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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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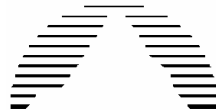
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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THE PATH OF DUTY

Part A

Occasionally we receive a letter from one of our readers who is confronted with what he regards as a perplexing situation, involving perhaps the stirring of his nest and a change of circumstances, expressing himself as very concerned to know what is "God's will" for him. Our first reaction is to wonder how far the inquirer has been *accustomed* to make conscience of pleasing God. If the inquirer (or the reader) is only exercised about the Divine will when some pressing situation or emergency faces him, it is a bad sign, betraying a sad state of soul and making it doubtful whether such an one has been truly converted. Just as being very religious on the Sabbath but thoroughly worldly through the week is to have "a form of godliness" but "denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5), so for me to be very solicitous about ascertaining and performing the will of God when some crisis arises but to have little regard what He has appointed during the general course of my life, is to place a big question-mark against the genuineness of my Christian profession.

The Most High is not at our beck and call, to be made use of only when we are in difficulty. Those who are indifferent to His honour and glory while things are going smoothly and pleasantly for them, are not likely to receive light and help from Him when they feel disposed to make an accommodation of Him in the evil day. Scripture is too plain upon this matter to be misunderstood: "he that turneth away his ear from hearing the Law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Prov. 28:9). Of the hypocrite it is said "will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him" (Job 27:9). No, He certainly will not. "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel...I also will laugh at your calamity...then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer...For that they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord...Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of [having] their own way" (Prov. 1:24-31). Compare Micah 3:4; Zechariah 7:13.

But in sharp contrast from the class mentioned above there are those who *have sought* to walk with God and avoid those things which are displeasing to Him, and when some difficulty arises, a parting of the ways suddenly confronts them, an important decision has to be made, they are anxious to know "what is God's will" for them. It appears to us that frequently these souls needlessly perplex themselves by the way in which they frame their question. It has long seemed to us that confusion of thought is betrayed by those who inquire "How am I to ascertain God's mind for me when I have to choose between two alternatives?" Yea, that something more than faulty terminology is involved, is evident from the sequel which immediately follows. So far as our own observation goes the questioner fails to arrive at any clear and decisive answer, being left in a state of doubt and distress, which is neither honouring to God nor comforting for His bewildered child.

Much confusion would be avoided and much uncertainty prevented by asking "Is this, or would that be, *according to the Scriptures?*" for God's "will" or "mind" is made known in His Word. *That* is the Rule, the sure and sufficient Rule we are to walk by, and not inward impressions of His secret will. Perhaps the reader replies, "Yes, I know the will of God is revealed in His Word on all spiritual and eternal matters, but it is about temporal things, the affairs of this life, which I am exercised about and over which I often find myself at an uncertainty." But that should not be, dear friend. God's Word is given to us for the express purpose of being "a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path" (Psa. 119:105), that is, our path in and through this world, which, because of its separation and alienation from God, is "a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19). It is wrong, quite unwarrantable, for us to mentally draw a line between spiritual and temporal matters as though they belonged to separate departments of our life.

The present spiritual life of the Christian is lived out in this world, and it is to actuate and regulate him in all his varied concerns: "whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). A spiritual life is very much more than elevated contemplations, ecstatic feelings, or being engaged only in distinctly devotional exercises—that is the erroneous view taken of it by those who shut themselves up in monasteries and convents. A spiritual life is not a nebulous and mystical thing, but something intensely practical. A spiritual life is to be maintained and exercised by the Christian in the schoolroom, the home, the workshop, as well as in the House of prayer. It is to dominate him in all his relations, in every association with his fellows, setting before them an example of piety, honesty, unselfishness,

helpfulness. In other words, the whole of his conduct is to be ordered by the precepts of Holy Writ, and not by the dictates of self-pleasing, nor by the customs of the world or the whims of “public opinion.”

In His Word God has given us rules which are pertinent to every aspect of our sojourn down here, which are to control every detail of our complex lives, so that there is no need for us to wonder “Is this right?” or “Is that wrong?” We are not left to our own erring judgment nor that of our fellows, for the Lord has supplied us with an unfailing chart and compass to direct us in our voyage to the better Land. The Scriptures not only announce explicit precepts enjoining obedience in detail but they also enunciate broad principles applicable to every sphere or situation in which Divine providence may place us. Therefore the one question for the saint to be constantly occupied about is, What does Holy Writ require of me? am I acting in accord with *its* teachings? Is my motive in harmony with what it demands? Would I be acting contrary to the Divine Rule if I entered upon such and such a course, adopted this or that fashion or followed a certain policy because my competitors do so or because my employer insists I must. Thereby a multitude of considerations are reduced to a simple and single issue.

What has been pointed out above may be summed up thus: God’s “mind” or “will” for me ever lies in my treading *the path of duty*. And that there may be no misunderstanding, let us here define our terms. What is *duty*? The word means “due to,” that which I am required to render unto another. The performance of duty is to discharge my obligations Godwards and manwards: loving Him with all my heart and strength and my neighbour as myself. It is to render that service which I am naturally or morally bound to perform unto others. More particularly, it is the execution of my responsibilities in the place which I occupy, whether in the home, the church, or the world. The *ground* of our duty is the Divine command, which is the sole determiner of human responsibility. The *end* of our duty is the glory of God, the pleasing of Him in the task He has allotted. The *present reward* of duty is a good conscience, the peace and satisfaction of mind in knowing I have done what is right. The *path* of duty is the course which Divine providence brings me into and which the Divine precepts have marked out for me.

It is by the providence of God each of us is black or white, male or female, a man of one or of five talents. Yet it is our responsibility to trade with those talents, and if they be put to a good use, more will be entrusted to us. Yet while the providence of God is often an *index*, it is *not the rule* to walk by—for *that* we must turn to the Word. It is in the Scriptures, and there alone, the path of duty is defined for us. Therein it is termed “the path of Thy commandments” (Psa. 119:35), which we need to pray that God will “make us go in,” for by nature we are not disposed thereto, being born “like a wild ass’s colt” (Job 11:12). Thus the path of duty is that of full obedience to God. It is “The way of holiness” (Isa. 35:8) in contrast from “the course of this world” (Eph. 2:2), which is one of *expediency* or choosing what seems easiest and pleasantest. It is “the way of wisdom” (Prov. 4:11) in distinction for the by-ways of folly. May Divine grace cause us to persevere therein. —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

5. *Romans 15:13*

In his preceding prayer the apostle had made request that the God of patience and consolation would grant the saints at Rome to be “like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus” (v. 5) so that amity and concord might prevail among them. He had followed this by reminding them that the Redeemer’s mission embraced not only the Jews but also the Gentiles: that the eternal purpose of God respected an elect portion from both parts of the human race (vv. 8-9). In support of which statement he made quotation of no less than four Old Testament passages, taken respectively from the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets (which were the principal sections into which the Divine oracles were divided, see Luke 24:44), each of which foretold that the Gentiles would take their place alongside of the Jews in worshipping the Lord. Thus the Hebrew Christians need have no hesitation in welcoming believing Gentiles into their midst. The apostle then concluded this section of his epistle, by again supplicating the Throne of grace on their behalf, thereby evidencing his deep solicitude for them, and intimating that God alone could impart the grace necessary for obedience to the injunctions given them.

Vital instruction is to be obtained by attending closely to the connection between the verse which is to be before us and those which immediately precede. In the context Paul had cited a number of Old Testament passages which announced the salvation of the Gentiles and their union with believing Jews. Now the prophecies of Scripture are to be viewed in a threefold manner. First, as proofs of their Divine inspiration, demonstrating as they do the omniscience of their Author in unerringly forecasting things to come. Second, as so many revelations of the will of God, announcements of what He has eternally decreed, and which must therefore come to pass. Third, as possessing a moral and practical bearing upon us: where they are predictions of judgment, they are so many *threatenings* and therefore warnings of the objects to be avoided and the evils to be shunned—as the fore-announced destruction of the Papacy bids us have nought to do with that detestable system; but where they consist of predictions of Divine blessing, they are so many *promises* for faith to lay hold of and for hope to anticipate before their actual fulfillment. It is in this third respect Paul is viewing them.

Here the apostle shows us what *use* we are to make of the Divine promises, namely, turn them into believing prayer, requesting God to make them good. As God draws near to us in promise, it is our privilege to draw near unto Him in petition. Those prophecies were so many infallible assurances that God intended to show mercy unto the Gentiles; no sooner had Paul quoted them than he bowed his knees before their Giver, thereby teaching the Roman saints, and us, how to turn the promises to practical account, instructing them *what* to ask for. In like manner when he would have the Ephesian saints beg God to enlighten their understandings, that they might know the great things of the Gospel, he set them an example by praying for that very thing (1:17,18). So here; it was as though he said “Thou hast promised that the Gentiles should hope in Thee [v. 12]. Thou art ‘the God of hope,’ then graciously work in these saints so that they ‘may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit,’ and that they too may from my example be constrained to supplicate Thee and plead this promise to the same end for the attainment of this very blessing.”

That the reader may have a more definite view of the connection we will now quote the verse before our prayer: “And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be a Root of Jesse and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles: in Him shall the Gentiles trust.” That is taken from one of the great Messianic prophecies, recorded in Isaiah 11. Whatever may or may not be its ultimate accomplishment Paul was moved to make known unto us that that prediction was even then receiving fulfillment. Literally the Greek reads, “in Him shall the Gentiles *hope*,” and it is thus rendered correctly in the Revised Version. Though intimately connected, as Hebrews 11:1 shows, there is a real difference between faith and hope. Faith is more comprehensive in its range, for it believes all that God has said concerning the past, present, and future—the threatenings as well as the promises; but hope looks solely to a *future good*. Faith has to do with the *Word* promising, hope is engaged with the *thing* promised. Faith is a believing that God will do as He has said, hope is a confident looking forward to the fulfillment of the promise.

Having sought to point out the instructive connection between the apostle’s prayer and the verses immediately preceding, a word now on its *remoter context*. This prayer concludes that section of the epistle begun at 14:1, in which the apostle had labored to remove what threatened to produce an unhappy division in the company of the Roman saints. Without taking sides and expressly declaring which was in the wrong,

he had laid down broad and simple principles for each to act upon, so that if their conduct was regulated thereby, Christian love and Christian liberty would alike be conserved. He set before them the example of their Master, and then showed that both Jews and Gentiles were given equal place in the Word of Prophecy. Now, to borrow the lovely language of Moule, "He clasps them impartially to his own heart in this precious and pregnant benediction, beseeching for both sides, and for all their individuals, a wonderful fullness of those blessings, in which most speedily and most surely, the spirit of their strife would expire." The closer a company of Christians are drawn to their Lord, the closer they are drawn to one another.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit." The "God of hope" is both the Object and the Author of hope. He is the One who has prepared the blessings which are to be the objects of our hope, who has set them before us in the Gospel, and who by the power of the Spirit enables us to understand and believe the Gospel, which awakens motives and sets in action principles that ensure hope. The burden of Paul's prayer was that the saints might abound in this spiritual grace, and therefore he addressed the Deity accordingly. As Matthew Henry points out, "It is good in prayer to fasten upon those names, titles and attributes of God which are most suitable to the errand we come upon and will best serve to encouragement concerning it." A further reason why the apostle thus addressed the Deity appears from the preceding verse, where it was announced of the Lord, "in Him shall the Gentiles hope." More literally our verse reads, "Now the God of that [or 'the'] hope"—the One who is the Inspirer of all expectations of blessing.

This expression "the God of [that] hope" had special pertinency and peculiar suitability unto the *Gentiles*—who are mentioned by name no less than four times in the verses immediately preceding. Its force is the more apparent if we consider it in the light of Ephesians 2:11,12, where Gentile believers are reminded that in time past they "were without Christ [devoid of any claim upon Him], being alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having *no hope* and without God in the world"—without any knowledge of Him, without a written revelation from Him. But the incarnation of Christ had radically altered this. The grand design of His mission was not restricted to Palestine but was worldwide, for He shed His atoning blood for sinners out of all peoples and tribes; and upon the triumphant conclusion of His mission commissioned His servants to preach the Gospel to all nations. Hence the apostle had reminded the Roman saints that God said, "rejoice ye Gentiles with His people." He had now become *to them* "the God of hope."

Unless God had revealed Himself in the Word of Truth we should be without any foundation of hope, but the Scriptures are windows of hope to us. This is evident from the 4th verse of our chapter: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have *hope*." Thus the God of hope is revealed in His living oracles with the design of inspiring hope. If we would be filled with faith, joy, and peace, it must be by believing what is presented to us in Holy Writ. Before we have any true inward grounds of hope, God Himself as revealed in the Bible must be our confidence. It was by searching it that the apostle discovered there was hope for the Gentiles, and so may the most burdened heart find solid consolation therein if he will search and believe its contents. Every Divine promise is calculated to inspire the believer with hope. Therein is to be found a sure foundation to rest upon.

Let us now consider the petition the apostle here presented unto the God of hope: it was that He would "fill you with all joy and peace in believing." This is to be considered first in its local bearing. The phrase "in believing" looks back to those blessed portions of the Old Testament which had just been quoted: it was a prayer that God would graciously enable those saints to lay hold of such promises and conduct themselves in harmony therewith. "In the fulfillment of that promise [v. 12] Christ came, and preached salvation to those who were near and to those who were afar off (Eph. 2:17). As both classes had been thus kindly received by the condescending Savior and united into one community, they should receive and love each other as brethren, laying aside all censoriousness and contempt, neither judging nor despising one another" (C. Hodge). In other words, the apostle longed that both alike should be occupied with Christ.

Let faith and hope be duly operative, and joy and peace would displace discord and strife. "Let that prayer be granted, in its pure depth and height, and how could the 'weak brother' look with quite his old anxiety on the problems suggested by the dishes at a meal and by the dates of the Rabbinic calendar? And could 'the strong' bear any longer to lose his joy in God by an assertion, full of self, of his own insight and liberty? Profoundly happy and at rest in the Lord, whom they embrace by faith as their Righteousness and Life, and whom they anticipated in hope as their coming Glory; filled through their whole consciousness by

the indwelling Spirit with a new insight into Christ, they would fall into each other's embrace, in Him. They would be much more ready when they met to speak 'concerning the King,' than to begin a new stage of their not very elevating discussion. How many a church controversy now as then, would die of inanition, leaving room for living truth, if the disputants could only gravitate, as to their always most beloved theme, to the praises and glories of their redeeming Lord Himself!" (H. Moule).

As our Lord's prayer in John 17 was not confined to His then disciples but reached forward to "them also which should believe" (v. 20), so this prayer of Paul's is suited to all the children of God. "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." Let it be duly noted that Paul did not hesitate *to ask for* these particular blessings. We make that remark because we very much fear that some of our readers are well-nigh afraid to cry unto God for such things: but they need not be. Fullness of spiritual joy does not unfit its possessor to live his life in this world, nor does fullness of peace produce presumption and carnal security. If such experiences were "dangerous," as Satan would fain have us conclude, the apostle would not have sought them on behalf of his fellow Christians. From his making request for these very blessings we learn they are eminently *desirable* and furnished warrant for us to supplicate for the same, both for ourselves and our brethren.

The example which the apostle has here set before us evidences that it is not only desirable for Christians to be filled with joy and peace, but that such a delightful experience is *attainable*. "We *may* be filled with joy and peace in believing, and may abound in hope. There is no reason why we should hang our heads and live in perpetual doubt. We may not only be somewhat comforted, but we may be full of joy; we may not only have occasional quiet, but we may dwell in peace, and delight ourselves in the abundance of it. These great privileges are attainable or the apostle would not have made them the subject of prayer... The sweetest delights are still grown in Zion's gardens, and are to be enjoyed by us; and shall they be within our reach and not be grasped? Shall a life of joy and peace be attainable, and shall we miss it through unbelief? God forbid. Let us as believers resolve that whatsoever of privilege is to be enjoyed we *will* enjoy it" (C. H. Spurgeon).

Once again we appeal to the context, for clear proof is found there that it *is* God's revealed will for His saints to be a *rejoicing* people. In verse 10 the apostle cites a verse from the Old Testament which says, "Rejoice ye Gentiles with His people." Israel had been given no monopoly of joy: those whom God had purposed to call from out the Nations would also share therein. If there was joy for Israel when redeemed from the house of bondage and led through the Red Sea, much more so is there for those delivered from the power of Satan and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Observe that the passage quoted is not in the form of a promise, but is a specific precept: regenerated Gentiles are expressly bidden *to* "rejoice." Nor did the apostle stop there. As though anticipating our slowness to enter into our privileges, he added, "And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles" (v. 11)—not merely the most eminent among them but all alike. Where there is praise there is joy, for joy is a component part of it. Thus one who professes to be a Christian and at the same time complains that he is devoid of joy and peace, acknowledges that he is failing to obey these precepts.

"The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace" intimates three things. First, that there are degrees of these blessings. A few Christians there are who enjoy them fully, but the great majority (to their shame) experience but a taste thereof. Each of us should look to God for the fullest communication of these privileges. Second, the breadth of the apostle's words, as also his "that ye may *abound* in hope," manifest how his heart was enlarged toward the saints and what comprehensive supplies of grace he sought for them. Third, that it is thus we honor God in prayer: by counting on the freeness of His grace. There is no straitness in Him, and there should be none in us. Since we are coming to Heaven's King, let us "large petitions with us bring." Has He not given us encouragement to do so? Having given His beloved Son for us and to us "how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things"! Has He not invited us to "drink, yea, drink *abundantly*" (Song of Sol. 5:1): then let our requests be in accord with His invitation and not approach Him as though He were circumscribed like unto ourselves.

That the apostle prayed for these blessings indicated they are not only desirable and attainable, but also that it is *incumbent upon us* to enter into possession of them. We cannot now attempt proof, but will here state the fact that, the things we may ask God for or to give us are, at the same time, obligations upon ourselves. Privileges and duties cannot be separated. It is the bounden *duty* of the Christian *to be joyous* and peaceful. If any should question that statement we would ask him to consider the opposite: surely none would affirm that it is a spiritual duty to be miserable and full of doubts! We do not at all deny that there is

another side to the Christian's life, that there is much both within and without the believer to make him mourn. Nor is that at all inconsistent. The apostle avowed himself to be "sorrowful," yet in the very same breath he added "yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor. 6:10). Most assuredly those who claim to be accepted in the Beloved and journeying unto everlasting bliss, bring reproach upon Him whose name they bear and cause His Gospel to be evil spoken of, if they are doleful and dejected and spend most of their time in the slough of despond.

But to proceed one step further. The apostle here made known *how* these most desirable and requisite blessings may be *obtained*. First, they are to be sought in prayer, as is evident from Paul's example. Second, they can only be attained as the heart is occupied with "the God of hope," that is, a promising God, for the things we are to hope for are revealed in His promises. Third, these blessings come to us "*in believing*," in faith's laying hold of the things promised. "Fill you with all joy and peace in believing." Many seek, though vainly, to reverse that order. They will not believe God till they feel they have joy and peace, which is like requiring flowers before the bulb has been set in the ground. But how can I have joy and peace while engaged in such a conflict—mostly a losing one—with indwelling sin? Answer: you cannot successfully oppose indwelling sin if you are joyless and full of doubts, for "the joy of the Lord is your *strength*" (Neh. 8:10)! There is no genuine joy and peace except "in believing," and in exact proportion to our faith will be our joy and peace.

"That ye may abound in hope." This clause informed the Roman saints, and us, the reason why the apostle made the above request, or the design he had in view for them. Established as to the past, joyous in the present, he would have them to be confident as to the future. The best is yet to be, for as yet the Christian has received but an "earnest" of his inheritance, and the more he is occupied with the Inheritance itself the better equipped he will be to press forward to it, through all difficulties and obstacles, for "*hope*" is one of the most powerful motives or springs of action: Hebrews 6:11, 12. In our day some of the Lord's people need to be informed that the word "hope" has quite a different meaning in Scripture from what it is accorded in human speech. On the lips of most people "hope" signifies little more than a bare wish, and often with considerable fear it will *not* be realised, being nothing better than a timid and hesitant desire that such may be obtained. But in Scripture (see e.g. Rom. 8: 25; Heb. 6:18,19) "hope" signifies a firm expectation and confident anticipation of the things God has promised. As joy and peace increase "in believing" so too does hope.

"Through the power of the Holy Spirit": the Father is the Giver, but the Spirit is the Communicator of our graces. Though it is the Christian's duty to be filled with joy and peace in believing and to abound in hope, yet it is only by the Spirit's enablement such can be realised. Here, as everywhere in the Word, we find the kindred truths of our accountableness and dependency intimately connected. The joy, peace, and hope here are not carnal emotions or natural acquirements but spiritual graces, and therefore they must be Divinely imparted. Even the promises of God will not produce these graces unless they be Divinely *applied* to us. Note that it is not merely "through the operation" but "the *power* of the Holy Spirit," for there is much in us which opposes! Nor can they be increased or even maintained by us in our own strength—though they *can* be decreased by us, through grieving the Spirit. They are to be sought by prayer, by eyeing the promises, and by looking for the enablement of the Holy Spirit. That "hope" is but a vain fancy which is not fixed upon God and wrought by Him: "remember the word unto Thy servant upon which *Thou* hast caused me to hope" (Ps. 119:49). —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

17. Tenth Miracle - part 4

In our last chapter we dwelt mainly upon *the requirement* which was made upon Naaman when he reached the prophet's abode: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times," seeking to supply answers to—why was he so enjoined? what was the implication in his case? what beating has such a demand upon men generally today? what is its deeper significance? We saw that it was a requirement which revealed the uselessness and worthlessness of Naaman's attempt to purchase his healing. We showed that it was a requirement which demanded the setting aside of his own will and submitting himself to the will of Israel's God. We pointed out that it was a requirement which insisted that he must get down off his high horse (descend from his chariot), humbling and abasing himself. We intimated that it was a requirement which, typically, pointed to that amazing provision of the grace of God for spiritual lepers, namely, the "Fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1), and by which alone defilement can be cleansed and iniquities blotted out.

"But Naaman was wroth and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper" (2 Kings 5:11). In his own country he was a person of consequence, a "great man," commander-in-chief of the army, standing high in the favor of the king. Here in Israel the prophet had treated him as a mere nobody, paying no deference to him, employing a servant to convey his instructions. Naaman was chagrined: his pride was wounded, and because his self-importance had not been ministered to, he turned away in a huff. Elisha's "Go and wash in Jordan seven times" was not intended to signify the means of cure, but was designed as a *test* of his heart, and strikingly did it serve its purpose. It was a call to humble himself before Jehovah: it required the repudiation of his own wisdom and the renunciation of self-pleasing; and that is at direct variance with the inclinations of fallen human nature, so much so that no one ever truly complied with this just demand of God's until He performed a miracle of grace in the soul.

Even the most humiliating providences are not sufficient in themselves to humble the proud heart of man and render him submissive to the Divine will. One had thought that a person so desperately afflicted as this poor leper, would have been meekened and ready to comply with the prophet's injunction. Ah, my reader, the seat of our moral disease lies too deep for external things to reach it. So fearful is the blinding power of sin that it causes its subjects to be puffed up with self-complacency and self-righteousness and to imagine they are entitled to favorable treatment even at the hands of the Most High. Aye, does not that very spirit lurk in the hearts of the regenerate! and not only lurk there, but at times moves them to act like Naaman! Has not the writer and the Christian reader never come before the Lord with some pressing need and sought relief at His hands, and then been angry because He responded to us in quite a different way from what we expected and desired? Have we not had to bow our heads for very shame as He gently re-proved us with His "doest thou well to be angry?" (Jonah 4:4). Yes, there is much of this Naaman spirit in each of us that needs to be mortified.

"Behold, I *thought*" said Naaman. Herein he supplies a true representation of the natural man. The sinner has his own idea of how salvation is to be obtained. It is true that opinions vary when it comes to the working out of detail, yet in all the world over, fallen man has his own opinion of what is suitable and needful. One man thinks he must perform some meritorious deeds in order to obtain forgiveness. Another thinks the past can be atoned for by turning over a new leaf and living right for the future. Yet another, who has obtained a smattering of the Gospel, thinks that by believing in Christ he secures a passport to Heaven, even though he continues to indulge the flesh and retain his beloved idols. However much they may differ in their self-concocted schemes, this one thing is common to them all: "*I thought*," and that "*I thought*" is put over against the Word and way of God. They prefer the way that "*seemeth right*" to them: they insist on following out their own theorisings: they pit their prejudices and presuppositions against a "*thus saith the Lord*." Reader, you perceive here the folly of Naaman, but have you seen the madness of setting *your* thoughts against the authority of the living God!

And what was it that this foolish and haughty Syrian "*thought*"? Why this: "he will surely come out *to me*, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the

leper." He was willing to be restored to health, but it must be in his own way—a way in which his self-respect might be retained and his importance acknowledged. He desired to be healed provided he should also be duly honored. He had come all the way from Syria to be rid of his leprosy, but he was not prepared to receive cleansing in the manner of God's prescribing. What madness! What a demonstration that the carnal mind is enmity against God! What proof of the fearful hold which Satan has over his victims until a stronger One delivers them from his enthralling power! Naaman had now received what the king of Israel had failed to give him—full directions for his cure. There was no uncertainty about the prescription nor of its efficacy, would he but submit to the same: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times and thou *shalt* be clean." But he felt slighted: such instructions suited not his inclinations; the Divine requirement accorded not with the conceits of his unhumiliated heart.

What right had Naaman, a leper, to either argue or prescribe? He was a petitioner and not a legislator: he was suing for a favor, and therefore was in no position to advance any demands of his own. If such was the case and situation of Naaman, how infinitely less has any depraved and guilty sinner the right to make any terms with God! He is a criminal, justly pronounced guilty by the Divine Law. Mercy is his only hope, and it is therefore for God to say in what way mercy is to be shown him and how salvation is to be obtained. For this reason the Lord says not only "Let the wicked *forsake his way*," but also adds "and the unrighteous man his *thoughts*" (Isa. 55:7). Man must repudiate his own ideas, abandon his own prejudices, turn away from his own schemes and reject his own preferences. If we are to enter the kingdom of Heaven we must "become as little children" (Matt. 18:3). Alas, of the vast majority of our fellows it has to be said, that they, "going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). They "*will not* come to Christ that they might have life" (John 5:40).

"In Naaman's mind all was arranged. He pictured the scene to himself, and made himself the foremost figure in the group—the Gentile idolator waited on by the prophet of God. The incongruity of this he did not then see. We see it. God would visit him in grace, but as one who had no ground of his own to stand on. As a sinner He could meet him. As a leper He could heal him. As the captain of the hosts of the king of Syria He would not receive him. What place has a sinner before God save that of one to whom *mercy* can be shown? What place is suited to the leper save that *outside* the camp? Naaman has to learn his place. He may be wroth with the prophet, but he cannot move him. Before him he is only a leper, whatever he may appear before others. Learning his place, he has to learn his vileness. He imagined Elisha would have struck his hand over the place. A sign, a scene, he expected—not a mere word. He did not know what a defiling object he was. The priest looked on the leper to judge whether he was leprous or not. He touched him only when he was clean (Lev. 14). Of Naaman's leprosy there was no doubt, for he had come to be healed of it. To touch him ere he was clean would only have defiled the prophet! But further, if he had been able to touch him, and so have healed him, would not man have thought there was virtue in the prophet? By sending him to the Jordan to wash, it would be clearly seen the cure was direct from God. Man has no virtue in himself—he can only be the channel of God's grace to others. *God* must have *all* the glory of the cure, and Naaman must be taught his own condition and vileness" (C. E. Stuart).

"Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage" (v. 12). Naaman was incensed not only because he thought that insufficient respect had been shown to his own person, but also because he felt his country had been slighted. If it was merely a matter of bathing in some river, why could not those of his own land have sufficed? This was tantamount to dictating unto Jehovah, for it was the word of His prophet he now challenged. Shall the beggar insist on his right to choose what form the supply of his need must take! Shall the patient inform the physician what remedy will be acceptable to him! Is the guilty culprit to have the effrontery to dictate to the judge what shall be done to him! Yet a worm of the earth deems himself competent to pit his wits against the wisdom of the Ancient of Days. A Hell-deserving sinner is impudent enough to draw up terms on which he considers Heaven is due him. But if we are to be cleansed, it can only be by the way of God's appointing and not by any of our own devising.

"He thinks this too cheap, too plain, too common, a thing for so great a man to be cured by; or he did not believe it would at all effect the cure, or, if it would, what medicinal virtue was there in Jordan more than in the rivers of Damascus? But he did not consider (1) That Jordan belonged to Israel's God, from whom he was to expect the cure, and not from the gods of Damascus; it watered the Lord's land, the holy land, and in a miraculous cure, relation to God was much more considerable than the depth of the channel or the beauty of the stream. (2) That Jordan had more than once before this obeyed the commands of Om-

nipotence: it had of old yielded a passage to Israel, and of late to Elijah and Elisha, and therefore was fitter for such a purpose than those rivers which had only observed the common law of their creation, and had never been thus distinguished; but above all, Jordan was the river *appointed*, and if he expected a cure from the Divine power he ought to acquiesce in the Divine will, without asking why or wherefore. It is common for those that are wise in their own conceits to look with contempt on the dictates and prescriptions of Divine wisdom, and to prefer their own fancies before them” (Matthew Henry).

“So he turned and went away in a rage.” How true to life: how accurate the picture! The flesh resents the humbling truth of God and hates to be abased. And let us say here for the benefit of young preachers who are likely to read these lines: you must expect some of *your* hearers to turn from you in anger if you faithfully minister the Word of God in its undiluted purity. It has ever been thus. If the prophets of the Lord incensed their hearers, can you expect your message will be palatable to the unregenerate? If the incarnate Son of God had to say, “Because I tell you the Truth, you believe Me not” (John 8:45), can you expect the Truth to meet with a better welcome from your lips? If the chief of the apostles declared “for if I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10), do you expect to be popular with them? There is but one way to avoid displeasing your hearers, and that is by unfaithfulness to your trust, by carnal compromise, by blunting the sharp edge of the Sword of the Spirit, by keeping back what you know will prove unacceptable. In such an event, God will require their blood at your hand and you will forfeit the approbation of your Master.

“So he turned and went away in a rage.” In this we may see the final effort of Satan to retain his victim ere Divine grace delivered him. The rage of Naaman was but the reflection of his whom he had hitherto served and who was now furious at the prospect of losing him. It reminds us of the case recorded in Luke 9. A father of a demon-possessed child had sought for help from the apostles, which they had been unable to render. As the Savior came down from the mount the poor father approached Him and He gave orders “bring thy son to Me,” and we are told “and as he was yet *a coming*, the devil threw him down, and tear him” (v. 42). But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father. It is frequently thus: the conflict which is waged in the soul is usually sorest just before peace is found. Lusts rage, unbelief seeks to wax supreme, the truth of sovereign grace when first apprehended is obnoxious, to be told our righteousnesses are as filthy rags stirs up enmity. Satan fills the soul with rage against God, against His truth, against His servant. Often that is a hopeful sign, for it at least shows that the sinner has been aroused from the fatal sleep of indifference.

“And his servants came near and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?” (v. 13). Let us consider first the surface teaching of this verse. This gentle remonstrance was “a word spoken in season.” Had Naaman remained calm and reasonable he should have perceived that what was required of him was simple and safe, and neither difficult nor dangerous. Had the prophet prescribed some laborious and lengthy task, or ordered a drastic operation or painful remedy, probably Naaman had complied without a murmur, so why not do so when no other sacrifice was demanded of him but the humbling of his pride? “When sinners are under serious impressions, and as yet prejudiced against the Lord’s method of salvation, they should be reasoned with in meekness and love, and persuaded to make trial of its simplicity” (T. Scott). If it is necessary to rebuke their petulance and point out to them the foolishness of their proud reasoning, we should make it evident that our rebuke proceeds from a desire for their eternal welfare.

“It is a great mercy to have those about us that will be free with us, and faithfully tell us our faults and follies, though they be our inferiors. Masters must be willing to hear reason from their inferiors: Job 31:13, 14. As we should be deaf to the counsel of the ungodly though given by the greatest and most venerable names, so we should have our ears open to good advice, though brought to us by those who are much below us: no matter who speaks, if it be well said. The reproof was modest and respectful: they call him ‘father’—for servants must honor and obey their masters with a kind of filial affection” (Matthew Henry). Alas, how far has our socialistic and Bolshevistic generation departed from the sound teaching of our Puritan forebears! How few ministers of the Gospel now proclaim the Divine injunction “Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed” (1 Tim. 6:1).

It may be those servants had heard quite a lot from the Hebrew maid of the wondrous miracles that had been wrought by Elisha, and hence they were very desirous that Naaman should try out his directions. Or,

perhaps it was because they were deeply devoted to their master, holding him in high esteem, and felt he was forsaking his own mercies by permitting his wounded vanity to now blind his better judgment. At any rate, they saw no sense in coming all the way from Syria and now leaving Samaria without at least making a trial of the prophet's prescription. Such are the suggestions made by the commentators to explain the ground and spring of this action of Naaman's attendants. Personally, we prefer to look higher and see the power of the Most High in operation, working in them both to will and to do if His good pleasure, employing them as one more link in the chain which brought about the accomplishment of His purpose; for "of Him and through Him and to Him, are *all* things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

What has been before us here is in full accord with the other things already contemplated. It seemed quite unlikely that any serious attention should be paid to the simple statement of the captive Hebrew maid, but God saw to it that her words did not fall to the ground. It appeared very much as though Naaman's mission was blocked when the sceptical king of Israel failed to co-operate therein, but God moved Elisha to intervene and caused his royal master to carry out his order. And now that Naaman himself turned away from the prophet in a rage, it certainly looked as though the quest would prove unsuccessful. But that could not be. The Almighty had decreed that the Syrian *should* be healed of his leprosy and brought to acknowledge that the God of Israel was the true and living God; and all the powers of evil could not prevent the fulfillment of His decree. Yet accordingly as He is generally pleased to work, so here, He used human instruments in the accomplishing of His purpose. It may be concluded that, naturally and normally, those attendants had kept their place and distance, and would not have dared to remonstrate with their master while he was in such a rage. Behold the secret power of God working within them, subduing their fears, and moving them to appeal unto Naaman.

The "little maid" was not present to speak to her august master and plead with him to further his best interests. The prophet of the Lord had issued his instructions, only for them to be despised. What, then, shall Naaman return home unhealed? No, such a thing was not possible. He was to learn there was a God in Israel and that He had thoughts of mercy toward him. But he must first be abased. Mark, then, how God acted. He moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform—oftentimes unperceived and unappreciated by us. He inclines his own followers to admonish Naaman and show him the folly of his proud reasoning. Remarkable and significant is it to observe the particular instruments the Lord here employed. It was first the *servant* maid whom He used to inform Naaman that there was a prophet in Israel by whom he could obtain healing. Then it was through his "servant" that Elisha gave the Syrian the needed instructions. And now it was his own *servants* who prevailed upon him to heed those instructions. All of this was intended for the humbling of the mighty Naaman. And, we may add, for *our* instruction: we must take the servant's place and have the servant spirit if we would hope for God to employ us.

See here too the amazing patience and longsuffering of the Lord. Here was one who was wrathful against His faithful prophet: what wonder then had He struck him down in his tracks. Here was a haughty creature who refused to humble himself and, in effect, impudently dictated to God how he should receive healing. Had he been on his knees supplicating the Divine favor, his attitude had been a becoming one; instead, he turns his back upon God's servant and moved away in a rage. Yet it was *then* that God acted: not against him, but *for* him, so that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. And why? Because sovereign mercy had ordained him a vessel unto honor from all eternity. Let the Christian reader join with the writer in looking back to the past, recalling when we too kicked against the pricks. How infinite was the forbearance of God toward us! Though we had no regard for Him, He had set His heart upon us, and perhaps at the very time when our awful enmity against Him was most high-handedly operative He moved some one of comparative obscurity to reason with us and point out to us the folly of our ways and urge us to submit to God's holy requirements. —AWP

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

3. *Its Need*

The word reconciliation means to unite two parties who are estranged. It denotes that one has given offence and the other has taken umbrage or is displeased thereby, in consequence of which there is a breach between them. Instead of friendship there is a state of hostility existing, instead of amity there is enmity, which results in separation and alienation between them. This it is which makes manifest the need for peace to be made between the estranged parties, that the wrong may be righted, the cause of the displeasure be removed, the ill-feeling cease, the breach be healed and reconciliation accomplished. The parties at variance are man and God. Man has grievously offended the Most High. He has cast off allegiance to Him, revolted from Him, despised His authority, trampled upon His commandments. The enormity of such an offence it is impossible for us to fully conceive. The heinousness of it can only be measured by the exalted dignity of the One against whom it is committed. It has been committed against the Almighty, against One who is infinite in majesty, infinite in excellency, infinite in His sovereign rights over the creature of His own hands; and therefore it is an offence of *infinite* magnitude and turpitude.

The original offence was committed by Adam in Eden, but that fearful transgression can only be rightly understood as we recognize that Adam acted there not as a private individual but as a public person. He was Divinely constituted to be not only the father but also the federal head of the human race. He stood as the legal representative of all mankind, so that in the sight of the Divine Law what *he* did *they* did, the one transacting on the behalf of the many. The whole human race were placed on probation in the person of the first man. His trial was their trial. While he stood they stood. While he retained the approbation of God and remained in fellowship with Him, they did the same. Had he survived the trial, had he fitly discharged his responsibility, had he continued in obedience to God, his obedience had been reckoned to their account, and they had entered into the reward which had been bestowed upon him. Contrariwise, if he failed and fell, they failed and fell in him. If he disobeyed God his disobedience is imputed unto all those whom he represented, and the just but fearful curse pronounced upon him falls likewise on all for whom he transacted.

What has just been pointed out by us above, was amplified at some length in our articles on the Adamic Covenant, which appeared in this magazine some ten years ago, but as many of our present readers have never seen them it will be necessary for us now to give a brief summary of what was then said. The legal relation between Adam and his posterity may be illustrated thus. God did not deal with mankind as with a field of corn, where each stalk stands upon its own individual root; but He dealt with it as a tree, all the branches of which have one common root and trunk. If you strike with an axe at the root of a tree, the whole tree falls—not only the trunk, but also the branches and even the twigs on the branches: all wither and die. So it was with Adam in Eden. God permitted Satan to lay the axe at the root of humanity and when he fell all his posterity fell with him. At one fatal stroke Adam was severed from communion with his Maker, and as the consequence “death passed upon all men.” This is not a theory of human speculation but a fact of Divine revelation.

That Adam *was* the federal head of the human race, that he *did* act and transact in a representative character, and that the judicial consequences of his act was imputed to all those for whom he stood, is clearly taught in Romans 5. “Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed [as a capital sentence] upon all men, in whom all sinned” (v. 12). “Through the offence of one many be dead” (v. 15). “The judgment was by one to condemnation” (v.16). “By one man’s offence death reigned” (v.17). “By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (v. 18). “By one man’s offence many were made [legally constituted] sinners” (v. 19). Such repetition and emphasis intimates the basic importance of the truth here revealed, and also hints at our slowness or rather reluctance to receive the same. The meaning of these declarations is too plain for any unprejudiced mind to misunderstand: it pleased God to deal with the human race as *represented* in and by Adam: “in Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22). There is the plainly-revealed fact, and they who deny it make God a liar.

Here, then, we learn what is the formal ground of man’s judicial condemnation before God. The popular idea of what it is which renders man a sinner in the sight of Heaven is altogether inadequate and erroneous. The prevailing conception is that a sinner is one who commits and practices sin. It is true that this is the *character* of the sinner, but it certainly is not that which primarily *constitutes* him such before the

Divine Law. The truth is that every member of our race enters into this world a guilty sinner, alienated from God, before ever he commits a single transgression. It is not only that he possesses a depraved nature but that he is directly “under condemnation,” the curse of the broken Law resting upon him, and from God he is “estranged from the womb” (Ps. 58:3). We are legally constituted sinners neither by what we are nor by what we are doing, but by the disobedience of our federal head, Adam. Adam acted not for himself alone, but for all who were to spring from him, so that his act, was forensically, our act.

Here also is the only key which satisfactorily opens to us the meaning of human history and explains the universal prevalence of sin. The human race is suffering for the sin of Adam, or it is suffering for nothing at all: there is no escape from that alternative. This earth is the scene of a grim and awful tragedy. In it we behold misery and wretchedness, strife and hatred, pain and poverty, disease and death on every side. None escape the fearful entail. That “man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward” is an indisputable fact. But what is the *explanation* of it? Every effect must have a previous cause. If we are not being punished for Adam’s sin, then, coming into this world we are “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3), beneath the Divine judgment, corrupt and defiled, on the broad road which leadeth to destruction, *for nothing at all!* Who would contend that this was better, more satisfactory, more illuminative, than the Scriptural explanation of our ruin? Genesis 3 alone explains why human history is written in the ink of blood and tears.

The objection that such an arrangement is unjust is invalid. The principle of *representation* is a fundamental one in human society. The father is the legal head of his children during their minority: what he does binds the family. A business house is held responsible for the transactions of its agents. Every popular election illustrates the fact that a constituency will act through its representative and be bound by his acts. The heads of a state are vested with such authority that the treaties they make are binding upon the whole nation. This principle is so basic it cannot be set aside. Human affairs could not continue nor society exist without it. This is the method by which God has acted all through. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children: the posterity of Canaan were cursed for the single transgression of their parent (Gen. 9), the whole of his family stoned for Achan’s sin (Josh. 7). Israel’s high priest acted on behalf of the whole nation. One acting for others is a basic principle both of human and Divine government.

Finally, let it be pointed out that the sinner’s *salvation* is made to depend upon this very same method. Beware, then, my reader, of quarrelling with the justice of this principle of representation—the one standing for the many. On this principle we were wrecked, and by this principle only can we be rescued. If on the one hand, the disobedience of the first Adam was the judicial ground of our condemnation, on the other hand the obedience of the last Adam is the legal basis on which God justifies sinners. The substitution of Christ in the place of His people, the imputation of their sins to Him and of His righteousness to them, is the central fact of the Gospel. But the principle of being saved by what Another has done is only possible on the ground that we were lost through what another did. The two stand or fall together. If there had been no Covenant of Works there would have been no Covenant of Grace: if there had been no death in Adam there had been no life in Christ. The Christian knows that such an arrangement is just because it is part of the revealed ways of Him who is infinitely holy and righteous.

Here, then, is the Divinely revealed fact: “by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (Rom. 5:19). Here is cause of humiliation which few think about. We are members of an accursed race, the fallen children of a fallen parent, and as such we enter this world “alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18), exposed to His judicial displeasure. In the day that Adam fell the frown of the Most High came upon His children. The holy nature of God abhorred the apostate race. The curse of His broken Law descended upon all of Adam’s posterity. It is only thus we can account for the universality of human depravity and suffering. The corruption of human nature which we inherit from our first parents is a great evil, for it is the source of all our personal sins. For God to allow this transmission of depravity is to inflict a *punishment*. But how can God punish all, unless all were guilty? The fact that all *do* share in this common punishment is proof that all sinned in Adam. Our depravity and misery are not, as such, the infliction of the Creator, but are the retribution of the Judge.

If we now repeat some of the statements made above it is that the reader may not form a wrong conception or draw a false conclusion. We are very far from teaching here that the human race is suffering for an offence in which they had no part, that innocent creatures are being condemned for the action of another which could not fairly be laid to their account. Let it be clearly understood that God punishes none for Adam’s sin (if considering him as a private person), but only for *his own sin in Adam*. The whole human race had a federal standing in Adam. Not only was each of us seminally in his loins when God created him,

but each of us was legally represented by him when God made with him the Covenant of Works. Adam acted and transacted in that Covenant as a public person, not simply as a private individual, but as the surety and sponsor of his race. The very fact that we continue breaking the Covenant of Works and disobeying the Law of God demonstrates our oneness with Adam under that Covenant. Our complicity with Adam in his rebellion is evidenced every time that we personally sin against God.

It is nothing short of downright hypocrisy for us to murmur against the justice of this arrangement or constitution while we follow in the steps of Adam. If we have nothing to do with him and are not in bondage through him, why do we not repudiate him—refuse to sin, break the chain, stand out in opposition to him, and be holy? This brings us to the second chief count in the fearful indictment against us. We take sides with Adam: we perpetuate his evil course: we make him an exemplar. The life of the unregenerate is one unbroken curse of rebellion against God. There is no genuine submission to Him, no concern for His glory, no disinterested love for Him. Self-will is our governing principle and self-pleasing our goal. Whatever religious deference may apparently be shown God, it is rendered out of self-interest—either to curry favor with Him, or to appease His anger. The things of time and sense are preferred before Him, the lies of Satan are heeded rather than the Word of Truth, and instead of humbling ourselves before Him because of our original offence in Eden, we multiply transgressions against Him.

However unpalatable it may be to proud flesh and blood, the fact is that the natural man is engaged in a warfare against God. He hates the things God loves, and loves the things He hates. He scorns the things God enjoins and pursues the things He has forbidden. He is a rebel against the Divine government, refusing to be in subjection to the Divine will. The moment his own will is crossed by the dispensations of Providence he murmurs. He is unthankful for the mercies of which he is the daily recipient, and less mindful of the Hand that so freely ministers to him than the horse or the mule to the one who feeds him. He continually growls at his lot, constantly grumbles at the weather, and is a stranger to contentment. In short “the carnal mind is enmity against God and is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him” (1 Cor. 2:14)—contrary to his corrupted mind, at variance with his vitiated desires. “There is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:11).

There is then a breach—a real, a broad, a fearful breach—between God and man. In the very nature of the case it cannot be otherwise. That breach has been made by sin. God is holy, so holy that He is “of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab. 1:13). Sin has given infinite offence unto God, for it is that “abominable thing” which He hates (Jer. 44:4). Sin is a species of spiritual anarchy, a defiance of the triune Jehovah: it is a saying in actions “Let us break Their bands, and cast away Their cords from us” (Ps. 2:3)—let us disregard the Divine laws and be lords of ourselves. Not only is sin highly obnoxious to the infinitely-pure nature of God, but it is flagrant affront to His government, being rebellion against it, and therefore as the moral Rector of the universe He declares His displeasure against the same. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18)—an open display of which was made of old when the flood swept the earth clean of His enemies.

Here then is the black background which discovers to us the *need for* reconciliation: “your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you” (Isa. 59:2). He is displeased with us and His justice cries out for our destruction. “They rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their *Enemy*” (Isa. 63:10). Unspeakably solemn is that, the terrible import of which is utterly beyond our powers to conceive. That the great I Am, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe has become man’s “Enemy,” so that His anger burns against him. This was evidenced at the beginning, for right after God had arraigned the guilty culprits in Eden, we are told that “He *drove out* the man, and He placed cherubims at the east of the garden of Eden, cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24). Man was now cut off from access to the One whom he had so grievously offended and turned to be his Enemy. And man is also at enmity with Him.

How little is it realised that there is an immeasurable gulf between God and the sinner. And little wonder that so few have even the vaguest idea of the same. All human religion is an attempt to gloss over this fearful fact. And with exceedingly rare exceptions the religion of present-day Christendom is but a studied effort to hide the awful truth that man has forfeited the favor of God and is barred from His holy presence, yea that “the Lord is *far from* the wicked” (Prov. 15:29). The religion of the day proceeds on the assumption that God is favorably disposed even unto those who spend most of their time trampling His

commandments beneath their feet: that providing they will assume an outwardly devout demeanor, they have but to petition Him and their supplications are acceptable unto Him. Priests and parsons who encourage such a delusion are but throwing dust in the eyes of the people: "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord" (Prov. 15:8).

The religion of our day deliberately ignores the fact of *sin*, with its terrible implications and consequences. It leaves out of sight that sin has radically changed the original relationship which existed between God and His creatures. It conceals the truth that man is outlawed by God and is "far off" (Eph. 2:12,13) from Him. It tacitly denies that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8), that He "heareth not sinners" (John 9:31). Yea it insists that they *can* please Him with their hypocritical piety and sanctimonious playacting. But the Holy One cannot be deceived by their pretences nor bribed by their offerings. Nor can they so much as draw nigh unto Him while they despise and reject the One who is the only Way of approach to Him. Make no mistake upon this point, my reader: until that awful breach which sin has made be healed, you can have no fellowship with God; until He be reconciled to you and you to Him, He will accept nought at your hands nor can you obtain audience with Him. Unless reconciliation be effected you will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord"(2 Thess. 1:9).

The need for reconciliation is unmistakable. A fearful breach exists, brought about by the entrance of sin, and continued by the perpetuation of sin. That breach radically altered the relationship of God to man and of man to God. Not only had man now forfeited His favor, but he had incurred His wrath. God could no longer view him with approbation, but instead regarded him with detestation. While man ceased to be a loyal and loving subject, becoming a rebellious outlaw. And "what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" None: they are opposites, the one antagonistic to the other. That breach between God and man, between righteousness and unrighteousness, will be demonstrated in the distance between Heaven and Hell. Therefore did Christ represent Abraham as saying to Dives in the place of torment, "Between us and you there is a *great gulf* fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us" (Luke 16:26). It is only by God's reconciliation to us and of our reconciliation to God the fearful breach can be healed. How that is effected we hope to show in future articles. —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

4. Its Nature

We have now arrived at what is really the most important part of our subject, but which is far from being the easiest to handle. If we are to be preserved or delivered from erroneous views at this point it is very necessary that we should form a right concept of what spiritual growth is *not* and what it actually *is*. Mistaken ideas thereon are widely prevalent and many of God's own people have been brought into bondage thereby. There are those who have made little or no advancement in the school of Christ that fondly imagine they have progressed considerably, and are very hurt if others do not share their opinion; nor is it any simple task to disillusion them. On the other hand, some who have grown considerably know it not, and even conclude they have gone backward; nor is it any easy matter to assure them they have been needlessly disparaging themselves. In either case the mistake is due to measuring themselves by the wrong standard, or in other words, through ignorance of what spiritual growth really consists of.

If the reader met a half dozen people out of as many different sections of Christendom whom he is warranted in regarding as children of God, and asked them to define for him their ideas of spiritual growth, he would probably be surprised at the diversity and contrariety of the answers given. As the reception of one part of the Truth prepares us to take in another, so the admittance of error paves the way for the coming in of more. Moreover, the particular denomination to which we belong and the distinctive form of *its* "line of things" (2 Cor. 10:16) has a powerful effect in determining the type of Christians reared under its influences—just as the nature of the soil affects the plants growing in it. Not only are his theological views cast into a certain mold and his concept of the practical side of Christianity largely determined thereby, but his devotional life and even his personal demeanor are also considerably affected by the same. Consequently there is much similarity in the "experience" of the great majority belonging to that particular company. This is largely the case with all the principal evangelical denominations, as it is also with those who profess to be "outside all systems."

Just as a trained ear can readily detect variations of inflection in the human voice and locate by a person's speech and accent which part of the country he hails from, so one with wide interdenominational associations has little difficulty in determining, even from a brief talk on spiritual things, which sect his companion belongs to: no label is necessary, his affiliation is plainly stamped upon him. And if in the course of the conversation he should ask his acquaintance to describe what he considered to be a mature Christian, his portrayal would naturally and necessarily be shaped by the particular ecclesiastical type he was best acquainted with. If he belonged to one particular group, he would picture a sombre and gloomy Christian; but if to a group at the opposite pole, a confident and joyous one. The kind most admired in some circles is a deep theologian; in others, the one who decries "dry doctrine" and is occupied chiefly with his subjective life. Yet another would value neither theology nor experience, considering that the soul's contemplation of Christ was the beginning and end of the Christian life; while still others would regard as eminent Christians those who were most zealous and active in seeking to save sinners.

In attempting to describe the character of Christian progress, or as it is more frequently termed, growth in grace, we shall therefore seek to avoid a mistake often made thereon by many denominational writers—a mistake which has had most injurious effects on a large number of their readers. Instead of bringing out what the Scriptures teach thereon, only too often they related their own experiences; instead of treating the essentials of spiritual growth, they dwelt upon circumstantial; instead of delineating those general features which are common to all who are the subjects of gracious operations, they depicted those exceptional things which are peculiar only to certain types—the neurotic or melancholy. This is much the same as though artists and sculptors took for their models only those with unusual deformities, instead of selecting an average specimen of humanity. True, it would be a human being that was imaged, yet it could convey only a misrepresentation of the common species. Alas that, in the religious as well as the physical realm, a freak attracts more attention than a normal person.

We shall not then relate our own spiritual history. First, because we are not now writing to satisfy the unhealthy curiosity of a certain class of readers who delight in perusing such things. Second, because we regard the private experience of the Christian as being too sacred to expose to the public view. It has long

seemed to us that there is such a thing as spiritual unchastity: the inner workings of the soul are not a fit subject to be laid bare before others—"The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy" (Prov. 14:10). Third, because we are not so conceited as to imagine that our own particular conversion and the ups and downs of our Christian life are of sufficient importance to narrate. Fourth, because there are probably some features about our conversion and some things in our subsequent spiritual history which have been duplicated in very few other cases, and therefore they would only be calculated to mislead others if they should look for a parallel in themselves. Finally, because as intimated above, we deem it more honoring to God and far more helpful to souls to confine ourselves to the teaching of His Word on this subject.

But before proceeding we must anticipate an objection which is almost certain to be brought against what has been said in the last paragraph. Did not the apostle Paul describe *his* conversion! And may not, should not, we do so too? Answer: first, Paul is the only New Testament writer who gave us any account of his conversion or related anything of his subsequent experiences. It would be a reversal of all sound reasoning to make an exception into a rule or conclude that an isolated case established a precedent. The very fact that Paul's case stands alone, indicates it is *not* to be made an example of. Second, his experience was not only exceptional but unique: the means used was a supernatural appearance to him of the ascended Christ, so that he had a physical sight of Him and heard His voice with his natural ears—a thing which none has done since. Third, the account of his conversion was not made to intimate Christian friends, nor before a local church when applying for membership: but instead before his enemies (Acts 22), and Agrippa—virtually his judge—when making defence for his life. Thus the circumstances were extraordinary and afford no criterion for ordinary cases. Finally, his experience on the Damascus road was necessary to qualify him for the apostolic office: Acts 1:22; 1 Corinthians 15:8, 9 and cf. 2 Corinthians 12:11).

Once more it seems advisable to take up first the negative side of our subject ere turning to the positive. So many mistaken notions now hold the field that they need uprooting if the ground is to be prepared: or to drop the figure, if the minds of many are to be fitted to take in the Truth. Our readers differ so much in the type of ministry they have sat under, and some of them have formed such fallacious views of what spiritual growth consists of, that if we now described the principal elements of Christian progress, one and another would probably consider, according to what they have imbibed, that we had omitted the most important features. We shall therefore devote the remainder of this article to pointing out as many as possible of those things which, though often regarded as such, are *not* essential parts of spiritual growth, in fact no part thereof at all. Though this may prove rather wearisome to some, we would ask them to bear with us and offer up a prayer that it may please God to use the paragraphs which follow to the enlightenment of those who are befogged.

1. *Weight of years.* It is often considered that spiritual growth is to be measured by the calendar, that the length of time one has been a Christian will determine the amount of progress he has made. Certainly it ought to do so, yet in fact it is frequently no index at all. God often pours contempt on the distinctions made by men: out of the mouths of "babes and sucklings" has He perfected praise (Matt. 21:16)! It is generally supposed that those with snowy locks are much more spiritual than young believers, yet if we examine what is recorded of the closing years of Abraham, Isaac, David, Hezekiah and others of Israel's kings, we find reason to revise or qualify such a conclusion. True, some of the choicest saints we have ever met were "patriarchs" and "mothers in Israel," yet they have been exceptions rather than the rule. Many Christians make more real progress in piety the first year than in the next ten that follow.

2. *Increasing knowledge.* We must distinguish between things that differ, namely, a knowledge of spiritual things and actual spiritual knowledge. The former can be acquired by the unregenerate: the latter is peculiar to the children of God. The one is merely intellectual and theoretical; the other is vital and effectual. One may take up "Bible study" in the same way as another would the study of philosophy or political economy. He may pursue it diligently and enthusiastically. He may obtain a familiarity of the letter of Scripture and a proficiency in understanding its terms, far in advance of the hard-working Christian who has less leisure and less natural ability; yet what is such knowledge worth if it affects not the heart, fails to transform the character and make the daily walk pleasing to God! "Though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge...and have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). Unless our "Bible study" is conforming us, both inwardly and outwardly, to the image of Christ, it profits us not.

3. *Development of gifts.* An unregenerate person taking up the study of the Bible may also be one who is endowed with considerable natural talents, such as the power of concentration, a retentive memory, a

persevering spirit. As he prosecutes his study his talents are called into play, his wits are sharpened and he becomes able to converse fluently upon the things he has read, and he is likely to be sought after as a speaker and preacher; and yet there may not be a spark of Divine life in his soul. The Corinthians grew fast in gifts (1 Cor. 1:4,7), yet they were but “babes” and “carnal” (3:2,3), and needed to be reminded of the “more excellent way” of love to God and their brethren. Ah, my reader, you may not have the showy gifts of some, nor be able to pray in public as others, but if you have a tender conscience, an honest heart, a forbearing and forgiving spirit, you have that which is far better.

4. *More time spent in prayer.* Here again, to avoid misunderstanding, we must distinguish between things that differ: natural prayer and spiritual. Some are constitutionally devotional and are attracted by religious exercises, as others are by music and painting; and yet they may be total strangers to the breathings of God’s Spirit in their souls. They may set aside certain parts of the day for “a quiet time with God” and have “a prayer list” as long as their arm, and yet be utterly devoid of the spirit of grace and supplications. The Pharisees were renowned for their “long prayers.” The Mohammedan with his “praying mat,” the Buddhist with his “praying wheel,” and the Papist with his “beads,” all illustrate the same principle. It is quite true that growth in grace is ever accompanied by an increased dependence upon God and a delighting of the soul in Him, yet that does not mean that we can measure our spirituality by the clock—by the amount of time we spend on our knees.

5. *Activity in service.* In not a few circles this has been and still is made the test of one’s spirituality. As soon as a young person makes a Christian profession he is set to work, either in the Sunday school, the Christian endeavor society, or taking part in open-air meetings. It matters not how ill-qualified he is, lacking as yet (in many instances) even a rudimentary knowledge of the fundamentals of the faith, nevertheless he is required or at least expected to engage forthwith in some form of what is plausibly termed “service for Christ.” But the Epistles will be searched in vain for a warrant for such things: they contain not so much as a single injunction for young believers to engage in “personal work.” On the contrary they are enjoined to obey their parents in the Lord (Eph. 6:1) and the young women are to be “keepers at home” (Titus 2:5). Many have reason to lament “*they* [not God!] made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard [spiritual graces] have I not kept” (Song of Sol. 1:6).

6. *Happy feelings.* Considerable allowance needs to be made for both temperament and health. Some are naturally more vivacious and emotional than others, of a more lively and cheerful spirit, and consequently they engage in singing rather than sighing, laughter than weeping. When such people are converted they are apt to be more demonstrative than others, both in expressing gratitude to the Lord and in telling people what a precious Saviour is theirs. Yet it would be a great mistake to suppose that they had received a larger measure of the Spirit than their more sober and equable brethren and sisters. A shallow brook babbles noisily but “still waters run deep”—yet there are exceptions here, as the Niagara Falls illustrate. Increasing holiness is not to be gauged by our inward comforts and joy, but rather by the more substantial qualities of faith, obedience, humility and love. When a fire is first kindled there is more smoke and crackling, but after, though the flame has a narrower compass, it has more heat.

7. *Becoming more miserable.* Yet, strange as it may sound to some of our readers, there are not a few professing Christians who regard *that* as one of the principal elements of spiritual growth. They have been taught to regard assurance as presumption and Christian joy as lightness, if not levity. Should they experience a brief season of peace “in believing,” they are fearful that the Devil is deceiving them. They are occupied mostly with indwelling sin, rather than with Christ. They hug their fears and idolize their doubts. They consider that the slough of despond is the only place of safety, and are happiest when most wretched. That is by no means an exaggerated picture, but sadly true to a certain type of religious life, where long-facedness and speaking in whispers are regarded as evidences of a “deep experience” and marks of piety. True, the more light God gives us the more we perceive our sinfulness, yet, though humbled thereby, the more thankful should we be for the cleansing blood.

8. *Added usefulness.* But God is sovereign and orders His providences accordingly. Unto one He opens doors, unto another He closes them, and to His good pleasure we are called upon to submit. Some streams He replenishes, but others are suffered to dry up: thus it is in His dealings with His people—by providing or withholding favorable openings for them to be of spiritual help to their fellows. It is therefore a great mistake to measure our growth in grace and our bringing forth of good fruit by the largeness or smallness of our opportunities of doing good. Some have larger opportunities when young than when they become older, yet if the hearts of the latter are right, God accepts the will for the deed. Some that have the most

grace are stationed in isolated places and are largely unknown to their fellow Christians, yet the eye of God sees them. Shall we say that the flowers on the mountain side are wasted because no human eye admires them or that the songs of birds in the forests are lost on the air because they regale not the ears of men!

9. *Temporal prosperity.* Though it is shared by few of our fellow ministers, yet it is the firm conviction of this writer that, as a general rule, temporal adversity and straitened circumstances in the present life of a Christian is a mark of God's displeasure; an evidence that he has choked the channel of blessing: see Psalm 84:11; Jeremiah 5:25; Matthew 6:33, and compare the January cover-page article. On the other hand we should certainly be drawing an erroneous conclusion if we regard the flourishing affairs of an unregenerate professor as a proof that the smile of Heaven rested upon him; rather would it be the case of one who was being fattened for the "day of slaughter" (James 5:5). Many such an one receives his good things in this world, but in the world to come is tormented in the flame (Luke 16:24,25). Even among God's own people there may be those who yield to a spirit of covetousness, and in some cases the Lord gratifies their carnal desires, but "sends leanness into their souls" as He did with Israel of old.

10. *Liberality in giving.* We do not believe any heart can remain selfish and miserly where the love of God has been shed abroad in it, but rather that such an one will esteem it a privilege as well as duty to support the cause of Christ and minister to any brother in need, according as God has prospered him, yet it is a very misleading standard to judge a person's spirituality by his generosity: 1 Corinthians 13:3. For some years we lived in districts where the principal denominations taught insistently that the church's spirituality was manifested by the amount it contributed to missions; yet while numbers of them raised very considerable sums, vital godliness was mostly conspicuous by its absence. Millions of pounds have recently been given to the "Red Cross society" by those making no Christian profession at all! Never were the coffers of the churches so full as they are to-day, and never were the churches so devoid of the Spirit's unction and blessing! —AWP

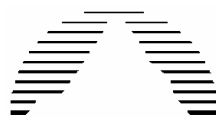
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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