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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

NO MORE

There are a number of deeply interesting and most important passages in which those two words are found, several of which are misunderstood by many of the Lord's own people. Some of them are most blessed and precious, others unspeakably solemn and awesome. For example, how comforting is the divine assurance contained in the first occurrence of them, “And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall *no more become a flood* to destroy all flesh” (Gen 9:15). That was said over four thousand years ago, and each generation of mankind since then has witnessed the verity of it. Equally assuring is the promise given in connection with the last reference, “And there shall be *no more curse*” (Rev 22:3), but, instead, perpetual blessing for the new earth. But in between those passages are others that tell us, “Many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (Joh 6:66). “Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews” (Joh 11:54). “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth *no more sacrifice* for sins” (Heb 10:26). But we turn now unto those verses which more directly concern the believer.

We begin with the following one, not only because it is of first importance, but because it lays a foundation for all that follows, “Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead *dieth no more*; death hath no more dominion over him” (Rom 6:9). That declaration is profoundly mysterious, unspeakably solemn, yet inexpressibly blessed. It is brought in for the purpose of confirming what had been affirmed in the foregoing verse—that since believers legally died with Christ, they must also share in His resurrection life. Death once had “dominion” over the Prince of life! It did so because He was its lawful captive. He had taken the place of His guilty people, was bearing their sins, and therefore received the full wages of them. How absolutely awe-inspiring to behold the Lord of glory in the jaws of

death! But blessed be God, that is the case no more. Having fully discharged the awful debt of His Church, the Law had no further claims upon Him. Its penalty had been met, justice had been satisfied, God glorified. Therefore, we read, "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was *not possible* that he should be holden of it" (Act 2:24)—Divine righteousness had been traduced if the sepulcher had continued to retain that blessed One. The design of His death being accomplished, He was freed, and is "alive for evermore" (Rev 1:18). Nor has death any "dominion" over those who are in Christ. He has secured for them a perfect and inalienable standing before God in grace and glory.

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am *no more worthy* to be called thy son" (Luk 15:18-19). Whatever be the true interpretation of the passage, we are certainly warranted at least to apply those words to the case of one who has been quickened and convicted by the Spirit. First, there is a frank and contrite acknowledgment of sin, for, as Matthew Henry (1662-1714) truly remarked, "The confession of sin is required and insisted upon as a necessary condition of peace and pardon." Second, there is an honest avowal of the heinousness of his case, mentioning the aggravations thereof. So far from attempting to extenuate his highhanded crimes, their enormity is emphasized. That which renders sin so abominable is that it is against *God*—the abuse of His goodness, contempt of His authority, despising of His holiness. Third, there is a condemning of himself, utter abasement, a feeling sense of his worthlessness. He perceives he can merit nothing good at the hands of Deity, but must cast himself on His grace and mercy. He is deeply conscious of his unfitness and vileness that he is deserving only of hell.

"I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I *remember no more*" (Heb 8:12). That is what God says unto all who truly take the place of the penitent prodigal. The word which is here rendered "merciful" means *propitious*, for it is not the exercise of absolute mercy apart from any satisfaction having been rendered unto justice, but the showing of clemency on the ground of an atoning sacrifice. Christ died in order to render God propitious (Heb 2:17, Greek), and it is in and through the Surety that He bestows forgiveness. Just as long as the sinner rejects Christ, he is under the curse, but as soon as he contritely receives Him by faith, he enters into all the blessings of the new covenant. He is completely delivered from under guilt, and henceforth God acts as though He had wholly forgotten, for as Judge He will never bring up those sins to pass sentence upon them. He is entirely absolved. Christ has cancelled his guilt, fully and finally, and before God. The Law can no longer prefer any charge against him. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1), that is, they are as guiltless as though they had never sinned. When the heart rests on God's I will "remember no more," then there is "no more conscience of sins" (Heb 10:2)—the terrifying sense of them is removed, and we no longer dread God's judgment upon them.

"Ye are *no more strangers* and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph 2:19). Like almost everything in the preceding verses, this one contains a double allusion—a dispensational and experiential. There is an obvious reference here to what had been said in Ephesians 2:12, "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of

promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” Then it is said, “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). As that “far off” and “made nigh” included *both* the separation and then the union of Gentile and Jew, *and* of men and God, so the terms of verse 18 have a twofold scope. They, who had previously been excluded from the earthly Jerusalem, are come with a gracious welcome to the heavenly Jerusalem, to find their names enrolled among the firstborn sons of God (Heb 12:22-23). Gentile believers enjoy equal privileges with Jewish believers, for they have been brought into “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16), made joint members of the body of Christ. But more. By nature, we were strangers to God Himself. We neither knew Him nor wished to do so—“Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways” (Job 21:14) was the language of our hearts. But when we were renewed and received, the atonement enmity was slain, and God in Christ adored, and we enjoy familiar intercourse with Him. Formerly, we were “foreigners” to the saints, though we mixed with them, we were not of one heart with them, but now, we love them. Previously, we were cut off from the holy angels, but are now fellow citizens with them and they minister to us.

“Neither do I condemn thee: go, and *sin no more*” (Joh 8:11). In the above passages, we have viewed some of the benefits and privileges of the saint. Here we have that which is addressed to his responsibility. Observe well the *order* of it—not as the legalist would put it, “Sin no more, and I will not condemn thee,” but rather, Christ deals with a soul in “grace” and then the application of “truth” to the heart. Note too the perfect *balance* of it—not a bare, “Neither do I condemn thee,” and nothing more, as the libertine desires, but the added, “Sin no more,” to protect the interests of holiness. The Gospel sets before us a standard of conduct no less perfect than that of the Law. No indulging of the flesh is permitted, no self-pleasing tolerated. Pardon places us under additional obligations to cease doing evil. “Awake to righteousness, and sin not” (1Co 15:34) is the rule set before us. The One who has redeemed us requires to be obeyed as Lord. The command is peremptory and unqualified. Sin must not be regarded as the natural element of life, nor is commission considered as inevitable. It is not, “Sin as little as possible,” but, “Sin not at all,”—rather is it to be hated, resisted, and forsaken. There must be a thorough watchfulness over our ways and a resolute determination to live to God’s glory. Reformation is the best evidence of gratitude. Turn the precept into earnest prayer. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Let the love of Christ constrain you to holy living.

“Now then it is *no more I that do it*, but sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom 7:17). The context supplies a vivid description of the fierce and ceaseless conflict which is waged between the two natures in the Christian, and which, in varying degrees of perception, is verified in the experience of every saint. By regeneration, the prevailing disposition and desire of the believer is to be fully conformed to the divine will, but (despite his having been delivered from the dominion of sin) his corruptions prevent the attainment of his longings and efforts, so that he daily fails in the doing of the good he essays, and is lured into that which he hates and seeks to avoid. Thus, in the eyes of Him who knows the heart, it is not the believer as such who is the guilty agent, but rather the enemy and traitor who lurks in his soul, and therefore, the guilt is not imputed to him unto condemnation, for the gracious tenor of the new covenant accepts the willingness of the spirit and has provided

pardon for the weakness of the flesh. The “no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me,” traces the actions back to *their source*, and makes known their real cause, as is the case in 1 Corinthians 15:10 and Galatians 2:20.

SAVING FAITH

4. *Its Communication*

From the human viewpoint, things are now in a bad state in the world. But from the spiritual viewpoint, things are in a far worse state in the religious realm. Sad is it to see the anti-Christian cults flourishing on every side, but far more grievous is it, for those who are taught of God, to discover that much of the so-called, “Gospel,” which is now being preached in many “fundamentalist churches” and “gospel halls,” is but a satanic delusion. The devil knows that his captives are quite secure while the grace of God and the finished work of Christ are “faithfully” proclaimed to them, so long as the only way in which sinners *receive* the saving virtues of the atonement is unfaithfully concealed. While God’s peremptory and unchanging demand for repentance is left out, while Christ’s own terms of discipleship (i.e. how to become a Christian, Act 11:26) in Luke 14: 26-27, 33 are withheld, and while saving faith is frittered down to a mere act of the will, blind laymen will continue to be led by blind preachers, only for both to fall into the ditch.

Things are far, far worse even in the “orthodox” sections of Christendom than the majority of God’s own children are aware. Things are rotten even at the very foundation, for with very rare exceptions, *God’s* way of salvation is no longer being taught. Tens of thousands are “ever learning” points in prophecy, the meaning of the types, the significance of the numerals, how to divide the “dispensations,” who are, nevertheless, “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2Ti 3:7) of salvation itself—unable, because unwilling to pay the price (Pro 23:23), which is a full surrender to God Himself. As far as the writer understands the present situation, it seems to him that what is needed today is to press upon the serious attention of professing Christians such questions as: *When* is it that God *applies* to a sinner the virtues of Christ’s finished work? *What is it* that I am called upon to do in order to appropriate to myself the efficacy of Christ’s atonement? What is it that gives me an actual entrance into the good of His redemption?

The questions formulated above are only three different ways of framing the same inquiry. Now, the popular answer which is being returned to them is, “Nothing more is required from any sinner than that he simply *believe on* the Lord Jesus Christ.” In the preceding articles of this series, we have sought to show that such a reply is misleading, inadequate, faulty, and that, because it ignores all the other Scriptures which set forth what God requires from the sinner—it leaves out of account God’s demand for repentance (with all that that involves and includes), and Christ’s clearly defined terms of discipleship in Luke 14. To restrict ourselves to any one Scripture term of a subject, or set of passages using that term, results in an erroneous conception of it. They who limit their ideas of

regeneration, to the one figure of the new birth, lapse into serious error upon it. So they, who limit their thoughts on how to be saved to the one word "believe," are easily misled. Diligent care needs to be taken to collect *all* that Scripture teaches on any subject, if we are to have a properly balanced and accurate view thereof.

To be more specific, in Romans 10:13, we read, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Now does this mean that all who have, with their lips, cried unto the Lord, who have in the name of Christ besought God to have mercy on them, have been saved by Him? They who reply in the affirmative are only deceived by the mere sound of words, as the deluded Romanist is when he contends for Christ's bodily presence in the bread, because He said, "This *is* my body." And how are we to show the papist is misled? Why, by comparing Scripture *with* Scripture. So here. The writer well remembers being on a ship in a terrible storm off the coast of Newfoundland. All the hatches were battened down, and for three days, no passenger was allowed on the decks. Reports from the stewards were disquieting. Strong men paled. As the winds increased and the ship rolled worse and worse, scores of men and women were heard calling upon the name of the Lord. Did He save them? A day or two later, when the weather changed, those same men and women were drinking, cursing, card-playing!

Perhaps someone asks, "But does not Romans 10:13 say what it means?" Certainly it does, but no verse of Scripture yields its meaning to lazy people. Christ Himself tells us that there are many who call Him, "Lord," to whom He will say, "Depart from me" (Mat 7:22-23). Then, what is to be done with Romans 10:13? Why, diligently compare it with *all* other passages which make known what the sinner must do ere God will save him. If nothing more than the fear of death or horror of hell prompts the sinner to call upon the Lord, he might just as well call upon the trees. The Almighty is not at the beck and call of any rebel who, when he is terrified, sues for mercy. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Pro 28:9)! "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and *forsaketh them* shall have mercy" (Pro 28:13). The only "calling upon his name" which the Lord heeds is that which issues from a broken, penitent, sin-hating heart, which thirsts after holiness.

The same principle applies to Acts 16:31 and all similar texts, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved." To a casual reader, that seems a very simple matter, yet a closer pondering of those words should discover that more is involved than at first sight appears. Note that the apostles did not merely tell the Philippian jailer to, "Rest on the finished work of Christ," or "Trust in his atoning sacrifice." Instead, it was a *Person* that was set before him. Again, it was not simply, "Believe on the Saviour," but "*the Lord Jesus Christ*." John 1:12 shows plainly that to "believe" is to "receive," and to be saved, a sinner must receive One, who is not only Saviour, but "Lord," yea, who must be received *as* "Lord" *before* He becomes the Saviour of that person. And to receive "Christ Jesus *the Lord*" (Col 2:6) necessarily involves the renouncing of our own sinful lordship, the throwing down of the weapons of our warfare against Him, and the submitting to His yoke and rule. And before any human rebel is brought to do *that*, a miracle of divine grace has to be wrought within him. And this brings us more immediately to the present aspect of our theme.

Saving faith is not a native product of the human heart, but a spiritual grace communicated from on high. "It is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8). It is "of the operation of God" (Col 2:12). It is by "the power of God" (1Co 2:5). A most remarkable passage on this subject is found in Ephesians 1:16-20. There we find the apostle Paul praying that the saints should have the eyes of their understanding enlightened, that they might know "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead." Not the strong power of God, or the greatness of it, but the "exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward." Note, too, the standard of comparison—We "believe *according to* the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead."

God put forth His "*mighty power*" when He resurrected Christ. There was a mighty power seeking to hinder, even Satan and all his hosts. There was a mighty difficulty to be overcome, even the vanquishing of the grace. There was a mighty result to be achieved, even the bringing to life of One who was dead. None but God Himself was equal to a miracle so stupendous. Strictly analogous is that miracle of grace which issues in saving faith. The devil employs all his arts and power to retain his captive. The sinner is dead in trespasses and sins, and can no more quicken himself than he can create a world. His heart is bound fast with the grave-clothes of worldly and fleshly lusts, and only omnipotence can raise it into communion with God. Well may every true servant of the Lord emulate the apostle Paul and pray earnestly that God *will* enlighten His people concerning this wonder of wonders, so that instead of attributing their faith to an exercise of their own will, they may freely ascribe all the honour and glory unto Him, to whom alone it justly belongs.

If only the professing Christians of this untoward generation could begin to obtain some adequate conception of the *real condition* of every man by nature, they might be less inclined to cavil against the teaching that nothing short of a miracle of grace can ever qualify any sinner to believe unto the saving of his soul. If they could only see that the heart's attitude towards God, of the most refined and moral, is not a whit different from that of the most vulgar and vicious. That he who is most kind and benevolent toward his fellow creatures has no more real desire after Christ than has the most selfish and brutal. Then it would be evident that divine power must operate to change the heart. Divine power was needed to create, but much greater power is required to regenerate a soul. Creation is only the bringing of something out of nothing, but regeneration is the transforming, not only of an unlovely object, but of one that *resists*, with all its might, the gracious designs of the heavenly Potter.

It is not simply that the Holy Spirit approaches a heart, in which there is no love for God, but He finds it filled with enmity against Him, and incapable of being subject to His Law (Rom 8:7). True, the individual himself may be quite unconscious of this terrible fact, yea, ready indignantly to deny it. But that is easily accounted for. If he has heard of little or nothing but the love, the grace, the mercy, the goodness of God, it would indeed be surprising if he hated *Him*. But once the *God of Scripture* is made known to him in the power of the Spirit, once he is made to realize that God is the Governor of this world, demanding unqualified submission to all His laws, that He is inflexibly just, and "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exo 34:7; Num 14:18), that He is sovereign, and loves whom

He pleases and hates whom He wills, that so far from being an easy-going, indulgent Creator, who winks at the follies of His creatures, He is ineffably holy, so that His righteous wrath burns against all the workers of iniquity—then will people be conscious of indwelling enmity surging up against Him. And nothing but the almighty power of the Spirit can overcome that enmity and bring any rebel truly to love the God of Holy Writ.

Rightly did Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) the Puritan say, “A wolf will sooner marry a lamb, or a lamb a wolf, than ever a carnal heart will be subject to the Law of God, which was the ancient husband of it (Rom 7:6). It is the turning of one contrary into another. To turn water into wine, there is some kind of symbolizing, yet that is a miracle. But to turn a wolf into a lamb, to turn fire into water, is a yet greater miracle. Between nothing and something there is an infinite distance, but between sin and grace there is a greater distance than can be between nothing and the highest angel in heaven....To destroy the power of sin in a man’s soul is as great a work as to take away the guilt of sin. It is easier to say to a blind man, ‘See,’ and to a lame man, ‘Walk,’ than to say to a man that lies under the power of sin, ‘Live, be holy,’ for there is that that will not be subject.”

In 2 Corinthians 10:4, the apostle describes the character of that work in which the true servants of Christ are engaged. It is a conflict with the forces of Satan. The weapons of their warfare are “not carnal”—as well might modern soldiers go forth equipped with only wooden swords and paper shields as preachers think to liberate the devil’s captives by means of human learning, worldly methods, touching anecdotes, attractive singing, and so on. No, “their weapons” are the “word of God” and “all prayer” (Eph 6:17-18), and even these are only mighty “through God,” that is, by His direct and special blessing of them to particular souls. In what follows, a description is given of where the might of God is seen, namely, in the powerful *opposition* which it meets with and vanquishes—“to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

Herein lies the power of God, when He is pleased thus to put it forth in the saving of a sinner. The heart of that sinner is fortified against Him. It is steeled against His holy demands, His righteous claims. It is determined not to submit to His Law, nor to abandon those idols which it prohibits. That haughty rebel has made up his mind that he *will not* turn away from the delights of this world and the pleasure of sin and give God the supreme place in his affections. But God has determined to overcome his sinful opposition and transform him into a loving and loyal subject. The figure here used is that of a besieged town—the heart. Its “strongholds”—the reigning power of fleshly and worldly lusts—are “pulled down.” Self-will is broken, pride is subdued, and the defiant rebel is made a willing captive to “the obedience of Christ”! “Mighty through God” points to this miracle of grace.

There is one other detail pointed by the analogy drawn in Ephesians 1:19-20, which exemplifies the mighty power of God, namely “and set him [Christ] at his own right hand in the heavenly places.” The members of Christ’s mystical body are predestinated to be conformed to the glorious image of their glorified Head—in measure, now, perfectly, in the day to come. The ascension of Christ was contrary to *nature*, being opposed by the law of gravitation. But the power of God overcame that opposition, and translated His

resurrected Son bodily into heaven. In like manner, His grace produces in His people that which is contrary to nature, overcoming the opposition of the flesh, and drawing their hearts unto things above. How we would marvel if we saw a man extend his arms and suddenly leave the earth, soaring upward into the sky. Yet still more wonderful is it when we behold the power of the Spirit causing a sinful creature to rise above temptations, worldliness, and sin, and breathe the atmosphere of heaven—when a human soul is made to disdain the things of earth and find its satisfaction in things above.

The historical order in connection with the Head in Ephesians 1:19-20 is also the experimental order with regard to the members of His body. Before setting His Son at His own right hand in the heavenlies, God raised Him from the dead. So, before the Holy Spirit fixes the heart of a sinner upon Christ, He first quickens him into newness of life. There must be *life* before there can be sight, believing, or good works performed. One who is physically dead is incapable of doing anything. So he, who is spiritually dead, is incapable of any spiritual exercises. First, the giving of life unto dead Lazarus, then, the removing of the grave-clothes which bound him hand and foot. God must regenerate before there can be a “new creature in Christ Jesus.” The washing of a child follows its birth.

When spiritual life has been communicated to the soul, that individual is now able to see things in their true colours. In God’s light, he sees light (Psa 36:9). He is now given to perceive (by the Holy Spirit) what a lifelong rebel he has been against his Creator and Benefactor. That, instead of making God’s will his rule, he has gone his own way. That, instead of having before him God’s glory, he has sought only to please and gratify self. Even though he may have been preserved from all the grosser outward forms of wickedness, he now recognizes that he is a spiritual leper, a vile and polluted creature, utterly unfit to draw near, still less to dwell with Him, who is ineffably holy. And such an apprehension makes him feel that *his* case is hopeless.

There is a vast difference between hearing or reading of what conviction of sin is and being made to feel it in the depths of one’s own soul. Multitudes are acquainted with the theory who are total strangers to the experience of it. One may read of the sad effects of war, and may agree that they are indeed dreadful. But when the enemy is at one’s own door, plundering his goods, firing his home, slaying his dear ones, he is far more sensible of the miseries of war than ever he was (or could be) previously. So an unbeliever may hear of what a dreadful state the sinner is in before God, and how terrible will be the sufferings of hell, but when the Spirit brings home to his own heart its actual condition, and makes him feel the heat of God’s wrath in his own conscience, he is ready to sink with dismay and despair. Reader, do *you* know anything of such an experience?

Only thus is any soul prepared truly to appreciate Christ. They that are whole need not a physician. The one who has been savingly convicted is made to realize that none but the Lord Jesus can heal one so desperately diseased by sin—that He alone can impart that spiritual health (holiness) which will enable him to run in the way of God’s commandments—that nothing but His precious blood can atone for the sins of the past and naught but His all-sufficient grace can meet the pressing needs of the present and future. Thus, there must be discerning faith before there is coming faith. The Father “draws” to the Son (Joh 6:44) by imparting to the mind a deep realization of our desperate need of Christ,

by giving to the heart a real sense of the inestimable worth of Him, and by causing the will to receive Him on His own terms.

PROFITING FROM THE WORD

8. *The Scriptures and the Promises*

The divine promises make known the good pleasure of God's will unto His people, to bestow upon them the riches of His grace. They are the outward testifications of His heart, who from all eternity loves them and foreappointed all things for them and concerning them. In the person and work of His Son, God has made an all-sufficient provision for their complete salvation, both for time and for eternity. To the intent that they might have a true, clear, and spiritual knowledge of the same, it has pleased the Lord to set it before them in the exceeding great and precious promises, which are scattered up and down in the Scriptures as so many stars in the glorious firmament of grace, by which they may be assured of the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning them, and take sanctuary in Him accordingly. And through this medium have real communion with Him in His grace and mercy at all times, no matter what their case or circumstances may be.

The divine promises are so many declarations to bestow some good or remove some ill. As such, they are a most blessed making known and manifesting of God's love to His people. There are three steps in connection with God's love—first, His inward purpose to exercise it, and the last, the real execution of that purpose. But in between, there is the gracious *making known* of that purpose to the beneficiaries of it. While love is concealed, we cannot be comforted therewith. Now, God, who is "love," not only loves His own, and will not only show His love fully to them in due time, but in the interim, He will have us *informed* of His benevolent designs, that we may sweetly rest in His love, and stretch ourselves comfortably upon His sure promises. There we are able to say, "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them" (Psa 139:17).

In 2 Peter 1:4, the divine promises are spoken of as "exceeding great and precious." As C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) pointed out, "Greatness and preciousness seldom go together, but in this instance, they are united in an exceeding degree." When Jehovah is pleased to open His mouth and reveal His heart, He does so in a manner worthy of Himself, in words of superlative power and richness. To quote again the beloved London pastor, "They come from a great God. They come to great sinners. They work for us great results, and deal with great matters." While the natural intellect is capable of perceiving much of their greatness, only the renewed heart can taste their ineffable preciousness, and say with David, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter then honey to my mouth" (Psa 119:103).

1. We profit from the Word when we perceive *to whom the promises belong*. They are available only to those who are in Christ. "For all the promises of God *in him* [the Lord Jesus] are yea, and in him Amen" (2Co 1:20). There can be no intercourse between the thrice holy God and sinful creatures except through a Mediator who has satisfied Him on their behalf. Therefore must that Mediator receive from God all good for His people, and

they must have it at second hand through Him. A sinner might just as well petition a tree as call upon God for mercy while he despises and rejects Christ.

Both the promises and the things promised are made over to the Lord Jesus and conveyed unto the saints from Him. "This is *the* [chief and grandest] promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life" (1Jo 2:25), and as the same epistle tells us, "This life is in his Son" (1Jo 5:11). This being so, what good can they, who are not yet in Christ, have by the promises? None at all. A man out of Christ is out of the favour of God, yea, he is under His wrath. The divine threatenings, and not the promises, are *his* portion. Solemn, solemn consideration is it that those who are "without Christ" are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and *strangers* from the covenants of promise, having *no* hope, and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). Only "the children of God" are "the children of the promise" (Rom 9:8). Make sure, my reader, that you are one of them.

How terrible, then, is the blindness and how great is the sin of those preachers who indiscriminately apply the divine promises unto the saved and unsaved alike! They are not only taking "the children's bread" and casting it to the "dogs," but they are "handling the word of God deceitfully" (2Co 4:2), and beguiling immortal souls. And they who listen to and heed them are little less guilty, for God holds all responsible to search the Scriptures for themselves, and test whatever they read or hear by that unerring standard. If they are too lazy to do so, and prefer blindly to follow their blind guides, then their blood is on their own heads. Truth has to be "bought" (Pro 23:23), and those who are unwilling to pay the price must go without it.

2. We profit from the Word when we *labour to make our own the promises of God*. To do this, we must first take the trouble to become really acquainted with them. It is surprising how many promises there are in Scripture which the saints know nothing about, the more so, seeing that *they* are the peculiar treasure of believers, the substance of faith's heritage lying in them. True, Christians are already the recipients of wondrous blessings, yet the capital of their wealth, the bulk of their estate, is only prospective. They have already received an "earnest," but the better part of what Christ has purchased for them lies yet in the promise of God. How diligent, then, should they be in studying His testamentary will, familiarizing themselves with the good things which the Spirit "hath revealed" (1Co 2:10), and seeking to take an inventory of their spiritual treasures.

Not only must I search the Scriptures to find out what has been made over to me by the everlasting covenant, but I need also to meditate upon the promises, to turn them over and over in my mind, and cry unto the Lord for spiritual understanding of them. The bee would not extract any honey from the flowers as long as he only gazed upon them. Nor will the Christian derive any real comfort and strength from the divine promises until his faith lays hold of and penetrates to the heart of them. God has given no assurance that the dilatory shall be fed, but He has declared, "The soul of the diligent shall be made fat" (Pro 13:4). Therefore did Christ say, "*Labour* not for the meat which perisheth, but *for* that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (Joh 6:27). It is only as the promises are stored up in our minds that the Spirit brings them to remembrance at those fainting seasons when we most need them.

3. We profit from the Word when we *recognize the blessed scope of God's promises*. "A sort of affectation prevents some Christians from seeking religion as if its sphere lay

among the commonplaces of daily life. It is to them transcendental and dreamy—rather a creation of pious fiction, and for the life which is to be. But they totally forget that true godliness hath the promise of the life which now is, as well as that which is to come. To them it would seem almost profanation to pray about the small matters of which daily life is made up. Perhaps they will be startled, if I venture to suggest, that this should make the question the reality of their faith. If it cannot bring them help in the little troubles of life, will it support them in the greater trials of death?” (C. H. Spurgeon).

“Godliness is profitable unto all things, having *promise* of the life that *now* is, and of that which is to come” (1Ti 4:8). Reader, do you really believe this, that the promises of God cover *every* aspect and particular of your daily life? Or have the “Dispensationalists” deluded you into supposing that the Old Testament belongs only to fleshly Jews, and that “*our promises*” respect spiritual and not material blessings? How many a Christian has derived comfort from, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5)? Well, that is a quotation from Joshua 1:5! So too, 2 Corinthians 7:1, speaks of “*having these promises*,” yet one of them referred to in 2 Corinthians 6:16 is taken from the book of Leviticus (Lev 26:24)!

Perhaps someone asks, “But where am I to draw the line? Which of the Old Testament promises rightfully belong to me?” We answer that Psalm 84:11 declares, “The LORD will give grace and glory: *no* good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” *If* you are really walking “*uprightly*,” you are entitled to appropriate that blessed promise and count upon the Lord giving you whatever “good thing” is truly required by you. “My God shall supply *all* your need” (Phi 4:19). If then there is a promise anywhere in His Word which just fits your present case and situation, make it your own as suited to your “need.” Steadfastly resist every attempt of Satan to rob you of any portion of your Father’s Word.

4. We profit from the Word when we *make a proper discrimination between the promises of God*. Many of the Lord’s people are frequently guilty of spiritual theft, by which we mean that they appropriate to themselves something to which they are not entitled, but which belongs to another. “Certain covenant engagements, made with the Lord Jesus Christ, as to His elect and redeemed ones, are altogether without condition so far as we are concerned. But many other wealthy words of the Lord contain stipulations which must be carefully regarded, or we shall not obtain the blessing. One part of my reader’s diligent search must be directed toward this most important point. God will keep His promise to thee, only see thou to it that the way in which He conditions His engagement is carefully observed by thee. Only when we fulfil the requirements of a conditional promise can we expect that promise to be fulfilled to us” (C. H. Spurgeon).

Many of the divine promises are addressed to particular characters, or, more correctly, speaking to particular graces. For example, in Psalm 25:9, the Lord declares that He will “guide in judgment” the *meek*. But if I am out of communion with Him, if I am following a course of self-will, if my heart is haughty, then, I am not justified in taking unto myself the comfort of this verse. Again, in John 15:7, the Lord tells us, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” But if I am not in experimental communion with Him, if His commands are not regulating my conduct, then, my prayers will remain unanswered. While God’s promises proceed from pure grace, yet it ever needs to be remembered that grace reigns “through righteousness”

(Rom 5:21) and never sets aside human responsibility. If I ignore the laws of health, I must not be surprised that sickness prevents me enjoying many of God's temporal mercies. In like manner, if I neglect His precepts, I have myself to blame if I fail to receive the fulfilment of many of His promises.

Let none suppose that by His promises God has obligated Himself to ignore the requirements of His holiness. He never exercises one of His perfections at the expense of another. And let none imagine that God would be magnifying the sacrificial work of Christ were He to bestow its fruits upon impenitent and careless souls. There is a *balance* of truth to be preserved here. Alas, that it is now so frequently lost, and that, under the pretence of exalting divine grace, men are really "turning it into lasciviousness." How often one hears quoted, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee" (Psa 50:15). But that verse begins with "And," and the preceding clause is, "*Pay thy vows* unto the Most High!" Again, how frequently is, "I will guide thee with mine eye" (Psa 32:8) seized by people who pay no attention to the context! But *that* is God's promise to one who has confessed his "transgression" unto the Lord (Psa 32:5). If, then, I have *unconfessed* sin on my conscience, and have leaned on an arm of flesh or sought help from my fellows, instead of waiting only on God (Psa 62:5), then I have no right to count upon the Lord's guiding me with His eye—which necessarily presupposes that I am walking in close communion with Him, for I cannot see the eye of another while at a distance from him.

5. We profit from the Word when we are enabled to make God's promises our *support and stay*. This is one reason why God has given them to us, not only to manifest His love by making known His benevolent designs, but also to comfort our hearts and develop our faith. Had God so pleased, He could have bestowed His blessings without giving us notice of His purpose. The Lord might have given us all the mercies we need without pledging Himself to do so. But in that case, we could not have been believers. Faith without a promise would be a foot without ground to stand upon. Our tender Father planned that we should enjoy His gifts twice over—first by faith, and then by fruition. By this means, He wisely weans our hearts away from things seen and perishing, and draws them onward and upward to those things which are spiritual and eternal.

If there were no promises, there would not only be no faith, but no hope either. For what is hope but the *expectation* of the things which God has declared He will give us? Faith looks to the Word promising, hope looks to the performance thereof. Thus it was with Abraham, "Who against hope believed in hope...and being not weak in faith, he considered not his body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb; he staggered not...through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom 4:18, 20). Thus it was with Moses, "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb 11:26). Thus it was with Paul, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (Act 27:25). Is it so with you, dear reader? Are the promises of Him, who cannot lie, the resting-place of your poor heart?

6. We profit from the Word when we *patiently await the fulfilment of God's promises*. God promised Abraham a son, but waited many years for the performance of it. Simeon had a promise that he should not see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ (Luk 2:26), yet it was not made good till he had one foot in the grave. There is often a long and hard

winter between the sowing-time of prayer and the reaping of the answer. The Lord Jesus Himself has not yet received a full answer to the prayer He made in John 17, nineteen hundred years ago. Many of the best of God's promises to His people will not receive their richest accomplishment until they are in glory. He, who has all eternity at His disposal, needs not to hurry. God often makes us tarry so that patience may have "her perfect work" (Jam 1:4), yet let us not distrust Him. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come" (Hab 2:3).

"These all died in faith, not having received the [fulfilment of the] promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them" (Heb 11:13). Here is comprehended the whole work of faith—knowledge, trust, loving adherence. The "afar off" refers to the things promised. Those they "saw" with the mind, discerning the substance behind the shadow, discovering in them the wisdom of and goodness of God. They were "persuaded." They doubted not, but were assured of their participation in them and knew they would not disappoint them. "Embraced them" expresses their delight and veneration, the heart cleaving to them with love and cordially welcoming and entertaining them. The promises were the comfort and the stay of their souls in all their wanderings, temptations, and sufferings.

Various ends are accomplished by God in delaying His execution of the promises. Not only is faith put to the proof, so that its genuineness may the more clearly appear, not only is patience developed, and hope given opportunity for exercise, but submission to the divine will is fostered, "The weaning process is not accomplished. We are still hankering after the comforts which the Lord intends us for ever to outgrow. Abraham made a great feast when his son Isaac was weaned; and, peradventure, our heavenly Father will do the same with us. Lie down, proud heart. Quit thine idols; forsake thy fond doings; and the promised peace will come unto thee" (C. H. Spurgeon).

7. We profit from the Word when *we make a right use of the promises*. First, in our dealings with God Himself. When we approach unto His throne, it should be to plead one of His promises. They are to form not only the foundation for our faith to rest upon, but also the substance of our requests. We must ask according to God's will if we are to be heard, and His will is revealed in those good things which He has declared He will bestow upon us. Thus we are to lay hold of His pledged assurances, spread them before Him, and say, "Do as thou hast said" (2Sa 7:25). Observe how Jacob pleaded the promise in Genesis 32:12; Moses in Exodus 32:13; David in Psalm 119:58; Solomon in 1 Kings 8:25; and do thou, my Christian reader, likewise.

Second, in the life we live in the world. In Hebrews 11:13, we not only read of the patriarchs discerning, trusting, and embracing the divine promises, but we are also informed of the *effects* which they produced upon them, "And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth," which means they made a public avowal of their faith. They acknowledged (and by their conduct demonstrated) that their interests were not in the things of this world. They had a satisfying portion in the promises they had appropriated. Their hearts were set upon things above. For where a man's heart is, there will his treasure be also.

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2Co 7:1). That is the effect they should produce in us, and *will*, if faith really lays hold of them. “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: *that* by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2Pe 1:4). Now, the Gospel and the precious promises, being graciously bestowed and powerfully applied, have an influence on purity of heart and behaviour, and teach men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly. Such are the powerful effects of Gospel promises under the divine influence, as to make men inwardly partakers of the divine nature, and outwardly to abstain from and avoid the prevailing corruptions and vices of the times.

COMING TO CHRIST

Part 2

There are some souls greatly distressed and puzzled to know exactly what is signified by, "Coming to Christ." They have read and heard the words often, and perhaps many a preacher has bidden them to, "Come to Him," yet without giving a scriptural explanation of what that term connotes. Such as have been awakened by the Spirit, shown their woeful condition, convicted of their high-handed and life-long rebellion against God, and brought to realize their dire need of Christ, and who are truly anxious to come savingly to Him, have found it a task altogether beyond their powers. Their cry is, "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!" (Job 23:3). True, there are not many who pass through such an experience, for *God's* "flock" is but a "little" one (Luk 12:32). True, the vast majority of professing Christians claim that *they* found "Coming to Christ" a very simple matter. But in the clear light of John 6:44, we must assure you, dear reader, that if *you* found "Coming to Christ" to be easy, then it is proof you have *never* come to Him at all in a spiritual and saving way.

What, then, is meant by "Coming to Christ"? First, and negatively, let it be pointed out that it is *not* an act which we perform by any of our bodily members. This is so obvious that there should be no need for us to make the statement. But in these awful days of spiritual ignorance and the carnal perversion of the holy things of God, explanation of the most elementary truths and terms is really required. When so many precious souls have been deluded into thinking that a going forward to a "Mourner's bench" or "Penitent form," or the taking of some preacher's hand, is the same thing as coming to Christ, we dare not pass over the defining of this apparently simple term, nor ignore the need for pointing out what it does not signify.

Second, the word, "Come," when used in this connection, is a *metaphorical* one. That is to say, a word which expresses an act of the body is transferred to the soul, to denote its act. To "Come to Christ" signifies the movement of a Spirit-enlightened mind toward the Lord Jesus—as Prophet, to be instructed by Him—as Priest, whose atonement and intercession are to be relied upon—as King, to be ruled by Him. Coming to Christ implies a turning of our back upon the world, and a turning unto Him as our only Hope and Portion. It is a going out of self so as to rest no longer on anything in self. It is the abandoning of every idol and of all other dependencies, the heart going out to Him in loving submission and trustful confidence. It is the will surrendering to Him as Lord, ready to accept His yoke, take up the cross, and follow Him without reserve.

To "Come to Christ" is the turning of the whole soul unto a whole Christ in the exercise of divine grace upon him. It is the mind, heart, and will being supernaturally drawn to Him, so as to trust, love, and serve Him. "It is the duty and interest of weary and heavy-laden sinners to 'Come to Christ'—renouncing all those things which stand in

opposition to Him, or in competition with Him, we must accept Him as our Physician and Advocate, and give up ourselves to His conduct and government, freely willing to be saved by Him, in His own way, and on His own terms" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). Ere proceeding farther, we would earnestly beg each reader prayerfully and carefully to test and measure himself or herself by what has been said in this and the preceding paragraph. Take nothing for granted. As you value your soul, seek divine help to make sure that you have *truly* "Come to Christ."

Now a popish "christ" is a christ of *wood*, and a false preacher's "christ" is a christ of *words*, but Christ Jesus, our Lord, is "the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:6). The Christ of God fills heaven and earth. He is the One by whom all things exist and consist. He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having all power, dominion and might. He is made higher than the heavens, and unto Him all principalities and powers are subject. At His presence, both the earth and the heavens shall yet flee away. Such a Christ is not to be offered or proffered, sold or given, by sinful men. He is the unspeakable Gift of the Father to as many as He has ordained to eternal life, and none others. This Christ, this Gift of the Father, is supernaturally revealed and applied to the heirs of salvation by the Holy Spirit, when, where, and as He pleases; and not when, where, and how men please.

In the preceding article, we dwelt at length upon those words in John 6:44, "No man can come unto me," seeking to show the nature of the fallen creature's spiritual impotence, or why it is that the unregenerate are unable to come to Christ in a spiritual and saving way. Let us now ponder the remainder of our Lord's sentence, "Except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Of what does that "drawing" consist? We answer, first, that just as our "Coming to Christ" does not refer to any bodily action, so this divine "drawing" respects not the employment of any external force. Second, it signifies a powerful impulse put forth by the Holy Spirit with the elect, whereby their native impotence for performing spiritual actions is overcome, and an ability for the same is imparted. It is this secret and effectual operation of the Spirit, upon the human soul, that enables and causes it to come to Christ. This brings us to our next division.

II. With our understandings

1. *A knowledge of Christ is essential.* There can be no movement towards an unknown object. No one can obey a command until he is acquainted with its terms. A prop must be seen before it will be rested on. We must have some acquaintance with a person before he will either be trusted or loved. This principle is so obvious that it needs arguing no further. Apply it to the case in hand, the subject before us. The knowledge of Christ must of necessity precede our believing on Him or our coming to Him. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom 10:14). "He that cometh to God *must* believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb 11:6). None can come to Christ while they are ignorant about Him. As it was in the old creation, so it is in the new. God first says, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3).

2. *This knowledge of Christ comes to the mind from the Holy Scriptures.* Nothing can be known of Him save that which God has been pleased to reveal concerning Him in the Word of truth. It is there alone that the "true doctrine of Christ" (2Jo 1:9) is found.

Therefore did our Lord give commandment, "Search the Scriptures...they are they which testify of me" (Joh 5:39). When He berated the two disciples for their slowness of heart to believe, we are told that, "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luk 24:27). The divine oracles are designated, "the word of Christ," (Col 3:16) because He is the substance of them. Where the Scriptures have not gone, Christ is unknown. Clear proof is this that an acquaintance with Him cannot be gained apart from their inspired testimony.

3. *A theoretical knowledge of Christ is not sufficient.* Upon this point, we must dilate at greater length, for much ignorance concerning it prevails today. A head knowledge about Christ is very frequently mistaken for a heart-acquaintance with Him. But orthodoxy is not salvation. A carnal judgment about Christ, a mere intellectual knowledge of Him, will never bring a dead sinner to His feet. There must be a living experience—God's word and work meeting together in the soul, renewing the understanding. As 1 Corinthians 13:2 so plainly and solemnly warns us, I may have the gift of prophecy, understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, yet if I have not love, I am nothing, Just as a blind man may, through labour and diligence, acquire an accurate theoretical or notional conception of many subjects and objects which he never saw, so the natural man may by religious education and personal effort obtain a sound doctrinal knowledge of the person and work of Christ, without having any spiritual or vital acquaintance with Him.

Not every kind of knowledge, even of God's truth and His Christ, is effectual and saving. There is a *form* of knowledge, as well as of godliness, which is destitute of power—"Which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law" (Rom 2:20). The reference is to the Jews, who were instructed in the Scriptures, and considered themselves well qualified to teach others, yet the truth had not been written on their hearts by the Holy Spirit. A "*form of knowledge*" signifies that there was a model of it in their brains, so that they were able to discourse freely and fluently upon the things of God, yet were they without the life of God in their souls. Oh, how many have a knowledge *of* salvation, yet not a knowledge *unto* salvation, as the apostle distinguishes it in 2 Timothy 3:15—such a knowledge as the latter must be imparted to the soul by the miracle-working operation of the Holy Spirit.

"They proceed from evil to evil, and *they know not me*, saith the LORD" (Jer 9:3). Of whom was this spoken—of the heathen who were without any written revelation from Him? *No*, of Israel, who had His law in their hands, His Temple in their midst, His prophets speaking to them. They had been favoured with many and wondrous manifestations of His majesty, holiness, power, and mercy; yet though they had much intellectual knowledge of Him, they were strangers to Him spiritually. So it was when the Son of God became incarnate. How much *natural* light they had concerning Him. They witnessed His perfect life, saw His wondrous miracles, heard His matchless teaching, were frequently in His immediate presence. Yet, though the light showed in the darkness, "The darkness comprehended it not" (Joh 1:5). So it is today. Reader, you may be a diligent student of the New Testament, be thoroughly acquainted with the Old Testament types and prophecies, believe all that the Scriptures say concerning Christ, and earnestly teach them to others, and yet be yourself a stranger to Him spiritually.

“Except a man be born again, he cannot *see* the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3), which means that the unregenerate are utterly incapable of discerning the things of God spiritually. True, they may “see” them in a natural way. They may investigate and even admire them theoretically, but receive them in an experimental and vital way, they cannot. As this distinction is of such great importance, and yet so little known today, let us endeavour to illustrate it. Imagine a man who has never heard any music. Others tell him of its beauty and charm, and he decides to make a careful study of it. That man might thoroughly familiarize himself with the art of music, learn all the rules of that art, so that he understood the proportions and harmony of it. But what a different thing is that from listening to a grand oratorio—the ear now taking in what before the mind knew only the theory of! Still greater is the difference between a natural and a spiritual knowledge of divine things.

The apostle declared, “We speak the word of God in a mystery” (1Co 2:7). He did not only affirm that it is a mystery in itself, but that it is still spoken “*in* a mystery.” And why is this? Because the unregenerate, even where it is spoken in their hearing, yea, when it is clearly apprehended by them in a notional way, neither know nor apprehend the mystery that is still in it. Proverbs 9:10 declares that, “The knowledge of the holy is understanding.” There is no true understanding of divine things except the “knowledge of the holy.” Every real Christian has a knowledge of divine things, a personal, experimental, vital knowledge of them, which no carnal man possesses, or can obtain, no matter how diligently he studies them. If I have seen the picture of a man, I have an image in my mind of that man according to his picture. But if I see the man himself, how different is the image of him which is then formed in my mind! Far greater still is the difference between Christ made known in the Scriptures and Christ “revealed *in me*” (Gal 1:16).

4. *There must be a spiritual and supernatural knowledge of Christ imparted by the Holy Spirit.* This is in view of 1 John 5:20, “We know that the Son of God is come, and hath *given us an understanding*, that we may know him that is true.” The faculty must be suited to the object or subject known. The natural understanding is capable of taking in Christ and knowing Him in a natural way, but we must be “renewed in the spirit of our mind” (Eph 4:23) before we can know Christ in a spiritual way. There must be a supernatural work of grace wrought upon the mind by the Holy Spirit before there can be any inward and spiritual apprehension of the supernatural and spiritual person of Christ. That is the true and saving knowledge of Christ which fires the affections, sanctifies the will, and raises up the mind to a spiritual fixation on the Rock of ages. It is *this* knowledge of Him which is “life eternal” (Joh 17:3). It is *this* knowledge which produces faith in Christ, love for Him, submission to Him. It is *this* knowledge which causes the soul truthfully and joyously to exclaim, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25).

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44). It is by the secret and effectual operation of the Spirit that the Father brings each of His elect to a saving knowledge of Christ. These operations of the Spirit begin by His enlightening the understanding, renewing the mind. Observe carefully the order in Ezekiel 37:14, “And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live...*then* shall ye *know* that I the Lord have spoken it.” No sinner ever comes to Christ until the Holy Spirit first comes to

him! And no sinner will savingly believe on Christ until the Spirit has communicated faith to him (Eph 2:8; col 2:12). And even then, faith is an eye to *discern* Christ before it is a foot to *approach Him*. There can be no act without an object, and there can be no exercising of faith upon Christ till Christ is seen in His excellency, sufficiency, and suitability to poor sinners. "That he may know *and* believe me" (Isa 43:10) is the order. "They that *know* thy name will [not "ought to"] put their trust in thee" (Psa 9:10). But again, we say that knowledge must be a spiritual and miraculous one imparted by the Spirit.

The Spirit Himself, and not merely a preacher, must take of the things of Christ and show them unto the heart. It is only in *God's* "light" that we truly "*see* light" (Psa 36:9). The opening of his eyes preceded the conversion of the sinner from Satan unto God (Act 26:18). The light of the sun is seen breaking out at the dawn of day, before its heat is felt. It is those who "see" the Son with a supernaturally enlightened understanding who "believe" on Him with a spiritual and saving faith (Joh 6:40). We *behold* as in a mirror the glory of the Lord before we are *changed* into *His* very image (2Co 3:18). Note the order in Romans 3:11, "There is none that understandeth" goes before, "There is none that seeketh after God." The Spirit must shed His light upon the understanding, which light conveys the actual image of spiritual things in a spiritual way to the mind, forming them on the soul, much as a sensitive photographic plate receives the light from the images to which it is exposed. *This* is the "*demonstration of the Spirit and of power*" (1Co 2:4).

5. *How is this spiritual and vital knowledge to be known from a mere theoretical and notional one?* By its effects. Unto the Thessalonians Paul wrote, "For our gospel came not unto you in *word only*, but *also in power*, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance" (1Th 1:5), which is partly explained in the next verse, "Having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit." The Spirit had given that Word in efficacy which no logic, rhetoric or persuasive power of men could give it. It had smitten the conscience, torn open the wounds which sin had made, exposed its festering sores. It had pierced them even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. It had slain their good opinion of themselves. It had made them feel the wrath of God burning against them. It had caused them seriously to question if such wretches could possibly find mercy at the hands of the holy God. It had communicated faith to look upon the great Physician of souls. It had given a joy such as this poor world knows nothing of.

The light which the Spirit imparts to the understanding is full of efficacy, whereas that which men acquire through their study is not so. Ordinary and strong mineral waters are alike in colour, but differ much in their taste and virtue. A carnal man may acquire a theoretical knowledge of all that a spiritual man knows vitally, yet is he "barren" and "unfruitful" in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2Pe 1:8). The light he has is ineffectual, for it does not purify his heart, renew his will, or transform his life. The head-knowledge of divine truth, which is all that multitudes of present-day professing Christians possess, has no more influence upon their walk unto practical godliness than though it was stored up in some other man's brains. The light which the Spirit gives humbles and abases its recipient. The knowledge which is acquired by education and personal efforts puffs up and fills with carnal deceit.

A spiritual and saving knowledge of Christ always constrains the soul unto loving obedience. No sooner did the light of Christ shine into Paul's heart than he at once asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" (Act 9:6). Of the Colossians, the apostle declared, "The Gospel which is come unto you...bringeth forth fruit...since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth" or "in reality" (Col 1:5-6). But a mere intellectual knowledge of the truth is "held in *unrighteousness*" (Rom 1:18). Its possessors are zealous to argue and cavil about it, and look down with contempt upon all who are not as wise as they. Yet the *lives* of these frequently put them to shame. A saving knowledge of Christ so endears Him to the soul that all else is esteemed as dung in comparison with His excellency. The light of His glory has cast a complete eclipse over all that is in the world. But a mere doctrinal knowledge of Christ produces no such effects. While its possessors may loudly sing His praises, their hearts are still coveting and eagerly pursuing the things of time and sense.

The natural man may know the truth of the things of God, but not the things themselves. He may thoroughly understand the Scriptures in the letter of them, but not in their spirit. He may discourse of them in a sound and orthodox manner, but in no other way than one can *talk* of honey and vinegar who never tasted the sweetness of the one or the sourness of the other. There are hundreds of preachers who have accurate notions of spiritual things, but who see and taste not the things themselves which are wrapt in the words of truth, "Understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1Ti 1:7). Just as an astronomer who makes a life study of the stars knows their names, their positions and varying magnitudes, yet receives no more personal and special influence from them than do other men, so it is with those who study the Scriptures but are not supernaturally and savingly enlightened by the Spirit. Oh, my reader, has the "Day Star arisen *in your heart*" (2Pe 1:19)?

HEART WORK

Part 2

As well might a poor man expect to be rich in this world without industry, or a weak man to become strong and healthy without food and exercise, as a Christian to be rich in faith and strong in the Lord without earnest endeavour and diligent effort. It is true that all our labours amount to nothing unless the Lord blesses them (Psa 127:1), as it also is that apart from Him, we can do nothing (Joh 15:5). Nevertheless, God places no premium upon sloth, and has promised that, "The soul of the diligent shall be made fat" (Pro 13:4). A farmer may be fully persuaded of his own helplessness to make his fields productive. He may realize that their fertility is dependent upon the sovereign will of God, and he may also be a firm believer in the efficacy of prayer. But unless he discharges *his own duty, his barns will be empty*. So it is spiritually.

God has not called His people to be drones, nor to maintain an attitude of passiveness. No, He bids them work, toil, labour. The sad thing is that so many of them are engaged in the wrong task, or, at least, giving most of their attention to that which is incidental, and neglecting that which is essential and fundamental. “Keep thy heart with all diligence” (Pro 4:23). *This* is the great task which God has assigned unto each of His children. But oh, how sadly is the heart neglected! Of all their concerns and possessions, the *least* diligence is used by the vast majority of professing Christians in the keeping of their hearts. As long as they safeguard their other interests—their reputations, their bodies, their positions in the world—the heart may be left to take its own course.

As the heart in our physical body is the centre and fountain of life, because from it blood circulates into every part, conveying with it either health or disease, so it is with us spiritually. If our heart be the residence of impiety, pride, avarice, malice, impure lusts, then the whole current of our lives will largely be tainted with these vices. If they are admitted there and prevail for a season, then our character and conduct will be proportionately affected. Therefore, the citadel of the heart needs above all things to be well guarded, that it may not be seized by those numerous and watchful assailants which are ever attacking it. This spring needs to be well protected that its waters be not poisoned.

The man is what his heart is. If *this* be dead to God, then nothing in him is alive. If *this* be right with God, all will be right. As the mainspring of a watch sets all its wheels and parts in motion, so as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Pro 23:7). If the heart be right, the actions will be. As a man’s heart is, such is his state now and will be hereafter. If it be regenerated and sanctified, there will be a life of faith and holiness in this world, and everlasting life will be enjoyed in the world to come. Therefore, “Rather look to the cleansing of thine heart, than to the cleansing of thy well; rather look to the feeding of thine heart, than to the feeding of thy flock; rather look to the defending of thine heart, than to the defending of thine house; rather look to the keeping of thine heart, than to the keeping of thy money” (Peter Moffat, 1570).

“Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). The “heart” is here put for our whole inner being, the “hidden man of the heart” (1Pe 3:4). It is that which controls and gives character to all that we do. To “keep”—garrison or guard—the heart or soul is the great work which God has assigned us. The enablement is His, but the duty is ours. We are to keep the imagination from vanity, the understanding from error, the will from perverseness, the conscience clear of guilt, the affections from being inordinate and set on evil objects, the mind from being employed on worthless or vile subjects—the whole from being possessed by Satan. This is the work to which God has called us.

Rightly did the Puritan John Flavel (1630-1691) say, “The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition is the great business of a Christian’s life.” Now to “keep” the heart right implies that it has been *set right*. Thus it was at regeneration, when it was given a new spiritual bent. True conversion is the heart turning from Satan’s control to God’s, from sin to holiness, from the world to Christ. To *keep* the heart right signifies the constant care and diligence of the renewed to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace has reduced it and daily strives to hold it. “Hereupon do all events depend—the heart being kept, the whole course of our life here will be according to the mind of God, and the

end of it will be the enjoyment of Him hereafter. This being neglected, life will be lost, both here as unto obedience, and hereafter as to glory” (John Owen [1616-1683] in *Causes of Apostasy*).

1. To “keep” the heart means *striving to shut out from it all that is opposed to God*. “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1Jo 5:21). God is a jealous God and will brook no rival. He claims the throne of our hearts, and requires to be loved by us supremely. When we perceive our affections being inordinately drawn out unto any earthly object, we are to fight against it, and “resist the devil.” When Paul said, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be *brought under the power* of any” (1Co 6:12), he signified that he was keeping his heart diligently, that he was jealous lest *things* should gain that esteem and place in his soul which was due alone unto the Lord. A very small object placed immediately before the eye is sufficient to shut out the light of the sun, and trifling things, taken up by the affections, may soon sever communion with the Holy One.

Before regeneration, our hearts were deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jer 17:9). That was because the evil principle, the “flesh,” had complete dominion over them. But inasmuch as “the flesh” remains in us after conversion, and is constantly striving for the mastery over “the spirit,” the Christian needs to exercise a constant watchful jealousy over his heart, mindful of its readiness to be imposed upon, and its proneness unto a compliance with temptations. All the avenues to the heart need to be carefully guarded so that nothing hurtful enters therein, particularly against vain thoughts and imaginations, and especially in those seasons when they are apt to gain an advantage. For if injurious thoughts are suffered to gain an inroad into the mind, if we accustom ourselves to give them entertainment, then in vain shall we hope to be “spiritually minded” (Rom 8:6). All such thoughts are only making provision to fulfil the lusts of the flesh.

Thus, for the Christian to “keep” his heart with all diligence means for him to pay close attention to the direction in which his affections are moving, to discover whether the things of the world are gaining a firmer and fuller hold over him or whether they are increasingly losing their charm for him. God has exhorted us, “Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col 3:2), and the heeding of this injunction calls for constant examination of the heart to discover whether or not it is becoming more and more dead unto this deceitful and perishing world, and whether heavenly things are those in which we find our chief and greatest delight. “Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart” (Deu 4:9).

2. To “keep” the heart means *striving to bring it into conformity with the Word*. We are not to rest content until an actual image of its pure and holy teachings is stamped upon it. Alas, so many today are just *playing* with the solemn realities of God, allowing them to flit across their fancy, but never embracing and making them their own. Why is it, dear reader, that those solemn impressions you had when hearing a searching sermon or reading a searching article so quickly faded away? Why did not those holy feelings and aspirations which were stirred within you last? Why have they borne no fruit? Was it not because you failed to see that your heart was duly affected by them? You failed to “hold fast” that which you had “received and heard” (Rev 3:3), and in consequence, your heart became

absorbed again in “the care of this life” or “the deceitfulness of riches,” and thus the Word was choked.

It is not enough to hear or read a powerful message from one of God’s servants, and to be deeply interested and stirred by it. If there be no diligent effort on your part, then it will be said that, “Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away” (Hos 6:4). What, then, is required? This—Earnest and persevering prayer that God will fasten the message in your soul as a nail in a sure place, so that the devil himself cannot catch it away. What is required? This—“Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart” (Luk 2:19). Things which are not duly pondered are soon forgotten. Meditation stands to reading as mastication does to eating. What is required? This—That you promptly put into practice what you have learned, walk according to the light God has given, or it will quickly be taken from you (Luk 8:18).

Not only must the outward actions be regulated by the Word, but the heart must also be conformed thereto. It is not enough to abstain from the act of adultery, the inward lust must be mortified too (Mat 5:28). God not only takes note of and keeps a record of all our external conduct, but He “weigheth the spirits” (Pro 16:2). Not only so, He requires *us* to scrutinize the springs from which our actions proceed, to examine our motives, to ponder *the spirit* in which we act. God requires truth—that is sincerity, reality—in “the inward parts” (Psa 51:6). Therefore does He command us, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”

3. To “keep” the heart means *to preserve it tender unto sin*. The unregenerate man makes little or no distinction between sin and crime—as long as he keeps within the law of the land, and maintains a reputation for respectability among his fellows, he is, generally speaking, quite satisfied with himself. But it is far otherwise with one who has been born again. He has been awakened to the fact that he has to do with *God* and must yet render a full account unto Him. He makes conscience of a hundred things which the unconverted never trouble themselves about. When the Holy Spirit first convicted him, he was made to feel that his whole life had been one of rebellion against God, of pleasing himself. The consciousness of this pierced him to the quick. His inward anguish far exceeded any pains of body or sorrow occasioned by temporal losses. He saw himself to be a spiritual leper, and hated himself for it, and mourned bitterly before God. He cried, “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa 51:9-10).

Now, it is the duty of the Christian, and part of the task, which God has set him, to see to it that this sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin be not lost. He is to labour daily that his heart be duly affected by the heinousness of self-will and self-love. He is steadfastly to resist every effort of Satan to make him pity himself, think lightly of wrongdoing, or excuse himself in the same. He is to live in the constant realization that the eye of God is ever upon him, so that when tempted, he will say with Joseph, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9). He is to view sin in the light of the cross, daily reminding himself that it was *his* iniquities which caused the Lord of glory to be made a curse for him—employing the dying love of Christ as a motive why he must not allow himself in anything that is contrary to the holiness and obedience which the Saviour asks from all His redeemed.

Ah, my Christian reader, it is no child's play to "keep the heart with all diligence." The easy-going religion of our day will never take its devotees (or rather its *victims!*) to heaven. The question has been asked, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or *who* shall stand in His holy place?" and plainly has the question been answered by God Himself, "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart," etc. (Psa 24:3-4). Equally plain is the teaching of the New Testament, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for *they* shall see God" (Mat 5:8). A "pure heart" is one that hates sin, which makes conscience of sin, which grieves over it, which strives against it. A "pure heart" is one that seeks to keep undefiled the temple of the Holy Spirit, the dwelling-place of Christ (Eph 3:17).

4. To "keep" the heart means *to look diligently after its cleansing*. Perhaps some of our readers often find themselves sorrowfully crying, "Oh, the vileness of my heart!" Thank God if He *has* discovered this to you. If such be so, and you really feel it, it is clear proof that He has made you to differ from the multitudes of blindly indifferent professing Christians all around you. But, dear friend, there is no sufficient reason why your "heart" should *continue* to be vile. You might lament that your garden was overgrown with weeds and filled with rubbish, but need it remain so? We speak not now of your sinful *nature*, the incurable and unchangeable "flesh" which still indwells you, but of your "*heart*," which God bids you "keep." You *are* responsible to purge your mind of vain imaginations, your soul of unlawful affections, your conscience of guilt.

But, alas, you say, "I have no control over such things. They come unbidden and I am powerless to prevent them." So the devil would have you believe! Revert again to the analogy of your garden. Do not the weeds spring up unbidden? Do not the slugs and other pests seek to prey upon the plants? What, then? Do you merely bewail your helplessness? No, you resist them, and take means to keep them under. Thieves enter houses uninvited, but whose fault is it if the doors and windows be left unfastened? Oh, heed not the seductive lullabies of Satan. God says, "Purify your hearts, ye double minded" (Jam 4:8)—that is, one mind for Him, and another for self! one for holiness, and another for the pleasures of sin.

But *how* am I to "purify" my heart? By vomiting up the foul things taken into it, shamefacedly owning them before God, repudiating them, turning from them with loathing. And it is written, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness." By daily renewing our exercise of repentance, and *such* repentance as is spoken of in 2 Corinthians 7:11, "For behold this selfsame thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." By the daily exercise of faith (Act 15:9), appropriating afresh the cleansing blood of Christ, bathing every night in that "fountain" which has been opened "for sin and uncleanness" (Zec 13:1). By treading the path of God's commandments, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit" (1Pe 1:22).

We close this article by pointing out what is obvious to every Christian reader, namely that such a task calls for divine aid. Help and grace need to be earnestly and definitely sought of the Holy Spirit each day. We should bow before God, and in all simplicity say, "Lord, Thou requires me to keep my heart with all diligence, and I feel utterly incompetent

for such a task. Such a work lies altogether beyond my poor feeble powers. Therefore, I humbly ask Thee, in the name of Christ, graciously to grant unto me supernatural strength to do as Thou hast bidden me. Lord, work in me both to will and to do of Thy good pleasure.”

GREAT FAITH

Luke 7:8

“For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it” (Luk 7:8). Do you see what he was doing? He was casting himself upon the Lordship of Christ. Divine grace had so wondrously opened his eyes that he realized he was standing in the presence of the One who said, “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3) and there was light. He said, “Let the earth bring forth” (Gen 1:11) and it brought forth. And He had only to say concerning his servant, “Be healed,” and he knew that he would be healed. He realized that he was standing in the presence of the Lord of creation, the One who had absolute control over all the powers of nature. As Matthew 8:8 puts it, “Speak the word only and my servant shall be healed.” “When Jesus heard these things, he marveled” (Mat 8:10), and as dear old Spurgeon used to put it, “What a marvel it was that the Son of God should marvel.” “He marveled.” It is the only time in the New Testament that we ever read that Christ marveled at anyone. And turning about He said unto the people that followed Him, “I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Mat 8:10).

There is one other instance recorded in the four Gospels where Christ spoke of someone having great faith. I am not going to tell you where it is. There is one other person mentioned in the Gospels who had great faith—only two persons in the Gospels. Will you remember the law of contrast and comparison? Just look up those two passages and work out the details. You will find a series of very striking comparisons and contrasts between them. Many times in the New Testament, we find Christ saying, “O ye of little faith” (Mat 6:30; 16:8; 8:26) Only twice did He acknowledge the greatness of faith.

I am afraid that there are many who have a very erroneous idea of what great faith is. Some of you think that doing a work like George Muller did, that nothing short of that, is great faith. Or going out to the ends of the earth to a foreign country with no guarantee behind you, and trusting in the Lord supplying your needs when you get there is great faith, and nothing else is as great faith. Now, you are wrong, absolutely wrong, and I am very anxious to put you right for the comfort of your own hearts. Great faith, in the light of this incident in this passage here, is first a realization of the Lordship of Christ. That is what great faith is, it is a realization of the Lordship, the absolute sufficiency, the almighty power, of Christ, who only has to speak and it is done.

Second, great faith is evidenced by a lowly submission to Him, an implicit confidence in His word. “Speak the word only” (Mat 8:8). That is how great faith expresses itself.

Listen! Thirdly, great faith is accompanied by great humility, and if you do not have the one, you certainly do not have the other. The man Christ said had great faith is the man who felt that he was not even worthy to approach unto Him. That is the great faith man of the Bible. Great faith is not expressed always in great deeds as men count them. That is a false standard of measurement and that is why I want to disabuse your minds. Some of you little ones in Christ, some of you whom God has made to feel your littleness, have no hope of ever attaining unto great faith. That is because you have a wrong conception of what great faith is. The man of great faith is the man who has been made to realize his own nothingness. That is great faith and Christ says so. It was said to the man who said, "I am not worthy even to come unto you" (Luk 7:7). The Lord said he had got great faith. Great faith is accompanied by great humility. The last thing is that great faith expresses itself in making requests from Christ and counting on Him to grant them.

