which are equally wholesome. So it is in the performance of duties: conscience in the natural man picks and chooses according to its own perverted caprice: neglecting what is distasteful, performing what is pleasing and then being proud because it has done so.

Now conscience is either good or evil, and that, according as it is governed by the revealed will of God. Briefly, the evil conscience first. This is of several kinds. There is the ignorant and darkened conscience, relatively so and not absolutely, for all (save idiots) possess rationality and the light of nature. This is the condition of the heathen, and alas, of an increasing number in Christendom, who are reared in homes where God is utterly ignored. Then there is the brazen and defiant conscience, which blatantly refuses to be in subjection to God's known will: such was the case with Pharaoh. In the case of Herod we see a bribed conscience, pretending that his oath obliged him to behead John the Baptist. The seared and insensible conscience (1 Tim. 4:2) pertains to those who have long resisted the light and are given over by God to a reprobate mind. The despairing and desperate conscience leads its possessor to lay violent hands upon himself.

At the new birth the conscience is renewed, being greatly quickened and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Through the exercise of faith the conscience is purified (Acts 15:9), being cleansed by an appropriation of the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:14). A good conscience may be defined, generally, as one that is *set to please God in all things*, for it hates sin and loves holiness; it is one which is governed by the Word, being in subjection to the authority of its Author. Its binding rule is obedience to God, and to Him alone, refusing to act apart from His light. Consequently, the more conscientious the Christian be, the

more he refuses all domination (the traditions and opinions of man) which is not Divine, the more likely is he to gain the reputation of being conceited and intractable. Nevertheless, each of us must be much on his guard lest he mistake pride and self-will for conscientious scruples. There is a vast difference between firmness and an unteachable spirit, as there is between meekness and fickleness.

How is a good and pure conscience obtained? Briefly, by getting it rightly informed, and by casting out its filth through penitential confession. The first great need of conscience is *light*, for ignorance corrupts it. "That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good" (Prov. 19:2). As a judge that understands not the laws of his country is unfit to give judgment on any matter that comes before him, or as a dim eye cannot properly perform its office, so a blind or uninformed conscience is incapable to judge of our duty before God. Conscience cannot take God's part unless it knows His will, and for a full acquaintance with that we must daily read and search the Scriptures. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word" (Psa. 119:9). O to be able to say, "Thy Word, is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psa. 119:105).

Let us now mention some of the qualities or characteristics of a good conscience. First, *sincerity*. Alas, how little of this virtue is left in the world: what shams and hypocrisy now obtain on every side—the religious realm, the political, the commercial, and the social. This is a conscienceless generation, and consequently there is little or no honesty, fidelity, or reality. That which now regulates the average person is a temporary expediency, rather than an acting according to principle. But it is otherwise with the regenerate: the fear of the Lord has been planted in his heart, and therefore can he say with the Apostle, "We trust we have a good conscience, in *all things* willing to live honestly." A sincere conscience genuinely desires to know God's will and is truly determined to be in subjection thereto. Guile has received its death wound, and the heart is open to the light, ready to be searched thereby.

Tenderness is another property of a good conscience. By this quality is meant a wakefulness and sensitiveness so that it smites for sin upon all occasions offered. So far from being indifferent to God's claims, the heart is acutely sensible when they have been ignored. Even for what many consider trifling matters, a tender conscience will chide and condemn. Job resolved to preserve a tender conscience when he said, "my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live" (27:6). Again; we may understand this characteristic from its opposite, namely, a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2), which is contracted by an habitual practice of that which is evil, the heart becoming as hard as the public highway. Pray frequently for a tender conscience, dear reader.

Fidelity. When conscience faithfully discharges its office there is a constant judging of our state before God and a measuring of our ways by His Holy Word. Thus the Apostle Paul could say, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). The favourable judgment which others may entertain of him will afford no satisfaction to an upright man unless he has the testimony of conscience that his conduct is right in the sight of God. No matter what may be the fashions of the hour or the common custom of his fellows, one whose heart beats true to God will not do anything knowingly against conscience: his language will ever be, "whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto *God*, judge ye" (Acts 4:19). On the other hand, his frequent payer is, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and

know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa. 139:23, 24).

Tranquility. This is the sure reward of sincerity and fidelity, for Wisdom's ways (in contrast from those of folly's) "are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3:17). An offended conscience will offend us, and "a wounded spirit who can bear?" (Prov. 18:14). The Christian may as well expect to touch a live coal without pain, as to sin without trouble of conscience. But a clear conscience is quiet, condemning not, being unburdened by the guilt of sin. When we walk closely with God there is a serenity of mind and peace of heart which is the very opposite of the state of those who are lawless and disobedient, "for the wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest." The tranquility of a good conscience is an earnest of the undisturbed calm which awaits us on High.

But let it be pointed out that every peaceful conscience is not a good one, nor is every uneasy conscience an evil one. The conscience of some is quiet because it is insensible. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace" (Luke 11:21): that is a quiet evil conscience, because put to sleep by the opiates of Satan. True tranquility of conscience is to be determined from the other properties: it must issue from sincerity, tenderness, and fidelity, or otherwise it is a seared one. We must consider not how much inward peace we have, but how much *cause*: as in a building, not the fairness of the structure, but the *foundation* of it is to be most regarded. On the other hand, a tender conscience is liable to err through lack of sufficient light, and needlessly write bitter things against itself, which is a "weak conscience" (1 Cor. 8:12); as we may also be troubled by sin's already pardoned.

Now a good conscience can only be maintained by constant diligence: "Herein do I *exercise myself* to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16). The Apostle made it his daily employment to keep his conscience clear, that it might not justly accuse him of anything, so that he should have the witness in his own heart that his character and conduct were pleasing in the sight of the Holy One. The maintenance of a good conscience is an essential part of personal piety: "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy . . . holding faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim. 1:18, 19): that is the sum of personal godliness—faith being the principle of things to be believed by us, conscience the principle of the things to be done. Faith and a good conscience are linked together again in 1 Timothy 1:5 and 3:9, for we cannot hold the one without the other.

If the reader will turn back to Acts 24 he will find that Paul was replying to charges brought against him. In verses 14-16 he made his defense, giving therein a brief epitome of practical and experimental Christianity. As the foundation he gives an account of his faith: "believing all things which are written"; as the immediate proof thereof—"and have hope toward God"; and then a brief account of his conversation "herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense." A saving knowledge of the Truth, then, is such a belief of the Scriptures as produces an hope of eternal life, which is evidenced by a keeping of the heart with all diligence. The same is enumerated again in "The end of the commandment" (the design of the Gospel institution) is that love which fulfills the Law, issuing from a heart that beats true to God (1 Tim. 1:5).

"Herein do I exercise myself": we must make it our constant endeavour. First, by a diligent and daily searching of the Scriptures that we may discover the will of God. We

are exhorted "Be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17), and this in order that we may ascertain what is pleasing to Him, so that we offend not either in belief or worship. A conscience ill-informed is, at best, a weak and ignorant one. Second, by a serious inquiry into the state of our heart and ways: "Stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still" (Psa. 4:4). We need to frequently challenge and call ourselves to account. If we would have conscience speak to us, we must speak often to it. It is given us for this very reason that we may judge of our state and actions with respect to the judgment of God. Then "Let us search and try our ways" (Lam. 3:40). Take time, dear reader, to parley with yourself and consider how matters stand between you and God. Short reckonings prevent mistakes, so review each day and put right what has come between you and God.

Third, a uniform course of obedience: "Hereby we know that we are of the Truth, and shalt assure our hearts before Him" (1 John 3:19). Fourth, by a constant alertness: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt. 26:41). Fifth, by a serious resistance and mortification of sin: cutting off the right hand and putting out the right eye. Sixth, by a sincere repentance and confession when conscious of failure. Seventh, by faith's appropriation of the cleansing blood of Christ.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF DAVID.

73. His Inordinate Grief.

It will be remembered that in Article No. 72, we were occupied with the effects which the advance messengers of Joab had upon David. Those special couriers informed him of the defeat and death of Absalom (2 Sam. 18:29-33), and the king at once broke down and gave way to bitter lamentations. No doubt this was natural, and to be expected, for the insurrectionist was his own son, though an utterly unworthy one; yet while an outburst of sorrow was excusable, inordinate grief was not so. In writing upon this subject care needs to be taken by us, so as to prevent the reader, as far as we can, from drawing wrong conclusions. Inordinate grief is neither the depths to which we may be shaken nor the copiousness of our tears, for that is largely a matter of personal temperament and the state of our health.

Inordinate grief is when we so far lose control of ourselves that we become guilty of hysterical outbursts which ill become a rational creature, and uttering intemperate expressions, which displease the Lord and offends those who have His fear upon them. Especially should the Christian ever seek to set before others an example of sobriety, checking everything which savours of insubordination to God. Again; we are guilty of inordinate grief when we allow a sorrow to so overwhelm us that we are rendered incapable of discharging our duty. Particularly is this the case with those who occupy a public position, upon whom others are dependent or influenced thereby. In David's case he failed at each of these points, being guilty of a violent outburst of his passions, using intemperate language, and taking issue with God's providential will.

In due time Joab and his victorious army arrived at Mahanaim, to receive the congratulations of the king and wait upon him for further instructions. But instead of meeting them with warm gratitude for the signal service they had rendered him and his kingdom, David conducted himself in such a way as to make the army conclude the sovereign was filled with regret at their achievements. Consequently, instead of there being joyous celebrations over the victory, the spirit of the camp was greatly dampened. Instead of being thankful that his kingdom had been mercifully delivered, David was completely overwhelmed with grief over the death of his wayward son, and all were made to suffer in consequence. The deplorable effects this produced will now be considered by us.

"And it was told Joab, Behold the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom. And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son. And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam. 19:1-4). "The excessive indulgence of any passion (grief by no means excepted), not only offends God, but betrays men into great imprudence in their temporal concerns. They who have faithfully served us expect that we should appear pleased with them, and thankful for their services; and many will do more for a smile and a kind word from their superiors, than for a more substantial recompense; and be much grieved and disheartened if they think themselves frowned on" (Thomas Scott).

This was no time for David to yield to his private sorrows: public interests urgently required him to bestir himself and grip the helm of state with a firm hand. A most serious and critical situation confronted him, which called for prompt and decisive action. Absalom's rebellion had rent the kingdom asunder, and only a prudent policy, swiftly exe-

cuted, could hope to restore peace and unity again. There had been a widespread revolt, and David's throne had been shaken to its very foundations. The king himself had been forced to flee from Jerusalem and his subjects had become divided in their interests and loyalty. But God had graciously intervened: the arch-rebel was slain and his forces utterly routed. This was the hour, then, for David to assert his authority, press upon the people the honour of Jehovah's name, take charge of things, and take full advantage of the situation which had swung things so markedly into his favour.

As soon as he had received confirmation that Absalom and his forces had been defeated, David's only wise course was to return immediately to Jerusalem. To set up his court once more in the royal city, while the rebels were in confusion and before they could rally again, was but the part of common prudence—how else could the insurrectionists be cowed and the unity of the nation be restored? But now grief paralyzed David: beclouding his judgment, sapping his energy, causing him to conduct himself most injudiciously. Never was there a time when he more needed to hold the hearts of his soldiers: it was essential to his royal interests that he should secure their respect and affection: but by keeping himself in close mourning, he not only dampened the spirits of his strongest supporters, but acted as though he disapproved of what they had done.

“And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom. And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son” (2 Sam. 19:1-2). “The people will take particular notice of what their princes say and do: the more eyes we have upon us, and the greater our influence is, the more need we have to speak and act wisely, and to govern our passions strictly” (Matthew Henry). David ought to have been ashamed of his sorrowing over such a worthless and wicked son, and done his utmost to subdue and hide it. See how the people reacted: they “gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle” (v. 3). Out of respect for their sovereign they would not rejoice while he continued to mourn, yet they must have felt deeply how little their efforts on his behalf were really appreciated.

“But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom! O Absalom my son, my son!” (v. 4). This was not the initial outburst of David's anguish, but the prolonged hugging to himself of his sorrow after the army had returned. The king was quite overcome, insensible to the pressing requirements of the hour and the needs of his subjects. This is what inordinate grief produces: it makes one so self-centered that the interests of others are ignored. It thoroughly unfits for the discharge of our duties. It so takes the eye off God that we are wholly occupied with distressing circumstances. It is in such an hour that we need to take hold of and act out that oft-repeated injunction “Be strong and of a good courage.” Inordinate grief will not restore the dead, but it will seriously injure the living.

David's conduct displeased the Lord, and He used an unwelcome instrument to bestir the king to a renewed sense of his responsibility, for it is from this angle that we must first view Joab's attack upon David. “When a man's ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov. 16:7) : yes, “maketh,” for our enemies are as much under the immediate control of the Most High as are our best friends. True it is that every attack made upon us by our foes is not, necessarily, an indication that we have offended God, yet oftentimes it is so, and therefore it is the part of wisdom for us to always regard the attacks of our enemies as being God's rod reproofing us, and for us to

examine our ways and judge ourselves. Did not God make Abimelech to be at peace with Isaac (Gen. 26:26-30) and Esau with Jacob (Gen. 33), then He could have easily softened the heart of Joab toward David; that He did *not* do so, intimates He was displeased with him for his inordinate grief.

“And Joab came into the house to the king and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons, and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; in that thou lovest thine enemies and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well” (2 Sam. 19:5, 6). As we have pointed out, Joab, during the later years of his life, was far from being friendly disposed toward David, and though he served at the head of his army, self-interest and not loyalty to the king was what actuated him. He was therefore quick to seize this opportunity to assert his arrogance, and not sparing David’s feelings at all, he strongly berated him for his present selfishness and inertia. True, he was justified in remonstrating with David on the impropriety of his conduct, yet that by no means excused his pride and insolence. Though there was much force in what Joab said, yet he sadly failed to show that respect which was due his master.

“Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants for I swear by the Lord, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now” (v. 7). David’s duty was here plainly if roughly pointed out to him: he ought to present himself at once before those faithful troops who had endangered *their* lives for the preservation of *his*. Let the king now bestir himself and delay no longer, but go forth and publicly congratulate their success and thank them heartily for their services. The painful alternative must not be ignored: there was grave danger of a further and worse revolt. If the king persisted in selfish ingratitude, he would lose the respect of his staunchest supporters, and then he would be left without any to further his interests. Sometimes God makes use of a rough hand to arouse us from our lethargy, and we should be thankful that He cares sufficiently for us to do so.

Joab had pressed upon David the claims of his people, and the king was duly aroused. So far from being angry at and refusing the counsel which he had received, David acted promptly upon it and took his proper place. “Then the king arose, and sat in the gate. And they told unto all the people, saying, Behold, the king doth sit in the gate. And all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent” (v. 8). A wise man will seek to profit from good advice, no matter who may proffer it or how unkindly it may be given—shall I refuse an important letter because I dislike the appearance or manners of the postman! “When we are convinced of a fault we must amend, though we are told it by our inferiors, and indecently, or in heat and passion” (Matthew Henry). Was David looking back to this incident when he wrote, “Let the righteous smite me. It shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head” (Psa. 141:5)?

“And all the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and he delivered us out of the hand of the Philistines, and now he is fled out of the land for Absalom. And Absalom, whom we anointed over us is dead in battle. Now therefore why speak ye not a word of bringing the king

back?" (2 Sam. 19:9, 10). These verses show clearly the timeliness of Joab's intervention and the deplorable state the kingdom of Israel was now in. A house divided against itself cannot stand: strong and swift measures were now called for. Many of the people still desired the return of their king, though they were too dilatory to do more than talk, and ask why a message was not sent urging him to come to Jerusalem. It is generally thus: those who are friendly disposed toward us lack the energy to *act* on our behalf.

The tribes of Israel were conscious of their predicament: they were without a competent head. David undoubtedly possessed the best claims: he had proved himself a valiant and successful leader, delivering them from their powerful foes. Yet, when his son turned traitor and many of his subjects had joined forces with him, the king fled. But Absalom was now dead, and his army had been defeated. A "strife" ensued: probably the people blamed their elders for not taking the initiative and communicating with David, to assure him of their repentance and renewed fealty; while the elders threw the blame on the people because of their recent disloyalty. Mutual recriminations got them nowhere; meanwhile no definite steps were taken by them to urge David's return to the capital.

"And king David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying, Speak unto the elders of Judah, saying, Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house. Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh: wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king?" (vv. 11, 12). When David learned of the favourable sentiment which existed, generally, throughout Israel toward him, he threw the onus on the elders of his own tribe. "We do not always find the most kindness from those whom we have the most reason to expect it" (Matthew Henry). Alas, how true that is. How often we find that those who are bound to us by the closest ties and upon whom we have the greatest claims, are the first to fail and the last to help us. Perhaps one reason why this incident is recorded is that it may warn us not to expect too much even from our spiritual brethren—the less we expect, the less will be our disappointment.

That Judah, his own tribe, were so lacking in affection or enterprise, suggests that they too had been seriously implicated in the recent rebellion; and now they were either too slack to make suitable overtures to their king, or else they feared they had wronged him so grievously by siding with Absalom that there was no hope of regaining his favour. By employing two of the priestly family to negotiate with the elders of Judah, David evidenced both his prudence and piety. As God-fearing men, Zadok and Abiathar were trusted by the king and respected by the best of people, and therefore there would be no suspicion on either side that they were working from self-interests. It is always wise and well for us to enlist the aid of those most looked up to for their uprightness when it becomes necessary for us to use intermediaries.

"And say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bones, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab" (v. 13). Though Amasa was the son of David's sister (1 Chron. 2:17), Absalom had set him over the rebel army (2 Sam. 17:25), and therefore he was the leader of an influential party whom David desired to win. Moreover, he was determined to strip the haughty and intolerable Joab of his power, if that were at all possible; yet he was very unwise in making known his purpose, for though Amasa accepted David's offer, yet on the very first military enterprise on which he was dispatched, Joab met and murdered him (2 Sam. 20:10). By singling out Amasa for special notice—owning him as his kinsman and prom-

ising to make him general of all his forces if he now stood by the king's cause—David gave clear intimation that he was ready to *pardon* those who had most grievously wronged him.

“And *he* bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man; so that they sent this word unto the king, Return thou and all thy servants” (2 Sam. 19:14). There is some difference of opinion as to whether the “*he*” refers to David, Amasa, or the Lord Himself. Personally, we believe it signifies the latter. First, because “*God*” is directly mentioned in verse 13; second, because had the reference been to David it had said “so they sent the word unto *him*” etc; third, because we have no reason to suppose that Amasa was sufficiently prominent or powerful to affect “all the men of Israel.” Finally, because it is God's prerogative alone to regulate the heart (Prov. 21:1). No doubt God, instrumentally, made use of the persuasions of the priests, and of Amasa to influence them; nevertheless their spontaneity and unanimity must be ascribed unto Him who sways all His creatures.

“So the king returned, and came to Jordan” (2 Sam. 19:15). David did not move until he was assured that the people really desired his return: he was unwilling to be king of those who welcomed him not. In this we have typically illustrated an important truth: “Our Lord Jesus will rule in those who invite Him to the throne of their hearts, and not till He is invited. He first *bows the heart* and makes it willing in the day of His power, and then *rules* in the midst of His enemies: Psalm 110:2, 3’ ” (Matthew Henry).—A.W.P.

THE DIVINE COVENANTS.

6. *The Davidic.*

In the opening article of this series it was pointed out that the various covenants which God entered into with men, from time to time, adumbrate different features of the Everlasting Covenant which He made with the Mediator ere time began. As we have followed the historical stream it has been shown wherein the Adamic, the Noahaic and the Siniatic covenants shadowed forth the essential features of that Eternal Compact which constituted the basis of the salvation of God's elect. In connection with the Davidic, it is observable there is an absence of those details which marked the earlier ones, that renders it less easy to determine the exact purpose and purport of it so far as the "letter" of it was concerned. Yet the reason for this is not far to seek: as the last of the Old Testament covenants, the type merged more definitely with the antitype. This becomes the more patent when we examine carefully those Scriptures bearing directly thereon, for in some of them it is almost impossible to say whether the type or the antitype be before us.

A notable instance of this is furnished by the 89th Psalm. Though we cannot be sure of the precise time when it was first penned, there seems good reason to conclude that it is to be dated from the reign of Rehoboam. Its closing verses make it quite plain that it was written at a period when the honour and power of David's royal line had been reduced to a very low ebb; yet before the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple—for no hint of that calamity is here given. It was in the days of Rehoboam ten of the tribes revolted from him, and that the one placed over them became his powerful adversary, while the king of Egypt so weakened and humbled him that it appears he only retained his kingdom at all by the clemency of Shishak. A sad condition had arrived, for the fortunes of David's family had sunk to a deplorable degree.

It was under such circumstances the 89th Psalm was composed. That its writer was fearfully agitated appears from its last fourteen verses, though perhaps he was there voicing the general sentiment which then obtained. Everything looked as though the Divine promises to David had failed and were on the eve of being made completely void. It was then that faith had its opportunity, and ignoring the black clouds which covered the firmament, took refuge in Him who dwelleth above it. It was in the covenant-faithfulness of the Father of Mercies that the Psalmist now found comfort. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known of Thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up forever: Thy faithfulness shalt Thou establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn unto David My servant: thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah." (Psa. 89:1-4).

One view only has obtained among the spiritually minded. Said the Puritan Brooks, "There are many passages in this Psalm which do clearly evidence it is to be interpreted of *Christ*, yea there are many things in this Psalm which cannot be clearly and pertinently applied to any but Christ." Toplady (author of the hymn "Rock of Ages") asked, "Do you suppose this was spoken of David in his own person only? No indeed, but to David as type and forerunner of Christ." "The whole context of the Psalm discovers the design of it to be to set forth some higher Person than David, for it seems to be too magnificent and lofty for an earthly prince" (S. Charnock). "The whole of the 89th Psalm, which is altogether devoted to the covenant, is expressly said to be a vision in which Jehovah spake to

His Holy One (v. 19), and all the purport of it is to show how Jehovah had entered into covenant engagement with Christ for the redemption of His people” (Robert Hawker).

Psalm 89, then, is the key to 2 Samuel 7:4-17. Not only does it unlock for us the meaning of the Davidic Covenant, but it also fixes the interpretation of those passages in the Prophets which obviously look back to and are based upon the same. “The covenant is made with David, the covenant of royalty is made with him, as the father of his family, and all his seed through him, and for his sake, representing the Covenant of Grace made with Christ as Head of the Church, and with all believers in Him . . . The blessings of the covenant were not only secured to David himself, but were entailed on his family. It was promised that his family should continue—‘thy seed will I establish forever,’ so that ‘David shall not want a son to reign’ (Jer. 33:17). And that it should continue a royal family: ‘I will build up his throne to all generations.’ This has its accomplishment only *in Christ*” (Matthew Henry).

“I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn unto David My servant” (Psa. 89:3). “David was the Lord’s elect, and with him a covenant was made, which ran along in the line of his seed until it received a final and never-ending fulfillment in ‘the Son of David.’ David’s house must be royal: as long as there was a sceptre in Judah, David’s seed must be the only rightful dynasty; the great ‘King of the Jews’ died with that title above His head in the three current languages of the then-known world, and at this day He is owned as King by men of every tongue. The oath sworn to David has not been broken, though the temporal crown is no longer worn, for in the covenant itself his kingdom was spoken of as enduring forever. In Christ Jesus there is a covenant established with all the Lord’s *chosen*, and they are by grace led to be the Lord’s *servants*, and then are ordained kings and priests by Jesus Christ . . . After reading this (2 Sam. 7:12-16), let us remember that the Lord has said to us by His servant Isaiah, ‘I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David’ ” (C. H. Spurgeon).

“Thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations” (Psa. 89:4). “David must always have a seed, and truly in Jesus this is fulfilled beyond his hopes. What a seed David has in the multitude which have sprung from Him who was both his Son and his Lord. The Son of David is the great Progenitor, the last Adam, the Everlasting Father, He sees His seed, and in them beholds of the travail of His soul. David’s dynasty never decays, but on the contrary, is evermore consolidated by the great Architect of Heaven and earth. Jesus is a king as well as a progenitor, and His throne is ever being built up—His kingdom comes—His power extends. Thus runs the covenant: and when the Church declines, it is ours to *plead it* before the ever-faithful God, as the Psalmist does in the latter verses of this sacred song. Christ must reign, but why is His name blasphemed and His Gospel so despised? The more gracious Christians are, the more will they be moved to jealousy by the sad estate of the Redeemer’s cause, and the more will they argue the case with the great Covenant-maker, crying day and night before Him, ‘Thy kingdom come’ ” (C. H. Spurgeon).

We shall not proceed any further with a verse by verse comment of this Psalm, but rather seek to call attention to its more essential features, as they serve to elucidate the Davidic Covenant. The first section of the Psalm closes with the declaration, “Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne.” This has reference to the *mediatorial* throne of God in Christ, as is clear from the remainder of the verse and what follows: justice and judgment are the *establishment* (margin) of His throne—the firmest foundations on which

any throne can be settled. The Son of God, as the Surety of His elect, undertook to satisfy Divine justice, by rendering perfect obedience to the precepts of the Law and by suffering its penalty, whereby He brought in everlasting righteousness. God's administration of grace, then, is founded upon the complete satisfaction of His justice by Christ as the Sponsor of His people: Romans 3:24-26; 5:21.

Having at some length praised the God of Israel by celebrating His perfections, the Psalmist next declared the happiness of the true Israel of God, closing with the blessed affirmation "For the Lord is our defense, and the Holy One of Israel is our *King*" (Psa. 89:18). The people that "know the joyful sound" (v. 15), are they whose ears have been opened by the Spirit to take in the glad tidings of the Gospel, so that they understand the covenant promises and perceive their own personal interest therein. They walk in the light of Jehovah's countenance, for they are accepted in the Beloved. In God's righteousness they shall continue to be exalted, for Divine justice is on their side and not against them. In God's favour their horn or spirit shall be elevated, for nothing so exhilarates the heart as a realization of God's free grace. As their King, the Holy One of Israel will both rule and protect them.

At verse 19 the Psalmist returns to a consideration of the covenant which God made with David, enlarging upon his previous reference thereto, and pleading it before God for His favour unto the royal family, now almost ruined. Yet one has only to weigh the things here said to perceive that they go far beyond the typical David, yea, some of them could scarcely apply to him at all, but receive their fulfillment in Christ and His *spiritual* seed. The covenant which God made with the son of Jesse was an outward adumbration of that Eternal Compact He had entered into with the Mediator on behalf of His people: it was the publishing on earth something of what transpired in the secret councils of Heaven. The ultimate reference in "Then Thou spakest in vision to Thy Holy One" is unto the Father's intercourse with the Son before time began: see Proverbs 8:22, 23, 30; Matthew 11:27; John 5:20.

"I have laid help upon One that is mighty" (Psa. 89:19). How fully was that demonstrated in Christ's life, death and resurrection. He was mighty because He is the Almighty (Rev. 1:8). As God the Son in personal union with the Son of Man, He was in every way qualified for His stupendous undertaking. None but He could magnify the Law and make it honourable, make atonement for sin, vanquish death, bruise the Serpent's head, and so preserve His Church on earth that the gates of Hades should not prevail against it. As this mighty One, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," the Apostle John beheld Him in the Patmos visions (Rev. 5:5). Because He is such, therefore "He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him" (Heb. 7:25).

"I have exalted One chosen out of the people" (Psa. 89:19). It is this, essentially, which qualifies Christ to occupy the Mediatorial throne, for not only is He "the mighty God" (Isa. 9:6), but as the woman's Seed (Gen. 3:15) He has taken unto Himself our very nature: "In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest" (Heb. 2:17). One of the titles by which God addresses the Redeemer is, "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine *Elect* (or chosen) in whom My soul delighteth" (Isa. 42:1). And this blessed One God has exalted to His own right hand.

"I have found David My Servant; with My holy oil I anointed Him" (Psa. 89:20). "This must also be expounded of the Prince Emmanuel: He became the Servant of the

Lord for our sakes, the Father having found for us in His Person a mighty Deliverer, therefore upon Him rested the Spirit *without measure*, to qualify Him for all the offices of love to which He was set apart. We have not a Saviour self-appointed and unqualified, but one sent of God and Divinely endowed for His work. Our Saviour Jesus is also the Lord's Christ, or anointed. The oil with which He is anointed is God's own oil, and holy oil; He is Divinely endowed with the Spirit of holiness—cf. Luke 4:18" (Spurgeon). In the Prophets Christ is called "David" again and again, the name meaning "the Beloved," for He is most dearly beloved of the Father. "He shall cry unto Me, Thou art My Father, My God" (Psa. 89:26). Where is there any record that David ever addressed God by this endearing term? Obviously the reference is to Him who, on the morning of His resurrection, declared "I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17). "Also I will make Him My Firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth" (Psa. 89:27). This too is intelligible only of the True David, who must have the pre-eminence in all things. Christ was made higher than the kings of the earth when God seated Him at His own right hand in the heavens, "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named" (Eph. 1:21).

"His seed also will I make to endure forever" (Psa. 89:29). Here again, the type loses itself in the antitype. Literally, David's "seed" lives on forever in the person of Christ, who was made of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3). But spiritually, it is the "seed" of the True David, namely, *believers*, for they alone own His sceptre and are His subjects. "Saints are a race that neither death nor Hell can kill" (Spurgeon). Of old it was declared of Christ, "He shall see His seed He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied" (Isa. 53:10, 11). In a coming Day, Christ shall exclaim "Behold I and the children which God hath given Me" (Heb. 2:13). "And His throne as the days of Heaven" (Psa. 89:29). Let it be duly noted that both here and in verse 36 Christ's "seed" and His "throne" are coupled together, as though His *throne* could not stand if His seed should fail. Well did Charnock ask, "If His subjects should perish, what would He be King of? If His members should be consumed what would He be head of?" It is His *mediatorial* throne and its *perpetuity* which are here in view: on the new earth there will be "the throne of God *and of the Lamb*" (Rev. 22:1).

If any doubt remains in the reader's mind as to the accuracy or truth of our interpretation above, that which is recorded in Psalm 89:30-37 should at once completely remove it. Nothing could be plainer than that the believing children of the antitypical David are there in view. In this most previous passage God makes known "His ways"—the principles according to which He deals with the redeemed: operative in *all* dispensations. Christ's children still have a sinful nature, and thus are ever prone to forsake God's Law, yet even though they do so, this will not annul the promises which God made to them in Christ. True, God is holy, and therefore will not wink at their sins; He is righteous, and so chastises them for their iniquities; but He is also both faithful and gracious, and so will not break His word to Christ, nor take away His loving kindness from those for whom His Son died.

God had declared "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn unto David My Servant: Thy seed will I establish forever" (vv. 3, 4). Yes, but suppose David's seed should prove thoroughly unworthy and unfaithful—what then? Will God cast them out of His covenant? No indeed: this is why verses 30, 31 began with "If": an objection is anticipated, the Arminian bogey of falling from grace and being lost is here laid by the

heels, If the seed of the antitypical David break God's statutes and keep not His commandments, will Divine rejection and eternal destruction be their inevitable portion? No; God will make them smart severely for their perverseness, yet it is the disciplinary rod He uses, and not the sword or axe of the executioner. God is not fickle: whom He loves, He loves forever, and therefore neither man nor Satan shall ever destroy any of the seed of the True David.—A.W.P.

THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

In our "Covenant" articles in the current issues it has been pointed out that one of the dominant characteristics of Christ's throne and kingdom, distinguishing it from all human and earthly ones, is its *everlastingness*. This particular feature is repeatedly emphasised in the Scriptures, in fact it is found in almost every passage where His kingdom is mentioned: see 2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:6, 7; Daniel 2:44; Luke 1:32, 33; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 11:15. Now this fact that Christ's throne is "forever and ever" at once refutes the idea of dispensationalists, whose assertions concerning Christ's kingdom are mainly confined (in most cases entirely so) to what they term His "millennial reign," which lasts for a thousand years only. In the past the writer has himself been misled by this fantasy and erred in some of his earlier writings thereon: therefore we here humbly make this acknowledgment and renounce what we now believe is an error.

There is, however, one passage which appears to clash with those verses which affirm the eternity of Christ's kingdom, and which at the same time seems to offer some support to the pre-millennialists; and therefore a separate consideration of its contents is called for. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But everyone in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming. Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power. For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy which shall be destroyed is death. For He (God) hath put all things under His (Christ's) feet. But when He saith all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15: 22-28).

The above has been a favourite passage with errorists of various types: Unitarians, dispensationalists, and Universalists have all appealed to it in support of their fallacies and have interpreted, or rather misinterpreted, it according to their particular views. It therefore behooves us to approach it with double care and caution, praying that the Holy Spirit will graciously guide us in its exposition. That this passage presents difficulties in translation, punctuation, and interpretation is freely granted, but that they are far from being insuperable we shall seek to show. Our first inquiry must be, What bearing do these verses have upon *their context*—why should this reference to Christ's delivering up the kingdom and His being subject to the Father be introduced into a description of the resurrection? Then: what particular "end" is referred to? Which "kingdom" is it that Christ delivers up? And what "death" is destroyed?

We begin by considering the *scope* of our passage. There were some at Corinth who were saying "that there is no resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:2), and this chapter was written in refutation of that serious error. First, the Apostle pointed out that such a denial involved the repudiation of the Gospel itself and excluded all hope of salvation. He shows that if there be no resurrection, then Christ Himself is still in the grave (vv. 12-19). Then he proceeded to argue that since Christ is risen from the dead, His people also must be raised—the resurrection of the unsaved nowhere falls within the compass of *this* chapter. According to the great principles of the economy of redemption, the resurrection of the Head guaranteed the resurrection of Christ's mystical body. The security which the

resurrection of Christ gives for the resurrection of His people, as here unfolded, is two-fold: arising both from its procuring and from its final cause.

The resurrection of the holy dead rests on the procuring cause, or *what led up to the* resurrection of Christ Himself. This was His becoming obedient unto death in the room and stead of His people. As the sin of Adam produced not only his own death, but also the death of all who were in him as their federal head, so the obedience unto death of Christ procured not only His own resurrection, but will also produce the resurrection of all who are united to Him as their federal Head (vv. 20-23). Again; the resurrection of the saints rests on the final cause, or what the resurrection of Christ *led onto*, and this was that He rose *to reign* (vv. 24-28). All power in Heaven and earth has been given to Him for the express purpose of subduing all the enemies of Himself and His Father, and this secures the abolition of death in the glorious resurrection of all His people.

Before proceeding further we call attention to what we are now convinced is a most misleading mistake in the punctuation. But lest any should think we are acting in an arbitrary manner or taking unwarranted liberties with the text of the A.V., let it be pointed out, first, that in any version the punctuation is entirely a matter for the translators to decide (for the original Greek is not broken up into either paragraphs or verses, sentences or clauses), and this upon grammatical or doctrinal considerations, which leaves room for considerable difference of opinion; and second, what we are about to advance is so far from being novel and original, that many before us (from Theophylact to Herinsius, and down to our own times) have adopted this construction.

That to which we have referred in the above paragraph is the opening clause of verse 24, which we believe concludes verse 23; in other words "then cometh the end" does not begin a sentence, but completes one. Instead of connecting the "then cometh the end" with what follows in verses 24-26, and thereby understanding it to signify "then cometh the termination of all mundane affairs," the end of the world's history, we regard it as meaning, "Then is the conclusion of *the resurrection*." This is obviously the more natural construction, for it not only removes the necessity for the supplement "cometh" which has been inserted by the translators (there being nothing in the Greek to warrant it), but it also furnishes a more fitting completion to the sentence—"Christ the firstfruits—then they that are Christ's at His coming—then the end," i.e., the grand completion of *the harvest*.

What follows in verses 24-26 introduces no new subject, but amplifies what has been said in verses 20-23. If verse 25 be placed in a parenthesis, and the supplementary (italized) words of verse 26 be omitted, the sentence will be much simpler and more perspicuous. "When He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when He shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power (For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet), the last enemy shall be destroyed—death." Let it be steadily borne in mind that the great object throughout the whole of this chapter is to show the absolute security which *Christ's* resurrection gives for the resurrection of His *people*. That this subject is continued by the Apostle after the passage we are now considering is clear from verses 29-32, where further and supplementing arguments are advanced, namely the case of those who are baptised, and his own conduct.

Verses 24-26 are brought in here to assure the hearts and strengthen the confidence of believers. We understand their central purport to be something like this: There are many and powerful enemies of Christ seeking to oppose Him and destroy His people, but their

efforts shall prove utterly futile, for being endowed with all power and authority from God Himself, Christ shall completely triumph over them all. Not only shall Christ reduce to impotency all human and demoniacal foes, but death itself shall be abolished. It is *death* which stands in the way of the full manifestation of Divine wisdom, power, and grace, in the complete holiness and happiness of the redeemed family. While their bodies remain in the grave Christ's triumph over sin and Satan is incomplete, and He does not see the entire fruit of "the travail of His soul," in which He is to find full satisfaction. Death, then, is here called "the *last enemy*" because when the appointed time for the resurrection arrives *it alone* stands in the way of the consummation of Christ's mighty work of full and eternal deliverance.

A right understanding, then, of verses 24-26 definitely fixes the meaning of "then the end," proving it belongs to verse 23. Verses 24-26 illustrate and demonstrate that at the coming of Christ there will be an end or completion of the resurrection: it is to be by the destruction of the last enemy—death. There will be no more resurrection (of saints) after the coming of Christ, for there will be no more to die, and so no more to be raised. It will then be fully evidenced that Christ has subdued all foes unto Himself, which was the grand purpose for which the Father delegated all power unto the Redeemer. He must reign till all His enemies are put under His feet, for He rose again for this purpose; wherefore it follows that the last enemy—death, must be destroyed, and when it is, the resurrection of the saints must have come to "the end"!

For a closer consideration of the details of these verses we must first ascertain the precise signification of "When He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God." Now it is self-evident that no explanation of those words can possibly be true which asserts that the throne of Christ's glory shall ever be vacated. Shall Christ lay down the reward which the Father gave Him for His unspeakable humiliation and obedience unto death? Surely His recompense is not to cease as soon as He has completed His great commission—destroying the works of Satan and subduing His Father's foes. Shall He cease to be Lord and King at the very time when every knee begins to bow to Him and every tongue confesses His name? What! Are the saints to be crowned with an *eternal* reward, and the King of saints with only a *temporary* one? Will the redeemed "reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:3) and the Redeemer for only a thousand years?

If it be strange that pre-millenarians interpret this clause as the ending of Christ's millennial kingdom, it is stranger still that some post-millenarians understand by it the termination of His mediatorial kingdom, for the perpetuity *of that is* affirmed again and again in Scripture. But if it refer to neither of them, what other alternative remains? The "kingdom" or dominion of Christ is a threefold one. First, that which belongs to Him as the second Person of the Godhead, namely, His absolute authority over all creatures. Second, that which pertains to Him as the incarnate Son, the Mediator, namely, His rule over His own people. Third, that to which He was exalted after His resurrection, when "all power was given Him in Heaven and earth," namely, His dominion over all His *enemies*, so that He might triumphantly conclude the work of redemption by subjugating every opposing force. It is the *third* which 1 Corinthians 15:24 has reference to.

The duties of a king may be summed up in these two things: to rule righteously over his subjects, to subdue his and their enemies. The subjugation of all who oppose is an essential part of *Christ's* reign. This He accomplishes now by setting bounds to their power, making even their wrath to praise Him; and ultimately by reducing them to complete im-

potency when sentence of punishment is passed upon them and they are all securely and eternally shut up in their own place. All things fell by sin into an enmity against God and the salvation of the Church. Christ as the Vice-regent of the Father has received commission for the removal of this enmity and the destruction of all His gainsayers. This He was to variously and gradually accomplish in the exercise of all His offices. He did so at the Cross by the exercise of His priesthood, when, He (judicially) removed the enmity between God and His people (Eph. 2:14-16). He does so now by the exercise of His prophetic office, in effectually causing the Gospel to experimentally reconcile His people to God (Psa. 110:2, 3). He will yet do so by the exercise of His kingship, when He destroys the finally impenitent.

Christ has received commission to put down that revolt which commenced in the sin of angels, and has been carried on through the Fall of man, with all its fearful consequences, so that the Divine supremacy shall again be effectually manifested and universally acknowledged. In the universe there is now a kingdom of darkness (Matt. 12:26 and Col. 1:13) as well as a kingdom of light; there is "the throne of iniquity" (Psa. 94:20), as well as the throne of righteousness. But this state of things cannot be permitted to continue forever. True, God had a wise end in permitting it, but He shall in His own good time end it. This work has been entrusted to Christ, partly as a reward or His humiliation, partly for the furtherance of His redemptive work. This, as we have said above, is accomplished by Him through a twofold process: by converting some of the rebels into loyal subjects; by depriving the others of all power to work any further evil. The finalization of the one shall be seen when Christ presents the Church to Himself "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle" (Eph. 5:27); the finalization of the other will be demonstrated when Revelation 19:11 to 20:15 is fulfilled.

There is, then, a "kingdom" which has been usurped by God's enemies, and which Christ has been appointed to restore unto Him. In order to His successful discharge of this appointment, Christ has been endowed with unlimited power: see Psalms 2:6-9, 45:3-6; Acts 2:36 and 5:31; Ephesians 1:20, 21; Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Peter 3:18-22. This recovery by Christ of that kingdom usurped by Satan and his hosts, is intimated in our passage by "when He shall have *delivered up* the kingdom to God," for the same Greek word is found in such verses as Matthew 19:17; 24:9; Acts 3:13; Romans 8:32, where it is an assigning over to judicial powers *for judgment*. This enables us to perceive clearly *what* kingdom it is which Christ renders to the Father; it is not the resignation of His own Lordship, but the arresting of His foes in order to their eternal incarceration in the Lake of Fire.

We trust it has been made quite plain to the reader that the central thought of 1 Corinthians 15:22-26 is that the resurrection of Christ Himself is connected with such a state of power and authority as is at once sufficient for securing the resurrection of all who are savingly connected with Him. That there are powerful adversaries at work seeking to prevent this seems clearly implied, but that their efforts shall prove utterly vain is here emphatically declared. The abolition of death will be the crowning act of Christ's triumph over Satan and his hosts. The reason why the Apostle brought in the parenthesis of verse 25 was to explain *how* Christ is to recover unto God the usurped kingdom—by putting down all hostile forces. He quotes from Psalm 110:1, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand," which means that at His ascension Christ was invested with the government of the universe; "until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool" promised Him

full victory over them, and that promise must be fulfilled. Verses 27, 28 we leave for our next article on the kingdom of Christ in the February issue.—A.W.P.

GOD'S WORD IN OUR HEARTS.

"Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psa. 119:11). The duty of God's children is to hide His Word in their hearts, and in so doing there must be a right end; their knowledge of it and delight in it is to be directed *to practice*.

One duty and necessary practice of God's children is to hide the Word in their hearts. See it confirmed by a Scripture or two: "This book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night" (Josh. 1:8); "Receive, I pray thee, the law from His mouth, and lay up His words in thy heart" (Job 22:22). Lay up His words as we would do choice things, that they may not be *lost*; and lay them up as a treasure to be *used* upon all occasions. In the *heart* let them not swim in the brain or memory only, but let the affections be moved therewith, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16): be so diligent in the study of the Scripture that it may become familiar with us, by frequent hearing, reading, meditating, conferring about it. As a stranger, let it not stand at the door, but receive it into an inner room; be as familiar as those that dwell with you. God complaineth of His people "I have written to him [Ephraim] the great things of My Law, but they were counted as a strange thing" (Hosea 8:12). To be strangers to the Word of God, and little conversant in it, is a great evil.

What is it to hide the Word in our hearts? (1) To understand it, to get a competent knowledge of it; we take in things into the soul by the understanding: "When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul" (Prov. 2:10). (2) When it is assented unto by faith. The Word is settled in the heart by faith, otherwise it soon vanisheth: "The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb. 4:2). (3) When it is kindly entertained. Christ complained "Ye seek to kill Me, because My Word hath no place in you" (John 8:37). Men are so possessed with lust and prejudice, that there is no room for Christ's Word. Though it break in upon the heart with evidence and power, yet it is not entertained there but cast out again as an unwelcome guest. (4) When it is deeply rooted. Many men have flashes for a time: their affections may be much aloft, and they may have great elevations of joy, but no sound grace: "ye rejoiced in his light *for a season*" (John 5:35). The Word must be settled into a standing affection, if we would have comfort and profit from it. We read of "The engrafted Word" (James 1:21): till there be the root of the matter in us, in vain do we expect fruit.

The reasons why this is one great duty and practice of the saints to hide the Word in their heart are two: first, that we may have it *ready for our use*. We lay up principles that we may lay them out upon all occasions. When the Word is hidden in the heart, it will be ready to break out in the tongue and practice, and be forthcoming to direct us in every duty and exigency. When persons run to the market for every pennyworth, it doth not become good housekeepers. To be seeking of comforts when we should use them, or to run to a book, is not so blessed as to hide it in the heart. "A good scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of Heaven . . . bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matt. 13:52). He hath not only this year's growth but the last year's gathering (for so is the allusion): he hath not only from hand to mouth, but a good stock by him. So should it be with the Christian, which is a very great advantage.

First, it will prevent vain thoughts. Why is evil so ready and present with us? Because our stock of spiritual knowledge is so small. A man that hath a pocket with more brass

farthings than pieces of silver, will more readily draw out farthings than shillings; his stock is greater. So vain thoughts will be more ready with us, unless the Word dwell richly in our hearts. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things" (Matt. 12:35). The workings of our spirits are as our treasure and stock. The mind works upon what it finds in itself, as a mill grinds whatever is put into it—chaff or corn. Therefore, if we would prevent evil thoughts and musings of vanity all the day long, we must hide the Word in our hearts.

Second, when you are alone and without outward helps, your hearts will furnish you with matters of counsel, or comfort, or reproof: "My reins instruct me in the night season" (Psa. 16:7). When we are alone, and there is a veil of darkness drawn upon the world, and we have not the benefit of a Bible, a minister, or Christian friends, our reins will instruct us; we may draw out of our heart that which will be for our refreshing. *A Christian is to be a walking Bible*: to have a good stock and treasure in himself.

Third, it will supply us in prayer. Barrenness and leanness of soul is a very great defect, which God's children often complain of. One great reason is because the Word of God does not dwell plenteously in them. If the heart were often exercised in the Word, the promises would hold up our hearts in prayer, enlarge our affections, and we should be better able to pour out our spirits before Him. "My heart is inditing a good matter" (Psa. 45:1). What follows? "My tongue is the pen of a ready writer." When the heart is full, the tongue will be loosed and speak freely. What is the reason we are so dumb and tongue-tied in prayer? Because the heart is so barren. When the spring is dry, there will be little water in the stream. "Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God," then follows "praying with all supplication" (Eph. 6:17, 18). When we have a good store of the Word it will burst out in prayer,

Fourth, it will be a great help to us in all our affairs. Proverbs 6:21, 22, speaking of the precepts of God, "bind them upon thy heart; when thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; when thou awakest it shall talk with thee." Upon all occasions the Word will be ready to cast in seasonable thoughts. When we awake, our first thoughts in the morning will begin with God, to season the heart all the day; and as we are about our business, the Word will hold our hearts in the fear of God; and when we sleep, it will guard us from vain dreams and imaginations. In a wicked man sin engrosses all his thoughts: it employs him all the day, plays in his fancy all the night; it solicits him first in the morning, because he is a stranger to the Word of God. But a man that is a Bible to himself, the Word will ever be upon him, urging him to duty, restraining him from sin, directing him in his ways.

Fifth, it is a great relief against temptations to have the Word ready. The Word is called "The Sword of the Spirit." In spiritual conflicts there is none like it. Those that ride abroad in time of danger will not be without a sword. We are in danger, and had need handle the Sword of the Spirit. The more ready the Scripture is with us, the greater advantage in our conflicts and temptations. When the Devil came to assault Christ, He had Scripture ready for him, whereby He overcame the tempter. The door is barred upon Satan, and he cannot find such easy entrance, when the Word is hid in our hearts, and made use of pertinently. "I write to you, young men, because ye are strong." Wherein lies their strength? "And the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:14). O it is a great advantage when we have the Word not only *by* us, but *in* us, engrafted in the heart! When it is present with us, we are more able to resist the attacks of

Satan. Either a man forgets the Word or has lost his affections to it, before he can be drawn to sin,

Sixth, it is a great relief in afflictions. Our fainting in trouble come from ignorance or forgetfulness: "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him" (Heb. 12:5). If we had a herb growing in our garden that would ease our smart, what, are we the better if we know it not? There is no malady but what has its remedy in the Word. To have a comfort ready is a great relief.

Seventh, it makes our conference and conversation with others more gracious. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34). When we have a great deal of hidden treasure in the soul it will get out at the tongue, for there is a quick intercourse between the heart and the tongue. The tap runs according to the liquor wherewith the vessel is filled. Come to men of an unsavory spirit, pierce them, broach them, give them occasion again and again for discourse, and you get nothing but frothy communication from them and vain talk. But now a man that has stored his heart with the Word is ever and anon interposing for God. Like a bottle filled with wine, he must have vent. As the Spouse's lips are said to "drop as honeycombs," they are ever putting forth savoury expressions in their converse with others.

Before I go to the second reason, let me anticipate an objection. Is not this to take from the Spirit and give it to the Word? And that to the Word not as written in God's book, but as it is in our hearts Will not this be to ascribe all to created grace? I answer (1) Without question, it is the office of the Spirit to bring things to our remembrance, and the great help He gives is by suggesting such passages as may be of most seasonable relief to the soul in temptations, in prayer, and in business (John 14:16). But what is ascribed to the Scriptures and grace is not to the robbing of the Spirit, for the Scripture is of *His* inditing, and grace is of *His* working; yea, we still reserve the chief honour to the Holy Spirit, for He not only works grace, but works by grace. He not only indites the Scripture, but operates by it; it is He that quickens prayer, and therefore it is ill trusting to our own understanding and memory, for it is the Spirit that is the great Remembrancer, and impresses upon the mind seasonable thoughts.

(2) I grant further, the children of God are subject to much forgetfulness of the Truth that is impressed upon their hearts; partly through the present cloud and mist which the temptation raiseth. The Psalmist had truths enough to support him, yet he said, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God, I was foolish and ignorant; I was as a beast before Thee" (73:17, 22). There is so much dullness upon the children of God that they cannot remember seasonable thoughts; as Hagar had a fountain by her, yet she did not see it till God opened her eyes (Gen. 21). So under temptation all are benighted, and the light that is in the understanding is obscured. And partly through the little sense they have for the present need of the comforts which the Word propounds; few are so wise as to lay up for a bad year. And partly through sloth and negligence, being taken up with other things. It is possible sometimes that we may be guided by the Spirit, and act right merely by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, without any interposing and concurrence of our own understandings as John 12:13 compared with verse 16:—"They took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet Him; and cried, Hosanna, blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord . . . these things understood not His disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things *were written of Him*,

and that they had done these things unto Him.” Mark they were guided by the Spirit to do that they knew not for the present.

(3) The Holy Spirit makes use of a sanctified memory, bringing Scripture to our remembrance as we have need. It is made their act, because the Holy Spirit made use of their memories: they “remembered that it was written, The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up” (John 2:17). They that neglect to search and hide the Word in their hearts, have not such seasonable refreshment; for God works more strongly with the strongest graces; there where there is the greater receptivity, there is the greater influence; those that are ignorant cannot expect such help as those having the Word dwelling richly in them.

The second reason is, therefore should we hide the Word in our hearts, because God doth so in the work of conversion: “I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb. 8:10). The mind is compared to tables of stone, and the heart to the ark; and so this is required of us to “write them upon the table of our heart” (Prov. 7:3). How doth this follow? because *God* does in conversion, therefore it is *our* duty? I answer (1) God requires what He works to show the creature’s duty, as well as the power of His own grace. God is to convert, yet do *you* turn; circumcise your heart and I will circumcise; mortify your members, and yet “If ye through the Spirit do mortify. “He gives and *requires*, to engage the subserviency of our endeavours, and to make us sensible of our obligation. (2) This follows because this work must be gone over and over that it may be more explicit. We must revive the work, and put a fresh copy of the Law into our hearts, to keep the old work a-foot.—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

Introduction

Twelve years ago we published in this magazine a series of addresses on Election which the editor delivered to large congregations in Australia. Those addresses, as was to be fully expected, met with a very varied reception: "some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not" (Acts 28:24). On the one hand, God was pleased to use them in the awakening of some who were utterly indifferent to Divine things, to arouse others in a backslidden condition to consider their ways, and to move not a few to give diligence to make their calling and election sure. On the other hand, Satan stirred up self-righteous Pharisees to hotly oppose, and denounce the doctrine as a most dangerous and injurious one. As many of our present readers do not have access to this earlier effort, and as we feel that a more systematic exposition of the subject is now called for, we have decided to take it up for fuller consideration in this year's issues.

It is a foundational doctrine. In the past, many of the ablest teachers were accustomed to commence their systematic theology with a presentation of the attributes of God, and then a contemplation of His eternal decrees; and it is our studied conviction, after perusing the writings of many of our moderns, that the method followed by their predecessors cannot be improved upon. God existed before man, and His eternal purpose long antedated His works in time. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). The Divine councils went before creation. As a builder draws his plans before he begins to build, so the great Architect predestinated everything before a single creature was called into existence. Nor has God kept this a secret locked in His own bosom; it has pleased Him to make known in His Word the everlasting counsels of His grace, His design in the same, and the grand end He has in view.

When a building is in course of construction onlookers are often at a loss to perceive the reason for many of the details. As yet, they discern no order or design; everything appears to be in confusion. But if they could carefully scan the builder's "plan" and visualize the finished production, much that had puzzled would become clear to them. It is the same with the outworking of God's eternal purpose. Unless we are acquainted with His eternal decrees, history remains an insolvable enigma. God is not working at random: the Gospel has been sent forth on no uncertain mission: the final outcome in the conflict between good and evil has not been left indeterminate; how many are to be saved or lost depends not on the will of the creature. Everything was infallibly determined and immutably fixed by God from the beginning, and all that happens in time is but the accomplishment of what was ordained in eternity.

The grand truth of election, then, takes us back to the beginning of all things. It antedated the entrance of sin into the universe, the Fall of man, the advent of Christ, and the proclamation of the Gospel. A right understanding of it, especially in its relation to the Everlasting Covenant, is absolutely essential if we are to be preserved from fundamental error. If the foundation itself be faulty, then the building erected on it cannot be sound; and if we err in our conceptions of this basic truth, then just in proportion as we do so will our grasp of all other truth be inaccurate. God's dealings with Jew and Gentile, His object in sending His Son into this world, His design by the Gospel, yea, the whole of His providential dealings, cannot be seen in their proper perspective till they are viewed in the light of His eternal election. This will become the more evident as we proceed.

It is a difficult doctrine, and this in three respects. First, in the *understanding* of it. Unless we are privileged to sit under the ministry of some Spirit-taught servant of God, who presents the Truth to us systematically, great pains and diligence are called for in the searching of the Scriptures, so that we may collect and tabulate their scattered statements on this subject. It has not pleased the Holy Spirit to give us one complete and orderly setting forth of the doctrine of election, but instead “here a little, there a little”—in typical history, in Psalm and prophecy, in the great prayer of Christ (John 17), in the Epistles of the Apostles. Second, in the *acceptation* of it. This presents a much greater difficulty, for when the mind perceives what the Scriptures reveal thereon, the heart is loath to receive such an humbling and flesh-withering truth. How earnestly we need to pray for God to subdue our enmity against Him and our prejudice against His Truth. Third, in the *proclamation* of it. No novice is competent to present this subject in its scriptural perspective and proportions.

But notwithstanding, these difficulties should not discourage, still less deter us, from an honest and serious effort to understand and heartily receive all that God has been pleased to reveal thereon. Difficulties are designed to humble us, to exercise us, to make us feel our need of wisdom from on High. It is not easy to arrive at a clear and adequate grasp of any of the great doctrines of Holy Writ, and God never intended it should be so. Truth has to be “bought” (Prov. 23:23): alas that so few are willing to pay the price—devote to the prayerful study of the Word the time wasted on newspapers or idle recreations. These difficulties are not insurmountable, for the Spirit has been given to God’s people to guide them into all Truth. Equally so for the minister of the Word: an humble waiting upon God, coupled with a diligent effort to be a workman that needs not to be ashamed, will in due time fit him to expound this truth to the glory of God and the blessing of his hearers.

It is an *important* doctrine, as is evident from various considerations. Perhaps we can express most impressively the momentousness of this truth by pointing out that apart from eternal election there had never been any Jesus Christ, and therefore, no Divine Gospel; for if God had never chosen a people unto salvation, He had never sent His Son; and if He had sent no Saviour, none had ever been saved. Thus, the Gospel itself originated in this vital matter of election. “But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation” (2 Thess. 2:13). And why are we “bound to give thanks”? Because election is the root of all blessings, the spring of every mercy that the soul receives. If election be taken away, everything is taken away, for those who have *any* spiritual blessing are they who have *all* spiritual blessings “*according as* they were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:3, 4).

It was well said by Calvin, “We shall never be clearly convinced, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the fountain of God’s free mercy, till we are acquainted with His eternal election, which illustrates the grace of God by this comparison; that He adopts not all promiscuously to the hope of salvation, but He gives to some what He refuses to others. Ignorance of this principle evidently detracts from the Divine glory, and diminishes real humility . . . If, then, we need to be recalled to the origin of election, to prove that we obtain salvation from no other source than the mere good pleasure of God, then they who desire to extinguish this principle, do all they can to obscure what ought to be magnificently and loudly celebrated.”

It is a *blessed* doctrine, for election is the spring of all blessings. This is made unmistakably clear by Ephesians 1:3, 4. First, the Holy Spirit declares that the saints have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. Then He proceeds to show *why* and *how* they were so blessed: it is "*according as* God hath *chosen* us in Christ before the foundation of the world." Election in Christ, therefore, precedes being blessed with all spiritual blessings, for we are blessed with them only as being in Him, and we are only in Him as *chosen* in Him. We see, then, what a grand and glorious truth this is, for all our hopes and prospects belong to it. Election, though distinct and personal, is not, as is sometimes carelessly stated, a mere abstract choice of persons unto eternal salvation, irrespective of union with their Covenant Head, but a choice of them *in Christ*. It therefore implies every other blessing, and all other blessings are given only through it and in accordance with it.

Rightly understood there is nothing so calculated to impart comfort and courage, strength and security, as a heart-apprehension of this truth. To be assured that I am one of the high favourites of Heaven imparts the confidence that God most certainly will supply my every need and make all things work together for my good. The knowledge that God has predestinated me unto eternal glory supplies an absolute guaranty that no efforts of Satan can possibly bring about my destruction, for if the great God be *for* me, who can be against me! It brings great peace to the preacher, for he now discovers that God has not sent him forth to draw a bow at a venture, but that His Word *shall* accomplish that which He pleases, and shall prosper whereto He sends it (Isa. 55:11). And what encouragement it should afford the awakened sinner. As he learns that election is solely a matter of Divine *grace*, hope is kindled in his heart: as he discovers that election singled out some of the vilest of the vile to be the monuments of Divine mercy, why should *he* despair!

It is a *distasteful* doctrine. One had naturally thought that a truth so God-honouring, Christ-exalting, and so blessed, had been cordially espoused by all professing Christians who had had it clearly presented to them. In view of the fact that the terms "predestinated," "elect," and "chosen," occur so frequently in the Word, one would surely conclude that all who claim to accept the Scriptures as Divinely inspired would receive with implicit faith this grand truth, referring the act itself—as sinful and ignorant creatures should do—unto the sovereign good pleasure of God. But such is far, very far from being the actual case. No doctrine is so detested by proud human nature as this one, which make nothing of the creature and everything of the Creator; yea, at no other point is the enmity of the carnal mind so blatantly and hotly evident.

We commenced our addresses in Australia by saying, "I am going to speak tonight on one of the most hated doctrines of the Bible, namely that, of God's sovereign election." Since then we have encircled this globe and come into more or less close contact with thousands of people belonging to many denominations, and thousands more of professing Christians attached to none, and today the only change we would make in that statement is, that while the truth of Eternal Punishment is the one most objectionable to non-professors, that of God's sovereign Election is the truth most loathed and reviled by the majority of those claiming to be believers. Let it be plainly announced that salvation originated not in the will of man, but in the will of God (see John 1:13, Rom. 9:16), that were it not so none would or could be saved—for as the result of the Fall man has lost all desire and will unto that which is good (John 5:40, Rom. 3:2)—and that even the elect

themselves have to be *made* willing (Psa. 110:3), and loud will be the cries of indignation raised against such teaching.

It is at *this* point the issue is drawn. Merit-mongers will not allow the supremacy of the Divine will and the impotency unto good of the human will, consequently they who are the most bitter in denouncing election by the sovereign pleasure of God, are the warmest in crying up the free-will of fallen man. In the decrees of the council of Trent—wherein the Papacy definitely defined her position on the leading points raised by the Reformers, and which Rome has *never* [not even to this day in 1998] rescinded—occurs the following: “If any one should affirm that since the Fall of Adam man’s free will is lost, let him be accursed.” It was for their faithful adherence to the truth of *election*, with all that it involves, that Bradford and hundreds of others were burned at the stake by the agents of the pope. Unspeakably sad is it to see so many professing Protestants agreeing with the Mother of Harlots in this fundamental error!

But whatever aversion men may now have to this blessed truth, they will be compelled to hear it in the last great day, hear it as the Voice of final, unalterable, and eternal decision. When death and Hades, the sea and dry land, shall give up the dead, then shall the Book of Life—the register in which was recorded from before the foundation of the world the whole election of grace—be opened in the presence of angels and demons, in the presence of the saved and of the lost, and that Voice shall sound to the highest arches of Heaven, to the lowest depths of Hell, to the uttermost bound of the universe: “And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15). Thus, this truth which is hated by the non-elect above all others, is the one that shall ring in the ears of the lost as they enter their eternal doom! Ah, my reader, the reason why people do not receive and duly prize the truth of election is because they do not feel their dire *need* of it.

It is a *separating* doctrine. The preaching of the sovereignty of God, as exercised by Him in foreordaining the eternal destiny of each of His creatures, serves as an effectual flail to divide the chaff from the wheat. “He that is of God heareth God’s words” (John 8:47): yes, no matter how contrary they may be to *His* ideas. It is one of the marks of the regenerate that they set to their seal that God is true. Nor do they pick and choose, as will religious hypocrites: once they perceive a truth is clearly taught in the Word, even though it be utterly opposed to their own reason and inclinations, they humbly bow to it and implicitly receive it, and would do so though not another person in the whole world believed it. But it is far otherwise with the unregenerate. As the Apostle declares, “They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:5, 6).

We know of nothing so divisive between the sheep and the goats as a faithful exposition of this doctrine. If a servant of God accepts some new charge, and he wishes to ascertain which of his people desire the pure milk of the Word, and which prefer the Devil’s substitutes, let him deliver a series of sermons on this subject, and it *will quickly* be the means of “taking forth the precious from the vile” (Jer. 15:19). It was thus in the experience of the Divine Preacher: when Christ announced “no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father,” we are told, “from that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him” (John 6:65, 66)! True it is that by no means all who intellectually receive “Calvinism” as a philosophy or theology, give evi-

dence (in their daily lives) of regeneration, yet equally true is it that those who continue to cavil against and steadfastly refuse any part of the Truth, are not entitled to be regarded as Christians.

It is a *neglected* doctrine. Though occupying so prominent a place in the Word of God, it is today but little preached, and still less understood. Of course it is not to be expected that the "higher critics" and their blinded dupes should preach that which makes nothing of man; but even among those who wish to be looked up to as "orthodox" and "evangelical," there are scarcely any who give this grand truth a real place in either their pulpit ministrations or their writings. In some cases this is due to ignorance: not having been taught it in the seminary, and certainly not in the "Bible Institutes," they have never perceived its great importance and value. But in too many cases it is a desire to be popular with their hearers which muzzles their mouths. Nevertheless, neither ignorance, prejudice, nor enmity can do away with the doctrine itself, or lessen its vital momentousness.

In bringing to a close these introductory remarks, let it be pointed out that this blessed doctrine needs to be handled *reverently*. It is not a subject to be reasoned about and speculated upon, but approached in a spirit of holy awe and devotion. It is to be handled *soberly*, "When thou art in disputation, engaged upon a just quarrel to vindicate the truth of God from heresy and distortion, look into *thy* heart, set a watch on thy lips, beware of wild fire in thy zeal" (E. Reynolds, 1648). Nevertheless, this truth is to be dealt with *uncompromisingly*, and plainly, irrespective of the fear or favour of man, confidently leaving all "results" in the hand of God. May it be graciously granted *us* to write in a manner pleasing to God, and *you* to receive whatever is from Himself.—A.W.P.

PREACHING AS WE WALK.

The story is told of St. Francis of Assisi that he once stepped down into the cloisters of his monastery, and, laying his hand on the shoulder of a young monk, said, "Brother, let us go down into the town and preach."

The venerable father and the young monk set out together. They wandered down the principal streets and wound their way through alleys and lanes, and even to the outskirts of the town and the village beyond, until they eventually found themselves back at the monastery.

Then inquired the young monk, "Father, when shall we begin to preach?"

The father looked down kindly and said:

"My child, we have been preaching; we were preaching while we were walking. We have been seen—looked at; our behaviour has been remarked upon, and so we have delivered a morning sermon. Ah! my son, it is of no use that we walk anywhere to preach unless we preach as we walk."