

We do not wish to prolong this present series of articles to an undue and wearisome length, yet on the other hand we desire to omit nothing which has a vital and essential place in our theme. Moreover, were we to considerably condense the material which we feel ought yet to be brought in and were we to hurriedly wind up our subject, what other of more practical importance could we possibly take up? Judging from the letters which came to hand last year, there seems to be a pressing need for a clear and full exposition of the Spirit's work of grace in the souls of God's people. It is a subject which occupies a place of considerable prominence in the Scriptures—far more so than many are aware—and yet, sad to say, it is grievously neglected by most preachers and writers of today; and, in consequence, the saints are to a large extent ignorant upon it.

The supernatural and special work of the Holy Spirit in the soul is that which distinguishes the regenerate from the unregenerate. The religion of the vast majority of people today consists merely in an outward show, having a name to live among men, but being spiritually dead toward God. Their religion comprises little more than bare speculative notions, merely knowing the Word in its letter; in an undue attachment to some man or party; in a blazing zeal which is not according to knowledge; or in censoriously contending for a certain order of things, despising all who do not rightly pronounce *their* particular shibboleths. The fear of God is not upon them, the love of God does not fill and rule their hearts, the power of God is not working in their souls—they are strangers to it. They have never been the favoured subjects of the Spirit's quickening operation.

“No man can come to Me, *except* the Father which hath sent Me *draw* him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44). This emphatic and man-humbling fact is almost universally ignored in Christendom today, and when it *is* pressed upon the notice of the average preacher or “church member,” it is hotly denied and scornfully rejected. The cry is at once raised, “If that were true, then man is nothing more than a machine, and all preaching is useless. If people are *unable* to come to Christ by an act of their own will, then evangelistic effort is needless, worthless.” No effort is made to understand the meaning of those words of our Lord: they clash with modern thought, they rile the proud flesh, so they are summarily condemned and dismissed. No wonder the Holy Spirit is now “quenched” in so many places, and that *His* saving power is so rarely in evidence.

With others the supernatural agency of the Spirit is effectively shut out by the belief that *Truth will prevail*: that if the Word of God be faithfully preached, souls *will be* truly saved. Far be it from us to undervalue the Truth, or cast the slightest reflection on the living Word of God; yet modern ideas and present conditions demand that we plainly point out that *it is not the Truth*, the Scriptures, the Gospel, which *renews the soul*; but instead, the power and operations of *the Holy Spirit*. “You may teach a man the holiest truths, and yet leave him a wretched man. Many who learn in childhood that ‘God is love,’ live disregarding, and die blaspheming God. Thousands who are carefully taught ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,’ neglect so great salvation all their days. Some of the most wicked and miserable beings that walk the earth are men into whose consciences, when yet youthful and unsophisticated, the Truth was carefully instilled.

“Unmindful of this, and not considering the danger of diverting faith *from the power to the instrument*, however beautiful and perfect the instrument may be, many good men,

by a culpable inadvertence, constantly speak as if the Truth had an inherent ascendancy over man, and would certainly prevail when justly presented. We have heard this done till we have been ready to ask, ‘Do they take men for angels, that mere Truth is to captivate them so certainly?’ Ay, and even to ask ‘Have they ever heard whether there be any Holy Spirit?’

“The belief that Truth is mighty, and *by reason of its might* must prevail, is equally fallacious in the abstract, as it is opposed to the facts of human history, and to the Word of God. We should take the maxim, the Truth must prevail, as perfectly sound, did you only give us a community of angels on whom to try the Truth. With every intellect clear, and every heart upright, doubtless Truth would soon be discerned, and, when discerned, cordially embraced. But, Truth, in descending among us, does not come among friends. The human heart offers ground whereon it meets Truth at an immeasurable disadvantage. Passions, habits, interests, ay, nature itself, lean to the side of error; and though the judgment may assent to the Truth, which, however, is not always the case, still error may gain a conquest only the more notable because of this impediment. Truth is mighty in pure natures, error in depraved ones.

“Do they who know human nature best, when they have a political object to carry, trust most of all to the power of Truth over a constituency, or would they not have far more confidence in corruption and revelry? The whole history of man is a melancholy reproof to those who mouth about the mightiness of Truth. ‘But,’ they say, ‘Truth will prevail in the long run.’ Yes, blessed be God, It will; but not because of *its own power* over human nature, but because *the Spirit* will be poured out from on high, opening blind eyes and unstopping deaf ears.

“The sacred writings, while ever leaving us to regard the Truth as the one instrument of the sinner’s conversion and the believer’s sanctification, are very far from proclaiming its power over human nature, merely because it is Truth. On the contrary, they often show us that this very fact will enlist the passions of mankind *against it*, and awaken enmity instead of approbation. We are ever pointed *beyond the Truth* to HIM who is the Source and Giver of Truth; and, though we had Apostles to minister the Gospel, are ever lead not to deem it enough that it should be ‘in word only, but in *demonstration of the Spirit and in power*’” (Wm. Arthur, 1859).

John the Baptist came preaching “the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4), but by what, or rather *Whose* power was it, that repentance was wrought in the hearts of his hearers? It was that of the Holy Spirit! Of old it was said, “He shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias” (Luke 1:17). Now the “spirit and power of Elias [Elijah]” was that of *the Holy Spirit*, as is clear from Luke 1:15, “he (the Baptist) shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.” Similarly, it should be duly observed that, when Christ commissioned His Apostles to preach in His name among all nations (Luke 24:47), that He added, “Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, *until ye be endued with power from on high*” (v. 49). Why was the latter annexed to the former, and prefaced with a “Behold” but to teach them (and us) that there could be no saving repentance produced by their preaching, except by the mighty operations of the third Person of the Godhead?

None will ever be *drawn to Christ*, savingly, by mere preaching; no, not by the most faithful and scriptural preaching: there must first be the supernatural operations of the Spirit to open the sinner’s heart *to receive* the message! And how can we expect the

Spirit to work among us while *He* is so slighted, while our confidence is not in Him, but in our preaching! How can we expect Him to work miracles in our midst while there is no humble, earnest, and trustful *praying* for His gracious activities! Most of us are in such a feverish rush to “win souls,” to do “personal work,” preach, that we have no time for definite, reverent, importunate crying unto the Lord for His Spirit to go before us and prepare the soil for the Seed. Hence it is that the converts we make, are but “*man* made,” and their subsequent lives make it only too apparent unto those who have eyes to see, that the *Holy Spirit* does not indwell them, and produce *His* fruits through them. O brethren, join the writer in contritely owning to God your sinful failure to give the Spirit His proper place.—A.W.P.

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## The Epistle to the Hebrews

### 85. *A Call to Steadfastness: 12:3, 4.*

At first sight it is not easy to trace the thread which unites the passage that was last before us and the verses which are now to engage our attention: there appears to be no direct connection between the opening verses of Hebrews 12 and those which follow. But a closer examination of them shows they are intimately related: in verses 3, 4, the Apostle completes the exhortation with which the chapter opens. In verse 1 the Apostle borrowed a figure from the Grecian Games, namely, the marathon race, and now in verse 4 he refers to another part of those games—the contest between the gladiators in the arena. Second, he had specified the principal grace required for the Christian race, namely, “patience” or perseverance; so now in verse 3 he is urging them against faintness of mind or impatience. Third, he had enforced his exhortation by bidding the saints to “look unto Jesus” their great Exemplar; so here he calls on them to “consider Him” and emulate His steadfastness.

Yet, the verses which are now before us are not a mere repetition of those immediately preceding: rather do they present another, though closely related aspect of the Christian life or “race.” In verse 1 the racers are bidden to “lay aside every weight,” and in verse 3 it is the “contradiction of sinners” which has to be endured: the former are hindrances which proceed more from *within*; the later are obstacles which are encountered from *without*. In the former case, it is the evil solicitations of the flesh which would have to be resisted; in the other, it is the persecutions of the world which have to be endured. In Verse 1 it is “the sin which doth so easily beset” or “encircle us”—inward depravity—which must be “laid aside”; in verse 4 it is martyrdom which must be prepared for, lest we yield to the “sin” of apostasy.

Now the secret of success, the way to victory, is the same in either case. To enable us to “lay aside” all that hinders from within there has to be a trustful “looking unto Jesus,” and to enable us to “endure” the oppositions encountered from without and to “strive” against inconstancy and wavering in our profession, we must thoughtfully “consider Him” who was hounded and persecuted as none other ever was. As the incentive to self-denial we are to be occupied with our great Leader, and remember how much *He* “laid aside” for us—*He* who was rich, for our sakes, became poor; *He* who was “in the form of God” divested Himself of His robes of Glory and took upon Him “the form of a servant.” *We* are not called on to do something which *He* did not—*He* vacated the Throne and took up His Cross! Likewise, the chief source of comfort and encouragement when we are called upon to suffer for His sake, is to call to mind the infinitely greater sufferings which *He* endured for our sakes.

The more we endeavour to emulate the example which the Lord Jesus has left us, the more shall we be opposed from without; the more closely we follow Him, the greater will be the enmity of our fellow-men against us. Our lives will condemn theirs, our ways will be a perpetual rebuke to them, and they will do all they can to discourage and hinder, provoke and oppose. And the tendency of such persecution is to dishearten us, to tempt us to compromise, to ask “What is the use?” Because of this, the blessed Spirit bids us, “Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” Let the experiences through which *Christ* passed be the subject of daily contemplation. The record of His unparalleled temptations and trials, His endurance, and His victory is to be the grand source of our instruction, comfort and en-

couragement. If we have grown “faint and weary” in our minds, it is because we have failed to properly and profitably “consider Him.”

Supremely important is a knowledge of the Scriptures concerning the Lord Jesus: there can be no experimental holiness, no growth in grace apart from the same. Vital godliness consists in a practical conformity to the image of God’s Son: it is to follow the example which He has left us, to take His yoke upon us and learn of Him. For this, there must needs be an intimate knowledge of His ways, a prayerful and believing study of the record of His life, a daily reading of and meditating thereon. That is why the four Gospels are placed at the *beginning* of the New Testament—they are of first importance. What we have in the Epistles is principally an interpretation and application of the four Gospels to the details of our walk. O that we may say with ever-deepening purpose of heart, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8). O that we may “follow on to *know* the LORD” (Hosea 6:3).

“For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Heb. 12:3, 4). The whole of this is a dehortation or caution against an evil, which if yielded to will prevent our discharge of the duty inculcated in verses 1, 2. That which is dehorted against is “be not wearied”—give not up the race, abandon not your Christian profession. The way whereby we may fall into that evil, is becoming “faint” in our minds. The means to prevent this is the diligent contemplation of our great Exemplar.

In verses 1, 2 the Apostle had exhorted unto a patient or persevering pressing forward in the path of faith and obedience. In verses 3-11 he presents a number of considerations or motives to hearten us in our course, seeking particularly to counteract the enervating influence which difficulties are apt to exert upon the minds of God’s tried people. The tendency of strong and lasting opposition and persecution is to discourage, which if yielded unto leads to despair. To strengthen the hearts of those tired Hebrews, the Apostle bade them consider the case of Christ Himself: *He* encountered far worse sufferings than we do, yet He patiently “endured” them (v. 3). Then they were reminded that their case was by no means desperate and extreme—they had not yet been called to suffer a death of martyrdom. Finally, their very difficulties were the loving chastisement of their Father, designed for their profit (vv. 5-11). By what a variety of means does the blessed Spirit strengthen, stablish, and comfort tried believers!

Are you, dear reader, disheartened by the hard usage you are receiving from men, yea, from the religious world; are you fearful as you anticipate the persecutions which may yet attend your Christian profession; or, are you too ready to show resentment against those who oppose you? Then “*consider Him* that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself.” The connecting “For” has the force here of “moreover”: in addition to “looking unto Jesus” as your Leader and Perfecter, consider Him in His steadfastness under relentless persecution. Faith has many actings or forms of exercise: it is to reflect, contemplate, call to mind—God’s past ways with us, His dealings with His people of old, and particularly the recorded history of His beloved and incarnate Son. We are greatly the losers if we fail to cultivate the habit of devout consideration and holy meditation. The Greek word for “consider” is not the same as the one used in 3:1 and 10:24; in fact it is a term which occurs, in this form, nowhere else in the New Testament.

The Greek word for “consider” in our text is derived from the one rendered “proportion” in Romans 12:6. It is a mathematical term, signifying *to compute* by comparing

things together in their due proportions. It means: form a just and accurate estimate. "For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself": draw an analogy between *His* sufferings and *yours*, and what proportion is there between them! Weigh well *who* He was, the place He took, the infinite perfection of His character and deeds; and then the base ingratitude, the gross injustice, the cruel persecution He met with. Calculate and estimate the constancy of the opposition He encountered, the type of men who maligned Him, the variety and intensity of His sore trials, and the spirit of meekness and patience with which He bore them. And what are *our* trifling trials when compared with *His* agonies, or even to our *deserts*! O my soul blush with shame because of thy murmurings.

"Consider Him" in the ineffable excellency of His Person. He was none other than the Lord of Glory, the Beloved of the Father, the second Person in the sacred Trinity, the Creator of Heaven and earth. Now, since *He* suffered here on earth, why should you, having enlisted under His banner, think it strange that you should be called on to endure a little hardness in His service! Consider His *relationship* to you: He is your Redeemer and Proprietor: is it not sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master, the servant as his Lord? If the Head was spared not trial and shame, shall the members of His body complain if they be called on to have some fellowship with Him in this? When you are tempted to throw down your colours and capitulate to the Enemy, or even to murmur at your hard lot, "Consider Him" who when here "had not where to lay His head."

The particular sufferings of Christ which are here singled out for our consideration are the "contradiction of sinners" which He encountered. He was opposed constantly by word and action; He was opposed by His own people according to the flesh; He was opposed by the very ones to whom He ministered in infinite grace and loving-kindness. That opposition began at His birth, when there was no room in the inn—*He* was not wanted. It was seen again in His infancy, when Herod sought to slay Him, and His parents were forced to flee with Him into Egypt. Little else is told us in the New Testament about His early years, but there is a Messianic prophecy in Psalm 88:15 where we hear Him pathetically saying, "I am afflicted and ready to die from My youth up"! As soon as His public ministry commenced, and during the whole of its three years' course, He endured one unbroken, relentless, "contradiction of sinners against Himself."

The Lord Jesus was derided as the Prophet, mocked as the King, and treated with the utmost contempt as Priest and Saviour. He was accused of deceiving (John 7:12) and perverting the people (Luke 23:14). His teaching was opposed, and His Person was insulted. Because He conversed with and befriended publicans and sinners, He was "murmured" at (Luke 15:2). Because He performed works of mercy on the Sabbath day, He was charged with breaking the law (Mark 3:2). The gracious miracles which He wrought upon the sick and demon-possessed were attributed to His being in league with the Devil (Matt. 12:24). He was regarded as a low-born fanatic. He was branded as a "glutton and winebibber." He was accused of speaking against Caesar (John 19:12), whereas He had expressly bidden men to render unto Caesar what rightly belonged to him (Matt. 22:21). Though He was the Holy One of God, there was scarcely anything about Him that was not opposed.

"For consider Him who endured *such* contradiction." Here is emphasised the greatness of Christ's sufferings: "*such* contradiction"—so bitter, so severe, so malicious, so protracted; everything which the evil wits of men and Satan could invent. That word

“such” is also added to awaken our wonderment and worship. Though the incarnate Son of God, He was spat upon, contemptuously arrayed in a purple robe and His enemies bowed the knee before Him in mockery. They buffeted Him and smote Him on the face. They tore His back with scourgings, as was foretold by the Psalmist (129:3). They condemned Him to a criminal’s death, and nailed Him to the Cross, and that, between two thieves, to add to His shame. And this, at the hands of men who, though they made a great show of sanctity, were “sinners.”

Christ *felt keenly* that “contradiction,” for He was the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. At the end, He exclaimed “reproach hath broken My heart” (Psa. 69:20). Nevertheless, He turned not aside from the path of duty, still less did He abandon His mission. He fled not from His enemies, and fainted not under their merciless persecution: instead, He “*endured*” it. As we pointed out in our exposition of the previous verse, that word is used of Christ in its highest and noblest sense. He bore patiently every ignominy that was heaped upon Him. He never retaliated or reviled His traducers. He remained steadfast unto the end, and finished the work which had been given Him to do. When the supreme crisis arrived, He faltered not, but “set His face as a flint to go up to Jerusalem” (Isa. 50:7, Luke 9:51).

Do you, tired reader, feel that your cup of opposition is a little fuller than that of some of your fellow Christians? Then look away to the cup which Christ drank! Here is the Divine antidote against weariness: Christ meekly and triumphantly “endured” far, far worse than anything you are called on to suffer for His sake; yet He fainted not. When you are weary in your mind because of trials and injuries from the enemies of God, “consider” Christ, and this will quieten and suppress thy corrupt propensities to murmuring and impatience. Set Him before thy heart as the grand example and encouragement—example in patience, encouragement in the blessed issue: “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim. 2:12). Faith’s consideration of Him will work a conformity unto Him in our souls which will preserve from fainting.

“Lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Heb. 12:3). There is no connecting “and” in the Greek: two distinct thoughts are presented: “lest ye be wearied,” that is, so discouraged as to quit; “faint in your mind,” states the cause thereof. The word for “weary” here is a strong one: it signifies exhausted, being so despondent as to break their resolution. In its ultimate meaning, it refers to such a state of despondency as an utter sinking of spirit, through the difficulties, trials, opposition and persecution encountered as to “look back” (Luke 9:62), and either partially or wholly abandon their profession of the Gospel. In other words, it is another warning against apostasy. What we are cautioned against here is the opposite of that which the Lord commended in the Ephesian Church, “And for My name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted” (Rev. 2:3)—here there *is* perseverance in the Christian profession despite all opposition.

At different periods of history God has permitted fierce opposition to break out against His people, to test the reality and strength of their attachment to Christ. This was the case with those to whom our Epistle was first addressed: they were being exposed to great trials and sufferings, temptations and privations; hence the timeliness of this exhortation, and its accompanying warning. Reproaches, losses, imprisonments, scourgings, being threatened with death, have a strong tendency to produce dejection and despair; they present a powerful temptation to give up the fight. And nought but the vigorous activity of faith will fortify the mind under religious persecution. Only as the heart is en-

courageously occupied with *Christ's endurance* of the “contradiction of sinners against Himself,” will our resolution be strong to endure unto the end: “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; *I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33).

“Faint in your minds” (Heb. 12:3). This it is which, if not resisted and corrected, leads to the “weariness” or utter exhaustion of the previous clause. This faintness of mind is the reverse of vigour and cheerfulness. If, under the strong opposition and fierce persecution, we are to “endure unto the end,” then we must watch diligently against the allowance of such faintness of mind. There is a spiritual vigour required in order to perseverance in the Christian profession during times of persecution. Hence it is that we are exhorted, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, *arm yourselves* likewise with the same mind” (1 Peter 4:1); “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. *Wherefore take unto you* the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:12, 13); “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, *quit you like men*, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13).

Any degree of faintness of mind in the Christian results from and consists in a remitting of the cheerful actions of faith in the various duties which God has called us to discharge. Nothing but the regular exercise of *faith* keeps the soul calm and restful, patient and prayerful. If faith ceases to be operative, and our mind be left to cope with difficulties and trials in our own natural strength, then we shall soon grow weary of a *persecuted* Christian profession. Herein lies the beginning of all spiritual declension—a lack of the due exercise of faith, and that in turn is the result of the heart growing cold toward Christ! If faith be in healthy exercise, we shall say, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18), realizing that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17); ah, but *that* consciousness is only “*while we look not* at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (v. 18).

“Consider *Him*” (Heb. 12:3): there is the remedy against faintness of mind; there is the preservative from such “weariness” of dejection of spirits that we are ready to throw down our weapons and throw up our hands in utter despair. It is the diligent consideration of the Person of Christ, the *Object* of faith, the *Food* of faith, the *Supporter* of faith. It is by drawing an analogy between His infinitely sorer sufferings and our present hardships. It is by making application unto ourselves of what is to be found in Him suitable to our own case. Are we called on to suffer a little for Him, then let our eye be turned on Him who went before us in the same path of trial. Make a comparison between what *He* “endured” and what *you* are called to struggle with, and surely you will be ashamed to complain! “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). Admire and imitate His meekness—weeping over His enemies, and praying for His murderers!

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Heb. 12:4). The persons here immediately addressed—the “ye”—were the Hebrews themselves. Because of their profession of Christianity, because of their loyalty to Christ, they had suffered severely in various ways. Plain reference to something of what they had already been called on to endure is made in Hebrews 10:32-34, “But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye



were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods.” Thus the Hebrew saints had been sorely oppressed by their unbelieving brethren among the Jews; it is that which gave such point to the exhortation and warning in the previous verse.

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” Here is the second consideration which the Apostle pressed upon his afflicted brethren: not only to ponder the far greater opposition which their Saviour encountered, but also to bear in mind that their own sufferings were not so severe as they might have been, or as possibly they would yet be. It is an argument made by reasoning from the greater to the less, and from comparing their present state with that which might await them: what could be expected to sustain their hearts and deliver from apostasy when under the supreme test of death by violence if they fainted beneath lesser afflictions? We, too, should honestly face the same alternative: if unkind words and sneers make us waver now, how would we acquit ourselves if called on to face a martyr’s death!

The present state of the oppressed Hebrews is here expressed negatively: “ye have not yet resisted unto blood.” True, they had already met with various forms of suffering, but not yet had they been called upon to lay down their lives. As Hebrews 10:32-34 clearly intimates, they had well acquitted themselves during the first stages of their trials, but their warfare was not yet ended. They had need to bear in mind that word of Christ’s, “Men ought always to pray, *and not to faint*” (Luke 18:1); and that exhortation of the Holy Spirit’s, “let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, *if we faint not*” (Gal. 6:9).

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood” (Heb. 12:4). The Apostle here hinted to the Hebrews what might yet have to be endured by them, namely a bloody and violent death—by stoning, or the sword, or fire. *That* is the utmost which fiendish persecutors can afflict. Men may kill the body, but when they have done that, they can do no more. God has set bounds to their rage: none will hound or harm His people in the next world! Those who engage in the Christian profession, who serve under the banner of Christ, have no guarantee that they may not be called unto the utmost suffering of blood on account of their allegiance to Him; for *that* is what His adversaries have always desired. Hence, Christ bids us to “sit down and count the cost” (Luke 14:28), of being His disciples. God has decreed that many, in different ages should be martyred for His own praise, the glory of Christ, and the honour of the Gospel.

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Heb. 12:4). “Sin” is here personified, regarded as a combatant which has to be overcome. The various persecutions, hardships, afflictions, difficulties of the way, in consequence of our attachment to Christ, become so many occasions and means which sin seeks to employ in order to hinder and oppose us. The Christian is called to a contest with sin. The Apostle continues his allusion to the Grecian Games, changing from the racer to the combatant. The great contest is in the believer’s heart between grace and sin, the flesh and the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). Sin seeks to quench faith and kill obedience: therefore sin is to be “striven against” for our very souls are at stake. There is no place for sloth in this deadly contest; no furloughs are granted!

“Striving against sin” (Heb. 12:4). That which the Hebrews were striving against was apostasy, going to the full lengths of sin—abandoning their Christian profession. Perse-

cution was the means which indwelling depravity sought to use, to employ in slaying faith and fidelity to Christ. Their terrible wickedness was to be steadfastly resisted by fighting against weariness in the conflict. O to say with the Apostle, "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13): but in order to reach *that* state of soul, there has to be a close walking with Him day by day, and a patient bearing of the minor trials. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jer. 12:5).—A.W.P.

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## The Life of David

### 37. His bringing up of the Ark.

For lack of space we were obliged to omit from the preceding article a number of important points upon the closing verses of 2 Samuel 5; so we will use them here as the introduction for this one. We saw how that when the Philistines came up against David (2 Sam. 5:18), he “inquired of the LORD what he should do” (v. 19), and God responded with the gracious assurance that the enemy should be delivered into his hands; which was accordingly accomplished. Then we saw that other Philistines came up against him again (v. 22). Taking nothing for granted, David once more sought unto the Lord for Divine instructions. Therein we are taught the duty of acknowledging God in *all* our ways (Prov. 3:6), and His gracious readiness to grant needed light for our path, for “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for *our* learning” (Rom. 15:4). The whole of that blessed incident reveals some valuable and precious lessons on the intensely practical subject of *Divine guidance*.

David did not act mechanically when the Philistines came against him the second time, and do according as God had instructed him on the first occasion; instead, he definitely inquired of Him *again!* Circumstances may *seem identical* to our dim vision, nevertheless, it is our duty and wisdom to wait upon the Lord on *all* occasions, trustfully seeking His instructions, implicitly obeying when His will is made clear to us through His Word. In no other way can victory over the lusts of the flesh and the subtle wiles of the Devil be insured. As we saw in our last, the Lord *did not* give David the same answer on the second occasion as He had given him in the first. His response was quite different: the first time He said, “Go up” (v. 21); the second time He said, “thou shalt not go up, but fetch a compass behind them” etc. It is at *that* point, particularly, there is important instruction for us.

On the first occasion the Lord said unto David, “Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand” (v. 19). But on the second, He said, “Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines” (vv. 23, 24). That made a *greater demand* upon David’s faith, patience, and submission, than the former order did. It was humbling to the pride of the flesh not to make an open and frontal attack. It called for quite a march to circle around and get to their rear. And when he got there, he must *wait* until he heard a movement in the boughs of the mulberry trees; and waiting is much harder than rushing ahead. The lesson here is that as we grow in grace and progress in practical godliness, the Lord requires fuller and fuller submission to Himself.

“And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees.” This was the equivalent of the word that was given to Israel at the Red Sea, as they saw the Egyptians bearing down upon them: “Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD.” The mulberry trees could not move of themselves: David was to tarry till a breath from the Lord stirred them: he was to wait till he heard the wind (emblem of the Spirit!) stirring their leaves. He was not to go to sleep, but to remain alert for the Lord’s signal. The lesson here is, that while we are waiting for the Lord, we must diligently observe the providential motions of God: “Continue in prayer, *and watch* in the same” (Col. 4:2).

“When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that *then* thou shalt bestir thyself” (2 Sam. 5:24): that is, David was to *respond* to the intimation which God had graciously given him. The practical lesson for us is obvious: when the Lord has made known His will, prompt action is required. There is a time to stand still, and a time to move. “Go forward” was the second word to Israel at the Red Sea. Strange as it may seem, there are many who fail at this very point. They arrive at some crisis in life: they seek unto the Lord for directions: His providential “pillar of cloud” goes before them, but they do not “bestir” themselves and follow it. It is only mocking God to ask Him for light when we respond not to what He *has* given. Listen attentively for His “sound of a going” and when you have heard it, act.

Observe the blessed and assuring promise which accompanied the directions to David at that time, “For then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines” (v. 24). If we carefully compare that with what is said in verse 20 it will be seen that the Lord wrought *more manifestly* on this second occasion than He did on the first. There we are simply told “and *David* smote them,” though he promptly ascribed his victory unto God. But here the Lord promised that *He* would smite the Philistines. The comforting lesson for us is, that if we duly wait upon God, implicitly obey His instructions—no matter how “unreasonable” they seem, nor how distasteful; if we diligently watch every movement of His providence, and “bestir” ourselves when His will is clear, then we may assuredly count upon Him showing Himself strong on our behalf.

There is a blessed sequel to the above incident recorded in 1 Chronicles 14:16, 17, which is not mentioned in 2 Samuel, “David therefore did as God commanded him: and they smote the host of the Philistines from Gibeon even to Gazer. And the fame of David went out into all lands; and the LORD brought the fear of him upon all nations.” God will be no man’s debtor; He always rewards those who keep His commandments. He not only enabled David to vanquish the Philistines, but He also honoured the one who had honoured Him, by causing his fame to go abroad, so that all nations were afraid to attack him. And is it not equally the case now, that where there is a soul who is fully subject to Himself, He causes even Satan to feel he is but wasting his time to assail such an one! Compare Proverbs 16:7.

The next thing we are told of David after his triumph over the Philistines is the godly concern he now evidenced for the Ark. This is exceedingly beautiful, manifesting as it does the deep spirituality of our hero, and showing again the propriety of his being designated “the man after God’s own heart.” David’s first thought after he was firmly seated as king over all Israel, was the enthronement in Jerusalem of the long-forgotten Ark, that sacred coffer which held supreme place among the holy vessels of the tabernacle; that Ark concerning which the Lord had said to Moses, “Thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And *there* I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony” (Exo. 25:21, 22).

That ancient symbol of the presence of the true King, had passed through many vicissitudes since the days when it had been carried around the walls of Jericho. In the degenerate times of the Judges, it had been superstitiously carried into battle, as though it were merely a magical mascot, and righteously did God mock their impious expectations: “the ark of God” fell into the hands of the uncircumcised. The Philistines carried it in triumph through their cities, and then housed it in the temple of Dagon. But again Jehovah vindi-

cated His honour, and the Ark was sent back to Israel in dismay. It had been joyfully welcomed by the inhabitants of Bethshemesh: then, alas, unholy curiosity moved them to look within the sacred chest, and the Lord smote them “with a great slaughter” (1 Sam. 6:19).

The Ark was then removed to the forest seclusion of Kerjath-jearim (the city or village of the woods) and placed in the house of Abinadab, where it lay neglected and forgotten for over fifty years. During the days of Saul, they “inquired not at it” (1 Chron. 13:3). But from his days as a youth, David was deeply exercised over the dishonour done to the Lord’s throne: “LORD, remember David, and all his afflictions: How he swore unto the LORD, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the LORD, *an habitation* for the mighty God of Jacob. Lo, we heard of it at Ephrath: we found it in the fields of the wood” (Psa. 132:1-6). He had resolved to establish a place where Jehovah’s worship could be celebrated, a house where the symbol of His presence should be fixed and communion with His people established.

Now that he was established over the kingdom of Israel, David did not forget his early vows, but forthwith proceeded to put them into execution. “Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the Ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims” (2 Sam. 6:1, 2). No doubt it was with a full heart that David now acted, with deep longings after God, with fervent rejoicings in Him: see verse 5. No doubt he painted a bright picture, as he anticipated the blessings which would follow the Ark being rightfully honoured. Alas, how his hopes were dashed to the ground! Sad indeed was the immediate sequel.

“And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the Ark of God: and Ahio went before the Ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon’s threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the Ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the Ark of God. And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perezuzzah (the breach of Uzzah) to this day” (vv. 3-8). Some exceedingly solemn lessons are pointed in this passage, and they are recorded for *our* warning; alas that they are so widely disregarded in Christendom today.

“To bring back therefore the Ark from the place of its dishonour; to bring it back again into the bosom of Israel; to make it once more that which Israel should seek unto and enquire at: and above all establish it in the citadel of Zion, the place of sovereign supremacy and strength, these were the immediate objects of David’s desires. Herein he was fulfilling his office of king, in giving supremacy to God and to His truth. But the servants of God have not unfrequently to learn that the pursuit of a right end does not necessarily imply the employment of right means” (B.W. Newton). This is the first thing here

to take heart.

“And they set the ark of God upon a new cart.” By so doing they were guilty of a serious error. In the fervency of his zeal, David ignored the precepts of God. The Lord had given very definite instructions as to the order which must be followed when the Ark was to be moved. Through Moses Jehovah had said, “When the camp setteth forward, Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the covering veil, and *cover the ark* of testimony with it: and shall but thereon the covering of badgers’ skins, and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall *put in the staves thereof*” (Num. 4:5,6). The sacred Ark was to be duly hidden from the gaze of the curious, but it does not appear that this detail was attended to by David! Nor was that all: “And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it” (Num. 4:15); “they should bear *upon their shoulders*” (Num. 7:9).

The will of God was plainly revealed: the Ark was to be covered, staves were to be inserted in the rings in its ends, and it was to be carried on the shoulders of the Kohathites. Nothing had been said about placing it on “a new cart”: *that* was a human invention, and *contrary to* the instructions of the Lord. David’s desire was holy, his motive was pure, but *he went about things in a wrong way*, and direful were the consequences. Now there are two ways of doing the work of the Lord, two ways of acquitting ourselves when engaged in His service: strictly following what is prescribed for us in the written Word of God, or following *our own* ideas and inclinations—or following the example of other men, which amounts to the same thing. Alas, how much more the latter is now in evidence; how often are right things being done in a wrong way!

The due order for the removing of the Ark had been plainly made known by God in His written Word. Jehovah had given express command that the Ark should be covered with the sacred curtains, committed to the charge of a Divinely-selected set of men, and it *must* be carried on their “shoulders,” and in no other way. That was *God’s* way. To move it on a cart drawn by cattle was *man’s* way. Some might think the latter was to be preferred. Some might consider it was such a “little” matter as to be of no consequence. Some might conclude that as their object was right and their motive pure, that even though they ignored *the prescribed mode* of performing the duty, they might surely count upon the Divine blessing. *What the Lord thought* of their procedure is evidenced in the tragic sequel.

But how are we to account for David’s serious failure to heed the commands of God? What is the explanation of the “confusion” which here attended his well-meant and praise-worthy effort? Let us go back again to the beginning of 2 Samuel 6, and read carefully its first three verses. Notice, dear reader, a very significant *omission*; observe closely the solemn contrast between his conduct in 2 Samuel 5:19 and 5:23, and what is said of him here. Each time the Philistines came up against him, David “inquired of the Lord,” but nothing is said of *that* now he purposed to conduct the Ark unto a suitable habitation for it! Need we wonder, then, at what follows? If *God’s* blessing be not definitely sought, how can it be rightfully expected? If *prayer* does not precede and accompany our very best actions, what are they likely to amount to! If in *any* of our ways God be not “acknowledged,” be not surprised if they lead to disaster.

“And David *consulted with the captains* of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader. And David said unto all the congregation of Israel, If it seem good *unto you*, and

that it be of the LORD our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren every where, that are left in all the land of Israel, and with them also to the priests and Levites which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us: and let us bring again the ark of our God to us” (1 Chron. 13:1-3). Instead of “inquiring of the Lord,” David had conferred with his officers. There was *no need whatever* for him to “consult” with any human being, for the *will of the Lord* was already upon record! And what was the policy suggested by the “leaders”? Why, to imitate the ways of the religious world around them! The Philistine “priests” had counseled that the Ark be returned to Israel upon “a new cart” (1 Sam. 6:2-11), and now David—under the advice of his officers—“set the ark of God upon *a new cart*” (2 Sam. 6:3)!—A.W.P.

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### Divine Guidance.

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5, 6). Note well the *order* here: the promise at the close of the passage is conditional upon our meeting three requirements. First, we are to have full confidence in the Lord. The Hebrew verb for “trust” here literally means “to lean upon”: it conveys the idea of one who is conscious of feebleness turning unto and resting upon a stronger one for support. To “trust in the Lord” signifies to count upon Him in every emergency, to look to Him for the supply of every need, to say with the Psalmist “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psa. 23:1). It means that we cast all our cares upon Him, drawing from Him strength day by day and hour by hour and thus proving the sufficiency of His grace. It means for the Christian *to continue* as he began: when we first cast ourselves upon Him as lost sinners, we abandoned all our own doings and relied upon His abounding mercy. Rely now on His wisdom, power and grace.

But what is meant by “trust in the LORD *with all thine heart*”? First, the giving unto God of our undivided confidence, not looking to any other for help and relief. Second, turning to Him with childlike simplicity. When a little one trusts there is no reasoning, but a simple taking of the parent’s words at their face value, being fully assured that his father will make good what he has said; he dwells not on the difficulties which may be in the way, but expects a fulfillment of what is promised. So it should be with us and our heavenly Father’s words. Third, it means with our *affections* going out to Him: love “believeth all things, hopeth all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). Thus, to trust in the Lord, “with all our heart” is *love’s reliance* in believing dependence and expectation.

The second requirement is, “and lean not unto thine own understanding,” which means we are not to trust in our own wisdom or rely upon the dictates of human reason. The highest act of human reason is to disown its sufficiency and bow before the wisdom of God. To lean unto our own understanding is to rest upon a broken reed, for it has been deranged by sin; yet many find it harder to repudiate their own wisdom than they do to abandon their own righteousness. Many of God’s ways are “past finding out,” and to seek to solve the mysteries of Providence is the finite attempting to comprehend the Infinite, which is not only being guilty of presumptuous sin, but is acting against our own well being. Philosophizing about our lot, reasoning about our circumstances, is fatal to rest of soul and peace of heart.

Third, “in all thy ways acknowledge Him.” This means, first, we must ask God’s *permission* for all that we do, and not act without His leave; only then do we conduct ourselves as dutiful children and respectful servants. It means, second, that we seek God’s *guidance* in every undertaking, acknowledging our ignorance and owning our complete dependence upon Him. “In *every thing* by prayer and supplication” (Phil. 4:6): only so is God’s lordship over us owned in a practical way. It means, third, seeking God’s *glory* in all our ways: “whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Ah, if we only *did so*, how very different many of our “ways” would be! If we more frequently paused and inquired, Will *this* be for God’s glory? we should be withheld from much sinning and from much folly, with all its painful consequences. It means, fourth, seeking God’s *blessing* upon everything. Here is another simple and sufficient rule: anything on which I cannot ask *God’s blessing* is WRONG.

“And He shall direct thy paths”: meet the three conditions mentioned above and here



is the sure consequence. The need for being directed by God is real and pressing. Left to ourselves we are no better off than a rudderless ship or a motor-car without a steering-wheel. It is not without reason that the Lord's people are so often termed "sheep," for no other creature is so apt to stray or has such a propensity to wander. The Hebrew word for "direct" means "to make straight." We are living in a world where everything is crooked: sin has thrown everything out of joint, and in consequence, confusion, worse, confound- edness, abounds all around us. A deceitful heart, a wicked world, and a subtle Devil, are ever seeking to lead us astray and compass our destruction. How necessary it is, then, for God to "direct our paths."

What is meant by "He shall direct thy paths"? It means, He will make clear to me *the course of duty*. Let this be firmly grasped: God's "will" always lies in the path of duty, and never runs counter thereto. Much needless uncertainty and perplexity would be spared if only this principle were steadily recognised. When you feel a strong desire or "prompting" to shirk a plain duty, you may be assured it is a temptation from Satan, and not the "leading" of the Holy Spirit. For example, it is contrary to God's revealed will for a woman to be constantly attending meetings to the neglect of her children and home. It is shirking his responsibility for the husband to go off alone in the evenings, even in reli- gious luxuriation, and leave his tired wife to wash the dishes and put the children to bed. It is a sin for a Christian employee to read the Scripture or "speak to people about their souls" during office or business hours.

The difficulty arises when it appears that we have to choose between two or more du- ties, or when some important change has to be made in our circumstances. There are many people who think they want to be *guided by God* when some crisis arrives or some important decision has to be made; but few of them are prepared *to meet the requirements* as intimated in our opening paragraphs. The fact is that GOD was rarely in their thoughts before the emergency arose: pleasing *Him* exercised them not while things were going smoothly for them. But when difficulty and trouble confronts them, when they are at their own wits end *how* to act, they sud- denly become very pious, turn to the Lord, earnestly ask Him to direct them, and make *His* way plain before their face.

But God cannot be imposed upon in such a manner. Usually such people make a rash decision and bring themselves into still greater difficulties, and then they attempt to con- sole themselves with "Well, I *sought* God's guidance." Ah, my reader, *God* is not to be mocked like that: if we ignore His claims upon us when the sailing is pleasant, we cannot count upon Him delivering us when the storm comes. The One we have to do with is *holy* and He will not set a premium upon Godlessness (called by many, "carelessness"), even though we howl like beasts when in anguish (Hosea 7:14). On the other hand, if we dili- gently seek grace to walk with God day by day, regulating our ways by His command- ments, then we *may* rightfully count upon His aid in every emergency that arises.

But how is the conscientious Christian to act when some emergency confronts him? Suppose he stands at the parting of the ways: two paths, two alternatives, are before him, and he knows not which to choose: *what* must he do? First, let him heed that most neces- sary word, which as a rule of general application is ever binding upon us, "he that believ- eth *shall not make haste*" (Isa. 28:16). To act from a sudden impulse never becomes a child of God, and to rush ahead of the Lord is sure to involve us in painful consequences. "The LORD is good unto them that *wait for Him*, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good

that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation (deliverance) of the LORD” (Lam. 3:25, 26). To act in haste generally means that afterward we shall repent at leisure. O how much each of us needs to beg the Lord to daily lay His cooling and quietening hand upon our feverish flesh!

Second, seek unto the Lord for Him to *empty your heart* of every wish of your own. It is impossible for us to sincerely pray “*Thy will be done,*” until our *own* will has, by the power of the Holy Spirit, been brought into complete subjection to God. Just so long as there is secret (but real) *preference* in my heart, my judgment will be biased. While my heart is really set upon the attainment of a certain object, then I am only mocking God when I ask Him to make *His way* plain before my face; and I am sure to *misinterpret* all His providences, twisting them to fit my own desire. If an obstacle be in my path, I shall then regard it as a “testing of faith”; if a barrier be removed, I at once jump to the conclusion that God is “undertaking” for me, when instead He may be *testing*, on the eve of giving me up to my own “heart’s lusts” (Psa. 81:12).

This is a point of supreme importance for those who desire their steps to be truly “ordered of the Lord.” We cannot discern *His* best for us while the heart has its own preference. Thus it is imperative that we ask God to *empty* our hearts of all personal preferences, to *remove* any secret and set desire of our own. But often it is far from easy to take *this* attitude before God, the more so if we are not in the habit of seeking grace to mortify the flesh. By nature each of us wants his own way, and chafes against every curb placed upon him. But just as a photographic plate must be a *blank* if it is to receive the impression of a picture upon it, so our hearts must be freed from their personal bias if God is to work in us “both to will and to do of *His* good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

If you find that as you continue waiting upon God the inward struggle between the “flesh” and the “Spirit” continues, and you have *not* reached the point where you can honestly say, “Have *Thine* own way, Lord,” then a season of *fasting* is in order. In Ezra 8:21 we read, “Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, *to seek of Him a right way for us*, and for our little ones.” This is written for our instruction, and even a glance at it suffices to show it is pertinent to our present inquiry. Nor is fasting a religious exercise peculiar to Old Testament times, for in Acts 13:3 we are told that before Barnabas and Saul were sent forth on their missionary journey by the church at Antioch, “When they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” There is nothing meritorious in fasting, but it expresses humility of soul and earnestness of heart.

The next thing is to humbly and sincerely acknowledge to God our ignorance, requesting Him not to leave us to ourselves. Tell Him frankly that you are perplexed and know not what to do, and that you deserve to be left in this woeful plight. But plead before Him His own promise, and beg Him for Christ’s sake to now make it good to you: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering” (James 1:5, 6). Ask Him to grant the wisdom so much needed, that you may judge rightly, that you may discern clearly what will promote your *spiritual* welfare, and therefore be most for His glory.

“Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass” (Psa. 37:5). In the interval of waiting, confer not with flesh and blood: if you go to fel-

low-Christians for advice, most probably no two of them will agree, and their discordant counsel will only confuse you. Instead of looking to man for help “Continue in prayer, and *watch* in the same with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2). Be on the look-out for God’s answer: mark attentively each movement of His providence, for as a straw in the air indicates which way the wind is blowing so the hand of God may often be discerned by a spiritual eye in what are trifling incidents to others. “And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that *then thou shalt bestir thyself*: for then shall the LORD go out before thee” (2 Sam. 5:24).

Finally, remember that we need not only *light* from the Lord to discover unto us our duty in particular cases, but, that being obtained, we also need His *presence* to accompany us, so that we may be enabled to rightly follow the path in which He bids us go. Moses realised this when he said to the Lord “If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence” (Exo. 33:15). If we have not the presence of God with us in an undertaking—that is, His approval upon it, His assistance in it, and His blessing upon it—then we shall find it a snare if not a curse to us.

As a general rule it is better for us to trouble our minds very little about “guidance”—*that* is God’s work: our business is to walk in obedience to Him day by day. As we do so, there is wrought within us a prudence which will preserve us from all serious mistakes. “I understand more than the ancients, *because I keep Thy precepts*” (Psa. 119:100). The man who keeps God’s precepts becomes endowed with a wisdom which far surpasses that possessed by the sages of antiquity or the learning of philosophers. “Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness” (Psa. 112:4). The upright man may experience his days of darkness, but when the hour of emergency arrives light shall be given him by God. Serve God with all your might today, and you may calmly and safely leave the future with Him. A duteous conformity to what is right shall be followed by a luminous discernment of what would be wrong.

Seek earnestly to get the fear of God fixed in your heart so that you tremble at His Word (Isa. 66:2) and are really afraid of displeasing Him. “What man is he that feareth the LORD? *him shall He teach* in the way that he shall choose” (Psa. 25:12). “Behold, the fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28). “Then shall we know, *if* we follow on to know the LORD” (Hosea 6:3). The more we grow in grace the fuller will be our knowledge of God’s revealed will. The more we cultivate the practice of seeking to please God in all things, the more light shall we have for our path. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8): if our motive be right, our vision will be clear.

“The integrity of the upright shall *guide* them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them” (Prov. 11:3). The upright man will not willingly and knowingly go aside into crooked paths: the honest heart is not bewildered by domineering lusts nor blinded by corrupt motives: having a tender conscience he possesses keen spiritual discernment; but the crooked policy of the wicked involves them in increasing trouble and ends in their eternal ruin. “The righteousness of the perfect (sincere) shall *direct* his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness” (Prov. 11:5): an eye single to God’s glory delivers from those snares in which the ungodly are taken. “Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD understand all things” (Prov. 28:5). Unbridled passions and unmortified lusts becloud the understanding and pervert the judgment till men call good “evil” and evil “good” (Isa. 5:20); but he who seeks to be subject to the

Lord shall be given discretion.

“The LORD shall direct thy paths.” First, by His *Word*: not in some magical way so as to encourage laziness, nor like consulting a cookery-book full of recipes for all occasions, but by warning us of the by-ways of sin and folly and by making known the paths of righteousness and blessing. Second, by His *Spirit*: giving us strength to obey the precepts of God, causing us to wait patiently on the Lord for directions, enabling us to apply the rules of Holy Writ to the varied duties of our lives, bringing to our remembrance a word in due season. Third, by His *providences*: causing friends to fail us so that we are delivered from leaning upon the arm of flesh, thwarting our carnal plans so that we are preserved from shipwreck, shutting doors which it would not be good for us to enter, and opening doors before us which none can shut.—A.W.P.

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## Vainglory

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3).

Vainglory is specially a sin of “spiritual” people. True, we see in the fops (dudes) of the world a glory which is empty and vain. We see people placing an utterly foolish value on their birth, education, reputation, and place in society. But this is to be expected of people who reject Christ’s view of things. It is sad enough, in all conscience, to see men and women who were made for the glory of God, consenting to be devotees of a glory that is hollow, empty and shallow. But what shall we say when we find people who call themselves after the name of the rejected and despised Man of Sorrows, secretly glorying in the vanities of life?

This vainglory is a very subtle thing. How frequently do we glide into a subdued and hidden sense of superiority over others, because grace has reached us! Have you never heard a preacher speaking to sinners as from a superior pedestal, his very tones showing that he thinks himself superior to his audience? Now, is the matter righted by his saying, as he often does, that he does not want to give the impression that he thinks himself to be on a higher and worthier plane than his listeners. The very words echo back on him with a hollow and empty sound—he shows so palpably that he feels his superiority, in spite of his disclaimer. What a vainglory it is for a man who has been lost in sin to think well of himself because Another pitied him in his way and stooped to bless and deliver him! There is great danger in “giving testimony” in a meeting, of secretly doing so with vainglory. Some people even magnify their past sinfulness in order to attract the attention to their changed life. I remember a man doing this and adding, with complaisance, “I’m a miracle of grace!” Personally, I thought he was a miracle of vainglory.

The Holy Spirit does not usually work alongside of the man who draws attention to himself. If you want people to get their eyes fixed on you—your superior sanctity, your wit, your ready speech, your eloquence, your dramatic power, or your logic, then do not expect the Holy Spirit to help you in this business. He is bent on bringing glory to CHRIST, *and not to the preacher*. It is a very low thing to glory in your natural gifts. “What hast thou that thou didst not *receive*?” (1 Cor. 4:7). What gift of yours did you create? And if every power you possess is the result of the beneficence of another, why should you glory as if you deserved the praise? Of course, if you really did create your own beauty, intellect, powers of speech, then you ought to be praised and glorying in yourself is not vain. But did you create these capacities? All you had to do with these things was to cultivate them, and God will never deny any true worth that is due to your credit in this direction.

But strange to say, there are more subtle regions of vainglory than those already mentioned. Reference need not to be made to those who can only rejoice in the advance of their own church or branch of work, and who feel jealous when others are used of God. Such vainglory is beneath contempt. But amongst those who seek to walk before God without rebuke, there may creep in a spirit of vainglory. A little holy inner circle becomes consciously, or more often unconsciously, formed. Others are supposed not to be saved so “high up”; they are not “so fully Spirit-filled”; or perhaps they are not so utterly self-less.

Now, nothing would so shock these people as to be told they had become formed into a little inner circle, and virtually said to other estimable Christians who were living up to

their light: “Stand thou on that side, for I am holier than thou.” They would be shocked if you were to tell them that their actions plainly denote that the spirit of vainglory is lurking like a canker beneath the surface of their lives—yes, deeper than their consciousness possibly.

I have seen this spirit creep into the lives of those who have been walking very near to God; and in one way or another God has dealt with it. When He could, apparently, take no softer way, He has allowed some development of spiritual life in another circle—bringing in a new line of things. Those who had gradually come to regard themselves as *the* people, now saw their deficiency. It was a very humbling revelation. And now, in turn, those who had been used to break up the little inner circle which had become self-righteous, become themselves a little proud, and a spirit of “spiritual” superiority begins to possess them. And so it goes on.

My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Can we not all take a low place before God, for “If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he *deceiveth himself*” (Gal. 6:3). Let nothing be done through vainglory. Not one of us has anything to boast of. And let us remember that nothing—I say it thoughtfully—nothing is *so hateful to God* as the spirit that says of another: “Stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou.” Those who say this by their actions and spirit of isolation and superiority, are a smoke in the nostrils of our Lord. The moment we say, “God, I thank Thee, I am not as other men,” we become Pharisees; our true place is to say, “God be merciful to me, the sinner.”—Dudley Kidd.

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Praise God from whom all blessings flow, by His abounding goodness there will be a credit balance for 1934, [remember this was written by Brother Pink for the *January, 1935* issue] but at the time of printing this issue we are unable to state the exact amount.—A.W. Pink

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## Union and Communion

### *Introduction.*

The present writer has not a doubt in his mind that the subject of *spiritual union* is the most important, the most profound, and yes, the most blessed of any that is set forth in the sacred Scriptures; and yet, sad to say, there is hardly any which is now more generally neglected. The very expression “spiritual union” is unknown in most professing Christian circles, and even where it is employed it is given such a protracted meaning as to take in only a fragment of this precious truth. Probably its very profundity is the reason why it is so largely ignored in this superficial age. Yet there are still a few left who are anxious to enter into God’s best and long for a fuller understanding of the deep things of the Spirit; and it is, principally, with these in mind that we take up this present series.

There are three principal unions revealed in the Scriptures which are the chief mysteries and form the foundation of our most holy faith. First, the union of three Divine Persons in one Godhead: having distinct personalities, being co-eternal and co-glorious, yet constituting one Jehovah. Second, the union of the Divine and human natures in one Person, Jesus Christ, Immanuel, being God and man. Third, the union of the Church to Christ, He being the Head, they the members, constituting one mystical body. Though we cannot form an exact idea of any of these unions in our imaginations, because the depth of such mysteries is beyond our comprehension, yet it is our bounden duty to believe them all, because they are clearly revealed in Scripture, and are the necessary foundation for other points of Christian doctrine. Hence it is our holy privilege to prayerfully study the same, looking unto the Holy Spirit to graciously enlighten us thereon.

The most wonderful thing of all, and yet the greatest mystery, in the natural world, is a *union*, namely, that conjunction which God has made between mind and matter, the soul and the body. What finite intelligence would or could have conceived of the joining together of an immaterial spirit and a clod of clay! What so little alike as the soul and an organized piece of earth! Who had ever imagined such a thing as animate and thinking dust! or that a spirit should be so linked with and tied to a carnal body that while *that* is preserved in health, *it* cannot free itself! And yet there *is* a union, a real union, a personal union, between the soul and the body. But that is only a *natural* mystery, and falls immeasurably below the *sacred* mystery of the union between human beings and the Lord of Glory.

The Scriptures have much to say upon the union which exists between Christ and His people. “At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you” (John 14:20). “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). “For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church” (Eph. 5:30, 32). What an astonishing thing it is that there should be a union between the Son of God and worms of the earth!—infinitely more so than if the king of Great Britain had married the poorest and ugliest woman in all his realm. How immeasurable is the distance between the Creator and the creature, between Deity and mortal man! How wonderful beyond words that sinful wretches should be made one with Him before whom the seraphim veil their faces and cry “holy, holy, holy!”

“The union of Christ to His people is an amazing subject. It is an eternal union; it is an union made known and enjoyed in time; it is an union which will be openly and manifestatively declared in all its glory and perfection in the latter day; it is a grace union; it is

also a glory union. As it is the foundation of all the gracious actings of Christ towards His Church in a time state, so it is of all the glory He will put on His Church and communicate unto His people at the last day. I cannot but lament we are most of us so great strangers to these important and heavenly truths. Depend on it, *we are great losers hereby*. The people of God lose much because they neglect truths of the greatest importance. In the present day they are too neglectful of important truths. They are willingly ignorant of them.

“We treat the Scriptures in the present day as though the less we know of the deep things of God, so much the better. Alas! alas! this, let us think of it as we may, is to cast contempt on God Himself. Nor will it serve to say we do not so mean or intend. It is a matter of fact, we are too neglectful of those Divine Truths and doctrines which concern the glory of Christ. The ancient and glorious settlements of grace are too little in our thoughts. It is sensibly felt, and by some very expressively confessed and acknowledged, that the influences of the Holy Spirit are very greatly suspended. Yet *the cause* is overlooked. Most assuredly one grand reason why we have so little of His sacred presence with us, and His power and influence manifested amongst us may be laid to the account of neglecting to preach supernatural, spiritual truth, and the mysteries of the everlasting Gospel” (S.E. Pierce, 1812).

The vital importance of this subject of the union of the Church to Christ may be clearly seen from the place which it occupies in the High Priestly prayer of Christ. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may *be one*; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee” (John 17:20, 21). Our Lord here began His prayer for the whole body of His people by speaking of the union which they had with Him and His Father in Him, and He spends the verses which follow in expressing the blessings which follow as the fruits thereof. We are *not* to conceive that Christ here prayed for an union *to be* brought about or obtained; no, for it *was* established from all eternity: rather was He praying that His beloved might be blest with the clear knowledge of it, so that they might enjoy all the benefits of the same in their own souls.

“And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may *be one*, even as We are one” (John 17:22). This subject of the union between Himself and the elect was truly sweet and blessed to the heart of Christ. He knew that the knowledge and use of it is of great value and service to His people, therefore did He speak of it again and again that His saints in all ages might receive the knowledge of it into their minds and enjoy in their hearts the blessings contained in it. And, my readers, if Christ Himself esteemed this truth of union with Himself as a foundation truth, *we* should learn to think of it so also. We should bring ourselves unto the closest and prayerful study of the same, for by it our faith and hope are sustained and kept in exercise on God our Saviour.

“And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may *be one*, even as We are one.” This petition is the very centre of Christ’s prayer, expressing the supreme desire of the Saviour’s mind towards His redeemed: it summed up the uttermost longing of His heart toward them. The union about which He prayed is such that thereby the Father and the Son dwell in us and we in Them. It is such that the elect are so joined unto God and His Christ that it is the very highest union which the elect are capable of. It is the chiefest and greatest of all blessings, being the foundation from which all others proceed.



“I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect *in one*” (v. 23). A great variety of blessings are set before us in the Gospel. Salvation is an unspeakable one, yet not so great as our union to the Person of Christ. If we had not been united to Christ, He had not been our Saviour: it was because we stood eternally related to Him that He was most graciously pleased to undertake for us. The grace of justification is an unspeakable blessing, yet not so great as that of union, because the effect can never be equal to the cause which produces it. To be *in Christ* must exceed all the blessings which flow *from* Him which we have or ever shall partake of, either on earth or in Heaven. Communion with Christ is unspeakably blessed, yet not so great as *union*, for our union is the foundation of all communion. It is the greatest of all those super-creation “spiritual blessings” (Eph. 1:3) which the Father bestowed on the Church before sin entered the universe. It is the fruit of God’s eternal love to His people.

Union with Christ is the foundation of all spiritual blessings, so that if there had been no *connection with* Him, there could be no regeneration, no justification, no sanctification, no glorification. It is so in the natural world—adumbrating the spiritual: sever one of the members from my physical body, and it is dead; only by its union with my person does it partake of life. “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9): the word “fellowship” signifies such a co-partnership between persons that they have a joint interest in one and the same enjoyment which is common between them. Now this fellowship or communion with Christ is entirely dependent upon our *union with* Him, even as much as the branch’s participation of the sap and juice is dependent upon its union and coalition with the stock of the tree. Take away union, and there can neither be communion nor communication.

As it is for Christ’s sake that God bestows upon His people all the blessings of salvation, so according to His eternal constitution those blessings could only be enjoyed in a state of communion with Him. The varied character of that communion it will be our joy to unfold, as the blessed Spirit is pleased to enable us, in the articles which follow. But the foundation of that vital, spiritual, and experimental union which the saints have with their Beloved in a time state and which they will enjoy forever in Heaven, was laid by God in that mystical union which He established between the Mediator and His elect before the foundation of the world, when He appointed Him to be the Head and they the members of His body: when God gave Christ to them and gave them to Christ in everlasting marriage.

In consequence of God’s having given the Church to Christ in marriage before the foundation of the world, He says to His people, “I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies” (Hosea 2:19); “thy Maker is thine Husband” (Isa. 54:5). And therefore does the Church exclaim, “My Beloved is mine, and I am His” (Song. 2:16). “Consider the closeness and intimacy of the union between Him and them, and let this encourage thee to lean and live on Him by faith. It is far more intimate and dear than the union between husband and wife among men, for they are indeed ‘one flesh,’ but He is ‘one body’ and ‘one spirit’ (1 Cor. 6:20) with His spouse; He is in *them*, and they are *in Him*. And by virtue of this intimate union, thou hast a title to Him and to His whole purchase (Eben. Erskine, 1775).

In consequence of this eternal marriage-union between Christ and His Church there is a communion of names. In Jeremiah 23:6 we read, “And this is His name whereby *He*

shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and in Jeremiah 33:16 we are told, “And this is the name wherewith *she* shall be called, The LORD our righteousness”—this by virtue of her oneness with Him. So again in 1 Corinthians 12:12 the Church is actually designated “the Christ,” while in Galatians 3:16 and Colossians 1:24 the Head and His Church forming one body are conjointly referred to as “Christ”; hence when Saul of Tarsus was assaulting the Church, its Head protested, “Why persecutest thou *Me*?” (Acts 9:4). But what is yet more remarkable, we find the Lord Jesus given the name of His people: in Galatians 6:16 the Church is denominated, “the *Israel* of God,” while in Isaiah 49:3 we hear God saying *to the Mediator* “Thou art My servant, O *Israel*, in whom I will be glorified”!

Unspeakably precious is this aspect of our wonderful subject. In Colossians 3:12 Christians are exhorted to “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies.” Each of those titles are given to the saints because of their *union with Christ*. They are “the elect of God” because *He* is God’s “Elect” (Isa. 42:1); they are “holy” because conjoined to God’s “Holy One” (Psa. 16:10); they are “beloved” because married to Him of whom the Father says, “This is My Beloved Son” (Matt. 3:17). Again, we are told that God “hath made *us kings and priests*” (Rev. 1:5), which is only because we are *united to Him* who is “the King of kings” and the “great High Priest.” Is Christ called “the Sun of righteousness” (Mal. 4:2)? so we are told, “Then shall the righteous shine forth *as the sun* in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43)! Does the Redeemer declare “I am the rose of Sharon” (Song. 2:1)? then He promises of the redeemed “The desert (their fruitless state by nature) shall rejoice, and blossom *as the rose*” (Isa. 35:1)—the only two occasions the “rose” is mentioned in Holy Writ!

The union between Christ and His Church is so real, so vital, so intimate that God has never viewed the one apart from the other. There is such an indissoluble oneness between the Redeemer and the redeemed, such an absolute identification of interest between them, that the Father of mercies never saw them apart: He never saw Christ *as* “Christ” without seeing His mystical body; He never saw the Church apart from its Head. Therefore the Holy Spirit has delighted to emphasise this wondrous and glorious fact in many Scriptures. In connection with Christ’s birth we read, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same” (Heb. 2:14). Further, we are told, “In whom also *ye* are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision *of Christ*” (Col. 2:11)—His actual circumcision was our mystical circumcision. At His baptism Christ was “numbered *with* the transgressors,” and hence, speaking as the Representative of the entire election of grace, He said, “Thus it becometh *us* (not simply “Me”) to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15).

We are told that when the Saviour was nailed to the tree “our old man was *crucified with Him*” (Rom. 6:6). We are told that when He expired at Calvary “if One died for all, then were all dead” (2 Cor. 5:14). We are told that when He was revived, we were “quickened *together with Christ*” (Eph. 2:5). He did not rise again as a single and private person, but as the Head of His Church: “ye then be risen *with Christ*” (Col. 3:1). Nor is that all: in Ephesians 2:6 we are told, “And hath raised us up together, and made us *sit together* in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” O how surpassingly wonderful is the Christian’s oneness with Christ: “Because *as He is, so are we* in this world” (1 John 4:17). When Christ appears in glory it will not be alone: “Then shall ye also appear *with him* in

glory” (Col. 3:4).—A.W.P.

“One in the tomb; one when He rose;  
One when He triumph’d o’er His foes;  
One in Heaven He took His seat,  
While seraphs sang all Hell’s defeat.  
With Him, their Head, they stand or fall,  
Their Life, their Surety, and their All.”

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## The Doctrine of Sanctification.

### 1. Introduction.

In the ten articles published in last year's Studies upon "The Doctrine of Justification" we contemplated the transcendent grace of God which provided for His people a Surety, who kept for them perfectly His Holy Law, and who also endured the curse which was due to their manifold transgressions against it. In consequence thereof, though in ourselves we are criminals who deserve to be brought to the bar of God's justice and there be sentenced to death, we are, nevertheless, by virtue of the accepted service of our Substitute, not only not condemned, but "justified," that is, *pronounced righteous* in the high courts of Heaven. Mercy has rejoiced against judgment: yet not without the governmental righteousness of God, as expressed in His Holy Law, having been fully glorified. The Son of God incarnate, as the Federal Head and representative of His people, obeyed it, and also suffered and died under its condemning sentence. The claims of God have been fully met, justice has been magnified, the law has been made more honourable than if every descendant of Adam had personally fulfilled its requirements.

"As respects justifying righteousness, therefore, believers have nothing to do with the law. They are justified 'freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 3:24), that is apart from any personal fulfillment thereof. We could neither fulfill its righteousness nor bear its curse. The claims of the law were met and ended, once and forever, by the satisfaction of our great Substitute, and as a result we have attained to righteousness without works, i.e., without personal obedience of our own. 'By the obedience of *one* shall many be made righteous' (Rom. 5:19). There may be indeed, and there are, other relations in which we stand to the law. It is the principle of our *new* nature to rejoice in its holiness: 'we delight in the Law of God after the inner man.' We know the comprehensiveness and the blessedness of those first two commandments on which all the Law and the Prophets hang: we know that 'love' is the fulfilling of the law. We do not despise the guiding light of the holy and immutable commandments of God, livingly embodied, as they have been, in the ways and character of Jesus; but we do not seek to obey them with any thought of obtaining justification thereby.

"That which *has been* attained, cannot remain to be attained. Nor do we place so great an indignity on 'the righteousness of our God and Saviour,' as to put the partial and imperfect obedience which we render *after* we are justified, on a level with that heavenly and perfect righteousness by which we *have been* justified. *After* we have been justified, grace may and does for Christ's sake, accept as well-pleasing our imperfect obedience; but this being a consequence of our perfected justification cannot be made a ground thereof. Nor can anything that is in the least degree imperfect, be presented to God with the view of attaining justification. In respect of this, the courts of God admit nothing that falls short of His own absolute perfectness" (B.W. Newton).

Having, then, dwelt at some length on the basic and blessed truth of Justification, it is fitting that we should now consider the closely connected and complementary doctrine of Sanctification. But what is "sanctification": is it a quality or position? Is sanctification a legal thing or an experimental? that is to say, is it something the believer has in Christ or in himself? Is it absolute or relative? by which we mean, does it admit of degree or no? is it unchanging or progressive? Are we sanctified at the time we are justified, or is sanctification a later blessing? How is this blessing obtained? by something which is done for us, or by us, or both? How may one be assured he has been sanctified: what are the charac-

teristics, the evidences, the fruits? How are we to distinguish between sanctification by the Father, sanctification by the Son, sanctification by the Spirit, sanctification by faith, sanctification by the Word?

Is there any difference between sanctification and holiness? if so, what? Are sanctification and purification the same thing? Does sanctification relate to the soul or the body, or both? What position does sanctification occupy in the *order* of Divine blessings? What is the connection between regeneration and sanctification? What is the relation between justification and sanctification? Wherein does sanctification differ from glorification? Exactly what is the place of sanctification in regard to *salvation*: does it precede or follow, or is it an integral part of it? Why is there so much diversity of opinion upon these points, scarcely any two writers treating of this subject in the same manner? Our purpose here is not simply to multiply questions but to indicate the manysidedness of our present theme, and to intimate the various avenues of approach to the study of it.

Diversive indeed have been the answers returned to the above questions. Many who were ill-qualified for such a task have undertaken to write upon this weighty and difficult theme, rushing in where wiser men feared to tread. Others have superficially examined this subject through the coloured glasses of credal attachment. Others, without any painstaking efforts of their own, have merely echoed predecessors who they supposed gave out the truth thereon. Though the present writer has been studying this subject off and on for upwards of twenty-five years, he has felt himself to be too immature and too unspiritual to write at length thereon; and even now, it is (he trusts) with fear and trembling he essays to do so: may it please the Holy Spirit to so guide his thoughts that he may be preserved from everything which would pervert the Truth, dishonour God, or mislead His people. Brethren, pray for us.

We have in our library discourses on this subject and treatises on this theme by over fifty different men, ancient and modern, ranging from hyper-Calvinists to ultra-Arminians, and a number who would not care to be listed under either. Some speak with pontifical dogmatism, others with reverent caution, a few with humble diffidence. All of them have been carefully digested by us and diligently compared on the leading points. The present writer detests sectarianism (most of all in those who are the worst affected by it, while pretending to be opposed to it), and earnestly desires to be delivered from partizanship. He seeks to be profited from the labours of all, and freely acknowledges his indebtedness to men of various creeds and schools of thought. On some aspects of *this* subject he has found the Plymouth Brethren much more helpful than the Reformers and the Puritans.

The great importance of our present theme is evidenced by the prominence which is given to it in Scripture: the words “holy, sanctified” etc., occurring therein hundreds of times. Its importance also appears from the high value ascribed to it: it is the supreme glory of God, of the unfallen angels, of the Church. In Exodus 15:11 we read that the Lord God is “glorious in holiness”—that is His crowning excellency. In Matthew 25:31 mention is made of the “holy angels,” for no higher honor can be ascribed them. In Ephesians 5:26, 27 we learn that the Church’s glory lieth not in pomp and outward adornment, but in holiness. Its importance further appears in that *this* is the aim in all God’s dispensations. He elected His people that they should be “holy” (Eph. 1:4); Christ died that He might “sanctify” His people (Heb. 13:12); chastisements are sent that we might be “partakers of God’s holiness” (Heb. 12:10).

Whatever sanctification be, it is the great promise of the covenant made to Christ for His people. As Thomas Boston well said, “Among the rest of that kind, it shines like the moon among the lesser stars—as the very chief subordinate end of the Covenant of Grace, standing therein next to the glory of God, which is the chief and ultimate end thereof. The promise of preservation, of the Spirit, of quickening the dead soul, of faith, of justification, of reconciliation, of adoption, and of the enjoyment of God as our God, do tend unto it as their common centre, and stand related to it as means to their end. They are all accomplished to sinners on design *to make them holy*.” This is abundantly clear from, “The oath which He sware to our father Abraham, that He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life” (Luke 1:73-75). In that “oath” or covenant, sworn to Abraham as a type of Christ (our spiritual Father: Heb. 2:13), His seed’s serving the Lord in holiness, is held forth as the *chief* thing sworn unto the Mediator—the deliverance from their spiritual enemies being a means to that end.

The supreme excellency of sanctification is affirmed in Proverbs 8:11, “For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.” Everyone who has read the Book of Proverbs with any attention must have observed that Solomon means by “wisdom” *holiness*, “and by ‘folly’ *sin*; by a wise man a saint, and by a fool a sinner. ‘The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools’ (Prov. 3:35): who can doubt whether by ‘the wise’ he means *saints*, and by ‘fools’ *sinners*! ‘The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom’ (Prov. 9:10), by which he means to assert that true ‘wisdom’ is true piety or real holiness. Holiness, then, is ‘better than rubies,’ and all things that are to be desired are not to be compared with it. It is hard to conceive how the inestimable worth and excellency of holiness could be painted in brighter colours than by comparing it to rubies—the richest and most beautiful objects in nature” (N. Emmons).

Not only is true sanctification an important, essential, and unspeakably precious thing, it is wholly *supernatural*. “It is our duty to enquire into the nature of evangelical holiness, as it is a fruit or effect in us of the Spirit of sanctification, because it is abstruse and mysterious, and undiscernible unto the eye of carnal reason. We say of it in some sense as Job of wisdom, ‘whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof. And unto man He said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding’ (Job 28:20-23, 28). This is that wisdom whose ways, residence, and paths, are so hidden from the natural reason and understandings of men.

“No man, I say, by mere sight and conduct can know and understand aright the true nature of evangelical holiness; and it is, therefore, no wonder if the doctrine of it be despised by many as an enthusiastical fancy. It is of the things of the Spirit of God, yea, it is the principal effect of all His operation in us and towards us. And ‘the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God’ (1 Cor. 2:11). It is by Him alone that we are enabled to ‘know the things that are freely given to us of God’ (v. 12) as this is, if ever we receive anything of Him in this world, or shall do so to eternity. ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him’: the comprehensions of these things is not the work of any of our

natural faculties, but ‘God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit’ (1 Cor. 2:9, 10).

“Believers themselves are oft-times much unacquainted with it, either as to their apprehension of its true nature, causes, and effects, or, at least, as to their *own interests* and concernment therein. As we know not of ourselves, the things that are wrought in us of the Spirit of God, so we seldom attend as we ought unto His instruction of us in them. It may seem strange indeed, that, whereas, all believers are sanctified and made holy, that they should not understand nor apprehend what is wrought in them and for them, and what abideth with them: but, alas, how little do we know of ourselves, of what we are, and whence are our powers and faculties even in things natural. Do we know how the members of the body are fashioned in the womb?” (John Owen).

Clear proof that true sanctification is wholly supernatural and altogether beyond the ken of the unregenerate, is found in the fact that so many are thoroughly deceived and fatally deluded by fleshly imitations and Satanic substitutes of real holiness. It would be outside our present scope to describe in detail the various pretensions which pose as Gospel holiness, but the poor Papists, taught to look up to the “saints” canonized by their “church,” are by no means the only ones who are misled in this vital matter. Were it not that God’s Word reveals so clearly the power of that darkness which rests on the understanding of all who are not taught by the Spirit, it would be surprising beyond words to see so many intelligent people supposing that holiness consists in abstinence from human comforts, garbing themselves in mean attire, and practicing various austerities which God has never commanded.

Spiritual sanctification can only be rightly apprehended from what God has been pleased to reveal thereon in His Holy Word, and can only be experimentally known by the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit. We can arrive at no accurate conceptions of this blessed subject except as our thoughts are formed by the teaching of Scripture, and we can only experience the power of the same as the Inspirer of those Scriptures is pleased to write them upon our hearts. Nor can we obtain so much as a correct idea of the meaning of the term “sanctification” by limiting our attention to a few verses in which the word is found, or even to a whole class of passages of a similar nature: there must be a painstaking examination of *every* occurrence of the term and also of its cognates; only thus shall we be preserved from the entertaining of a one-sided, inadequate, and misleading view of its fullness and manysidedness.

Even a superficial examination of the Scriptures will reveal that holiness is *the opposite of sin*, yet the realisation of this at once conducts us into the realm of mystery, for how can persons be sinful and holy at one and the same time? It is *this* difficulty which so deeply exercises the true saints: they perceive in themselves so much carnality, filth, and vileness that they find it almost impossible to believe that *they* are HOLY. Nor is the difficulty solved here, as it was in justification, by saying, Though we are completely unholy in ourselves, we *are* holy *in Christ*. We must not here anticipate the ground which we hope to cover in future articles, except to say, the Word of God clearly teaches that those who have been sanctified by God *are* holy *in themselves*. The Lord graciously prepare our hearts for what is to follow.—A.W.P.

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“Without one thought that’s good to plead,  
O! What could save us from despair  
But this, though we are vile indeed,

The Lord our righteousness is there.”

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## Desires Unrealized.

by John Newton

“Ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal. 5:17). This is an humbling, but a just account of a Christian’s attainments in the present life, and is equally applicable to the strongest and to the weakest. The weakest need not say less, the strongest will hardly venture to say more. The Lord has given His people a desire and will aiming at great things: without this they would be unworthy the name of Christians; but they cannot do as they would. Their best desires are weak and ineffectual, not absolutely so (for He who works in them to will, enables them *in a measure to do* likewise), but in comparison with the mark at which they aim. So that while they have great cause to be thankful for the desire He has given them, and for the degree in which it is answered, they have equal reason to be ashamed and abased under a sense of their continual defects, and the evil mixtures which taint and debase their best endeavours. It would be easy to make out a long list of

particulars which a believer would do if he could, but in which, from first to last, he finds a mortifying inability. Permit me to mention a few, which I need not transcribe from books, for they are always present to my mind.

He would willingly enjoy God in prayer. He knows that prayer is his duty; but, in his judgment, he considers it likewise as his greatest honour and privilege. In this light he can recommend it to others, and can tell them of the wonderful condescension of the great God, who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in Heaven, that He should stoop so much lower, to afford His gracious ear to the supplications of sinful worms upon earth. He can bid them expect a pleasure in waiting upon the Lord, different in kind, and greater in degree, than all that the world can afford. By prayer, he can say, You have liberty to cast all your cares upon Him that careth for you. By one hour’s intimate access to the Throne of Grace, where the Lord causes His glory to pass before the soul that seeks Him, you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort than by a day or week’s converse with the best of men, or the most studious perusal of many folios: and in this light he would consider it and improve it for himself. But, alas! how seldom can he do as he would. How often does he find this privilege a mere task, which he would be glad of a just excuse to omit! And the chief pleasure he derives from the performance is to think that his task is finished: he has been drawing near to God with his lips, while his heart was far from Him. Surely this is not doing as he would, when (to borrow the expression of an old woman here) he is dragged before God like a slave, and comes away like a thief.

The like may be said of reading the Scriptures. He believes them to be the Word of God; he admires the wisdom and grace of the doctrines, the beauty of the precepts, the richness and suitableness of the promises; and therefore, with David, he accounts it preferable to thousands of gold and silver, and sweeter than honey or the honeycomb. Yet while he thus thinks of it, and desires that it may dwell in him richly, and be his meditation night and day, he cannot do as he would. It will require some resolution to persist in reading a portion of it every day; and even then his heart is often less engaged than when reading a pamphlet. Here again his privilege frequently dwindles into a task. His appetite is vitiated, so that he has but little relish for the food of his soul.

He would willingly have abiding, admiring thoughts of the Person and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Glad is he, indeed, of those occasions which recall the Saviour to his

mind; and with this view notwithstanding all discouragements, he perseveres in attempting to pray and read, and waits upon ordinances. Yet he cannot do as he would. Whatever claims he may have to the exercise of gratitude and sensibility towards his fellow creatures, he must confess himself mournfully ungrateful and insensible towards his best Friend and Benefactor. Ah! what trifles are capable of shutting out of our thoughts, of whom we say, He is the Beloved of our souls, who loved us, and gave Himself for us, and whom we have deliberately chosen as our chief good and portion. What can make us amends for the loss we suffer here? Yet surely if we could we would set Him always before us; His love should be the delightful theme of our hearts. "From morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve." But though we aim at this good, evil is present with us; we find we are renewed but in part, and have still cause to plead the Lord's promise, to take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh.

He would willingly acquiesce in all the dispensations of Divine providence. He believes that all events are under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, and shall surely issue in the glory of God and the good of those who fear Him. He doubts not but the hairs of his head are all numbered;—that the blessings of every kind which he possesses were bestowed upon him, and are preserved to him by the bounty and special favour of the Lord whom he serves; that afflictions spring not out of the ground, but are fruits and tokens of Divine love, no less than his comforts;—that there is a needs-be, whenever for a season he is in heaviness. Of these principles he can no more doubt of what he sees with his eyes, and there are seasons when he thinks they will prove sufficient to reconcile him to the sharpest trials. But often when he aims to apply them in an hour of present distress, he cannot do what he would. He feels a law in his members warring against the law in his mind; so that, in defiance of the clearest convictions, seeing as though he perceived not, he is ready to complain, mummer, and despond. Alas! How vain is man in his best estate! How much weakness and inconsistency, even in those whose hearts are right with the Lord! And what reason have we to confess that we are unworthy, unprofitable servants!

It were easy to enlarge in this way, would paper and time permit. But, blessed be God we are not under the law, but under grace: and even these distressing effects of the remnants of indwelling sin are overruled for good. By these experiences the believer is weaned from self, and taught more highly to prize and more absolutely to rely on Him, who is appointed unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. The more vile we are in our own eyes, the more precious He will be to us, and a deep repeated sense of the evil of our hearts is necessary to preclude all boasting, and to make us willing to give the whole glory of our salvation where it is due. Again, a sense of these evils will, when hardly any thing else can do it, reconcile us to the thoughts of death, yea make us desirous to depart that we may sin no more, since we find depravity so deep rooted in our nature, that, like the leprous house, the whole fabric must be taken down before we can be freed from its defilement. Then, and not till then, we shall be able to do the thing that we would: when we see Jesus we shall be transformed into His image, and have done with sin and sorrow forever. (1772).

N.B. It is not to be understood from the above article that the experience of the Christian is one of constant or total defeat. On the other hand, no Christian enjoys a course of uninterrupted victory. Nor does the above article portray the experience of a backslider, for when a Christian lapses into a backslidden state, his desires and efforts are far below

the level of what was here described by Mr. Newton. Just as in the natural world all days are not bright and fair, so it is in our present spiritual life; there is light and shade, brightness and gloom, ups and downs, songs and groans, praisings and confessions. No Christian perfectly realizes his own aspirations. The “perfect day” has not yet dawned.—  
A.W.P.