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STUDIES
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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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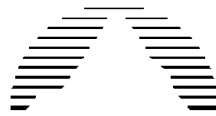
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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CURIOSITY REBUKED

This short article has been suggested by the nature of the inquiries we often receive from correspondents. We welcome questions of a practical character, which evince a desire for a closer walking with God; but those which savour of mere intellectual inquisitiveness we disfavour. The Scriptures were not written for the purpose of gratifying curiosity, but to enlighten and direct conscience, to nourish the soul, and to bring our lives into conformity with God's will. The very first chapter of the Bible is sufficient to evidence that. A score of questions might be asked on its opening verses, but it is more than doubtful if any spiritual edification would result, even if satisfactory answers were obtainable. "In the beginning God created" (Gen 1:1) is addressed unto *faith*; and the very terseness of that declaration is an intimation that any prying attempt to go behind it would be presumptuous. No explanations are made, and we must be content with what God has been pleased to reveal, and curb our curiosity.

There is a spirit of inquiry which is legitimate and praiseworthy, and there is one which is to be deprecated. A drowsy indifference is the mark of an indolent mind, but an inquisitiveness which is directed by carnality is vain and profitless. A careful reading of the four Gospels will at once reveal that the Lord Jesus nowhere set a premium on mental inertia, but rather did He ever seek to stimulate the minds of those around Him. How frequently did He ask His hearers questions, and how often did He condescend to answer theirs! Yet it will be found that He never gave the slightest encouragement to idle curiosity, nor did He deign to furnish answers to queries of no practical moment. When He paid any attention to those who asked vain questions, He at once directed their minds unto matters of more pressing importance. In other words, He rebuked an idle curiosity.

"There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices" (Luk 13:1). Various conjectures have been made by the commentators as to the reason or motive of that statement; and no doubt, there is room for legitimate difference of opinion concerning it. But in the light of what immediately follows, it seems to us that a prying spirit was at least one of the elements which prompted it, that it was tantamount to asking, "*Why* did such a doom overtake those Galileans? Was it because they had been guilty of some heinous crime and were greater sinners before God than others?" In His answer, the Saviour at once revealed that He read their hearts and knew their secret thoughts, but pressed upon them their responsibility: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luk 13:2-3). Instead of concerning yourselves about the fate of others, look well *to yourselves* and make sure that *you* have that godly sorrow which "worketh repentance to salvation" (2Co 7:10).

Again and again, we find our Lord checking the spirit of presumptuous inquiry. When the Pharisees came unto Him saying, "Master, we would see a sign from thee" (Mat 12:38), and when Herod "hoped to have seen some miracle done by him" (Luk 23:8), He refused to gratify either the one or the other. When one asked Him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" we are told that "he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door" (Luk 13:23-25). Look to yourself, instead of speculating about others. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out, "Many are most inquisitive respecting who shall be saved, and who not, than respecting what they shall do to be saved." "Work out *your own* salvation with fear and trembling" (Phi 2:12) is a word which many need to attend unto.

"And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?" (Joh 6:25). That was the language of vain curiosity, its force being, "*How* did you get here?" In the immediate context, it will be seen that on the previous day, Christ had miraculously fed the multitude, after which He departed alone into a mountain, while His disciples entered a ship and crossed over to Capernaum. The people saw there was no other boat there, but later they took shipping and came to Capernaum. When they found Christ there, they were puzzled, wondering *how* He had crossed the sea, and hence, their question. Instead of pandering to their inquisitiveness, the Lord said, "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you" (Joh 6:26-27).

The risen Redeemer announced unto Peter, "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should

glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following"; and curiosity getting the better of him, he asked, "Lord, and what shall this man do?"—or better, "But of this one, what?" "Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? *follow thou me*" (Joh 21:18-22). That was manifestly a rebuking of the spirit which had prompted the apostle's inquiry, being the equivalent of saying, "That is none of your affair." Instead of wanting to know what should befall his brother, let him attend to the performance of duty. If he gave due heed to all that was involved in that precept, "follow me," he would have no time to waste upon useless speculations.

On the very eve of Christ's ascension, after bidding the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, they asked Him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Act 1:6). To which He gave the blunt rejoinder, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power," adding, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Act 1:7-8). How prone we are to pry into that which is none of our business. How ready to engage to idle speculations, instead of the more practical things. The Lord had already given those apostles their orders: Let them attend unto the same and not inquire after times and seasons. How pertinent is this incident to our own day! Many now are possessed of a similar spirit, puzzling over what is yet to take place on this earth. The future is in the hands of God, who will assuredly accomplish His eternal purpose. Our concern should be to be endued with the Spirit and to be faithful witnesses for Christ.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

33. *Philippians 1:8-11, Part 1 (1:8-9)*

It has been well said that, "The prayers of holy men are usually the utmost and choicest expressions of their graces—the drawings forth, or pourings forth rather, of their deepest affections and desires, for things which the light of the Spirit in them judgeth to be most excellent." It must be so, for where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also (Mat 6:21); and the more spiritual a man becomes, the more is his soul engaged with and enraptured by spiritual things, and the more will experimental and practical holiness be his supreme quest. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Mat 12:34); and when a spiritually-minded person has liberty in prayer, he will necessarily seek both for himself and his fellow-saints an increased measure of grace, that his and their eyes may perceive more clearly the inestimable value of Divine things and have their hearts set upon them more constantly, in order that the fruits of righteousness may abound in their lives. Such were the breathings of the apostle on this occasion.

Variety marks all the works of God. Men's intellectual endowments are as unlike each other as their countenances. There are many different types of Christians, though broadly speaking, they may be grouped under two classes—the intelligent or well instructed, and the affectionate. As Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) pointed out: "There are usually extant those two sorts of Christians: affectionate, fond of souls of Christ, but less knowing; others more knowing, yet less passionate; though true Christians both." The primitive times give instances of both. The Corinthians were "enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge" (1Co 1:5), yet their love was weak and low. This is implied by the contrast pointed between knowledge and love in 1 Corinthians 8:2-3, and is still more plainly intimated where the apostle tells them, "yet shew I unto you a more excellent way" (1Co 12:31)—which he proceeded to do in the next chapter, wherein he set forth at length the nature, excellency, and pre-eminence of spiritual love. The fearful imprecation of 1 Corinthians 16:22—found nowhere else in the New Testament—also illustrates this solemn feature of the Corinthians.

In sharp contrast from the Corinthians, the Philippian saints were a more plain and less gifted order of Christians. They were warmly devoted to Christ and His people, but they had an inadequate understanding of His mind. Their affections exceeded their knowledge—as is the case with a few simple but sincere and ardent Christians today. Generally, and markedly so in Christendom now, those with more light in their heads than love in their hearts have greatly outnumbered the others. Now Paul was far from despising or disparaging the case of the Philippian saints, but he longed for a better balance in their characters, and therefore, he prayed (not as most of *us* need to—that our love may increase in proportion to our light, but) that their intelligence might be commensurate with their affections; that their "love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phi 1:9); that both might grow up and develop together; and that they be well-proportioned Christians. Thereby, would they more fully conform unto God who is both "light" (1Jo 1:5) and "love" (1Jo 4:8).

The prayer we are now to be occupied with admits of a simple analysis. We have, first, its *spring*: "How greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:8). It was the fervent affection which the apostle had for these brethren that prompted his supplication on their behalf: The measure of our love for others can largely be determined by the frequency and earnestness of our prayers for them! Second, its *petition*, namely, that their "love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phi 1:9): That was the "one thing" (Psa 27:4) he "desired" on their behalf, the comprehensive blessing which he requested for them. What follows in verses 10-11, we do not regard as additional petitions, but rather as the effects which would result from the granting of his single petition. Thus, we view the contents of verses 10-11 as third, its *reasons*. Grant, Lord, that their love may be more fully informed and directed by heavenly knowledge and wisdom, "that [Revised Version, "so that"] ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Jesus Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Phi 1:10-11).

First, its *spring*. "For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (Phi 1:8). This was a solemn appeal unto the Searcher of hearts of the reality and intensity of his love for them—whether *they* knew or realised it or not, *God* did. Having them in his heart, he longed for their spiritual welfare. He not only longed after them, but "after you all"; and that, with intense affection and good will. And that, "in the bowels [or "compassions"] of Jesus Christ"—with the Hebrews, the "bowels" were

regarded as the seat of affections and sympathy, as the “heart” is with us. This expression, “the compassion of Jesus Christ” is susceptible of a twofold meaning. First, as referring to the personal love which the Redeemer Himself bears unto the redeemed; second, causally, as that tender compassion for His saints which Christ had infused in the heart of His servant. Paul regarded them with something of the tenderness which the Lord Jesus had for them. This was the warmest and strongest expression which he could find to denote the ardour of his attachment.

If then Christ had infused such love in the heart of His servant unto these saints, what must that be in its fulness for them in the heart of Christ: If such be the stream, what the Fountain! What a marvellous change had been produced in the apostle! Most probably, it is that which the Holy Spirit here moved him to emphasise in contrasting the transformation which grace had produced in him from what he was in former days. As Saul of Tarsus, how ferocious and cruel he had been unto the followers of Christ—what havoc he wrought among them by his threatenings and persecutions! What had changed the lion to the lamb? Who had made him so tender and considerate, so solicitous of the welfare of the Philippians? Who had given him such affection for them? The Lord Jesus. “Through the tender mercy of our God” (Luk 1:78) is literally, “the bowels of the mercy of our God.” And cannot each Christian reader—to some extent at least—join with the apostle in calling God as witness of the blessed change which His grace has wrought in him; so that from being self-centered and ice-cold to God’s people, his heart is now compassionate and warm to them, yearning to promote their welfare!

Second, *its petition*. “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” (Phi 1:9), or “sense.” Paul not only prayed for these saints, but he acquaints them with the particular things he requested for them, so that they might know what they should ask for and earnestly strive after. In like manner, his prayer is placed on permanent record in the Word that saints in all generations might be similarly instructed. If we would ascertain that they are our special spiritual needs, if we would be better informed of the specific things we most require to ask for, then we should pay more than ordinary attention to these prayers of the apostles—fixing them in our minds, meditating frequently upon them, begging God to open unto us their spiritual meaning, and to effectually impress our hearts with the same. There is nothing provincial or evanescent about these prayers, for they are suited unto and designed for Christians of all ages, places, and cases. There is a wealth of heavenly treasure in them, which no expositor can exhaust, and which the Holy Spirit will reveal unto humble, earnest, seeking souls. At most, we can but seek to interest the reader in them and attempt to indicate their principal bearings.

Those saints already loved God and His Christ, His Cause, and His people, yet the apostle prayed it might, “abound yet more and more” (Phi 1:9), which illustrates what we pointed out in a previous article. The more we discern the grace of God at work in an individual Christian or church, the greater encouragement have we to make request that a still larger measure of it may be communicated to him or them. T. Goodwin pointed out that the Greek word here used for “abound” is a metaphor taken from the bubbling up and flowing of a spring of water, and showed the force and appropriateness of it. A spring flows naturally and spontaneously, and not by the mechanical efforts of men. Such is Divine love in the soul: It operates freely and not by constraint, it works readily, and requires no urging from without. Where Christ is known to the soul, the heart cannot but be drawn out unto Him and delight in Him. “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves *are taught* of God to love one another” (1Th 4:9). No one can be made to love one another, but where there is love, it will act freely and readily.

“In a fountain, as you take away, still more comes, and the faster it comes; and thus as a spring retains not its water to itself, so love keeps nothing to itself, but it flows to the use and benefit of God and men.” Love is selfless: Its very nature is to give, seeking to promote the glory of God and the good of our fellows. “Again, as fountains have their rise in hills, so this of love is first in God’s heart in heaven: ‘We love him, because he first loved us’ (1Jo 4:19).” As the Psalmist declared, “all my springs [of holiness and comfort] are in thee” (Psa 87:7)—my life, my light, my love, my faith, and all my graces originate from Thee. To the “that your love may abound” (Phi 1:9)—or spring up and flow forth—the apostle added, “yet more and more.” God can ever have enough of our love, nor us of His grace. “Seeth thou a spark of fire, lay straw to it, and then add more fuel, and it ‘abounds more and more’ according to its fuel. Such a thing is grace and love: all the excellencies in God are ordained to be the object, the fuel of it, yet it can neither consume nor be consumed, but abounds still more and more” (T. Goodwin). Thus, if we would receive an enlargement of love, we must be more and more engaged with its Object.

“That your love may abound yet more and more *in knowledge*” (Phi 1:9) As the understanding needs to be enlightened and the conscience informed, so love requires *instructing*. There is a necessary connection between knowledge and love—both for its inception, continuance, and development. A person must be known by us before we can love him. Christ must become a living reality before the heart is drawn out unto Him. There must be a personal and spiritual acquaintance with Divine things before they can be delighted in. Where God is truly known, He is necessarily adored. And as has been pointed out in the last paragraph, if our love for Him is to increase, then we must be more occupied and absorbed with His perfections. But love not only needs to be fed and nourished, it also requires to be taught, if it is to act intelligently. Spiritual love should not act by blind impulse, but be Scripturally-regulated. The Jews had “a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge” (Rom 10:2). They sincerely believed they were serving God when they excluded Christians from their synagogues, and later killed them because they supposed those Christians were heretics (Joh 16:2); yet they erred grievously therein—and their case has been recorded as a solemn warning for us.

It is painful to witness sincere and affectionate believers making mischievous mistakes and falling into wrong courses through lack of light, yet there are many such cases. An ill-instructed and injudicious Christian causes much trouble among his brethren, and often increases the reproaches of the world. That for which Paul here prayed was an intelligent affection in the saints, that a warmheartedness should be based upon and flow from an enlarged perception of Divine things, that they might have a clear apprehension of the just claims of God and of their brethren and sisters in Christ. The world says that ‘love is blind,’ but the love of the Christian should be an enlightened one, well-instructed and directed in all its exercises, effects, and manifestations, by the Scriptures. Unless love be regulated by an enlarged and exact knowledge of the Word, and by that good judgment which is the result of matured discernment and experience, it soon degenerates into fanaticism and ill-advised exertions. An affectionate regard for our brethren is to be far more than a mere sentiment, namely, “love in the truth” (2Jo 1)—love informed and controlled by the Truth.

If there be some Christians who have a good understanding of the Truth, yet are considerably carnal in their walk (1Co 3:1-3), there are others who though defective in knowledge and unsettled in the Faith, yet are warm hearted, having much zeal toward God and His cause, and have a considerable command over their passions. Now God’s people should labour for *both*: “For a good heart, well headed, and a head well hearted” (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677). It was love and zeal for Christ which prompted the apostles to say, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?” (Luk 9:54) when they saw how their Master was slighted; yet it had been a misdirected love and zeal, as His “ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of” (Luk 9:55) showed. Love, then, must be *instructed* if it is to be placed upon its legitimate objects, and restrained from non-permissible ones if it is to be rightly exercised on all occasions; and only from God’s Word can the needed instruction be obtained. Only as love is regulated by light—and light is accompanied by and infused with love—are we well balanced.

“That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all *judgment*” (Phi 1:9). Something more than bare knowledge—even though it be a knowledge of the Word—is needed if love is to be duly regulated and exercised: That something is here termed, “judgment,” or in the margin, “sense.” The facts concerning that word are as follows: In the singular number, it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and only once (Heb 5:14) in its plural form, where it is rendered, “senses.” In Young’s Analytical Concordance, it is defined as “perception, sense, intelligence.” The Revised Version has “discretion,” and Bagster’s Interlinear has “intelligence.” But T. Goodwin—for whom we have a very high regard both as a theologian and expositor, and who was a scholar of the first rank—decidedly favours “sense.” Following our usual custom, we shall take in both meanings. Not only do we need to be thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures, but if we are to make proper use of such knowledge, then *good judgment* is required in the governing of our affections and the ordering of our affairs.

Many are wise in the general principles and in the letter of the Word, but err grievously in the applying of those principles in detail. There is a vast variety of circumstances in our lives which call for much prudence in dealing with them aright. If our hearts are to be properly governed and our ways suitably ordered, much instruction and experience is required. Besides a knowledge of God’s will, the spirit of discretion is needed. There are times when all lawful things are not expedient, and wisdom is indispensable to determine when those times and where those places are, as well as by which persons they may be used or performed. Much indiscretion and folly remain in the best of us. The chief work of our “judgment” is to perceive what becometh the time, the place, the company where we are, that we may order our behaviour aright (Psa

50:23), that we may know how to conduct ourselves in all relations civil and sacred, in work or in recreation; how to conduct ourselves as husbands, fathers, wives, or children, as employers or employees; to know what is good, what is better, and what is best in all situations.

“There is much wisdom and prudence needed to know how to converse profitably and Christianly with all that we have to do. That we judge what is due the Creator, and what is allowed the creature. That we may know how to pay reverence to superiors, how profitably to converse with equals, what compassion to inferiors, how to do them good. Wisdom maketh us profitable in our relations: ‘Husbands, dwell with them [your wives] according to knowledge’ (1Pe 3:7). In short, how to love our friends in God, and our enemies for God; how to converse secretly with God, and how to walk openly before men, how to cherish the flesh that it may not be unserviceable, yet how to mortify it that it may not wax wanton against the spirit; how to do all things in the fear of God in meats and drinks, apparel, and recreations; when to speak and when to hold our peace, when to praise and when to reprove; how to give and how to take, when to scatter and when to withhold” (T. Manton on Psalm 119:66). In its exercises and expressions, love needs to be directed by a good judgment.

“That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in all judgment*” (Phi 1:9). It should be duly noted that this is where the emphasis is placed: “In *all* sense,” to denote this is of the greatest importance—such “knowledge” as has sense added to or joined with it. With his painstaking thoroughness, T. Goodwin showed that this term has a threefold force. First, as added to “knowledge,” the two words signify the same as the term, *faith*. What is faith but a spiritual perception of Divine things? The soul has its “senses,” as well as the body; and as God has placed in our bodies senses suited to the material objects we come into contact with in this outer world—faculties which enable us to cognise them—so when the soul is renewed at regeneration, we receive that which is suited to the objects of the spiritual realm, which capacitates us to cognise and enjoy the same. Faith is metaphorically expressed by each of the bodily senses: “O *taste* and *see* that the LORD is good,” which is explained in the next clause, “blessed is the man that *trusteth* in him” (Psa 34:8). To actually partake of God’s goodness, to perceive in our hearts His excellency, are the acts of faith.

“He that hath an *ear*, let him hear” (Rev 2:7). Those born again have an inward ear, such as the natural man possesses not (Deu 29:3-4). Said the Lord Jesus, “The sheep follow him: for they *know* his voice” (Joh 10:4)—that is, they discern and distinguish His voice by an inward instinct or sense, for it is at once added, “And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him” (Joh 10:5). So with *smelling*: “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: [So to men] To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life” (2Co 2:15-16). There he likens the effects of the ministry to that of vapours or smells. As there are some (like gases in the mines) which suffocate and kill, such is the effect of the Gospel upon the reprobate; and as there are scents (like smelling salts) which revive the fainting, such the Gospel is made unto the elect. So too our sense of touch, “which...our hands have *handled*, of the Word of life” (1Jo 1:1)—all referring to acts of *faith*.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

13. Rahab (2:8-13)

Mark the contrast: "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not" (Heb 11:31). And why? Because a sovereign God had made her to differ from them (1Co 4:7). She was blessed with "the faith of the operation of God" (Col 2:12). Consequently, she "heard" of the works of the Lord not merely with the outward ear, as was the case with all her fellow-citizens, but with the ear of the heart; and therefore, was she affected by those tidings in a very different manner from what they were who heard but "believed not." It is clear from her words, "I know that the LORD hath given you the land" (Jos 2:9) that she had both heard and believed the promises which He had made to Abraham and his seed; and perceiving He was a gracious and giving God, hope had been born in her. Behold then the distinguishing favour of God unto this vessel of mercy, and realise that something more than listening to the Gospel is needed to beget faith in us. "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them" (Pro 20:12). Only those "who hath believed" the "report...to whom is the arm [power] of the LORD revealed" (Isa 53:1). As later with Lydia, so Rahab was one "whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Act 16:14).

Solemn indeed is the warning pointed by the unbelieving fellows of Rahab. So far as we are informed, they heard precisely the same report as she did. Nor did they treat those tidings with either scepticism or contempt; instead, they were deeply affected by them, being terror-stricken. The news of God's judgments upon the Egyptians, and their nearer neighbours, the Amorites, made their hearts melt, as they feared it would be their turn next. If it be asked, "Why did they not immediately and earnestly cry unto God for mercy?" the answer—in part, at least—is supplied by Ecclesiastes 8:11: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Space was given for repentance, but they repented not. A further respite was granted during the six days that the hosts of Israel marched around Jericho, but when nothing happened and those hosts returned to their camp, its inhabitants continued to harden their hearts. Thus it is with the majority of our fellows today, even of those who are temporarily alarmed under the faithful ministry of God's servants.

The workings of natural fear and the stirrings of an uneasy conscience soon subside; having no spiritual root, they endure not. Only one in all that city was Divinely impressed by the account which had been received of the Lord's work in overthrowing the wicked. Ah, my reader, God's sheep have ever been few in number, though usually a great many goats have mingled with them, so that at a distance and to a superficial survey, it seems as though the flock is of a considerable size. Not only few in number, but frequently isolated from each other, one here and one there, for the children of God are "scattered abroad" (Joh 11:52). The experience of David was very far from being a unique one when he exclaimed, "I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top" (Psa 102:6-7). God's thoughts and ways are not as ours, being infinitely wiser and better, though only the anointed eye can perceive that. Not only is His keeping power more strikingly displayed, and glorified by preserving a lone sheep in the midst of goats and wolves, but that solitary believer is cast back the more upon Him.

It is this very *loneliness* of the saint which serves to make manifest the genuineness of his faith. There is nothing remarkable in one believing what all his associates believe, but to have faith when surrounded by sceptics is something noteworthy. To stand alone, to be the solitary champion of a righteous cause, when all others are federated unto evil, is a rare sight. Yet such was Rahab. There were none in Jericho with whom she could have fellowship, none there to encourage her heart and strengthen her hands by their godly counsel and example: All the more opportunity for her to prove the sufficiency of Divine grace! Scan slowly the list presented in Hebrews 11, and then recall the recorded circumstances of each. With whom did Abel, Enoch, Noah have spiritual communion? From what brethren did Joseph, Moses, Gideon receive any help along the way? Who were the ones who encouraged and emboldened Elijah, Daniel, Nehemiah? Then think it not strange that you are called to walk almost if not entirely alone, that you meet with scarcely any like-minded or any who are capable of giving you a lift along the road.

During the past six years, this magazine was sent to quite a number in the different fighting forces, and without a single exception, they informed us that they were circumstanced similarly to Rahab. Some were with the British, some with the Colonials, some with the Americans; some were in the Navy; others in the

Army and Air Force; but one and all reported the same thing—totally cut off from contact with fellow-Christians. The “Studies” were sent to and deeply appreciated by men in both the Royal and the Merchant Navies; but in each instance, they were on different ships, surrounded by the ungodly. How easily the Lord could have gathered them together on to one ship! But He did not. And it was for their *good* that He did not; otherwise, He had ordered things differently (Rom 8:28). Faith must be tried, to prove its worth. Nor is it a hothouse plant, which wilts and withers at the first touch of frost. No, it is hardy and sturdy; and so far from winds and rain dashing it to pieces, they are but occasions for it to become more deeply rooted and vigorous.

The isolation of Rahab appears in that utterance of her’s, “*I know...that your terror is fallen upon us*” (Jos 2:9). They were but naturally and temporarily affected; she, spiritually and permanently so. What she heard came to her soul with Divine power. And again, we say it was God who made her to differ. By nature, her heart was no different from that of her companions; but having been supernaturally quickened into newness of life, she received “with meekness the engrafted word” (Jam 1:21). “All men have not faith” (2Th 3:2), because all are not born again. Faith is one of the attributes and activities of that spiritual life (or nature), which is communicated at regeneration. The firm foundation for faith to rest upon is the sure Word of God, and Divine testimony. By it alone is faith supported and established. Frames and feelings have nothing whatever to do with it, nor is spiritual confidence either begotten or nourished by them. Assurance comes from implicitly receiving the Word into the heart and relying upon it. Such was the case with Rahab: “*I know* that the LORD hath given you the land...*For* we have *heard* how the LORD” (Jos 2:9-10), etc. She received those tidings, “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1Th 2:13). Have you done so, my reader?

Observe well how definite and confident was her language. There was no “if” or “perhaps,” no dubious “I hope”; but instead, a sure and positive, “I know.” That was the knowledge of a saving faith. It is true that faith and assurance may be distinguished, yet they can no more be separated than can faith and obedience. Faith without works is dead, and faith without assurance is something of which this writer can find no mention in Scripture. We refer, of course, to a *saving* faith. What is that faith? It is taking God at His Word, appropriating it unto myself, personally resting upon the testimony of Him who cannot lie. Now I either am doing so, or I am not. If I am, then I must be conscious of so doing, for I cannot possibly be trusting in God and relying on His promise and yet be unaware that I am so doing. Read through the New Testament epistles, and nowhere is there a single passage addressed to saints who questioned their acceptance by God; but everywhere, the language is “*we know*” (2Co 5:1, Gal 4:9, Eph 6:9, Phi 1:6, Col 3:24, 1Th 1:4, 1Pe 1:18-19).

Rahab’s faith was not only accompanied with confidence, but it regulated her actions. The faith of God’s elect is a living, energetic principle, which “worketh by love” (Gal 5:6) and produces fruit to the glory of God. Therein, it differs radically from that nominal and inoperative faith of frothy professors, which goes no deeper than a mere mental assent to the Gospel, and ends in fair but empty words. That faith which is unaccompanied by an obedient walk and abounds not in good works is “dead, being alone” (Jam 2:17). Far different was the faith of Rahab. Of her we read, “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?” (Jam 2:25). This does not mean that her good works was the meritorious ground of her acceptance with God, but that they were the evidence before men that a spiritual principle had been communicated to her, the fruits of which vindicated and approved her profession, demonstrating that she was a member of the household of faith. “Had she said, ‘I believe God is your’s and Canaan is your’s, but I dare not show you any kindness,’ her faith had been dead and inactive, and would not have justified her...Those only are true believers that can find in their hearts to venture for God, and take His people for their people, and cast in their lot among them” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

That is something which needs to be constantly insisted upon in this day of empty profession. A faith which does not issue in conversion is not a saving one; and conversion is a radical change of conduct, a right-about face, a reversal of our former manner of life. Saving faith necessarily involves the relinquishing of what previously occupied the heart, the repudiation of what formerly was trusted in, the abandonment of all that is opposed to the thrice holy God. It therefore involves the denying of self and the forsaking of old companions. It was thus with Abram, who was required to leave his old situation in Ur of Chaldea and follow the call of God. It was thus with Moses, who “refused to be called [any longer] the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for

a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb 11:24-26). It was thus with Ruth, who—in sharp contrast from Orpah—went “back unto her people, and unto her gods,” refusing to forsake Naomi, averring, “thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:15-16). And it was thus with Rahab. A faith which does not relinquish anything and produce a break from former associations is worth nothing.

Yes, Rahab’s faith was a *self-denying* one; and nothing short of that is what the Gospel requires from all to whom it is addressed. Said the Lord Jesus, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mar 8:34); and again, “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luk 14:27). Ah, dear friend, you may profess to “believe John 3:16”; but suffer us to ask, Do you also, do you really, *believe* Luke 14:27? Be honest with yourself: Does your daily walk supply *proof* you do so? The self-denying faith of Rahab appeared in her preferring the will of God to the safety of her country, and in sheltering those two spies before the pleasing of her fellow-citizens. Still more conspicuously did it appear in the venturing of her own life, rather than betray the messengers of Joshua, who were the worshippers of the true God. Her faith in God and love for His people made her scorn whatever scoffs she might be subject to and the dangers threatening her. A saving faith is ready whenever God shall call upon us to part with everything which we hold near and dear in this world. Acts of self-denying obedience are the best and surest evidence of a real spiritual faith.

From the standpoint of natural and temporal considerations, Rahab’s faith cost her something. It induced her “to renounce all her interests among the devoted Canaanites (i.e. doomed to destruction), to venture her life and expose herself to the imminent danger of the most cruel tortures in expressing her love for the people of God” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821). Such is the wonder-working power of the Spirit in a human soul, producing that which is contrary to fallen human nature, causing it to act from new principles and motives, making it to prefer sufferings for Christ’s sake and to endure afflictions by throwing in its lot with His people, than to pursue any longer the vanities of this world. Such was the transformation wrought in Saul of Tarsus, who not only bore with fortitude the persecutions which faith in Christ entailed, but rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer for His sake. Such too has been the blessed fruit borne by the faith of many a converted Jew since then, and many a Gentile, too—especially those in Papish and heathen countries, as the missionary-records abundantly testify. And such in some measure is the case with every converted soul.

In receiving “the spies with peace” (Heb 11:31) Rahab made it manifest that she had a heart for the people of God, and was ready to do everything in her power to assist them. That brief clause summarises all that is revealed in Joshua 2 of her kindly conduct toward the two Israelites. She welcomed them into her home, engaged them in spiritual conversation, made provision for their safety, and refused to betray them. “Her whole conduct manifested a reverential fear of the Lord, an entire belief of His Word, a desire and hope of His favour, an affection for His people, and a disposition to forsake, venture and suffer anything in His cause” (T. Scott). We believe there is a latent reference to her kindness (as well as Abram’s) in Hebrews 13, for the word translated “messengers” in James 2:25 is the one rendered “angels” in Hebrews 13:1-3: “Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” Alas, that so many today instead of so doing, are almost ready to rend each other to pieces over every difference of opinion.

Yet, as we saw in our last, Rahab’s faith—like ours—was not free from defect, for her falsehoods proceeded from one who failed to trust God fully. This illustrates, in a general way, the humbling fact that in our best performances, there is a mingling of frailty and folly. But let it be pointed out that in this matter, her conduct is far from being recorded as an excuse for us to shelter behind. Rather, it is chronicled as a solemn warning, and also to teach us that faith in its beginnings has many blemishes. God bears with much weakness, especially in the lambs of His flock. Those who have faith do not always act faith, but there is often much of the flesh mixed with that which is of the Spirit. Very different is *our* case and situation from that of this young convert from heathendom. Rightly did the editor of M. Henry’s Old Testament commentary point out, “Her views of the Law must have been exceedingly dim and contracted: a similar falsehood told by those who enjoy the light of Revelation, however laudable the motive, would of course deserve much heavier censure.”

“And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you...for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Jos 2:9, 11). Here we find her making an open avowal of that

which the Holy Spirit had secretly wrought in her heart. She acknowledged Jehovah to be the true God, that Israel was the people whom He had loved and owned, and hoped for a place among them. Nothing less is required from the believing sinner today: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom 10:9). The Lord will not own any cowardly and secret disciples. "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Mat 10:32-33). Joseph was not ashamed to confess his God in Egypt, nor Daniel in Babylon; and when Paul stood forth in the midst of the idolatrous crew and soldiers on the ship and told of the reassuring message he had received from the angel of God, he added, "whose I am, and whom I serve" (Act 27:23). Then, no matter where we be, let us not be afraid to show our colours and make known whose banner we serve under.

"Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death" (Jos 2:12-13). Some contracted hearts, in which the very milk of human kindness appears to have congealed, would regard this request of Rahab's as highly presumptuous. Personally, we believe that her soul was so overflowing with gratitude unto the Lord for having saved such an abandoned wretch, that her faith now perceived something of the infinitude of the Divine mercy, and believed that such a God would be willing to show grace to the whole of her family. Nor was she disappointed. Moreover, as M. Henry rightly pointed out, "Those who show mercy may expect to receive mercy." Thus God promised Ebedmelech, in recompense for his kindness to the prophet, that in the worst of times, his "life shall be for a prey" (Jer 39:18).

That this request of Rahab's was something more than an expression of the tenderness of nature is evident from the whole of its tenour. That it was the language of faith appears from her assurance, that without any doubt, Canaan was going to fall before Israel. Her "swear unto me by the LORD" (Jos 2:12) indicates the intelligence of her faith—a solemn oath would clinch the matter. In asking for a "true token," she made request for some pledge of deliverance: The word occurs first in Genesis 9:12, where God announced that the rainbow would be "the token of the covenant." In supplicating for the deliverance of her whole family, she left us an example which we may well follow. It is right that we *should* desire God to show mercy unto those who are near and dear unto us. Not to do so would show we were lacking in natural affection. It only becomes wrong when we ignore God's sovereignty and dictate instead of supplicate. It is blessed to observe that He who has said, "According to your faith be it unto you" (Mat 9:29), responded to Rahab's faith!

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

11c. Its Criteria

Another criterion by which each of us should carefully measure himself is, Am I now a *friend* of God? That is a most pertinent and necessary inquiry, for, as was shown under a considerable variety of expressions when defining the meaning of reconciliation, that term signifies the bringing together of two persons who have previously been alienated, the changing of a state of enmity and hostility unto one of amity and friendship. By nature and by practice, I was the enemy of God, hating and opposing Him; but if a work of grace has been wrought in my soul, then I am now the friend of God, loving and serving Him. As this is a matter of deepest importance—both practically and experimentally—we propose to canvass it in some detail, endeavouring to do so along lines so clear and simple that no exercised soul should have any uncertainty in determining to which class he belongs.

“Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the *Friend* of God” (Jam 2:23). It seems passing strange that scarcely any of the commentators perceived the force of that last clause, interpreting it quite out of harmony with its setting. Most of them see in God’s styling Abraham His “friend” an amazing instance of His sovereign grace and condescension, while a few regard the expression in the light of the extraordinary and intimate communion, which the patriarch was permitted to enjoy with Jehovah. But what is there in the context which paves the way for any such climax? It was in nowise the design of the Holy Spirit in this epistle to portray the wondrous riches of Divine grace, nor to describe the inestimable privileges they confer upon their recipients; rather was it to expose a worthless profession and supply marks of a valid one. James was not moved to refute the legality of Judaism, which insisted that we must do certain things in order to our acceptance by God, but was repelling Antinomianism, showing the worthlessness of a faith which bore no fruit.

In the days of the apostles, as in all succeeding generations, there were those bearing the name of Christians who supposed that a mere intellectual belief of the Gospel was sufficient to secure a passport for Heaven. There is not a little in the New Testament which was expressly written to refute that error, by an insistence upon holiness of heart and strictness of life being necessary in order to evince a saving faith in Christ. The principal design of James was to show that when God justifies or reconciles a sinner to Himself, He also works in that person a disposition which is friendly toward Him, a spirit and attitude which reciprocates His own benignity. In a genuine conversion, an enemy is transformed into a friend to God, so that he loves Him, delights in Him, and serves Him. No one has any right to regard himself as a friend of God, unless he has the character of one and conducts himself accordingly. If I be the friend of God, then I shall be jealous of His honour, respect His will, value His interests, and devote myself to promoting the same; in a word, I shall shew myself friendly (Pro 18:24).

The apostle’s scope is clear enough both from what immediately precedes and follows. In James 2:20, he says, “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” and in verse 24, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” A bare mental assent to the Gospel is worthless, for it affects no change in the heart and walk of the one exercising it. Fair words on the lips are downright hypocrisy, unless they be borne out in our daily conduct. A faith in Christ which conforms not to His image is not the faith of God’s elect. Saving faith produces good works. In verses 8 to 14, the apostle had insisted that the Gospel requires a sincere respect unto all the Divine commandments, while in verses 15-25, he shows what a real faith therein brings forth. This he illustrates first by the illustrious case of Abraham. It is to be duly noted that reference is not here made to the initial act of his faith when the Lord first appeared unto the patriarch in Ur of Chaldea, but rather to that memorable incident on mount Moriah recorded in Genesis 22.

Faith is not a passive thing, but an active principle, operating powerfully within its possessor. “Faith worketh by love” (Gal 5:6). Let those words be carefully pondered. “Faith *worketh*”: It is the very nature of it to do so, for it is a new, living, and powerful energy, imparted to the soul at regeneration. “Faith which worketh by love”—not by fear or compulsion, but freely and gladly. Such was the faith of Abraham: His faith “*wrought* with his works” (Jam 2:22); and it was wrought by love, for it was love to God which moved the patriarch, in obedience to His behest, to lay his dear Isaac upon the altar; and thereby, he attested his friendship to God. “Friendship is the strength of love, and the highest improvement of it. ‘Thy friend’ says Moses, ‘which is as thine own soul’ (Deu 13:6). Friendship is common to and included in all

relations of love. A brother is (or ought to be) a friend; it is but friendship natural. Husband and wife are friends—that knot is friendship conjugal. In Song of Solomon 5, we have an instance of both: Christ called His church Sister, and then Spouse; and not contented with both, though put together, He added another compellation as the top of all, ‘*O friends*’ (Song 5:1).”

In its first working, faith comes to God as an empty-handed beggar to receive from Him; yet if it be a sincere and spiritual faith, it will necessarily form the soul of its possessor unto a correspondent and answerable frame of heart unto God; thus, if I come to Him for pardon and peace, and receive the same, the reflex or consequence will be the exercise of a filial and friendly spirit in me toward God. Faith is made the grateful recipient of all from God; yet on that very account, it becomes the worker of love in the soul. In James 2:21-23, the apostle shows what a powerful working thing faith is: It moulded Abraham’s heart into friendship with God. A friend is best known or most clearly manifested in a time of *trial*. Thus it was in Genesis 22: The Lord there put Abraham to the proof, bidding him, “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest...and offer him there for a burnt offering.” And God so approved of his ready response as to henceforth own him as His “friend”—see 2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8; and since He only calls things as they actually *are*, Abraham had truly conducted himself as such.

Let it next be pointed out that Abraham’s case is not to be regarded as an exceptional or extraordinary one, but rather as a representative and typical one. As Romans 4:11 and 16 plainly teaches, Abraham is a pattern and father unto all believers. Those who are his spiritual children (Rom 9:7-8) and seed (Gal 3:7, 29) “walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham” (Rom 4:12) and “do the works of Abraham” (Joh 8:39), and they too are owned by the Lord as His “friends” (Joh 15:14). Observe that in both 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8, it is “the seed of Abraham thy friend,” while in James 2:21, Abraham is expressly presented in that passage as “our father.” Thus, this blessed appellation pertains to all his spiritual seed. For one to be owned by God as His “friend” imports that person has a friendly disposition of heart and deportment of life toward Him, as one friend bears unto another. Wherever a saving faith exists, it frames the heart of its possessor into a friend-like temper and brings forth a friend-like carriage in our life.

“He was called the Friend of God” (Jam 2:23). While that indeed be a title of unspeakable dignity and honour, yet—though scarcely any appear to have perceived it—it is also (and chiefly) expressive of the *inward disposition* of a saint toward God, describing his love for Him and his bearing toward Him. By our carriage and conduct, we exemplify and ratify that character. The faith which justifies a sinner before God is one that worketh by love and is expressed in an obedient walk, earnestly endeavouring to please God in all things; and therefore, the character and carriage of a Christian is appropriately expressed under the notion of *friendship*. In a truly marvellous way had God befriended Abraham, and the patriarch manifested his appreciation by conducting himself suitably thereto. It is the law of friendship to answer it again with friendship: “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Pro 18:24); and to *Him* we must show ourselves supremely friendly, doing nothing to displease or dishonour Him, but exercising subjection to Him, delighting in Him, and promoting His interests.

We will pass now from the general to the particular and consider some of the more obvious characteristics and marks of friendship, together with the duties and offices to be performed, as are proper and suited to such a relationship—friendship, too, combines both privilege and duty, and we should be dishonest if we confined our remarks to one of them only. First of all, then, between two friends, there necessarily exists a *close bond of union*, a oneness of nature, or at least similarly of disposition, so that they share in common the same likes and dislikes—not perhaps in every detail, but generally and essentially so. There can be no congeniality where there is no singleness and harmony of nature. It is the gift and dwelling of the Holy Spirit within the Christian which is the bond of union, and which capacitates him to hate what God hates and love what He loves. It is that oneness of nature and disposition which causes two persons to have a mutual regard and affection, and to look favourably on one another, in which the very essence of friendship consists. From all eternity, God set His heart upon him, and now the reconciled one has given his heart to Him.

One has a very *high regard* for an intimate and proved friend. That God greatly values and esteems those whom He reconciles to Himself is clear both from His declarations concerning them and what He has done for them. He prizes them above the world and orders all things in its governance for the furthering of their good. “For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee” (Isa 43:3-4). What a wondrous and blessed testimony is that! “He delivered me, because he

delighted in me” (2Sa 22:20). “How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!” (Song 7:6) is His language respecting His Spouse; and She in return declares, “I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste” (Song 2:3). So highly does the saint prize God in Christ that he avers, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25).

Since real and warm friends highly value and delight in one another, it is their chief pleasure to *share each other's company*, being happiest when together. Thus it is between the reconciled soul and his heavenly Friend: “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1Jo 1:3). In nothing can the Christian more fitly evince his friendship with God than by a diligent endeavour to maintain a constant and intimate communion with Him. In addition to the regular tribute of his daily worship, if the soul of the believer be in a healthy condition, he will take occasion to frequently come into God's presence on purpose to have communion with Him. Friendship is best maintained by visits, and the more free and less occasioned by urgent business, the more are they appreciated. David, owned as a man after God's own heart (Act 13:22)—the equivalent of Abraham's being called His “friend”—said, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee...To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee...My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips” (Psa 63:1-5). *That* was the language of pure friendship.

Intimate converse and close communications characterise the dealings of one warm friend to another. Things which I would not discuss with a stranger—personal matters—I would be silent upon to a mere acquaintance, I freely open to one I delight in. It is thus between God and the reconciled soul. It is so on *His* part: “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant” (Psa 25:14). “And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face [without restraint or reserve] as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Exo 33:11)—thus Scripture makes this freedom of communications one of the marks of spiritual friendship. So, too, we find the Lord Jesus saying to His beloved apostles, “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you *friends*; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (Joh 15:15). Do you, my reader, know anything of this experience? Are you in such close touch with Him as to make this (morally) possible? It is through His Word, God now speaks to us: Do you know what it is for your heart to “burn” while He talks with you by the way and “opens” to you the Scriptures (Luk 24:32)?

Yet this intimate conversation is not one-sided, but is reciprocal: The reconciled one finds liberty in opening his heart unto his heavenly Friend, as he does to none other. This is his holy privilege: “Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him” (Psa 62:8). How do you treat your best earthly friend? When you have not seen him for a season, how warmly you welcome him, how freely you express your pleasure at meeting him again, what utterances of good will and delight do you make! Equally free should the saint be with his Lord. He should pour out his heart with joy and gladness. He should unrestrainedly avow his delight in the Lord. He should bring with him a sacrifice of praise—that is, the fruit of his lips, giving thanks (Heb 13:15). Such will not only be acceptable unto Him, but it will give Him pleasure. It is on these occasions that He says, “Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue” (Song 4:11)—such communications are sweet unto Me.

But there are times when one is so sorely troubled and weighed down that his expressions of delight and joy toward a loving friend will be restrained. True, yet that only affords occasion for another attribute of friendship to be exercised—namely, to freely *unburden his heart* unto him. Thus it is with the reconciled soul and God: He will speak to Him more freely and make mention of things which he would not to his nearest and dearest earthly friend. This is the Christian's privilege: To ease his heart before God. Said the Psalmist, “I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble” (Psa 142:2); and He deems Himself honoured by such confidences. The more communion there is betwixt God and us over our distresses, the more will He discover our secret faults, and the more will we disclose again to Him. The one is a sure consequence of the other: After speaking of our fellowship with God in 1 John 1:3, it is added, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1Jo 1:9). One great part of our friendship with God is the taking of Him fully into our confidence, as on His part, it is to pardon us.

Having confidence in a friend, we freely *seek his help and advice*. When describing a close friend, David said, “We took sweet counsel together” (Psa 55:14). And that is how we ought to treat our heavenly Friend, making use of Him, counting upon His favour and help in all our concerns. That is both our privi-

lege and duty: "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Pro 3:6)—seek His counsel, give yourself up to His guidance. That little (and large) word "all" includes small things, as well as great! Therein the friendship of God excels that of others: We are loath to trouble an earthly friend about trifles, but we may spread the smallest matter before Him who has numbered the very hairs of our head. Therein we honour Him, for it is an acknowledgement on our part that He ruleth all things, even the very least.

One is very careful in seeking to avoid giving any offence unto a dear friend and doing all in our power to please him—apply that Godwards, and it has reference to our *obedience*. Therefore, do we find Christ saying, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Joh 15:14). That "if" is addressed to responsibility and is the testing of our profession: It is by obedience we evidence and approve ourselves to be His *friends*. Obedience goes much further than resisting sin and abstaining from wicked works: "Cease to do evil; Learn to do well" (Isa 1:16-17). It is not sufficient to forbear the commission of sin if we perform not our duty. The fig tree was cursed not because it bore evil fruit, but because it was barren. There are many who, like the Pharisees, pride themselves on negations: "I am not profane, immoral, irreligious." But that gives them no title to regard themselves as friends of Christ: Are they actually doing the things He has enjoined—that is the crucial test and characteristic mark of the reconciled.

Observe, it is not "ye shall be," but "ye are my friends, if ye do" (Joh 15:14). It is the doers of His Word whom the Lord owns as His friends: They who are as diligent in practicing His precepts as in shunning what He hates. And their obedience is not that of mercenary legalists, nor the forced work of slaves, but is the voluntary and joyful response of loving and grateful hearts. An action may have the appearance of friendship when there is nothing of good will behind it. But none can impose upon the Lord—He knows when there is inward conformity to His will, as well as outward compliance when a person's "good works" are those of the formalist, or of a loving heart. If they be the latter, we shall not pick and choose between His precepts, but "do *whatsoever* he commandeth" (Job 37:12): "Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it *for thee*" said Jonathan to his friend (1Sa 20:4). That is indeed the longing and aim of every reconciled soul, but his infirmities and distempers often cause him to go halting.

Another characteristic or mark of friendship is *confidence*: "Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted" (Psa 41:9) said David. Nothing more readily undermines friendship than the harbouring of suspicions. It is because we have proved the staunchness and affection of another that we count him our friend, and rely upon him. Thus it is with a reconciled soul and God. He has shown Himself to be graciously disposed unto me, given me innumerable proofs of His lovingkindness and faithfulness, and that draws out my heart in confidence toward Him. The more I trust in Him and look to Him for help, the more is He pleased and honoured by me, and the more do I show myself to be His friend. "Cast thy burden upon the LORD" (Psa 55:22) is His blessed invitation, for He desires not His child should be weighted down by it. "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1Pe 5:7). God would have His people act toward Him with holy familiarity, confiding in Him at all times, counting upon His goodness, reposing themselves in His love, making known their requests with thanksgiving, expecting Him to supply all their need. That is both our privilege and duty if we sustain to God the relationship of friends.

Where there is full confidence in a tried and trusted friend, we place a *favourable construction* upon even those actions of his which may puzzle and perplex us. We refuse to impute evil to or harbour suspicions against him. Any fancied slight he has given, any apparent unconcern or unkindness he has shown, anything in his letters which we do not understand, we leave until we again see him face to face, quietly assured that a satisfactory explanation will be forthcoming from him. Thus it is with the saint and his heavenly Friend. Some of His dealings sorely try and exercise him, yet he doubts not that He is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. Some of His dispensations are exceedingly trying to flesh and blood, but a believing soul will "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace," realizing that "behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face" (William Cowper, 1731-1800, hymnodist). Thus it was with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). Love "thinketh no evil" (1Co 13:5), but favourably interprets the most mysterious of God's ways, knowing that He is making all things work together for our good.

There is no real reason why anyone of ordinary intelligence should remain in doubt as to his spiritual state. If you faithfully examine yourself and honestly measure yourself by the different criteria we have mentioned in these articles, you should have no difficulty in determining whether you be still alienated from God, or reconciled to Him. If you be at peace with Him, then you are making common cause with

Him, warring against His foes—the Devil, sin, the world. If you be reconciled to God, then you are His friend, evidencing the same by a friendlike disposition and deportment, conducting yourself toward Him, treating with Him, as one friend does with another. The Lord so add His gracious blessing that in His light, each of us may see light.

THE GREAT CHANGE

Some of our older readers may recall a book which made quite a stir in the religious world, especially the Arminian sections of it, some forty years ago. It was entitled, "Twice-born Men," and was written in a somewhat racy and sensational style by a well-known journalist, Edward Harold Begbie (1871-1929). It purported to describe some startling "conversions" of notorious profligates and criminals under the evangelistic efforts of the Salvation Army and City Missions. Whether or not the reader is acquainted with that particular book, he has probably read similar accounts of reformations of character. He may, as this writer, have personally heard the "testimonies" of some unusual cases. We recall listening unto one in New York City some twenty-five years ago: A man past middle age who had "spent twenty Christmas days in prison," who had been delivered from a life of crime, attributing his deliverance to the amazing grace of God and the efficacy of the redeeming blood of Christ, and who—to use one of his Scriptural quotations—had been given "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isa 61:3).

Many, if not all, of those reformed characters testify that so thorough was the work of grace wrought in them that their old habits and inclinations had been completely taken away, that they no longer had the slightest desire to return to their former ways, that all longing for the things which once enthralled them was gone, declaring that God had made them new creatures in Christ, that old things were passed away, and all things had become new (2Co 5:17). Personally, we do not deem ourself competent to pass an opinion on such cases. Certainly, we would not dare assign any limit to the wonder-working power of God; nevertheless, we should need to be in close contact with such people for some considerable time and closely observe their daily walk, in order to be assured that their goodness was something less evanescent than "a morning cloud, and as the early dew," which quickly vanishes (Hos 6:4). On the one hand, we should keep in mind the miraculous transformation wrought in the fierce persecutor of Tarsus; and on the other, we would not forget Matthew 12:43-45.

But this we may safely affirm, that such cases as those alluded unto above are not general or even common, and certainly must not be set up as the standard by which we should ascertain the genuineness of conversion—be it our own or another's. Though it be blessedly true that in His saving operations, God communicates subduing and restraining grace to the soul—to some a greater measure, to others a lesser—yet it is equally true that He does not remove the old nature at regeneration or eradicate "the flesh." Only One has ever trodden this earth who could truthfully aver "the prince of this world [Satan] cometh, and hath nothing in me" (Joh 14:30)—nothing combustible which his fiery darts could ignite. The godliest saint who has ever lived had reason to join with the apostle in sorrowfully confessing: "When I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom 7:21). It is indeed the Christian's duty and privilege to keep himself from all outward sins: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:16); yet as the very next verse tells us, the flesh is *there*, operative, and opposing the spirit.

But we will go further. When such persons as those referred to above appropriate 2 Corinthians 5:17 to describe their "experience," no matter how well suited its language may seem to their case, they are making an unwarrantable and misleading use of that verse; and the consequence has been that many of God's dear children were brought into sad bondage. Countless thousands have been led to believe that if they truly received Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour, such a radical change would be wrought in them; that henceforth, they would be immune from evil thoughts, foul imaginations, wicked desires, and worldly lusts. But after they *did* receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour, it was not long ere they discovered that things inside them were very different from what they expected—that old inclinations were still present, that internal corruptions now harassed them, and in some instances, more fiercely than ever before. Because of the painful consciousness of "the plague of his own heart" (1Ki 8:38), many a one has drawn the conclusion that he was never soundly converted, that he was mistaken in believing he had been born of God, and great is their distress.

Now one very important and necessary part of the work to which God has called His servants is "take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people" (Isa 57:14 and compare Isa 62:10); and if he would faithfully attend unto this part of his duty, then he must make it crystal clear to his hearers—believers and unbelievers—that God has nowhere promised to eradicate indwelling sin from the one who believes the Gospel. He *does* save the penitent and believing sinner from the love, the guilt, the penalty, and the reign-

ing power of sin; but He does not in this life deliver him from the presence of sin. The miracle of God's saving grace does indeed effect a real, a radical, and a lasting change in all who are the subjects of it—some being more conscious of the same and giving clearer evidence of it, and some (who previously led a moral, and perhaps religious, life) less so; but in no single instance does He remove from the being of that person "the flesh" or evil principle, which he brought with him when he entered this world. That which was born of the flesh is still flesh—though that which was born of the Spirit is spirit (Joh 3:6).

Not that the minister of the Gospel must swing to the opposite extreme and teach, or even convey the impression, that the Christian can expect nothing better than a life of defeat while he be left in this scene; that his foes—both internal and external—are far too mighty for him to successfully cope with. God does not leave His dear child to cope with those foes in his own power, but strengthens him with might by His Spirit in the inner man; yet he is required to be constantly on his guard, lest he grieve the Spirit and give occasion for Him to suspend His operations. God tells the saint, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2Co 12:9), but that grace must be *sought* (Heb 4:16) and *used* (Luk 8:18); and if it be sought humbly and used aright, then "he giveth more grace" (Jam 4:6), so that he is enabled to fight the good fight of faith. Satan is indeed mighty, but there is one yet mightier: "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1Jo 4:4); and therefore is the Christian called upon to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph 6:10); and though while severed from Christ, he can produce no fruit (Joh 15:5), yet strengthened by Christ, he "*can* do all things" (Phi 4:13). Christians are "overcomers" (1Jo 2:13, 5:4; Rev 2:7).

Thus we see once more that there is a balance to be preserved: Avoiding at the one extreme the error of sinless perfectionism, and at the other, that of spiritual defeatism. Truth is to be presented in its Scriptural proportions, and not dwelt unduly on either its gloomy or its bright side. When one is regenerated, he is effectually called "out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1Pe 2:9); yet if an unconverted soul reading those words forms the idea that should God quicken him, all ignorance and error will be immediately dispelled from his soul, he draws an unwarrantable conclusion and will soon discover his mistake. The Lord Jesus promises to give rest unto the heavily-laden soul which comes to Him, but He does not thereby signify that such an one will henceforth enjoy perfect serenity of heart and mind. He saves His people from their sins (Mat 1:21), yet not in such a way that they will have no occasion to ask for the daily forgiveness of their transgressions (Luk 11:4). It is not that His salvation is an imperfect one, but that it is not completely experienced or entered into in *this* life, as such passages as Romans 13:11, 1 Peter 1:5 show. The "best wine" is reserved into the last. Glorification is yet future.

Above we have said that when such characters as those mentioned in the opening paragraph appropriate 2 Corinthians 5:17 to describe their "experience," they make an unwarrantable and misleading use of that verse. They are not the only ones who do so, and since many have been stumbled by failing to understand that verse aright, a careful exposition of it is called for. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2Co 5:17). It must be admitted in all fairness that the *sound* of those words decidedly favours those who claim that such a miracle of grace has been wrought in them, that the old nature with its evil propensities was eradicated when they were born again. But in view of the very different experience of the vast majority of God's children of the last two thousand years—of whom we have any reliable knowledge—must we not pause and ask, Is *that* really the *sense* of the verse? If so, how shall we account for the actual history of the most eminent Christians? And if not, what other meaning can we legitimately ascribe to that verse? Probably there are few of our readers who have not been perplexed by its language.

The careful student will observe that we have *omitted* the opening word of 2 Corinthians 5:17, which is done eight times out of ten by those who quote it; nor are we acquainted with any exposition that satisfactorily explains its force. "*Therefore* if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Obviously, that "therefore" is where we must begin in any critical examination of the verse. It indicates that a conclusion is here drawn from a foregoing premise, and tells us this verse is not to be regarded as a thing apart, complete in itself, but rather as intimately related to something preceding. On turning back to verse 16, we find that it, in turn, opens with "Wherefore" (the same Greek word being used), which at once serves to *classify* the passage, indicating that it is a didactic or *doctrinal* one, wherein the apostle is presenting an argument, or a reasoned-out train of thought; and not a hortatory passage wherein a call unto duty is made, or a biographical passage in which an experience of the soul is delineated. Unless that key be used, the passage remains locked to us.

The key is hung upon the door by the presence of its introductory “therefore” or “wherefore”; and if it be ignored, and instead, we force the door, then its lock is strained, or its panels and hinges broken. In other words, the interpretation given to it will be a strained and unsatisfactory one. And such has indeed been the case with those who sought to explain its meaning *without* giving any due weight to—using—the very word on which the verse turns. Disregarding the opening “therefore,” it has been commonly assumed that 2 Corinthians 5:17 is speaking of the miracle of regeneration and describing what is thereby effected in the one experiencing the same. But those who gave the verse that meaning at once felt themselves faced with difficulties, and were obliged to whittle down its terms or qualify its language—for it is an undeniable fact, a matter of painful consciousness to Christians, that though some of the “old things” which characterised them in their unregeneracy have “passed away,” yet others of them have *not* done so, nor have “*all* things” yet become new within them.

In his commentary on 2 Corinthians, one otherwise excellent expositor tells us: “In the Old Testament [Isaiah 43:18-19; 65:17] the effects to be produced by the coming of the Messiah are described as a making all things new. The final consummation of the Redeemer’s kingdom in heaven is described in the same terms, ‘he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new’ (Rev 21:5). *The inward spiritual change* in every believer is set forth in the same words, because it is the type and necessary condition of this great cosmical change. What would avail any conceivable change in things external, if the heart remained a cage of unclean birds? The apostle therefore says that if any man be in Christ, he experiences a change *analogous* to that predicted by the prophet, and like to that which we still anticipate when earth shall become heaven. ‘Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new’ (2Co 5:17). Old opinions, plans, desires, principles, and affections are passed away; new views of truth, new principles, new apprehensions of the destiny of man, and new feelings and purposes fill and govern the soul.”

It is accrediting just such extravagant statements as the above—which is a fair example of those made by many other good men who have held influential positions in the churches—that have brought so many of God’s little ones into cruel bondage, for they know full well that no such great change has been wrought in them as like unto that which will obtain on the new earth, concerning which God assures us, “there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie,” and where “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev 21:27, 4). We make so bold as to say that the Christian experience of that expositor falsified his own assertions. “Old opinions and plans” many indeed pass away when a person is soundly converted, but it is *not true* that old “desires, principles, and affections” pass away—on the contrary, they remain, are active, and plague him to the end of his course; otherwise, there would be no corruptions for him to resist, no lusts which he is exhorted to mortify.

It is really surprising to find some excellent men—whose writings are generally most helpful, and whose memories we revere—uttering such absurdities when interpreting 2 Corinthians 5:17 (The explanation is that, like ourself, they too were compassed with infirmity). Another of them wrote of the Christian: “He concludes that he is in Christ, because he is ‘a new creature.’ He finds ‘old things passed away, and all things become new.’ His old secure, benumbed, unfaithful conscience is passed away. His old perverse, stubborn, rebellious will; he has a new will. His old strong, sensual, corrupt, unbelieving, impenitent heart is gone...his old disordered, misplaced, inordinate affections...He has new thoughts, new inclinations, new desires, new delights, new employments.” True, he closes his paragraph by saying, “sometimes (i.e. formerly) carnal, but now in some measure spiritual; sometimes worldly, but now in some degree has his conversation in Heaven; sometimes profane, but now in part holy”—which not only virtually contradicts his previous sentences, but serves to illustrate what we said above about men creating their own difficulties when ignoring the key to a passage, and being obliged to tamper with its terms to make them fit their interpretations.

The Greek word for “passed away” is a very strong one, as may be seen from such passages as Matthew 5:18, 24:34; James 1:10; 2 Peter 3:10, and signifies (not from its etymology, but its *usage*) a removal, a making an end of. Whatever be the “old things” referred to in 2 Corinthians 5:17, they are not merely subdued, or temporarily put to sleep, only to waken again with fresh vigour, but are “passed away”—*done with*. Therefore, to define those “old things” as “old affections, old dispositions of Adam”—as still another theologian does—is utterly misleading, and one had supposed his own spiritual history had taught him better than to make such an assertion. An older writer is somewhat more satisfactory when he says, “By old things, he means all those corrupt principles, self ends, and fleshly lusts belonging to the carnal state, or the

old man; all these are 'passed away,' not simply and perfectly, but only in part at present, and wholly in hope and expectation hereafter." The very fact that such a frittering of "passed away" was deemed necessary makes us highly suspicious of his definition of the "old things"; and should make us search for an alternative one.

CONFESSION OF SIN

This article is by Joshua Caryl (1602-1673, a.k.a. Joseph Caryl).

“I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?” (Job 7:20). Though to speak a general confession be an easy matter and every man’s duty, yet to make a genuine confession is a hard matter and a work beyond man. As no man can say (in a spiritual sense) Jesus is the Lord, “but by the Holy Ghost” (1Co 12:3), so no man can say (in a holy manner) I have sinned, but by the Holy Spirit. Good and bad, believers and unbelievers, speak often the same words, but they cannot speak the same things, nor from the same principles: nature speaks in the one; in the other, grace. One may say very passionately he hath sinned, and sometimes almost drown his words in tears; but the other saith repentingly, “I have sinned,” and floods his heart with godly sorrows.

The general confessions of the saints have these four things in them: 1. Besides the fact, they acknowledge the blot: that there is much defilement and blackness in every sin; that it is the pollution and abasement of the creature. 2. They confess the fault: that they have done very ill in what they have done, and very foolishly, even like a beast that hath no understanding. 3. They confess a guilt contracted by what they have done: that their persons might be laid liable to the sentence of the Law for every such act, if Christ had not taken away the curse and condemning power of it. Confession of sin (in the strict nature of it) puts us into the hand of justice; though through the grace of the new covenant, it puts us into the hand of mercy. 4. Hence the saints confess all the punishments threatened in the Word to be due to sin, and are ready to acquit God whatsoever He hath awarded against sinners—see Daniel 9:7.

The manner in which saints confess sin widens the distance between theirs and the general confessions of wicked men. The saints confess *freely*: Acknowledgements of sin are not extorted by the pain and trouble which seizeth on them, as in Pharaoh, Saul, Judas. But when God gives them best days, they are ready to speak worst of themselves; when they receive most mercies from God, then He receives most and deepest acknowledgments of sin from them. They are never so humbled in the sight of sin, as when they are most exalted in seeing the salvations of the Lord. The goodness of God leads them to repentance—they are not driven to it by wrath. *Feelingly*: When they say they have sinned, they know what they say. They taste the bitterness of sin, and groan under the burdensomeness of it, as it passes out in confession. A natural man’s confessions run through him as water through a pipe, which leaves no impression or scent there, nor do they any more taste what sin is than the pipe doth of what relish water is. *Sincerely*: They mean what they say—see Psalm 32:2. The natural man casts out his sin as seamen cast their goods overboard in a storm, which in the calm, they wish for again. *Believingly*: While they have an eye of sorrow upon sin, they have an eye of faith upon Christ. Judas said he had sinned in betraying innocent blood, but instead of washing in that blood, he defiled himself with his own. No wicked man ever mixed faith with his sorrows, or believing with confession. —*Joseph Caryl, 1645*

