

CHRISTIAN TRUTH VOLUME 8

by P. Wilson, R.G. Rule, C. Buchanan

A collection of articles and writings by P. Wilson, R.G. Rule, C. Buchanan from Christian Truth Volume 8, covering various biblical topics and Christian teaching.

94 Chapters

Table of Contents

0. Christian Truth Volume 8
1. 1 Peter 2
2. Meditation on 1 Timothy 3:16
3. The Actings and Leadings of the Spirit of God
4. Are All Unserved People "Servants of Satan"? a Reader Inquires
5. Avoiding the Point
6. Blessings of Jacob and Moses
7. Brussels Pact: Russia, Israel, Arabs, Egypt
8. Changes in a Decade: the Editor's Column
9. The Child of Resurrection: Practical and Needful Lessons From the Shunnamite
10. Christ Preached
11. Christ's Reign
12. Conflict in Heavenly Places
13. Day of Small Things
14. Dead and Buried
15. Declension and Its Course
16. Devotedness of Heart
17. The Divine Anathema
18. Earth and Man: the Editor's Column
19. Election and Predestination: the Editor's Column
20. Explanations
21. Ezra: Restoration From Babylon
22. Faith's Ground of Confidence
23. Fingers of a Man's Hand
24. For the Latter Days
25. A Form
26. Frankincense
27. Galatians 3:13: a Reader Inquires
28. The God of Peace
29. God's Elect
30. God's King: the Son of Man
31. Good Title and Sound Practice
32. Grace Be With You
33. The Holy Scriptures
34. The Holy Scriptures: Part 1
35. The Holy Scriptures: Part 2
36. How Do You Worship?
37. International Alignment: the Editor's Column
38. Isaiah 53:2: Extract From a Letter

39. I've Lost Him: Eternal Security
40. Jesus
41. Jews Immigration to Israel: the Editor's Column
42. Josiah and His Days: "After All This"
43. Knowledge and Practice
44. The Law of Liberty
45. Light and Love
46. Live Thou and Thy Children of the Rest
47. The Lord's Messenger With the Lord's Message
48. Brief Thoughts on Malachi
49. The Man Whose Eyes Were Opened: the Life, Death, and Parables of Balaam
50. A Man's Folly and a Woman's Faith: Nabal and Abigail
51. Martha and Mary
52. The Martyr Stephen: Christianity Exemplified
53. Maryolatry: the Editor's Column
54. Meanings of the Symbols of the Tabernacle: Vessels
55. The Nature and End of Suffering
56. Noah's Preaching
57. Original Sin
58. Passover or Pesach: the Editor's Column
59. The Passover Recorded Seven Times: the Editor's Column
60. The Path of Peace: a Word for Troubled Souls
61. The Person of the Son
62. Peter's Restoration: the Question, Answers, and Commission
63. The Pharisee, Publican, and a Man in Christ
64. Philadelphia and Laodicea
65. Reconciliation
66. Reformation Is Not Cure
67. A Rejected but Coming Christ
68. Restoration After a Fall
69. The Restoration From Babylon
70. Resurgent Protestantism: the Editor's Column
71. China, Russia, and Satan's Man: the Editor's Column
72. Satan and His Workings
73. Scripture As a Whole
74. The Secret of Success
75. Self-Surrender: Part 1
76. Self-Surrender: Part 2
77. The Seven Churches
78. Sin and Superstition
79. As Sorrowful yet Always Rejoicing
80. Stellar Universe: the Editor's Column

- 81.** A Stronghold
- 82.** The Surrender of Love
- 83.** The Sympathy of Jesus
- 84.** They Believed God
- 85.** Thomas ... Called Didymus
- 86.** Transportation
- 87.** Truth Commends Itself
- 88.** The Two Rich Men
- 89.** Unity or Union
- 90.** The Valley of the Shadow of Death
- 91.** A Wise Choice ... That Good Part
- 92.** The Word "Godhead" in Scripture
- 93.** The Word of God

Christian Truth Volume 8

1 Peter 2

The second chapter of 1 Peter opens very remarkably. To these persons(mentioned in the first chapter) who had obeyed the truth and were born again, he writes that they should lay aside all malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies, and evil speakings. What! is it possible that true Christians can have these things? Certainly, or they would not be told to lay them aside, for the new birth is not an alteration of the old evil nature, but is something additional - "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; J.N.D. Trans.). Hence our Lord said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Here are two natures. The malice, guile, etc., are the actings of the old nature, and they must be laid aside. It is very humbling to feel that we still have such things, but it is too true; and in order for growth (mark, not security, but Christian progress, growth in grace), these evil lusts and workings must be laid aside, and the Word of God constantly fed upon. If malice, guile, etc., are not laid aside, the Spirit will be grieved, and there will be little or no appetite for the truth. By disallowing evil, and drinking in the Word as a newborn child does the milk, there will be growth. And as the Word of God always leads the heart to Christ, because it testifies of Christ, so will the soul thus feeding be brought into constant association with Christ. Hence the next words, "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious." It is impossible, perhaps, to overrate the importance of this truth in the present day of looseness and indifference. If then there would be growth, spiritual progress, in a soul who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, there must be laying aside of the lusts of the flesh, a drinking in the sincere milk of the Word, and personal intercourse with Christ Himself. Let us seriously ponder these three things.

But further. Every Christian is a priest. In the next verse we read, "Ye also as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood." The upward action of spiritual life and energy will be in offering "up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." The outward action of the Christian we find in the ninth verse to be expressing Christ, living Christ, showing "forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

The result of all this knowledge of Christ is such fellowship with Him as to make us feel that we are strangers here where He had no rest; a stranger where He was, and still is, rejected-where He could say, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." Matt. 8:20. A Christian is necessarily a pilgrim also, because he is going home. He is hasting on to the possession of the heart's dearest object. The knowledge of Christ necessarily makes him long to see and be with Him.

" 'Tis the treasure I've found in His love,

That has made me a pilgrim below."

May we know what it is, not only to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory in Him whom having not seen we love, but looking to Him, abiding in Him, holding personal intercourse with Him, our souls may gratefully worship, faithfully serve and honor God, and take our true place as

not of the world, but strangers and pilgrims who cannot be fully satisfied till we are with Him and like Him in glory.

Meditation on 1 Timothy 3:16

There are several mysteries spoken of in the Word of God, but the one spoken of here is that which will never, in time or eternity, be fully fathomed by created beings - the mystery of godliness or piety. God has been pleased to show the depth of His love in the gift of His own Son (John 3:16). The Father has been fully revealed in and by His Son. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." John 1:18. "No man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him." Luke 10:22. The Lord Jesus could say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." John 14:9. The Father, in all His grace and love, was fully manifested by Jesus here on earth, and especially at the cross where God made His own Son a sacrifice for all who avail themselves of the cleansing virtue of His shed blood. Truly, God has been manifested in His Son, but to know the Son is to know the Infinite, and our poor finite minds are not great enough to comprehend Him who will for all eternity be the object of the worship and praise of His redeemed.

"God was manifest in the flesh." When Moses was with God on Mount Sinai, he was told, "There shall no man see Me, and live." Exod. 33:20. But on that momentous night at Bethlehem, the shepherds were told by an angelic messenger, that "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11. There, for the first time in the history of this world, God became visible to the eye of man. And what a sight for poor mortal man to behold! There He lay, in the weakness of a babe, in the manger - He who is to have the government of the world upon His shoulder - the One who is "The mighty God" (Isa. 9:6). He, who being in the form of God, had now taken upon Himself the form of a servant, made in the likeness of men. When His mother and Joseph brought Him to the temple to do for Him after the custom of the law, Simeon could recognize that here was the One of whom Isaiah spoke - here was God's Salvation, in the flesh - "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of... Israel." Anna, a prophetess, spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Israel. In later years, the people of His nation said, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" Mark 6:3. But Peter, by the Spirit, said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matt. 16:16.

He was "justified in the Spirit." At His birth, God could witness of His Son, "Good pleasure in men" (Luke 2:14; J.N.D. Trans.). For the first time since Adam was unfallen, God looked down from heaven and saw One in whom He could take pleasure. Jesus, about to enter upon His ministry, came to John the Baptist to be baptized of him, and to take His place among the publicans and the multitude who were confessing their sins. God, in justice to His own Son, opened heaven, and His voice was heard, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matt. 3:17. The Spirit of God descended like a dove and lighted upon Him. God was well pleased in what His Son had done, and He could not allow man to believe that this One was a sinner like those others. Later, the King, having been rejected by an unbelieving nation, was manifested on the holy mount in all His glory, and "there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And Peter says, "This voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount." (2 Pet. 1:17, 18.) Was He not justified in the Spirit when He

said, "Father, glorify Thy name"? A voice came to Him from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." John 12:28.

The angels were present at the creation when the morning stars sang together. They were present at Mount Sinai when the holy law of God was given, for it was given by the ministration of angels. God chose to send angels round about Elisha when he was threatened by the enemy. An angel, spoken of by name to Daniel, was the one by whom God chose to communicate with that great prophet. These were God's servants, created to do His bidding. But in all those ages they had never seen their Creator. Now on that most not able night, in the manger at Bethlehem, they viewed their King for the first time. There lay the Object of their worship and adoration, a Babe, helpless and an outcast from His birth, to be hunted so soon for his very life. No wonder that they proclaimed through the skies, "Glory to God in the highest."

As a man, when He had fasted for forty days in the wilderness, and had withstood all the temptations of Satan, the angels came and ministered to Him. An angel also appeared unto Him from heaven when He, contemplating the bearing of the sins of His people, cried out in the agony of His soul, "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done." Luke 22:42. What a sight this must have been to the angels, to see Him, whose word brought worlds into existence, thus prostrated in the Garden of Gethsemane. And they were to behold more. Poor, weak, puny men, who were dependent on Jesus for their very breath of life, took Him and nailed Him to the cross, using Him most shamefully; and when they could think of nothing more to do to give vent to their hatred of Him, they sat down to watch His sufferings.

An angel was present on that glorious morning when Mary Magdalene, weeping at the tomb, turned herself and saw Him standing. Angels could say to the disciples at Bethany, "Ye men of Galilee... this same Jesus-" (Acts 1:11). What must have been the thoughts of those angelic hosts who had witnessed the incarnation and path of ministry of Him who had heretofore been invisible, but who had now manifested Himself in all meekness and humility to be the Savior by whom sinful men should obtain salvation from eternal judgment.

When the Lord Jesus went into the coast of Tiro and Sidon, on being accosted by a Gentile woman, He said truthfully, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," but nevertheless, on more than one occasion we have the record that His grace overstepped all bounds to reach out to meet the needs of those "having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). And His words are recorded, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." But it was not until Peter entered the house of Cornelius that the Gentiles as a class had the Word of God spoken to them. God proclaimed His approval of the reception of His Word by the Gentiles by the giving and sealing of His Holy Spirit. At the same time, God was preparing in His school a chosen vessel to carry the Word to the Gentiles-Saul of Tarsus, later to be known as the beloved Apostle Paul. How wonderful the plan of God, to prepare the way, and the servants too, to bring the light of the gospel to the Gentiles as He had promised. How fruitful has that work been! Think of the countless myriads of Gentiles who have had the gospel preached to them.

That many of those who have heard the gospel now find the Lord Jesus precious to their souls is evidence that He is "believed on in the world." The world, as such, goes on its way, willfully ignoring Him whose claims are going to be heeded one day soon, but there are those who now, and also those who from the beginning, have believed to the saving of their precious souls. Oh!

that all who hear the Word might receive it by faith in their hearts. It is sad to think that there will be some who refuse to believe

God's Word concerning Jesus. Because they refuse to believe the truth, God will "send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believe not the truth." 2 Thess. 2:11, 12. Oh, to think that those who reject God's Son as their Savior will go down to perdition, to be forever in the place of torment prepared for the devil and his angels.

If man refuses to honor the name of Jesus, yet God in righteousness to His Son must and will vindicate His name. Until that time comes, Jesus is waiting patiently at the right hand of God in the glory. God had proclaimed in the Psalms, "The LORD said unto My Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." How blessed to know that the Object of our worship is now in the glory. The world cast Him out with these words: "We will not have this man to reign over us." Then they sent a messenger after Him in the person of that faithful martyr, Stephen, to repeat and reaffirm the message. But though earth would not have Him, heaven has received Him till the times of restitution of all things (Acts 3:21).

May God enable us who believe, to keep our eyes on Him in the glory, that we might be filled with His glory, so that we, too, by reflection may shine with that same glory light.

The Actings and Leadings of the Spirit of God

Ought we not to distinguish between the actings of the Holy Ghost in the world generally and His actings in the midst of the separated people of God?

I see the Spirit of God testifying to God's thoughts of such a separated company, and acting in them, in Malachi 3. "They... spake often one to another," for they "feared the LORD, and... thought upon HIS NAME." Was not that of the Spirit? However far away Israel might have been as to the knowledge of the mind of God at that moment, there was no mixture among them; they had the same desire and object. There was no stranger among them; they knew each other well-this is evident- and they were in Israel just what Israel should have been as a whole among the nations; that is, "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." Numb. 23:9. Such words described this little company, and the Spirit of God tells of God's delight in them as His "jewels."

I see them again, and the Spirit of God drawing attention to them, in Luke 2. There was Anna, and Simeon, and those that "looked for redemption in Jerusalem." There was distinct action of the Holy Ghost among them. As to Simeon, the "Holy Ghost was upon him." "It was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost" about the coming One, and again Simeon "came by the Spirit into the temple." And Anna came in at the same moment. There was this special favor of God shown to them, that they were instructed and brought into fellowship with His mind and purposes at that moment-a moment of special interest with Him as to this world. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him. They learned it from Himself. It was a wondrous moment- one that stands alone in the history of this world-when God was bringing in the second Man, the Lord from heaven, and the favor of learning His mind about Him was theirs, and that little company to whom they belonged, who "looked for redemption in Israel." Who can overestimate the wondrous favor of being thus brought at any time into a knowledge of the present thoughts and purposes of God?

But while this was the action of the Holy Ghost toward this little separated company, the "poor of the flock," He was at the same time acting elsewhere, and entirely apart from them. John the Baptist was to be the vessel whom the Spirit would use in another work, and John was "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." It was not the secrets of the Lord that were to be revealed to him in the same way as to the little remnant; for John had to confess, "I knew Him not." But there was to be a mighty public wave of blessing for Israel that was to prepare the way of the coming Messiah; and this wondrous wave of blessing, which reached even the throne of the heathen king, was as much the work of the Spirit of God as was the song of praise and thanksgiving raised by old Simeon when he held in his arms Him whom by revelation he knew as the salvation of Israel - GOD'S SALVATION.

There may be a similar public work of the Spirit just prior to our Lord's second coming. But notice the effect of thus being brought into communion with the present mind of God. It is quietness, contentment, satisfaction. Simeon desired nothing more; and Anna's work thenceforward was but to speak "of HIM" wherever a hearing ear was found in Jerusalem. But these quiet, contented,

satisfied ones, the feeble few who possessed by special instruction of the Holy Ghost the present "secret of the Lord," are not made the instruments of the public activity of the Holy Ghost in the land; but John is, as we have observed, and it was a wondrous and stirring moment of God's activity: "Then went out to him [John] Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan." Pharisees and Sadducees, publicans and soldiers, the real and the unreal, the "generation of vipers" and those who boasted, "We have Abraham to our father," all were moved; for God was moving among His people, and who could resist Him? But what was the testimony? It was but for them to prepare for Him whom this little company had already got, John's testimony being the need of the confession of sins, and the baptism unto repentance, and of the coming One who was to baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. I have no doubt that the little remnant bowed to the testimony too, and so far went with Israel in this public movement; but they had already more, even Himself, and the deep, deep satisfaction and contentment and joy that He gave, which Simeon's thanksgiving and Anna's expressed; and did it diminish as He lived and walked before them day by day, God's Christ, revealed to them as such by the Holy Ghost? When drawn to Him, there is ever this in the true heart that contemplates Him, an increased binding of bonds that can never break; and Peter's simple testimony, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life," will answer this question as to whether their delight in Him diminished.

I might also have drawn attention to Paul, the "prisoner of the Lord." The especial depositary of the mind of God as taught of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13), as this Apostle was, he was shut up in a prison at Rome, whence we have received those wondrous epistles (the dictates of the Holy Ghost), Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Hebrews. But in the public testimony (except in the palace, I suppose), the Apostle had then no share; yet it went on, and he rejoiced that it did: "Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." Phil. 1:18. In it too (that is, in the public testimony), at that time, Peter and John and others had their share; but to none of them was unfolded the secrets of the mind of God as they were to Paul, as Peter himself will admit (2 Pet. 3:16), and as their own writings prove. It was his wonderful solace to know that the Lord stood with him. Here again then the actings of the Holy Ghost in the world generally, and His actings to a faithful servant, have to be distinguished, and not confounded.

In view of what has been said here, I cannot expect any but a separated people or a separated servant to be instructed in the present mind of God, and it appears to me that it has always been so: "He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel." Psalm 103:7. "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth." Jer. 15:19. God is sovereign, and in a day of ruin like the present (and it is this as to the Church and the truth in the hands of man) He can work, and does, by whom He will. But we must not depart from obedience and the Word. The question set at rest, as I said at the beginning (if these things are so, as to which we must search "the Scriptures"), is, Why does not the Lord use us more in His public testimony in this world? There are new movements of the Spirit of God in the world -salvation armies, gospel armies, and the like. The believer should rejoice that

"Christ is preached" and that the Holy Ghost is working in this world in this way. But if in a day of ruin we have not both these actings of the Spirit carried on through us, then I covet, for myself and for others with whom God has been pleased to associate me, to be more distinctly of that separated and satisfied company to whom He has revealed His present mind, rather than to be the more public and apparently more used instrument who is not of that company, but who is as much

used of the Spirit in a public sphere (and one must remember it, though not in it) as the others are blessed in a private one.

Are All Unserved People "Servants of Satan"? a Reader Inquires

Answer: From the time that our first parents listened to the voice of the tempter, and fell, the whole race, apart from the delivering grace of God, has been under his mastery. He led mankind on to fill the earth with corruption and violence before the flood, and after it, to worship idols, behind which were demons. Romans 1 gives us the declivity of idol worship; it began with images of men, then birds, then quadrupeds, and finally creeping things. Men might not have accepted worship of creeping things if that had been advanced first, but the descent was easy and natural to a heart estranged from God. In tree worship of creeping things Satan was showing himself more clearly.

The enemy of God and man was not called the prince of this world until the cross, for there his mastery of the race was fully exposed. He led the whole world on to cast God out of the scene when He had come into it in grace (John 14:30). He is also called the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4). As the former he has subjects; as the latter he has worshipers, or at least controls their worship.

In Luke 11 he is called "the strong man," who guards his palace and keeps his goods in peace. His goods are people, and he serves many and various opiates to keep their consciences quiet so they will remain peaceful on the brink of hell. The Lord Jesus was the "stronger" Man who came upon him and overcame him (Luke 11:22). He entered into the strong man's house (the world), and bound the strong man in the wilderness (Matt. 12:29), with "It is written" as we read in Luke 4; then immediately He began to spoil his goods by casting out demons and healing the sick. He overcame the strong man by dying (Luke 11:22), and coming forth in resurrection He wrested from him the power wherein he trusted (Heb. 2:14, 15), and then "divideth his spoils" (Luke 11:22) by setting his captives free.

We need to remember that when man fell, he fell spirit, soul, and body, and as fallen he became an easy prey to the wiles of the devil. Satan controls the unsaved, and so the world in general, through the "lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." With great cleverness he knows how to appeal to man's fallen nature, and these three principles govern the whole world. "The wicked one" not only deludes the unsaved with these lusts which find their answer in the evil heart of man, but he presents the same things to the Christians; hence we are warned against loving the world, for "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 John 2:15.

In John 8:44, the Lord addresses some thus: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." This refers to the Jews of Jerusalem who had rejected Him and were bent on His destruction - it is a certain class. 2 Cor. 4:4 indicates a special class who had rejected the gospel and were blinded to it by the god of this world-Satan.

Avoiding the Point

"And when one of them that sat at meat with Him heard these things, he said unto Him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." Luke 14:15.

The utterance of this man who had the privilege of sitting at table with the Lord Jesus, seems at first sight to be a very pious reflection; but looking deeper, it is seen to be an attempt to turn aside the application of the Lord's words. The Lord, as men speak, had been intensely personal, and many at the table must have felt very uncomfortable; and the speaker comes to their relief. He said, as it were, Let us raise our thoughts to heaven. Souls in a bad state never like the word to reach their conscience.

Blessings of Jacob and Moses

It is natural to contrast Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33; but I understand a decided difference in the words of Jacob and of Moses over the twelve -the one regarded them as children, and the other as tribes of the Lord-the one was anticipating their own conduct and history, and the other was putting them severally in that place of honor and blessing which God had settled and secured for them. Thus, in the words of Moses, you get nothing but blessing. No mention of any fault or evil of their own, but God disposing of them all according to His own purpose of grace. It is the tribes under the covenant of promise in the latter day. There may be, and are, divers glories among them, but all are blessed. No mention of any evil they had committed. All that is forgotten. Jehovah finds none. No iniquity in Jacob- no perverseness in Israel. Their tents are all goodly under the favor and light of the Lord! It is the blessing, as from Mount Gerizim, being under God's covenant, as just before it was the curse from Ebal under their own (Deut. 28). And on the mount, as it were, the God of Jeshurun is riding in His magnificence for their help. Happy are such a people. But Jacob anticipates their ways-ways which they have already (generally) run, and ended-sin, shame, loss, apostasy marking nearly all, more or less.

Brussels Pact: Russia, Israel, Arabs, Egypt

Another year with all its turmoil has now passed into history, and a new year dawns on an apprehensive world. Men and governments have struggled through the year that has passed by shifting from experiment to experiment, and from one expedient to another. For the future there is no hope of betterment, but rather of continuing unrest. The word "perplexity" in Luke 21:25 perhaps best and most concisely describes the bewilderment of the statesmen dealing with international complexities, but we as Christians can look forward and sing:

"Tis not far off-the hour

When Christ will claim His own!

We soon shall hear that voice of power,

The Lord Himself shall come!

"The days are passing by,

The years flow on apace,

Lord Jesus! Thy return draws nigh,

We long to see Thy face."

We are twelve months nearer to that moment of unequalled bliss than we were a year ago.

As we look back over 1954 we can see that the events of the year all pointed in one general direction-the end of the day of grace and the coming of the day of judgment for a Christ-rejecting world. Coming events have been casting longer and deeper shadows across the landscape, and all these portend the days of unparalleled trouble (Matt. 24:21) which are to come after we have been caught up to meet our Lord in the air. Let us briefly recall some events in this light.

For a time it looked as though the European Defense Community which seemed to be a forerunner of the revived Roman Empire would be discarded and the Western European nations revert to intense nationalism, but then almost over night the Brussels Pact came into the vacuum with nine nations in an alliance.

The exact make-up of this organization is not important, nor the number of nations involved, for that can be changed in short order. The new alliance is evidence that the plan is alive, and only a circumstance would be required to bring the 10-headed beast into being. This is but another link in the chain of events leading up to the great tribulation and the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

During the year, Egypt secured an agreement for the withdrawal of the British troops from the Suez Canal. This is another step in the future resurgence of Egypt as the "king of the south" who will be an open and avowed enemy of the Jews in their land. A few years ago it seemed

impossible that Egypt would gain her independence and full sovereignty, and so be able to fulfill her part.

There has been increasing unity among the Arab nations, and so the future "king of the north" as head of the Moslem world appears closer. This is coupled with an unrelenting opposition to the nation of Israel. Moslem leaders have found it a good rallying cry to denounce Israel and speak of future aggression against the young nation. All events in that part of the world point up the fact that Jerusalem is to be the focal point of the greatest international crises. They are in the making at present. All eyes are toward that land to which Jehovah will bring all nations in the days of His wrath (Joel 3), and that city will be "a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it." Zech. 12:3. King Saud of Saudi Arabia has boasted that he would sacrifice 10,000,000 of his subjects to vanquish Israel. Even Egyptian leaders who are now receiving military aid from the West have made many warlike pronouncements against Israel and continue to carry on an illegal blockade of the Suez Canal against all shipping bound to or from Israel. We were impressed by the following statement from a Jewish columnist: "To realists it appears that the Arab world will never agree to a peaceful coexistence with Israel unless the great Western powers make it unmistakably clear that they guarantee the independence of Israel." (*Italics are ours.*) This is in perfect accord with the prophecy in Daniel 9:27 where God has foretold that the future head of the revived Roman Empire will do just exactly as this Jewish writer suggests—he will make a compact with Israel so that they will have their rights to their land guaranteed by the Western powers. This will be a covenant to be their protector for seven years, and those seven years are to be after we are gone from the scene.

During the year Russia greatly increased her strength, and more of Asia came under her sway. A recent compact entered into between Russia and China was honored by the presence of India's leader, Jawaharlal Nehru. The significance of his presence may be understood when it is considered that Russia, China, and India together control nearly half of the human race. Time is on the side of Russia and the Eastern powers, and it would appear that within a generation they could dominate the world at their pleasure. But God is forgotten in all their calculations; He will allow them to go just as far as suits His purposes, and not one inch farther.

The great conference of the World Council of Churches at Evanston, Illinois, also was a sign pointing to the soon-fulfillment of God's Word. Confederacy is the spirit of the day, and moves all toward that last dreadful state of Christendom known as "Babylon the Great." Men of many languages and many denominations were able to sit down together at Evanston and find ways of agreement between open and avowed modernists and some who still reverence the Word of God. Such unanimity is only accomplished by compromise and sacrifice of the truth. Protestantism is getting ready to speak with one voice, and when the Lord takes the true believers out of it, it will be an easy thing for it to go over to Rome. It is also significant that the Church of Rome would have no part in the great ecumenical conference; they still maintain that no merger with Protestantism is possible and that all must return to Rome. As pointed out in a previous issue, everything is veering either toward the man (infidelity, or atheistic materialism) or toward the woman (superstition, or Romish ritualism). The currents are running strong as the end comes in view.

The moral conditions of the last days described in 2 Timothy 3 are very much in evidence and increasing by the day. In fact, any way we look we can see that we are living in the last minutes of the "last hour" before we, Enoch like, are translated. What a blessed moment that will be when we are caught up to meet our Lord in the air! Then we shall see Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, and whom by grace we have learned to love. The words of the poet, G. W. Frazer, may well cheer us by their happy anticipation of the coming day of glory.

"That bright and blessed morn is near

He, the Bridegroom, shall appear,

And call His bride away.

Her blessing then shall be complete,

When with her Lord she takes her seat

In everlasting day.

"The days and months are gliding past,

Soon shall be heard the trumpet's blast

Which wakes the sleeping saints.

The dead in Christ in glory rise,

When we with them shall reach the skies

Where Jesus for us waits.

"What wonder, joy, and glad surprise

Shall fill our hearts as thus we rise

To meet Him in the air;

To see His face, to hear His voice,

And in His perfect love rejoice,

Whose glory then we'll share!

"No more deferred our hope shall be,

No longer through a glass we'll see,

But clearly, face to face.

We'll dwell with Jesus then above,

Whom absent we have learned to love,

Blest samples of His grace.

"O may this hope our spirits cheer,

While waiting for our Savior here;

He'll quickly come again.

O may our hearts look for that day,

And to His word responsive say,

`Come, Jesus, Lord. Amen.' "

One solemn thought intrudes on us when we think of the coming of the Lord; that is, the doom of the Christ rejecters. The door of grace will soon be closed and many like the "foolish virgins" will be found on the outside. May we seek to make good use of the intervening time to tell unsaved ones of the Savior and warn them to flee from the wrath to come.

Changes in a Decade: the Editor's Column

Ten years is a comparatively short space of time when compared with man's history. One decade seems almost infinitesimal against the background of more than 4000 years since the language barrier separated the sons of men into families, communities, and finally into rival and often warring nations.

It is now just one decade since the cessation of hostilities of the last great world war - Germany surrendered May 7th, and Japan on August 14, 1945. Let us briefly examine the doings and results of these years. Have they brought peace to the earth? Has the awful reality of war's destruction, brought home so forcibly by that world holocaust, caused nations to "beat their swords into plowshares"? Has the war been fought that will end wars? It is all too evident that the answer to these questions is "No," but we shall look at some details of the history of the decade.

One of the early happenings of the period was the dissolution of the old League of Nations (formed after the First World War to safeguard the world from another war), and the formation of the United Nations, which it was hoped would succeed where its predecessor failed. Great hopes were expressed at its founding that it would guarantee peace in the world, yet its inception was devoid of prayer to God in deference to atheistic Russia. Very little can be said for its accomplishments, and at some times of crisis it has seemed almost impotent.

1945 ushered in the atomic age with the dropping of bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, August 6 and 9. This revolutionary development, together with faster-than-sound means of delivery, and many other contemporaneous inventions of war have urged on the leaders of nations seeking to learn the latest methods of destruction. It touched off the greatest armaments race in history, and instead of nations beating their swords into plowshares, they are doing the reverse (which according to prophecy must come first:

Joel 3:10; then Isa. 2:3, 4 and Mic. 4:2, 3). The potential for mass destruction is now so great that scarcely anyone is able to comprehend it—from A bombs and H bombs to chemical and bacteriological warfare the prospects are frightening. Perhaps no mere decade in history has witnessed such revolutionary changes—changes which have antiquated the weapons of the world war of ten years ago.

In this short span great empires have shrunk: France has lost Indo-China and is having great trouble holding possessions in Africa; the Netherlands lost Indonesia; Great Britain lost India, and Egypt, and South Africa, except that some of these retain very slim ties with the Commonwealth.

Great Britain withdrew from Palestine after forestalling many attempts of Jewish immigrants to land there, and then the Jewish people declared the formation of the nation of Israel. This was ultimately acknowledged by many nations, but the Arab countries declared war against the fledgling state. War finally terminated in the Israeli's conquest of the Negeb desert area in the south of Palestine, but left Jerusalem divided and the old city still in the hands of the Arabs, a standing witness to the Lord's words in Luke 21: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles,

until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." An uneasy truce rests upon the whole Near East, and the Arabs will not officially renounce a state of war with Israel. Trouble may flare up there again at any time.

Tremendous changes have taken place between nations; former allies and friends are now enemies, and former enemies are now staunch allies. In 1946 the United States proposed a treaty with England, Russia, and France to keep Germany disarmed for 25 years, and yet in a few years has reversed herself and has helped rebuild the former enemy's cities, and now has promoted a treaty to permit her the right to rearm; yes, and more, to help her do it.

A "cold war" has been the order of the last few years, which many times has almost flared into a shooting war. Russia through devious means has gained most in the decade, and through her alliance with the Communists of China has enabled them to subjugate all of China, North Korea, and a sizable part of Indo-China. In these years Russia has never demobilized, and has continued on a war footing. Her constant threat to world peace has brought Western Nations into an alignment once thought impossible.

We shall not speak much on the subject of religion in this period as we have taken that up in other issues, except to point out that Roman Catholicism has been squeezed out of the Russian orbit and has gained strength in Western areas. This is in keeping with the place that the prophetic word gives to her. In fact, her power may well furnish much of the cohesion of the revived Roman Empire so soon to flourish in this world.

So as we look back just ten years to the end of World War II, we see it as a period of tension and strife, of far-reaching developments which presage the last days of Christendom and the coming of "the great and terrible day of the Lord." Perhaps no decade in all history has produced changes of such magnitude, and that in many fields. As the period comes to a close there is some talk of peace and prosperity ahead, but we should not be deceived thereby. The time is coming when men shall have made things so secure, according to their thoughts, that they will say, "Peace and safety," just before "sudden destruction" shall come upon them (1 Thess. 5:3).

There is one line of truth that has been very much before us in writing this brief summary; that is, that God is behind the scenes and ordering them all according to His plans. In Daniel 7, the prophet said, "I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea." He was given to see the effects of the winds upon the sea. These winds represent God's providential dealings with the earth—they are "the four winds of heaven." They are currents that are allowed by God to affect the courses of the nations. Policies and public opinions, circumstances, great and apparently trivial, all work out His will. The sea represents the restless moving masses of people who are acted upon by these things. When John, looking ahead, sees these four winds in Revelation 7, they are being held back until a remnant of Israel are sealed before the time of Jacob's trouble. John speaks of the winds as "the four winds of the earth." The difference between Daniel and John is that the former spoke of the source from which they come, and the latter, the object on which they act.

In Daniel 7 the activity of these winds upon the seas produces the agitation that brings forth great empires, and this commotion has always preceded great changes among the nations. Sometimes seemingly unrelated happenings prove to be but the workings of a divine providence to produce

certain complex situations out of which arise great leaders and great nations. Look back through history and see the background from which sprang those great beasts of Daniel 7-the Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires. All came up from the tossing of the peoples, which were brought about by the providential winds of heaven.

Then when we come to Revelation 13 we find that the future beast - the great and terrible Roman Empire of the future-will arise out of the sea, no doubt troubled by the winds of the heaven acting upon the earth. Surely the last decade has witnessed the blowing of the winds of heaven upon earth, and the changes have been momentous and drastic. Stormy winds have been fulfilling His will, and soon the final actors in this scene of man's day will come forth ready to fulfill their appointed parts. But let us not forget how the picture of prophecy everywhere closes --with the coming and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Daniel says, when contemplating the four Gentile kingdoms, especially the revived Roman Empire, that "in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and IT SHALL STAND Forever." Dan. 2:44.

If the reign of our Lord is so soon to supplant the militant forces of Gentile sovereignty, then His coming to receive His own must be at the very doors. Any day we may hear that summons: "Come up hither." May He not come and find us sleeping, but waiting and watching.

The Child of Resurrection: Practical and Needful Lessons From the Shunnamite

A lovely specimen of the workmanship of the Spirit is presented to us in the Shunammite, whose faith, with its fruits, trials, and triumphs, forms the subject of the narrative before us. One fruit of faith much commended in Scripture is that enjoined upon us in such passages as the following: "Given to hospitality." Rom. 12:13. "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." 1 Pet. 4:9. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Heb. 13:2. "I was a stranger, and ye took Me in." Matt. 25:35. 'What a beautiful instance of such hospitality is presented to us here. "And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that, as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread." The lowly husbandman of Abel-Meholah, a welcome guest with the "great woman" of Shunem, is a lovely illustration of what grace can do. Nor did she know, as it would appear, anything of him when she first "constrained him to eat bread," save the homely garb, the unpretending exterior of the man.

Another fruit of faith much noted in Scripture is the capacity of discerning and owning "like precious faith" in others. Who could give a cup of cold water to a disciple in the name of a disciple if he had not the capacity of discerning the badge of discipleship? Beautiful is the display of this spiritually intuitive discernment of where God had set His mark and put His honor in the case of this godly Shunammite. She had shown him hospitality as a stranger, and afterward, "as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread"; but in these repeated interviews she saw enough of him to make her long on other and higher grounds to provide for him more permanent accommodation. "She said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither." The Lord grant us, beloved, to be so in communion with Himself that wherever His name is truly confessed, and His Spirit dwells, we may be quick to discern and joyful to own His handiwork.

The Shunammite's appreciation of the tastes and habits of her guest is another lovely trait which the Spirit has been pleased to note in this delineation of her ways. It was Martha's failure, in Luke 10, that while she really and devotedly loved the Lord, she so little appreciated what His glory really was, and the errand on which He had come from heaven to earth, that she thought to please Him by providing for Him a sumptuous feast. To think of entertaining God manifest in the flesh with a feast! Not so Mary. She knew that He had come not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. She spread the table and provided the feast that He had really come for the purpose of enjoying, by sitting at His feet and opening her heart to drink in the words of eternal life from His lips. Likeminded with her was this godly Shunammite. She had Martha's hospitality with Mary's appreciation of her guest; and her guest was but mortal, a servant of God indeed, but still a mortal man. Martha and Mary's guest was the Lord from heaven. Elisha had a

hearty welcome to the hospitalities of the Shunammite; there was even an apartment set aside for his use, where he might turn in and tarry as long as he would. But what a tale does its furniture tell! No provision for the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life. A bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick are what it contained. A pilgrim's accommodation showed how entirely the Shunammite had appreciated the pilgrim character of her guest. Would that there were more of this heavenly simplicity among us, beloved. Would that our hearts were so in heaven that we might feel, as to one another, that even our hospitality must be after a godly sort-cordial, large-hearted, without grudging, as the Apostle says-but yet not as though we looked upon each other as in the flesh, or thought we could gratify one another by making provision for its lusts.

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have," is the exhortation of the Apostle. How the spirit of it was exemplified by the Shunammite! Elisha instructed Gehazi to say to her, "Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" God had wrought a great deliverance by Elisha for the king and his allies but a short time before; and thus, for the season, he could doubtless have had of the king whatever he asked. But the Shunammite wished for nothing that the king or the captain of the host could give. "I dwell among mine own people," was the reply of her contented spirit. Can we in any way so powerfully testify to the world of its vanity and the emptiness of all it offers? If anything can tell on the conscience of a worldling, it is to see a child of God so conscious of his portion in his Father's love that he declines when it is in his power to accept of a portion here.

But if the prophet of Abel-Meholah, like an apostle of later days, was destitute of silver and gold, and if the Shunammite cared not for what Elisha's temporary favor with the king might have procured her, he had interest at another court, and she refused not what the prophet promised on behalf of that "God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." She was childless, and her husband was old; but the prophet assured her that at the set time she should embrace a son. The promise thus given, God fulfilled; and a child, direct from His hand, crowned the faith which had already produced such lovely fruits. What that child must have been to the Shunammite! With what inexpressible tenderness must she have nursed him in infancy, and watched the unfoldings of his faculties as from infancy he passed to boyhood, and from that to youth. The mother only that loves the Lord, and nurses and brings up her offspring for Him, can form the least idea, and even hers must be but faint of what that mother's feelings were; the deep throbbings of her heart as she looked onward to the future in connection with the prospects of her child; and the calm but deeper joy which must have often pervaded and filled her heart while, encouraged by the occasion and circumstances of his birth, she trusted in God that that future was charged with blessing. But she had to learn the lesson that God is the God of resurrection; and well will it be for us if God's record of His dealings with her should be used of Him to aid us in learning that lesson too.

"And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head! And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died." What a stroke was this! The child with the birth of which her faith had been crowned, and which she had received as it were direct from God's hand, snatched from her embraces, and cold in death. And was this God's reward for the care which He had put into her heart to have for His

servant, the prophet? Was it for this that God made Himself known as the quickener of the dead, causing the barren to bear, only that when the child was born he might be suddenly torn away? No, she had better thoughts of God than this. It was not that she questioned His right to resume what His mercy had bestowed. But her faith gathered from the past what God's meaning and purpose was in dealing with her as He had done, and she was not without hope. But her son was dead. What then? It was from God, who quickens the dead, that she had received her son. But what could she do? No, that is not the question. What can, or rather, what can not God do? That was faith's question, and thus there was no case too extreme for faith because there is none too extreme for God. Faith knows and trusts. "With God all things are possible."

Circumstances which produce utter despondency where there is not faith, are but to faith the occasion for more singly and entirely trusting God. "And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again." The husband remonstrated. It was neither the new moon nor the Sabbath day, and his faith went not beyond the ordinary exercises of devotion, if indeed he were a man of faith at all. Faith like his wife's, who did not give up her son though dead, because she knew Him who quickens the dead, he seemed to have no thought of. But his wife could neither be detained nor turned aside. "It shall be well," is all the reply she made, and hastened to the man of God at Cannel.

But here she was to meet with other trials of her faith. If there was anyone or anything in danger of being between her soul and God, it was the prophet, the man of God. To own him as the prophet of God was indeed at that time the test of faith in Israel. Singularly had God honored him in fulfilling his promise, in God's behalf, that this woman should have a son. But it was possible then-as alas, we find it now-for the channel, more or less, to have the place with the soul which only belongs to the source from whence it is supplied. At all events, the Shunammite was to learn that even the man of God of himself could do nothing for her. To all the inquiries of Gehazi she had but one answer-"Well." She was not to be detained by him. "And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." One word from her revealed the whole, and the prophet at once dispatched Gehazi with his master's staff to lay upon the face of the child. Whether the prophet did this under divine guidance for a lesson to Gehazi, as well as to try the Shunammite's faith, or whether, as the case had been hidden from him by the Lord, he was left to act in his own wisdom and strength without any direct guidance from God, I would not say. It is suggested as an inquiry for prayerful consideration. In either case the result is plain. The Shunammite could no more be put off with Gehazi and his master's staff than before she could be detained by her husband's expostulations or Gehazi's inquiries. "And the mother of the child said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her." They met Gehazi returning from his fruitless journey-one of a cloud of witnesses that the forms and circumstances by which the actings of faith may be attended are all nothing apart from faith itself and the power of the living God, on which faith rests. Elisha's staff in Gehazi's hands was as powerless as any other piece of wood. The prophet's staff without the prophet's faith accomplished nothing "There was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked." The

Lord grant us to lay to heart the serious lesson which these words convey.

What a scene ensued! There had been enough already to make even Elisha feel that it was no ordinary case, and that through it God was dealing with him as well as with the Shunammite. That it should have been hidden entirely from him, that Gehazi's journey with the staff (undertaken at the prophet's instance) should have proved entirely unavailing, was enough to awaken the inquiry in the soul of the prophet whether God would teach him too that the power was not in him, but in God Himself. But even if Elisha had to learn this lesson more deeply than he had as yet learned, it was not that his faith in God might be shaken or weakened, but tried and strengthened. Tried it was, but not shaken. "When Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed." The mother's faith had placed the dead body there. "He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD." The prophet, a dead corpse, and the living God, the quickener of the dead! "And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child." So completely did he identify himself with the one for whom he interceded; it was as though he would tell God that if the child were not restored to life he could only lie there with him in death. What faith! what holy boldness! Nor is it left without encouragement. "The flesh of the child waxed warm." There were some signs of returning vitality to strengthen the prophet's faith and encourage him to persevere. "Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him." What is all this the witness of but of that agony of prayer, that energy of faith, of which-alas! in our day and in our poor souls-we know so little? But "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Jas. 5:16. "The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes." Prayer was heard; faith was crowned. God showed Himself once more to be in very truth the God of resurrection. And when the mother came in to the prophet into the chamber, he said, "Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet [her heart too full to utter a single word], and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out."

The Lord grant us, like her, to know nothing, to regard nothing but Himself, privileged as we are to know Him, the Resurrection and the Life, unknown to saints in any former dispensation, in an intimacy of communion. May we acknowledge indeed and mourn the sins which have turned our joy into lamentation; but may neither these nor anything be allowed to hide from the view of faith "God, w h o quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were."

Christ Preached

"What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." Phil. 1:18.

It was in the fact that Christ was preached that Paul rejoiced, even though the motives that led some to preach Him were to be deeply censured. Alas! that any should preach Him of envy and strife. Yet it was so. Such is the heart of man. But Paul did and would rejoice that Christ was preached. The reasons that disposed some to preach Him might be and were unworthy. Paul could have no fellowship with such; but nevertheless Christ was preached, and that was a matter of continual rejoicing to the beloved Apostle.

Christ's Reign

This world is not to remain forever the sporting place and playground of the devil. That will not be allowed forever. The Son of David will yet have His place in it, and His glory too, as its ruler, and the world will then be altered. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain." Isa. 11:9. There is a time coming when Christ will be the Prince of Peace. He has declared positively that this is not at the present time. "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division," etc. That is, this is the time when the bringing in the light awakens the passions of men; and until Christ's second coming puts them down, they continue their raging.

And Christians now have to take up the cross and follow Him. Do you think if Christ were reigning, His followers would only have the cross? Why, they would have the crown. We are positively told that our part is the cross. We must now take it up every day. But, when Christ reigns, that will not be the part of His people. He will "come to be glorified in His saints"; and a glorious place they will get when He comes to reign.

Conflict in Heavenly Places

The very blessings of the Church (as in Eph. 1:3) set us into a sort of conflict, which without such blessings, we should not have. So the Church is subject to, more failure than either Jews or Gentiles were, because they were not called to the same blessing. A Jew might do many things that would be monstrous in a Christian, and yet find no defilement in his conscience. The veil being rent, that was over the knowledge of God, the light shines out; and the consequence is that this light which has come out of the holy place cannot tolerate evil. Christians are in a more dangerous position, if not walking in the light, than Jews. Satan may draw and entice me with many things which would have no power against me if I were not so favored, "Be strong in the Lord"; here is the place of strength. There is no strength but in Christ-I have none at any time except as my soul is in secret communion with Him, and through Him with God the Father. The direct power of Satan is toward this point: to keep our souls from living on Christ. Put on the whole armor of God; there is no standing against Satan without this. Strength is always the effect of having to do with God in the spirit of dependence.

We see in 1 Samuel 14 the contrast between Saul and Jonathan, between confidence in God overcoming all obstacles, and self failing with all the resources of royalty. Jonathan clambered up on his hands and feet, confident in God, and the enemies were overcome. Saul, when he saw the work going on, not knowing the Lord's mind, called for the priest. He had a right intention, but not a simplicity of dependence on God when inquiring what he should do, and spoiled all by his foolish oath. It was said of Jonathan that "he hath wrought with God." God was with him, and he had strength and liberty- not a humiliation we have often felt-because he wrought with God. When we are walking in dependence on God, there will always be liberty before God. Jonathan knew what he should do and took some honey because he went on in liberty, for God was with him, while Saul in legality had put himself and the people into bondage.

The word then, after grace in Christ has been fully shown throughout the epistle, is "Be strong in the Lord" (v. 10). We have the privilege here of individual dependence on God. Everything may be dark, but the Lord tells us to be strong. This is always accompanied with lowliness of heart; come what will, when the Lord is rested on we are strong.

We are called to put on the panoply of God, to take it to us (vv. 11-13). And no wonder! the conflict is not with men, but with evil spirits (v. 12). Who but an unbeliever can overlook or despise them? They are principalities and authorities; they are the universal lords of this darkness; they are spiritual wickednesses in the heavenly places. Truly, to withstand such, we need the whole armor of God which, remember, is not a question of standing but of practical power, and this in entire dependence.

If we pray, be it observed, without searching the Word, or read the Word without prayer, we may get no guidance, for Jesus said, "If... My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will," etc.; without this I may be asking some foolish thing that would not be given. We are to stand against the wiles of the devil, not his power. It is not knowing Satan that enables us to discover his wiles,

but keeping in God's presence. It was always so with Christ because He was always dependent on God. Stand, having your loins girt about with truth. Truth is never really ours except as the affections are ordered by it. If the soul of the hearer be not in communion with God in the truth he hears, his loins are not girt with it. The breastplate of righteousness supposes not merely this, but that we have nothing on the conscience (v. 14). Christ's blood made it good, and walking in the Spirit keeps it so.

Verse 15. The gospel of peace is ours in Christ, but I must have the spirit of peace in my heart, and be sanctified by the God of peace, the soul in communion with God, with Him in the spirit of peace; without this, how can the saint walk as always having peace? He is thus prepared to walk according to the gospel.

Verse 16. Whether I look at the sin that made grace necessary, or at the power which caused me to enjoy it, I may walk in perfect peace against every source of sorrow. Every fiery dart is quenched by confidence in God-the shield of faith. It is as essential for the conflict as for saving the soul. We need to cherish confidence in the grace of God all through.

Verse 17. I hold up my head because I know I am safe; salvation is mine. I must first get that which is internal-that which is wrought in me is power. Before I use the sword of the Spirit, I must first have the loins girded about with truth-the heart covered with righteousness - the feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace-and then (the shield of faith being up and the helmet of salvation on) I can take the sword of the Spirit. Nothing is more dangerous than to use the Word if it has not touched my conscience. I put myself in Satan's hands if I go beyond what I have from God, or what is in possession of my soul. To talk with saints on the things of God, beyond what I hold in communion, is most pernicious; to fight without it is disastrous,

Verse 18. The Word always must, deal with ourselves before others, but prayer is the expression and exercise of dependence. When a question or difficulty comes, do we turn to God? We may have turned to God before, and the thing is answered, and we ought to have such power of prayer that there would be no difficulty when any circumstance arises. If supplication be thus continual, there would be no occasion to ask Him about particular things when they come before us.

"Supplication in the Spirit." All acceptable prayer is not, I think, prayer in the Spirit. A wish or desire expressed to God, in all the confidence of a child to his Father, is heard, but this is not necessarily prayer "in the Spirit." It is the power of the Spirit in us looking for blessing as walking in the Spirit of God-that is such prayer - not even a difficulty here when living really in the power of communion. We have that energy of supplication which looks for answers-for all answers, and for myself too - watching thereunto with all perseverance. Suppose you begin the day with a sweet spirit of prayer and confidence in God; in the course of the day, in this wretched world, you find a thousand cares and agitations; but if you are spiritually exercised, alive to see the things of God, everything will be a matter of prayer and intercession according to the mind of God. Thus humbleness and dependence should mark all a saint's actions.

Instead of being full of regret at what we may meet with, if we are walking with

Christ we shall see His interests in a brother - in the Church. What a blessed thing to carry everything to God! The word in verse 18 refers to a man walking in the whole armor.

The Apostle took the love of the saints for granted. We also, if walking in the Spirit, can always count on others being interested in our affairs.

Day of Small Things

It is truly a day of small things, but the Lord is working. It gives me great confidence in a day such as this to remember "The Father loveth the Son" equally as much today as when those words were uttered, and it therefore pleases Him to work for His sake. This true and precious thought has been quite an inspiration to me.

We are apt to look around and within and feel, if we do not say, We cannot expect God to work; whereas if we look above at Him we get quite different thoughts.

Occupation with Him leads to believing, hopeful occupation for Him. E. F. B.

You may check your answers with those given on page 244.

'What was a "sabbath day's journey"?

'What was a "sabbath day's journey" from Jerusalem?

Why are some told to pray that their flight from Jerusalem "be not... on the sabbath day"?

Why is the Sabbath not mentioned in Luke 21 in the instructions regarding flight from Jerusalem?

Dead and Buried

"Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" Col. 2:20.

"Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead." Col. 2:12.

Many Christians like to dwell on being dead, but do not understand being buried; that is, put out of sight and done with. On the contrary, they like to keep "their dead" in sight, and to exalt themselves on the fact of counting themselves dead. We are not only dead but buried, thank God, and entitled thus to be occupied no longer with our wretched selves b u t with Christ

Declension and Its Course

In a day of widespread declension, such as this, it may be useful to trace the steps by which a low point is reached, as the discovery of our real state; and its exposure by the Word, is one of the means God uses in order to extricate us from it.

No one sets out on a downward path with the idea of its being that, though God may allow many warnings to come, and even the discipline of His hand to be felt, to awaken from its lethargy the soul that is indifferent. Neither can anyone who is pursuing that way tell how far he will go, though of course his own purpose is to keep within certain bounds. But the power of the enemy is such that we have no ability to stand against him, unless we are going on with God, in the strength He gives to those who are dependent on Him.

In 1 Cor. 10:1-13, we have the steps in the course of declension very fully pictured, and they present a striking contrast to the Apostle's own way as given at the end of the previous chapter. Some have difficulty in understanding Paul's words because they have in some degree disconnected the life-eternal life- from the path in which those who have it should, and more or less do, walk. For some, alas! the deliverance from judgment because of failure in responsibility as children of Adam, by the cross of Christ, is, it is to be feared, deliverance also from responsibility itself. But this is surely not God's way. No; He puts us by redemption upon higher ground than we had left, and with, as a consequence, higher responsibilities. If we are saved by grace - "Not of works, lest any man should boast"-yet we are "Created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them," and he who does not more or less walk in that path disproves his title to eternal life. It is still true that without "holiness,... no man shall see the Lord," and one part of Scripture is not in conflict with another, but all is in harmony. Compare also 2 Timothy 2:19.

The outward participation in the things of Christianity was no guarantee of attaining to the rest of God, and it is this that is insisted on in the first verses of chapter 10. They all stood on new ground, and partook of what was God's provision for their need, the bread from heaven and the water out of the rock; yet with many of them God was not well pleased, and they fell in the wilderness-they did not reach Canaan. These things are expressly said to have "happened unto them for ensamples [examples, or types]: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

The first step in the downward course is lust. If God had been retained in their thoughts, they could not have doubted that He would give all that was needful. To desire something different from what God sees good to give, shows that the heart has turned from Him and lost its confidence in His love. To desire what is according to His will, is not lust, and He has not limited us as to what is really for our good: "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." The restless craving of desire is itself a witness that we have turned away from the only One who can satisfy. "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst"

What follows next is idolatry-a god that suits the low state-with Israel, of course, the golden calf is referred to. It may be only a limitation of the God of revelation, an ideal which suits the fancy or taste, but which is therefore only a reflex picture of the one who forms it - of myself. Hence men deified human passion which was a large part of heathenism. But it is only a human sentiment or idea, for God can only be known through revelation, and is far from being what man's imagination would paint Him: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself." Psalm 50:21. Unrestrainedness of ways is the result: "The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." Exodus 32:6. "Aaron had made them naked," should probably read, "let them loose." See 2 Chron. 28:19. If God is turned from, how soon the heart is turned to folly! How like the prodigal going off into the far country to indulge himself in every evil! If piety toward God is neglected, then no amount of truth can keep us, or be a check upon the flesh.

Next worldly alliances are formed. If we are down upon the world's level, it will soon be glad of our company, and little by little will take away from us all that savors of the fear of God. It is easy to acquire a liking for what conscience at first refused as evil. If it is not judged, but tolerated, however spurious the plea, it will soon be accepted and delighted in. And it is striking that from Peor, Salaam was forced to speak the highest blessing of the people when he took up his parable the third time; and it was there the people fell into alliances with the Midianites. God's best thoughts and grace toward them are seen in contrast with their own low state and acts. How seductive is the world! How few of us have grace to refuse it, especially in the shape in which it pleases us! For each of us it has a different aspect exactly adapted to our tastes, and what would be an attractive bait to one would not be to another. But "The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world," and "Whosoever... will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

We then have despised Christ, and esteemed the manna as light food. If I share the world's tastes, I shall not see much in the lowliness of Christ to attract me, and the connection between despising the manna and the fiery serpents is important. If He is rejected, the work of death goes on unhindered. It is sin become exceedingly sinful, manifestly by the rejection of Him who came to relieve from it, and death working unhindered in those that despised Him who came in lowly grace to seek and save the lost.

Finally, the dissatisfaction of the heart is openly expressed in their murmuring which brought the judgment of God -no doubt a reference to Numbers 13 and 14, their refusal of the pleasant land, and in heart turning back to Egypt. It was this that brought the full sentence upon them of exclusion from the land which they had openly refused. How solemn the warning! How it should stimulate us to diligence and carefulness to watch against the coming in of what would, if its results were fully known, end in entire separation from God. And "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Self-confidence is a very different thing from confidence in God, though it may carry one on a good way without the discovery being made of what it really is. We "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." But this is the confidence of one who, knowing his own weakness, has learned to trust Him, and everything else must fail and break down. How beautiful the encouragement given to one beset with the very wilderness trials which the enemy would use to discourage and drive from God into the meshes of his own net.

Do you think your trials are greater than others?-true as it is that "the heart knoweth its own bitterness." "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful." What a word! "God is faithful." Yes, think of Him who is still interested in your welfare, and who, though He may try your faith for your good, will never forsake. Only wait on Him as One who is entitled to the confidence of your heart, and He will make a way to escape that you may be able to bear it, and will give you that for which to praise Him when His delivering hand is seen. To have these exercises is true gain, as to be without them would indeed be loss; and those who seek to fortify themselves against the trials by their own inventions will find how much they have lost in the weakening of their faith, and the consequent obscurity of all that is most precious. To leave the path of faith because of its exercises, to seek one that seems smoother, is to ensure ones own downfall and the missing of even that we aimed at.

Devotedness of Heart

How much blessing is lost by souls from being occupied with some action or blessing from Christ, instead of making Himself the aim and object of the heart. Now in John 14, in a striking and beautiful way, He presupposes that nothing can cheer the heart here during His absence but Himself- that the blank caused by it never can otherwise be filled. He therefore promises to come for us! No sweeter word could be said in parting than this, "I will come again"! It was a promise filled with every joy to the widowed hearts of those He was leaving behind. But there is more - He adds, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." He promises to come for us, and while we wait for that moment, He will come to us; what more could the heart desire? It is very precious. He will come for us and He will come to us - one in Person, and the other by the Holy Ghost whom He was about to send. But "come" is the word by which He would cheer and sustain the heart. The heart which knows most of His coming to us will most truly desire and look out for His coming for us.

O for more personal affection for Him! Out of personal love to Christ Himself, one may admire and feel their need of Him without the sense of giving up anything here. This is devotedness-it is the heart seeing such worth in Christ that it lays aside as weights those things which hinder the soul's enjoyment of Him.

The Divine Anathema

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha." 1 Cor. 16:22.

The position which this solemn anathema occupies is truly remarkable. In the course of his lengthened epistle, the Apostle had to rebuke and correct many practical evils and doctrinal errors. There were divisions among the Corinthians. They were puffed up for one against another. There was fornication among them. They went to law one with another. There was gross disorder at the Lord's supper. Some of them called in question the grand foundation truth of the resurrection of the dead.

These were grave errors and formidable evils - errors and evils which called forth the sharp and stern reproof of the inspired Apostle. But, be it carefully noted, when at the close he pronounces his solemn "Anathema, Maranatha," it is not directed against those who had introduced the errors or practiced the evils, but against "any man" who loves not the Lord Jesus Christ. (The word "Anathema" signifies anything devoted to death; and "Maranatha" signifies the Lord comes to execute judgment.) This, surely, is well worthy of serious thought. The only security against all manner of error and evil is genuine love to the Lord Jesus Christ. A man may be so strictly moral that no one could put his finger upon a single blot in his character-or a single stain in his reputation - and underneath that strict morality there may be a heart as cold as ice as far as the Lord Jesus Christ is concerned. Also, a man may be so marked by a spirit of benevolence that his influence is felt throughout the entire sphere in which he moves, and all the while his heart may not have a single pulsation of love to Christ.

Finally, a man may possess, in the region of his understanding, a perfectly orthodox creed, and he may be devotedly attached to the ordinances and observances of traditionary religion, and be wholly without affection for the adorable Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It may even happen that all these things,- lofty morality, noble benevolence, sound orthodoxy, and devoted attachment to religious forms-exist in one and the same individual, and that individual be wholly void of a single spark of genuine affection for the Lord Jesus Christ and, as a solemn and startling consequence, stand exposed to the burning Anathema of God the Holy Ghost. I may be moral through love to self. I may be benevolent through love to my fellow. I may be orthodox through a love of dogmas. I may be religious through a love of sect. But none of these things can shield me from the merited judgment which is denounced by the Holy Ghost against "any man," no matter who or what, who loves not the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a deeply solemn and most seasonable word for the present moment. Let the reader deeply ponder it. Let him remember that the only basis for true morality - the only basis for genuine benevolence - the only basis for divine orthodoxy - the only basis for "pure religion" - is love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and where this love exists not, all is cold, sterile, and worthless-all exposed to death and judgment by the "Anathema, Maranatha" of the Holy Ghost. If the heart be really touched with the vital spark of love to Jesus, the every outgoing of the soul is precious to the Father - precious to the Son - precious to the Holy Ghost -all is fragrant with the perfume of that

blessed name which is the theme of heaven's wonder, the center of heaven's joy, the object of heaven's worship.

May the Holy Ghost so unfold to our souls His matchless glories and peerless excellencies, that we may say with the Apostle, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

Earth and Man: the Editor's Column

Last month we considered the vast celestial system and the billions of stars which God has created. Now let us turn our attention to the planets of our solar system, of which there are nine: Mercury, Venus, the Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. These are given in the order of their distances from the sun. They have no light of their own, but reflect the light of the sun in varying degrees. Each planet revolves on its axis, and each travels a regular orbit about the sun. The planets range in size from Mercury the smallest with a diameter of 3012 miles (the earth is 7926 miles at the equator) to Jupiter the largest with an equatorial diameter of 88,800 miles. The earth is medial in size; there are four smaller and four larger ones.

Notwithstanding the relative smallness of the earth when compared to an innumerable host of stellar bodies, it is the most important orb in the heavens for several reasons. It is here and here alone that man is found. Quite obviously no life can exist on the surface of the burning stars, and from all astronomical observations it seems conclusive that there can be no life of any kind on any of the known planets except Earth, which thus occupies a unique place in the universe of God.

These considerations take us back to Genesis 1 and 2, where we have the divine record of God's having originally created the earth. Next we are told of a subsequent chaotic state, and finally God's careful preparation of the earth for man, after which He created man in His own likeness and image, and gave him dominion over the earth. A verse in Isaiah is conclusive proof to the Christian that God did not create the earth in a chaotic state-"He created it not in vain" (chaotic). Chap. 45:18. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." Heb. 11:3.

We are not told how or when the chaotic state came about, but merely that it was such and that darkness covered the face of the deep at the time when God began to prepare it for man. Sufficient room is left between the first and second verses of Genesis 1 to account for all the real and conjectured ages of the geologists and psuedo-geologists. God merely tells us of its original creation and then passes down to the time of its being readied for the human family. We need not concern ourselves with what or how many changes it may have undergone. What we need to know, God has told us; that is, He created it originally and then later set it in order for man. After all was ready, the Godhead took counsel: "Let us make man in our image [representative], after our likeness [moral likeness, sinless]." This is how man came to be upon the earth - all the vain reasoning and conceit of man notwithstanding. God created him and gave him to be its lord, but alas, he soon sinned and fell. He lost the likeness of God, but still retains His image, or is His representative here.

The sun and stars were created in God's original work, but all was placed in its present relation to the earth in the week of His work of preparation. We now learn from astronomers that the earth is 92,897,000 miles distant from the sun. God knew just exactly what distance was needed to have it do its part in sustaining life on earth. If it were much closer to the earth, then everything would be burned up; were it much farther away, everything would have been enveloped in a perpetual deep

freeze.

Each year the earth travels 583,400,000 miles around the sun at a velocity of about 66,000 miles per hour (this makes all man's boasted speed of travel look insignificant) and it never falters nor needs repair. Its speed is constant. Here again we see the wisdom of God in the speed and in the size of the earth's orbit, for if this were changed it would affect its relation to the sun with resultant disaster for life on earth.

The earth is tilted 23 degrees on its axis; this produces our seasons with utmost regularity. And God has promised that while the earth remains, "Seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." Gen. 8:22. If the earth were not thus tilted, life would soon have become impossible here, for without the warming of the polar regions as they are briefly turned toward the sun each year, their increasing accumulation of snow and ice would soon affect all the water balance of the whole earth.

Every 23 hours, 56 minutes, 4.1 seconds the earth makes a complete revolution on its axis, and this does not change by even a second from generation to generation. Man cannot make such a timepiece. At the equator the earth's surface moves slightly more than 1000 miles per hour. Let us consider how very important this rotation is to our very existence. Saturn makes its rotation in only 10 1/2 hours, which if done by the earth, the days and nights would be far too short for proper benefit to be derived from the sun; for example, it takes the long hot days of summer to mature the corn and other crops. Mercury, on the contrary, only revolves on its axis once in 88 days. Just think of long dark nights 88 times 24 hours; or the hot burning sun for 88 long days without intermittence. To add to the comparison, Mercury also travels on its orbit about the sun in 88 days; thus by the same timing for its rotation and revolution it always keeps just one side toward the sun. If this were true of the earth, then one side would be burned up and the other side cold, to say nothing of the fact that all the weather and water would be disrupted.

In God's preparation of the earth, He placed the moon in its present relationship as a satellite of earth. It travels in an orbit around the earth. Six other planets also have satellites, or moons - Mars and Neptune have two each, Uranus five, Saturn nine, and Jupiter eleven. These are planets. Earth's moon is the sometimes called secondary "lesser light" which God set to rule the night, and the "greater light" was to rule the day. We might consider the typical significance of these in that the Lord Jesus is spoken of as "the Sun of righteousness" by Malachi, and He will truly be the Light that will rule the millennial day, while morally, at present, this world is enveloped in the darkness of night. The true Light once entered the world and was cast out of it; since then it has been a long dark night. The Church has been set for light here while the Sun of righteousness is hidden. The Church, like the moon, has no light of its own, but sheds reflected light on this poor darkened scene.

People little realize the important place that the moon plays in the affairs of earth. To mention just one thing, the tides of the oceans (which in some places rise to 50 and 60 feet) are created through the gravitational pull of the moon. The moon keeps an average distance from the earth of 238,860 miles. Suppose that this were only half that distance; then the tides would be so great as to engulf large areas of the world.

We may well apply the words of the Apostle Paul, when he thought on the wonders of God's dispensational ways with men, to the wonders everywhere apparent in creation, if men only had eyes to see them: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen." Rom. 11:33-36. Man was God's crowning work of creation, and then He abundantly supplied him with everything needful, and many things for his pleasure and comfort. All creation is an intricately woven pattern of most delicate balance - the air we breathe, the water we drink, the foods we eat, the sunshine and the rain, the great ocean currents ("the paths of the sea"), and the winds which we feel, besides the great jet streams of air which move at tremendous velocity in the higher elevations.

David sang of God's wonders in the creation of the human body, saying, "I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made"; and then he adds, "Marvelous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." Psalm 139:14. "O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches." Psalm 104:24.

God not only placed man on earth, but He gave it to him, as we read, "The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath He given to the children of men." Psalm 115:16. The man is going to stay where God put him; he is not going on interplanetary trips. Such schemes are only the speculations of dreamers. Today there are some people who publish books in all seriousness claiming to have talked with visitors from other planets, and some even claim to have made trips with these visitors in space ships. Such aberrations are wildest flights of fancy, or else hoaxes for the purpose of deceiving the simple.

But there is still a stronger claim for the pre-eminence of the earth above all other heavenly orbs; that is, this is the place where God has been revealed. After man sinned and brought ruin into the scene that God had pronounced very good, he was tried in various ways to see if there could be any recovery. At every fresh test, man only failed, and often more signally than before. Finally God sent His beloved Son into this world. Yes, this small orb is the very place where God came in human form. He came into the scene of His own creation, only to be refused. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." John 1:10. He came in lowly guise - was born in a stable, was a carpenter, a lowly and poor Man who at times had not where to lay His head. He who was so truly human that He was weary with His journey and sat on the well at Samaria, was the Lord of glory. He who came "full of grace and truth" met poor sinners where they were.

"Thou wast 'the image' in man's lowly guise,

Of the invisible to mortal eyes;

Come from His bosom, from the heavens above,

We see in Thee incarnate, 'God is love.'

"No curse of law, in Thee was sov'reign grace,

And now what glory in Thine unveiled face!

Thou didst attract the wretched and the weak,

Thy joy the wand'rers and the lost to seek."

The earth bears this distinction, that here it was that

God was pleased to reveal Himself in the Person of His Son. It was here on this terrestrial globe that angels for the first time beheld their Creator. (See Luke 2:13, 14 and 1 Tim. 3:16.) God spoke to the fathers in the Old Testament times, by the prophets, but after that, He spoke in the Person of His Son (Heb. 1:1, 2). Wonder of wonders that God should come so near to His poor fallen creatures! and that He should occupy Himself with this little orb. The Apostle John said by revelation: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us)." 1 John 1:1, 2.

That blessed One came so near that they could hear, nor was it indistinctly; they could see, and not obscurely, for He remained long enough for men to contemplate Him; they could even handle Him, as John who rested on His bosom at supper time, and alas, He was taken by wicked hands and crucified.

When He was here He was light revealing darkness, but He was also love. If there had been only light it would have repelled the sinner, but the love drew many to Him. The poor woman of the 4th of John, did not respond to His overtures of love and offers of a gift, so He as light exposed her whole life in His presence. This together with the love that first manifested itself to her brought out a full confession of her sins, and at the same time won her heart.

"Thou the light that showed our sin,

Showed how guilty we had been:

Thine the love that us to save,

Thine own Son for sinners gave."

The physical wonders of creation may well astonish us, but the glory of God revealed in Jesus the Son on earth is beyond words to express. Truly this earth is the center of all God's ways, and the place where His love, His grace, His goodness, His holiness and truth, are also displayed. Everything meets in the Son, and fully at the cross. There too the perverse wickedness of the human heart was told out to its fullest extent - its innate hatred to God when He came in grace and truth.

Well may we praise Him for this display of His heart. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." 1 John 4:9. His beneficent goodness to His creature in creation is wonderful, but all pales into comparative insignificance before the full revelation of HIMSELF. It is in this that we learn to know God.

"O God, how wide Thy glory shines!

How high Thy wonders rise!
Known through the earth by thousand signs,
By thousands through the skies.
"Those mighty orbs proclaim Thy power;
Their motions speak Thy skill;
And on the wings of ev'ry hour
We read Thy patience still.
"Part of Thy name divinely stands
On ev'ry work impressed;
Each is the labor of Thy hands
By each Thy power's confessed.
"But when we view Thy strange design
To save rebellious worms,
Where vengeance and compassion join
In their divinest forms:
"Here Thy bright character is known,
Nor dares a creature guess
Which of the glories brightest shone
The justice or the grace.
"Now the full glories of the Lamb
Adorn the heavenly throne,
While saints on earth that know His name,
Their Lord and Savior own.
"How blest are we who have a part
In the immortal song!
Wonder and joy become our heart,
And praise and thanks, our tongue."

Election and Predestination: the Editor's Column

A book written by a well known radio Bible teacher was recently put into our hands for examination. This we did cursorily and, while we do not feel that we should review the book as a whole in this column, we are constrained to examine its teaching on the very important but little-understood subject of God's sovereignty and man's so-called free will. We shall first speak of what God's sovereignty and related terms mean in their scriptural sense before considering the comments found in the book.

God's sovereignty means that God has a valid and inalienable right in the absoluteness of His Person, and in the greatness of His power, to do as He pleases with and in His own creation. Not that God will ever cease to act in and according to His own character and nature of light and love, but the crux of the matter is that He has this supreme right to do as He pleases. If this could be limited in anywise, then God would be circumscribed; in fact, He would cease to be God.

Closely akin to this obvious fact of God's sovereignty lies the truth of election; that is, God, acting in sovereign grace, has chosen some persons out of many with a view to blessing them. God chose Abraham out of an idol-worshiping world, and made him the depositary of His promises and blessings; and who shall challenge His right to do so? It was God's choice, not Abraham's.

When we come to the New Testament we find that "He [God] hath chosen us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." Eph. 1:4. The point of time of His choosing does not enter into the question of His sovereignty, for it would still be His choice if He should choose some now or at any time. The fact that He did it before the foundation of the world shows that He had His thought and counsel about certain people before the world existed. He chose them independently of the world, and they were not to be of it (though in it for a time), as the Lord Jesus said,

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." John 17:16. Theirs is a portion outside of and beyond the world.

Peter also wrote of election when addressing the converted Jews, saying, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 1:2. They had been chosen by God out of an unbelieving nation. It was His sovereign choice, not theirs. As the Lord said to His disciples, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." John 15:16.

Christians should not, however, rush to the conclusion that whenever we find the word "elect" in Scripture it refers to us, for God has other elect ones in other dispensations, as Abraham most surely was in his day. The Lord Jesus said that when the Son of man comes He shall send His angels and "gather together His elect from the four winds." Matt. 24:31. These will be the elect Jews out of an apostate nation when He comes back to reign. The Apostle Paul also speaks of elect angels (1 Tim. 5:21), which we judge to be those that were kept from sinning when many did.

Predestination is often confused with election, or choosing, and many profitless controversies have thereby ensued. While God set His heart upon us and chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, He has predestinated to something those whom He thus chose. So we read in Eph. 1:5 of those whom He chose: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." Predestination then is the purpose of God concerning those whom He chose. He chose us out of a lost race that "we should be holy and without blame before Him in love," and then marked us out, or predestinated us, "unto the adoption of children." It is the peculiar place belonging to those whom God has chosen in this age. In Rom. 8:29 we read of being predestinated "to be conformed to the image of His Son." Again, it is plain that predestination is separate and distinct from election or choosing, and is the marking out of the chosen ones to a certain portion.

We knew one servant of the Lord who used this homely illustration to explain God's predestination: a father of a large family marked out each child for a certain vocation in life - one son was to be a physician, another an accountant, another an engineer, etc.

"Foreknowledge" is another word that is often confused with election, and even made to limit it, but there is no reason for such confusion. Foreknowledge is God's knowing certain persons in a past eternity-it is a knowledge of persons, not what they would do. (Not but what He does know, as omniscient, all that everyone does and will do.) When God chose to have a people out of a lost race before Him in love, He did not merely decide that a certain number of persons had to be saved to fill up certain niches in heaven, but He actually knew these persons individually. In Romans 8 we read, "whom He did foreknow," not "what He foreknew." Nor does it mean that He merely foreknew the fact that we would be saved, but that He foreknew each one individually. Peter also said, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God"; He knew the persons whom He chose.

All of this is most comforting to the heart of the saved soul. We gladly acknowledge that it was all of His grace, and that we were the unworthy objects of His sovereign choice. This does not (as some charge) make for any carelessness in our walk, for He who chose us created us "in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Eph. 2:10. Where Peter speaks of election the same principle holds true, for our election of God is unto sanctification (or setting apart) of the Spirit "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." We are set apart by the Spirit, not only to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, but to His obedience; that is, we are to obey as He did. And how was that? He as a man always had a will that delighted in God's will. He could say, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God," and "I do always those things that please Him [the Father]." His was not a legal obedience where a human will had to submit itself to God's will, but His will ever and always was to do the Father's will. (Except that He shrank from being made sin- a part of His divine perfection.)

Now we come to the erroneous teaching of the book in question. The author speaks of God's sovereignty and His right to do as He pleases, and then by later comments nullifies it. He limits God's right to do as He pleases by a misuse of the word "foreknowledge." Speaking of Jacob and Esau, this author says, "God looked down the avenue of time and He saw the response which would come from the heart of Jacob, and the lack of response, from the heart of Esau; on the basis of His foreknowledge of their behavior as free will agents, He was able to lay His plans

accordingly." This is basically erroneous. If such could be true, God would be circumscribed by the volition of the impotent creature. This would leave Him no choice at all. God would cease to be sovereign.

God chose Jacob instead of Esau as the one through whom the Messiah would come, and that sovereign choice was in no way dependent on the later conduct of either or both men.

This author comes very close to another serious mistake, often made by others, by saying, "God chose Jacob, He rejected Esau." Many have attributed to God the reprobation of Esau and of all the lost; that is, they were rejected by God's decree before they were born. This is not to be found in the Holy Scriptures. God said to the mother, about the two boys, "The elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23), but did that make Esau a profane man? By no means. God certainly had the right to make Jacob the master, and Esau the servant, but that did not consign Esau to reprobation. What either Jacob or Esau did had nothing to do with God's selection, but it is not until the last book in the Old Testament that God said, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Esau and his posterity had then proved by a long and continuous course of action their unrelenting hatred of Jacob and his descendants. The infidel would fain place the statement of Malachi along with the one of Genesis which merely said which son would serve the other. It is important to remember that God did not say before they were born that He loved Jacob or hated Esau.

The natural heart of man rebels against God's right to choose some for blessing, but this is largely due to a lack of seeing the hopelessly lost condition of the whole human race. All, all have been proved hopelessly bad - "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." All deserve death and eternal judgment- not one excepted. Mankind is so bad that unless God chose and called some, none would be saved. True we are saved by faith, but God is careful to add, "and that [faith] not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Eph. 2:8. I cannot even boast of faith, for if God had not given it to me I would not have believed. Not one redeemed one in heaven will be able to take credit to himself for anything. The poet Cowper well expressed this truth in the following words:

"Of all the gifts Thy love bestows,

Thou Giver of all good!

Not heaven itself a richer knows

Than the Redeemer's blood.

"Faith, too, that trusts the blood through grace,

From that same love we gain;

Else, sweetly, as it suits our case,

The gift had been in vain."

The official head of every sovereign state or country has the right to pardon condemned criminals, and occasionally this prerogative is used, but does that mean that all condemned criminals must be pardoned? Oh, no! And shall God, who is supreme and who in order to prove His love and maintain His holiness gave up His dear Son to the death of the cross, be criticized when He picks up some unworthy objects and gives them to believe? "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest

against God?"

As for man's free will, there is no such thing. He may be free to will, but his will is not free. He is sold under sin, is a slave to his lusts, and a slave of Satan-how then is his will free? Did the slaves of a century ago have a free will to choose their masters or their work? Surely not. Neither has lost man.

Another has said, "A man being really set to choose between evil and good is alike horrible and absurd; because it supposes the good and evil to be outside, and himself neither. If he is one or the other in disposition, the choice is there. To have a fair choice, he must be personally indifferent; but to be in a state of indifference to good and evil is perfectly horrible. If a man has an inclination, his choice is not

free: a free will is rank nonsense morally, because if he have a will, he wills something. God can will to create. But will in moral things means either self-will, which is sin (for we ought to obey); or an inclination to something, which is really a choice made as far as will goes.... Man was set to good [in Eden], though not externally forced to remain so. He first exercised his will - free will, morally speaking - in eating the forbidden fruit, and was therein and thereby lost, and since then he has been inclined to evil."

If the Son makes a man free, he is free indeed (John 8:36). When one is set free and has a new nature, then he may in the power of the new life delight to do God's will, but apart from new birth man is a slave. And if God did not act in grace, then all men would be lost.

We may well say with another:

"Why was I made to hear His voice

And hearken while there's room?

While others make the wretched choice,

And rather starve than come.

" 'Twas the same grace that spread the feast,

That gently forced me in,

Else I had still refused to taste,

And perished in my sin."

Let us remember that the truth of election is a family secret. We should not preach it to the unsaved. We should tell men of their lost condition, and of the Savior to meet them in their need. Then we should press the urgent need of repentance and of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ at once. The Apostle Paul who gave the Church the truth of election also said, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" God calls on all men everywhere to repent, and takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The old illustration of a great sign over an entrance, reading, "Whosoever will may enter," is still true in the gospel. Then when we have entered, we read on the reverse side that we were "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world."

Nor should we forget that the same Word that teaches us God's sovereign electing grace, also teaches that man is responsible for his sins. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are found side by side in the Holy Scriptures. Man is responsible and will be judged for his sins and for rejecting Christ when He was offered to him. Man is without excuse, and in a lost eternity will have no one to blame but himself, while the redeemed in glory will take no credit to themselves, but confess what debtors they are to His grace. But never, never speak of election to the unsaved, and if perchance one of them should raise the subject and suggest that he does not know whether he is one of the elect or not, you can tell him that if he will accept Christ he is one of the elect. This throws the responsibility back on himself as to whether or not he will accept Christ. May God help us to keep all truth in its relative distinctness, and to share in t h e Apostle's burden: "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." 2 Tim. 2:10.

Explanations

To be taken up with the Spirit's guidance apart from the authority of the written Word, may lead to the wildest fanaticism, of which there have been painful examples.

To be taken up with the Word apart from the Spirit's teaching, is rationalism, for it is founded on the false assumption of man's competency to reason about God's truth, instead of being judged by it.

To refuse the authority of the Word because we cannot understand it, is infidelity. To look to any persons or ordinances to come between us and God, besides the accomplished work of His beloved Son, is ritualism

Ezra: Restoration From Babylon

Jehovah's house being now completed, we have in the next place the account of the dedication.

"And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, and offered at the dedication of this house of God a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses." vv. 16-18.

It was but natural that they should rejoice at such a moment, for the house of their God was the expression of all the blessings of the covenant in which they stood. And at length, after weary years of failure, difficulties, disappointments, and sorrow, it stood completed before their eyes. It was for this that they had been brought up out of Babylon, and if any of them had sown in tears they now reaped in joy. But their own feebleness, and the poverty of their circumstances, may be seen by contrasting this dedication with that of Solomon's temple. Then the king offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep, besides sheep and oxen which could not be told nor numbered for multitude, which were sacrificed before the ark (2 Chron. 7:5; 5:6). If they had dwelt on this aspect, their joy, as on laying the foundation, might well have been accompanied with lamentation and tears. Faith, however, has to do with unseen things, and it could thus recall to the mind of this feeble remnant that Jehovah was no less mighty and no less merciful for them than for Solomon.

The house might be less glorious, and they themselves but poor subjects of a Gentile monarch, but if God was for them, as He was, the resources available to faith were as unbounded as ever. This truth cannot be too deeply impressed on our minds, that Christ remains the same for His people in a day of difficulty as in a season of prosperity. To be in the power of this raises us, as nothing else can, above our circumstances, and gives us courage to press on, whatever the perils of the path.

And faith was in exercise in these children of the captivity, for we find that they offered a sin offering for all Israel. All Israel was not there -only representatives of two or three tribes-but these few were on the ground of the nation before God, and they understood this, and thus included in their sin offering all the tribes of Israel. This is surely a significant lesson for the remnant gathered out in these last days to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They may be but few, and both poor and feeble; but if they enter into the truth of their position, they will include in their hearts and in their prayers all the members of the one body. In spirit they will occupy the ground on which they have been set "with all the saints"; or otherwise they will but add another to the many sects which already divide the Church of God. This becomes easy when faith is in lively exercise, for the faith that on the one hand links itself with God, on the other, links itself with all His people.

They were also characterized at this moment by obedience. They regulated the service of the house-the priests and the Levites - "as it is written in the book of Moses." The path of obedience, whether for the individual or for the assembly, is the only path of blessing. At such a time - just when the house of God was completed-it would have appeared folly to them for man to have intruded his thoughts into the house of God. Their only concern was to know what God had said-what He had directed. So it was when the house of God was built at Pentecost, in the apostolic Church; and so it was when God graciously permitted the revival of the truth of the Church at the beginning of the last century. But what happened after the departure of the apostles has happened again (as also with the remnant, as will be seen in the closing chapter of Ezra); that is, the Word of God as the sole regulator of His house is often displaced by man for his own convenience, or for his own wisdom.

No danger is more subtle than the gradual creeping into the assembly of human thoughts and arrangements in substitution for the Word of God. In effect, although not so intended, it is the deposition of the Lord from His place of supremacy over His people. There never was a time, therefore, when it was more necessary to remember the words of our risen Lord: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Following the dedication of the house, although actually a short interval elapsed, the Passover was observed.

"And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat, and kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel." vv. 19-22.

The connection is exceedingly beautiful. The house of their God finished, His people celebrate the memorial of their redemption from the land of Egypt, and thus remind themselves, to the praise of Jehovah, of the ground on which they stood, and of the fact that the foundation of all their blessing, of all God's actings in grace toward them, was the blood of the slain lamb. This according to the word of Moses, was "a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt; this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations." Exod. 12:42. Nothing could show more distinctly that these children of the captivity were at this moment in possession of the mind of the Lord than their observance of the Passover. Passing by the glories of the kingdom, they traveled upward until they reached the charter of all they possessed, whether in title or in prospect, and there confessed God as the God of their salvation. Thus they built on what God was for them on the ground of the blood of the passover lamb, and they found in that, as individual souls ever find, a rock which is both immutable and immovable. Their hearts were in this feast; "for," as we read, "the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure." (See Numb. 9:10-14.) They discerned what was due to Him whose feast they kept.

There were others besides themselves who united with them in this observance - those who had "separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel." Whether these were of the few Israelites who had been left behind in the land when their brethren were carried away captive, or whether they were of the heathen, is not mentioned. In Exodus 12 it is said, "There shall no stranger eat thereof"; but it is added, "When a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it." (See also Numb. 9:14.) There were probably therefore "strangers"; and if so, they had been attracted to the children of the captivity by witnessing the divine power that was seen in their separation from evil. Alas! we do not read of any more being thus drawn; rather the children of Israel were drawn afterward to the heathen. It is ever the same with the people of God. When the Spirit of God works in their midst, and when, as a consequence, they walk in any measure according to the nature of their calling, there will always be numbers, constrained by what they behold, seeking their company and fellowship. When, on the other hand, life and power vanish, and are succeeded by coldness and indifference, it is the world that attracts, and not the Church. Hence it is that every movement in the Church of God is most influential at the outset, because then the display of the Spirit's power is more manifest.

After the Passover, they observed according to the Word of God the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy. (See Exodus 13.) This feast followed immediately upon the Passover, and derives its special significance from it. The Apostle has explained this to us. He says, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." 1 Cor. 5:7, 8. That is, the moment we are redeemed God claims us, and He desires us to respond to His claims by holy lives - separation from evil, and separation unto Himself. The feast lasted seven days; that is, a perfect period-typically, the period of our lives. Thus in the Old as in the New Testament all God's claims upon His people are founded on redemption. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." This, whatever the change of words, is the unvarying note, and teaches the uniform lesson, everywhere repeated, that since He is holy, we also are to be holy. Leaven must not be found in our dwellings, but we are to keep the feast perpetually with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Nor should these two things ever be disjoined in teaching. If grace - grace unbounded - is displayed in our redemption, grace should be operative in the hearts of the redeemed. If God calls us out of the world, it is not that we should go back to and find our home again in the world. If by His grace we are washed in the precious blood of Christ, He surely looks that we should keep our garments undefiled. If then the memorials of our redemption are sweet to us, if we delight to be found around the Lord's table, to feast upon the emblems of His body and His blood, let us also delight to keep the feast of unleavened bread in testimony to Him who has redeemed us.

It was a time of joy to this poor remnant, for the blessing of God rested upon them, and the heart of the Gentile king was turned toward them. For a season the clouds had disappeared, and they could rest in the sunshine of heavenly and earthly favor.

Here the first part of the book closes; the remaining four chapters are occupied with the mission and work of Ezra.

Faith's Ground of Confidence

When the soul apprehends the Lord Jesus as the one offering for sin, it has confidence in God, and that on the very ground of His knowing thoroughly our sinfulness. It is impossible that God should pass over the blood of the Lord Jesus, and impute to sinners those sins which He has washed away.

God cannot impute sin to a believer without condemning the value of Christ's blood-shedding and virtually denying the efficacy of it. Faith knows that death is God's own sentence against sin, and that it has been executed on Christ in the sinner's stead. Faith sets to its seal that God is true, and receives His thoughts who has said about the blood-shedding of Jesus, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you."

Fingers of a Man's Hand

There were great things going on in the city of Babylon. Mighty preparations had been on foot for some time. Regardless of God and His righteous claims over them, heedless of His judgment so soon to burst upon them, the giddy, thoughtless multitudes were about to abandon themselves to "lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries." They forgot that soon they would have to "give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead." (1 Pet. 4:3-5.)

But at length all was ready, the appointed day had come, "Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords." The invitations had gone out, the guests had arrived. Not a little disappointment, jealousy, and envy were awakened in many breasts as their places were allotted to them, according to their respective rank, farther from or nearer to the king. Finally all were seated around the tables gorgeously decorated with gold and silver and laden with choicest viands. Soon the wine went around, and a loose rein was given to all the lusts and passions of the heart -the human heart, the heart estranged from God, and filled with sin - the heart that is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

"Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines, might drink therein." Rash, foolish, and godless man! Think not that thy riches, thy rank, or thy human greatness and dignity can deliver thee from the hands of that God to whom thou must give an account!

Suddenly the loud hum of voices ceased; the pealing laughter was heard no more; the stillness of death reigned in that banqueting hall as breathless, panic-stricken, and dismayed, every eye was turned toward the king.

What was the matter? What could have happened to turn the laughter so suddenly into dismay, the feasting into fear? "Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him"-and well they might, for the God whom he had sought to obliterate from his mind had interposed, and was pronouncing the judgment that was to seal his doom.

But how did this all come about? Listen! "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote."

The time for trifling was at an end; matters had grown intensely serious; a solemn feeling of uneasiness overspread that vast multitude as they gazed with alarm upon those words, unintelligible to them, but written indelibly upon the wall.

Belshazzar was in dead earnest now. He cried "aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers." But not one could help him in his difficulty. They could neither read nor explain the mysterious writing on the wall. And, dear reader, if you have never found this out, you

will yet, that the world cannot help you in the hour of your soul anxiety. Companions that have shared your pleasures and helped you to while away your days in forgetfulness of God, cannot still your fears nor quiet your alarm when death and eternity stare you in the face.

But there stood those awe-inspiring words "over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace" - yes, and the king himself had seen "the part of the hand that wrote."

The alarm increased; it spread from the king to his lords, and men and women that but an hour ago joined with the king in his reckless impiety, were troubled in their thoughts, and trembling with terror and alarm.

At length the queen entered (not the wife, but the mother of the king), who it appears had not been present at the banquet. "There is a man," she said, "in thy kingdom."

But Daniel breathed another atmosphere than that which enveloped the banqueting hall of Belshazzar the king. He was a man of God, who walked with God, and lived for God; and this, dear Christian reader, is sure to make itself felt sooner or later.

"Then was Daniel brought in before the king." Rewards were offered, promotion was promised, but what did he care for inducements such as these? Conscious of the dignity of his position as the servant and messenger of the most high God, he said, "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king and make known to him the interpretation." Ah, yes! Daniel, who until now had been despised, forgotten, and ignored, was possessed of a secret which was hidden from all the wise men of Babylon.

Fellow-Christians, let us not hide our lights; let us not shun the cross; let us not shirk our responsibility to confess Christ; rather, let us not lose the priceless privilege! Wherever our lot is cast, let it be known that we are His, and His alone! Let us aim at being somewhat like Abraham of old, who lived a life of communion with God, apart from all the follies and pleasures of the guilty cities of the plain, and to whom was communicated the solemn tidings of the overwhelming judgment that was about to fall upon them. How different the case of Lot who chose them as his dwelling place, and was well-nigh overtaken in their downfall.

But Daniel boldly and fearlessly addressed himself to the king's conscience. He reminded him of warnings already received, but unheeded. "Thou,... O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this." And have not you, dear reader, been warned times without number? Is it with you as it was with Belshazzar of old - "the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified"? Here was the secret of the king's distress - God had been left out - God had been forgotten. And that God was speaking to him in judgment.

"God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it." "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain."

For the Latter Days

"I am come," says the angel to Daniel, "to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days." Dan. 10:14. Nothing can be plainer. It is put as a sort of frontispiece to the prophecy to show that the great thought of God for the earth is the Jewish people, and the main design of this prophecy is what must befall them in the latter days.... Prophecy in general may afford to give a little earnest close at hand, but we never see the full drift of it save in the latter day; and then the thoughts and plans of God always have as their earthly center the Jews and their Messiah.

I do not deny that the Church is a far higher thing than the Jews, and the relations of Christ to the Church nearer and deeper than His relations to the Jews. But you do not lose Christ and the Church because you believe in His link with Israel. No, if you believe not this, you confound them with your own relations to Christ; and both are lost as far as definite knowledge and full enjoyment go. This is for want of looking at Scripture as a whole.

A Form

It is one of the special characteristics of the last days that men shall have "a form of godliness," but deny the power thereof. The form suits the worldly heart because it serves to keep the conscience at ease while the heart enjoys the world in all its attractiveness. Satan's masterpiece is the uniting of things apparently Christian with things decidedly unholy; he deceives more effectually by this means than by any other.

Frankincense

The perfection of Christ in all His path was that He never did anything to be seen of men; it all went entirely up to God. The savor of it was sweet to the priests, but it all was addressed to God. Serving man, the Holy Ghost was in all His ways, but all the effect of the grace thus was in Him, was in His own mind, always toward God; even if for man, it was to God. And so with us; nothing should come in, as motive, except what is to God.

We see in Eph. 4:32 and 5:1 and 2, the grace toward man, and the perfection of man toward God as the object. "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children" (J.N.D. Trans.). In all our service as following Christ here, we get these two principles: our affections toward God and our Father, and the operation of His love in our hearts toward those in need. The more wretched the object of service in the latter case, the truer the love, and the more simply the motive is to God. We may love down and love up; and the more wretched and unworthy the persons are for whom I lay myself out for blessing, the more grace there is in it. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Rom. 5:8. But while that is true, yet as to the state of my heart, the higher the object, the more elevated the affection. With Christ it was perfect. How can a poor creature like me be an imitator of God? Was not Christ an example- God seen in a man? And we are to "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God." He gave Himself for us, but to God; it was God's grace toward poor wretched sinners.

If we look at ourselves, we shall soon see how motives get mixed up, and things come in, even where there is right, truehearted purpose; and that is where we have to watch. In Christ all was perfect; all, every bit of it, as to spring and motive, was for God's glory in this world-no thought of men, as to pleasing them, but that singleness of eye which looked to God alone, though full of kindness to man-loving down in that sense, but ever looking up, with His God and Father before His eye, which made Him perfect in everything He was, of course, perfect - could not be anything else.

Now it is not that the priests could not smell the sweet savor, but it was not offered to them; it was all burned to God. As regards His own path, there was not a feeling that was not entirely up to God- for us, but to God. It was that which was perfectly acceptable to God.

Galatians 3:13: a Reader Inquires

Question: "Does Gal. 3:13-`Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us'-apply to us Gentiles?" S.J.

Answer: The Galatian saints were Gentiles by nature, but after being saved they had listened to Judaizing teachers. They began simply by faith, but then sought to perfect their lives by keeping the law. This was a basic departure from the truth of the gospel, and the beloved Apostle takes them to task very sharply for having removed from the grace of Christ to another gospel, which really was no gospel at all.

Paul takes up the case of Abraham and shows that the father of the Jews, and the one in whom they boasted, was blessed unconditionally with promises from God. The law was a condition or rule of life, imposed later-four centuries later-on the Jews, to prove their helplessness to answer to God's requirements. It caused sin to become exceeding sinful; that is, what they knew to be wrong by natural conscience became a transgression when the law forbade their doing it.

It was evident then that every Jew was under the curse, for anyone who did not obey the law was cursed. How then was a Jew to be free from the curse which he incurred by failure to keep the law? Simply by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ who had so identified Himself with them that He bore the curse of the broken law in His death. So Paul can add, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." He is speaking strictly of the Jews here, and links himself with the believing Jews in the word "us."

But is grace not to flow out to the Gentiles? for they need salvation too, although they were never under the law. Immediately, the Apostle adds, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham [who was blessed apart from and before the law] might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ." v. 14. The hanging on the tree then becomes the ground of blessing for poor Gentiles too. Then Paul concludes the point by saying, "That WE might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." This "we" now embraces all, believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

If Christians put themselves under the law for a rule of life, or for any purpose whatsoever, they are putting themselves under the curse. And those who have the law as a rule of life, greatly lower the standard of walk, for we are identified with Christ and are to live to please Him. Those who thus walk, not only do the things which would have been required by the law, but far transcend legal requirements, and all is done as the willing service of love, not of duty.

The God of Peace

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant." Heb. 13:20.

The title under which the Holy Ghost in this passage introduces God to our thoughts is peculiarly expressive. He calls Him, "The God of peace."

That is what He is to us in connection with the opening grave of the "great shepherd of the sheep," and on the foundation of "the blood of the everlasting covenant." In short, we have in this most comprehensive passage two Persons and two things. We have the God of peace, and the Lord Jesus; the blood of the everlasting covenant, and the resurrection from the dead. All these we have under the pen of the Holy Ghost.

But there is another title under which God must be seen before the soul can really enjoy Him as "The God of peace," and that is as the "God of judgment." To speak of peace while the claims of God in this latter character lie unanswered is the very height of presumptuous folly. God can have no peace with sin in any shape or form. If sin be not put away there can be no peace with God. There may be the peace of ignorance, the peace of carnal security, the peace of a hardened heart, the peace of a seared conscience; but there can be no peace with God so long as sin remains unjudged. Hence, therefore, it becomes us to inquire on what ground the inspired Apostle can speak of God as "The God of peace."

The ground is this-may the anxious reader understand it! -the "God of judgment" met the Sin-Bearer at the cross and there went into the entire question of sin and settled it once and forever. The divine Substitute made peace by the cross in order that "The God of peace" might meet us without judgment at the opening grave. All that the God of judgment had against my sin He laid on the head of my Substitute on the cross in order that I might know and enjoy Him as the God of peace.

This is the grand fundamental truth of the gospel which must, when simply believed, give settled peace to the conscience. The justice of God has been perfectly satisfied about sin by the death of Christ. And more, God has been glorified about sin by the death of Christ. Yes, dear reader, not only has God been perfectly satisfied, but eternally glorified in reference to sin by the blood of the cross. This must give peace to every one who simply believes it.

It is wonderful to think of the meager view we take of the gospel, notwithstanding its moral grandeur as it shines before us in the pages of the Book of God. From the way in which one sometimes hears the gospel put, it would seem as though forgiveness of sins were the fruit of an exercise of mercy at the expense of justice, or as though justice consented to stand aside while mercy pardons and saves.

How different is this from that stupendous scheme of redemption which had its origin in the bosom of God; which was laid in the eternal counsels of the Trinity before the foundation of the world;

which was ratified by the blood of the everlasting covenant; which is revealed by the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures of truth, and received by faith into the hearts of all those who through grace set to their seal that God is true (John 3:33).

In that glorious scheme we behold mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, blessedly combined so that the sinner is as positively saved by righteousness and truth as by mercy and peace. The latter are not more favorable to Him than the former. Justice and judgment are the pillars of that blood-sprinkled throne of grace to which the saved sinner approaches in worship and adoration. The "God of judgment" met Christ on the cross, and there entered into and definitely settled the great question of sin.

How is this to be known? Is it by some feeling in my own mind? Is it by my passing through some mental process? Is it by aught that I can do or say or think or feel? No. How then? "The God of peace,... brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus." This is the way I am to know that the question of sin has been eternally settled. If it had not been settled we should never have heard of "The God of peace," or seen the great Shepherd's opening grave, or known of the changeless efficacy of the blood of "the everlasting covenant."

The God of peace could never have appeared on the scene if all the claims of the God of judgment had not been divinely answered. How were they answered? By the blood of Jesus-nothing less -nothing more - nothing different. Nothing else could avail. If I had all the good works that were ever performed beneath the canopy of heaven; if I had all the morality, all the fleshly pietism, all the legal righteousness of which man ever could boast; if I had all the alms that ever were distributed by the hand of benevolence; if I had all these and ten thousand times ten thousand more besides placed to my credit, it would not answer the claims of the God of judgment with respect to my sins.

But the death of Christ has answered for me. That sacrifice stands before the eye of infinite holiness in all its solitary grandeur, in all its divine sufficiency. It needs no addition. It has met all. What more do I want as the ground of my peace? Nothing more. God is satisfied; so am I; the matter is settled forever, nor can anyone or anything ever unsettle it.

Reader, are you satisfied? Is Christ sufficient for you? Has He done enough to meet the claims of your conscience? Do you want to add something of your own doings or feelings to His all-sufficient atonement? If not, what are you waiting for? You say, "I do not feel." I reply, "We are not saved by feeling, but by faith." "The just shall live," not by feeling, but "by faith." Do you not see that while you talk of not feeling you are still on legal ground - on the ground of works? You have, it may be, abandoned the idea of manual labor, but you are still looking to your mental labor. The one is as worthless as the other. Give up both as a ground of salvation, and take Christ. This is what you need in order to be happy.

If you were to hear a person say, "I am happy now, I have peace with God because I have given a large sum to charity," would you not pronounce him self-deceived? Doubtless; and yet you say, "If I could feel, I should be happy." Where lies the difference between "do" and "feel"? Is not the one as stable a foundation for a sinner's peace as the other? Would it not be better to let Christ supplant both? Is there not enough in Him without your feelings as well as without your works? If your feelings or your works had been necessary, then why did "The God of peace" bring again

from the dead our Lord Jesus? Is it not evident that you are seeking something more as a ground of peace than that which is presented to you in the gospel?

Dear friend, do think of this. My heart's desire is that you may rest, now and evermore in a full Christ-that He may be sufficient for you as He is sufficient for God. Then feelings and works of the right kind will be forthcoming, not as a ground of peace, but as the fragrant fruits of an enjoyed salvation; not as a title to life, but as the outflow of a life possessed through faith in Christ.

It is interesting to observe the three titles applied to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ as Shepherd. In John 10 He is called "The good shepherd" in death. In Hebrews 13 He is called "That great shepherd" in resurrection. And in 1 Pet. 5 He is called "The chief Shepherd" in glory. Each title has its own specific meaning, and its own appropriate place.

God's Elect

A great many people are troubled about election, and are occupied in trying to discover whether they are elect or not.

Now God never puts election before unsaved souls; He never says a word to them about it; on the contrary, when He speaks to a sinner, He says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). And again, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. Could anything be freer than that? It is a strait gate that leads to life, but if it be, it is set wide open, wide enough to admit "whosoever will" without the question of election being raised.

God has never yet met a needy sinner that wanted Jesus, with the reply, "He is not for you because you are not one of the elect"; and blessed be His name, He never will. He cannot deny Himself, and when He says, "Whosoever will," He means it.

It is quite certain, however, that God has an elect people in this world. I read in Eph. 1:1-4, where the Apostle Paul writes "to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus," that they (the saints) had been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. But observe they are saints, not unsaved sinners, who are told this. These people to whom Paul was writing had already got "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (see verse 7). And to such only, in Scripture, God ever says a word about election.

The truth is, election is a family secret, only known to the family of God; and so instead of a sinner wasting time in trying to find out if he is elect or not, far better would it be to seek to know how he, a poor guilty sinner can become one of the children of God.

In Rom. 3:23 I read, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"; so each one may be quite certain he has sinned, for this verse says all have sinned. Now in Romans I read of God as the Justifier; of whom, do you think? I suppose you would say, The righteous, but the 10th verse of Romans 3 says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." How then can God be the Justifier of any one? I get the divine answer to this question in verses 24 to 26 of this same 3rd of Romans: "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ. Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness;... that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." And so I find it is because Jesus has died, because God's righteousness and holiness in dealing with sin have been shown at the cross, and God has been glorified there, that He is now just in being the Justifier of the one that believes in Jesus.

Thus the cross of Christ has placed the righteousness of God on the sinner's side, the moment he believes on Jesus.

It is not that God has become indifferent to sin. That could not be; but having dealt with it at the cross-a spotless victim having suffered in the sinner's stead - the moment the sinner takes his true

ground and justifies God in condemning him, God is just in justifying him, and would not be just if He did not.

Now we will compare three verses in this epistle which I think will show clearly who are the elect. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Rom. 4:5. "That He might be just, and the JUSTIFIER of him which believeth in Jesus." Rom. 3:26. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that JUSTIFIETH." Rom. 8:33.

I find from these verses that God JUSTIFIES the ungodly sinner who believes in Jesus, and that those whom God JUSTIFIES are called "God's elect."

None ever knew, or ever will know, his election of God before coming to find out in the presence of God that he is a sinner, and receiving Jesus as his Savior. It is the mere folly of utter indifference to say, "If I am elect, I shall be sure to get to heaven." It is but a deception of Satan that has made many a one careless about his soul, only to find out his mistake when too late.

Suppose a man is drowning, and a rope is thrown to him, but instead of grasping it he says, "If it is ordered that I shall be saved, I will be," and then refuses the rope within his reach. Surely he deserves to drown.

So now, when God has come down with salvation to men, and has brought it to them where they are, when one look of faith at Jesus, crucified for sinners, saves the soul, and men will not look because they do not know if they are elect or not, surely they deserve to perish in the lake of fire.

O sinner (if such should read these lines), trifle not with God's salvation. Come to Jesus now while you may. He does not say, "If you are elect, come"; but He says, "'Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). And when you have come, and have been met like the prodigal in Luke 15 by the Father, and have been forgiven, and have got on the best robe, then He will put on your finger the ring that tells of His eternal purpose for your blessing - that tells He has had His eye on you from all eternity, that banishes the thought forever from your heart that you chose Him, but opens your lips in praise and thanksgiving forever and ever for the boundless sovereign grace of which you have been the object.

One more illustration and I close. If a letter comes addressed to you, and you want to know what is inside, it is clear you must open it. Well, God's salvation is like that; it comes addressed to you on the envelope- To "Whosoever believeth in Him" (see John 3:16), or to "'Whosoever will" (see Rev. 22:17).

Now, you say, "If I only knew if I were elect or not, I would open the envelope." Well then, you will never know; the secret is inside, and you must open the envelope to find it. I never heard of anyone who opened it - that is, who came to Jesus-who failed to find his own name inside, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Reader, I do not ask you, "Are you one of the elect?" but, "Are you a poor sinner who believes in Jesus, and whom God has justified?" If so, you are one of "God's elect," and will sing with joy:

"Why was I made to hear Thy voice,

To enter while there's room,
While thousands make the wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?
"'Twas the same love that spread the feast,
That sweetly forced me in;
Else I had still refused to taste,
And perished in my sin."

God's King: the Son of Man

Compare Psalm 2 with Psalm 8. God says, "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion." Psalm 2:6. Christ is come, and is not yet set there as King. Now Psalm 8 shows that, though rejected as Messiah, Jesus took the place of Son of man. So when Peter confesses Him as the Christ, Jesus charges him straitly not to tell any, for the "Son of man [His title in Psalm 8] must suffer many things," etc. Sin must be put away before God could set up His kingdom. We are now passing through that order or state of things which is not yet put under Jesus.

Good Title and Sound Practice

While it is divinely true that nothing can come out before the judgment seat of Christ to disturb, in any way, the standing or relationship of the very feeblest member of the body of Christ, or of any member of the family of God, yet the thought of that judgment is most solemn and weighty. Yes, truly, and none will feel its weight and solemnity more than those who can look forward to it with perfect calmness. And be it well remembered that there are two things indispensably needful in order to enjoy this calmness of spirit. First, we must have a title without a blot; second, our moral and practical state must be sound. No amount of evangelical clearness as to our title will avail unless we are walking in moral integrity before God. It will not do for a man to say that he is not afraid of the judgment seat of Christ because Christ died for him, while, at the same time, he is walking in a loose, careless, self-indulgent way. But the grace that has delivered us from judgment should exert a more powerful influence upon our ways than the fear of that judgment.

Grace Be With You

It is not without interest to observe how the Apostle Paul closes his epistles with this desire of his heart.

And indeed, what can be more in keeping with the "grace and truth" that came by Jesus Christ, whose followers we are, than that we should desire this encompassment in a world like this, and amid the many distractions of Christendom?

It is not standing on our rights; for what rights have we? If our just deserts are rendered to us, what can the issue be but "the lake of fire"? But sovereign, unmerited grace to those who merited it not in the least, has been manifested, and from first to last we are debtors to mercy. Where there is the due sense of this in the soul, we shall not be exactors but benefactors. We shall not demand, but be glad to serve, even as "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Oh! how blessed to serve in all humility of mind, for we serve the Lord. Christ and the objects of His grace here below. The Apostle could say, "I endure all things for the elects' sakes, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory?",

Do we expect things to go smoothly? We are called to forbear one another in love (Eph. 4:2), and to see to it that we ourselves do not "fail of the grace of God."

May we then consider one another to provoke to love and to good works, and beseech, when called for, "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Our speech should be "always with grace" (this is the staple), "seasoned with salt." It is not good to have too much seasoning, but love never fails and is never inconsistent with "love in the truth."

May His grace ever rest upon us for His name's sake. Amen.

The Holy Scriptures

The Lord Jesus used the Old Testament Scriptures in several different ways.

He observed them obediently, ordering His life and forming His character, as I may speak, according to them.

He used them as weapons of war, or shield of defense, when assailed by the tempter or by the world.

He treated them as authority when teaching or reasoning.

He avowed and averred their divine origin, and their indestructible character, and that too in every jot and tittle of them.

He fulfilled them, not withdrawing Himself from His place of service and of suffering till He could survey the whole of them (as far as that service and suffering had respect to them) as realized, verified, and accomplished.

In such ways as these, and it may be in others, the Lord honored the Scriptures. What a sight! What a precious fact! How blessed to see Him in such relationship to the Word of God-that Word which is the ground and witness of all the confidence and liberty and peace we know before God.

Then, when the ministry of the Lord is over, when the Son has returned to heaven, and the Spirit comes down, He appears (as in the apostles whom He filled to write the epistles) doing the like service for us. For in the epistles we get quotations from the writings of the Old Testament.

And there is no limit to this. These quotations are found in every part of the New Testament, and are taken from every part of the Old, from Genesis to Malachi - and that very largely. So we have, in the structure of the divine volume, nothing less than the closest, fullest, and most intricate interweaving of all parts of it together, the end too returning to the beginning, and the beginning anticipating the end. In a certain sense, we are in all parts of the volume when we are in any part of it, though

the variety of communications in disclosing the dispensations of God is infinite.

And surely we say, these qualities of the holy Book are in the highest sense divine, as its contents or material have in them a comprehension and display of moral glories in all unsullied excellency which in the clearest manner speak of God unmistakably to heart and conscience.

The Holy Scriptures: Part 1

We may by a little consideration observe the value which God has set on the revelation He has, from time to time, been making of Himself and His will, and also our own title to the direct personal use of that revelation. And such truths are of serious and happy importance to our souls at all times, but in some sense especially now.

When the Lord God planted and furnished the garden, and set Adam in it, He made all to depend on His word or revelation; "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." This was the revelation then; and man's history, as we know, was to hang entirely upon it. And thus, at the very outset, we see what a place of value the word which had gone out from the mouth of the Lord holds; and it became the direct object of the serpent's assault and enmity.

So, when the character of things had been changed through man's disobedience to this first word of God, all is made to depend on another word: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; and it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel." Man's return to God now depended on his belief of this word, as his departure from God had afore hung on his disobedience to the first word. For all now rested on faith, or obedience to this revelation. Thus we find that Abel, by faith, offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. All service from man now rested on faith or obedience to the word or revelation of God (Heb. 11). So high was the value which the Lord put on His word, making it, as before, the standard and the test of obedience, and the hinge on which man's history was to turn. And Cain's offering was in unbelief, or in despite of God's word about the seed of the woman. He despised God's word, as the serpent had before assailed it. And so in process of time, in like manner, Noah and Abraham are called forth from a revolted world by revelations from God, and their acceptance of such revelations determines their path in present peace onward to glory.

But when we reach a larger scene for the energies and acts of God, as in the nation of Israel, we still find that all was made to turn upon the revelation He was giving His people. We read that they were neither to add to it or diminish from it (Deut. 4 and 12). Thus carefully did He hedge around it and jealously watch over it, that it might not be entangled with the thorns of the wilderness of worldly wisdom, or disturbed by the admixtures of man's thoughts. And having thus protected it, and provided for its purity, Jehovah ordered that His people should bind it around their heart and their soul, and fix it under their eye continually, inscribing it on their gates and doors, making it their morning and evening meditation and the theme of their family intercourse (Deut. 6 and 11), so that they should let it in, that it might mingle itself with all their personal and social life, and shed its light on every path, however ordinary, of their daily journey. And if any of them were put at a distance from the more immediate place of the nation and of their religious observances, still the word was to be their rule there (Josh. 22:4, 5). And if any of them were called into circumstances which might be extraordinary or unlooked for, the same word of God should follow them there; for if there were to be a king in days to come, the law of his God should go up to the throne with him, and be there before him as fully as he was before the people (Deut. 17). And the history of Israel

as a nation, like that of Adam in Eden and out of Eden, was to be determined by their use of God's word (Deut. 28).

What an expression of the value which the Lord set upon His Word all this gives us! and with what jealousy does He watch it, that He may maintain it in its purity! and how immediately would He have it bound around the heart and soul of each of His people!

It is blessed to see the Lord thus esteeming His own revelation, and commending it to our esteem; and, as we go on in His ways, it is His Word we still find the Lord using and estimating. Israel was disobedient to the word of His law, and what He does is to send them the word of His prophets. If they refuse one testimony, it is only another they must get. God will still use His word, and still make their history to rest on their use or abuse of it. And therefore we find that their final dispersion and bondage in Babylon came of this, that when the Lord had even risen up early to send them His prophets, they did but despise those prophets, and the words which they brought; so that wrath came on them to the uttermost, and there was now no remedy (2 Chron. 36).

There is however a return to Jerusalem out of Babylon, and return to God then is marked very clearly by a return to His word. The captives are obedient to the word. Ezra, for instance, makes it his meditation, the theme of his intercourse with the people, and the rule of his ways and acts in the midst of them (chap. 7). So Nehemiah and his companions. They read it, they own the power of it over their consciences, and they set themselves to walk and act in the light of it (chaps. 8 and 13). As long, or as far, as those returned Jews were obedient to God, so long, and so far, were they attentive to the voice of His truth, both trembling at and rejoicing in His word according to its spirit in addressing them. They had returned to God, and must therefore return to His word; and while this was so, blessing was theirs, and latter day blessing is made to depend on this also (Mal. 4:5, 6).

When we open the New Testament, after all this, we find the word, or revelation of God, in this accustomed place of honor and value. It is put into the lips of the Baptist; no power lies in his hand, but the word of the Lord breaks from his lips. "John did no miracle," but he was a "voice" from God, acceptance of which was again to determine the history of Israel. So the Lord's own ministry, which this of John introduced, was not only a fresh ministry of God's Word (on the value of which I will not speak), but it did itself greatly honor the precious Word; and this still shows us what value in God's esteem His Word holds. Thus, in His acts, the Lord Jesus was ever fulfilling that Word, as the evangelists are careful to tell us; in His conflicts with the devil, He uses that Word as the gospels again tell us; and in His teachings, He is ever referring to that Word, rebuking the Jews for their value for anything else, for their use of traditions, and their neglect of it, and giving them to know that not a jot or tittle of it can in any wise fail; that the Scripture cannot be broken; and that if Moses and the prophets be not heard, even one risen from the dead would not avail to lead to repentance (John 5:47).

This is much to be observed; and thus did the Son, in His day, honor the Word. The Holy Ghost, in like manner, is a Spirit of revelation in the apostles, and fills up by them the Word of God. And not only so, but in them He does continually, clearly, and fully express His high divine sense of the value of the Scriptures. If man dare not add to it, God need not. It is perfect, able, as the Apostle tells us, thoroughly to furnish the saint to all good works. And no authority stands, or can possibly stand, on equal ground with it, so that even if an angel were to gainsay it, he must be cursed. It

matters not who it may be, all must sink below the voice and authority of that gospel or revelation of God which had been delivered.

Thus do we see, from the beginning to the end, the Lord's value for His own Word-how He has made a hedge about it, that no rude hand may guiltlessly touch it, and also has appointed it to be the great standard at all times, on which the history of His people, either for blessing or for curse, was to turn, and has bound it around the heart and soul, before the eye, and on the palms of His people, and given it an authority which nothing is to be allowed either to gainsay or to rival. God of old, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, each in His day, attests this. And all this is precious to the soul. God and His Word are joined together. To give up His Word is to give up Himself, for He can be known only by His own revelation.

But if we see the divine estimate of the Word, with equal clearness and sureness we may see our title to that Word, and how the Lord has joined us and the Word together also, and that no man therefore can put such asunder.

By one short sentence the "ready writer" has given all saints an immediate personal interest in all the old scriptures. "Whatsoever things

were written aforetime were written for our learning." This one sentence writes our title to a most precious inheritance. The old scriptures are God's gift, and this word from Romans 15 is the deed of gift, entitling all saints to a common property in it. The title is short and clear and simple, as the inheritance conveyed is invaluable.

But with equal simplicity can we make out our title to the new scriptures. Luke addresses his Gospel to a private Christian friend, as we may speak, hereby showing that it was written for the saint in the most ordinary circumstances - not committed to any elect order of persons, or persons in authority, but to a private Christian friend who bore no office or distinction of any kind; of whom, indeed, we hear nothing but in this address of the Evangelist to him. But this shows that this Gospel is given to us all. And if Luke be thus part of our inheritance, so surely are Matthew, Mark, and John. We ask no favor from anyone to allow this-the title is so clear, so simple, so beyond all question - and on the very same ground is our title to the book of The Acts. This was the property of the same private friend, the same Theophilus; any lover of God may deem himself in fullest possession of it, as a further part of his inheritance, and use it without reserve.

The epistles in their turn not only convey their rare and valuable treasures to our souls, but at the very outset tell us of our title to them.

They are addressed (saving in personal cases, as Timothy, Titus, or Philemon) to the saints or the churches in the different places to which the Spirit by His apostles, sends them; and the book of Revelation (which, following the epistles, closes the volume of God) is sent to the seven churches in Asia; and thus we read the title of all saints to these words. They are not specially committed to any separated order of men, but cast upon the hearts of all the saints, as Moses had done with all the statutes and judgments of Israel. And I may add, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" would never have been written to the saints at Colosse if they had not title to the immediate personal enjoyment of that Word. But so it is, blessed be God. He has as simply joined His Word and the heart of His saint together, as He has joined Himself and His Word together. And we say again, "What... God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

And if any do so violently- if any take away the key of knowledge -they are falling under the direct judgment of the Lord; "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge."
Luke 11:52.

The Holy Scriptures: Part 2

We have already noticed God's estimation of His own precious revelation, and His care that it should be kept pure. But in connection with this, I would for a moment look at 1 Kings 13.

The kingdom of the ten tribes under Jeroboam was at this time an unclean place. The calves of gold set up at Bethel and at Dan were the confidence of the people, obedient to this word of their king: "Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of... Egypt."

The Lord sends a missionary into that land with words of judgment. His commission, his ministry, and his conduct in his ministry, were all specially ordered by "the word of the LORD." He comes out of Judah to Bethel "by the word of the LORD" (v. 1); he cries against the altar there "in the word of the LORD" (v. 2); and his behavior, while in that place and doing that service, is prescribed to him "by the word of the LORD" (v. 9). And thus, as we said, his commission, his ministry, and his conduct-all are under the light and authority of God's word. This provided for everything; he had only to observe it.

This is most particularly marked by the Spirit of God in this narrative. And at the beginning, the Lord's missionary, "the man of God," acts accordingly. He pleads "the word" as the warrant for his ministry of judgment upon the altar at Bethel, and also against the offers and invitations of Jeroboam, making it the only light and guide of his path while in his country. And this was all safe and happy. The Lord had given him a very simple directory, and in the observing of it his path was maintained in security and peace.

But that old serpent who in the garden of Eden made "the word of the LORD" the object of his attack, and has ever since been seducing the heart of man from it, tries with this man of God something further, since the offers and invitations of a king are resisted.

There was "an old prophet" in Israel at that time-another man of God, I doubt not, like Lot, found in a place where he could not act in character as a prophet; for how could he reprove the darkness with which he was more or less in fellowship?

Such a one is easily used by the enemy, and so it proves here. The father of lies employs him to do his work, and he tempts the Lord's missionary to eat and drink with him, contrary to "the word" which he had received, under the pretense that "an angel" from the Lord had spoken to him. And the temptation prevails; the path of simple obedience to "the word of the LORD" is deserted, and the servant of God dies under the judgment of God-a kind of pillar of salt- a kind of abiding witness and warning to us all, that our souls may ever hold to this, "Let God be true, but every man a liar."

Deep and serious and, for the present evil day, well-timed is the instruction of this little narrative. The man who withstood the invitations of a king, and had determined on cleaving to "the word of the LORD," though against the offers of a man in power, falls under the pretenses of a man of religion. A religious guise seduces one whom the splendors of a court had tempted in vain. And so it is still and will increasingly be. The devil is still practicing by what the world judges to be religion,

as it judged and estimated the traditions and observances of the Pharisees of old. And he succeeds, if he can but withdraw from subjection to "the word of the LORD." That is what God opposes to everything: "If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isa. 8:20.

Clearly then do we trace in the Scriptures God's value for His Word or revelation, and the believer's title to it. If God's Word be deserted, He Himself is given up, for He can be known only by the revelation of it. There is no light in the soul-they "have taken away the key of knowledge"-and our Lord joins this with not entering into the kingdom of God (Luke 11).

There is an opposite error. There is the taking of this key and using it to one's own destruction. The untaught and unstable do this (2 Pet. 3). The mere human or intellectual man, in the confidence of his own strength, takes this key and injures, all he can, the door of the treasury of wisdom and knowledge through his awkwardness or violence. This is very true.

And the danger is lest, being offended by this, as the saint should and must righteously be, he is cast on the former error and tempted to let the key of knowledge be taken away and deposited in some sacred hand, as is thought. But one error is not to be corrected by another; the key is neither to be taken away nor used unskillfully.

I, however, fully allow, and it is to be deeply remembered by our souls in a day of intellectual pretense like the present, and of much activity of human thought and wisdom, that the Book of God is not to be subjected to the mere acuteness of man's mind Far otherwise indeed! It demands, in the name of God, our full subjection to itself. Nor is it written, as one has said, for critics, for scholars, or for judges, but for sinners. "It is not an interesting exercise for our faculties that we are to expect in it. And it is by laying aside malice and envy and hypocrisies, and by simple desire after the living God Himself, that we are really to grow by its sincere milk or strong meat (1 Pet. 2:1, 2)." I would indeed add this to what I have said on the value of the Scriptures. The Lord forbid that we should say anything that would appear to treat it as only one of the many books of the schools. For the Son of God is not the mere master of a new school, but the living Head of the Church to minister nourishment through joints and bands to the whole body. And let me add the striking and seasonable language of one of other days: "Wouldst thou know that the matters contained in the Word of Christ are real things? Then never read them for the sake of mere knowledge. Look for some beams of Christ's glory and power in every verse. Account nothing knowledge but as it is seasoned with some revelation of the glorious presence of Christ and His quickening Spirit. Use no conference about spiritual truths for conference' sake, but still mind the promotion of edification."

This would help to put the soul into a right attitude when purposing to learn the secrets of God's most precious oracles. And when the Apostle prays for the saints (as in Eph. 1 and Col. 1), that they may grow in knowledge, he does this after he has sought for them that they might have a spiritual understanding; and this tells us, or intimates to us, that mere acquaintance with, or information about Scripture, would all be divinely worth nothing, and that we should be careful not to pursue inquiry into revealed truth by the light or skill of the human mind, but by the exercise of the understanding given to us in Christ Jesus.

Surely I would uphold all this before my own conscience at all times. But it leaves untouched the great truth we have been mainly considering -the value of the written Word with God and to us, and that it is the one great standard for the testing of all our thoughts, and is the common inheritance of all the children. It is even the delight and commendation of an inspired Apostle, that Timothy, the child of a child of God, from his childhood had known that Word. So surely has God bound it about the heart and soul of His people. Therefore, again we say, let no authority divorce them or put them asunder; neither let anyone use it but in that holy obedient mind that is due to a gift of God.

The Spirit, in a very large sense, gives the Scriptures to all. For in the inspired penman of The Acts, the, Holy Ghost commends the Bereans for their candor, their nobleness, in searching the Scriptures, whether what even an apostle was teaching was according to them. It was grateful to the mind of the Holy Ghost to have His Word thus used and honored by these poor private Jews. Bereans they were, of the synagogue in that city; and the Spirit rejoices at seeing the Scriptures in their hands, making them the standard, even though an apostle was preaching unto them. This surely puts the written Word in high places. And so the same Apostle reasoned with the Jews out of the Scriptures, from "morning till evening," as Jesus Himself restored the hearts of the two disciples by leading them through all the Scriptures. Peter also commends the disciples to the light of the prophetic word, and by his own word would ever have them bear in mind all that was needful for them, whether for past, present, or future truth, and never (as another has observed) thinks of commending them to any official or apostolic successor of his, but to that Word which the Holy Ghost by him was then delivering. Even teachers, feeders of God's flock-as spiritual elders set over them-are commended to God and His Word, and not to anything else, in order that they might be kept and edified. (Acts 20; Luke 14 Pet. 1)

This, and more than this, which we have, is more than enough to make our souls prize this precious, precious gift of God-much more precious to our souls by the attempt there has ever been made to take it from us, as not belonging to us, and to deposit it in some dark and distant corner. Some have sought to put asunder what God has joined together -the heart of His wayfaring saint and the light of His Word.

God's Word may be given up by the infidel who rejects it; but it may be given up, though in another way, by him who would join other words with it.

Traditional Christianity is real infidelity, for it denies the Scriptures which assert their own sufficiency, and makes themselves the standard. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isa. 8:20. And again, "The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them?" Jer. 8:9. A betrayer of the Book, in purer days, was judged to be as wicked a one as the denier of the faith. But the one is profane infidelity, the other is religious infidelity, and man by much chooses the latter. It enables him to keep God at a distance, which is the desire of man, or the flesh, and at the same time to keep a conscience at peace with religion still, which is equally his desire.

In closing I would just say that we need the whole of it, but nothing supplemental to it. This is intimated both by the Lord and Moses: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Deut. 8; Matt. 4.) This testimony is strong. These words tell

us that nothing less, nothing more, is needed as food for the sustaining and strengthening of divine life in our souls, the Spirit alone being most surely able to make it effectual. The soul does not know what portion of the precious Word, in its conflict with various darknesses and subtleties of Satan, it may need, but it can live by that Word. Its life will need nothing beside.

These two thoughts are clearly intimated in these words. And thus, for our blessing as for the Divine Giver's praise, we are not to add thereto or diminish therefrom. We may and shall attain different measures in the knowledge of it, according as there is gift of God and the exercise of the spiritual senses; but we are to make it the common standard in the camp of God. And the standard-bearer of the Lord must not faint in the day of battle. A firm hand and a broken heart are to give character to us.

How Do You Worship?

She came not to hear a sermon, although the first of teachers was there; to sit at His feet and hear His word (Luke 10:39) was not her purpose now, blessed as that was in its proper place. She came not to make her requests known to Him. There was a time when she had fallen at His feet saying, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:32); but to pour out her supplications to Him, as her only resource, was not now her thought, for her brother was seated at the table. She came not to meet the saints, though precious saints were there, for it says, "Jesus loved Martha... and Lazarus." John 11:5. Fellowship with them was blessed likewise, and doubtless of frequent occurrence; but fellowship was not her object now. She came not after the weariness and toil of a week's battling with the world to be refreshed from Him, though surely she, like every saint, had learned the trials of the wilderness; and none more than she, probably, knew the blessed springs of refreshment that were in Him. But she came, and that too, at the moment when the world was expressing its deepest hatred of Him, to pour out what she long had treasured up (v. 7), that which was most valuable to her, upon the Person of the One whose love had made her heart captive, and absorbed her affections. "Jesus only" filled her soul - her eye was on Him - her heart beat true to Him - her hands and feet were subservient to her eye and to her heart as she "anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair."

Adoration, homage, worship, blessing, was her one thought, and that in honor of the One who was "all in all" to her; and surely such worship was most refreshing to Him.

The unspiritual (v. 4) might murmur, but He upheld her cause, and showed how He could appreciate and value the grateful tribute of a heart that knew His worth and preciousness, and could not be silent as to it. A lasting record is preserved of what worship really is by the One who accepted it, and of the one who rendered it.

And now, dear reader, is this your mode of worship, or do you on the Lord's day go to hear a sermon, say your prayers, meet the saints, or be refreshed after your six days' toil? Oh! if every eye were on the Lord alone, if every heart were true to Him, if we were each determined to see "no man, save Jesus only," what full praise there would be! Not with alabaster boxes now, but our bodies filled with the Holy Ghost, a stream of thanksgiving, of worship of the highest character, would ascend to the blessed One that now adorns the glory as He once adorned the earth. Be it ours thus to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Amen!

International Alignment: the Editor's Column

On several occasions we have written of the marked trend of the times, and the shaping up of international alignments for the time of the end - the preliminary steps toward the revival of the Roman Empire of the West; the intransigence of Russia and the displaying of her characteristic features of which prophecy speaks; the anti-Jewish agitation of the Arab world, divided into those north and those south of Palestine. Now some of our readers may wonder if these foreshadows of things to come are receding, or perhaps being obliterated, by the peaceful talk emanating from Soviet Russia.

The July meeting of the high officials of four great powers seemed to augur well for a peaceful solution of international strife. Some subsequent conciliatory moves by the Chinese added to this supposition. It is still our considered judgment, however, that while there may be some relaxation of tensions from time to time, yet things will continue to move generally in the same direction. While we cannot know what things may take place between now and the moment when the prophetic word concerning this world will be accomplished, we can speak with assurance of the final outcome, for Scripture has spoken, and we are as sure of its accomplishment as though it were already fulfilled. If the end therefore is certain, we may well expect that the overall general pattern will be toward those developments.

A general feeling that an era of peace and security has come to the world, is not a good sign from its standpoint, but rather a bad one, for just before the sorest judgments fall on this Christ-rejecting world, men will be saying that they have achieved "peace and safety." "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." 1 Thess. 5:3.

Western European nations have been brought closer together through mutual fear of Russia than we might ever have expected to see before the Church was called home. This is definite preparatory work for that future wicked alliance. And while their fears may be somewhat allayed by soothing assurances from Russia, yet when disillusionment comes it will bring greater disappointment and a faster pace than ever toward confederation.

There is no real indication of a change of heart in the leaders of world Communism, nor of their avowed purpose of world domination. It seems to be for their advantage to have a lull in the strife so that they, may put their own house in order. Their own ends can be best served temporarily by peaceful overtures. We have heretofore quoted from the will • of Peter the Great of Russia, how he advised that peace and war should be subservient one to the other in the expansion of Russian power.

In 1919 a prominent Russian official said: "We are willing to sign an unfavorable peace. It would only mean we should put no trust whatever in the piece of paper we should sign. We should be using the breathing space so obtained in order to gather our strength so that the mere continued existence of our government would keep up a worldwide propaganda which Soviet Russia has

been carrying on for more than a year."

It is a well-known fact of history that many kings and rulers have often negotiated peaceful terms in bad faith. The Word of God told before it happened that the ruler of Egypt would sit down at the same table with the ruler of Syria to make a treaty, and that, they would both "speak lies at one table." (Dan. 11:27.)

The United States Senate Committee that has studied Russian diplomacy and acts, said that in the past 38 years the Soviet Union has broken its word to virtually every country to which it gave a signed promise. In the last 22 years they have made 52 major agreements with the West, and broken 50 of them. This may be understood in the light of a remark by Joseph Stalin: "Words must have no relations to actions - otherwise what kind of diplomacy is it? Words are one thing, actions another. Good words are a mask for concealment of bad deeds. Sincere diplomacy is no more possible than dry water or wooden iron."

God's Word declared almost 2700 years ago that there would be a power which would be marked by deceitful dealings: "Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee!" Isa. 33:1. This chapter follows the one which tells of the Messiah's reigning, after having put down the Assyrian (or king of the North), and the false king in Jerusalem, and this brings us to a power that will come against Israel after they are brought back to their land by their Messiah - Russia of Ezekiel 38 and 39.

Whether the so-called "meeting at the summit" in Geneva last July could produce any real lasting effects with this background is more than questionable.

But as Christians we need not be troubled by these world movements, for our prospect is the coming of the Lord. Not one thing needs to be accomplished before we hear that shout, "Come up hither."

"Daily nearer draws His coming, This makes all His own rejoice."

May we be found laying up treasure in heaven where it cannot be stolen or corrupted, and where wars will not affect it (Luke 12:33).

The lull in armed conflict is having a definite result in another way. The god and prince of this world is using it as an opiate to dull the senses of the men of this world. Never before in all history has there been so much leisure, wealth, pleasure, and general self-indulgence, as today. Mankind seems thoroughly devoted to gratifying every lust and whim, to having what is called "a good time." Together with this there is still an increase in religion, but men in prosperity become harder to reach about their soul's need. Thus peace and prosperity will together lead many down to the pit, whereas the danger of death by armed conflict tends to make men think of the hereafter. Nevertheless we should be faithful in warning people to flee from the wrath to come, and presenting the gospel of the grace of God.

In closing, just a word of warning and caution for Christians. The things by which the enemy is blinding the unsaved so that they can be happy on the brink of hell are also calculated by him to sap your spiritual vigor and mine. May God grant us grace to be much cast upon Him to be kept in these difficult times of the last days. We need to keep our loins girded (our affections bound up by the Word) and our lights burning (our testimony undimmed) while we wait for our Lord (Luke 12:35,

36). And in a day of general self-indulgence we should practice self-denial while we take up the cross (fellowship with His rejection by the world) and follow Him (Matt. 16:24).

Isaiah 53:2: Extract From a Letter

I have been just asking myself how far I really see "form" and "comeliness" in the rejected and despised Jesus, and I am assured that while the soul is under the power of things seen, this cannot be; because the marred visage, the thorny crown, the carpenter's Son, the penniless, homeless stranger, the One spit upon, the patient sufferer of wrongs and reproaches daily heaped upon Him, is no object of "form" and "comeliness" before the eye of mere man. If the soul, therefore, be under the power of things seen, what is Jesus to it? It is faith alone that can admire Him. It is the eye trained and practiced by the Holy Ghost that alone can see the beauty of the smitten form of the low-estimated Galilean. This speaks loudly against the constant currents of our hearts. May we be more and more lifted above the admiration of or delight in the things seen-the fair shows of the flesh. Such glances of our hearts, of which they are so guilty, weaken our power to perceive this only real "form" and "comeliness."

So where is the ear for the Shepherd's voice? Surely only in that which the Spirit has, in like manner, opened. And if the flesh and the world be practicing it with its music and soft words, its readiness and skill to catch that unearthly voice will, in like manner, decline and be impaired. Another solemn thought for our souls, another humbling reflection on the too easy and constant ways of our senses, arises here.

I've Lost Him: Eternal Security

One evening I met a man whose appearance and manners at once arrested my attention. He was young and looked intelligent, but there was an air of restlessness, if not of absolute uneasiness, about him which could not be concealed by the flippancy of his manner; and, as I gazed on his thin, worn face, my heart felt insensibly drawn toward him. He was evidently unhappy, and his desperate efforts to be what is termed "jolly" proved ineffectual to remove the dark cloud that hung over him.

After several feeble efforts to get up a lively conversation, he sank back into silence, and his face gradually assumed a dull, moody expression.

It was then that I spoke to him about the love of God to the poor sinner as shown in the gift of His only begotten Son, and, as I dwelt upon the grace which brings a present and perfect salvation so close to the dying grasp of a lost, ruined world, he fixed his large eyes steadily upon me, but said not a word. I went on describing the wondrous love of Jesus in laying down His life for His enemies, and began to point out the solemn necessity that there was for the cross as the only way of escape from eternal damnation.

"Oh!" he said, suddenly interrupting me, "I know all about that. But look here, I've lost Him."

"What do you mean?" I asked, rather startled at the abruptness and earnestness of his tone.

"About twelve months ago I was converted and was very happy; but in course of time I got mixed up with the world, and somehow or other my joy went, and I lost Christ."

"But if ever you received

Christ, you received Him forever. 'He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life' (John 6:47). And we learn from another scripture that He is our life; and again, 'He that hath the Son hath life' (1 John 5:12). Now if Christ is the life we get on believing, and that life is everlasting, how can we lose it? If it were possible to do so, we could never say at any one time that it was ours forever; and yet we read, 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life' (1 John 5:13). But suppose I turn my back upon Christ, and do not value Him-do not enjoy Him as I ought? God never takes away His eternal gift because its receiver fails to value Him as he ought, although most assuredly it grieves Him to have His gift slighted."

"Do you say so?"

"Indeed I do. Are you fond of a horse?"

"Yes."

"Suppose I made you a present of one. What would you give me in exchange for it?"

"I should not need to give you anything for it if you made me a present of it. It would be mine for nothing."

"That is precisely the way God deals with the sinner. He offers him Christ for nothing. The gift of God is eternal life' (Rom. 6:23). But what would you do with your horse when you had him?"

"I would have him out every day."

"That would be a proof that you valued the gift. But suppose you got weary of your horse and, leaving him in the stable one fine morning, you went out for a walk. A friend meets you and immediately says, 'You have lost your horse.' Would you not at once say, 'You are mistaken. The horse is safe in my stable at home'? But suppose he replied, 'Oh, that cannot be; you must have lost him because you are not enjoying him - you haven't him out.' Would you not tell your friend that it was one thing to be sure of your possession, and another thing to enjoy it? 'My horse,' you would say, 'is as much mine when I am walking without him as when I am riding him. Of course the friend who gave him to me would greatly prefer my appreciating his gift by enjoying it, but he gave me the horse unconditionally. He never said, He is yours on condition that you ride him, and the moment that you cease to do so, I will take him away from you.' Now God gives Christ not as a bribe for something to do or as a reward for something done. He gives Him unconditionally. You have nothing to do to get Him, and you have nothing to do to keep Him. God knows the need of poor, hell-deserving sinners, and He meets that need with Christ. And oh! blessed be His name, He does not give Him simply for a season, but forever."

"But when my heart gets cold," he eagerly said, "what must I do?"

"Bring it into the sunshine of His love, and that will warm it. Confess your coldness, judge your condition, and think of His love to you, and if that does not draw out your heart in love to Him, nothing else will. 'We love Him, because He first loved us' " (1 John 4:19).

Tears filled the eyes of the poor fellow as I spoke. A light seemed to break in upon his soul, and his words at parting were:

"Well, that certainly puts the matter into a different shape. I never saw it in that way before."

Jesus

"Thou shalt call His name JESUS." Matt. 1:21.

Thou name of deep, unfathomed love,

Yea, love and grace unknown!

The wonder of all worlds above,

The glory of God's throne.

Oh, 'tis a name I love to own,

I love to call Him mine;

No other name could e'er atone,

Or save my soul, but Thine.

All other names may countless form

A vast variety,

But Thine through ages yet unborn,

One sweet monotony!

Our souls may well this portion claim,

Since but for us-our sin-

Thy name, that blessed saving name,

Of JESUS, ne'er had been.

Thy ancient titles, Son and Word,

Forever stood the same;

But through Thy love for us, blest Lord,

Was known Thy human name.

The cross! the cross! it gave Thee right

To bring us to Thy throne;

And there as precious in Thy sight,

Thy purchased ones wilt own.

There with the joys for which Thou'st died,

Thou cant not want for more;

While all the universe beside

Will wonder and adore.

The name of Jesus brings us into His nature and His work. It is the office of the Spirit through these to reveal Him as a Person. He tells of the love and glory of a personal Christ. Christianity is no abstract theory. It does not consist in mere doctrines or truths, however great. No; the very heartstrings of Christianity are closely entwined around a Person, a glorified Man who is now in heaven, who is not only our salvation, but is the great center and end of all God's purposes and ways. Such is Christianity; it concerns Christ. The beginning and the end, nay, the very soul and center of it, is not so much the truth, or the cross even, but Christ Himself.

And as to ourselves, beloved, who are Christians, such in fact are our affections that we cannot rest merely in a system of truths, or in a book, or even in the Bible, unless it revealed Him.

If we have not Christ, we have nothing. We must know Him and live in the sense of His deep love and grace as a Person. Without such a sense of Him, we grow cold and worldly. We lose all our freshness of soul and power in service. But knowing Him and realizing Him, we have all. Paul, standing on this, exclaimed, "I know whom I have believed." He had no imaginary glory; his was no illusion, no fancy of the brain. His eye was on the Lord Himself, whom he had seen. To his spiritual vision one glorious object alone was ever present: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." 2 Tim. 1:12. J. Denham Smith

Jews Immigration to Israel: the Editor's Column

A most unusual story (but with a sad sequel) has come to us from Palestine. More than 40,000 Jews immigrated to Israel from Bulgaria in recent years; these settled in the vicinity of Jaffa. Their leader in Bulgaria was the chief rabbi, Daniel Zion, who also went with them to Jaffa. Shortly after his arrival in Israel he came to the conviction that Jesus was the Jews' Messiah, and made bold, public declarations of his belief, addressing as many as 1000 Jews at one time in a public meeting.

We would have cause to rejoice in the awakening of a prominent son of Israel to own Jesus as the Christ, but alas, this man easily fell into the false and soul-damning teaching of Arius, the Unitarians, and latterly of Jehovah's Witnesses (which cult's literature was readily furnished to him). How much he was influenced by it, we do not know, but he rejected the truth of the deity of Jesus and His place in the eternal Godhead, and published a leaflet in Hebrew seeking to refute it.

It is sad indeed to find the enemy at work with a false doctrine about the Person of Christ, so that Jews may acknowledge that Jesus was their Messiah, and remain poor, lost souls. The Jews stumbled over Jesus, the stumbling stone that God laid in Zion (1 Pet. 2:6-8), by utterly rejecting His claims of deity. They looked for a Messiah who would restore Israel to a place of prominence and blessing, but because He came in His Father's name, they rejected Him (John 5:43).

The teaching of this totally false cult, Jehovah's Witnesses, lends itself easily to the enemy's work with the Jews. Their teaching does not go beyond earth, hence the Zionism of the Jews is an easy ally. Their hopes are earthly and both will agree in the blasphemy against the glorious Person of Jesus the Son of God.

When the Lord Jesus was on trial before the high priest and the Sanhedrin, He was put under an official oath to tell if He were the Christ, the Son of God. When He truthfully replied that what they had

said was correct, the high priest rent his clothes in feigned shock, and charged Him with speaking blasphemy (Matt. 26:63-66). He was then condemned by that august body for His good confession.

Unbelievers have sometimes falsely said that the Lord Jesus did not claim deity, but witness His dealings with the Jews in the 8th of John's Gospel. He said, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad." v. 56. Whereupon they argued from His youth that He could not have seen Abraham (twisting His words, for He said Abraham rejoiced to see His day). Then Jesus said to them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." v. 58. He did not say, Before Abraham was, I was, but "I am." It is a sublime statement of the fact that He was God, that He always existed. He was Jehovah, the self-existent One. It was the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses when He was about to enter into covenant relationship with Israel (Exod. 3:14; 6:3). He could have said, Before Adam was, I am, but He went no further than to answer the charge they made. True greatness does not have to multiply substantiating statements.

And why should a Jew or anyone else be willing to accept Jesus as an earthly Messiah if He were not what He claimed to be? To deny the truth of what He claimed, and yet to accept Him is to claim to accept an untruthful man as a Messiah. And is not this what Judaism, and that which is left of an apostate Christendom after the believers' rapture, will do? They will accept a man who will come in his own name, as the Lord Himself said they would do (John 5:43).

This is in keeping with the prophecy of Zechariah 11. There the Lord Himself was commissioned as the Shepherd of Israel, and was rejected as such. Because of this, God will give them a foolish shepherd, a "worthless shepherd" (v. 17; J.N.D. Trans.) who will not do the work of a shepherd, and he will leave the flock. He will be the one of whom the Lord spoke in John 10-the hireling, "whose own the sheep are not," who will flee for his own safety in that last deluge of judgment of the great tribulation. He, however, shall not escape the judgment of the very One whom he sought to impersonate, for the Lord Jesus coming in His glory shall cast that willful king into the lake of fire, along with the wicked head of the revived Roman Empire.

There are two forms of unbelief which are equally fatal. They are found together in 1 John 2:22: "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son." The mass of the Jews in that day denied that Jesus was the Christ; this is to be a liar and not know the truth. It was an especial Jewish unbelief in the rejection of Him who came in His father's name. The next statement is a form of unbelief which largely characterizes what is often referred to as Christendom. It is denial of "the Father and the Son"-the special revelation of God as known in Christianity, the Father and the Son, co-equals in deity. This is the basis of the apostate teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, and many others, not excluding some religious and semi-religious secret orders which profess to recognize God, but relegate the Son to a plane on the level with an imposter, Mohammed. This is antichrist.

"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him." John 5:22, 23. "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." 1 John 2:23.

Now, strange as it may seem, the devil has given some Jews to admit that Jesus was the Messiah, and then adopt the other soul-destroying heterodoxy, by rejecting "the Father and the Son." As the end approaches, the activities of this false "angel of light" increase, and false doctrines multiply.

What a blessed portion is ours who accept the truth of His deity and His true humanity-holy, spotless, undefiled, and undefilable.

"How wondrous the glories that meet

In Jesus and from His face shine!

His love is eternal and sweet,

'Tis human, 'tis also divine.

"His glory-not only God's Son-

In manhood He had His full part-
And the union of both joined in one
Form the fountain of love in His heart.
"The merits and worth of His blood
Have freed us from hell and from fear,
That we, as the blest sons of God,
May make His good pleasure our care.
"Oh then may this union and love
Make us walk in the service of heaven,
'Mid obedience and suffering to prove
That we to the Lamb have been given."

Josiah and His Days: "After All This"

The history of the kings of Israel and Judah is a dreary recital of provokings of the Holy One to anger, so that the reigns of a Jehoshaphat, a Jotham, and a Hezekiah stand out brightly as lights in the midst of a dark waste. The spirit of idolatry, dispossessed for a while by repentant Manasseh, returned in sevenfold power, for "Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made," and did worse and worse, so that according to the number of the cities of Judah were her gods, and according to the number of the streets in Jerusalem, they set up altars to burn incense unto Baal. The horses which the kings of Judah gave to the sun were stabled at the entering in of the house of the Lord (2 Kings 23:11), while the ark of the Lord was cast out of the sanctuary (2 Chron. 35:3). It is at this juncture, an hour of all but total apostasy, that the son of Amon, a child of eight years old, came to the throne. But how wondrous are the ways of God! He had reserved unto Himself, in the midst of these abominations, a remnant who, like Simeon and Anna of after days, sighed and cried before Him; and the boy king, suckled at the breasts of idolatry, found grace in His eyes. The history of His work in and through Josiah is given with much minuteness in 2 Chronicles 34 and 35.

In the eighth year of his reign, "while he was yet young," Josiah began to seek after the God of David his father. Four years after, at the age of twenty, he set about purging Judah and Jerusalem of high places, groves, and carved images; broke down the altars of Baal; made dust of the idols, strewed it upon the graves of their worshipers, and burned the bones of their priests on the altars. Nor did he stop here. As a consequence of the idolatry of the latter years of the reign of Solomon, ten tribes had been rent from the throne of David; but the faith in the energy of which Josiah acted had respect to the claims of Jehovah in regard of the land, and he would not cleanse Judah and Jerusalem only, but "so did he in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali." And here we must not fail to notice an incident which, though unmentioned in these chapters, is given at some length in 2 Kings 23. Standing by the altar at Bethel (the seat of the false worship devised by Jeroboam, the first king of the separate kingdom of Israel), while engaged in the act of breaking it down and defiling it with the bones of its idolatrous priests, Josiah turned and noticed an inscription at a short distance from him. He inquired what it was, and was told by the men of the city, "It is the sepulcher of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel." More than three hundred years had elapsed since the man of God cried in the word of the

Lord against the altar, and declared that a child should be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, who should do such and such things; and though signal indeed was the failure of the instrument, directly after speaking in the word of the Lord, that word had been brought to pass, so that as Josiah stood between the altar and the sepulcher, and listened to the prophecy, he had both a wondrous confirmation of his being the special servant of the Lord for the work he was engaged in, and a solemn admonition to hearken attentively to the Lord.

Six years later he sent to the temple to repair and amend that which former kings of Judah had destroyed, and proceeded to restore, according to its prescribed form, the worship of the true God. In the midst of these labors, a book was discovered by the high priest—a long neglected and forgotten book—what was it? "A book of the law of the LORD given by Moses." It was taken and read before the king. "And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes." "Go," he said, "inquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book." Scripture may be neglected, but it cannot be broken; the Lord answered Josiah, that while he personally, on account of his tenderheartedness in trembling at the word, should be gathered to his fathers in peace, so as not to see the evil, the curses read out of the book shall assuredly take hold. Having gathered together all the people, both great and small, into the house of the Lord, he read before them all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found there; made a covenant, "with all his heart, and with all his soul," to perform that which was written in the book; caused all present to stand to it; took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to Israel; and brought the people back to the service of Jehovah. "And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their fathers."

And now came the crowning, as it were, of this zeal for the Lord. The Passover was kept after a most godly sort. The Levites prepared themselves by the houses of their fathers, after their courses, "according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son." They killed the passover, sanctified themselves, prepared their brethren, and the priests sprinkled the blood from their hand, removed the burnt offering, that they might give according to the division of the families of the people, to offer unto the Lord "according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses." The passover was roasted, "according to the ordinance." The singers, the sons of Asaph, stood in their places, "according to the commandment of David." Josiah has a "Thus saith the LORD" for all he did. What a wondrously lovely picture! "There was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem." It was reserved for a backslidden people, on their return to God and His Word, to keep such a commemoration of the night much to be remembered when the blood of the lamb was under His holy eye for His Israel, as even Solomon in all his glory never kept.

The hour was one of light and gladness in Zion. Yet there was rottenness at the core: "Judah hath not turned unto ME with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD." Jer. 3:10. And thick darkness was gathering ahead, and he that hindered the bursting of the storm was soon to be taken out of the way.

Nor did the sun of Josiah go down in an altogether cloudless horizon. The emphatic words which stand at the head of this paper are found here, and form a hinge on which the Bible narrative of Josiah and his times turns to a shaded side. "After all this (we read) "when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him." v. 20. The potsherds of the earth were at strife among themselves; wherefore was it that the Lord's anointed was found mixing himself up with their strife, unless indeed he had a word from the Lord bidding him to do so? Had he such a word? No; but the very

opposite. Listen to Necho's remonstrance: "What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy thee not." And mark what the Scripture says: "Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo." v. 22.

How solemnly instructive is this! Whence came it that the ear which was recently so attentive was deaf to the voice of God? We are told concerning another godly king, Uzziah, that "he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction," and we may regard the case of Josiah as somewhat parallel. The flesh in a saint, through unwatchfulness, will fatten on the very prosperings of God; and a lifted-up heart both deafens and blinds. But though we may refuse to listen to the voice of God, there is no disguise by which we can get from under His eye, and no shelter that will avail us. Feigning himself, like ungodly Ahab, to be another than himself, like Ahab he was struck down by an arrow commissioned of Him who sees through all disguises.

So Josiah fell - taken away in loving-kindness from the evil to come. Yet it is sad and humbling to see a saint of God fall by the hand of the uncircumcised in an hour of self-will.

Great lamentation was made over him: "All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they are written in the lamentations." v. 25. Let us draw near to the mourners and see if they have not some word of admonition for ourselves.

In the book of "The Lamentations of Jeremiah" (chap. 4:20), there are these significant words: "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen."

It was with his whole heart and soul that Josiah set himself to work to bring back worshipers of graven images to the living and true God. He was a bright and a shining light, and the people were willing for a season to walk in his light. "All his days" (as we have seen) "they departed not from following the LORD." Yet they were at heart, according to the Lord's declaration, idolaters still. They walked in the light of Josiah, not in the light of the Lord. They lived upon the breath of Josiah, not upon the words that proceeded out of the mouth of God. They thought to dwell under the shadow of Josiah, not under the shadow of the Almighty.

These things happened of old. They "are written for our admonition." Like the bell swinging to and fro above the sunken rock, giving warning to the mariner that near where he is passing others have been wrecked, they sound in our ears, even while we are being borne along by wind and tide - "Take heed!" "Take heed,... lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Heb. 3:12.

Knowledge and Practice

It is always a sign that a man has faith in the truth which he knows, when it has had its corresponding effect upon his life -when it has been acted upon in practice. No man has ever had the joy and power of a divine truth till he has accepted it, and walked therein. Many are thus ever learning, and never able to come to a divinely confirmed knowledge of it because the practice is wanting. It is learned in the intellect; the natural mind is touched perhaps with the beauty and divine excellence of it. It cannot be denied, but there is no faith in it. It has not been learned in the conscience and the soul.

The Law of Liberty

If I tell my child to remain in the house when he wishes to go out, he may obey; but it is not a law of liberty to him--he restrains his will. But if I afterward say, Now go where you wish to go, he obeys, and it is a law of liberty because his will and the command are the same--they run together.

The will of God was for Jesus a law of liberty; He came to do His Father's will; He desired nothing else. Blessed state! It was perfection in Him, a blessed example for us.

The law is a law of liberty when the will, the heart of man, coincides perfectly in desire with the law imposed upon him - imposed, in our case, by God--the law written in the heart. It is thus with the new man as with the heart of Christ. He loves obedience, and loves the will of God, because it is His will, and as having a nature which answers to what His will expresses, since we partake of the divine nature--in fact it loves that which God wills.

Light and Love

It is a great thing to have grace and truth together. If truth had come without grace, we could not have borne it a moment. Man is a sinner utterly unfit for heaven; but it is immense comfort that grace and truth have come together. God's two essential names are Light and Love. If we had not love with light, it would have condemned us; but we have perfect light in presence of perfect love. Our comfort is that light does come and reveal everything. Being in God's very nature, we cannot separate the two things, light and love. Just the same things appear in the details of the Christian's life.

In many instances in Scripture we see how light penetrates; but there is an attractive power along with it. There is never real working in man's soul without attractive power. The Christian stands "accepted in the beloved," but the light of God comes in on all his ways. Take the prodigal - the light shines in and shows that he is a lost sinner, but there is attractive power too - "I will arise and go to my father." Take the woman that was a sinner - there was a sense of sinfulness because light comes in, but the measure in which light shone into her soul cannot be separated from the love that came with it. Take Peter falling at Jesus' feet and saying at the same time, "Depart from me." Wherever the blessed God reveals Himself to our souls, nothing is left in the dark. If anything is not completely revealed, it may come out in the day of judgment; but all is revealed. We have a perfect revelation of God as light and as love, and both are working in the soul.

If you have an idea of God's love without the conscience being reached, it may pass away as the morning dew. It is a blessed thing that we are brought to God, and that everything is fully out. The blessed Lord bore our sins; there was full light and full love at the cross. There are two parts in the gospel: one is the revelation of God, and the other is the work done by the Lord as Man for us on the cross. First, we find the revelation of God Himself, then the work of the Lord.

Live Thou and Thy Children of the Rest

Who has not read the deeply interesting story of the widow's pot of oil in the 4th chapter of 2 Kings, and the gracious intervention of God by His servant Elisha to save the widow's sons from being taken as slaves in payment of her debts? Many a time too the miraculous multiplication of the pot of oil, and its sale to pay the widow's debts, has been used as an illustration of the grace of God in pardoning those who cast themselves on God's mercy, confessing they have nothing wherewith to pay their obligations to Him.

It recalls at once the words of the Lord Jesus in the house of the Pharisee (Luke 7:40-43), when He sought to reach that poor proud heart by the simple story of the two debtors-the one owing five hundred pence and the other, fifty - but when they had nothing to pay, the creditor frankly forgave them both.

We, who have through grace found the deepest blessing in taking our place among the bankrupt debtors, rejoice in free, full forgiveness of our sins. But there is more than this typified in the story of the widow's pot of oil, and we think some of the many blessings peculiar to Christianity are beautifully illustrated in the words of the prophet, "Live thou and thy children of the rest." It tells us that in the gospel of the grace of God there is not only made known the forgiveness of sins, and justification "from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:39), but that there is something provided to live upon, a gracious provision for the believer, to meet his need all the journey through.

Let us take a simple illustration. When a prisoner has served the term of his sentence, and is discharged from prison, he is often more in need of help than at any moment of his life. It is true, the law has no further claim upon him, he is free of his sentence, but it offers no help, nor makes any provision for his future, although he might have lost his situation and estranged his friends by the crime that brought him under its power. So again with a debtor -a generous friend may pay his debts, and leave him without a fear of any creditor's demands, but does he not need something to provide against getting into debt again? He wants, like the widow and her sons, some provision to live upon, and this is just the special feature of the fullness of the gospel which we wish to point out.

It has been said that it is easier to die a martyr than to live a Christian, and we can understand the point of view from which such a remark was made. Not many days ago, a poor widow said to the writer, "The hardest thing in this world is to live a Christian"; but she knew nothing of the more blessed side of the gospel, or the joy of a living, loving Savior in heaven, at all times ready and willing to help His tried and troubled people.

It has become a hackneyed phrase to speak of our three great enemies, "The world, the flesh, and the devil"; but it is none the less true that we have these three enemies, and if we measure our own strength against them, we may well be dismayed. And we shall be worsted in the combat too. But let us look briefly at the provision for the way-What is it that answers to the words, "Live thou

and thy children of the rest"?

Let us glance at the beginning of the 5th chapter of Romans, for example, and we shall find that we are started with "peace with God" as the result of being justified on the principle of faith; and then in equally precise terms we are told that by the same blessed Person (Christ) "we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." Who can adequately describe the value of such a privilege as this for our everyday needs? There is never a time or circumstance, difficulty or trial, that can alter or affect this wondrous access, or close that door against us. We do not, like Queen Esther, wait at a distant part of the audience chamber to see if the royal scepter is extended toward us ere we approach to make our requests known or seek the needed strength for conflict. No; the One who gave Himself for us, who died to bring us to God, is there in His presence, our High Priest and Advocate, and we are thus emboldened to approach, whatever our felt weakness may be. Neither is joy lacking, for the same finished work has secured for us a share in the glory of God, and we rejoice in the hope of it while on the way to it.

But mark the words, "not only so," "much more then"; how often they occur in this wonderful chapter. We have space only to call the briefest attention to them. There are sure to be tribulations in our path, but we need not get under them, but rather glory in them. Then look also at the 9th verse, and ponder what is meant by being "saved from wrath through Him "

And again, the 10th: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Preserved, helped, sustained, and shielded by the living Savior who on high as a watchful and unwearied shepherd lives for us. Is this not something more than being cleared from all charges and knowing that God now has nothing against us? It is hardly necessary, perhaps, to say that "saved by His life," in this 10th verse, has no reference to the life of the Lord Jesus on the earth before the cross. In that sense, as we all know, our salvation is by His death, the atoning death of the cross - by His blood shedding. But it is the life of Christ where He is now that this passage refers to; and what a precious thought it is for the tried and troubled Christian.

The 11th verse touches a higher note still, and declares that "not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." So there is not only provision for the way, and encouragement in tribulation and trials, but joy of the highest and deepest character-joy in God Himself.

We were started on the journey with "a clean slate" (as the world speaks); "Every charge our God refuses, Christ has answered with His blood." But not only so, we are amply provided for, whether the journey be long or short; we are of those "which receive abundance of grace," and "shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." So in a very special and blessed way the prophet's words apply, "Live thou and thy children of the rest." Let us not be discouraged, dear fellow believer, whatever the strength of the forces arrayed against us may appear to be. Has not the Lord Jesus said,

"Because I live, ye shall live also." John 14:19. And as to the world, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33.

There is even much more than this, for we are started with a new life, eternal life; and a new power, the Holy Spirit; and a new object and hope, Christ in glory. But the consideration of these would take us beyond our present thought of showing how the riches of God's grace in Christ have furnished the Christian "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Eph. 3:20.

The Lord's Messenger With the Lord's Message

It is as one lives in the good of the glad tidings of the grace of God that one thinks of others and is in any feeble way the able communicator of the blessed message of God to others.

When I was a child, I used to be sent to deliver messages. My mother had a peculiar habit of saying to me, at the last moment, after giving me all her instructions, "Now Harry, to whom are you going and what are you going to say?" It was my defect as to the latter part of the question that she often had to correct in me; I was generally least prepared to answer this part to her satisfaction. It often comes to me that if brethren who desire to evangelize would go through beforehand with God what I had to go through as my mother's messenger, they would have people to go to and something to say; and they would leave off and go home, as I used to, when they had said it.

My mother would finish her instructions by saying to me, "And mind you tell them who sent you!" These three points in my mother's training are good for an evangelist: (1) "To whom are you going?" (2) "What are you going to say?" (3) "Mind you tell them who sent you."

Brief Thoughts on Malachi

The captivity did not purify Israel. The returned captives deny the love and despise the judgment of the Lord. See chapter 1:2; 2:17.

The unclean spirit went out, but the house was not the Lord's.

But there is a remnant, informal, spiritual, remembered now, to be distinguished hereafter.

They are exhorted to hold by the Word. They are promised the judgment of the evil, and a new dispensation. They are not promised present recovery of David's throne, or deliverance from the Gentiles.

Apostles contemplate an informal remnant, promise judgment and a new thing, but hold out no present recovery. See 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation 2 and 3.

Malachi's remnant were found by Jesus as Malachi left them. See Luke 1 and 2. So will the coming of the Lord find the saints as left by the apostles in the epistles.

So the Reformation in Christendom; the unclean spirits went out, but the house was not the Lord's.

The Man Whose Eyes Were Opened: the Life, Death, and Parables of Balaam

When God singles out a man from the Old Testament and refers to him three times in the New Testament, there must be some special significance for us - something for us to learn from his history. Such is the case with a man named Balaam. His history is recorded in Numbers 22 to 24, and his death in Numbers 31; in the New Testament he is mentioned in 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation:

"Cursed children: which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbade the madness of the prophet." 2 Pet. 2:14-16.

"Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core." Jude 11.

"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." Rev. 2:14.

In these scriptures we have first the way, then the error, and finally the doctrine of Balaam.

The "way" of Balaam was to love money and be willing to curse the people of God provided that he could be enriched thereby.

The "error" of Balaam was to attempt to speak falsely in Jehovah's name for reward.

The "doctrine" of Balaam was the teaching of a method by which Balak could pull the beloved people down from their high eminence by persuading them to leave their own special place of separation and mingle with the Moabites.

In the epistle of Jude, the last days are described; there Balaam is linked with two other men, so that the three together might picture certain moral conditions which would prevail at the end in Christendom. They are "Cain,... Balaam,... and Core." The first man sought to approach God without a suitable offering; he came on the ground of his works, and not that of having a substitute. The second sought to make a gain of speaking the Word of God, and the third rose up in rebellion against God's anointed high priest.

These conditions are to be seen all around us. The great religious profession is the religion of Cain. Good deeds, character development, self-improvement, religious ethics, are substituted for the grand work of atonement on the cross. The whole scheme is a denial of the fall and utter ruin of man on the one hand, and of the wondrous truth of the Lord Jesus Christ as the sinner's substitute on the other. "What does God say of all those who follow this course? "Woe unto them." And just as surely as Cain's offering was rejected, and he with it, so will these modern religionists

be rejected. He will say to them, "I know you not."

The sad fact of the "error of Balaam" being current is that religion has become commercialized, and many mere professors are following in Balaam's error in preaching for the reward. Many of them are as false as Balaam was.

The last character of the last days which is coupled with the "way of Cain" and the "error of Balaam" is the "gainsaying of Core." He was a man who rose up against God's king (Moses; Deut. 33:5), and high priest (Aaron), and is a picture of those who today deny the Lord's authority - they reject Christ's authority while claiming to be Christians. In other words, it is infidelity clothed in the garb of religion. How prevalent it is! Surely we should be able to discern the signs of these times.

But let us turn back to the book of Numbers, and I think we shall learn some profitable lessons from the history of Balaam. He was a wicked man, a false prophet, who was willing to sell his services to King Balak. He had a reputation as a prophet, for Balak said to him, "I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." Numb. 22:6. He was not a prophet of the Lord but was a sorcerer using divination; however, the Lord did take him up and use him, and that contrary to his own will and to the will of Balak. The Word of God gives us a number of instances where He used unregenerate men to speak His mind; for instance, Caiaphas the high priest, the man who took the lead in having Jesus crucified, prophesied "that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." John 11:51, 52.

Balak the king had much reason to be distressed when he saw the progress of the great multitude of Israelites swarming toward his land. He knew how they had victoriously left Egypt, and what they had done to the Amorites. He did not, however, take into account that Jehovah was with them, nor seek their favor, nor cast in his lot with them; instead, he sent the honorable elders of Moab with the elders of Midian to persuade this renowned prophet of Midian to come and curse Israel. When they went, they took "the rewards of divination in their hand."

Balaam received them, lodged them courteously, and cunningly made it appear difficult to enlist his services, and also made a display of seeking supernatural guidance, even to using the name of Jehovah - the name by which God was known in Israel - to parry their offers for a time. He wanted money, and perhaps the charge for his services went up with his delay.

God spoke to him that night and told him that he was not to go with the elders of Moab, nor was he to curse the Israelites, for they were blessed. Balaam then grudgingly declined their proffered gifts, saying, "The LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you." This statement made it apparent to the elders that as far as Balaam was concerned he was willing. 'Whereupon, Balak sent "princes, more, and more honorable" than the first to persuade the wily Balaam to come. They were empowered to offer him greater and greater rewards.

This time God permitted Balaam to accompany the elders, but warned him that He would not allow him to speak anything but what He wished. God was about to use the enemies of Israel for their blessing. With God's permission, the false prophet readily acted, for he "loved the wages of unrighteousness."

But before Balaam was allowed to proceed very far the angel of the Lord stood in the way of the ass upon which he was riding, but Balaam did not see the angel, and smote the ass. This occurred three times; then the ass spoke with a man's voice, rebuking him; whereupon the angel of the Lord told Balaam that his way was perverse before Him, and again warned the covetous prophet that he was not to speak anything but that which God gave him to speak. It took much preparation by God to use the false prophet's mouth to pronounce good concerning Israel.

God may use a dumb ass or a wicked man to speak His truth, but they are only instruments of His power, and the credit is not to them. He has used unsaved men to tell others the way of salvation to their eternal blessing. God is sovereign and can use what and whom He will, but that in no wise lessens the servant's responsibility to do as he is told.

At length Balaam arrived in the land of Moab, and King Balak took him up to a prominence from whence he could see Israel encamped below. Balaam felt, however, that he should make a great show of seeking hidden wisdom from some supernatural source. While it had the appearance of seeking God, it was really Satan's counterfeit of what God had established- something that was done by dealers in the occult sciences of the day. He had Balak prepare seven altars and their offerings, and then he went away alone to seek some special revelation. Here God met him and put words into his mouth, which he had already learned he MUST speak. Let us listen:

"And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Chap. 23:7-10.

The children of Israel were God's earthly people, a chosen nation on earth, but there are some principles here that can well be applied to Christians - the heavenly people. Actually, this man Balaam wanted to curse the people of God for the gain he would make, but he is forced to say, "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed?" Any curse of his would be meaningless and useless when God had not cursed them. This brings to mind a verse in Romans 8: "What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" No one, not even Satan, can touch the people of God in their security. The devil may for a time be allowed by God, for purposes of good toward His people, to touch them in their earthly circumstances, but to curse them is impossible. Surely "if God be for us, who can be against us?" This is self-evident. Our distress of spirit in times of trial really springs from lack of believing that God is for us. Jacob, at the very moment when God was moving all for his good, said, "All these things are against me." And have we not all more or less echoed the thoughts of Jacob? But what does it matter if the whole world be against us, when God is for us?

It is important to notice where Balaam was called to behold this people - "From the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him." God beholds them from His eminence, and Balaam is compelled to see them from above also. O that we always beheld one another as God sees us in Christ! How differently we would feel at times. What harsh and unkind words would be spared if we thought of the people of God as viewed from above.

Next Balsam says, "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." This is a cardinal truth, forever since God called Abraham to a path of separation, the people of God have been called to walk apart from the world. Even before the time of Abraham we find in Genesis 5 a line of faith - men who were perhaps little esteemed by the world of their day, but they "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth," and "died in faith." There was another line of people, mentioned in Genesis 4 - descendants of Cain - who did great things and made a name in the earth. But those in the line of faith generally were not prominent in secular history.

Israel's distinctive glory was their separation to God. They were not the largest nation, nor did they have giants among them; if they were to boast, they were to boast in the Lord, for He was their glory. When they mingled with the nations they fell from their exalted place. Christians are not now called out as a special nation, but God is taking out of the nations a people for His name. They are not of the world, even as Christ was not of it. He was so separated and apart from the whole world system that when He left it there was scarcely a ripple on the surface of their society. The organized system of that day was hostile to Him, and He said it would be the same to His followers; but He has said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." And how did He overcome? By walking in communion with His Father so that He was neither elated by their fleeting acclamations nor depressed by their rejection. May God grant us to be of that mind, so that we shall neither seek a place in man's world, nor bemoan it when we are made to feel its scorn and derision.

"Nay, let the world cast out our name,

And vile account us if it will."

Balaam is moved to add at the close of his first prophecy: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" This he never achieved, for he died as he lived, a wicked man. He was slain by Israel among their enemies (Numb. 31:8). It is a vain wish for one to desire to die as a righteous man, and yet remain a rebel against God. Many today hope to go to heaven when they die, but they prefer to live for the earth, with no thought of God. Their wish shall perish with them.

The Man Whose Eyes Were Opened: the Life, Death, and Parables of Balaam

Balak was much displeased with Balaam for what he uttered, and continued his attempts to get the people cursed. He took Balaam to another vantage point from which he could see the Israelites, hoping that he would curse them from there. Again Balaam went through his ritual, and notice that in the 15th verse Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here by thy burnt offering, while I meet... yonder." The words "the LORD" are in italics in the King James Version; showing that they were added by the translators. They were not in the original. Hebrew. Balaam did not here speak of meeting Jehovah, but of going to meet with some evil spirit. It was a typical act of occult diviners of that day. However, the Lord did meet Balaam and put the words in his mouth that he was to speak to Balak. Let us listen to what he has to say:

"Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: God is not a man, that He should lie; neither, the son of man, that He should, repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken; and shall He not make it good?" No, there would be no disannulling what God had said. As the poet has said:

"When once His word is passed,
When He has said, will,
The thing shall come at last,
God keeps His promise still."

Neither Balaam, nor Balak, nor all the hosts of hell could change God's decree concerning His people Israel, nor can "death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,... separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 8:38, 39. Every purpose and promise of God concerning us will be fulfilled; nothing shall fail of all the good things which the Lord has spoken.

Balaam then continues: "I have received commandment to bless: and He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it." Evidently he would have reversed it if he could, but he had been warned most solemnly not to do so when he was withstood by the angel and reproved by the dumb ass. Satan and many ungodly persons would gladly curse the saints of God today, and there is a man coming who will "blaspheme... God,... and them [the saints] that dwell in heaven" in his rage, but all to no avail.

Balaam's first prophecy contained negative truth: God had not cursed the people, so Balaam could not. His second utterance gave positive truth: God had blessed them, and that could not be reversed. Just so we read in the New Testament of both negative and positive blessing; for example, John 3:16 says that the believer in Jesus shall not perish on the one hand, and shall have everlasting life on the other.

Dear fellow-Christians, if God blessed Israel of old, how exceedingly more has He blessed us. It is good to stop and consider how many and great are our blessings. In Ephesians 1 we are told that we are blessed with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." There is not a saint, however feeble, who does not have every blessing God can give him, in Christ. May we have a deepened sense of how God has manifoldly blessed us, and that not all the evil designs and power of men and demons can affect these blessings.

Next Balaam says, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel." What a statement! If Balaam had been down in Israel's tents, he might have heard them murmuring and complaining, but if God had not beheld iniquity, who is going to make Him do so? The enemy would gladly accuse them before God, but

"Though the restless foe accuses,
Sins recounting like a flood,
Every charge our God refuses,
Christ has answered with His blood."

It, was not apparent in Old Testament times how God could behold, a people, like the Israelites, and not see iniquity. Christ had not yet died, and the gospel had not yet been proclaimed, but there were those who had some sense of the forgiveness of God. "Even as David also describeth

the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Rom. 4:6-8. In Old Testament times God looked forward to the work of Christ while He dealt in grace with those who had faith. Now He beholds the believer in Jesus as "clean every whit." More than that, He sees us in Christ, in His beauty.

O that we saw one another more as God sees us. I am afraid that we often drop down to a lower plane when we think of our brethren in Christ. We see their crotchets. Sometimes their dispositions cross with ours, and we become annoyed and irritated, forgetting what they are in all their loveliness in Christ. Naturally we do see some things with them that are not very pleasant, but let us not forget that they see things in us which are not what they should be. May our eyes be open to see our brethren as God sees them, as those dear to Him, and precious to the heart of Christ. O to see one another from the "top of the rocks!"

To Balak's consternation, Balaam continues to enlarge on Israel's blessing: "The LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brought them out of Egypt; He hath as it were the strength of a unicorn. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" vv. 21-23. God was with them, and God had acted for them, and He had wrought all for their blessing. What a blessed people they were. Strange that they should ever forsake Him and turn to other gods! But is it not stranger still that we who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and have been accepted in the Beloved, should seek our satisfaction apart from Him whose we are?

By that time Balak was exasperated with Balaam, and said to him, "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all." But if the enemy made God step in and speak for them, he must hear still more. Balaam replied, "All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do." Thereupon Balak made one more attempt to get the people cursed. What utter folly!

The first verse of chapter 24 is enlightening as to the character of Balaam. "And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness." This lets us know definitely that he had merely been in the habit of seeking enchantments from Satan, and that his display of seeking God's guidance was a sham. Then Balaam spoke.

"Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: he hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open." Chap. 24:3, 4. His eyes had been opened, but against his will. He heard the "words of God," and "saw the vision of the Almighty," and his heart was unchanged. How much more was his guilt than if his eyes had not been opened.

Then he says, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lignaloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters." vv. 5,6.

Balaam's third parable continues the advance noted in the two previous ones: first, they could not be cursed, for God had not cursed them; second, God had blessed them, and they would be blessed: third, they were to be seen in their beauty as trees of the 'Lord's planting. 'What an

advance! Now God would tell their enemies of their beauty and loveliness, and all was the fruit of His doings. And when God tells how He has accepted us, He says, "accepted [taken into favor] in the beloved." How precious is that! Not accepted in Christ, though that is true, but accepted in that One in whom He delights. Nothing can be higher than that.

But poor Balaam had to say, "I shall see Him but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh." How dreadful for man to have his eyes opened and to resist the light and revelation. All such will assuredly see Christ as their judge one day, but then be banished from His presence. They, like Balaam, will have no part in the blessing which they witnessed for others.

The Man Whose Eyes Were Opened: the Life, Death, and Parables of Balaam

When God singles out a man from the Old Testament and refers to him three times in the New Testament, there must be some special significance for us - something for us to learn from his history. Such is the case with a man named Balaam. His history is recorded in Numbers 22 to 24, and his death in Numbers 31; in the New Testament he is mentioned in 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation:

"Cursed children: which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbade the madness of the prophet." 2 Pet. 2:14-16.

"Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core." Jude 11.

"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." Rev. 2:14.

In these scriptures we have first the way, then the error, and finally the doctrine of Balaam.

The "way" of Balaam was to love money and be willing to curse the people of God provided that he could be enriched thereby.

The "error" of Balaam was to attempt to speak falsely in Jehovah's name for reward.

The "doctrine" of Balaam was the teaching of a method by which Balak could pull the beloved people down from their high eminence by persuading them to leave their own special place of separation and mingle with the Moabites.

In the epistle of Jude, the last days are described; there Balaam is linked with two other men, so that the three together might picture certain moral conditions which would prevail at the end in Christendom. They are "Cain,... Balaam,... and Core." The first man sought to approach God without a suitable offering; he came on the ground of his works, and not that of having a substitute. The second sought to make a gain of speaking the Word of God, and the third rose up in rebellion against God's anointed high priest.

These conditions are to be seen all around us. The great religious profession is the religion of Cain. Good deeds, character development, self-improvement, religious ethics, are substituted for

the grand work of atonement on the cross. The whole scheme is a denial of the fall and utter ruin of man on the one hand, and of the wondrous truth of the Lord Jesus Christ as the sinner's substitute on the other. 'What does God say of all those who follow this course? "Woe unto them." And just as surely as Cain's offering was rejected, and he with it, so will these modern religionists be rejected. He will say to them, "I know you not."

The sad fact of the "error of Balaam" being current is that religion has become commercialized, and many mere professors are following in Balaam's error in preaching for the reward. Many of them are as false as Balaam was.

The last character of the last days which is coupled with the "way of Cain" and the "error of Balaam" is the "gainsaying of Core." He was a man who rose up against God's king (Moses; Deut. 33:5), and high priest (Aaron), and is a picture of those who today deny the Lord's authority - they reject Christ's authority while claiming to be Christians. In other words, it is infidelity clothed in the garb of religion. How prevalent it is! Surely we should be able to discern the signs of these times.

But let us turn back to the book of Numbers, and I think we shall learn some profitable lessons from the history of Balaam. He was a wicked man, a false prophet, who was willing to sell his services to King Balak. He had a reputation as a prophet, for Balak said to him, "I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." Numb. 22:6. He was not a prophet of the Lord but was a sorcerer using divination; however, the Lord did take him up and use him, and that contrary to his own will and to the will of Balak. The Word of God gives us a number of instances where He used unregenerate men to speak His mind; for instance, Caiaphas the high priest, the man who took the lead in having Jesus crucified, prophesied "that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." John 11:51, 52.

Balak the king had much reason to be distressed when he saw the progress of the great multitude of Israelites swarming toward his land. He knew how they had victoriously left Egypt, and what they had done to the Amorites. He did not, however, take into account that Jehovah was with them, nor seek their favor, nor cast in his lot with them; instead, he sent the honorable elders of Moab with the elders of Midian to persuade this renowned prophet of Midian to come and curse Israel. When they went, they took "the rewards of divination in their hand."

Balaam received them, lodged them courteously, and cunningly made it appear difficult to enlist his services, and also made a display of seeking supernatural guidance, even to using the name of Jehovah - the name by which God was known in Israel - to parry their offers for a time. He wanted money, and perhaps the charge for his services went up with his delay.

God spoke to him that night and told him that he was not to go with the elders of Moab, nor was he to curse the Israelites, for they were blessed. Balaam then grudgingly declined their proffered gifts, saying, "The LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you." This statement made it apparent to the elders that as far as Balaam was concerned he was willing. 'Whereupon, Balak sent "princes, more, and more honorable" than the first to persuade the wily Balaam to come. They were empowered to offer him greater and greater rewards.

This time God permitted Balaam to accompany the elders, but warned him that He would not allow him to speak anything but what He wished. God was about to use the enemies of Israel for their

blessing. With God's permission, the false prophet readily acted, for he "loved the wages of unrighteousness."

But before Balaam was allowed to proceed very far the angel of the Lord stood in the way of the ass upon which he was riding, but Balaam did not see the angel, and smote the ass. This occurred three times; then the ass spoke with a man's voice, rebuking him; whereupon the angel of the Lord told Balaam that his way was perverse before Him, and again warned the covetous prophet that he was not to speak anything but that which God gave him to speak. It took much preparation by God to use the false prophet's mouth to pronounce good concerning Israel.

God may use a dumb ass or a wicked man to speak His truth, but they are only instruments of His power, and the credit is not to them. He has used unsaved men to tell others the way of salvation to their eternal blessing. God is sovereign and can use what and whom He will, but that in no wise lessens the servant's responsibility to do as he is told.

At length Balaam arrived in the land of Moab, and King Balak took him up to a prominence from whence he could see Israel encamped below. Balaam felt, however, that he should make a great show of seeking hidden wisdom from some supernatural source. While it had the appearance of seeking God, it was really Satan's counterfeit of what God had established- something that was done by dealers in the occult sciences of the day. He had Balak prepare seven altars and their offerings, and then he went away alone to seek some special revelation. Here God met him and put words into his mouth, which he had already learned he MUST speak. Let us listen:

"And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Chap. 23:7-10.

The children of Israel were God's earthly people, a chosen nation on earth, but there are some principles here that can well be applied to Christians - the heavenly people. Actually, this man Balaam wanted to curse the people of God for the gain he would make, but he is forced to say, "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed?" Any curse of his would be meaningless and useless when God had not cursed them. This brings to mind a verse in Romans 8: "What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" No one, not even Satan, can touch the people of God in their security. The devil may for a time be allowed by God, for purposes of good toward His people, to touch them in their earthly circumstances, but to curse them is impossible. Surely "if God be for us, who can be against us?" This is self-evident. Our distress of spirit in times of trial really springs from lack of believing that God is for us. Jacob, at the very moment when God was moving all for his good, said, "All these things are against me." And have we not all more or less echoed the thoughts of Jacob? But what does it matter if the whole world be against us, when God is for us?

It is important to notice where Balaam was called to behold this people - "From the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him." God beholds them from His eminence, and Balaam is

compelled to see them from above also. O that we always beheld one another as God sees us in Christ! How differently we would feel at times. What harsh and unkind words would be spared if we thought of the people of God as viewed from above.

Next Balsam says, "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." This is a cardinal truth, forever since God called Abraham to a path of separation, the people of God have been called to walk apart from the world. Even before the time of Abraham we find in Genesis 5 a line of faith - men who were perhaps little esteemed by the world of their day, but they "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth," and "died in faith." There was another line of people, mentioned in Genesis 4 - descendants of Cain - who did great things and made a name in the earth. But those in the line of faith generally were not prominent in secular history.

Israel's distinctive glory was their separation to God. They were not the largest nation, nor did they have giants among them; if they were to boast, they were to boast in the Lord, for He was their glory. When they mingled with the nations they fell from their exalted place. Christians are not now called out as a special nation, but God is taking out of the nations a people for His name. They are not of the world, even as Christ was not of it. He was so separated and apart from the whole world system that when He left it there was scarcely a ripple on the surface of their society. The organized system of that day was hostile to Him, and He said it would be the same to His followers; but He has said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." And how did He overcome? By walking in communion with His Father so that He was neither elated by their fleeting acclamations nor depressed by their rejection. May God grant us to be of that mind, so that we shall neither seek a place in man's world, nor bemoan it when we are made to feel its scorn and derision.

"Nay, let the world cast out our name,

And vile account us if it will."

Balaam is moved to add at the close of his first prophecy: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" This he never achieved, for he died as he lived, a wicked man. He was slain by Israel among their enemies (Numb. 31:8). It is a vain wish for one to desire to die as a righteous man, and yet remain a rebel against God. Many today hope to go to heaven when they die, but they prefer to live for the earth, with no thought of God. Their wish shall perish with them.

A Man's Folly and a Woman's Faith: Nabal and Abigail

"I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." Luke 12:16-22.

"O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Matt. 15:28.

The above two scriptures seem almost like a New Testament commentary upon the Old Testament story of Nabal and Abigail (1 Sam. 25). David was at this time, though God's anointed king, a homeless wanderer and fugitive from the hands of Saul, accompanied only by a small band of faithful followers who owned his claims.

What an illustration is this of the present position of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's King, rejected and cast out by the world. "The kings of the earth stood up," we read in Acts 4, "and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ." "We will not have this man to reign over us," was the world's verdict, and the last it saw of Him, He was hanging upon a cross between two thieves. When next it sees Him, He will be coming in "power and great glory," in righteousness to "judge and make war.... And... on His vesture and on His thigh a name written,

KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19).

Well, here we find David needing provisions and, being in the neighborhood of this wealthy man of the world, whose shepherds he had protected amid the rocky solitudes of Carmel, he sends to ask for supplies for his young men, with the quiet dignity of conscious power. "Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. And thus ye shall say to him,... Peace."

What a lovely word! How well calculated to touch the heart of even the most thorough worldling! because it is just one thing that the world cannot supply, or money purchase. "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" The world speaks of joy, mirth, pleasure, but never mentions peace, for it knows it not. "There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked." Isa. 48:22.

"Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not?" said Nabal; and when David heard the reply, he said, "Gird ye on every man his sword." If he will not have peace, judgment must fall. Alas! for Nabal. The offer of peace rejected, he fell under the judgment of God. The sweet message of mercy scoffed at and ignored, he sat down to eat and drink while death was hovering over his threshold. "And it came to pass about ten days after, that the LORD smote Nabal, that he died."

"So David's young men... came and told him all those sayings." There is a sweet thought here for all the Lord's servants. When the Word has been preached, and the people have dispersed, then it is your privilege to return and tell Him about it. "Send me away," said Eliezer, "unto my master" (Gen. 24:54). Flushed with the success of his mission, one less devoted might have been inclined to linger in the happy surroundings where he had been so blessed. But his heart was with his

master, and all the joy and success was incomplete till shared with him. So too, the apostles whom the Lord had sent forth, "when they were returned, told Him all they had done" (Luke 9:10).

But it is a relief now to turn to Abigail, and follow the footsteps of this woman of faith. Doubtless the fame of David had reached her ears. She had heard of his gracious acts, his mighty power. She believed him to be God's anointed, though at the moment a fugitive from the hands of Saul. Her servants told her how the message of peace had come to her household, and of its rejection, and, like one of an earlier day, "moved with fear," she determined to go to meet him, and seek the salvation of herself and of her people. Happy decision!

A Man's Folly and a Woman's Faith: Nabal and Abigail

Abigail made haste. Three times we read that she made haste. This was a business which would admit of no delay. All other concerns must be thrown aside till this momentous matter had been settled, and her salvation secured. "Abigail made haste," and taking her true place before David in utter self-abasement at his feet, she owned her sins, sought his forgiveness, and acknowledged him as lord.

How sweetly must those words have sounded in the ears of the hunted fugitive - "My lord"-though they came from a feeble woman's lips. How cheering the confident confession, "My lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days.... But when the LORD shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid." Like the dying thief, she looked on to a day of glory and, like him, she received a ready reply to her petition-"Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person."

Marvelous picture of Christ's way of receiving sinners! And how sweet it is to His heart now, to be sought and owned by poor lost ones like you and me in this day of His rejection. Listen to His own words as He describes it when the poor outcast of John 4 owns Him in her heart as "the Christ": "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," and in Luke 15, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost."

And listen to what David says to Abigail: "Blessed be thou." "Why? What was she blessed for? Because she took her true place as a needy suppliant, and owned him as her savior. Because her faith recognized him as God's anointed and, cost what it might, she determined to throw in her lot with him. So he calls her blessed.

Well, David never forgot Abigail's faith. But he was not content that she should remain at a distance from him, so, after the death of Nabal, he sent for her to be his wife. And will anything short of union satisfy the heart of Christ for His blood-bought ones? No; "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." Col. 3:4.

As Abigail shared the fortunes of David, as she roamed with him from one hiding place to another - sharing his poverty and hardship - some might have said, What folly to give up a luxurious home, and the broad acres and great possessions of her husband Nabal, for a life of trial and privation. But a day of reversal was coming, a day for which she was content to wait, when David, with the kingdom restored to him, would be reigning at Jerusalem, and she reigning with him. And how richly did that time compensate for all the sorrows of the past!

"He and I, in that bright glory,

One deep joy shall share;
Mine to be forever with Him,
His, that I am there."

Martha and Mary

They were both dear to the Lord Jesus, and they both loved Him, but they were different. The eye of the one saw His weariness, and would give to Him; the faith of the other apprehended His fullness, and would draw from Him.

Martha's service was acceptable to the Lord, and was acknowledged by Him, but He would not allow it to disturb Mary's communion. Mary knew His mind. She had deeper fellowship with Him. Her heart clung to Him. She sat at His feet, drinking in from the streams of grace and truth that flowed from His lips. Blessed it is to serve the Lord, but still more blessed to enjoy Him; and therefore the moment Martha would bring the outward services of the hand in competition, the Lord lets her know that Mary was refreshing Him with a richer feast than the abundance of her house could supply.

This lovely narrative illustrates a great principle. It is the glory and delight of God to give. What He wants is the empty, longing, and believing heart, as a sphere in which He can allow His goodness to overflow. What He wants is to bring us into the enjoyment of His own blessedness. The highest place is properly His. He is the giver; and from Him we are to receive. The place of blesser is His; the place of debtorship is ours, for "without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better" (Heb. 7:7).

Acceptable to the Lord as are the willing services of His people, nothing is more grateful to Him than that we should be continually receiving out of His treasury of grace. Nothing honors Him more than that we take our place of creature-dependence, and acknowledge His Godhead glory, allowing Him to be still giving, still blessing, still pouring forth on thankful recipients from the inexhaustible fountain of His own fullness.

The Martyr Stephen: Christianity Exemplified

There are two grand facts which characterize Christianity and mark it off from all that had gone before. These are, first, Man glorified in heaven; second, God dwelling in man on the earth. These are unquestionably stupendous facts, divinely glorious, and fitted to produce the most powerful effect upon the heart and life of the Christian.

But they are peculiar to Christianity. They were never known until redemption was fully accomplished, and the redeemer took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. Then was seen, for the first time in the annals of eternity, a Man on the throne of God. Wondrous sight! Magnificent result of accomplished redemption! The enemy seemed to have triumphed when the first man was expelled from Eden; but lo! the second Man has made His victorious way into heaven and taken His seat on the eternal throne of God.

This, we repeat, is a fact of transcendent glory, and the counterpart, the companion fact thereof is God the Holy Ghost dwelling with and in man on the earth. These things were unknown in Old Testament times. What did Abraham know of a glorified man in heaven? What did any of the ancient worthies know of it? Nothing; how could they? There was no man on the throne of heaven until Jesus took His seat there; and, until He was glorified in heaven, the Holy Ghost could not take up His abode in man on the earth. "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)" John 7:38, 39. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." John 16:7.

Here we have our two facts linked together in the most direct and positive manner:

Christ glorified above, and the Holy Ghost dwelling in man below. The two are inseparably connected; the latter is entirely dependent upon the former; and both together form the two great distinguishing features of that glorious Christianity revealed in the gospel of God.

It is not by any means our purpose to enter upon any elaborate proof of these truths. We assume them as established; moreover, we assume that the Christian reader cordially receives and holds them as eternal verities, and that he is prepared to appreciate the illustration of their practical power and formative influence presented in the history of Stephen as recorded in Acts 7:55-60. Let us draw near and gaze on the marvelous picture - the picture of a true Christian.

The principal part of this chapter is occupied with a most powerful unfolding of the history of the nation of Israel -a history stretching from the call of Abraham to the death of Christ. At the close of his address, Stephen made a pungent application to the consciences of his hearers, which drew forth all their most bitter animosity and deadly rage. "When t h e y heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." Here we see the effect of religiousness without Christ. These men were the professed guardians of religion, and the guides of the people,

but it proved to be religion versus Christianity. In them we have the terrible exponent of a godless, Christless religion; just as in Stephen we have the lovely exhibition of true Christianity. They were full of religious animosity and rage; he was full of the Holy Ghost. They gnashed their teeth; his face was like that of an angel. What a contrast! But we must quote the passage for the reader:

"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

Here are our two great facts, again, displayed in a man of like passions with ourselves. Stephen was full of the Holy Ghost, and his earnest gaze was fixed on a glorified Man in heaven. This is Christianity.

This is the true, the normal idea of a Christian. He is a man full of the Holy Ghost, looking up with the steady gaze of faith into heaven, and occupied with a glorified Christ. We cannot accept any lower standard than this, short as we may come of it practically. No doubt it is very high and very holy; and, moreover, we have to confess how very little we are up to it. Still it is the divine standard, and every devoted heart will aspire to it and nothing less. It is the happy privilege of every Christian to be full of the Holy Ghost, and to have the eye of faith fixed on the glorified Man in heaven. There is no divine reason why it should not be so. Redemption is accomplished; sin is put away; grace reigns through righteousness; there is a Man on the throne of God; the Holy Ghost has come down to this earth and taken up His abode in the believer individually, and in the Church corporately.

Thus it stands. And, be it carefully noted, these things are not mere speculations or cold, uninfluential theories. Alas! they may be held as such, but in themselves they are not such; on the contrary, they are immensely practical, divinely formative, powerfully influential, as we can distinctly see in the case of the blessed martyr Stephen. It is impossible to read the closing verses of Acts 7 and not see the powerful effect produced upon Stephen by the object which filled the vision of his soul. There we behold a man surrounded by the most terrible circumstances, malignant enemies rushing upon him, death staring him in the face; but instead of being in any wise affected or governed by those circumstances, he was entirely governed by heavenly objects. He looked up steadfastly into heaven, and there he saw Jesus. Earth was rejecting him as it had already rejected his Lord; but heaven was opened to him and, looking up into that open heaven, he caught some of the rays of glory shining in the face of his risen Lord, and not only caught them but reflected them back upon the moral gloom which surrounded him.

Is not all this most deeply practical? Assuredly it is. Stephen was not only lifted above his surroundings in the most wonderful manner, but he was enabled to exhibit to his persecutors the meekness and grace of Christ. In him we see a most striking illustration of 2 Cor. 3:18—a passage of singular depth and fullness. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

("Beholding as in a glass" hardly conveys the force, fullness, and beauty of the original word. The English reader should be informed that the entire clause is expressed by the one Greek word which conveys the double idea of beholding and reflecting. The passage might be rendered thus: "We all, with open face mirroring t h e glory, a r e changed," etc. The real idea is that the Christian

reflects, like a mirror, the glory on which he gazes, and thus becomes conformed to the image of his Lord by the powerful ministry of the Spirit. The whole verse is one of the most condensed, yet comprehensive and magnificent, statements of practical Christianity anywhere to be found in the sacred canon. It furnishes a pithy commentary on the facts, of which Stephen is a vivid illustration. Would that we all more fully entered into and more faithfully exhibited the power of these things!)

Only see how all this is livingly unfolded in the scene before us. The very highest expression of heavenly Christianity is met by the deepest, darkest, and most deadly display of religious rancor. We can see the two culminating in the death of the first Christian martyr. "Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Here then is genuine, practical Christianity-living conformity to the image of Christ. Here we see a man so lifted above circumstances, so lifted out of himself, as to be able- after the pattern of his Lord- to pray for his murderers. Instead of being occupied with himself, or thinking of his own sufferings, he thinks of others and pleads for them. So far as he was concerned, all was settled. His eye was fixed on the glory-so fixed as to catch its concentrated beams and reflect them back upon the very faces of his murderers. His countenance was radiant with the light of that glory into which he was about to enter, and he was enabled, by the power of the Holy Ghost, to imitate his blessed Master, and to spend his last breath in praying for his murderers: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And what then? Why then he had nothing more to do but fall asleep-to close his eyes upon a scene of death and open them upon a scene of deathless glory, or rather to enter upon that scene which already filled the vision of his enraptured soul.

Reader, let us remember that this is true Christianity. It is the happy privilege of a Christian to be full of the Holy Ghost, looking off from himself and up from his surroundings, whatever they may be, gazing steadfastly into heaven, and occupied with the glorified Man, Christ Jesus. The necessary result of being thus occupied is practical living conformity to that blessed One on whom the eye is fixed. We become like Him in spirit, in ways, in our entire character. It must be so. We all, with open face mirroring the glory, are changed into the same image.

It is of the very last possible importance to see and know that nothing short of this is up to the mark of the Christianity presented in the New Testament. This is the divine standard; nor should we be satisfied with anything less. We see in Stephen a man reflecting the glory of Christ in a very positive, practical way. He was not merely talking about glory, but actually reflecting it. We may talk largely about heavenly glory while our practical ways are anything but heavenly. It was not so with Stephen. He was a living mirror in which men could see the glory reflected. And should it not be so with us? Unquestionably. But is it so? Are we so absorbed with our risen Lord-so fixed on Him, so centered in Him- that our fellow men, those with whom we meet from day to day, can see the traits, the features, the lineaments of His image reflected in our character, our habits, our spirit, our style? Alas! alas! we cannot say much on this score. But then, dearly beloved Christian reader, can we not at least say, "It is our heart's deep and earnest desire to be so occupied and filled with Christ that His lovely grace may shine out in us to the praise of His name"? God in His rich mercy

grant that our eye may be so fixed on Jesus that we too may, in some degree, mirror the glory and thus shed some tiny ray of that glory upon the darkness around!

Maryolatry: the Editor's Column

The veneration of the virgin Mary by fallen humanity has reached a new peak. Since the formal adoption of the dogma of Mary's bodily assumption to heaven by the Roman Catholic Church at the beginning of what they called the Marian year (1954), there has been a steady stream of Marian propaganda poured out wherever Roman Catholicism is known. Perhaps the climax was reached when an ancient painting of Mary and the Child Jesus (which superstition claims was painted by the Evangelist Luke) was carried in solemn procession through the streets of Rome to St. Peter's Cathedral where the ailing Pope Pius XII placed jewel-studded crowns above the heads of the Infant and of Mary. Mary was then declared to be the "Queen of Heaven and of all creation," and May 31 was set as "the feast of the blessed Mary." This is now official Church doctrine.

And as if this were not enough in the worship of the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25), the Pope added that "Mary as mother of King and associated to Him in work of divine redemption participates in His royal dignity." Now even our Lord's individual work of redemption is to be sullied by claiming Mary has some association with Him in it.

From a paper published by the Church of Rome comes the shocking statement that a chapel has been erected in Southern Japan "in honor of the true Mercy Seat, Mary of Perpetual Help." (Italics are ours.) Side by side with this is a claim that this "miraculous picture" (of Mary of Perpetual Help) is "a favorite of the Mother of God."

Words can scarcely express our revulsion at these doings and statements, for they indicate a rapid rise in a form of idolatry often referred to as "Maryolatry." It is the worship of the creature Mary, rather than the Creator. Man has ever been prone to this evil, and even the beloved Apostle John was twice reprov'd for attempting to worship an angel.

Now Mary has officially been declared to be the "Queen of Heaven." Search the New Testament where you will and you will not find even a hint of a "Queen of Heaven." The only woman mentioned as in heaven is "the bride, the Lamb's wife," and that is future, and is the whole Church collectively seen in glory. Blessed as Mary was, she will only be one part of the heavenly bride. Nor is the bride ever called a queen, but she will be united to Christ when all things in heaven and earth are headed up in Him.

Rome seeks to back up the adoration of Mary by reference to certain markings left in the Catacombs of Rome by early Christians indicating that there was some veneration of her then, and by some so-called Church fathers who made laudatory statements regarding Mary. But neither the one nor the other has any weight or value, especially against the Word of God. The markings about Mary in the Catacombs only serve to show how easily pagan idolatry got a foothold among early professing Christians, for pagans always had a goddess as well as a god, and it was easy and natural to carry over such thoughts into Christianity. Mary furnished a logical subject for such idolatrous veneration, and was easily substituted for former goddess worship. As for the early "fathers," it can easily be shown how far many of them erred from the truth on many points.

Scarcely had the apostles left the scene before error came in like a flood, and some of the "fathers" made heterodox statements, some affecting the Person of Christ, and some bordering on infidelity. Certainly there was no infallibility among them. Let us cease "from man, whose breath is in his nostrils" and cleave to the infallible and unerring Word of God.

Romish Maryolatry savors greatly of Israel's false worship of the "Queen of Heaven" so soundly condemned in Jeremiah 44. The children of Israel burned incense and poured out drink offerings to her, and to her they credited their blessings. Is there not a similarity between this and the professed miraculous cures attributed to Mary and to her pictures and images? They also made "cakes to portray her" (see Jer. 44:19; J.N.D. Trans.). Was this similar to pictures and images of Mary? And then to think of the audacity which now states that "the Mother of God" (shocking term!--and untrue, for it is not possible that God had a mother) would approve such idolatry by having a favorite picture of herself. Truly all this savors much of a woman on earth claiming to be a queen who is called by God the "MOTHER OF... ABOMINATIONS," which means "mother of idolatry" (Rev. 17:5).

The daring effrontery to our blessed Lord is increased when "Mary of Perpetual Help" is declared to be "the true Mercy Seat." None but Christ, and Christ alone in His work of atonement (in which He was alone) forms the basis for guilty man to approach a holy God. Of old in the tabernacle the mercy seat was upon the ark of the covenant- which ark was a type of Christ, as was the mercy seat -see Rom. 3:25; J.N.D. Translation. On this mercy seat, over which were the golden cherubim, was placed the blood of the sin offering on the great day of atonement. God dwelt in Israel above the mercy seat and He saw the blood which was placed there by the high priest. When the high priest entered the holy of holies (which he alone could do on only one day in the year) he had to come in with his censer in which was fire from the altar, and on which he placed the incense to send up the cloud to cover the mercy seat. Everything there spoke of Christ, and Christ alone. The ark, the mercy seat, the sweet incense, the blood, and the high priest-all typified the Lord Jesus. There was absolutely no room for another. He was alone in the great work of expiation for sin. Even in the type in the tabernacle, God expressly said: "There shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement." Lev. 16:17. And, "When He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Heb. 1:3. (Let it be noted that there was no place for Mary either in the work of redemption or in His present place at the right hand of God.) As the poet has so well expressed it:

"Alone He bare the cross,

Alone its grief sustained."

And another has said:

"His precious blood has spoken there,

Before and on the throne."

Let us beware of any attempt from any quarter to touch either the Person or the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is scarcely less fatal to sully His spotless, holy humanity in life or in death than to detract from His true deity.

And to attempt to associate any human being with Him is equally reprehensible and offensive. May the Lord preserve us from the seductions which increase by the hour- another mark of the last days.

Meanings of the Symbols of the Tabernacle: Vessels

Tabernacle

GOLD - Divine glory - divine righteousness - divine nature of the Lord Jesus.

SILVER - Jesus in the value of His Person and work for redemption.

BRASS - Christ sustaining God's judgment against sin. BLUE - Heavenly character.

PURPLE - Royal character of the Lord Jesus.

SCARLET - Glory of the Lord Jesus as man.

FINE LINEN - Christ the righteous One - righteousnesses of saints.

GOATS' HAIR - Absolute separation from evil.

RAMS' SKINS DYED RED - Life and death devotedness of Christ to God.

BADGERS' SKINS - Protection of self from evil. Psalm 17:4. SHITTIM WOOD - Holy humanity of the Lord.

OIL FOR THE LIGHT - Testimony in power of Spirit. SPICES FOR ANOINTING OIL AND FOR SWEET IN-

CENSE - Moral glories of Christ in energy of Spirit, and

Christ's intercession for believers.

ONYX STONES AND STONES IN EPHOD AND BREASTPLATE - Moral glories of the Lord Jesus reflected in His saints in the divine presence.

VESSELS OF TABERNACLE

ARK WITH GOLD CROWN - Type of Christ in dignity and glory of His Person as God (gold), as man (shittim wood), now crowned in heaven.

BRAZEN ALTAR-Righteous meeting place of God and sinners as to sin.

GOLDEN ALTAR - Holy meeting place of God and the purged sinner for worship.

BREASTPLATE - Believers borne on Christ's heart before God.

CHERUBIM - Divine attributes judicially displayed.

CANDLESTICK - Holy Spirit's light displaying Christ and His beauties.

GOLDEN BELLS AND POMEGRANATES - Testimony and fruit of the Holy Spirit.

LAVER - Provision for maintaining priestly holiness. MERCY SEAT - God's throne.

TABLE OF SHOWBREAD - Christ the food of the priestly family.

TABERNACLE WITH ITS THREE PARTS-

(1) Holiest - God's dwelling place.

(2) Holy place - the heavens.

(3) Court - meeting place with sinners.

THE VEIL - Christ's flesh.

Fine linen - absolute purity.

Blue - heavenly character.

Purple - royalty.

Scarlet - human glory. (see footnote above)

Cherubim - judgment and the power to execute judgment.

Copied from Bible of A. H. Rule. Date given in Bible, Jan. 1875.

The Nature and End of Suffering

It is not so much from what trials or sorrows we suffer, but how we suffer-the extent or amount of our sufferings, -which determines the purpose of God in them; every suffering, be it imaginary or otherwise, it is as I feel it that God purposes that a corresponding virtue of His grace should grow up in me. The suffering is to bring out a peculiar virtue from His own grace which no other suffering could bring out.

Certain preparations bring out certain desired colors. It is through the tears of the firmament that the colors of the rainbow are obtained. But I mean more than this; the suffering, or the depression, indicates the nature of the contrast, or correlative, which this pressure is appointed to elicit. If the pressure is great and peculiar, then some great and peculiar characteristic of the grace within is thereby to be evoked.

You thresh wheat for the grain, but you grind the grain to make flour-the produce is useful according to the severity and peculiarity of the process by which it is made available for use. We dry grapes for raisins; we bruise them for wine. Yet, the same grapes which make raisins, might have made wine if only they had been subjected to a more severe pressure.

Noah's Preaching

"For Christ also hath once, suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water." 1 Pet. 3:18-20.

Much erroneous teaching as to Christ's preaching to spirits in prison has been built upon the misuse of this passage. Let us remember that Peter was writing to Christian Jews who were but a small and despised company saved out of the mass of the nation. It was as much as to say, "Do not be discouraged; even in the days of Noah's preaching, when the long-suffering of God waited so long, only eight souls were saved."

It was the Spirit of Christ in Noah who preached to them before the flood, when they were alive. We have the same expression in chapter 1:11: the "Spirit of Christ" in the Old Testament prophets testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. In Gen. 6:3 we have the contrast between flesh and the Spirit (of God), where we read, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh."

The idea that Christ went and preached to spirits in prison between His death and resurrection is quite a mistake. But the spirits of the men to whom the testimony was rendered through Noah in his day, are now "in prison" awaiting judgment, because they were unbelieving as to the testimony given by the Spirit of Christ through Noah, when they were alive.

Original Sin

My dear brother,

I find in general that people do not know what they mean by "original sin." Is it a taint, an evil in nature, or a relative state with God? For instance, it is said, By one man's disobedience many were made sinners.

But it is never said that Christ has put away sin, in any sense. He came once in the end of the world to put away sin. But the result is not yet produced. Faith knows it is effectual, and rejoices. But the Holy Ghost convicts the world of sin because men believe not in Jesus, so that there they are, sin increased upon them by the death of Christ. But, I repeat, it is never said, Christ has put away sin. He has done the work that does it, so that in the new heavens and new earth righteousness will dwell. Hence my first answer must be the question, What do they mean by original sin? If it be the nature, it is not put away at all, but condemned in the cross. If it be the relationship and standing of the sinner, it is not changed till he believes. Only the cross is the adequate and glorious ground on which,

God being glorified and the blood before His eyes, He can send to every sinner beseeching him to be reconciled; but this proves he is not till he answers the call.

If it be meant that sins are put away (which is not original sin in any sense), and we remain guilty of unbelief, it is wholly anti-scriptural. T h e Lord says, "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24); and Paul, "Let no man deceive you for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." Eph. 5:6. And men are judged according to their works for the deeds done in the body. Only remember, with the vague words "original sin," we must know what they mean. The text generally, I suppose, applied to it is Rom. 5:19- "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." But this says nothing as to putting away. And it is never said that Christ has put away sin at all.

Your affectionate brother in Christ,

Passover or Pesach: the Editor's Column

The manners and customs of the Jews in the keeping of the Passover (Pesach) this month are very interesting, especially when considered in the light of the Holy Scriptures, but first let us trace this great Jewish festival from its beginning.

It is now almost 3500 years since God brought the Israelites out of Egypt. At that time they were greatly oppressed by the Egyptians, and God asked Pharaoh to let His people go, but he would not. Plague succeeded plague, but Pharaoh only hardened his heart, until at length God sent an angel to slay all the first-born in the land of Egypt. But for the angel to destroy only the first-born of the Egyptians, and not those of the Israelites, called for some line of demarcation, for surely all were sinners. Therefore Moses said to the people: "But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between t h e Egyptians and Israel." Exod. 11:7. And how did the Lord make a difference? By the application of the blood of the slain lamb to the lintels and doorposts of the Israelitish houses. The passover lamb must needs die and its blood be applied to each house individually. And God said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." Exod. 12:13.

The deliverance of the people from the judgment inflicted on the first-born, and their subsequent deliverance from Egypt and all the power of Pharaoh, through the Red Sea, was of such great significance that God changed the calendar for His people. The ordinary year had been running its course, but God said, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you." The month when they were redeemed by the blood of the lamb was to be a new beginning for them. And is it not so in a better sense for us who have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ? We have not only been delivered from the judgment to come, but have been put into an entirely new position; that is, "in Christ," who in resurrection is "the beginning of the creation of God." "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Cor. 5:17.

God also gave the Israelites His instructions for the keeping of the Passover, year by year, when they came into the land of Canaan. It was to be done on the 14th day of the month Nissan, and to be followed at once by the feast of unleavened bread which was to last seven days. Directions were given in Exodus 12 and 13, Leviticus 23, and Deuteronomy 16. (In Deuteronomy 16 it would appear that the feast of unleavened bread may sometimes be called the Passover, for sacrifices from the "herd" would doubtless be connected with the feast of unleavened bread.)

When we come to 2 Kings 23, and read about the revival under Josiah the king of Judah, there is this striking comment: "Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; but in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the LORD in

Jerusalem." vv. 22, 23. How strange that in all the vigorous days of Israel under David, and in the balmy, happy days under Solomon, not such a passover was kept as it was written. And yet

should we count it strange, when Christians who have been more highly favored have so signally failed to keep the Lord's one request, "This do in remembrance of Me," as it is written? Alas, it is failure whether we look at Israel or the Church; wherever man is found, he has failed. (Except that one perfect Man who was once here.)

When we come to the New Testament we find the Passover being kept by the Jews at Jerusalem, but in John's Gospel, it is called "the Jews' passover," and "the passover, a feast of the Jews," and not a "feast of the LORD" as it was originally called and instituted. How like what has become of the "Lord's supper"! It has become a mass, a sacrament, a life-giving ordinance, or empty form and ritual; while the "Lord's table" has become tables of men or of creeds.

But let us pass down through the centuries and we come to April, 1955. On the seventh of this month, Jews throughout the world will keep the Passover (Pesach), and follow through with their religious rites for another seven days. Yes, they are still keeping the Passover, and perhaps more so this year than for many years past, for there is more of a revival of Jewish spirit among them-this since the rebirth of the nation of Israel and its growing importance in world affairs.

When the Jews gather in their homes on April 7th (and also on the 8th) for "Seder" (order of service), they will have much that was mentioned in Exodus, and also much that has come in through the years. They will eat unleavened bread (matzoth), and in fact they will put all leaven out of their houses, or hide it away, for the whole eight days of the Pesach festival. They will have a recitation of the "Hagadah" (the account of their affliction in Egypt, their exodus, etc.). This is evidently in keeping with the instruction of Exod. 12:25-27: "And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as He hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel," etc. There will be something on the table (more such as horseradish) to remind them of the bitter herbs (Exod. 12:8).

In reading of the customs and traditions of the Jews we came across some interesting innovations. At the Seder they drink four cups of wine. This was not given in any Old Testament instruction, but it seems to have come in before the days of our Lord. We read in Luke 22 that He desired to keep that last Passover with His disciples, and that He did so in the upper room. At that time a cup of wine was connected with the supper, and we are told by some writers that four cups during the meal were then in vogue. The Lord Jesus refused to drink of the cup of wine which was associated with the Passover (see chap. 22:17, 18), and then instituted the remembrance of Himself in death. The Passover looked forward to His death as the true Lamb of God, and the Lord's supper is a memorial to look back to it.

A strange custom that came in somewhere along the years, and which is very interesting as throwing some light on that people who are "beloved for the fathers' sakes," is that they also fill a fifth cup with wine which is not touched by anyone at the table-it is for the prophet Elijah, and during the meal someone is sent to open the door so that he can come in. They still look upon Elijah as the great prophet to bring them into blessing. This reminds us that when John the Baptist came preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and calling on the people to repent, they first asked him, "Who art thou?" He replied, "I am not the Christ"; whereupon they asked him, "Art thou Elias [Elijah]?" Then, as now, they were looking for Elijah.

Their hopes of blessing with the coming of the prophet Elijah are based upon the last chapter in the Old Testament: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD." v. 5. Thus their Scriptures close with the prophecy of the coming of Elijah, but note that his coming is before "the great and dreadful day of the LORD." His coming will precede the coming of the Son of man in power and great glory, when the Jews will be put through the "day of atonement" in reality.

It is not that the actual Elijah of the days of Ahab will have to come back to the earth, but it will be one of like character-one who will come to call Israel back to the God of their fathers, for at that time the majority of them will have accepted the false king in Jerusalem as their Messiah.

One thing that they do not know today is that John the Baptist came "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Elijah), but they would not receive him. The Lord Jesus said to the multitude concerning John, "And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." Matt. 11:14. If they had received John and his message, then he would have been the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy to them, but they rejected John who was the Lord's forerunner, and then rejected the Lord, their Messiah. Once when Jesus spoke to His disciples of His death and resurrection, they "asked Him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them." Matt. 17:10-12. But however blinded they have been regarding Jesus as their Messiah, there is still a hope in their breasts of Israel's blessing. Many of them, doubtless, only carry out this ritual because it is the custom to do so, while they have no real comprehension of their true hope; but nevertheless it does indicate that lying buried beneath much rubbish and tradition there is still the hope of Israel's recovery.

During the days of "Jacob's trouble," the "great tribulation," God will have witnesses in Jerusalem, spoken of in Revelation 11 as "two witnesses" who will "have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will." v. 6. These witnesses will have the dual character of Elijah (power to shut heaven that it does not rain for three and one half years), and of Moses (power to smite the earth with plagues). The reason for these special features will be that as Elijah prophesied for God among an apostate people who were worshiping a false god, so will these speak for God among an apostate nation who have accepted the antichrist; and as Moses witnessed for God before a hostile Gentile power, so will these witness before the God-defying head of the revived Roman Empire, called the beast, who will openly and wantonly blaspheme God.

But when these things have come to pass, then the days of Israel's travail will be almost over, and before long the 24th Psalm will have its fulfillment, when the "King of glory" shall enter. Israel's long tragic suffering and future hope are beautifully put together by the poet:

"Lift up your heads, eternal gates;

A glowing dawn shines o'er ye!

At Salem's door the Sov'reign waits;

He is the King of glory!
"The palms of yore their branches waved,
When Judah's sons were singing:
'Hosanna! Zion shall be saved,'
Their gentle Monarch bringing.
"But the sun's light at midday died,
And Judah's matrons, wailing,
Lamented loud the Crucified,
All trace of glory failing!
"Those gloomy years have rolled away-
The years of Israel's mourning;
The rising sun with healing ray
Proclaims the King's returning.
"Lift up your heads, eternal gates,
Transcendent dawn glows o'er ye!
At Salem's door Messiah waits;
He is the King of glory."

The Passover Recorded Seven Times: the Editor's Column

Since the April manuscript containing the editorial on the Jewish Passover went to the printer we read a periodical of The International Hebrew Christian Alliance of London (sent to us by someone in England) in which was an article by its president on "The Passover and its Relation to the Lord's Supper."

This Hebrew Christian minister made a strange statement in his opening paragraph, which we quote: "There are in the Bible five instances of the celebration of the Passover. In Egypt (Ex. 12), under Solomon (2 Chron. 30:15), under Josiah (2 Kings 23:21; 2 Chron. 35:1), and one celebrated by the Lord Jesus (Luke 22:7-20)." While he says there are five instances recorded of its being kept, he only lists four, but in reality there are seven. And there is no record of Solomon's keeping of the Passover; the reference given refers to the time of Hezekiah. The three instances he has not listed are:

1. "And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season.... And they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month at even in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the LORD commanded Moses" (Num. 9:1-5).

When the Israelites came into the land of Canaan, after their forty years' trek in the wilderness they "encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho." Josh. 5:10.

Then after their captivity in Babylon and the return of the remnant in the days of Ezra to rebuild the temple, and after it had been finished, "the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month." Ezra 6:19.

There are some special lessons to be gleaned from the instances which had been overlooked. In Numbers 9, the people, in their second year in the wilderness, kept the feast according to the command of the Lord by Moses. At that time they also received some special instructions regarding the necessity of its being kept, and the necessity of freedom from defilement in those who kept it. If an Israelite had become defiled by a dead body, and had not time to be properly cleansed before the Passover, then he could not eat of it. Defilement and keeping of the Passover could not go together. This brings to mind that in 1 Corinthians the saints were told to examine themselves before they ate of the Lord's supper, and if there were things in them to be judged, then they should judge themselves and eat. Whatever pertains to the Lord requires that defilement in the individual be judged or else the Lord will judge that person (1 Cor. 11:28-32). Holiness becomes His house forever (Psalm 93:5). Another reason given in Numbers 9 for one's not keeping the Passover at the appointed time was, if he were on "a journey afar off," and consequently would not be there at the right time.

But were those who were thus hindered from eating the Passover to be deprived of it? No. Provision was then made for these persons to keep the Passover one month later, on "the fourteenth day of the second month at even." They must, however, be careful to keep it "according to all the ordinances of the passover." (vv. 10-12.) They must be as careful about how it was observed as though it were done in the first month.

It was no light matter for an Israelite to fail to keep the Passover, for if he failed to keep it when he was clean and was not on a journey, then he was to be cut off from among his people. These were commands from the Lord. Now we know that the Lord did not command us to remember Him in death, for we are not under law but under grace, but He distinctly expressed His desire that we should. And how shall we excuse ourselves before Him at the judgment seat of Christ for carelessness or willful failure to do so now? It is indeed a privilege - a most precious one - and not an obligation; surely something must be wrong with the saved soul who can willingly forfeit such a great privilege of responding to his Lord's one request. It is not a light matter to do so.

This special provision to keep the Passover in the second month was used in the revival in the days of Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 30. The good king had discernment that it would not be in order to attempt to keep the feast in the first month, and that he should avail himself of the gracious provision to keep it in the second month.

Joshua 5 also gives us some wholesome instruction. It appears that the children of Israel had not kept the Passover for those 38 years in the wilderness, nor had they practiced the right of circumcision which had been given them by God. At the institution of the Passover in Exodus 12 it was plainly stated, "No uncircumcised person shall eat thereof." v. 48. What then was to be done when they entered the promised land? They must first be circumcised, before, they kept the Passover, for many had grown up during the years in the wilderness; "Them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way." v. 7. Then they kept the Passover, and to their meal was added "parched corn," or food that they found in Canaan - a type of Christ in resurrection glory.

What may we learn from the proscription against an uncircumcised person eating of the Passover? Simply this, that while the Israelites were to perform the rite according to the flesh, "we are the circumcision" in a spiritual way, for "we... worship by the Spirit of God," not by any fleshly system, "and boast in Christ Jesus " not in ourselves or in anything of ourselves, "and do not trust in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3; J.N.D. Trans.). This last clause does not mean anything about bad flesh, as men speak, but flesh in its best forms, in its religious activities, or legal tendencies. All our boast and trust is in Christ. In such manner we can keep the remembrance of our Lord's death, and in so doing, "discern" His body (1 Cor. 11:29).

The third missing instance is also instructive. In the book of Ezra we find the feeble remnant returning to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. They had many difficulties to overcome, and not the least was a disposition to relax under pressure, but as encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah they returned to their building and finished the work. Then although they were few in number, and the temple lacked the richness and display that it had in the days of Solomon, yet they had recourse to the Word of God, and acted thereon. What a word for us at the end of this dispensation! Although the outward oneness is all broken to pieces, and few keep the Lord's supper as it is written, yet we still have His Word, Himself, and His Spirit as was said by the

prophet Haggai. So "They set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses. And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month." Ezra 6:18, 19. They acted in faith beyond those in the time of Hezekiah for they did not need to have recourse to the "second month" provision.

Let us then recapitulate the seven times the keeping of the Passover is recorded:

Exodus 12 gives its institution and divine order, while the Israelites were in Egypt.

Numbers 9 gives the record of its being kept in the wilderness, with special provision for keeping it in the second month when circumstances required it.

Joshua 5 gives the record of the Israelites' being circumcised first, and then keeping it in the land of Canaan, with the addition of eating the "old corn" of the land.

2 Chronicles 30 tells of a revival, but it lacked the strength that carried back to the divine order as it was in the beginning.

2 Chronicles 35 and 2 Kings 23 describe the brightest revival, and that at the very end, before the captivity of Judah. In the days of Josiah the Passover was kept, "as it was written."

The returned remnant in the days of Ezra had faith and courage to act on first principles and keep the feast in its appointed season and way.

Before looking at the 7th let us notice some thoughts that may be adduced to apply to our remembrance of the Lord in death. In one sense, we keep this loving remembrance of Him in the world, of which Egypt is the type, and in so doing we eat, as it were, of the roast lamb; that is, we feed on Christ as the One whose precious blood sheltered us from the just judgment of God, and who underwent the fire of His judgment.

We also keep it in the wilderness, for that is what the world has become to those who are redeemed to God. In the wilderness the Israelites also ate the manna which prefigured Christ as the bread come down from heaven. Even so we sometimes combine in our remembrance of Him the thoughts of His coming down as the true Manna with thoughts of His death as the Lamb of God.

In another sense we remember Him as the risen and glorified Christ who was once in death. Of this the children of Israel's keeping the Passover in Canaan and eating the "old corn of the land" gave us a picture. In doing this we are in spirit in heavenly places of which Canaan was but a type.

The Church's history in many ways parallels that of Israel. Failure and departure from the truth were prevalent before the apostles left the scene, and after they departed to be with Christ error came in like a flood. A low point of moral and ecclesiastical corruption was seen during the dark ages, and then through the mercy of God there was a revival of much truth and the opening of the Bible to the people during the Reformation. Alas, we know how shortly thereafter this settled down in to a cold formalism of state churches. Then more than 100 years ago there was a great stirring in Christendom when the truth of the Lord's coming, the heavenly calling of the Church, and the simple remembrance of the Lord in death were revived. In the tale of Christendom, perhaps we

have a counterpart of the two revivals under the kings of Judah.

We may also learn a lesson from the feeble remnant of Israel who were brought back from Babylonish captivity. Without great numbers or anything that would make a show before the heathen they reverted to what was written, and acted thereon. How good it is for us to know that no matter how great the failure and ruin of that which was once a bright testimony for the Lord on earth, there is still a path for faith to walk in. We still have what they had at the beginning - Himself, His Word, and His Spirit.

We now come to the last, the seventh, time the Passover was kept. We all know that the Spirit of God uses the number seven as a symbol of completeness, in either good or evil. Seven forms a complete cycle, as seven days make one week.

So according to the divine record the Lord Jesus and His disciples kept that seventh and last Passover in the upper room on the very night of His betrayal. He went forth from the upper room, where He kept the Passover, to the Garden of Gethsemane; and from there He went to meet the mob that came to take Him. That was at night, and by nine o'clock the next morning He was crucified. For faith, that Passover which He kept was the last one. Now we know that "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." 1 Cor. 5:7. Thus we see the purpose of God in recording seven, and only seven, accounts of keeping the Passover. Doubtless it was kept in some sort by the Jews with some regularity, and not only on these special occasions recorded by the Spirit. In Luke 2:41 we read that Joseph and

Mary went up each year to the Passover; in John 2, "the Jews' passover was at hand," and Jesus went up to Jerusalem (vv. 13,23); in John 6:4, "the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh." But only of the seven instances we have enumerated are there any specific accounts of its being kept.

After the last Passover the Lord instituted His supper. The former pointed on toward His death as the Lamb of God, and the latter looks back as a memorial of His death for us. Well did the poet, J. G. Deck, say:

"O mystery of mysteries!

Of life and death the tree;

Center of two eternities,

Which look, with rapt, adoring eyes,

Onward and back to Thee -

O cross of Christ, where all His pain

And death is our eternal gain."

The Path of Peace: a Word for Troubled Souls

"He leadeth me beside the still waters." Psalm 23:2

Beside the still waters! What a place to lie in, beloved, in this world of trouble, of unrest, of aching, restless hearts! What fullness of meaning for the pilgrim's heart! How many has the Shepherd so led through this valley and shadow of death-led through this dry and thirsty land by an unseen hand, and supplied from an unseen source-whose hearts have known the meaning of Peter's words, who was bidden by the Chief Shepherd to feed the lambs and sheep, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Such is the sweet portion of those who, if need be, are in heaviness, through manifold temptations, for the trial of their faith.

Are you in trouble? Are your goods not increased enough? Do your friends lightly esteem you? Have you fears for tomorrow? Are you in debt, or sick, or bereaved? Is the thing come upon you which you feared? Is the Lord's hand heavy upon you so that though you might otherwise trust, yet now you must plan and scheme for yourself, hoping to trust when things are easier?

O beloved for whom Christ died, for whom God gave His Son, by those very trials, sore as they may be, and the full measure of which God knows and has meted out to you, He is, in infinite love, opening a way for you of deepening joy, and Satan only would enlist your doubts and fears to close it against you. To whom will you yield yourself, beloved of God? which path will you walk in, that of faith or sight? "While we look not at the things which are seen," says Paul. So he could say, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment."

The language of faith is always brave language because God is trusted and things seen do not occupy the mind. What trouble is there that does not belong to things seen? Can you name one? What perplexity or distrust? Here is just the struggle, and what a momentous one, that is going on in each of us. Shall I look up or down, shall I give all attention to my troubles, or give heed to the Shepherd's voice? Shall I trust God who has saved me, or let Satan overwhelm me and drive me into the path of one who knows he is saved, but has, alas! lost communion, and is without "heart" or energy? There are trials in the path of faith, but, beloved, the trial is the door to lessons of joy and peace in Christ. Do not shrink back at the entrance. He, Himself, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross. "Surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off." Pro. 23:18.

What were the things that men saw Paul passing through? They are recorded in 2 Cor. 4-"Troubled on every side," etc. Would nature have chosen them, or gone through them? Might he not have chosen an easier path? How many have done so, but what a choice! Before Paul's eye there opened up not the fear of fresh trials in the future-oh, no-but the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory in the presence of Him who had chosen him. And is it not thus we make our calling and election sure- the heart gets familiar with the prospect of glory-and the aged warrior can say, "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I

know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

The trials are not to keep you from but to bring you beside the still waters in companionship with the Shepherd -they mark out the way to glory. If trouble has taken away your happiness in the Lord, on what was your happiness based? What is it that you want, that the heart is not quiet? Ask yourself the question; can you set before the mind what it is? Would its attainment restore the soul? Ah, no! dear troubled soul, do not think it. It is Satan who would persuade you. Be sure the place of quiet and refreshment is not so found! but by a shorter, quicker path-yes, a shorter way-a broken heart- a broken heart just where you are, in the very circumstances. For that the Shepherd is waiting. His voice is calling. You need not arise, nor go down the street, nor take counsel with a friend, nor with your own heart which will not befriend you, but bow the heart down-the proud heart-before the Word of God-that Word so full of perfect and sweet assurance for faith against any day of evil, such an answer to every doubt, such a shield against the enemy's darts. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you."

Then will the song be raised, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." The lessons of trial (it may be bitter) have taught the soul this sweet confidence, and a personal relationship is recognized between the individual and the Lord. It is not "the Lord is the shepherd," as He is for all, but I have learned with delight that He is my Shepherd. It is no dry argument or reasoning, but a sweet assurance made good in the depth of the heart. What a stay for the soul! The

Lord-the Almighty-my caretaker. It is true that it is in weakness we have to learn this trust, for trusting is acknowledged weakness, and that we shrink from. The flesh cannot do it, but the lesson learned, and the heart submissive and content to trust, oh, what a source of strength has the child of God! What comparison between human and divine power! How infinitely strong the weakest child of God, whose trust is in God! Do we realize it? Inasmuch as we do, peace, ineffable peace, dwells within, which changing circumstances cannot destroy-cannot reach. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee.... In the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength." Isa. 26:3, 4.

What comparison is there between trust in horses and chariots, and in the living God? Are your circumstances such as you cannot trust in or get comfort in? Then know that the Lord is hedging you in that you may be forced to look up, since you cannot see over or through the difficulty. What if it hurts your pride and disappoints your expectations and upsets your plans; the Lord has a better thing for you. Think, then, of the love that patiently deals with us! We distrust Him, but He does not rest until He has opened the eye to see His love. How wicked often is our unbelief when we only deem ourselves tried sufferers.

It is a great thing to be persuaded of the Lord's love. What a portion for the heart! The Lord of heaven and earth loves me. This indeed fills the heart and gives quietness-every moment. "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Because He loved me, He gave Himself for me. The springs are in Himself. I may forget myself then-it is no question of my deserts and faithfulness -and dwell upon His love alone.

Let us not seek then to walk by sight; let us not be wearied of faith-to faith all is bright, and the feet stand firm upon the solid, everlasting basis of God's promise, and we take heed to the word, "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." Heb. 10:36. So long then as we are in this life, we remain so by "the will of God." Is there anything then we cannot submit to, seeing it is His will? His will, whose will Christ did when He came and died for us on the cross. Only for a little while is the trouble-"For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Heb. 10:37. "Now the just shall live by faith"- a path which He Himself trod to the end, and in which He leads us by the hand-a sweet companionship. Beloved, He it is who leads, not we; and He it is who restores the soul. Not one bit of care belongs to you, but let the heart be free to enjoy His love, and speak His praise.

"Our Shepherd is the Lord,

The living Lord, who died:

With all His fullness can afford,

We are supplied.

He richly feeds our souls

With blessings from above,

And leads us where the river rolls,

Of endless love.

"Our souls He doth restore,

And keeps us in His way;

He makes our cup of joy run o'er

From day to day;

Through love so full, so deep

Anointed is our head;

Mercy and goodness us shall keep,

Where'er we tread.

"When faith and hope shall cease,

And love abide alone,

Then shall we see Him face to face,

And know as known:

Still shall we lift our voice,

His praise our song shall be;

And we shall in His love rejoice,
Who set us free."

The Person of the Son

The blessed Person, life, and work of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth are set forth in the four Gospels. The chief feature in Matthew is His presentation as the Messiah; in Mark, as the Prophet and perfect Servant of God; in Luke, as the Son of man; and in John, as the Son of God. In beautiful keeping with this, our Lord's genealogy is traced in Matthew to David and Abraham; is omitted in Mark; is traced back to Adam in Luke; and is also omitted in John as it is obvious that, as the Son of God, He had none. At the same time, in all the four Gospels, other titles, names, and traits are also brought forward, but the above is the salient feature of His presentation in each.

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, the varied glories of the ever blessed Son of God come out in a most marked way. It commences with the sublime statement, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word existed eternally.

The Word never had a beginning. In the beginning the Word already was, and the Word was with God. The latter clause brings before us distinct personality; and, moreover, the Word was God, which shows His deity. So that in this wondrous verse we have before us the eternity, personality, and deity of the Word- His glories, before creation, which eternally abide. As another has beautifully written of Him, "He is, and He is the expression of, the whole mind that subsists in God - 'the Word.' "

And the Holy Ghost adds emphatically, "The same [or He] was in the beginning with God," thus carefully guarding His distinct personality in eternity, before creation and time.

And this wondrous divine being, the Word, who was with God, and who was God, was the Creator. "All things were made by Him." He it was who spoke, and it was done; who commanded, and it stood fast. He it was who called heaven and earth into existence; who studded the boundless sky with untold myriads of mighty orbs; who said, "Let there be light," and there was light; who clothed the earth with verdure, and gave life to every living thing. All things, visible and invisible, were made by Him. Every living creature in heaven or on earth; every principality, power, might, dominion, the innumerable company of angels, and the whole race of man; all owe their existence to the mighty fiat of the everlasting Word. "And without Him was not anything made that was made."

"In Him was life." It was nowhere else. The Word, God, is its eternal source and spring. The life was ever in Him. "And the life was the light of men." The life was revealed, manifested down here in the world, "the light of men," as we get also in 1 John 1:1-3, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

Men were here in darkness; the world was under the power of it through the entrance and reign of sin; men, fallen creatures, had their minds and hearts darkened. But the Light appeared. "The life

was the light of men." The ever blessed Son of God, walking here as man upon the earth (sin apart), Jesus, was the life. The Holy Ghost passes from the presentation of the Word in eternity to His manifestation here in time among men. He in whom was life came into the world. The life was the light of men, not of angels. But though "the light shineth in darkness," and that with unclouded luster morally, yet so gross was the darkness that it comprehended it not. Instead of the darkness being dispelled by the bright shining light, it remained as it was. Man as such was completely under its power. Gross darkness covered the world, and there was no comprehension of that wondrous light.

John, a man sent of God, came and bore witness of the Light, that all men through Him might believe. "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." The true Light did not shine for that people only whom God had blessed of old, who had the law, and the law is light (Pro. 6:23), but for all, for men in general. The world knew Him not, and the Jews received Him not; but there was a people who did, a people born of God, to whom He gave right to be the children of God, all believers in this day of grace (John 1:12, 13). Blessed are all they who are found among them.

Pursuing this wondrous chapter, we come next to the incarnation. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:14. Wondrous grace! The eternal Word here on the earth as man, clothed with true humanity (without sin)-holy. A real Man, Jesus, dwelt among men-the holy One of God. "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." 1 Tim. 3:16. "And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father [or, a glory as of an only begotten with a Father], full of grace and truth." John 1:14. How deeply blessed! Who does not know the joy of an earthly parent in an only begotten son? How much greater the joy and delight of the Father in His only One? How wondrous that men should contemplate such a One! No man has seen God at any time. He is invisible, dwelling in light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, neither can see (1 Tim. 6:16). He is a Spirit-light, love- the invisible God; but the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him. In Him we learn here what God is, for He was Immanuel, God with us.

John the Baptist, seeing Jesus coming to him, said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" Wondrous mystery! This same blessed One is the Redeemer, the One who was about to offer Himself a sacrifice for sin -the Lamb of God. Abraham said to his son Isaac, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb." Here is the great antitype of whom we may take these words as prophetic- God's Lamb, the Holy One, without blemish and without spot, the Lamb which taketh away sin. He was the One who was going to die, and who, later on, did die. At Calvary Jesus offered Himself without spot to God to put away sin (Heb. 9:14, 26). Sin has gone from before God for everyone who believes, and that forever. But He was on the cross in relation to the sin of the world, and eventually, as the result of His work, sin will be taken away from the world altogether. And God will establish an eternal system wherein righteousness shall dwell based on the perfection of the finished work of Jesus, the holy Lamb of God.

Of this same blessed One, John bare record when he saw the Spirit descending on Him at His baptism, that it is He who baptizeth with the Holy Ghost, the Son of God (John 1:33, 34). "Again the next day after,... looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!" Not only is He the sin-bearer, but the Lamb of God in whom God could find His perfect satisfaction and

delight, and who, as a burnt offering on the cross, was a sweet savor before Him. Disciples followed Him as they heard John's words, and the gladness spread from one to another, that the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed One of God, was found. Jesus Himself called Philip; the latter found one, named Nathanael, confessing Him as Jesus of Nazareth, of whom Moses, in the law and the prophets, did write. Nathanael confessed Him as the Son of God, and the King of Israel; and Jesus, among other things, said to him, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." This precious portion thus closes with a foreshadowing of that blessed day for this poor earth when, the curse being removed (Rev. 22:3), Jesus, Son of God and Son of man, shall reign as King of Israel, and when all things shall be gathered in one in Him, both in heaven and on earth (Eph. 1:10).

How wondrously the Holy Ghost brings before our souls in this chapter the manifold glories of the Person of God's beloved Son! Surely every heart that knows Him and His love must bow in worship, adoration, and praise, as we think of Him-He who is the everlasting Word, God, the mighty Creator, and yet became a Man that He might glorify God accomplish redemption, and eventually deliver this groaning scene. This is He who is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, crowned with glory and honor, the triumphant Savior in the eternal glory of God.

"Thou art the everlasting Word,

The Father's only Son;

God manifest, God seen and heard,

The heaven's beloved One;

Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou

That every knee to Thee should bow."

May God engage each Christian's heart's affections increasingly with His blessed Person, and give us a holy jealousy for the glory of His name.

Peter's Restoration: the Question, Answers, and Commission

There is much practical instruction in the touching account of Peter's restoration given us in John 21. Three times he had denied his Lord with oaths and curses; but after one "look" from Jesus had touched Peter's heart, he went out and wept bitterly.

But the root which produced the failure had not yet been reached. The root was self-confidence. Peter had said, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I," and again, "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death." No doubt he honestly meant it, but how little he knew his own heart!

It is just so with ourselves. If we think we are strong, it is then we are sure to go down. True strength, for the Christian, is to be found in a consciousness of his own utter weakness and complete dependence on the Lord. "When I am weak, then am I strong," is not understood by the man of the world, but the Christian who is going on in communion with God, knows well what it means.

And mark the grace of the Savior; He does not say one word of reproach to Peter. True, He reaches his conscience and probes it to the bottom; but this was in grace so that Peter might be thoroughly restored. True self-judgment and true restoration always go together.

The change of words used in the questions and answers, which is not seen in the King James Version, but which has been pointed out by many scholars, is instructive to notice. It is as follows:

THE QUESTIONS

Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?

Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?

Simon, son of Jonas, dearly lovest thou Me?

THE ANSWERS

Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I dearly love Thee.

Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I dearly love Thee..

Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I dearly love Thee.

THE COMMISSION

Feed my lambs.

Tend (or shepherd) My sheep.

Feed My sheep.

The Lord addresses Peter three times. First He says in effect, "Simon, do you really love Me more than do these other disciples?" The second time Jesus does not bring in the comparison with the others. The third time He takes up Peter's own stronger word, and says, "Dearly lovest thou Me?" In his reply Peter falls back on the Lord's divine knowledge that he did indeed dearly love Him.

Now that the work of restoration was complete, the Lord could entrust to Peter that which was most precious to Him. "Feed My lambs," He says. These little ones of the flock who need special care are the first He commits to Peter. Then, "Tend [or shepherd] My sheep." And last, "Feed My sheep." Peter himself, in his epistle, takes up the second word here used; "Tend the flock of God which is among you," he says to the elders.

For this blessed service Peter was fitted now that he was restored and in the happy enjoyment of communion with Christ. We too may know a little of it if we are walking in communion with Him.

The Pharisee, Publican, and a Man in Christ

We read in Luke 18 that "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican." Now it is not as easy to dispose of this Pharisee as people think; there is much to be said for him. He was in the temple, the right place for a religious man such as he, the place that God had appointed for worship. There is no temple now. Men have indeed tried to make imitations of it, and very poor imitations they are, but God has not ordained any place of worship on earth. Where is the place of worship now? Heaven, where Christ is.

The Pharisee was in the temple, and his first words are, "God, I thank Thee." This sounds very well. What have creatures to do but to praise God? "That I am not as other men." Here he gets on rather dangerous ground, but you will observe that he thanks God for this: that he is not as others. There was not only what was negative in his case, but something positive also: "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." The Pharisee's mistake was that he stood on the ground of self in the presence of God who knew the material that was before Him; He prefers the position taken by the publican. The mistake of the Pharisee was to stand before God in the value of self. When we think of what God is - when we think what the judgment will be - which of us would not join in David's prayer, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant"?

There are more Pharisees than people think. Have 'you peace with God? If not, are you on the ground of the Pharisee? is not self before you in some way? You see some who have been looked on as devout people all their lives, and yet when they come to die they are all at sea. Is that Christianity-to leave people at sea just when they most need help? It is that bit of self they are standing on that does all the mischief.

The Lord commends the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner." My heart goes with the utterance, but it is not Christian language-it would be unsuitable language for a Christian-but, beloved friends, it was a blessed utterance. It was extracted by God from a soul overwhelmed by the sense of his miserable, wretched condition. It was not a Christian's standing, but it was a blessed state.

If in the case of the publican we do not find Christian ground, where shall we get it? In 2 Corinthians 12 where we read of a man in Christ. But it may be said, Surely there is something between the publican and the man in Christ. Nothing whatever. If you have said with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and accepted Christ as your Savior, the next position for you is a man in Christ. There is no halting place, no halfway house, no borderland. If you are not in Christ, you perish. Does anyone dare to say that if you are in Christ you will perish? "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.... I and My Father are one." You must not expect to find a declaration of the gospel in the account of the publican.

The publican would certainly have been material for the blessing of which we speak, but Christ had not died; the blood had not then been shed.

Is it not a strange thing that people still like that old covert of Adam in the trees of the garden, where they can indeed hear the voice of God, but are not near Him. They prefer shade and distance to nearness and sunshine.

"A man in Christ." This explains it all. If "in Christ," I am out of self. I am looked at by God as having died, having gone under judgment; and oh, dear friends, there will be a resurrection of everything, but not of my sins or of my evil nature. I stand now, not on the merits of Christ, but in Christ. I am in a place of unalterable value. No panic of my wretched heart can cause any fall in the value of Christ. Satan may charge me, my own heart may charge me, but it will not alter the value of Christ. I believe in a peace that nothing in the present-nothing in the future -nothing in the world-nothing in hell - can ever alter. Christ is everything to the Christian. He stands in the simple excellency-oh! who would add to it-of Christ. The Christian up there is according to the value of Christ; down here he is a poor weak creature.

The eye of God rests with eternal complacency on Christ, and on me because I am in Christ. Faith is no credit to me; as to myself, I am nothing. Paul says of himself, "Though I be nothing"; and if he could say it, you and I may. Is it that the flesh gets any better by the believer breathing the air of heaven? No. As has been said, if taken up into the third heaven, a thorn is needed as soon as one comes down again. If this were so with an old saint-a veteran like Paul- what about poor things like ourselves? And sincerity makes it no better. There are no more miserable people in the world than these sincere people. But in Christ, higher you could not be, holier you could not be.

Philadelphia and Laodicea

I would observe that 1 Samuel 4 and 7 remind us of the churches of Laodicea and Philadelphia in Revelation 3. The former presents to us a condition which we should sedulously avoid; the latter, a condition which we should diligently and earnestly cultivate. In that, we see miserable self-complacency, and Christ left outside. In this, we see conscious weakness and nothingness, but Christ exalted, loved, and honored; His Word kept and His name prized.

And be it remembered that these things run on to the end. It is very instructive to see that the last four of the seven churches give us four phases of the Church's history right on to the end. In Thyatira we find Romanism; in Sardis, Protestantism. In Philadelphia, as we have said, we have that condition of soul, that attitude of heart, which every true believer and every assembly of believers should diligently cultivate and faithfully exhibit. Laodicea, on the contrary, presents a condition of soul and an attitude of heart from which we should shrink with ever-growing intensity. Philadelphia is as grateful as Laodicea is loathsome to the heart of Christ. The former He will make a pillar in the temple of His God; the latter He will spew out of His mouth, and Satan will take it up and make it a cage of every unclean and hateful bird - Babylon! An awful consideration for all whom it may concern. And let us never forget that for any to pretend to be Philadelphia is really the spirit of Laodicea. Wherever you find pretension, assumption, self-assertion, or self-complacency, there you have, in spirit and principle, Laodicea, from which may the good Lord deliver all His people!

Beloved, let us be content to be nothing and nobody in this scene of self-exaltation. Let it be our aim to walk in the shade as far as human thoughts are concerned, yet never be out of the sunshine of our Father's countenance. In a word, let us ever bear in mind that the fullness of God ever waits on an empty vessel.

Reconciliation

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.... Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us: we pray in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God." 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; see J.N.D. Trans.

Man has departed from God and become His enemy. He needs reconciliation. Satan seeks to lead the sinner to believe that God is against him, and that He needs to be propitiated by works of his. Hence the vast amount of religious doings in the flesh. Tens of thousands seek to reconcile God by their fleshly efforts to be good and religious. But the Word of God shows clearly that it is man, the sinner, who needs reconciling to God, and not God to the sinner. There is a vast difference between the two.

The full enmity of man against God, in the Person of Christ, came out at the cross. Put to the proof in various ways for some four thousand years or so, the cross fully manifested the sinner's condition as an enemy of God. While God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, we find the world at large refused the goodness of God, and crucified His Son. And while the cross of Christ, on the one hand, seals the world's condemnation, on the other, it is the expression of the wondrous love of God to man. It is the basis upon which God in righteousness now sends forth the word of reconciliation. Paul and others declared it in the early days of Christianity; and it is the privilege of God's servants now to announce the same blessed tidings to all, according to the ability given.

Hence God in grace has now taken the attitude of beseeching sinners to be reconciled to Him. The Apostle, coupling his companions with himself, says, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Cor. 5:20. The sinner must be reconciled in the day of His grace, or come before God in judgment in the future in his sins. It will be too late to be reconciled then. "Behold, now is the day of salvation." 2 Cor. 6:2.

God, having been glorified in the finished work of the cross, raised His Son from the dead. Grace now reigns, and all who come to Him in self-judgment, by faith in the name of His Son, are justified and reconciled. Our Lord, when on earth, gave us a striking illustration of the manner of our reconciliation to God, in the story of the prodigal son. In this dissatisfied, ungodly worldling, Jesus illustrated the moral condition of the publicans and sinners of that day; but it also sets forth the state of the unconverted world without God at the present time. Reduced to beggary and misery through his own sin, and having failed in his own efforts to remedy his condition, he made up his mind to return to his father and confess his sin. "He arose, and came.... But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Luke 15:20. Lovely picture of the sinner's reconciliation to God! Take your place before Him, dear reader, like the prodigal son, in self-judgment and confession, if you have never done so before, and you will be reconciled in like manner. If you seek to justify yourself, you are like the Pharisees and scribes who are illustrated in the elder son, and you will be found outside the place

of blessing. But if you come to God, like the prodigal arose and came to his father, you will find yourself the object of His love, and His Spirit bearing witness with your spirit that you are a child of God. And henceforth, "Abba, Father," will be your cry.

Let us dwell a little upon the manner of this reconciliation. Five things may be especially noted. The father saw, compassionated, ran to meet, embraced, and kissed his son. The father saw. "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him." Occupied with his long lost one, he was on the lookout for his return. His eye lighted on him in the distance. Recognizing the well-known form, the heart followed the eye, and was filled with compassion toward his son. Love immediately sped the feet, and he ran to meet him. And there, just as he was in all his wretchedness, love satisfied itself by folding the lost one in its fond embrace. His eyes saw, his heart compassionated, his feet sped, his arms embraced, and his lips covered him with kisses.

The son confesses his sin, but is interrupted by the father ere he can talk, as he had intended, about being a hired servant (Luke 15:18-23). He was welcomed and treated as a son. Not a word of reproach escaped the lips of his loving parent. His return and his confession were a witness to his repentance, and immediately a heart of love lavishes its all upon the object of its affection. This is the way of love.

Blessed triumph of grace! Lovely picture of the grace of our God! Dear reader, what do you know of all this? Have you judged and confessed the past? Do you know what it is to be reconciled to God, folded in His everlasting arms? Have the kisses of peace and reconciliation been imprinted upon your cheek? "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Rom. 4:7, 8. Do you know too the blessedness of being included in that precious verse, "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life"? Rom. 5:10. If so, you too can join with all His own in adding, "And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation." Rom. 5:11; see J.N.D. Trans.

And the father said to the servants, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry," etc. Luke 15:22, 23. Grace abounds. The best of everything for the reconciled one, alone will satisfy a father's heart. It was not a question of his deserts, but a heart of love finding its gratification in the blessing of its object. Wondrous grace! And this is the way of our God, fellow believer. All that love can devise and grace bestow is lavished upon every sinner who returns to Him. Clad with heaven's best robe; sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption; fitted to walk before Him, it is now the joy and privilege of every child of God to feast with a loving Father upon the exceeding riches of His grace. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin bath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom. 5:20, 21.

Beloved reader, this is the manner of the sinner's reconciliation to God. Are you reconciled?

Reformation Is Not Cure

You will find that man changes his way, but never cures himself. This truth has had abundant illustration in the progress of the world's history, and may be a seasonable warning to us just at this moment.

Israel in the wilderness showed this. They made a calf first; afterward they made a captain. The unclean idol was followed by setting up one of themselves; but this was only change, and not cure.

Israel in the land did the same again. They had the gods of the nations as their gods till Babylon became the place of their captivity and judgment. But when returned to the land, though they did not return to their idols, they became infidel and presumptuous. Read their ways in Ezra and Nehemiah, and very specially in Malachi. Again it was change, and not cure.

The Lord in His teaching contemplates this (see Matt. 11 and Luke 11). It was first the unclean house, and then the swept and garnished house. But this was no cure. Some said the Lord did His works by Beelzebub, and others challenged Him for a sign. They may vary in the form of their enmity, but it is enmity still. And instead of all this change and variousness working a cure last state is worse than the first.

What transpires in the swept house is still worse than what had been witnessed and practiced in the unclean house.

This, beloved, is a serious truth, but it is seasonable. The nations are now hailing a change. Men's hearts are beating high, and promising them great things. It is well to remember that man may change his way, but he never can cure himself. The change only ends in something worse. In the "latter times" of Christendom we get certain forms of evil (1 Tim. 4), but when we read of "the last days," it is only a change of the former we get (2 Tim. 3). It is evil still, and no cure. In the awful disclosures of the Apocalypse we find this.

It is change, and not cure. The woman that corrupted the earth is removed, but the beast and his army takes the lead and conducts his strength against the Lord (chap. 19). The kings of the earth may hate the whore and put her down, but then this is only to give their power to the beast and put him up (chap. 17).

Thus changes are witnessed. One form of evil gives place (in the course of the dispensations, whether in Israel or in Christendom, but then it is only giving place) to another form of evil. There is no cure. Judgment must be executed, and that is not cure, but the making way for something new. The judgment will displace man and corruption, and make room for Christ and His power and righteousness.

The evil is incurable, and must be displaced by judgment. And just as man's change of his ways did not work a cure, so the Lord's different dealings with him have not worked correction. His piping has not led to dancing, nor His mourning to lamentation. "Let favor be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness." All tells us that nothing remains but judgment. As says

the same prophet, "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9, 10). And again, "All nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgments are made manifest." Rev. 15:4.

The Reformation was a change, but no cure; and judgment awaits Christendom.

A Rejected but Coming Christ

We are the present companions of a rejected, absent, unworldly Christ. We recognize the world around us (which has seen and hated Him and His Father, as the Lord Himself says) as morally incurable, awaiting the judgment of His coming day. We look to meet Him in the air when the hour of His good pleasure to that end shall come; and when that is to be we do not know. And we reckon upon returning with Him, first to the execution of judgment, and then to the sharing with Him, in manifestation, the glory of His dominion in the world to come. These things form and define the proper attitude of the saints of this dispensation. It is easy to apprehend this; but to realize it we need simple energetic faith in the power of the Holy Ghost-the faith that cherishes single-heartedness to Christ, and the love for Himself that ever keeps a welcome for Him in the heart.

Restoration After a Fall

There are cases where a Christian has fallen, yet in nowise doubts his salvation or the efficacy of the blood of Christ; but the heart has gotten to a distance from God, has not the sense of what sin is, such as the presence of God always gives.

Now to be truly restored, the Christian must recognize the point of departure where his soul gave up communion with God, and sought its own will. It was thus with Peter. The Lord does not reproach him with his fault, but says to him, "Lovest thou Me more than these?" That was the point where his soul had turned aside from the right way, where self had shown itself- confidence in himself. The Lord probes Peter's heart, and makes known to him the undercurrent of pride and false confidence which was found there. Until that moment Peter was not restored, although on the way to be so. When a brother in fellowship has fallen, and has sincerely acknowledged his fault as an evil, even when he may have been reinstated, he is always in danger of falling again if he has not judged the root of it. It is there that he got to a distance from God. Communion with God is not thoroughly reestablished, self and its will are not thoroughly broken, as long as the Christian has not found the point where his heart began to lose its spiritual sensibility, for the presence of God makes us feel that. I am not speaking of a matter of memory, but of the state of the soul. A soul is restored when it enjoys the favor of God, not simply as certainty of salvation, but when the Spirit, instead of accusing, causes it to rejoice in the goodness of God. Restoration is not complete until there is enjoyment of communion with our brethren. I remember having seen horror at having sinned against grace, and at the dishonor done to the name of Christ, as the first effect of the renewed power of the Word in the heart; then came the sense that grace has triumphed over all-blessed be God!

The Restoration From Babylon

The book of Ezra marks an important epoch in God's dealings with His people Israel. Although seventy years had elapsed, it is yet the continuation of 2 Chronicles, for time does not count with the Jews when in exile from the land of promise. They had lost everything by their sins and apostasy, and God had sent Nebuchadnezzar to chastise them, to destroy His own house which His people had profaned and polluted, to carry them away captive to Babylon, and "to fulfill the word of the Loan by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths." 2 Chron. 36:21.

Nothing could be sadder than the record of the destruction of Jerusalem and the termination of the kingdom as entrusted in responsibility to the hands of man, except indeed the still more fearful accounts of the siege and capture of Jerusalem by Titus soon after the commencement of the Christian era.

The long-suffering of God had been tested in every possible way. In His patient grace He had borne with the highhanded rebellion of His people; He had lingered with a yearning heart, like the Savior when He was upon earth, over the city which was the expression of royal grace; He had sent to them by His messengers, "rising up betimes, and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees," etc. The sword of His justice thus fell upon His guilty people, for their sins had exceeded those even of the Amorites whom God had driven out before them (see 2 Kings 21:11). God's throne on earth was henceforward transferred to Babylon, and the times of the Gentiles-which still continue, and will do so until Christ Himself shall establish His throne, the throne of His father David (see Luke 1:32, 33; 21:24)-commenced. Lo-ammi, meaning, "not My people"-(it is on this account that God never, in these post-captivity books, whatever His care over them, addresses the Jews as His people) was in this way written upon the chosen race, and they entered upon the sorrowful experience of captivity and banishment under the judicial dealings of the hand of their God.

But now, when the book of Ezra begins, the seventy years of their exile which had been foretold by Jeremiah, had been completed, and Ezra relates the actings of God in connection therewith for the accomplishment of His own sure and faithful word; and it is the character of these which explains the attitude of God toward His people during the times of the Gentiles, and also, to some extent, the peculiarity of this portion of the Scriptures, as well as Nehemiah and Esther. In these books God is no longer seen actively interposing in the affairs of His people, but He works, as it were, behind the scenes, and at the same time, recognizing the new order which He Himself has established, He uses the Gentile monarchs into whose hands He had committed the scepter of the earth for the execution of His purposes.

Bearing these principles in mind, we shall be the better able to enter intelligently upon the study of this book. The book divides itself into two parts. The first six chapters give the account of the

return of the captives who responded to the proclamation of Cyrus, and of the building of the temple; the last four, of the mission of Ezra himself.

CHAPTER I

There are two things in this chapter - the proclamation of Cyrus and the response to it on the part of the people, together with an account of the number of "the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods" (v. 7), and which Cyrus now restored to those of the captivity who were about to return to Jerusalem. The first

verse draws back the curtain and reveals the source of the power which was acting then and through all the subsequent events of this book for the fulfillment of Jehovah's purposes. It runs, "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing," etc.

Let us pause for a moment to point out how the Lord-whatever the outward appearances - holds the hearts of all men in His hands, and turns them whithersoever He will; how He uses men of all degrees as the instruments of the counsels of His will. The very mention of Cyrus carries us a step further back, "Who," says the prophet Isaiah, speaking in the name of Jehovah, "raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to His foot, gave the nations before him," etc. (chap. 41:2). And again, "That saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid."

Chap. 44:28.

This prophecy was uttered long before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and at least a hundred years before Jeremiah was called to his prophetic work, and thus shows that the eye and heart of God are perpetually upon His people and upon their interests, and that the public events of the world, the rise and fall of monarchies, the advent of mighty conquerors, are but the instruments of His power by which He works on through the governments of the world to fulfill His own purposes in relation to His earthly people. How calmly therefore the children of God may rest amid political confusions and strife! In this way God has designated by the mouth of Isaiah, two hundred years before the event narrated in our chapter, His chosen vessel for the restoration of His people, and for the erection of His house at Jerusalem.

A century passed away, and Jeremiah prophesied during the closing days of the kingdom, alternately warning and beseeching his people - warning them of the certainty of the approaching judgments, and beseeching them to repent and to humble themselves before the God whose wrath they had provoked by their wickedness and folly. It was in the course of this work that he said, "This whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD." Jer. 25:11, 12. Also, "For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." Jer. 29:10. First, then, Cyrus is designated long years before he was born into this world and, after another period had elapsed, Jeremiah, while announcing the approaching captivity of the people,

proclaims the exact duration of their exile.

But there is yet another instrument, not appearing indeed in this chapter, whom God was pleased to associate with Himself in carrying out His purposes of grace and blessing toward His people.

Turning to the book of Daniel we read, "In the first year of his reign" (that of Darius) "I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." Dan. 9:2, 3. God had spoken the words concerning, and provided the instruments for, the restoration of His people; and yet what do we find? That one of the captives whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away to Babylon, the prophet Daniel, had discovered, not by any special revelation, but by patient study of the writings of Jeremiah, that God had fixed the period of seventy years for "the desolations of Jerusalem."

Thereon, grounding himself upon this infallible word, he gave himself to prayer and fasting, humbling himself before God, confessing the sins of his people, and making supplication for the fulfillment of His own word. "O Lord," he said, "according to all Thy righteousness, I beseech Thee, let Thine anger and Thy fury be turned away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers,

Jerusalem and Thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of Thy servant, and his supplications, and cause Thy face to shine upon Thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake." vv. 16, 17. Thus Daniel, identifying himself with the state of his people, and in communion with the mind of God, had the unspeakable privilege of becoming an intercessor for Israel, and for the fulfillment of the promises of God. His prayer was heard (vv. 21-27) and we thereby learn that God in His grace permits His people to enter into His own thoughts, and to be associated with Himself in the accomplishment of His counsels for His own glory.

All therefore was now ready; the preparatory work had all been accomplished. In accordance with Isaiah's prediction, "the righteous man from the east" had been called to the sovereignty of the Gentiles; and it is through him that the appointed deliverance must come. The next action is therefore recorded—"The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia," and the following proclamation is the result:

"Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (He is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem." vv. 2-4.

Three things are here announced; namely, the commission which Cyrus himself had received as to the Lord's house; his royal permission to any of the Jews to return to Jerusalem for the purpose of building the temple; and last, his invitation to those Jews who should remain in his dominion to have fellowship by freewill offerings with those who should depart.

The rest of the chapter is taken up with an account of the effect produced by the proclamation. We say "the effect of the proclamation," but the reader will not fail to notice that it was He who had stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, who "raised" the spirit of those who offered themselves for the holy work in prospect. Two or three particulars only need to be observed. It is of importance, first of all, to point out that the chief of the fathers who offered themselves for the work were of the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. There were also Levites, but they did not count as a tribe, for Levi had "no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance." See Deut. 10:8, 9. It is plain indeed from this and other scriptures that though there may have been individuals from other tribes there were but these two tribes restored. It was only therefore to Judah and Benjamin that Christ, when born into this world, was afterward presented for acceptance; and owing to their having rejected Him, it is they, and they only of the twelve tribes, who will pass through the terrible trouble "such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be," which will be consequent upon the advent and power of the antichrist in Jerusalem. For the same reason the ten tribes will not be collected and restored until after the appearing of the Lord for the salvation of the remnant in the land. See Zech. 14; Eze. 20:33-44; chap. 34; Jer. 31:6-14.

In the next place God wrought in the hearts of the neighbors of those who devoted themselves to the work of the Lord's house, for they "offered willingly" according to the terms of the proclamation of their substance, helping them with vessels of silver and gold, etc. Last, Cyrus himself showed his interest in the work, in evidence that his heart also had been touched by divine power, by restoring the vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods (see Dan. 5:1-4); and these he numbered unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah (vv. 6-11).

We have thus in this chapter all the signs of a genuine work of God. Concurrence of heart and object is produced in all concerned, whether in Cyrus, without whose permission the captives could not have returned; in the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin who were needed for the actual work of building; or in those who remained who, in having fellowship with their brethren by their freewill offerings, contributed toward the necessary expenses. There were no preliminary meetings to arrange and to come to an agreement, but the union of heart and purpose was produced alone by the action of the Lord on the hearts of all alike. This distinguishes a divine from a human work, and is sure proof of a real action of the Spirit of God. Every needed instrument therefore comes forward at the right moment, for the work is of God, and it must be accomplished.

The last three verses contain the number of the sacred vessels which Sheshbazzar received from Cyrus and brought up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The Restoration From Babylon

We have in this chapter a register of "the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city." v. 1. There are several interesting particulars to be noticed in the record; the first is that the fact of its existence shows how precious to God was the response which His grace had produced in the hearts of His people, however feebly they may have entered into His thoughts in regard to His house. On this account He has caused this list to be preserved, in evidence that He beholds with joy the smallest fruits of His Spirit's work, and that the very names of His people are known and

proclaimed as an encouragement to all to walk in His ways, to be identified with His interests, and to maintain fidelity in times of corruption and apostasy. (Compare Luke 12:8 and Rev. 3:5.) In verse 2 the names of the leaders are given, and then the people are classified according to their family descent.

Examining this catalog a little more closely, a fourfold division will be found. Down to the end of verse 42, those who were undoubtedly of Israel, of Judah, Benjamin, or of Levi (among the last both singers and porters), are described. Then follow two other classes-the Nethinim and the servants of Solomon, concerning whom a few words will be necessary.

First, the Nethinim (vv. 43-58). The question is raised whether these were of Jewish descent. The word would seem to mean "those that are given"; and it has been concluded that they, from the place in which their names occur in the chapter (see also 1 Chron. 9:2), were of another race, but had been given originally to the Levites for their service, even as the Levites-only these by divine command, and in the place of the first-born of Israel (see Num. 8)-had been given to Aaron for the Lord's service in His tabernacle. And traces of such are found in two scriptures. In Numbers we read respecting the spoil taken from the Midianites, "Of the children of Israel's half, Moses took one portion of fifty, both of man and of beast, and gave them unto the Levites, which kept the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD; as the LORD commanded Moses." Chap. 31: 47. We also find that Joshua said to the Gibeonites, "There shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." Josh. 9:23. (Compare Ezra 8:20.)

It is here, therefore, that we probably find the origin of the Nethinim-those who were spared from the just judgment of God - and if reduced to servile bondage, it was bondage in His mercy in connection with His house, whereby the very curse that rested on them (see Josh. 9:23) was turned into a blessing. For what do we find? That instead of being destroyed with the sword of the Lord's host, they were rescued; and now, after the lapse of centuries, they are found in honorable association with the Lord's people, and with a heart too for the Lord's house, inasmuch as they returned from Babylon with their fellow captives at this special moment. They are surely thus no mean foreshadowing of the objects of grace even in this dispensation.

Second, Solomon's servants. Of these the information is less distinct. But we read that Solomon levied "a tribute of bond-service unto this day" of the children of the Amorites, etc., that were left in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy (1 Kings 9:19-21); and it might have been the descendants of these who received the designation of "Solomon's servants." However this might have been, the lesson already drawn is again significant, that the least connection with the Lord's people and the Lord's things becomes a means of blessing-if not always, as it surely does not, of spiritual, yet almost ever of temporal blessing, even though it may be sometimes limited, through sin and unbelief, to length of days and earthly comfort. But with "the servants of Solomon," as with the Nethinim, there must have been more than this; for through grace they had returned of their own desire to aid in building the house of God at Jerusalem. The number of these two classes was three hundred and ninety-two.

We have in the next place two other classes occupying a peculiar and, in a sense, a most mournful position. There were some - the children of Dalaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two-who could not show their father's house and their seed,

whether they were of Israel; and besides these, of the children of the priests, the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, etc. -"These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood." (vv. 59-62.)

In the land of their exile the same care as to title and qualification had not been exercised. Babylon represents the corruption to which God's people are in bondage through their sins, and hence the period of their captivity was a time of carelessness, a time indeed when they were suffering under the hand of their God, but still a time of confusion and disorder; and necessarily so, inasmuch as they were without a temple, without sacrifices, and without Jehovah's presence. But now that, through the mercy of their God, there had been a recovery-a partial recovery, it is true, but one that contained within itself a distinct action of the Spirit of God-and now that Jehovah's house was once more to become their center, they were properly exercised concerning the title of all who had returned from Babylon.

If any could not show their genealogy, they had no claim to take part in the work to which they had been called; and in the case of the priests, the consequence was still more grave. These - if they could not find their register-were, as polluted, put from the priesthood. They were not told that they were not priests; the ground taken was that their claim was not proven. It might be at a future time; and hence, "The Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim " When that time arrived, the priest, who should be once more endowed with divine intelligence and discernment through the light and perfection of God (Urim and Thummim), might adjudge them to be truly priests; but meanwhile their claim was forfeited. Grace could restore what was lost under law, only for this they must patiently wait.

A precisely similar thing in principle was seen during the past century. It is not too much to say that at its commencement the Church of God in this land was completely under the domination of the world power. The life of God's people was sustained through the ministry of a few faithful men here and there, and through the study of the Word of God; but the Church as a whole was enslaved, and had been enslaved, in Babylonish captivity. Soon after, a recovery took place. God wrought in the hearts of many in different places, producing great exercise of soul; and a movement was initiated which resulted in the deliverance of numbers in many parts of the country.

The charter of their deliverance from captivity was the Word of God. To it they turned day and night, and there they found both light and life. By it they judged themselves and their ways; by it they discovered the true character of their past bondage; and from it they obtained also guidance for the future. Listening to its teachings, they once again spread the Lord's table in all its simplicity. They learned that the Holy Ghost dwelt in the house of God, and that the Lord had promised to come quickly to receive His people to Himself. Thereon they were immediately confronted with the difficulty found in this chapter-the difficulty of title and qualification to break bread at the Lord's table. In the past every good citizen might do so, and all such were often exhorted to come. No one who claimed to be a Christian was ever denied, while very many whose lives contradicted their profession were received without question. Could such practices be continued?

Then the answer was found that only such as could "show their father's house" or could find "their register," had the scriptural qualification for a place at the table of the Lord. In other words, unless

we have peace with God, unless we know that we are children of God through the possession of the Spirit, and can thus show our Father's house, and trace our genealogy, we have not the divine title required. Profession is not enough. In a day like this, a day of restoration from captivity, there must be the ability to verify our profession from the sure Word of God; for, as the Apostle says, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." 1 Cor. 10:16, 17.

But, it is objected, Do you not constitute yourselves judges of others? By no means. As indeed the governor said in effect to the priests in this chapter who were put away, "You may be really priests, only you cannot produce your title. It must be left over therefore until a priest arises with the Urim and Thummim-one who can judge according to God." So now the burden of proof lies upon the one who desires to come to the Lord's table, and to be thus identified with His people. If he fail to produce it, he is not excluded by those who have to do with him, but by his inability to declare his genealogy, and if he be really a member of the body of Christ, his title, albeit all is of grace, will be fully acknowledged in a future day by the Lord Himself. It is needful that this scriptural principle should be both understood and enforced.

The question of the priests goes still further. These, as we have seen, were put out from their office, the functions of which were to minister before the Lord, and to teach the people (see Exod. 28; Lev. 10:9-11; Deut. 10:8; Mal. 2:5-7); and they were also forbidden, owing to their inability to find their register, to eat of the holy things. (Compare on this subject Lev. 22:1-16.) What a solemn commentary on the practices that have obtained for centuries in Christendom! Forgetful or ignorant of the truth that all true believers, and no others, are priests (1 Pet. 2), they have devised a way of making priests-of filling their "holy" offices by a human ordination. And such, when thus appointed, arrogate to themselves the exclusive right of approach to God, as well as that of interpreting the Scriptures. It is a small thing to say that these practices are a denial of Christianity - they are worse, for they set aside the efficacy of the work of Christ, and deny His authority, as well as ignore the sovereign action of the Holy Ghost. God alone makes priests, and every one who is washed with water (born again), is brought under the value of the one sacrifice of Christ, is sprinkled with His precious blood, as also with the anointing oil (the unction of the Holy Spirit), is set apart by Him for this office. (Read Exod. 29; Heb. 10.) Such, and such alone, can find their register among those who are reckoned by genealogy, and have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh" (Heb. 10:19, 20); where, by the grace of God, they are permitted to feast on the holy things -the various aspects of Christ as symbolized by these - in communion with God in His own presence.

The number of the whole congregation, we are now told, was forty and two thousand three hundred and sixty. Besides these were their servants and maids, amounting to seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven; among them two hundred singing men and singing women. There were also seven hundred thirty and six horses, two hundred forty and five mules, four hundred thirty and five camels, and six thousand seven hundred and twenty asses (vv. 65-67).

Such was the large company or caravan that traveled from Babylon to Judah and Jerusalem with their hearts set upon the holy enterprise to which they had been divinely called. But a narrower

inspection of the elements of which this multitude was composed will discover the sure precursors of decline and decay. What had these pilgrims to do, for example, with singing men and singing women? Their land was desolate, their sanctuary had been consumed with fire, and was lying waste, and they themselves were but a feeble remnant just emancipated from the yoke of captivity. Surely it was no time for mirth and song! (Compare Psalm 137.) Alas! every action of the Spirit of God producing a revival in the hearts of His people is speedily limited by man, and by his own thoughts and desires. Even the first response to His mighty power gathers with those who are really under His influence those also who will corrupt the movement and ensure its outward failure. How remarkably this is exemplified in the book of Judges, and has been so in every age of the Church!

Arrived at their destination, we read that some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in its place. They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priests' garments (vv. 68, 69).

It is interesting to notice the form of the statement- "When they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem" - showing that the house, whatever its outward condition, and razed to the ground as it had been, still existed before the eye of God. Thus, though there were three different houses until the time of the Lord, it was always the same house in the mind of God. Haggai, on this account, says, as it should be rendered, "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former." Chap. 2. There is undoubtedly another reason for this form of words in Ezra. God would seem to have used the desolations of His sanctuary to touch the hearts of these chief of the fathers.

When they came to Jehovah's house-when they saw, as it were, its condition-they were moved, and they "offered freely" of their substance; and, as the Spirit of God is careful to notice, thus setting the seal of His approval upon the act, "they gave after their ability." In this they are surely examples for all time for those of the Lord's people who have the privilege of ministering to the Lord, whether in having fellowship with His necessitous saints, or with the needs of His service.

The chapter closes with the statement, "So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities." v. 70. It is open to the spiritual reader to question whether this record -especially when read in the light of what took place afterward, as related in Haggai 1- is not symptomatic of the decay of their first energy, whether it does not reveal the tendency to think of themselves and their own houses before the interests of the Lord's house. Solomon spent thirteen years in building his own house, while he occupied but seven upon the temple; and knowing what man is, it is not surprising if the restored remnant began by first minding their own things. But if so, the next chapter will show that the word of God was still energetic in their souls, to the praise of Him who had redeemed them from captivity, and associated them with Himself in the thoughts of His heart toward Jerusalem, and toward His temple.

The Restoration From Babylon

At the close of the last chapter we have seen that "all Israel" - the remnant in fact, but taking the place of the nation before God - dwelt in their cities. The commencement of this chapter opens out

another remarkable action of the Spirit of God. "And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem." v. 1. In the book of Numbers we read, "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, ye shall have a holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: it is a day of blowing the trumpets unto you." Chap. 29:1. This feast of trumpets prefigures the restoration of Israel in the last days; and it was therefore with a true spiritual perception that the people assembled themselves in Jerusalem at this time-a perception which, combined with their perfect unity, showed that both they and their leaders had been taught of God, and were under the power of His word. (Compare Acts 2:1.)

It is but seldom in the history of God's people that such oneness has been displayed, because it can only be produced, not by any general agreement, but by common subjection of all alike to the power of the Spirit through the truth. Twice only has it been seen in the history of the Church (see Acts 2:4), and now it will never more be displayed on earth in the Church at large, though it might perhaps be exhibited in small companies of the saints. But here, as at Pentecost, the whole congregation was as one man-one will dominating all, and gathering them with irresistible power to one common center-for they were all with one accord in one place in the city on which the mind and heart of God were at that time set.

Having thus assembled, there "stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening." vv. 2, 3. The governor, Zerubbabel, and the priest, Jeshua (aided by their respective "brethren"), united in this blessed work, the combination of the two foreshadowing Him who will be a priest on His throne, the true Melchizedek (see Zech. 6:9-15).

One of their motives in the erection of the altar would seem to have been their felt need of the protection of their God, and faith discerned that this protection would be ensured on the ground of the efficacy of the sacrifices. And what could be more beautiful than this exhibition of confidence in God? They were but a feeble remnant, having no outward means of defense, and surrounded by enemies of every kind; but their very weakness and peril had taught them the precious lesson that God was their refuge and strength. The setting up of the altar was therefore their first object; and as soon as the sweet savor of the burnt offerings ascended up to God, all that He was, as then revealed, was engaged on their behalf.

Moreover, it will be observed that their burnt offerings were presented morning and evening. This was called, at its original institution, the "continual burnt offering" (see Exod. 29:38-46), in virtue of which God had been able to dwell in the midst of His people. And if His presence was no longer in their midst, if He dwelt no longer between the cherubim overshadowing the mercy seat, the efficacy of the burnt offering remained; and as long as faith brought this and presented it to God morning and evening, the people were as surely under the protection of Jehovah as before; as safe as, indeed far safer than when Jerusalem in her glory was surrounded by her fortified walls and bulwarks. They might have therefore adopted the language of one of their psalms: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be

removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." Psalm 46:1-3.

The altar having been duly ordered, they kept the feast of tabernacles, as it is written (see Lev. 23:33-36), and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required. The feast of tabernacles was a figure of millennial joy (Lev. 23:40). Israel was to rejoice before the Lord their God seven days. To human eyes looking at their desolate condition it might have seemed a mockery for these poor returned captives to be keeping a joyful feast. But faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," and thus brings the future into present realization. Moreover, when the soul once stands before God in all the acceptance of Christ, as prefigured by the burnt offering, it has already the certainty of every promised blessing as secured in Him. It was thus open to the believing Israelites who stood around the altar which they had erected amid the ruins of the temple, and as they saw the smoke of the burnt offerings ascend up to heaven, to look onward to the time when all God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be fulfilled, and when the ransomed of the Lord would return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads-when they would obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing would flee away.

They also, we are told, "offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD." v. 5. And it will be remarked that the striking feature of all their proceedings was that they offered everything now according to the word of God (vv. 2, 4). Whatever they may have practiced in Babylon, whatever had been their traditional rites and customs, all these had been left behind in the scene of their captivity; and now, delivered and brought back, nothing could satisfy them short of the authority of the written Word.

We might therefore characterize the proceedings narrated in this passage as the restoration of scriptural worship. This contains a principle of immense importance, and one that has found an illustration within the memory of some who are still living. [This was written in 1885.] There was a movement some fifty or sixty years ago, as already pointed out in a previous chapter, corresponding largely, as to its spiritual features, with this deliverance from Babylon; and the first object of the saints of that time, as with this remnant, was the restoration of the altar (using this term as a symbol of worship), and the ordering of the assembly in all its meetings according to the written Word. Customs, traditions, observances, all rites and ceremonies, were now tested by the recorded apostolic practices, and such as could not stand the proof were abandoned. It was but a remnant also that were brought out of bondage; but they had light and life in their dwellings and in their gatherings because "as one man" they sought to give the Lord Jesus Christ His rightful place of pre-eminence as Son over His own house. In truth, God owned this movement in a remarkable manner, using it to recall believers in every part of the land to the authority of the written Word, to the knowledge of the fullness of His grace in redemption, to their priestly place and privileges, to the truth of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and to the expectation of the Lord's return. And if the spiritual power of that day has not been maintained, its influence is still felt; and it is not too much to say that the whole Church of God is indebted to it, through the sovereign grace and appointment of God, for the exhibition and preservation of the full-orbed truths of Christianity.

Before that time Christianity, in the hands of its public advocates, had degenerated into a mere code of morals, and the consequence was Socinianism and widespread infidelity; whereas since that day, whatever the increasing power of evil, and the rapid development of the signs of the coming apostasy, there has never been wanting a full testimony to the truth of God, and to His Christ as glorified at His right hand. All this proclaims to us, as with a trumpet voice, that the path of obedience to the written Word, in the power of the Spirit, is the path of recovery from error, the secret of all blessing, and the true method of arresting spiritual decline.

The first five verses of this chapter are a delightful record, and might well be studied in connection with the first days of the Church after Pentecost (Acts 2:4). In both places alike individual, as well as collective or corporate, spiritual energy is manifested. Thus it was not only the new moons and the set feasts that are noticed as having been observed, but it is added, and "every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD." v. 5. When God's Spirit is acting in power, He fills the hearts of many of His people to overflowing, and the vessel, not being able to contain the blessing, runs over in thanksgiving and praise to God. This is the secret both of devotedness and worship.

The next two verses close up this period, preparatory to the introduction of another. "From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tire, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia." vv. 6, 7. The record of the commencement of offering burnt offerings the first day of the seventh month is made with evident delight. It was grateful to the heart of God to behold the return of His people to Himself, acknowledging His claims, and the only ground of their acceptance. It shows us how particularly He observes the actions of His own, and that He takes pleasure in their approach and worship. Producing these fruits by His grace in their hearts, with the same grace He puts them to their account. (Compare Eph. 2:10, and 2 Cor. 5:10.)

Then follows, as we judge, a note of sadness - "But t h e foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid." The people had responded largely to the grace and goodness of Jehovah in their restoration, they had rejoiced to place themselves under His protection, and had ordered His worship according as it was written in the law of Moses the man of God. But at present they went no further.

Instead of entering into God's thoughts concerning His house, they rested in the blessings into which they had now been brought. Their spiritual energy had in measure expended itself in their first efforts, and their temptation was now to pause before going farther. Such has ever been the history of all real revivals in the Church of God. Take, for example, the mighty work of God, of which Luther was the instrument.

At the outset the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures was the battle-ax with which he waged war upon the corruptions and idolatries of Rome, and God wrought with him and granted a remarkable deliverance. But what followed? Luther, and his followers alike, rested in and feasted upon the fruits of their first victories, and the Reformation subsided into a system of state churches and creeds, out of which all vitality soon departed. (See Rev. 3:1-3.) They failed to go on in communion with the mind of God -they labored for their own objects rather than His-and the

consequence was that blight and decay soon showed themselves; the movement was arrested; and now, today, the very truths which were then recovered are fast fading away (if they have not already gone) from the very places which were the scene of the conflict.

We learn therefore that the safety of God's people lies in their rising to the height of their calling. He calls us to fellowship with Himself and with His Son Jesus Christ. If, forgetting this, we are satisfied with the enjoyment of our blessings, and lose sight of God's desires for us, feebleness and decline will soon mark us, whether as individuals or as companies of believers. If, on the other hand, God's objects are ours, if our minds are set upon what is before Him, He will ever lead us on into fuller intelligence of His purposes of grace, as well as of His ways, and into larger blessedness. He delights in our happiness, and He would ever increase this by associating us in His grace with His own objects and aims.

If, however, the children of Israel did not prosecute the work of the Lord with all diligence, they were not unmindful of the purpose of their restoration; for, as we have seen, they began to make provision for the materials wherewith to build the temple (v. 7). To understand the circumstances of the remnant in contrast with the glory of the kingdom when Solomon's temple was built, 1 Kings 5 and 1 Chronicles 28 and 29 should be read. Together with this, it should be remembered that Jehovah was the same, and that His resources were as available, through the exercise of faith, for this feeble remnant as for David and Solomon in all their power and splendor. True, they were outwardly dependent upon the grant of a Gentile monarch for permission to build, and for the means to secure the necessary materials; but it was God's work on which they were engaged and, counting upon Him, He would enable them to prosecute it to a successful issue. When believers work with God, their apparent difficulties and obstacles become the servants of faith to bring God in, before whom crooked things are made straight, and rough places plain.

The Restoration From Babylon

In this section the account is given of the actual laying of the foundation of the temple. An interval of at least seven months must be placed between verses 7 and 8. How it was spent is not revealed. The ostensible ground of the pause before commencing the work of the building would seem from the connection to be waiting for the "cedar trees." However this might have been, "In the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren, the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD." v. 8.

Three things are to be noted in this statement. Whatever the state of the people at large, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the governor and the priest, are foremost in the Lord's work. Officially at the head, they retain the spiritual lead of the people. Happy is it for the people of God in every age, when their leaders are in the secret of the Lord's mind, when they can call upon the people to follow them in His service. It is not always so; indeed, not infrequently the first action of the Spirit of God is in the midst of His people, and then the nominal leaders are set aside, or constrained to follow to preserve their place.

Second, the governor and the priest know how to associate the people with themselves in their sacred enterprise. This is the sure mark of spiritual power on their part, as well as a testimony to the fact that God was working with them. Thus far there were no schisms, but all were banded together by the Holy Spirit for one common object. Last, we find that the Levites from twenty years old and upward were commissioned to set forward the work of the house of the Lord. This was evidently a recurrence to the scriptural order arising out of a divine intelligence as to the nature of the work on which they were engaged. (See Num. 4; 1 Chron. 23:24.) The maintenance of God's order in the work of His house is of the first importance, for it is in fact subjection to His will as expressed in His Word. To man's thoughts some other method might have seemed preferable; but the only question for the Lord's servants was, and is, What has He directed? From not perceiving this, there has been perpetual conflict in the Church of God between man's will and the Lord's; and, alas! the consequence has been that man and man's thoughts have almost universally usurped the place of Christ and His Word.

The Levites through grace readily entered upon their labors. There were but seventy-four. (The children of Asaph, and the children of the porters [chap. 2:41, 42] were also Levites. All together, therefore, they numbered three hundred and forty-one; but only these seventy-four were available for this special work.) In the wilderness, comprising only those who were "from thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old," they numbered "eight thousand and five hundred and fourscore (Numb. 4:47, 48). When the Lord therefore opened the door of deliverance for them from their Babylonish captivity, very few had cared to avail themselves of it; they had found a home, alas! in the land of their exile, and had forgotten Jerusalem, and ceased to remember Zion. The more precious to the Lord was the fidelity of these seventy-four, and with His presence and blessing they were enough for His service as overseers of the workmen in the house of God. Grace too had wrought in their hearts, for they stood "together," or, as the margin reads, "as one" in their office. This was true fellowship, and sprang from the fact that they were in communion with the mind of God concerning His house. His objects were theirs, and hence they were not hampered by divided counsels; but "as one" they set forward the workmen. Blessed augury for the success of their enterprise, as well as the evident fruit of the action of the Spirit of God!

The next two verses describe the celebration of the laying of the foundation. "And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because He is good, for His mercy endureth forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid." vv. 10, 11. It was a day of great joy and gladness; and as they had gone back to the word, "as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God," for directions concerning the altar, the sacrifices, and the feasts, so they have recourse to "the ordinance of David king of Israel" for guidance in their service of praise. (Compare 2 Chron. 5:12, 13.)

In the wilderness indeed we do not read of songs of joy; they had sung the song of redemption on the banks of the Red Sea, but even that soon died away on their lips, and was succeeded by the murmurs which were begotten by the hardships and perils of their pilgrim journey. But when in the land the ark had found a resting place, if but for a time, in Zion, David "appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, and to record, and to thank and praise the LORD

God of Israel." Also Asaph and others were to play upon psalteries and harps; Asaph himself was to make a sound with cymbals, while certain priests were to blow with trumpets. "On that day David delivered first this psalm to thank the LORD into the hand of Asaph and his brethren," in which the words occur, "O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever" (1 Chron. 16). Few and feeble therefore as were the children of Israel who gathered this day on Mount Moriah, they were scrupulously exact in obedience to the Word. Engaged on the Lord's work, they discerned rightly that in it human thoughts and human wisdom had no place. The Lord, and the Lord alone, must prescribe the method of His house.

Three classes are distinguished in this joyful celebration: there were the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the sons of Asaph with cymbals; and there were outside of these the people who answered the praise they heard with a great shout because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. None but priests were permitted to blow with the sacred trumpets (see Num. 10) for it needs to be in the holy place, in the presence of God, in communion with His mind, to discern when to sound the notes of testimony and praise. So likewise only the sons of Asaph- Levites, "according to the king's order" - must use the sacred cymbals (1 Chron. 25:6). Thus duly arranged, "they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD," and the burden of their song was, Jehovah "is good, for His mercy endureth forever toward Israel."

But there were tears of sorrow mingled with their notes of praise, for the next verse tells us of many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, those who had seen Solomon's temple in all its glory and splendor, and as they contrasted it with the house they were now commencing, they wept with a loud voice while the others shouted aloud for joy. And truly the tears of the one and the gladness of the other befitted the circumstances of the day; for those who had seen the glory of the kingdom and the visible cloud of the presence of Jehovah in the first temple, and who were now spectators of the desolations of Jerusalem, and felt their present impoverished condition, and their feebleness in attempting to build anew the house of the Lord, it was but natural, whatever their gratitude, that grief should predominate. For those, on the other hand, who remembered only their captivity in Babylon, with its deprivation of both altar and temple, it could be nothing but unmingled gratitude and praise.

And who can doubt that both the tears and the gladness were alike acceptable to the Lord, inasmuch as both might equally have been the fruit of the working of His grace in their hearts? Indeed, might not a parallel be found in our own times? When the Lord brought some of His people out of their Babylonish captivity, and they entered anew upon the possession of their priestly privileges of access and worship; when they marked out again from the Word the true ground of the Church, and sought in whatever feebleness to occupy it, their hearts, under the power of the Holy Ghost, would of necessity overflow in thanksgiving and praise. Now delivered from sacerdotal assumptions and claims, from the corruptions of the Church and of Christianity, and filled with gratitude to Him who in His grace had opened their eyes, smitten off their fetters, and brought them into this wealthy place, they could but shout "aloud for joy."

On the other hand, when the ancient men who were more deeply instructed in the Word, and who had often pondered the beauty and order of the Church in Pentecostal days, compared it with their own feeble efforts to conform themselves according to the directions of the Scriptures, and when they reflected how many of their brethren had been left behind in bondage, sorrow was as

appropriate as joy. There could not but be the blending of the two so that, as in the case of the children of Israel, there might have been a difficulty in discerning "the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people."

Altogether the celebration of laying the foundation of the temple is a beautiful scene. The reader, however, will remark that in accordance with the nature of the book and the position of the people, the record is wholly taken up with what the people did and felt. God is not visibly in the scene, though it is apparent that all is being done for and to Him. In a word, His people are acting in faith, and faith only could bring Him in, and that of necessity was an individual thing. But we are not left without witness of God's thoughts of His people on this day. If we turn to the book of Zechariah, we shall find that He was watching for His people, and interested in their doings. As yet God had not begun to speak by prophecy to His restored people, either by Haggai or by Zechariah; but when He, some years later, stirred them up and encouraged their hearts by this means, He refers to the laying of the foundation of the temple. Zechariah thus speaks: "The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." Chap. 4:8-10.

We thus learn how precious to God was the commencement of His house. His heart was set upon it, and He ever rejoices when His people understand His thoughts and, with intelligence of His mind, seek to be found in the path of His will. Zerubbabel had laid the foundation, and he also should finish it; and this should be a sign to the people that the Lord had sent His servant. It might be a day of small things, as measured by the outward eye; but it was a day which contained within itself the promise of the restoration of the kingdom in glory, under the sway of the promised Messiah (see Zech. 6:12, 13), and it was the privilege of faith to link itself in this day of small things with the full accomplishment of the purposes of God toward His people.

Moreover, the eyes of the Lord - "those seven," His perfect intelligence and cognizance of all things, for they are the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth - should rejoice, and see the plummet in the hands of Zerubbabel; that is, when His house should be completed. In the previous chapter these seven eyes are upon the foundation stone. "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth My servant the BRANCH. For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree." Chap. 3:8-10.

The Scripture reveals to us the full significance in the thoughts of God in the laying of the foundation of His house by the remnant in Jerusalem. It was the assurance of the introduction of Christ, the Branch, who should secure to His people the promised blessing. So looked at, it was God that was doing all, if His people were the instruments. He laid the foundation stone (compare Isa. 28:16), though it were by the hands of Zerubbabel. It was His work, inasmuch as it was the fulfillment of His counsels. His eyes were upon the stone-that stone of grace and blessing-for indeed it was "a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation"-and He Himself would

engrave the graving; that is, He would unfold and declare all its divine import, and then He would remove the iniquity of the land in one day. For truly it was through His death and resurrection that Christ would become the Savior of His people from their sins, and thus the foundation stone on which His people should be built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:4, 5), and on which His people Israel should also rest, and trusting in which they should never be confounded. The consequence, therefore, should be full earthly blessing, every man calling his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree.

Combining the above scriptures with the narrative in Ezra will enable the reader to view the proceedings of that day with a double interest. If in Ezra the Spirit of God would associate us with the thoughts and feelings of the people in connection with their work, in Zechariah He draws us into fellowship with the thoughts of God. The people, it may be, saw but little beyond the promise of the restoration of the temple and its services; but God, with whom a thousand years are as one day, beheld in that day of small things the commencement of His work of grace and power, in virtue of which He would accomplish all His counsels through the advent, death, appearing, and reign of His anointed - His King, whom He would one day establish on His holy hill of Zion.

The Restoration From Babylon

No sooner had the foundation of the temple been laid than adversaries appeared on the scene. It was so also in New Testament times; for wherever the Apostle went, laying the foundation of the assembly, the activity of the enemy was excited. Hence his warning, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:10, 11. But as with Paul, so with Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the enemy assumed the guise of friendship. "Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither." vv. 1, 2.

The reader is not left in doubt for a single moment as to the character of these would-be helpers of God's people in their work. The Holy Spirit tells us plainly that they were "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin," although the words of peace were upon their lips; for He knew their hearts, their aims and ends. And indeed they betray themselves in the very words they use. It is ever so; for the mere professor cannot understand the things of God. They say, "We do sacrifice unto Him" (God) "since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither." They revealed in this way their true origin; they were, by their own confession, not the children of Abraham, but Assyrians, and had therefore no claim to be of the children of Israel. These were, in fact, the fathers of the Samaritans (see

2 Kings 17:24-31) who continued down to the very end of the Jewish economy, to seek to intrude themselves into the place of privilege and blessing. It was on this account, and because of the strife thereby engendered, that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. We may learn for ourselves from this incident the source of one of the gravest dangers in the work of the Lord. The kisses of an enemy are both deceitful and dangerous, though it seems ungracious to refuse the

proffered help of professed friends. The Church, to her loss, has not only forgotten this truth, but has also sought the aid of the world in her work. She has thus become both corrupt and corrupting, illustrating anew the old proverb, "The corruption of the best thing is the worst corruption."

Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and their fellow builders, were endowed with divine perception, and hence alive to the wile of the foe. They replied to this seductive offer, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God; but we ourselves, together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us." v. 3. It may seem to some that these leaders of the people were taking up a narrow and exclusive position, and in fact they were; but in so doing they had the Lord's mind, and were resting on a divine principle which still abides; namely, that only the Lord's people can be engaged in the work of His house. Others may call themselves builders, and profess a desire to help on His work, but they can only build in wood, hay, or stubble; and the Apostle has uttered the solemn warning voice for all ages, "If any man defile" (corrupt) "the temple of God, him shall God destroy." 1 Cor. 3:17. No possible straits or difficulties, no circumstances whatever, can justify the alliance of the Church with the world, the acceptance of the world's favor or assistance in the holy work of the Lord. Not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world, it is to deny both our character and that of the world itself if we break down the everlasting distinction between ourselves and it, which has been revealed in the cross of Christ. See Gal. 6:14; John 15:18-21.

The true nature of the offer these adversaries of Judah and Benjamin had made is seen by the effect produced by its refusal. For what do we read? "Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia." vv. 4, 5. Thus failing in their object of corrupting the work on which the children of the captivity were engaged, they now throw off the mask of friendship, and seek to hinder by open hostility. Such is Satan's method of proceeding in every age. He and his servants will often transform themselves into angels of light and ministers of righteousness, because it is easier to deceive than to deter the saints; but the moment his presence and activity are detected and exposed, his rage is unbounded. How could he seek to advance the building of God's house? The foundation is Christ; and "what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. 6). But alas! Satan in the case before us gained a temporary advantage; for through his machinations, working on the fears and the unbelief of the people, he succeeded in stopping the building of the temple, even until the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

It will be perceived that these two verses (4 and 5) are a summary of the activity of the foes of Israel during the reigns of Cyrus, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes; and that therefore verse 24 is connected with verse 5, the intervening passage being a parenthesis which gives an account of the way in which the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin succeeded in their designs. Moreover it would seem, from a careful comparison of the prophecies of Haggai with this chapter, that the children of Israel ceased to build long before the prohibition was obtained; for it is evident from Hag. 2:15 that they had made but little, if any, progress after the foundation was completed. Fear of their adversaries was stronger than their faith in God; and, consequently, losing heart, and thinking only of themselves and their own selfish interests, they began to build their own houses, and to say, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." Hag. 1:2. It is

true that they were but a feeble remnant, and that their enemies were numerous and active; but they might have read in one of their own Psalms: "When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple." Psalm 27:2-4. But alas! our own hearts understand but too well both the weakness and the fear of these poor captives, and how easily we are disheartened by a demonstration of the enemy's power when we forget that if God be for us, none can succeed in their designs against us, when, in other words, we walk by sight and not by faith. The failure of God's people in this chapter is therefore but the failure of His servants in all ages.

From verses 6-23, as already pointed out, we have the particulars of the way in which the adversaries of God's people secured a royal decree in their favor, and against the building of the temple. Their attempt in the reign of Ahasuerus seems to have failed (v. 6), but nothing daunted they persevered with their object in the reign of his successor, Artaxerxes, and then their efforts were rewarded. (This is scarcely the place to discuss the question as to who were Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes. There is great difficulty in identifying them now with the monarchs of profane history. Probably the first was Xerxes, and the second Artaxerxes Longimanus. The reader may consult on the subject any good Bible Dictionary.)

There are several points of instruction to be noted in the record of their proceedings. The first is the union of all the various races of the land "against Jerusalem." "Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites, and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnapper brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria" (vv. 9, 10)-all these were banded together to frustrate the work of the Lord in the building of His house. The carnal mind is enmity against God, and there is therefore no difficulty, when God and His testimony are in question, in securing unity of aim and purpose among His enemies. Differ as they may among themselves, and even hating one another, they have but one mind when God appears on the scene. This was remarkably illustrated in the case of our blessed Lord when the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel against Jehovah, and against His Anointed (Psa. 2). Even Herod and Pilate, who before had been at enmity between themselves, were made friends together by their common contempt of Christ.

It was in this way that Satan was proved to be the god of the world, for he succeeded in uniting the highest and the lowest against the Son of God, and marshaling all together -Romans and Jews, the civil, the ecclesiastical, and the military authorities, as well as the common people. He led on his army, animated by his own mind and spirit, to cut off Christ out of the land of the living. Once more in the world's history he will prove his power over the hearts of sinful men, but then to his own, and alas! also to their everlasting destruction. (See Rev. 19 and 20.) So in our chapter, Satan, though concealed, is the active agent in stirring up these various peoples in their action against the work of the remnant

This is seen in the next point to be noticed. In the letter addressed to the king, they say, "Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem,

building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations." v. 12. This statement betrays the speech of the "accuser of the brethren," for it was false, and proceeded therefore from Satan, for "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." John 8:44. So far indeed from having set up the walls and joined the foundations of the city, they had barely laid the foundation of the temple. And the reader will perceive that, though these "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" had professed a desire to help in building the temple, on the ground that they also sacrificed to the God of Israel, they omit all reference in their accusation to the temple, and speak only of the city. Their reason was obvious. The proclamation of Cyrus was concerning the temple. If therefore they accused the Jews of building the city, they gave a color to the charges of rebellion and treasonable practices which they insinuated; and from the king's answer it is clear that they had not miscalculated (vv. 19,20).

Another point not to be passed over is that the sin of Israel in the past bears bitter fruit for these children of the captivity. Their last king, Zedekiah, had sworn "by God" to be faithful to Nebuchadnezzar; but he broke his oath, and rebelled against the king of Babylon, and thus procured the destruction of Jerusalem, as well as incurred the judgment of God. (See 2 Chron. 36:13; Eze. 17:12-16.) There was truth therefore in the accusation that Jerusalem had been a rebellious city; so that while the remnant themselves were under the favor and protection of God, and no one could harm them as long as they went forward in confidence in Him, they now suffered, in His government in this world, the consequence of the sins of their fathers. It is still to be emphasized that these adversaries could have had no power as against the people of God, if the people themselves had not lost faith in God and heart for their work. The Apostle wrote, "A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9); but not one of his opponents could have hindered his work, because he was counting on Him who "openeth, and no man shutteth." So had it been with the remnant but for their own sloth and unbelief; for, as already pointed out, they ceased, it would seem, from their work before the prohibition was obtained.

The two motives urged on the king were provision against future danger, and the possibility of loss of revenue. Thus appealed to, and the statements made concerning the character of the city in past days having been verified by the records in the royal archives, he wrote, "Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?" (vv. 17-22.) The adversaries were thus successful and, having received the letter, went up with all speed, armed with royal authority, and effectually provided against any attempt to continue the work of building Jehovah's house. 'They "made them cease," it says, "by force and power."

The chapter then closes with the statement, "Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia." v. 24. This last verse, however, connects itself with verse 5, and gives the result of the enemy's opposition of which verses 4 and 5 contain a general summary. The parenthesis gives the details of the way in which Artaxerxes was prevailed upon to issue his decree. Altogether it is a sad chapter-the account of the activity of Satan. The only bright gleam in it is the faithfulness of the leaders of Israel in refusing the alliance of the world. The rest of the chapter is darkness. God does not

appear in it; and, looked at with human eyes, it would seem as if the enemy had completely conquered. 'While, however, God does not interpose, He is no uninterested spectator of what is taking place. Whatever His people are, He abides faithful; and we shall see that, though He will have His people thoroughly tested, He only waits for the proper moment to raise up a power which the enemy will not be able to withstand, and with which He will arouse His servants from their slumbers, and urge them onward in the prosecution of the object for which they had been brought back from Babylon.

The Restoration From Babylon

In the last chapter we saw how the people were turned aside from their work by the activity of Satan. In the first two verses of this chapter we have the record of God's intervention, by His prophets, on His people's behalf, in order to overthrow the enemy's designs.

The reader will recall the special position of these restored captives. Though brought back, in the mercy of God, to their own land, they could not have Jehovah's visible presence in their midst, as in the days of the kingdom, for He had transferred the sovereignty of the earth to the Gentiles. Fire no longer came down from heaven to consume their sacrifices, and the priests were without the sacred Urim and Thummim (chap. 2:63). God therefore was now purely the object of faith, and the godly had to endure as seeing Him who was invisible.

On this very account it was that God came in - not by any act of power to confound the adversary, but by the word of prophecy to reach the conscience of His people, and to stir them up to confidence in Himself, and thereby to strengthen them for the conflict which their labors would involve, as well as to assure them that as long as they trusted in Him the utmost efforts of their enemies would be in vain. And herein we learn the true function of the prophet. As another has said, "Prophecy supposes that the people of God are in a bad condition, even when they are still acknowledged and prophecy addressed to them. There is no need of addressing powerful testimony to a people who are walking happily in the ways of the Lord, nor of sustaining the faith of a tried remnant by hopes founded on the unchangeable faithfulness of God, when all are enjoying in perfect peace the fruits of His present goodness - attached, as a consequence, to the faithfulness of the people. The proof of this simple and easily-understood principle is found in each of the prophets."

It should, moreover, be pointed out that the prophet was raised up as the medium for communication with the people of God when the responsible head or heads of the people had failed. Thus when the priesthood had failed under Eli, Samuel was God's chosen vessel for His messages to His people, and his ministry continued through the reign of Saul, or at least until David was anointed king. This explains the fact that the greatest of the prophets appeared on the scene at the darkest periods of the history of Israel, as, for example, Elijah and Elisha. So in our chapter, Zerubbabel the governor, and Jeshua the high priest, were the responsible heads of the captivity; but, worn out by the harassing attacks of their adversaries, they had also succumbed with the people, and had with them ceased to build the house of the Lord. God therefore now sent prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, and they "prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them" (v. 1).

As a matter of fact Haggai (as may be seen by a comparison of the dates of their respective prophecies) received his first message from Jehovah two months before Zechariah was employed, and it is worthy of notice as indicative of their failure that his first errand was to Zerubbabel and Jeshua. (See Hag. 1:1.) It is of the utmost importance (as shown in our exposition of Haggai) that the messages of the prophets should be read in connection with Ezra, for it is in these that the true condition of the people is discovered. It is evident that it was not only the fear of the enemy that led them to desist from their work, but that also their own hearts were settling down upon their own ease and comfort. They found time to build their own houses while saying, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." (Hag. 1:1-5.) Alas! how often the people of God, forgetting that their citizenship is in heaven, and that therefore they are pilgrims, bend their efforts to build houses for themselves in a scene of death and judgment. So the children of the captivity, untouched by the sight of the desolations of Jehovah's house, lying waste as it was, turned aside to erect "ceiled houses" for themselves. But God was not indifferent to the state of His house, if they were, and He "did blow upon" all the increase of the field because of His house that lay waste while they were running every man to his own house. (Hag. 1:6-9.)

It was to this state of things that Haggai was sent to call attention, and his words were clothed with such energy and power that in a little more than three weeks the chiefs of the people, and the people themselves, were aroused from their selfish apathy, and they obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people did fear before the Lord. (Compare Hag. 1:1 with vv. 12-15.) It would seem then that verse 1 of our chapter is a general statement of the work of the prophets, and that in verse 2 we have, in fact, the effect of Haggai's first message; or it may be also the general effect of the prophetic work among the people. "Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them." This last expression will refer to the continuous work of the prophets during the progress of the building, by which Jehovah encouraged His people to persevere in their labors, unfolding before them the glory of the future in connection with the advent of Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom. The people builded, and the prophets prophesied, both alike filling their appointed places, and both alike fulfilling their task in fellowship with the mind of God. If the prophets spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:21), it was Jehovah who stirred up the spirit of the builders (Hag. 1:14); and hence all alike labored in the power of the Spirit, and all occupied the places assigned to them by the sovereign action of the grace of God.

The reader should again be reminded that the people did not wait for the renewal of their commission to build from the Gentile authorities. No doubt they were in subjection to the powers that were ordained of God, and a decree had been obtained forbidding them to build; but God Himself had spoken, and if, therefore, they were to render to Caesar the things that were Caesar's, they were also to render to God the things that were God's. When God condescends to speak, His claims are supreme, paramount to every consideration, whatever may be the consequences entailed. This principle was recognized by the builders of a later day, Peter and John, who, when forbidden to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Acts 4:19, 20. In truth, faith links itself with God Himself, with His objects and His power, and can thus peacefully leave every other question with Him. Hence these children

of the captivity obeyed the voice of their God, and went forward with their work knowing that He held the hearts of all men in His hands, and that He could - as He did in the issue - use even the opposition of their enemies to further the work of His house. The record of the manner in which God manifested that He was above all the proud devices of the adversary is contained in the rest of this, and the following chapter. First we have the action of the Gentile governor, with his companions. We read:

"At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who bath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building?" vv. 3,4.

The governor, in making this inquiry, was undoubtedly within his rights and acting in the interests of his sovereign, inasmuch as a decree prohibiting the building of the city, if not of the temple, had been issued. He could know nothing of any commandment except that of his own king. The children of this world can never understand the claims of God upon His people, and it always seems folly to them that any should brave the displeasure of an earthly monarch to please One in whom they themselves do not believe.

The fourth verse is somewhat ambiguous. Comparing it with verse 10, it is evident that the "we" of verse 4 applies to the enemies of Israel. It was they who asked, "What are the names of the men that make this building?" - their object being to report these transgressors of his commandment to the king. It is still Satan working behind the scene; and whenever God acts on the earth through His people, Satan immediately counterworks. This will be the force of the words, "At the same time." v. 3. We do not read of any persecution of the people during the time of which Haggai speaks, when they were building their own houses. But at once, on their resumption of their work upon Jehovah's house, they are met by new wiles - indeed, open opposition.

The house of Jehovah was the testimony for that day, and it is this which Satan always hates. If believers settle down in the world, mind earthly things, become "dwellers on the earth" - using this phrase in its moral sense-Satan will let them alone; but the moment, wrought upon by the Spirit of God, they apprehend His mind and go forth in living testimony, the adversary will seek to turn them aside by any art or device which is likely to accomplish his purpose. We have a striking and perfect illustration of this principle in the life of our blessed Lord, as well as in the exhibition of Satan's powerlessness to touch His people as long as they are maintained in dependence and obedience (see Matt. 4).

On the other hand, if Satan is merciless in his opposition, God is not indifferent to the needs and weaknesses of His servants when engaged in the conflict. We are thus told, immediately after the new effort of the enemy to deter the Jews from their work, "But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius." The eye of God was upon His beloved people, beholding their danger, in order that He might minister the needed courage in the presence of the foe, to give them the consciousness of His presence and shelter, and thus to animate them to perseverance in their work. And indeed it is a wonderful thing for our souls when we in any measure realize that the eye of God is upon us. It produces in us that holy fear which makes us fearless of man, and also gives us the sweet sense of the overshadowing presence and protection of Him who

has in His grace bound us to Himself by imperishable ties, while it brings to our lips the victorious challenge of the Apostle, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" We are thus enabled to pursue the path of service to which we have been called in calmness and peace, though surrounded by powerful enemies, because we are assured of the omnipotent succor of our God. It acts as an incentive both to perseverance and fidelity.

We have in the next place the copy of the letter which Tatnai and his companions sent to King Darius, from which fuller details of their visit to Jerusalem may be gathered. A brief analysis of this letter will be both interesting and profitable. They were evidently impressed with the work of the feeble Jews, for they tell the king, "We went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands." v. 8. Unlike the letter given in the former chapter, this gives at least a faithful report of the facts, though the object of both was to stop the progress of the work, while the enemy in this case bears testimony to the diligence and devotedness of the builders.

The next two verses (9,10) are a repetition of verses 3 and 4, for the information of the king; and then from verses 11-16 we have the answer which the elders of the Jews returned to their interrogators. Nothing could be more simple and beautiful than the way in which they give their own history, and that of the temple on the building of which they were engaged. In the very forefront of all they declare themselves as "servants of the God of heaven and earth." In dealing with the wiles of Satan there is no weapon more potent than the bold confession of our true character. The beginning of Peter's fall, or rather the first outward step toward it, was his denial that he belonged to Jesus of Nazareth. And how often since that day has it been the precursor of shame and defeat! Blessed was it therefore that these Jews were able to take their stand upon this open confession that they were God's servants; it was blessed for their own souls, the result surely of knowing that the eye of God was upon them, and it was at the same time their complete justification for commencing their work in spite of the king's decree. Moreover, they narrated the cause of the destruction of the house in past days. Their "fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath," and He had given them "into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon." vv. 11,12.

What a history! Solomon had built the house, and Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it, and the cause of all this sorrow was their fathers' sins. And what a tale of long-suffering grace and mercy was included between these two dates; and, alas! what a revelation of the heart of man - under divine culture as it was. In a word, between those two epochs is contained the history of the kingdom under man's responsibility, established in glory and splendor under Solomon as prince of peace (David was the first king, but it was the erection of the temple that marked the establishment of the kingdom), and destroyed in the reign of weak and wicked Zedekiah. (Read 2 Chron. 36:11-21.) Furthermore, they explain that the work on which they were employed was the result of a decree of Cyrus, in proof of which they told how he had committed to their care the vessels of gold and silver belonging to the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away (vv. 13-15). "Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished." v. 16. If the account so given by the Jews was correct, they were entirely justified even in the eyes of man; for it was a well-known characteristic of the laws of the Medes and Persians (and Cyrus was king of Persia) that they could not be changed (Dan. 6), and their adversaries were shown to be in error

through ignorance of the law.

Hence the letter concludes: "Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter." v. 17.

The Restoration From Babylon

The king thus appealed to, ordered the search to be made, and the decree of Cyrus was found (6:1-5). The statement of the Jews was thus confirmed in every particular, and even more, for it was now discovered that Cyrus had not only issued his decree for the rebuilding of the temple, but had also ordered that "the expenses be given out of the king's house," as well as directed the restoration of the sacred vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away.

Acting then upon this decree, Darius commanded Tatnai, Shetharboznai, and their companions to cease to molest the Jews, and to allow them to continue their work in peace. To faith, God was manifestly working behind the scenes, and using the power of the enemy for the accomplishment of His own purposes, affording another instance of how He causes all things to work together for good to them that love Him. For not only did Darius, on the interposition of their adversaries, confirm the decree of Cyrus, but he also issued another to the effect that all the necessary provision for the house of God should be made at his expense.

He says, "Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savors unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons." vv. 8-10.

"When a man's ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Pro. 16:7); and when found, therefore, in the path of His will, he may safely leave his enemies in the Lord's hands. So these elders of the Jews discovered, and they might have learned the lesson often taught in the Word of God, and ever needed by His people, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them."

Thus God Himself was the shield of His people while they were engaged in His service; and as long as they were obedient to His Word, and counting upon Him for strength and defense, it was not possible for them to be hindered. In this way Satan once more overreached himself, and was used to further the work that he hated. The Apostle wrote in after centuries, "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." Phil. 1:12. When Satan succeeded in shutting Paul up in prison, he thought he had gained a victory, even as he did in the most notable case of all, when he urged the Jews to demand the crucifixion of their Messiah; but in both instances his apparent success was a most disastrous defeat. We may well, therefore, whatever the opposition or persecution, go calmly forward, courageous in perseverance because it is the Lord's work on which we are engaged, and He has said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Darius went still further. He added, "Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. And the God that hath caused His name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed." vv. 11, 12. The king thus surrounded the Jews with his authority, and guarded them against further molestation by attaching the penalty of death to interference with their work. And from the language employed, it can scarcely be doubted that Darius himself had some knowledge of "the God of heaven," for he speaks of Him as causing "His name to dwell there."

Be this as it may, God disposed his heart in favor of His people and of the work of building His house. The effect of the decree was instantaneous, for we read that Tatnai and his companions "did speedily" according to that which Darius had sent, and forthwith all opposition ceased, and the enemies of the work disappeared from the scene.

Not only had the opposition to the work of the house of God now ceased, but God, in His care for His people, and in response to their faith, had also turned the heart of the king toward them, so that his royal power had now become their shelter and defense. Hence we read:

"And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king." vv. 14, 15.

Before entering upon the particulars of this statement, we may recall to the minds of our readers a striking parallel from the history of the building of the house of God in the New Testament. In connection with the death of Stephen, there arose "a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." Acts 8:1.

Soon after, on the visit of Saul, after his conversion (we say, after his conversion - in fact, several years had elapsed - see Galatians 1:1 - but we speak of the order of the narrative), to Jerusalem, opposition was once more aroused, and the Grecians went about to slay Saul; and the brethren sent him forth to Tarsus (Acts 9:29, 30). The statement follows, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified [built up]; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." Acts 9:31. God had given them rest from persecuting enemies, and they, by His grace, used the opportunity to build themselves up upon their most holy faith. So it was with the elders of the Jews. They builded, and they were encouraged by the comfort of the Holy Ghost as ministered by the prophets.

It is of importance to notice these two classes-the builders and the prophets. As pointed out when expounding Haggai, these two characters of service can never be confounded. A builder cannot assume the functions of a prophet, nor could a prophet exchange his prophetic mantle for the trowel of the builder. Hence the Apostle says, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering." Rom. 12:6, 7. A builder is one whose work is to lay stones

upon the foundation- one, that is, who is used of God by preaching or teaching to gather souls, to bring them as living stones to the foundation which is Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor. 3). A prophet is one who both urges the people forward in their work by the communication of the mind of God, and who also tests everything by His Word. A prophet sets the conscience in the presence of God, maintains therefore the sense of responsibility, and ministers guidance, rebuke, or exhortation according to the need of the moment, speaking as he is moved by the Holy Ghost- now, of course, through the written Word, but guided of the Spirit to the word suited to the case.

Thus the elders of Israel labored, and the prophets prophesied; and it is also recorded that "they prospered through the prophesying," etc. The reason is evident. The Holy Spirit was acting in power, first through the prophets; second, in producing a response to the Word of God as ministered by the prophets in the hearts of the builders. All through the history of the kingdom the nation prospered when they heeded the voices of their prophets; and, on the other hand, every evil consequence flowed from disregard of these heaven-sent admonitions and warnings. Nor is it different in the Church of God. Whenever "the builders" are attentive to the prophets who unfold and apply the mind of God as revealed in His Word, they prosper, their work is durable, and they themselves receive blessing.

But if they are careless of divine guidance and monition, and work after their own thoughts, they do but corrupt the work upon which they are engaged, and introduce wood, hay, and stubble in the place of gold, silver, and precious stones. Their work may seem greater, and even more prosperous, to the eye of man; but it remains to be tested at a future day, and the Lord alone is the judge of true prosperity of service.

There was now no further interruption, for they continued their work until they had it finished; and, as the Spirit of God carefully notes, it was finished "according to the commandment [or decree] of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia." All was done, therefore, in obedience to God, and by the permission of the earthly power to which, by God's appointment, they were in subjection. Blessed privilege for these workmen to have so labored, and no small honor, it may be added, for these Gentile monarchs thus to be associated with and to be used for the execution of the purposes of God! No doubt- and the lesson ought not to be passed over- the names of the kings are thus mentioned to show, for one reason, the value God attaches to the principle of obedience to constituted authority.

The 'only limit, as before pointed out, is where the "powers that be" intrude their claims into the province in which God is supreme. The moment human authority clashes with the claims of God over the soul, it becomes null and void. With this exception (Acts 4:19), the believer has ever to submit to the powers that are ordained of God (Rom. 13).

Then the date on which the house was completed is added. It was on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. That is, there were four years occupied from the recommencement of the building until its completion. (Chap. 4:24.) How many years had passed away since the foundation was laid cannot be exactly ascertained, inasmuch as the length of the reign of the sovereigns between Cyrus and Darius is not given. It could scarcely have been less, and was probably more, than twenty years. With what long-suffering and patience God had borne with the failures of His people. And now that His purpose is accomplished, and the house builded, with what delight He calls our attention to the labors of His people. Although all had

been wrought by His grace, in that same grace He reckons to His people that which He Himself had wrought. And so it ever has been, and will be, as the judgment seat of Christ will abundantly testify. For if any of us receive for the good things we have done in the body, we shall confess to His praise that He Himself was the source and the power of all the good works which He has been pleased to commend.

The Restoration From Babylon

We now enter upon the second part of this book. In the first part, the return of the people from Babylon and the building of the temple are narrated; and in the second, we have the personal mission and the work of Ezra. It should again be noticed that the signs of the transference of governmental power in the earth from the Jew to the Gentile are everywhere apparent. Thus the date of Ezra's mission is given as "in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia," and indeed his commission for his work from the king is given at length (vv. 11-26) in proof that God's people were at this time under the authority of the Gentiles, and that God Himself ever recognizes the powers which have their source in His own sovereign appointment.

It may aid the reader if the structure of chapters 7 and 8 is first briefly indicated. After Ezra's genealogy (chap. 7:15), a short summary is given of the king's permission for him to go, of his journey up to Jerusalem, and of the object of his mission (vv. 6-10). Then follows the king's letter, conferring upon Ezra authority to act, as well as the necessary powers for the execution of his work (vv. 11-26). This chapter closes with Ezra's ascription of praise to God for having inclined the heart of the king to Jehovah's temple, and for having extended mercy to himself before the king, etc. (vv. 27, 28). In chapter 8:1-14 we have a catalog of those who voluntarily availed themselves of the royal permission to go up from Babylon with Ezra. All these having been assembled by "the river that runneth to Ahava," Ezra finding that none of the sons of Levi were there, took measures to secure "ministers for the house of our God" (vv. 15-20). All being thus prepared, two things follow; first, fasting and supplication before God (vv. 21-23); second, the appointment of twelve of the chief of the priests to take charge of the silver, the gold, and the vessels which had been offered for "the house of our God" (vv. 24-30). Last, we have the journey, and the arrival at Jerusalem, together with the necessary preparations for the commencement of Ezra's work (vv. 31-36).

It will thus be seen that chapters 7 and 8 should be read together, forming as they do a continuous narrative, of which chapter 7:1-10 is the preface or introduction.

The genealogy of Ezra is traced back to Aaron (vv. 15). He was one therefore entitled to all the rights and privileges of the priesthood (see chap. 2:62); and moreover he was a ready scribe in the law of his God, and thereby qualified to be the instructor of the people in the statutes of Jehovah. (See Lev. 10:8-11; Mal. 2:4-7.) He became a priest by birth and consecration; but he only became "a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given," by personal study of the Word. Inherited office therefore, even with the Jews, could not bestow the qualifications for its exercise. These could only come from individual converse with God in the Scriptures; for while by virtue of consecration the priest was entitled by grace to minister before God, he could only minister acceptably when all was done in obedience to the Word, and it was impossible that he could teach unless he himself were acquainted with the mind of God. It was neglect of this second part of their office that led to the failure and corruption of the priesthood; for so completely was the

Word of God forgotten in the days of Josiah, that he finding of a copy of the law in the temple became an epoch in his reign.

It is therefore of surpassing interest-like finding a beautiful flower in the midst of a sandy desert - to discover in Ezra one who, while he cherished his priestly descent, found his joy and strength in the law of his God; and in verse 10 the secret of his attainments is unfolded. He had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it." Let the reader ponder this significant and instructive statement - "Ezra had prepared his heart." So the Apostle prayed for the Ephesian believers, that the eyes of their heart (heart is the right reading) might be enlightened, that they might know what is the hope of His calling, etc. (chap. 1:18). Yes, it is to the heart that the revelations of God are made, even as it was to the heart of the Magdalene that the Lord manifested Himself at the sepulcher, rather than to the intelligence of His disciples. Nor can we attach too much importance to this truth. Preparation of heart (and this also comes from the Lord) is everything, whether for the study of the Word, for prayer, or for worship. (See 1 Cor. 8:1-3; Heb. 10:22; 1 John 3:20-23.)

There is yet another thing. If Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, it was first and foremost that he might do it. It was not therefore to increase his knowledge, to add to his reputation as a teacher, but it was that his heart, life, and ways might be formed by it - that his own walk might be the embodiment of the truth, and thus well-pleasing to the Lord. Then followed teaching, "and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." This order can never be neglected with impunity, for where teaching does not flow out of a heart that is itself subject to the truth, it is not only powerless to influence others, but it will also harden the heart of the teacher himself. This is the secret of many a failure in the Church of God. The saints are ever and anon startled by the sudden departure from the truth, or by the fall, of those who had occupied the place of teachers; but whenever the state of the heart is overlooked, and the activity of mind is permitted upon divine things, the soul is exposed to some of Satan's most subtle temptations. A true teacher should be able, in measure, like Paul, to point to his own example and to say, as he did to the Thessalonians, "Ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." (See also Acts 20 and Phil. 3.)

It is evident, moreover, that Ezra was in communion with the mind of God as to His people. His heart was upon them, for we learn that he had sought permission of the king to go up to Jerusalem, and that "the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him." v. 6. What he desired, therefore, was the welfare, the blessing, of his people, the people of his God, but being under subjection to the king, he had to obtain his leave; for the Lord will not have us, even for His own service, slight the authority under which we are placed. If, however, the Lord had put the desire to serve Him in the heart of Ezra, He will influence the king to answer His servant's request.

How good it is to leave ourselves in His hands! We are tempted oftentimes to overleap the barriers which man may place in our path, to force open the doors which the hand of man may have closed; but it is for our comfort and strength to remember that the Lord can make His way plain before our face whenever He wills, and that our part is to quietly wait on Him, ready to go forward when He shall speak the word. The recognition of the hand of God upon him was a characteristic of this devoted servant (see v. 9; chap. 8:18, 22, 31, etc.), and it was at once the source both of his patience and of his courage.

The details of the journey, of which we have a short account in verses 7-9, will occupy us in the next chapter; and hence we may pass at once to the king's letter of authorization to Ezra - a letter which empowered him to act, defined the object of his mission, and provided, through the king's treasurers beyond the river, the means for the execution of his service in connection with the ordering of the house of Jehovah.

First, after the salutation- a salutation which shows that Ezra was a true witness in the midst of the Gentiles - the king decrees that "All they of the people of Israel, and of His priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded by their own free will to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee." v. 13. Cyrus, as seen in chapter 1, had also accorded the same privilege; and now, after the lapse of many years, once again the Spirit of God works, through the king, to deliver His people. But no human constraint was to be exercised; if any man went up it must be voluntarily, for God would have willing servants. If under constraint, it must be only that of the Holy Spirit. Then from verses 12-20 the scope and objects of Ezra's mission are carefully defined even as to its details. He was "sent of the king, and of his seven counselors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand." v. 14. He was, further, to take charge of the silver and gold which the king and his counselors had freely offered to the God of Israel, also of that found in the province of Babylon, together with the free will offering of the people, etc.; and this was to be expended in the purchase of animals, for sacrifice, etc., or as Ezra and his brethren might decide "after the will of" their God.

The reader may gather the particulars of Ezra's commission for himself. His attention, however, may be directed to one or two of its instructive features. It cannot fail to be observed that this Gentile monarch refers everything to the will of God, or, to speak more exactly, that he directs that all should be ordered in subjection to that will. It would almost seem, Gentile though he was, that he was in full fellowship with the object of Ezra; and from the confession of Jehovah as the God of heaven (vv. 21, 23), it is not impossible that grace had visited his heart. 'Whether this were so or not, he carefully provides for the execution of Ezra's mission in every possible way, and at the same time entrusted Ezra with the government of his people "after the wisdom of God." Finally, penalties were attached to disobedience to the law of God and to the law of the king, rising even to death itself. The lesson lies on the surface that God is sovereign in the choice of His instruments, and that He does according to His will among the inhabitants of the earth as in the army of heaven, and that none can stay His hand, or say to Him, 'What doest Thou? An illustration of this is found in our chapter in that "Artaxerxes, king of kings," and "Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of God," are yoked together for the execution of God's thoughts for His people and for His house in Jerusalem.

Ezra himself is filled with adoration as he contemplates the wonder-working power of the hand of his God; for having recorded the letter of the king, he breaks out into an ascription of praise: "Blessed be the Loan God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem: and hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes." vv. 27, 28.

He adds, "And I was strengthened as the hand of the Loan my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me." In this he showed himself to be a true man of faith; he traced everything up to God. He lost sight of himself, and to his soul God was all in all. It

was thus not his request (v. 6) that induced the king to act, but it was God who put the thing into the king's heart; it was not Ezra's influence that commended him to the king and his princes, but it was God that extended mercy to him in their presence; it was not in his own power that he assembled the chief men to go up with him, but it was God who strengthened him with His own hand upon him.

In all this he is a striking example to every believer; and happy is he who like Ezra has learned to live in the presence of God, to look beyond the actions of men to the power that controls them all, and to receive all, favor or persecution, aids or hindrances, from the Lord. That soul has acquired the secret of perfect peace amid the confusion and turmoil of the world, as well as in the presence of Satan's power.

The Restoration From Babylon

The close connection between this and the preceding chapter will be perceived at once. Chapter 7 closed with the words, "And I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me"; this commences with, "These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king." This genealogy reaches to the end of verse 14, and it shows how precious to God were the very names of those who responded to His call at such a moment. The response itself is the fruit of His grace; but in the exercise of that same grace He is pleased to impute to His people that which He Himself had produced in their hearts. It was a goodly company, numbering over fifteen hundred souls, who were thus gathered to return to the land of their fathers - the land of all their traditions, as well as the land of all their hopes.

The first act of Ezra was to assemble them by "the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi." v. 15. There were two, but only two, priests; namely, Gershom, son of Phinehas, and Daniel, son of Ithamar; but of the Levitical family, outside of the priesthood, there was absolutely not one. Well might Ezra have been concerned, for it was a sad symptom of the state into which the people had fallen. The priests alone enjoyed access to the holy place of the house of their God, and the Levites alone were the appointed ministers in all that appertained to its service; and yet when the proclamation was made that they might return and once more resume their privileges, they were untouched and indifferent. They had found a home in the very place where their fathers had hung their harps on the willows, and wept when they remembered Zion. And it is the same with

God's people now. The moment they are tempted by the enemy to "mind earthly things," they become careless of their spiritual privileges and, if not aroused from their lethargy, may even become "enemies of the cross of Christ." No child of God who understands his heavenly calling could be content to dwell in Babylon.

Nor was Ezra content to leave the Levites behind. Besides, he knew the needs of the Lord's house, and it pained this devoted servant to find them caring for their own things rather than for the courts of Jehovah. He accordingly took measures to reach their consciences, that they might even yet join him in his mission to Jerusalem. To this end he sent for some of their chief men, among whom were Joiarib and Elnathan, "men of understanding." It is well for the people of God

when, in times of decay and corruption, there are still men of understanding to be found. It is by these that God preserves His saints from sinking into still deeper depths, and keeps alive what of faith and hope may still remain. Ezra knew where to put his hand on some of these; and his zeal for the work on which his heart was set is expressed in the commission with which he entrusted them.

He says, "And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo, the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinim, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God." v. 17. It is said of the Lord Jesus, or rather, speaking in spirit, He Himself said, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up" (Psalm 69:9; John 2:17); and this was because the glory of the Father was ever His supreme object. God's name, God's honor, were ever the delight of His soul. And Ezra also, in his measure, desired Jehovah's honor in His house, and was therefore in fellowship with the heart of God Himself. This was the secret of his earnestness in seeking to obtain "ministers for the house of our God."

And God wrought with him, as he himself confesses; for he says, "By the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; also of the Nethinim, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim all of them were expressed by name." vv. 18-20. There were still less than forty Levites, while there were two hundred and twenty Nethinim (for an explanation of these, see comments on chapter 2). It is another proof that amid the carnal ease of Babylon, the national hopes and privileges of the nation had ceased to exert any practical power upon their minds. By the side of the sloth of the Levites, it is beautiful to notice the number of the Nethinim (probably of an alien race) that obeyed the summons of Ezra.

It may be in reference to this that it is said, "All of them were expressed by name." God notices their faithfulness, and caused it to be recorded.

All was now ready, as far as collecting the people was concerned; but both Ezra as well as the people needed preparation for the journey which they had undertaken. Hence he says, "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and He was entreated of us." vv. 21-23.

The work of God is never lightly to be entered upon; and it was with a true discernment both of the character of the work, and of what was due to His glory who had called him to it, that Ezra proclaimed this fast, that he and the people might afflict themselves before their God. The flesh cannot be used in any shape or form in the Lord's service; and it is only when in true separation from all that it might feed upon, and in humiliation in the presence of God, that our motives, aims, and objects are tested and become apparent. Thus among those that had gathered around Ezra, some might have been attracted by other things than the welfare of the house of their God. This is

always the case in any action of the Holy Spirit. Ezra, therefore, would have all searched by the light of God's holy presence, that they might learn that nothing would avail to protect and guide them in their journey, and nothing could sustain them by the way or in their after service but the good hand of their God. Thus it was that he and they together fasted, afflicted their souls, and prayed.

And the question may well arise whether in this day our service for God is not often too easily taken up; whether it would not conduce to spiritual power and efficacy if, before we embarked upon anything for God, we were more frequently found in this attitude of Ezra and his companions. Far be it from us to insinuate for one moment that the Lord's servants do not thus seek His face before commencing their service. Our question concerns rather collective waiting upon God, with fasting, before work is entered upon in which the saints at large have a common interest. It was understood in the early Church, for we read: "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets.... As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me now [This word "now," or some such, should be inserted as a translation of the Greek particle, and as showing the connection between the ministering and the fasting, and the command of the Holy Spirit; in fact, the Holy Spirit responded to the prayers of these prophets.] Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Acts 13:1, 2. If there were but a revival of such a practice in the power of the Holy Ghost (for to imitate it without the power would be worse than useless), far larger results from service in teaching and ministry might be confidently anticipated.

Another reason for this gathering actuated Ezra. He was a man of faith, and he had avowed before the king his confidence in God for protection during his journey, and he would not therefore ask for a military escort. And now, in consistency with his profession, he, together with the people, cast himself on God for guidance, for a "right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance." As every believer knows, it is one thing to express trust in God before a difficulty comes, and another thing to maintain that dependence in the presence of, and when passing through, the difficulty. Ezra was able to do both, and was able to rest in the assurance that the hand of his God would be upon all them that seek Him for good, and that His power and His wrath would be against all them that forsake Him. All this he doubtless told out before the Lord during this fast, and indeed he had pledged the faithfulness of God before a Gentile monarch, so that the name and honor of Jehovah were concerned in appearing for His servant. Ezra tells us, "So we fasted and besought our God for this: and He was entreated of us." Yes, God delights to respond to the confidence of His people, and to appear for those who testify to what He is for them amid trials and dangers.

The reader should remark that it was no imaginary danger which Ezra had conjured up, for he records afterward to the praise of his God that "He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way." v. 31. Surely God is the refuge and strength of His people, and a very present help for them in trouble, and they would know it more fully if, like Ezra, they did but learn to count upon Him as all-sufficient in all possible circumstances. When Nehemiah made the same journey some years after, he was accompanied by captains of the army and horsemen (Neh. 2:9). In him faith was not in such lively exercise, though he had a true heart for the Lord's interests. How much better to trust in the Lord than in a visible arm! and they that wait on Him will, like Ezra, never be ashamed.

In the next place Ezra "separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren," to take charge of the offerings he had received for the house of their God until they should arrive at Jerusalem (vv. 24-30). The ground of the choice was that they were "holy unto the LORD," as also were the vessels (v. 28). As the prophet said, "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD." Isa. 52:11. And this we know was according to the divine order, for none but the priests and Levites could touch or carry the holy vessels or furniture of the house of God (see Num. 4).

Out of a blind misconception of this, and of the nature of Christianity, has grown the ecclesiastical custom of setting apart an order of men, the clergy, for ministration in the Church. It is quite true that those who minister in any way from the Lord to His people must needs be set apart for their service; but this must be accomplished, not by the hands of men, but by the sovereign action in the grace of God through the power of the Holy Ghost. Under law there was a distinct class of men - the priests and the Levites - but these were divinely appointed and divinely consecrated; but under grace, while there are still distinctions of gifts and services (1 Cor. 12), all believers alike are priests, and as such have an indefeasible title to appear in the holiest in the immediate presence of God.

It was then to the custody of the priests that Ezra committed the holy vessels, and the silver and the gold, which had been given as a free will offering unto the Lord God of their fathers. And he enjoined them to watch and keep these things "until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and the chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD." v. 29. The expression "weigh them" contains a principle of importance. It was not that Ezra doubted the fidelity of the priests he had selected; but even as the Apostle of a later age, he would provide "for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." 2 Cor. 8:21. The people might have had full confidence in the integrity of both Ezra and of the priests; but Ezra would remove all occasion for the enemy's work by having the vessels, and the silver and the gold, weighed when put into the priest's hands, and again weighed when delivered. He thus proved his and their fidelity. And surely this is a godly, a scriptural example to be followed by those who in any way have charge of the offerings of the Lord's people. Such should be careful to render an account of their stewardship, and not to be pressed to give it.

Many a difficulty in the Church of God might have been obviated if this practice had been adopted. It may further be noted that on reaching Jerusalem the weighing was done by others than Ezra, "and all the weight was written at that time." (vv. 33, 34.) In modern language, the accounts of Ezra were checked and audited, and this was done on the fourth day after the completion of their journey.

In verse 31 we have a short statement (already alluded to) concerning their journey. It simply records the faithfulness of their God in answer to their prayers. "Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days." In chapter 7:9 it is said that they began to go up upon the first day of the first month, this being the probable date of gathering the people to the river Ahava (chap. 8:15). The actual journey occupied therefore a little less than four months; and Ezra testifies that God safely guided them through all its perils and dangers, and

shielded them from all their foes. Truly "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." Pro. 18:10.

Nor were they unmindful of the Lord after the difficulties of their journey were over, for the "children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering unto the LORD."

It is touching in the extreme to see this feeble remnant, as also was the case at the dedication of the house of God (chap. 6:17), embrace in their faith the whole of Israel. They were but few in number, but they could accept no narrower ground than that of the twelve tribes, and to this they testified by the number of their offerings. It is the same now, or should be so, with those who are gathered out to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ on the ground of the one body. They also may be few, feeble, and poor; but if they have any intelligence of the wealthy place into which they have been brought, they will refuse any narrower ground than that of all the members of the one body; and if they hold this truth in power, their sacrifices of praise will bear witness to it in the presence of all. Failing to do so, they degenerate, whatever their profession, into the narrowest sectarianism, than which nothing is more abhorrent to the mind of the Lord.

Others may taunt them with their poverty and broken condition; but if they do but "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love," endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, maintaining before God the sense of oneness with all the saints, the Lord will abundantly sustain them with His approbation and blessing.

It will be noticed that there were two kinds of sacrifices - burnt offerings and sin offerings. From the numbers it would seem that the twelve he goats, as well as the twelve bullocks, were for all Israel, and that the other offerings were individual, the spontaneous expression of grateful hearts for the mercy of Jehovah toward them in bringing them in safety to Jerusalem and to His house.

Having thus put themselves under the efficacy of the sacrifices, and having established their relationships with God on the only possible ground, they proceeded to deliver "the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God." v. 36. This order is as instructive as beautiful. They first placed themselves under the favor of God, through their offerings, and then they turned to the king's officers. They gave their God their first thoughts and the first place, and they owned thereby that all depended on Him. He answered to His people's confidence by touching the hearts of the lieutenants and governors, and inclining them to favor His people and the object they had in view.

How blessed it is to be wholly dependent on God, and to look to Him alone to further His cause!

The Restoration From Babylon

Whoever seeks the welfare of God's people must expect a path of trial and sorrow; for, with the affections of God Himself actuating him, the servant will, in his measure, identify himself with their state and condition while laboring for the glory of God in their midst. This was perfectly exemplified in the life of Him who was able to say, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up"; and also in no mean degree, in His servant Paul, who says, in the power of the Holy Ghost, "I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal

glory." 2 Tim. 2:10.

It was the experience also of Ezra in the opening of this chapter. Filled with a holy zeal, he had been moved to come up to Jerusalem that he might "teach in Israel statutes and judgments"; and he finds at the very outset that many of the chosen people had already sunk nearly as low as, if not lower than, the Canaanites whom God had cast out before them. He says:

"Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass." vv. 1, 2.

Such is man! Nay, such are the people of God when following the inclination of their own hearts instead of walking in obedience to His Word. Remark, moreover, that when the saints fall into sin, it is often into worse and grosser forms of sin than those committed by the people of the

world. It is as if Satan, having gained the advantage over them, would mock at and triumph over them by displaying the most horrible forms of the flesh. In the case before us, it was not only the abominations of the Canaanites, etc. (the former inhabitants of the land), but also those of the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites, into which the children of the captivity had fallen; that is, into every possible form of corruption.

And all this had taken place in so short a time-within a few years of the completion of the temple. Objects of the special grace of God in their deliverance from their Babylonish captivity, they had turned His grace into lasciviousness.

What forbearance and long-suffering on the part of Him who had restored them once again to the land of their fathers, in that He did not instantly deal with them in judgment! But if His people are ever the same in their backsliding and sins, He is also unchangeable in His mercy and grace. Hence the gifts and calling of God are without repentance; and therein, and therein alone, lies the security of His people.

The special sin here mentioned is, that "the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands"; that is, by intermarriages. This had been expressly forbidden. (That it was not intermarriages only may be gathered from the passage above cited from Exodus, as also from Numbers 25; in fact, all the abominations of the idolatry of the several nations named were connected with these marriages.) See Exod. 34:12-16. It was therefore in willful disobedience that they had contracted these shameful alliances with the world, for this is what these marriages typify - the besetting sin of God's people in every age. The Apostle James thus says, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be" (is minded to be) "a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (chap. 4:4); and the Apostle Paul cries, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" etc. 2 Cor. 6:14, 15.

For if Jehovah deigned to say that He was married to Israel (Isa. 54; Jer. 2), believers now are said to be espoused to Christ (2 Cor. 11). Whether for the Jew therefore or for the Christian to unite himself with the world is both unfaithfulness and sin, as well as to forget the holy place of separation into which the former had been, and the Christian is called.

Nor was this sin confined to any one class of the people. The hand of the princes and rulers had been chief in this trespass, and the priests and the Levites, as well as the people, are distinctly named. It would seem then that the princes and rulers had first set the example, and that the others had been only too ready to follow. "One sinner destroyeth much good" (Eccles. 9:18), especially when that one has a place of position and influence. As when a standard-bearer faints in the day of battle, the soldiers are often discouraged and so easily defeated, so after Satan has succeeded in entrapping a leader in the Church of God, he often finds it easy work to ensnare many who are less conspicuous. On this account the sin of a ruler or priest under the law needed a larger sacrifice than that of one of the common people. It is therefore a solemn thing - solemn for himself and for the consequences entailed - when a "prince" or "ruler" becomes the leader of God's people into the path of worldliness and idolatry.

Such were the heavy tidings brought to the ears of Ezra soon after his arrival in Jerusalem; and in the next verse we have the effect produced upon this pious and devoted soul. He says, "And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished." v. 3. He was thus smitten with a great and unspeakable grief because of the sins of his people, and the secret of the intensity of his sorrow, expressed in all these outward signs of humiliation before God, was that he felt in his inmost soul the dishonor done to Jehovah's holy name.

It is comparatively easy to feel for God's people when they are dishonored by their sinful conduct in the eyes of the world; but it is only those who are, through the power of the Holy Ghost, in communion with the mind of God, those who share in His affections for His own, those therefore who first and foremost are filled with zeal for the maintenance of His glory, that can estimate their sin as it affects the holy name by which they are called, can go down, take up, make the sin their own, and tell it all out before God. Moses, Nehemiah, and Daniel are examples of this in their several measures, as well as Ezra; but all these, with others that might be named, are but feeble foreshadowings of Him who so identified Himself with His people that in confessing their sins He said, "O God, Thou knowest My foolishness; and My sins are not hid from Thee." Psalm 69:5.

The grief and humiliation of Ezra were used to reach the consciences of others, or rather to attract to him all who in any degree had mourned over the condition of the people; for he tells us, "Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away." v. 4. "To this man," says the Lord, "will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word." Isa. 66:2. Trembling at God's word is the evidence of a tender conscience, of one walking in the fear of God and desiring to be found in His ways. Blessed was it therefore that there were still such among the children of the captivity, though it would seem their trembling sprang rather from an apprehension of the consequences of the transgression of their fellows than from a gracious fear of offending their God.

However this might have been, where had they been, and where their testimony before the arrival of Ezra? But that their hearts were true is shown by their taking their stand at this critical moment with him; and we learn at the same time that we have no power to help our brethren until we distinctly and openly take our stand against the evil by which they have been ensnared. Faithfulness to God is the first qualification for helping others.

Ezra retained his place in the dust-borne down by his inexpressible sorrow - until the evening sacrifice. If on the one hand he was heartbroken on account of the people's sin, on the other he discerned, in the exercise of faith, the only ground of approach to God concerning it. In a word, he laid hold of the efficacy of the sacrifice as the foundation on which he could appear before God to spread out before Him the iniquities of the children of Israel. (Compare 1 Sam. 7:9; 1 Kings 18:36, etc.) The evening sacrifice was a burnt offering, all of which, consumed on the altar, went up as a sweet savor unto the Lord; and when once Ezra was before Him in the value of this - in all the value typically of what Christ was to God in His death - the success of his intercession was assured. The Lord Himself could on this account say, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." John 14:13. It was then, as understanding the value of the sacrifice, that Ezra rose up from his heaviness, and having rent his garments and mantle, he fell upon his knees, and spread out his hands unto the Lord his God, and confessed the sins of his people. Let us examine a little these outpourings of his burdened heart.

Remark, first, how completely he takes the place of the people before God. He says, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens." v. 6. Not even in spirit does he separate himself from those who had sinned; he and they-indeed, all the people are one, corporately one before God. It was so in the eyes of God Himself, for when Achan transgressed, He said to Joshua, "Israel hath sinned." Ezra understood this, and was thus qualified to become an intercessor for the people with God; for unless we apprehend our oneness with God's people, that their sin and sorrow are our sin and sorrow, we cannot truly bear them on our hearts before the Lord in the time of their need.

Having thus taken their place, Ezra confessed that nothing but sin had marked them from the days of their fathers, and that all God's judicial dealings with them, in delivering them "into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil and to confusion of face, as it is this day," had been on account of their iniquities. He justified God in all His past dealings with His people. And then he owned the grace that had been shown to them from the Lord their God in bringing back a remnant, "and to give us a nail in His holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. For," he adds, "we are [not were, as in our version] bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a, reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem." vv. 8, 9.

The order of Ezra's confessions is most instructive. Having owned the sins of his brethren, and justified God in His ways with His people, he in the next place magnifies the grace which had visited them in their low estate, and had brought them - a remnant - back to the land, and permitted them once again to set up the house of their God. But why does he recite this proof of Jehovah's grace and mercy? It was to show the character of his people's sin; for he proceeds,

"And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken Thy commandments"; and then he confesses that they had sinned against both light and grace. He conceals nothing, and extenuates nothing, but spreads out all before God, while he owns that if, after all the mercy they had received (v. 13), they should break God's commandments, and "join in affinity with the people of these abominations," God might well be angry with them till He had consumed them, "so that there should be no remnant nor escaping." v. 14. He then concludes by once more justifying God, and by taking His part against himself and the people. He says, "O LORD God of Israel, Thou art righteous; for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before Thee in our trespasses; for we cannot stand before Thee because of this." v. 15.

There is much in this inspired confession to commend to the attention of the Lord's people. Its main features have already been indicated; but we desire to emphasize the fact that Ezra from first to last justifies God, and lays bare the iniquities of his people. This in itself is not only a proof of the work of the Holy Spirit, but also a promise of blessing. The place of confession is always the place both of restoration and of spiritual power; and hence it is always a sign of a bad condition when that place is rarely taken. Let us then for a moment challenge ourselves. We have more than once pointed out the correspondence between this remnant and that gathered out to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in the present day. Is there no correspondence between the sins of the two? Is it not the fact that we have largely "joined in affinity" with the people of the world? Have we not submitted ourselves to their habits, ways, and customs? Is not worldliness our bane? Are not traces of Egypt to be seen everywhere in the assembly? Do we not think more of riches and social position than of the fruits of the Spirit?

Moreover, is it not seldom that our sins (we do not mean our individual sins, but the sins of God's people) are really confessed in our meetings? Nay, is there not an unwillingness on our parts to hear our sins spread out before the Lord? If, for example, our departures from the Word of God are owned, our setting aside the authority of Christ, our coldness, our unfaithfulness to the Lord and His truth, our want of separation - if these things are told out in our meetings for prayer, is there not often a manifest impatience, a feeling like that expressed in Malachi, "Wherein" have we done this or that? But we cannot too soon learn the lesson that the Lord will have reality; that, if we are blind to it, He sees our condition, and that until we are brought to own it, like Ezra in this scripture, He must from His very love to us deal with us in corrections and chastisements.

It should also be observed that Ezra does not once pray for forgiveness. No, with any intelligence of the mind of God, it was impossible that he should do so. When there is known evil in our hearts or in the assembly, our first responsibility is to judge it, not to pray for forgiveness. Thus, when Joshua lay on his face before the Lord, after the defeat of Israel by the men of Ai, the Lord said, "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned," etc.

And yet how often does Satan beguile the Lord's people, in a time of manifested evil, by suggesting through one or another, Let us pray about it. Confess our sins we surely should, but even then only as seeking grace and strength to deal with the evil, and to separate ourselves from it; for if Ezra lay before the Lord in this chapter owning his people's guilt, we shall see him in the next, energetic in dealing with the sin he had confessed, and resting not until it had been put away.

The Restoration From Babylon

It would seem that the tears of the people proceeded either from contrition, or from fear of the consequences of their misdeeds. Ezra was armed with authority (see chap. 7:25, 26), and his zeal for his God was manifested; and they therefore knew that he would proceed to separate them from the evil for which he had humbled himself before God. This would entail upon many of them the most bitter consequences. Though they had acted in self-will, in disobedience, their hearts might have been truly upon the wives they had married, and upon their children. To separate from them might thus involve the rending of the most affectionate ties, a prospect which might well cause them to weep. That this is the explanation of their tears seems plain from the fact that women and children were found with the congregation that had gathered about Ezra. Alas! how hard it is to retrace the steps of unfaithfulness and sin! And how often the bitter fruits of it remain for the rest of our lives!

There were some, however, who saw the necessity of proceeding at once to act in the matter, at whatever cost, knowing, as they must have done, that Jehovah could not bless them or prosper them in the land as long as they were living in open violation of His commandments. "Shechaniah the son of Jehiel," we read, "one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it." vv. 2-4.

Several points in this address of Shechaniah may be noticed with profit. First, it is worthy of attention, as noticed in the last chapter, how the Lord uses the faithful zeal of one to arouse others to the sense of their condition. Before the advent of Ezra, the consciences of all seem to have been deadened. Not even Jeshua or Zerubbabel appear to have been troubled because of the prevailing sin. Ezra was alone, and alone he would be, if necessary, in taking the part of God against the transgression of the people. But it needed courage and a single eye, and both these things Ezra by grace possessed. And he had God with him in the part he was taking; and now we see the effect. Shechaniah comes forward on behalf of the people, owns their sin, and accepts the necessity of subjection to the Word; and besides him there were those who trembled at the commandment of God (those alluded to in chap. 9:4), who had been drawn to the side of Ezra. In times of evil, the only path of blessing-and even of success, in its divine sense-is the path of fidelity.

Second, it may be observed that both wives and those born of them were to be put away. The wives, not being of Israel, were unclean; and the children, the fruit of the mixed marriages, were also regarded as unclean. This was under law; but now under grace all this is reversed. Not that a Christian is at liberty to intermarry with the unconverted, but, as the Apostle teaches, "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." 1 Cor. 7:14. That is, if either husbands or wives, perhaps converted after their marriage, find themselves linked up with the unconverted, the above instruction applies to their case.

Under law, as in the scripture before us, the heathen wife and her children were to be sent away; but under grace the unbelieving wife is sanctified by her husband, and the children are holy. It will be readily understood that the sanctification referred to is of an external character, as well as the holiness of the children. The wives and children were dismissed under the law because they were unclean, and as such could not be admitted into the congregation of Israel; but under grace the unconverted wife is sanctified through the husband, and is thus considered as set apart for God with His people on the earth. So also the children are holy and reckoned on earth as belonging to His people. If this holiness is purely external, and carries no saving power with it, as it surely does not- for salvation is ever connected with the personal exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ -it yet bestows the inestimable privilege of being in the place of blessing, the sphere where the Holy Spirit dwells and acts.

Grace could not be confined within the narrow limits of the law, even as our Lord taught when He said, "No man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish." Luke 5:37. And how precious to us to learn that the heart of God is interested in all who are linked up by natural ties with His people on the earth.

It may also be pointed out that Shechaniah owns the authority of the Word. "Let it be done," he says, "according to the law." The restoration of the authority of the law over the ways, if not over the hearts and consciences, of the people was the object of Ezra's mission (chap. 7:10), and God had now provided him with a helper in Shechaniah. There is, in truth, no other way of reformation among God's people.

In the course of time, as may be seen in every dispensation, customs, human maxims, traditions, etc., are adopted to the neglect of the written Word (see Matt. 15; 1 Tim. 4, etc.), all of which are the fruitful cause of corruption both in heart and life as well as in the government of God's house. The only remedy therefore in times of departure is the rigid application of that Word which is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and the refusal of all which it condemns. Thereby also the people themselves are brought into the presence of God and His claims, and are encouraged to hear what "the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Individual consciences are aroused and enlightened, and, acted upon by the Spirit of God, all who tremble at the word of the Lord (chap. 9:4) are drawn together in the common desire that the Lord's name may be vindicated and His supremacy be restored. Shechaniah's counsel was thus of God, and sprang from a true perception of the cause of Israel's sins, and what was due to Him whose name had been profaned by the transgressions of His people.

Finally he urges Ezra forward. "Arise"; he said, "for this matter belongeth unto thee: be of good courage, and do it." How grateful these words must have been to the burdened heart of Ezra! And doubtless he would see in them the interposition of God in answer to his prayers. He had indeed learned the source of all wisdom and strength; and thus he turned to the Lord before he sought to rectify the abuses which were prevalent in the midst of Israel. Hence the Lord went before him, prepared the way, and inclined the people to confess and put away their sin.

It is an immense thing to learn, as Ezra had done, that nothing can be accomplished for God by human energy, that it is only as He gives wisdom and strength, discernment and opportunity, that anything can be accomplished.

Ezra redeemed the opportunity which the Lord had thus made for him, and he "made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they swore." v. 5. He thus bound them by a solemn oath to do what they had promised. One cannot but be struck with the spiritual power thus exhibited by one man. The secret of it was that he was in communion with the mind of God, was standing in faithfulness for God in the midst of common unfaithfulness; and thus God was, and wrought, with His servant. To the outward eye Ezra was almost alone, but the truth is, it was God and Ezra; and thus it came to pass that the hearts of the people were bowed before him. 'What a difference it makes when God is brought in! Many a servant might well be daunted when he views the opposition and difficulties by which he is confronted; but the moment he raises his eyes to the Lord, he measures everything by what He is, and immediately the obstacles he deplored become to his faith but occasions for the display of His power in whom he was trusting. Our only concern therefore should be to see that, like Jonathan, we are working with God.

The work, however, was not yet done, and the sorrow of Ezra continued as long as the sin remained; for he felt in his inmost soul the dishonor done to the name of his God. He then, we read, "rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away." v. 6.

Ezra felt the sin of his people according to God, and it was in this way God qualified him to separate His people from their sin. When the Lord came down from the mount and cast out the demon from the afflicted lad, His disciples asked, "Why could not we cast him out?" The answer was, "Because of your unbelief"; and then, after declaring the efficacy of faith to remove mountains, He added, "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." And surely we may say that an unclean spirit had entered into Israel at this time, and it was precisely because Ezra had been before God with prayer and fasting that he could be used to cast him out. Yes, is it not the secret of all spiritual power--to be thus alone with God? There is indeed no power without it, and hence the want of it betrays the fact that we have been so little like Ezra in this scripture.

Proclamation was thereon made "throughout Judah and Jerusalem" that all the children of the captivity should come within three days to Jerusalem, under the penalty for disobedience of the forfeiture of their substance, and excision from the congregation (vv.

7, 8). All came, "all the men of Judah and Benjamin," in the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month. It must have been a striking scene, one easily recalled, as here described-"And all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain." Their bodily discomfort did but add to the sorrow within.

Ezra rose and addressed them. First, he charged them with their sin (v. 10), and then urged them to confess "unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do His pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives." v. 11. His first thought therefore was concerning what was due to Jehovah; but if they confessed to Him they must submit themselves to His will.

Too often the soul deceives itself even by confession-confession without judging the sin. Ezra was too well instructed in the Word and in the ways of God to permit this; and hence there must be

self-judgment and separation from the evil as well as its confession. The order of the separation too is most instructive- "From the people of the land, and from the strange wives." As marrying the strange wives had been sin, it might be thought that these might be mentioned first. But what had led to these marriages? Association with the people of the land. This was the root of the mischief, and Ezra thus deals first with it. So in all departures from God, until the root is discovered nothing is gained, and restoration is impossible.

The Lord Himself has given a perfect illustration of this in His dealing with Peter. Not until He had asked him three times, "Lovest thou Me?" (once, "Lovest thou Me more than these?" for confidence in his own love to Christ-a love, as he affirmed, greater than that of the rest-was the cause of his fall) did He effect his restoration. It was on this same principle that Ezra acted when he demanded separation, first of all, from the people of the land.

The power of God was still manifestly with His servant. The people assented to his demands, for they had been made to feel that "the fierce wrath" of their God was upon them because of their sins. They answered, "As thou hast said, so must we do." They only pleaded that the work could not be carried out there and then; for they said, "The people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us." vv. 12-14.

The plea and counsel of the people were accepted, and we have in the next place the names of those who were employed about the matter (v. 15). (It is not clear whether those named in verse 15 were not rather opposing the suggestion of the people. One translation gives, "Stood up against this matter." Certainly Ezra and the chief of the fathers did the work [v. 16].) Further we are told that "Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names, were separated [that is, set apart for this work], and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month." Thus in two months the work was completed. Thereafter is given a list of the names of those who had transgressed, concerning which there are two or three remarks to be made.

First, the names of the priests who had fallen into sin are recorded, and these are divided into two classes. In verse 18 there are "the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren"; and in verses 20-22, other priests. (See chap. 2:37-40.) The former were held, it would seem, to be the more culpable, and with reason, for Jeshua had been associated, in the grace of God, with Zerubbabel, as the leaders of His people in building His house. It shows how all that conscience had been lost as to the character of their sin. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they [the people] should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts"; but in this case the priests had corrupted the people by their evil ways. But now being dealt with, "they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass." This, it will be observed, is only said of the kindred of Jeshua. The names of the rest, priests, Levites, singers, porters, and Israel are singly given.

This leads to our second observation - that nothing escapes the eye of God. By Him all our actions are weighed and recorded, one day to be produced either to magnify His grace, or (if we include unbelievers) as the ground of righteous judgment. "We must all," says the Apostle, "appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." 2 Cor. 5:10.

Finally, it may be pointed out that while Ezra, as may be seen from Nehemiah (chap. 8:1), continued to labor in the midst of his people, he no longer appears as the prominent figure-as the leader. Together with this chapter his special work was done, and he discerns it. For this, great grace is needed. The temptation when the Lord uses one of His servants for some particular and public service, is to think that he must continue in a foremost place. If he yield to the temptation, it brings sorrow to himself, and failure for the people. The Lord who uses one today, may send another tomorrow; and blessed is that servant who can recognize, as Ezra did, when his special mission is ended, and who is willing, like John the Baptist, to be anything or nothing if so be his Lord may be exalted.

Resurgent Protestantism: the Editor's Column

Our attention was recently called to a special report in Newsweek on "Resurgent Protestantism." Since it spoke of the great strength and wealth of the Protestant profession today, we are interested in reviewing it because we had just selected an article for this issue, entitled, "The Seven Churches," which, while written some years ago, deals with present boastful pretensions of Protestantism. It begins on page 177, and we recommend that it be read in connection with this editorial.

The special report on Protestantism has to do with religious growth and vigor in the United States, but it will be seen that to a certain extent the principles involved apply more generally.

It is claimed that there are now 56 million Protestants in this country, and that their percentage to the population has increased by 8 per cent in 30 years. One denomination boasts of 9 million members against 5.5 million 40 years ago. Nor is it only in numerical stature that Protestantism boasts; contributions, church building, number of ministerial students, religious sentiments, all is in a resplendent upsurge; at least, so says the report.

Our readers are all aware of the trend for years toward so-called modernism in Protestantism; we say, "so-called modernism," for there was nothing very modern about it; it was plain old infidelity dressed in a little different garb. But now, contends this report, there is a "reborn emphasis on the gospel," a "message that appears orthodox and uncompromising" is spread with the most modern weapons.

And what is this new emphasis on the gospel and a message that appears orthodox and uncompromising? It is referred to as "neo-orthodoxy." But the name will leave some of our readers with little light on the subject. Let us examine it: Webster's dictionary says that "neo" means "new, recent; especially, a new and different period, or form of a faith...."

The fact that it is "new" should make any real Christian beware of it, for when the Apostle John writing by inspiration tells of the last days, he takes us back to that which was from the beginning. God's mind concerning the truth of Christianity has been fully revealed, and anything that poses as "new" in this realm is false.

This so-called neo-orthodoxy has for the sake of religious harmony sought to bridge the gap between what has often been referred to as fundamentalism on the one hand, and bold modernism on the other. Perhaps we may call neo-orthodoxy a shift to the right from crass modernism toward real Bible Christianity, but alas, it falls far short of a turning to God and the simple truth of His Word. It has embraced the form of godliness and uses the language of true orthodoxy, but lacks its vitality. It is broad latitudinarianism, that will embrace just about anything.

The National Council of Churches is a key figure in this resurgent Protestantism. It "embraces 30 religious groups representing 35 million members," and in its embrace are those adopting the new orthodoxy, and also some of the very worst of Bible-denying modernists. The head of this

organization, Dr. Eugene C. Blake, "got good, conservative training" in certain colleges, so today he does not step on "fundamentalist's toes unwittingly." Those at the head in this wave of "religiosity" must be able to walk tightropes and offend no one. They must be able to compromise all differences and use great diplomacy so that all shades and colors of so-called faith can rest comfortably together in one great tent.

Perhaps the switch from a modernism that scoffed at the Bible and its miracles was caused by the hunger of soul in the populace which infidelity did not supply, and cannot. But is the language of orthodoxy, which says it believes the Bible and talks of sin and salvation, but does not bring the sinner face to face with God, leading to his "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," going to do the sinner any good for eternity? No! No! It is but a Satanic delusion to lull aroused men and women back to sleep in their sins. Individual salvation through faith in the atoning work of Christ is not stressed in this "neo" movement. While it has the "form of godliness," it lacks "the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5).

This perhaps can be well illustrated by mentioning some correspondence between a friend of ours and Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, one of the foremost preachers today; who the report says is "Probably the best-known Protestant minister in the United States." He reaches an estimated 30 million people each year through his books (one of which has sold more than 1 million copies) pamphlets, radio talks, and television appearances. His works of optimistic humanism are reaching people in all walks of life, especially business men and women. He has "given a psychiatric touch to pastoral counsel." We shall give an abridgment of our friend's letter:

"Dear Dr. Peale: A friend of mine has just loaned me a group of your booklets - 'Thought Conditioners' - 'What's Your Trouble' - and 'Spirit Lifters,' among others. I can subscribe to them... with this one reservation,... and I feel I must tell you about it, as you are looked up to by so many and your writings are widely read by business men with whom I am acquainted, being published in the local newspaper,... in addition to other outlets.

"This is what troubles me. Nowhere do I find, in your writings, the basic truth of the Word of God emphasized - the theme that runs all through Scripture from the first book to the last; that is, man's fallen nature and his need of a Savior completely outside of himself...:For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,' and 'Without shedding of blood is no remission.' Not unless we accept the Lord's atoning work on the cross are we entitled to call God 'Father.'...

"Further, I cannot find any mention of the fact that each of us has a never-dying soul which shall live forever either with God or in separation from Him if God's way of salvation is rejected....

"You do allude, in one or two places in the literature I have read, to Christ's cleansing from sin, but do you not think it important enough to the soul's eternal welfare to speak this truth plainly? Perhaps you feel that each individual will find this truth for himself by reading the Gospels as you recommend.... But many... will read only your writings, and I believe it is possible thus to lull people into a false sense of well-being which, fine for this life, is not the all-important factor, as this life is only a brief day compared to the eternity which surely follows.

"Respectfully submitted

(Signed) E.B."

This letter very well analyzes the fundamental lack in the "neo-orthodoxy" of the day, which may occasionally refer to salvation through Jesus Christ, and speak of sin, too, but it is all couched in language to please the natural man and give him an uplifted feeling, rather than new birth.

The brief reply from this renowned minister may well speak for itself. True to form, there is little in it to offend anyone, but the reader can judge for himself what it lacks.

"Dear M- B. I am sorry that you are disturbed by my neglect of emphasis on the shedding of the blood for remission of sins. I do emphasize the love of God. It was because of that love that blood was shed, but it is the love and not the blood that is the important element in our salvation.

"We may differ in terminology, but we both have the same loyalty to Jesus Christ. "Most cordially,

(Signed) Norman V. Peale." (*Italics ours*)

It should not take much spirituality to find the crux of the whole matter-"It is the love and not the blood." True, God always loved the poor sinner, and in greatest love sent His beloved Son into the world to be his Savior, but the sinner's salvation does not depend on the love of God, but the blood of Christ. Otherwise God could have had no righteous foundation on which to forgive and receive the guilty, hell-deserving sinner. The reply is a smooth, polished circumventure of the truth of God.

Of old the devil lied to Eve and said, in substance, that God was not good, for He was withholding something from her that would be a boon - the knowledge of good and evil. It was a libel on God. God was good and was acting for her good by placing that one restriction on her and her husband. Now the devil's lie has a new twist; it is the love and goodness of God that is extolled to the loss of His character of light and holiness which cannot endure sin in

His presence. The present story suggests subtly that God would not be good if He put the rebellious sinner in hell. But, be it remembered, a good God can punish the unrepentant sinner without any impairment of His goodness, and a holy God must punish the sinner who prefers his sins to God's Christ.

Thus we see the form of godliness and the language of orthodoxy are maintained, while the substance is eliminated - the power is lacking.

Confident, boastful Protestantism says that they now have 33 million children in Sunday Schools, but what percentage of that great throng ever hear the truth of God regarding sin, death, and judgment after death on the one hand, and a full, perfect, and free salvation by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as one's own personal Savior on the other? How solemn it is to think that they are being, for the most part, blindly led on to a Christless eternity, with the language of orthodox Christianity on their lips. Solemn also for their teachers!

And now, Christian reader, turn back to the article on "The Seven Churches," and note that we have much of it in italics. Apply the truth presented there to this mammoth resurgent Protestantism "What is Laodicea which the Lord decries? Is it not that which is "rich and increased with goods" and needs nothing, according to their own estimate? That which is nauseous to Him? That which is proud, boastful, and self-confident, where all degrees of spiritual light and darkness can peacefully dwell together, and plan to press on to loftier and loftier heights?

Be it remembered, too, that the National Council of Churches owns and controls the new Revised Standard Version of the Bible, which, while it is not like some of the rank productions which eliminated the blood and the need of it, still lends itself to the new orthodoxy of the day, and adds to Laodicea's boastful pretensions. They have need of nothing. But, alas, millions in their camp need everything to fit them for the day when they must meet Christ. All will meet Him; some as their Savior, and many as their judge.

We are not unmindful that the last four churches of Revelation 2 and 3 run on concurrently at the end-Thyatira,

Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These are explained briefly in the article, "The Seven Churches." Nor do we confuse Sardis and Laodicea; the former comes out of the Reformation as State churches, and the latter, the spiritual decay of that which began as the evangelicals. This latter being the core of the present modernist and neo-orthodox religious upsurge, with all the boastfulness of needing nothing, is truly Laodicean.

The denomination which boasts of 9 million members in this country came out of the great evangelical movement of the 18th century, and today has gone about as far as possible in departing from "the faith of God's elect."

Surely if we look abroad and see the widespread empty profession which is filled with utmost self-complacency and pride, can we fail to discern the signs of these times?-the signs of Laodicea which are the sure precursor of the day when Christ shall spew the lifeless thing out of His mouth as nauseous?

So today, whether we look at the professing church, the Nation of Israel, the Western nations, the Arab world, Russia and her satellites, or even the state of our own hearts which is more or less influenced by conditions, everything portends the imminence of our Lord's return. We are definitely at the END. Let us seek to keep our lights burning, in testimony to our Lord, and our loins girded by the truth in holy separation from the world, while we joyfully anticipate that shout, "Come up hither."

China, Russia, and Satan's Man: the Editor's Column

The restless tossings and heavings of the nations remind us of a verse in Isaiah 57: "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." v. 20. The world generally is in commotion, while men vainly seek peace and security.

In recent months Communist China has advanced her frontiers farther toward the southeast, as the Tachen and other islands were given to her rather than risk an international war which many now feel would bring about the end of civilization as it is known. Men have real cause to fear another great war, for the fertile brain of man which has resisted the truth of God has brought forth incredible weapons of destruction.

There is no reason to believe that Red China will have her voracious appetite satisfied by throwing a little more real estate to her. It reminds us of a friend who confronted a bear out in the wild country. He was supplied with some chocolate, and he knew that bears liked it, so he tossed some to the hungry creature, but the bear just came on for more; the more he got, the more he wanted. The few Communist leaders who sallied forth from their hideaway in a river-bank cave on the Yen River in Chensi Province about seven years ago have conquered more land and subjugated more people than was ever done before in such a short time. Even the great nation of India has veered toward the Communist world, and its leaders have been very laudatory of the Communists, their manners, aims, and goal. Communism is entrenched just across India's borders, through China's conquest of Tibet, and this Marxian ideology is steadily infiltrating the hungry masses of that populous Asian nation.

The ousting of Premier Malenkov in Russia is another sign portending more trouble for the world. He represented a faction which was ruthless, but considerably nationalistic. He and his clique were willing for a period of co-existence with the West, but the new ruling powers are of the old

Communist pattern which is devoted to the expansion of and eventual world domination by Moscow-dictated Communism. This means more aggressive action by China, and fresh trouble here and there, wherever Moscow can foment trouble and gain an advantage. It can be expected to break out anywhere, and in all likelihood Russia and China together will continue to advance the outposts of their dictator-directed Communism in many places.

But Christians can calmly and confidently behold the tossings of the nations, knowing that the boisterous waves are but fulfilling their Father's will. His beloved Son was once cast out of this world, and there is to be no peace until that same One comes to execute judgment, to "dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel," and to set up His kingdom and rule in righteousness. The great men of the world vainly imagine that they are directing affairs, but they are only carrying out God's purposes. Every fresh advance of the world Communist forces but brings the day nearer when the Western alliance of ten nations shall form the Roman Empire under "the beast." Each new Communist conquest helps to crystallize Western opinion and opposition, until at length, at the right moment, the great federation will come into being. The groundwork is all laid, and the

constant proddings of Russia, her satellites, and her co-partner China will force the West to unite.

The inner weakness of France, with the constant governmental crises, is but a mark of the general trend, showing that there are not many great men in the West, and a superman is needed, humanly speaking. The non-Communist world will welcome him with open arms when he comes on the scene with a plan to create a balance of power that will be able to stop all Communist expansion. This man will be honored, and finally deified- worshiped as God-but it will be Satan's man, not God's. The more tensions and weakness which develop will only increase the inner yearnings for a man" speaking great things, and with a look more stout than his fellows (Dan. 7:20).

The Moslem world is in a state of flux, with several countries trying to control a league of Moslem nations. Turkey and Iraq have just completed an alliance, but this is distasteful to other Moslem nations, and Egypt wants no part in it. However, out of all the unrest and agitation of the Near East will come another great man, "a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences" (Dan. 8:23). He will be what Scripture calls, "the Assyrian," or "king of the north"; he will be the implacable foe of the Jews in Palestine, and will be God's scourge against them for their unholy alliance with the beast of the Roman Empire, and for their apostasy.

Egypt will also continue as an enemy of the Jews, and at the time of the end "the king of the south" will come against the antichrist in Jerusalem (Dan. 11:40).

So we see in the unrest and tossings of the nations the great preparation for the very things that have been foretold for many centuries; whether we look at Russia, or China, Western Europe with the Powers of the Western Hemisphere, the Near East of Asia, or Egypt, all are producing mixtures which will crystallize in proper sequence.

And what is withholding that these things have not taken place? It is the longsuffering of God who is waiting on poor lost men to believe the gospel. God has foretold that judgment will come on this Christ-rejecting world, but "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Pet. 3:9. But when we see things shaping up very fast for the end, should we not confidently look up expecting that at any moment we shall hear His shout and be caught up to meet Him in the air? And as soon as we, with the Spirit of God, have left the scene, the conditions for the end of "man's day" will mature with lightning rapidity.

The recent turnover of power at the very top in Russia gives room for some serious meditation. How men strive for power! The men of the Kremlin know what power is as was never known before. Yet how short-lived it all is. If the head that wears the crown lies uneasy, how much more the head of a dictator! Just think of what has happened in our days to dictators-in Russia, in Germany, in Italy.

Think of all those who have fallen since Czar Nicholas II of Russia was slain in the revolution of 1917; and the struggle still goes on. This is nothing new; the dictators of the old Roman Empire of the East for the most part fell victims of tragedy and foul play. When Emperor Constantine the Great made Constantinople (Byzantium) his capital in about 330 A.D., the Eastern or Byzantine Empire continued there, and of 107 persons who ruled it from 395 to 1453 A.D. as emperors or associates, 20 were assassinated, 18 were blinded or otherwise mutilated, 12 died in confinement

or prison, 12 abdicated, 3 died of starvation, 8 died in battle or in accident. This left only 34 of these (generally despotic) rulers to die natural deaths or finish their reigns.

Truly the Christian has the better part in this world, and in the world to come. The devil is a bad paymaster, and deceives his dupes. He met Judas' lust for money with the suggestion that he could gain thirty pieces of silver by selling his Lord and then, when that traitorous act had been committed, he left Judas to his remorse and a fate of endless torment. He has led many persons on by appealing to their lust for money, power, or pleasure, only to leave them to regret and remorse when it failed.

How good it is to be a Christian! and better yet to live as one, in loving response to Him who loves us and died for us. Soon every little bit of faithfulness to Christ will be rewarded.

" 'A little while' - He'll come again;

Let us the precious hours redeem;

Our only grief to give Him pain,

Our joy to serve and follow Him.

Watching and ready may we be,

As those that wait their Lord to see.

" 'A little while' - 'twill soon be past,

Why should we shun the promised cross?

O let us in His footsteps haste,

Counting for Him all else but loss;

For how will recompense His smile,

The sufferings of this 'little while.' "

*The contents of this column in November, 1954 are now available from the publishers in separate pamphlet form entitled, "A Look at Modern Evangelistic Methods," at 6 cents each, or 65 cents per dozen.

Satan and His Workings

Satan is a fallen creature and he does not possess either omniscience or omnipotence. John 8:44 is a distinct testimony. Many Christians believe that Satan is represented under the figure of the king of Tyrus, in Eze. 28:17, and I think they are right. But Satan has a whole multitude of demons under his authority-so much so that in the poor Gadarene there was a legion. He is the prince of the demons.

With respect to the knowledge of thoughts, he does not know them intuitively, as God does; but he knows as a spirit full of intelligence and subtlety, who discerns with the greatest clearness the motives of the heart, and who has gained experience by the practice of many thousand years: but I believe that he understands nothing of the power of love. He was able in his malice to raise up the Chaldeans, etc., through the desire of plunder, against Job; but, not in any way knowing the purpose of God to bless him by this means, he did nothing but fulfill it. He did all that he could to get Christ put to death, but he only fulfilled the wonderful purpose of God for our salvation. However, when he has to do with the evil heart of man, the case is different. He can present objects to awaken lusts. If we reckon ourselves to be dead, dead to sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, he is not able to tempt us; at least, the temptation remains without effect. But if the flesh is not held as dead, then he can present objects which the flesh likes, and suggest to a man the means of satisfying his lusts. Thus he put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus for a little money. But man is responsible because without lust Satan could do nothing: he has nothing to offer to the new man, or if he offers anything, it only produces horror in the soul; the soul suffers as Christ suffered at the sight of evil in this world, or else it overcomes as Christ overcame in the wilderness. But, when the soul is not set free, he can indeed insinuate wicked thoughts, and unbelieving thoughts, and words of blasphemy, in such a way that these words and thoughts seem to proceed from the man himself. Nevertheless, if the man is truly converted, we always find that he has a sense of horror at the things that arise in his mind, and we see that they are not really his own thoughts. If he is not converted, he does not distinguish between the demon and himself, as we find in the Gospels. But also when he is converted, it is a proof that he has opened the door to the devil by sin - hidden sin it may be-or by negligence.

Further, Satan is the prince of this world, and its god, and he governs the world by means of the passions and lusts of men; and he is able to raise up the whole world against Christians, as he did against Christ, and so try their faith. He can seek to mingle truth and error, and thus deceive Christians if they are not spiritual. He can, as did the demon at Philippi, get Christians mixed up with the world in order to destroy the testimony of God; he can change himself into an angel of light, but the spiritual man discerns all things (1 Cor. 2:15; J.N.D. Trans.). Satan has little power over us if we walk humbly, close to the Lord, following faithfully the Word of God, having Christ as the only object of the heart. Satan knows well that he has been conquered; therefore it is said, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." His influence in the world is very great through the motives of the human heart, and he acts on men through each other; likewise, from the rapidity of his operations and actions, he appears to be everywhere; and then he employs a great multitude

of servants who are all wicked. But in fact he is not present everywhere. Now God is really present, and if we are under the influence of the Spirit of God, and the conscience is in the presence of God, Satan has no power. "He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." However things may be with us, if we are truly the children of

God, he will fulfill the counsels of God with respect to us; it may be, if need be, by chastisement. But God knows all things; He in the most absolute sense penetrates everywhere. He orders all things- Satan's efforts even - for our good. If we are armed with the whole armor of God, the darts of the evil one do not reach the soul.

Scripture As a Whole

Some people read Scripture very much as others preach it. A few words are taken and are made the motto of a discourse which perhaps has no real connection with the scope of that passage-perhaps not with any other in the Bible. The thoughts may be true enough abstractedly, but what we want is a help to understand the Word of God as a whole, as well as the details. If you were to take a letter from a friend and were merely to fasten upon a sentence or a part of one in the middle of it, and dislocate it from the rest, how could you understand it? And yet Scripture has infinitely larger scope and compass than anything that could be written on our part; and therefore there ought to be far stronger reasons for taking Scripture in its connections than the little effusions of our own mind. This is a great key to the mistakes which many estimable people make in the interpretation of Scripture. They may be men of faith too; but still it is difficult to rise above their ordinary habits.

The Secret of Success

"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." Josh. 1:8, 9.

Self-Surrender: Part 1

It is perfectly delightful to contemplate the moral triumphs of Christianity - the victories which it gains over self and the world, and the marvelous way in which such victories are obtained. The law said, Thou shalt do this, and thou shalt not do that. But Christianity speaks a totally different language. In it we see life bestowed as a free gift - life flowing down from a risen and glorified Christ. This is something entirely beyond the range of the law. The language of the law was, "The man which doeth those things shall live by them." Rom. 10:5. Long life in the land was all the law proposed to the man who could keep it. Eternal life in a risen Christ was something utterly unknown and unthought of under the legal system.

But Christianity not only gives eternal life, it gives also an object with which that life can be occupied - a center around which the affections of that life can circulate - a model on which that life can be formed. Thus it gains its mighty moral triumphs. Thus it gains its conquests over a selfish nature and a selfish world. It gives divine life and a divine center; and as the life moves around that center we are taken out of self.

This is the secret of self-surrender. It cannot be reached in any other way. The unconverted man finds his center in self; and hence, to tell him not to be selfish is to tell him not to be at all. This holds true even in the matter of mere religiousness. A man will attend to his religion in order, as he thinks, to promote his eternal interest, but this is quite a different thing from finding an object and a center outside himself. Christianity alone can supply these. The gospel of the grace of God is the only thing that can effectually meet man's need and deliver him from the selfishness which belongs to him. The unrenewed man lives for himself. He has no higher object. The life which he possesses is alienated from the life of God. He is away from God. He moves around another center altogether, and until he is born again, until he is renewed, regenerated, born of the Word and Spirit of God, it cannot be otherwise. Self is his object, his center in all things. He may be moral, amiable, religious, benevolent, but until he is converted, he is not finished with himself as to the ground of his being or as to the center around which that being revolves.

The foregoing train of thought naturally introduces us to the striking and beautiful illustration of our theme afforded in Philippians 2. In it we have a series of examples of self-surrender, commencing with a divinely perfect One, the Lord Himself.

But, ere we proceed to gaze upon this exquisite picture, it may be well to inquire what it was that rendered it needful to present such a picture before the Philippian saints. The attentive reader will doubtless observe, in the course of this most charming epistle, certain delicate touches from the inspired pen leading to the conclusion that the keen and vigilant eye of the Apostle detected a certain root of evil in the bosom of the beloved and cherished assembly gathered at Philippi. To this he addressed himself, not with a sledge hammer or long whip, but with a refinement and delicacy far more powerful than either the one or the other. The mightiest moral results are reached by those delicate touches from the hand of God the Holy Ghost.

But what was the root to which we have referred? It was not a splitting into sects and parties, as at Corinth. It was not a return to law and ritualism, as at Galatia. It was not a hankering after philosophy and the rudiments of the world, as at Colosse. What was it then? It was a root of envy and strife. The sprouting of this root is seen very distinctly in the collision between those two sisters, Euodias and Syntyche (chap. 4:2), but it is glanced at in earlier portions of the epistle, and a divine remedy supplied.

It is a great point with a medical man not only to understand what is wrong with his patient, but also to understand the true remedy. Some physicians are clever in discovering the root of the disease, but they do not know so well what remedy to apply. Others again are skilled in the knowledge of medicine, the powers of various drugs, but they do not know how to apply them to individual cases. The divine Physician knows both the disease and its remedy. He knows exactly what is the matter with us, and He knows what will do us good. He sees the root of the matter, and He applies a radical cure. He does not treat cases superficially. He is perfect in diagnosis. He does not guess at our disease from mere surface symptoms. His keen eye penetrates at once to the very bottom of the case, and His skilful hand applies the true remedy.

Thus it is in the epistle to the Philippians. These saints held a very large place in the heart of the Apostle. He loved them much, and they loved him. Again and again he speaks in grateful accents of their fellowship with him in the gospel from the very first. But all this did not and could not shut his eyes to what was wrong among them. It is said that love is blind. In one sense we look upon this saying as a libel upon love. If it were said that love is superior to faults, it would be nearer the truth. What would anyone give for blind love? Of what use would it be to be loved by one who only loved us because he was ignorant of our blots and blemishes? If it be meant that love will not see our blots, it is blessedly true (Numb. 23:21); but no one would care for a love that was not at once aware of and superior to our failures and infirmities.

Paul loved the saints at Philippi, and rejoiced in their love to him, and tasted the fragrant fruit of that love again and again. But then he saw that it was one thing to love and be kind to a distant apostle, and quite another thing to agree among themselves. Doubtless Euodias and Syntyche both contributed to send a present to Paul, though they were not pulling harmoniously together in the wear and tear of daily life and service. This is, alas! no uncommon case. Many sisters and brothers too are ready to contribute of their substance to help some distant servant of Christ, and yet they do not walk pleasantly together. How is this? There is a lack of self-surrender. This, we may rest assured, is the real secret of much of the "strife" and "vainglory" so painfully manifest in the very midst of the people of God. It is one thing to walk alone, and it is another thing to walk in company with our brethren in the practical recognition of that great truth of the unity of the body, and in the remembrance that "we are members one of another." Christians are not to regard themselves as mere individuals, as isolated atoms, as independent persons. This cannot be, seeing that Scripture declares, "There is one body," and we are members thereof. This is a divine truth—a grand fact—a positive reality. We are not to be like the hairs of an electrified broom, each standing out in lonely individuality. We are living members of a living body, each one having to do with other members with whom we are connected by a bond which no power of earth or hell can sever. In a word, there is a relationship formed by the presence of the Holy Ghost, who not only dwells in each individual member, but is the power of the unity of the one body. It is the presence of God the Spirit in the Church that constitutes that Church the one living body of the living Head.

Now it is when we are called to walk in the actual acknowledgment of this great truth that there is a demand for self-surrender. If we were merely solitary individuals treading each in his own self-chosen path, carrying out his own peculiar thoughts, walking in the sparks of his own kindling, pursuing his own peculiar line of things, indulging his own will, then, indeed, a quantity of self might be retained. If Euodias and Syntyche could have walked alone, there would have been no collision - no strife. But they were called to walk together, and here was the demand for self-surrender.

And be it ever remembered that Christians are not members of a club, of a sect, or of an association; they are members of a body, each connected with all, and all connected by the fact of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost with the risen and glorified Head in heaven.

This is an immense truth, and the practical carrying out of it will cost us not only all we have, but all we are. There is no place in all the universe where self will be so pulled to pieces as in the assembly of God. And is it not well? Is it not a powerful proof of the divine ground on which that assembly is gathered? Are we not - should we not be - glad to have our hateful self thus pulled to pieces?

Shall we - ought we to - run away from those who do it for us? Are we not glad - do we not often pray - to get rid of self? And shall we quarrel with those who are God's instruments in answering our prayers? True, they may do the work roughly and clumsily, but no matter for that. 'Whoever helps me to crush and sink self does me a kind turn, however awkwardly he may do it. One thing is certain, no man can ever rob us of that which, after all, is the only thing worth having; namely, Christ. This is a precious consolation. Let self go; we shall have more of Christ. Euodias might lay the blame on Syntyche, and Syntyche on Euodias; the Apostle does not raise the question of which was right or of which was wrong, but he beseeches both to be "of the same mind in the Lord."

Here lies the divine secret. It is self-surrender. But this must be a real thing. There is no use in talking about sinking self while, at the same time, self is fed and patted on the back. We sometimes pray with marvelous fervor to be enabled to trample self in the dust, and the very next moment, if anyone seems to cross our path, self is like a porcupine with all its quills up. This will never do. God will have us real, and surely we can say, with all our weakness and folly, we want to be real - real in everything - and therefore real when we pray for the power of self-surrender. But, most assuredly, there is no place where there is more urgent demand for this lovely grace than in the bosom of the assembly of God.

Self-Surrender: Part 2

We may range through the wide domain of inspiration and not find a more exquisite model of self-surrender than that which is presented to us in the opening lines of Philippians 2. It is, we may safely say, impossible for anyone to breathe the holy atmosphere of such a scripture and not be cured of the sore evils of envy and jealousy, strife and vainglory. Let us approach the marvelous picture and, gazing intently upon it, seek to catch its inspiration.

"If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." vv. 1-8.

Here then is the divine remedy for envy and jealousy, strife and vainglory-for self-occupation, in short, in all its hideous forms. The inspired penman introduces to our hearts the self-emptied, humble, obedient Man, Christ Jesus. Here was One who possessed all power in heaven and earth. Divine majesty and glory belonged to Him. He was God over all, blessed forever. By Him all things were made, and by Him they subsist. And yet He appeared in this world as a poor man-a servant - one who had not where to lay His head. The foxes and the fowls, the creatures of His formation, were better provided for than He, their Maker. They had a place to rest in. He had none. He "made Himself of no reputation." He never thought of Himself at all. He thought of others, cared for them, labored for them, wept for them, ministered to them, but He never did a thing for Himself. We never find Him taking care to supply Himself with anything. His was a life of perfect self-surrender. He who was everything, made Himself nothing. He stood in perfect contrast with the first Adam, who, being but a man, thought to make himself like God, and became the serpent's slayer. The Lord Jesus, who was the Most High God, took the very lowest place among men. It is utterly impossible that any man can ever take so low a place as Jesus. The word is, He "made Himself of no reputation." He went so low that no one could possibly put Him lower. He "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

And be it observed that the cross is here viewed as the consummation of a life of obedience - the completion of a work of self-surrender. It is what we may call, to use a Levitical term, the burnt offering aspect of the death of

Christ, rather than the sin offering. True it is-most blessedly true-that the selfsame act which consummated a life of obedience, did also put away sin; but in the passage now before us, sin-bearing is not so much the thought as self-surrender. Jesus gave up all. He veiled His glory and came down into this poor world; and when He came, He eschewed all human pomp and

grandeur, and became a poor man. His parents were poor. They were only able to procure the lowest grade of sacrifice which the law admitted for the poor - not a bullock, not a lamb, but a pair of turtledoves. (Compare Lev. 15:29 and Luke 2:24.) He Himself worked, and was known as a carpenter. Nor are we to miss the moral force of this fact by saying that every Jew was brought up to some trade. Our Lord Jesus Christ did really take a low place. The very town where He was brought up was a proverb of reproach. He was called the "Nazarene." And it was asked, with a sneer of contempt, "Is not this the carpenter?" He was a root out of a dry ground. He had no form nor comeliness, no beauty in man's eye. He was the despised, neglected, self-emptying, meek and lowly Man from first to last. He gave up all, even to life itself. In a word, His self-surrender was complete.

And now mark the result. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The blessed Lord Jesus took the very lowest place, but God has given Him the very highest. He made Himself nothing, but God has made Him everything. He said, "I am a worm, and no man"; but God has set Him as Head over all. He went into the very dust of death, but God has placed Him on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

What does all this teach us? It teaches us that the way to go up is to go down. This is a grand lesson, and one which we much need to learn. It would effectually deliver us from envy and jealousy, from strife and vainglory, from self-importance and self-occupation. God will assuredly exalt those who, in the spirit and mind of Christ, take the low place; and, on the other hand, He will as assuredly abase those who seek to be somebody.

O to be nothing! This is true liberty, true happiness, true moral elevation. And then what intense power of attraction in one who makes nothing of himself! And, on the other hand, how repulsive is a pushing, forward, elbowing, self-exalting spirit! How utterly unworthy of one bearing the name of Him who made Himself of no reputation. May we not set it down as a fixed truth that ambition cannot possibly live in the presence of One who emptied Himself? No doubt. An ambitious Christian is a flagrant contradiction.

But there are other samples of self-surrender presented to us in this exquisite Philippians 2-inferior no doubt to the divine model at which we have been gazing, for in this, as in all other things, Jesus must have the pre-eminence. Still, though inferior and imperfect, they are deeply interesting and valuable to us. Look at Paul. See how deeply he had drunk into his Master's spirit of self-surrender. Harken to the following accents from one who naturally would have allowed none to outstrip him in his career of ambition. "Yea," he says, "and if I be offered [poured forth as a drink offering] upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all." v. 17.

This is uncommonly fine. Paul was ready to be nothing -to be spent-to be poured forth as a libation upon the Philippians' sacrifice. It mattered not to him who presented the sacrifice, or who performed the service, provided the thing was done. Does this not cause some of us to blush? How little do we know of this excellent spirit! How prone we are to attach importance to work if we ourselves have anything to do with it. How little able to joy and rejoice with others in their sacrifice and service! Our work, our preaching, our writings, have an interest in our view quite different from those of anyone else. In a word, self, self, detestable self, creeps in even in that which seems to

be the service of Christ. We are drawn to those who think well of us and our work, and retire from those who think otherwise. All this needs to be judged. It is unlike Christ, and unworthy of those who bear His holy name. Paul had so learned Christ as to be able to rejoice in the work and service of others as well as in his own; and even where Christ was preached of contention, he could rejoice.

Then again, look at Paul's son, Timothy. Hearken to the glowing testimony borne to him by the pen of inspiration. "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel." vv. 19-22.

Here was self-surrender. Timothy genuinely cared for the saints; and that too at a moment when all sought their own things. And yet, dear as Timothy was to Paul's heart - valuable as such a self-denying servant must have been to him in the work of the gospel-he was willing to part with him for the sake of the Church. Timothy, likewise, was willing to be separated from his invaluable friend and father in the faith in order to ease his anxious mind in reference to the state of the Philippians. This was indeed giving proof of real devotedness and self-surrender. Timothy did not talk of these things; he practiced them. He did not make a parade of his doings; but Paul, by the Holy Ghost, engraved them on a tablet from which they can never be erased. This was infinitely better. Let another praise thee and not thyself. Timothy made nothing of himself, but Paul made a great deal of him. This is divine. The sure way to get up is to go down. Such is the law of the heavenly road. A man who makes much of himself saves others the trouble of doing so. There is no possible use in two persons doing the same thing. Self-importance is a noxious weed nowhere to be found in the entire range of the new creation. It is alas! often found in the ways of those who profess to belong to that blessed and holy creation, but it is not of heavenly growth. It is of fallen nature -a weed that grows luxuriantly in the soil of this world. The men of this age think it laudable to push and make way for themselves. A bustling, self-important, pretentious style takes with the children of this generation. But our heavenly Master was the direct opposite to all this. He who made the worlds stooped to wash a disciple's feet (John 13); and if we are like Him we shall do the same. There is nothing more foreign to the thoughts of God, the mind of heaven, the spirit of Jesus, than self-importance and self-occupation. And, on the other hand, there is nothing that savors so of God, of heaven, and of Jesus, as self-surrender.

Look once more reader, at our picture in Philippians 2. Examine with special care that figure which occupies a very prominent place. It is Epaphroditus. Who was he? Was he a great preacher, a very eloquent speaker, a preeminently gifted brother? We are not told. But this we are told-and told powerfully and touchingly-he was one who exhibited a lovely spirit of self-surrender. This is better than all the gifts and eloquence, power and learning, that could possibly be concentrated in any single individual. Epaphroditus was one of that illustrious class who seek to make nothing of themselves; and, as a consequence, the inspired Apostle spares no pains to exalt him. Hear how he expatiates upon the actings of this singularly attractive personage. "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants."

What a cluster of dignities! What a brilliant array of titles! How little did this dear and unpretending servant of Christ imagine that he was to have such a monument erected to his memory! But the Lord will never suffer the fruits of self-sacrifice to wither, nor the name of the self-emptied to sink into oblivion. Hence it is that the name of one who otherwise might never have been heard of shines on the page of inspiration as the brother, companion, and fellow soldier of the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

But what did this remarkable man do? Did he spend a princely fortune in the cause of Christ? We are not told, but we are told what is far better—he spent himself. This is the grand point for us to seize and ponder. It was not the surrender of his fortune merely, but the surrender of himself. Let us hearken to the record concerning one of the true David's mighty men. "He longed after you all, and was full of heaviness." Why? Was it because he was sick? because of his pains, and aches, and privations? Nothing of the sort. Epaphroditus did not belong to the generation of whiners and complainers. He was thinking of others. "He... was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick." How lovely! He was occupied about the Philippians and their sorrow about him. The only thing that affected him in his illness was the thought of how it would affect them. Perfectly exquisite! This honored servant of Christ had brought himself to death's door to serve others, and when there, in place of being occupied about himself and his ailments, he was thinking of the sorrows of others. "He was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow."

Can anything be morally more beautiful than this? It is one of the rarest pictures ever presented to the human eye.

There is Epaphroditus, nigh unto death for the sake of others, but he is full of sorrow about the Philippians; and the Philippians are full of sorrow about him; Paul is full of sorrow about both, and God comes and mingles Himself with the scene and, in mercy to all, raises up the loved one from the bed of death.

And then mark the tender solicitude of the blessed Apostle. It is like some tender mother sending her darling son away and committing him, with fond earnestness, to the care of some friend. "I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation." Why? Was it because of his gifts, his rank, or his wealth? No; but because of his self-surrender. "Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me." O dear Christian reader, let us think on these things. We have introduced you to a picture and we leave you to gaze upon it. The grouping is divine. There is a moral line running through the entire scene and linking the figures into one striking group. It is like the anointing of the true Aaron, and the oil flowing down to the skirts of His garments. We have the blessed Lord, perfect in His self-surrender, as in all beside; and then we have Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, each, in his measure, exhibiting the rare and lovely grace of self-surrender.

The Seven Churches

The Spirit of God has given us in the addresses to the seven churches a picture of the moral phases of the Church's history from the time of its departure in heart from Christ until its utter rejection by Him. The last four are clearly all found at the end, and are the result of the first three, which we shall note briefly. At Ephesus there was the leaving of first love, the heart having gone from Christ. No activities in judging evil could compensate in His estimation for that; and while it exposed the Church to His judgment, it also left an open door for other evils which soon followed.

At Smyrna there were two divisions in the church-those who held to the truth and suffered at the hands of the world for it, and those who set up an earthly legal system to oppose. The clearly marked division within into two parts existed - those who maintained the true, and therefore heavenly, calling, and those who set up Judaism, an earthly calling, with Christian names for things. It is remarkable that we only get those who "say they are Jews," again mentioned in Philadelphia where, after a long period of forgetfulness of these truths, the Lord has revived the heavenly side of Christianity. Smyrna is followed by Pergamos, and the Church then openly accepted the patronage of the world; its downfall was complete. What the enemy cannot successfully oppose, he will change his attitude toward, and under his patronage it is sure to wither. When Balaam accused Israel to God, it was of no avail; when he got at the people and allied them with the Midianites, his ends were accomplished.

One need not dwell on popery with its dark history of idolatry, blood, and crime which Jezebel in Thyatira presents. The eyes must be blind that do not see its character depicted here. Yet it has its remnant who are discerned amidst the corrupt mass by the searching, yet gracious, eye of the Master-those who have not known the depths of Satan, and who are counseled to hold fast till He comes.

Sardis is well recognized as giving us a picture of Protestantism, the state religions which came out of the Reformation when God raised up deliverers for His people from the yoke of their oppressors, and gave back to the Church an open Bible, and the precious foundation truth of justification by faith, through chosen and honored vessels. But how soon they sank down, as Israel under the judges, into forgetfulness of the God who had wrought for their deliverance! State churches are necessarily but the stereotyping of the truth as far as it has been known, with a gross admixture of worldliness and politics, though one gladly owns the faith and faithfulness of the many honored servants of the Lord who have been used of Him to maintain something of life toward God amidst it all. So here too is a remnant of faithful ones who will be fully owned of Him in that day, while the dead and formal part will share the judgment of the world at His coming, since it is only that in reality, with the heightened guilt of the Christian name attached to what openly dishonors Him.

Philadelphia is the revival of the truth of the heavenly calling, the knowledge of the Person of Christ, and a care for His name and glory. Its condition of "little strength" is answered by the pledge on His part who has "all power... in heaven and in earth" of an "opened door, which no one

can shut" (J.N.D. Trans.). Nothing can hinder the testimony save the unfaithfulness of those who should maintain it. But it will be a testimony to Him, and not to their own knowledge or zeal, if it is to meet His approval. A warning is here given to "hold fast" lest the crown be taken by another; and the encouragement is, "I come quickly." To limit it in its application to any select company savors of the narrowness of man's heart and mind. Doubtless it points to the revival of God's truth, which manifestly is found among His people today (as the wise virgins wake up to trim their lamps), but to seek to define its limits would be to forget the widespread dissemination and, let us hope, love of Christ and truth; though many sad blemishes are found in the ways of those who are content with a wider path than the one many are assured the Lord delights to have His people found in. But all will get their share of praise or blame when He who silently is taking account of His people's ways shall manifest everything in the penetrating light of His presence.

What then of Laodicea? It seems hardly a gracious thing for saints to brand each other with this mark. Yet few there are, if truthful, who cannot find a measure of it not far distant to be judged and confessed, unless sufficiently blinded by a good opinion of themselves to have forgotten the measure of the Christian's responsibility and path - the obligation or the call to walk as He walked. How much room for confession this leaves! How little for boastful pretension! Yet if it humbles, how it also cheers to look at Him and His blessed pathway through a world of sin and sorrow-ministering, not ministered to, save by the hands and hearts of those who out of His fullness were receiving "grace upon grace."

If I look around in Christendom, I need not be at a loss to discover what is really Laodicea. "Lukewarm" is a mixture of hot and cold, and modern revivalism is just that. The alabaster box of ointment has been forgotten, and man is the object of many an earnest worker who creates a stir amidst what otherwise would soon be seen to be dead enough toward God. But we see growing rapidly today wealthy churches, where the poor have no place, popular and eloquent preachers, sensuous music, and religious songs which the world can adopt; all this, while, save in a remnant, life to God is wanting, we see growing rapidly today. Laodicea is to Philadelphia, I believe, what Peramos was to Smyrna. Popularize truth and you have spoiled it effectually. Adapt the gospel to man's tastes and you most effectually take away the offense of the cross; and if the whole counsel of God is not declared, the world will thank you for so yielding the cross as to make it attractive.

The sensuous in religion is eagerly sought today, and all that appeals to the natural man; and this, in its broad features, is Laodicea. The Lord recognizes those mixed up with it who are really not of it, and whose hearts can only be kept awake by the rebukes and chastening which love inflicts. But for them Christ knocks at the door. He proffers the most intimate fellowship with those who care for His company. "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

The mass, however, know Him not at all. Like the foolish virgins, they have no oil. The Lord counsels them to buy of Him what they lack. If we look at these pictures of the four churches as thus developed, each one continuing as a distinct thing until the end, we must not forget that instead of closely defined edges they are found to overlap and interlace at their edges; while the nearer we get to the distinctly pronounced character of each, the more marked and separate the lines will be.

May the Lord give us discernment as to these things that we may avoid what is offensive to Him, and be content with His approval and His company until He calls us up through that open door in

heaven to share His throne and glory, and to view from thence the execution of this well-earned wrath upon those who in a day of grace have refused to own Him Lord.

Sin and Superstition

The gospel addresses itself to man not only as a guilty but as a religious creature. It finds him under the power of superstition or religiousness, as well as of sin. It is as natural for man to refuse to go into the judgment hall lest he should be defiled (John 18:28), as it is, in very enmity to God, to cry out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." And the gospel gets as stern a refusal from the religious man as from the lustful man. As the Divine Teacher tells us, the harlot goes into the kingdom before the Pharisee.

Religious vanities are playing their part in our day, and fascinating many souls. 'What answer, beloved, do you and I give them? Is Jesus so precious that no allurements has power? Is the virgin purity of the mind still kept? and as chaste ones are we still betrothed to Christ only? Like the newly-formed Eve, are we in our place of earliest, freshest presentation to our Lord? or have we, apart from His side, opened our ear to the serpent?

As Sorrowful yet Alway Rejoicing

If trouble and care will try to force themselves upon us, we have nothing to do or say to them, but cast them all upon Him who "careth" for us, and is the master of them. Our only business here, for God, is to glorify Him in every step of the path His grace has marked out for us. Christ is for us in heaven (Heb. 9:24), and we are for Him down here (John 17:18); so that come what may, we should rejoice, and be able to say, "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight." Matt. 11:26.

"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." S. of Sol. 4:16. Blow hot or blow cold, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine "

"Clouds may seem to pass between us,

There's no change in Him above."

Why, then, art thou cast down,

O afflicted and tried one? "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?" Luke 24:38. Jesus knows and feels your smallest woe. So very precious are you to Him that even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. What affects you, affects Him, for you are bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh.

"Sorrow overmuch is suicide of the heart, and buries a man with his head downward." Over anxiety about one trouble is as the grave to bury hundreds of mercies. Rise up then, O dearly beloved, from your despondency, emerge from the dark shadow, do no more dishonor to your Lord, and let your heart be as the glad welling fount in the midst of the desert, that the weary traveler may be refreshed even at the sight of you. We are responsible to God to refresh and cheer each other, and to comfort one another with the comfort we have of God; it is a work and a witness for Him in the midst of a joyless and thankless world.

As one has said, "If the east wind will blow, put up another button on your coat"; brave the wave of trial as one who, in the strength of the Lord, is more than a match for it. "Be strong, yea, be strong." God is for you, with you, and in you. You may be in the furnace, and the only loss you will sustain will be your bands, and in company with you will be the "Son of God." You may not be able to say, much less do, anything. Weakness has a special claim upon God, and God has a special blessing for it. "Them that honor Me I will honor." We honor God by patiently enduring. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God." Give place to care, and it will soon prove to be your master, and you its slave.

It has been remarked that "like the disagreeable saint, the gloomy saint is an anomaly in grace." What a sad spectacle, a child of God, who makes the young feel old, the old feel older, and the sad feel sadder. Some hearts are full of false sentiment and morbid feeling; they appear to shrink from being happy, and prefer being miserable; others are afraid of being happy, as if God grudged His children happiness. Instead of leaving all things in the keeping of their loving God, they darken

the present with the shadows of the future, and suffer the many sorrows of unbelief. They forget that the more they "joy in God," the more cause for joy He will give them; that the more they praise Him, the more they glorify Him.

"Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." Phil. 4:4. "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Phil. 4:6, 7.

While we retain God in our hearts, there is room for nothing else but His peace. A heart full of Christ is a heart full of joy, not my own, but His. "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." John 15:11. Let His joy rule in your hearts, and be

"A sunshine in the shady place."

A wise man has said, "Be we what we may, and we cannot be worse than we are, nothing in or about us ought to be allowed to interrupt the calmness of conscious victory, or to hinder our power of enjoyment of what Christ is made of God unto us (1 Cor. 1:30), and of what God has made us to be in Him" (Colossians 2:10; Eph. 1:6). The enemy may accuse, and conscience charge, but nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God: we are what we are as created in Christ Jesus, so "that neither death, nor life" need cause one moment's dismay (read Rom. 8:31-39). Everything may appear to be against us, but God is for us, and we are here for Him. "Ye are of God, little children" (1 John 4:4), and He has created and filled our hearts to beat for and to Himself, that His own joy might flow into and out of them. "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." 1 Cor. 6:19, 20. God has created our bodies to place His treasure in, to show to men and angels what His power in, as well as for, us is. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Phil. 2:13. And His only pleasure is to see us occupied with and enjoying the Son of His love. If we suffer, it is for Him; if we rejoice, it is for Him; if we bear pain, it is for Him; all we do and say is for Him, because we are for Him, as well as of Him, and He is for us. Christ in you, you in Christ, and Christ in God; so that come what may, we can afford to lift up the head as those who have a right to be happy, and sing:

"My Shepherd is the Lamb,

The living Lord who died;

With all things good I ever am

By Him supplied.

He richly feeds my soul

With blessings from above,

And leads me where the rivers roll

Of endless love.

Stellar Universe: the Editor's Column

Man has from the beginning stood on this planet on which he was placed and peered off into the great space beyond to behold and wonder. The sun, the moon, and the countless stars have fascinated him while arousing his intense curiosity. Even to the naked eye the magnitude of what he saw was awe-inspiring and overwhelming, so that the "sweet psalmist of Israel" chanted:

"When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon, and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" Psalm 8:3, 4. Why should the God who created all that vast celestial system take note of poor mortal man, a comparatively infinitesimal speck?

God left to man a standing witness to the power and wisdom of his Creator, as David says in another psalm: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." Psalm 19:1, 2. Man had corrupted the earth, but the heavens still speak of the glory of their Creator, and give witness to Him day and night in unmistakable language. A better translation of the next two verses is, "There is no speech and there are no words, yet their voice is heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their language to the extremity of the world." vv. 3, 4. Without audible words, the testimony of the heavens spoke a universal language which none could mistake. So forceful was it, that even though mankind had given up God for vain idols, they were rendered inexcusable by reason of its attestation. The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul said:

"Because what is known of God is manifest among them, for God has manifested it to them - for from the world's creation the invisible things of Him are perceived, being apprehended by the mind through the things that are made, both His eternal power and divinity-so as to render them inexcusable." Rom. 1:19, 20; J.N.D. Trans.

If the heathen were specially accountable to God by reason of His constant testimony to them through the visible creation, which was a distinct voice to their conscience, how much more so are present-day astronomers (and people in general) whose knowledge far transcends anything known by men in old times. There is besides today the full revelation of God in the Son, and the proclamation of the gospel far and wide which renders man so much the more inexcusable.

The book of Job lets us know that the ancients of the east had considerable knowledge of the heavens, and the Chinese and Babylonians are supposed to have been the first to build elevated platforms with unobstructed views for the observation of the heavens. Then the Greeks, about the 6th century B.C., developed a fairly sound astronomy, and about 300 B. C. built a famous observatory at Alexandria, Egypt, which remained in continuous operation for 500 years. During this time Hipparchus of Bithynia cataloged 1081 stars. Galileo Galilei was the first to use a telescope (1609) which began to open up better means of observative astronomy. Then Sir Isaac Newton in 1669 built a reflector type telescope, the prototype of modern telescopes. He also made many important discoveries which put the science of astronomy on a solid basis. (It is worthy of

note that Sir Isaac Newton was a devout Christian; he was a faithful student of the Scriptures and wrote a treatise on prophecy.)

In man's quest for knowledge of the stellar universe he has built larger and better telescopes until at length he has produced the giant 200 inch reflector telescope on Mt. Palomar, California. This has greatly increased his capacity to reach out into the hitherto unknown and make pictures and observations with astonishing accuracy.

Before we notice some of the information gleaned by the great Mt. Palomar telescope, let us preface our remarks with a pertinent verse of Scripture:

"Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth." Isa. 40:26. O that all would scan the heavens, and as they do, think not only of the vastness of the universe, but of the majesty, wisdom, and power of Him who created and who sustains all things! Let us obey this call and lift up our eyes and see not only the creation, but the Creator as known thereby. He calls all those heavenly bodies by names, and in the light of what is now known, this is an immense work in itself - something that man could not do.

On a dark, clear night, away from the lights of the big cities, many stars are to be seen, but only about 5000 stars are visible to the naked eye from any one spot on earth; the luminous band across the sky which we call the Milky Way is really the light from billions of stars which can only be seen through a telescope. The earth is a part of the Milky Way which is a thin, lens-shaped Galaxy containing an aggregation of about 200,000,000,000 stars. Our sun is only a small one of these. The whole system rotates in space, with each star being at a great distance from its nearest neighbor, so that the distance is measured in light years; that is, the distance that light travels in one year at the rate of 186,000 miles per second. This amounts to the staggering total of 5,870,000,000,000 miles per year. To get some idea of the immensity of the one Galaxy, the Milky Way, it should be pointed out that it is about 100,000 of these light years in diameter, and 10,000 light years in thickness.

Powerful telescopes are able to reach out and photograph other galaxies beyond the Milky Way. The 100-inch Mt. Wilson telescope has a range of 500,000,000 light years, and within that distance 100,000,000 galaxies, similar to the Milky Way, and composed of billions of stars each, are to be found. Now the 200-inch Mt. Palomar telescope has a range of 1,000,000,000 light years, within which are an estimated 800,000,000 galaxies. So great is the actual number of stars which man can now see that it dwarfs imagination. And the One who cares for each one of us, and who watches over the sparrows, has made them all. "O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all." Psalm 104:24. Surely even the feeble conception we have of the vastness of the creation awakens within us the spirit of praise and adoration to His great name.

Then if we turn our thoughts to the size of these great celestial orbs, we are again awestruck; for example, the star Betelgeuse, in the constellation Orion, has a diameter of 215,000,000 miles as against a diameter of 865,000 miles for our sun. The largest star the dimensions of which are known with reasonable accuracy is a Aurigae. It is about 390,000,000 miles in diameter, or approximately 450 times that of the sun. The smallest star known, Von Maanen's star, is thought to be about the same size as the earth, with a diameter of only 7900 miles. At every turn we can

exclaim with the psalmist, "When I consider Thy heavens,... what is man?" Strange that he should feel himself to be so great that he can reason against his Creator! or fail to accept the Bible as His revelation - that Book which has never been opposed to any scientific fact, but has stood out as an unfailing beacon to those who might be shipwrecked on the rocks of human speculation. And yet, Dr. Max Mason, who wrote the foreword to a book entitled "Photographic Giants of Palomar" says, "Man wants to know and nothing will stop him. We grope dimly through our ignorance, driven by an insatiable curiosity inherited from our simian ancestors." (*Italics ours.*) It is beyond us to understand how one can gaze into the heavens with the instruments of today and then turn back and speak of an ape ancestry of the human race- to turn from facts beyond all fancy and imagination to an unsupported and unprovable hypothesis.

If we think of what man has accomplished, even in the realm of observative astronomy, we may well praise God who endowed him with such faculties. But how little thanks, or even credit, the Creator receives from His tiny creature, whose intellectual powers are often used to reason against God and His revelation. But God will be God in spite of all, and He will be glorified in both the salvation of the believing sinner who trusts in the precious blood of Christ, and in the damnation of those who despise and those who neglect "so great salvation."

In closing let us turn our thoughts to God and His wisdom and grace while we adoringly meditate on the words of an old hymn:

"Great God of wonders! all Thy ways
Are wondrous, matchless, and divine;
But the blest triumphs of Thy grace,
Most marvelous, unrivaled shine.
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?
"Crimes of such horror to forgive,
Such guilty, daring worms to spare;
This is Thy grand prerogative,
And none can in that honor share.
Pardon, O God! is only Thine;
Mercy and grace are all divine.
"In wonder lost, with trembling joy,
We hail the pardon of our God;
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,
A pardon traced in Jesus' blood.

To pardon thus is Thine alone;
Mercy and grace are both Thine own.
"Soon shall this strange, this wondrous grace,
This perfect miracle of love,
Fill the wide earth, while sweeter praise
Sounds its own note in heaven above.
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich, so free?"

A Stronghold

"The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him." Nah. 1:7.

These are comforting words at any time, but especially in times like the present.

The context describes the Lord, Jehovah, in the most striking and majestic language, as a jealous God, taking vengeance on His adversaries, reserving wrath for His enemies, and by no means clearing the guilty. His power, His majesty, and His judgments are infinite.

But what is He for His people, for the souls who trust Him? "The Lord is good." How sweet this is! Have we not proved it many and many a time? Then He is a "stronghold in the day of trouble." Yes, it is the very same God, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who cannot look on iniquity, who must judge sin because it is contrary to His nature - it is this very same God who is the unfailing resource and refuge for His people in every time of trouble.

And not only so, but "He knoweth them that trust in Him." Precious consolation to the heart! He is not unmindful, He never forgets, He never fails the trusting soul, and surely He is worthy of all our trust and confidence.

Let us then, in the dark times as well as in the bright, in days of trial as well as in days of sunshine, trust in Him at all times. If He puts us in the crucible, if He puts faith to the test, it is in order that it may be refined, and be found "unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 1:7.

The Surrender of Love

Present surrender here in view of future joy, and entrance now upon that which is unseen and abiding, is a cardinal feature of true Christianity. Love is the spring of it all. The Lord Jesus Christ is the most striking example of it. Though in the form of God, He emptied Himself and took upon Him the form of a bondsman, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:6-8). He sacrificed all that He might glorify God. He came down from the heavenly glory, refused earthly glory, endured the cross, and despised the shame, until that which was His heart's delight was accomplished-the will of God.

Throughout His wondrous pathway, the soul of this blessed Man was in communion with His Father. And He had meat to eat which even His disciples knew not of (John 4:32). He was ever walking in the light of God, ever governed by that invisible and abiding scene which surrounded Him, filled with God's glory. He walked here as the dependent Man, completely under the control of the Word, refusing all the glory of men, with which Satan sought to turn Him from His blessed path. He was the perfect witness of self-surrender, the fruit of perfect love, and has set us an example that we should follow His steps.

Now both before and since the advent of Christ in this world, we have examples furnished us in the Scripture, by the Spirit, of men who were the subjects of the call of God, and who, wholly or partially, according to the measure of their faith, surrendered things here in answer thereto. One striking instance is that of Abraham. The Lord told him to get out of his country, and from his kindred, and from his father's house unto a land that He would show him (Gen. 12:1). And in Hebrews 11 we learn that by faith he went out, not knowing whither he went. Though in the detail in Genesis we find there was a measure of failure as to his journeying and sojourning first with Terah, his father, and in allowing one of his kindred, Lot, also to accompany him. Eventually, however, clear of those hindrances, we find him sojourning with his family in the land of promise, as in a strange country. And with his tent and his altar, he was manifestly a pilgrim on earth, and a worshiper of the true God. His faith was tested and stood the test in the offering of his son on Mount Moriah at the command of God. And God delighted to call Abraham His friend (Jas. 2:23). The secret of Abraham's power in answering to God's call, and surrendering here, was because he believed the promises of God, and was governed by that which was unseen and abiding. He desired a better country, a heavenly, and looked for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

The Christian likewise is called out of this world to enter now, in the power of the Holy Ghost who dwells in us, upon that which is unseen, abiding, and eternal, the scene which is filled with the glory of the Son of God. Soon we shall dwell there, and enjoy without hindrance His blessed presence forever; but faith, by the Spirit's power, makes it a present reality for the soul. It is the substantiating of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Heb. 11:1; J.N.D. Trans.). And though to be without natural affection is a sign of the last days (2 Tim. 3:3), and not to honor

parents is contrary both to the law and to the gospel; yet, the Lord has said, He that loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me (Matt. 10:37). Hence, the nearest and dearest earthly ties should not be allowed to hinder our wholehearted response to God's call.

Another bright example of surrender is found in Moses. When come to years in the palace of the Pharaohs, and his prospects were of the brightest, and in a certain combination of events he might, perhaps, even have inherited the Egyptian throne, by faith he forsook the position in which, in the providence of God, he found himself. He refused to be called 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 of Egypt, for he had respect to the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. (Heb. 11:24-27.) Had he reasoned according to the natural thoughts of man, or allowed himself to be governed by the circumstances which surrounded him, he would have clung to his position, reasoning as to what a help he could be to his people in it. But no, he entered into the true call of God and, without hesitation, sacrificed all to answer thereto. The reproach of Christ was dearer to that faithful heart than all the world beside. With light from God, he knew what to refuse, what to choose, and what to esteem. He forsook all, and endured, as seeing Him who is invisible. His reward was both present and eternal. Shall such a history, fraught with such momentous consequences, be written for us in vain? May the Lord give each believer who reads these lines to take it to heart, that we may identify ourselves wholly and uncompromisingly with the interests of Christ and His people at all costs in this the day of His rejection.

One meets with other instances where the surrender was only partial. The case of Jonathan is one. We read that his soul was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as he loved his own soul. And, moreover, he made a covenant with him, and stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle. Yet notwithstanding this surrender of love for the anointed one of God, of that which he would most highly value as the warrior son and heir of King Saul, when put to the test as to whether he would identify himself with the rejected David, or continue a path of ease in connection with his self-willed father, he chose the latter. David abode in the wood. But Jonathan went to his house (1 Sam. 23:18), and eventually, when David came to the throne, Jonathan had already fallen with Saul on Mount Gilboa. This solemn history teems with instruction for our souls, showing how far we may go as Christians in surrendering things we esteem and value for Christ's sake, and yet lack the full surrender of love which leads us now to wholehearted identification with Christ in the day of His rejection.

A solemn example of the lack of surrender is found in the young ruler of Mark 10:17. Running and kneeling in the Lord's presence, he said, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" The Lord, knowing his heart was set on wealth, and that he desired long life to enjoy it, tested him with the commandments which referred to his neighbor. He professed to have kept them; but the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," exposed him. His departure, sad and grieved, showed that he loved treasure here more than Christ. The Lord loved him (v. 21) but he lacked that love in return which leads to surrender in this world in view of the one to come. He might have had great possessions in and with Christ forever, but the "great possessions" of this transitory scene filled his heart. He missed his opportunity, and it is the last we hear of him.

It is blessed to turn in contrast to the case of Paul. In his early days of proud Pharisaism, Saul of Tarsus, filled with religious enmity against Christ, sought to blot out the name of Jesus of Nazareth from the earth. But, met in grace from the glory by Him whom he persecuted, when in the full tide of his mad career, light broke in upon his dark soul, and he was blessedly converted to a glorified Savior. Straightway, at Damascus, instead of persecuting His followers, he preached Him as the Son of God. His heart had been captured on the road. And now, enraptured with that blessed Man at the right hand of God in glory, his whole life henceforth, without reserve, as Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles, became devoted to His interests on earth. So completely was he captivated with Christ, that everything here became completely eclipsed in his eyes, and he could write to the Philippians some thirty years after his conversion, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord," etc. Phil. 3:7, 8. Paul's was a wonderful surrender. Constrained by the love of Christ, his heart responded; drawn and controlled by love, in the Spirit's power, he pursued a straight course from start to finish. With him it was no boast, but the simple expression of that which was true when he said, "To me to live is Christ." Phil. 1:21. So closely did Paul follow Christ, that he could write to the beloved saints at Philippi, "Brethren, be followers together of me." Phil. 3:17.

May God in His great grace so work in power in our souls that, constrained by the love of Christ, we may, each one without reserve, surrender our will, our all, ourselves to

Christ, and so answer in heart and life to the call of God. Thus only shall we bring glory to His all-worthy name, who surrendered all that He might suffer for us that we might be redeemed to God forever by His precious blood. May the surrender of love characterize us, as His disciples, till He come.

The Sympathy of Jesus

This account presents a magnificent picture of the way of the Lord Jesus when down here, and gives us an insight into the path of the Man Christ Jesus. And let me say here that the study of the path of the Son of God is not only that which the mind may dwell upon with pleasure and admiration, but it is something on which the heart may feed for strength and blessing. There are three precious facts which I want to consider.

1. The blessed Lord Jesus was at all times actuated by a true and real desire to glorify His Father in heaven. It was this that moved Him moment by moment. Ah! He is the only One who has ever lived in this scene, having this one thing governing the whole course of His life - the glory of God. Personal affection never for a moment swayed Him, nor did personal fear hold Him back, but, along His entire pathway, the glory of God shone out most brightly through Him.

And in this case, had Jesus no love for those sorrowing sisters? Did He know their case, and yet stay two days "in the same place where He was"? Yes; He knew all about their need - He had love for them. Then why not at once hasten to their side? This is how you and I act, beloved friends; we hear of the illness of some loved one, and take the next train in order to be with that one as soon as possible. But to bring glory to the Father was that which was ever dearest to the heart of the Son. Was it that Jesus had forgotten their distress? or that His love for them had changed? No; there was no coldness in His affection for these tried ones (as they prove by-and-by), but the right moment for Him to act had not come then.

Yes, Jesus pitied them, loved them, felt for them, as He alone was able, and yet things got to the very worst in that little home, and the Master came not. What would those loving hearts feel? Would they question, like the disciples in the boat, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" Did they dare to say that to the Master? - "Carest Thou not?" Oh, how little they understood Him, to speak thus! And perish, with Jesus on board? Impossible!

Beloved, do we know anything of this, "Carest Thou not?" When circumstances look dark, our hearts begin to question the love of the One who permits such to befall us. Oh, let me press upon you this important truth - the dealings of the Father's hand must ever be looked at in the light of the love of that Father's heart. Grasp this. Never try to interpret love by its manifestations. How often our Father sends chastisement, sorrow, bereavement, pressure! How well He could take me out of it all - in a moment - He has the power, but He leaves me there. Oh, may He help us to rest patiently in Himself at such times, not trying to read His love by the circumstances, but them, whatever they may be, through the love of that heart. This gives wondrous strength-knowing that loving heart, and not questioning the dealings of His hand.

In their bitter sorrow the sisters flee at once to the Master. No one like Him for them now. Do we know anything of this? -telling Him the trouble of the heart, the sorrow of the way? They send word, but He sets not out to their help. But all is right; they are not forgotten, nor left without His caring for them, or concerning Himself about them.

Oh, no; and if we tell Jesus, we may rest satisfied that He will undertake for us. Have you taken your needy case to Him? Then leave it with Him - that is all -how simple. Have we not sometimes seen the little child take some treasures to the mother for her to keep,. and then, in the restlessness of its mind, turn back to take them into its own hands again? And do we not too often, in the restlessness of our unbelief, carry away the need and care we have been telling out to Him? Sickness, sorrow, want, bereavement come upon us; perhaps some domestic trouble burdens us; the thing has gone on so long, it seems as though the Master heeded not. Have you "told Jesus"? Then leave it with Him, in happy confidence. This Martha and Mary found, and truly our God is worthy of the unwavering trust of the heart. He does all things well.

In the Father's dealings, He may see fit to suffer trial and pressure to remain for years, because He, in His wisdom, knows that it is exactly what His child needs. Do you ask for an illustration? I give you one that occurs to the mind at this moment. The "thorn in the flesh" to Paul. "What!" you say, "the Apostle Paul need something to keep him balanced!" Yes; he who had been up in the third heaven, and had heard things which it was impossible for human speech to utter, needed a counterpoise - something to keep the flesh in check. Perhaps you think that one who had been up there and had listened to such glorious words, might have kept straight down here ever afterward. No, Satan would make use of those wondrous revelations to puff up the flesh; so God allowed the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he "should be exalted." And the beloved Apostle "besought the Lord thrice" that it might depart from him.

"What!" you say, "could he have been in communion with the Lord when he asked a thing which it was not the will of the Lord to grant?" That is not the point for us; let us make our request known to Him, and, if it be right, we shall get deliverance; if not, like the Apostle, we shall get what will be infinitely better, the Lord's grace in the pressure, enabling us to bear it all for His glory. This will give moral elevation - bearing the trial, supported by the condescending grace of God, knowing that what His hand dispenses is good, and so giving glory and honor to His name.

"But," you say, "that is too lofty a height for me ever to attain to; how can I glorify Him in my commonplace duties which seem like domestic drudgery from Monday morning to Saturday night?" Better than that, beloved, you are where He has placed you, and that is not too common a place for glorifying His name. What says the Holy Ghost? "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Cor. 10:31. Can anything be more commonplace than eating and drinking? Surely not. And can I do this to His glory? Yes. Two persons may be sitting at the same table, one eating merely to gratify the appetite and passion, the other to keep his body in working order for the Master to use down here. So in the home circle, behind the counter, or elsewhere, His name may be honored and glorified. How would nineteen out of every twenty of us live for Him if the only way of so doing were public service? No; service is what the Master gives each one to do, whether it be to evangelize a continent, to stand behind a counter, or to sweep a crossing; only let each one of us be where He wills, and be there shining for Him.

Then saith He, "Let us go into Judea again. His disciples say unto Him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee; and guest Thou thither again?" Yes; He will not allow fear of personal safety to keep Him back now, any more than He suffered personal affection to take Him to Bethany, when it is a question as to what is for the glory of God. No thought of personal danger kept Him from being about His "Father's business." And now the moment is come, God's glory will shine

through the One who "pleased not Himself."

2. The profound sympathy of the heart of Jesus with us in all the sorrows and trials through which we pass. Had those sisters for a moment questioned the love of Jesus for them, and His sympathy with them in their sorrow, how they would be rebuked by those groans and tears! "Jesus wept." I suppose this is the shortest verse in the Bible, when one talks of verses, but oh! what it opens out to us! He is going to the grave of His friend as "the resurrection and the life," and as He goes, He weeps. What tender sympathy and grace! And He is the same today. It is true the surroundings are different, but the heart is the same "yesterday, and to-day, and forever."

He "wept." How we see the reality of His human nature! Yes; it was a perfectly human heart. He wept for the sorrow and desolation which sin had brought into the world; and He entered into it as no other could. Oh! those groans and tears! How they tell out the love and tenderness of the heart of our precious Lord Jesus! Yes; He truly loved those tried ones, and they proved it. So shall we, if we rest in the same tender, gracious, sympathizing Lord. How sad for Him to have to say to Martha, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Unbelieving heart, listen, doubt not, and thou shalt see that glory too. Hinder not the Master by unbelief.

3. His gracious condescension in linking us with Himself in the work which He is now carrying on in this world. He only does that which they are unable to perform. He allows them to roll away the stone; it is His work to raise the dead, so He speaks, "Lazarus, come forth." He stands at that open grave, the expression of God, and surely God's glory shines forth most brightly through His beloved Son.

Then "Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go." Here again they can help in the work, and can free Lazarus from the graveclothes that bind him hand and foot. So now, Jesus graciously permits us to help Him in His work with dead souls. It is true He alone can speak the word that quickens the dead, unsaved one; but He, blessed be His holy name, allows us poor, feeble things, saved by His grace, to speak a word here and there to the unsaved, and to endeavor to bring them under the power of His Word so that they may be blessed, and in our measure to assist Him in the wondrous work which He is at present carrying on.

May He enable us to enter into those marvelously blessed facts, and teach us to make them truly practical, so that we may, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, do all, even the most commonplace things of our daily life, to the glory of God. And may He also help us to understand and to realize the sympathy of Jesus for us in all we go through, and too that we may be "workers together with Him," while He leaves us here.

They Believed God

It was nearly four thousand years ago that Abraham lived. He had no child and he was old. God, however, told him that he should have a son, and that his descendants should be as numerous as the stars. This was a hard saying, but "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Rom. 4:3.

In this day of grace, God says, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Rom. 4:5.

More than 2800 years ago there was an exceeding great city called Nineveh. The wickedness of its inhabitants reached up to God, and He sent the prophet Jonah there to preach the preaching that He should bid him. So Jonah stood in the street of the city and he cried, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

That was not a pleasant preaching of grace and mercy, but a solemn one of judgment. We do not know that the Ninevites had ever before heard about the living God, though they had plenty of false gods; yet we read, "The people of Nineveh believed God" (Jonah 3:5). They heeded His warning and they were delivered from the coming judgment.

Some 1900 years ago Paul stood on the deck of a small vessel plying in the Mediterranean. He was a prisoner. A tempest was raging, and the ship was driving before the wind. There was no hope of being saved. Suddenly Paul stood forth among the crew and passengers, and told them that God had sent an angel to him, and that there should be no loss of life, but only of the ship. Incredible news! Almost too good to be true. But what did Paul add? "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts 27:25); this was faith.

Blessing through Jesus is still being offered to the sinner. "We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." 1 John 4:14. What answer will you give to the love that makes known such blessing to you? Here is the inspired answer which is recorded for us: "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us." 1 John 4:16.

Thomas ... Called Didymus

On the evening of the first day of the week-the resurrection day, that day so great with victory - there had assembled secretly, and perhaps spontaneously, as drawn together by new bonds, a little company of men. They were the disciples of Jesus. Fear of the Jews had made them close the doors, for already diversity of religious interest began to separate the true from the false, and lead the faithful minority to seek shelter from persecution.

And as thus assembled in the quiet hours of the evening, their hearts were free to dwell on the marvelous event of the morning. The Lord was risen. He had been seen and heard. The very Jesus whom they had seen nailed to the tree, and whose side was pierced, was now actually in resurrection life.

Often had He told them that He was to die and be raised again the third day, yet never had they accredited His words. But now His death was a fact, for He had been buried, as they all could witness.

Sorrow filled their hearts, for they had lost everything. The whole scene was but a desolate waste to those whose very being was wrapped up in a living Christ.

But they hear of His having risen. The hearts lately burdened now flutter with hope. His words begin to take shape in their memories. The third day had come, and with it the report of His resurrection. Could it be true? Who is to decide?

Hence the little meeting within doors. What an interesting meeting! What line did their consultation take? We are not furnished with any particulars; but while engaged in wistful deliberation, and conversing together about Him, Jesus entered-stood in their midst-and said, "Peace be unto you." Calm and calming, peaceful and peace-giving, did the risen Lord place Himself amid His assembled disciples. How full of gracious majesty!

A few hours before, these very men had all forsaken Him and fled; yet now not a word of rebuke escapes His lips. He taunts them with no unfaithfulness; He upbraids them with no ignorance. He forsakes them not, but in their very midst He proclaims peace to them. Yes, peace as the result of the battle fought and the victory won; peace made by the blood of the cross; peace, with pardon to the believer and eternal honor to the Savior; peace, the fruit of the soul travail of the Son of God, and the abiding portion of all who are His. What a salvation for such a company! What a word to burst from the lips of the risen One, as He owns them as His brethren!

"And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side," tenderly to corroborate, by tangible tokens, the veracity of His words, and evidently to identify Himself to them by proofs unmistakable.

Once more He said, "Peace be unto you," and then He sent them as the Father had sent Him. Then He breathed upon them, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." How rich an investiture!

Having peace, they were free to go now as His missionaries in blest occupation with His interests and, further, possessed of His life in the power of the Holy Ghost. Such was the result of this first meeting of the disciples after the Lord's resurrection. How filled with fruit for all ages!

"But Thomas... called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came." How was that? Why was Thomas absent at such a moment? He had never expected that Jesus would preside there, else he would surely have been present. Was self-will at work? Had he heard the report of the morning, and discredited it? Was the news too good to be true? Was the resurrection of Jesus impossible?

Anyhow, Thomas was absent from this informal meeting of his fellow disciples, and he was the loser. He missed hearing those words of peace and of liberty. He missed seeing the hands and side. He missed that first sight of their Lord, as in grace He placed Himself in the midst of His brethren. Ah, how much we may lose through a little willful neglect! It is oftentimes ruinous to despise meetings of true hearts just because they are small. The Lord may select such as spheres of rich unfoldings of Himself in His Word.

Well, the disciples tell Thomas that they had seen the Lord. He refuses to believe them. A mere sight of Jesus would not suffice for him No, unless he could put his finger into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into the side, he would not believe. So be it. The disciples had said all they could. It was outside their power to communicate faith to their unbelieving brother.

In such a case the help of man is vain. The perplexed and troubled soul must have to do personally, directly, and individually with God. "They looked unto Him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed." Psalm 34:5.

Thomas, though loud and willful, was sincere. He loved his Master, and would have died with Him in Judea at the occasion of His raising Lazarus. His unbelief was of the head, and not of the heart; and so after eight long days, the Lord, on the occasion of a similar assembly, bids Thomas to reach hither his finger, and behold His hand; to reach hither his hand, and thrust it into His side. He bids him gratify to the full his desire, and to find every satisfaction for his greatest difficulty - to discover indeed, in those unclosed wounds, those everlasting evidences of redeeming love, the complete dissolution of the doubts of unbelief. "Be not faithless, but believing."

"Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God."

Enough. Could patient grace or perfect love have done more? Impossible.

Oh, it is not that signs could not be given, or evidences produced! They are abundant. God could accomplish any external display. But if Thomas believed by seeing, they are more blessed who believe without seeing.

Israel will do the former by-and-by. We are called on to the more blessed part now. Yes, we are called on to believe apart from every evidence except the written Word of God. It suffices for God. Let it suffice for us.

"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Transportation

Ways of transportation are often difficult and wearisome, and almost always expensive. Transportation to another world will be quickly accomplished, and with ease, and no money will be required: "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself." John 14:3. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." 1 Thess. 4:16-18.

Truth Commends Itself

Revealed truth is like the light. It cannot be said to require illumination from without in order to let us know what it means; it really displays itself. You do not need a taper or a torch from man to find out the light of day. The sun, as it needs none, entirely eclipses all such artificial helps; it shines for itself and rules the day. So it is that wherever you find a man capable of seeing, the truth commends itself. He has what the Evangelist Luke calls "an honest... heart," and what other scriptures speak of as "a single eye." Wherever the truth is really brought to bear upon a man who is open to receive it as the precious light of God in Christ, they answer mutually to each other. The heart is prepared for it and desires it; and when the truth is heard, it bows, receives, and enjoys it. When the heart, on the contrary, is occupied with itself or the world, there is no truth that can possibly bend it. The will of man is at work, and where is there a more unvarying enemy of God? Therefore it is said (John 3) that no man can see or enter the kingdom of God without being born again-born of water and of the Spirit. That is, there must be a direct positive work of the Holy Ghost dealing with the soul, judging it and giving a new nature which has as decided an affinity for the things of God as the old life has for the things of the world. The Spirit acts upon the new creature, and gives intelligence, and the truth is, we may say, its natural sustenance.

The Two Rich Men

How beautifully the incidents recorded in the evangelists exhibit the workings of nature and of grace. They are short and familiar, but full of matter for the meditation of our hearts, that we may be either warned or comforted.

Uneasiness of conscience was goading the rich young ruler of chapter 18 to seek relief wherever it might be found. He loved the world and could not give it up; and yet he had religious apprehensions of a day of judgment, and owned the fact that there was a kingdom of God still to come. This is a common case: a calculating worldly heart with serious religious sentiments, all together working uneasiness in the soul. He was a sample of the thorny ground hearer. He would fain have both worlds, and yet was not sure that he had the future world. And how could he? How could such a double-minded man be stable? How could a body, the eye of which was thus evil, be full of light? His uneasiness was goading him hither and thither, and in his waverings he seeks Jesus.

Can anything be more natural? He was not a reckless man of pleasure, but a religious, calculating man of the world who could deliberately weigh his own interests for time and eternity, and make them supreme in all his reckonings.

He was, with all this, of course nothing but an old bottle (see Matt. 9:17). The new wine is therefore spilled. The doctrine of Christ is lost upon him. He goes away as he had come—a lover of the world—for the love of money keeps him apart from Jesus, and thus outside the kingdom of God.

The Lord draws the simplest moral from this incident. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" The disciples, however, are amazed at this, and say, "Who then can be saved?" And Jesus answers, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." These last words are much to be noted.

It is the way of the Spirit in Luke to group together matters for moral instruction, making that much rather his end than mere accuracy of historic time and place. After a short interval from the time of the case of the rich ruler, according to this his usual method, Luke gives us the case of the rich publican, Zacchaeus of Jericho.

They were both rich. And up to this moment they may, have had much more in common; but from this on, as far as we learn of them, they are separated forever. Solemn thought!

Zacchaeus is not under the goading of a natural conscience. Nothing of this appears in his present movement. His path was under the drawings of the Father, for he seeks Jesus (John 6). It was the secret effectual drawing and teaching of the Father, and not the goad of an uneasy conscience, that was determining his present path. This was so, as we have said, because it lay toward Jesus; as He says Himself, "Every man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me." And that path, really leading to Jesus, as really led away from the world. For Zacchaeus was now traveling a road which nature and the spirit of the world would never have taken. He forgets

himself on this journey. He was no longer the rich publican of Jericho. The young ruler, on the contrary, had never forgotten his riches. But, wealthy and important as Zacchaeus was, all that is now forgotten, and through the crowd he passes, and up the tree he makes his way, careless of every cost if he may but see the Lord.

This is very beautiful. Here is an incident, exhibiting the working of grace; the former had shown the working of nature.

And the ends of these workings are as different as the paths themselves. He lays his wealth at the feet of the Lord; the ruler had gone away full-handed as he came.

For Zacchaeus was a new bottle. He keeps the new wine. Both are preserved. The wine is not spilled; the bottle is not burst. The drawing of the Father had led the soul, and the Person of the Son filled it.

Here was a living witness of what the Lord had said-"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." Here was a rich man entering the kingdom because he was not under the mere impulse of the conscience-that could never have done it-but under the leading of God Himself, the teachings and drawings of the Father.

Unity or Union

The unity of the body is so great a truth, and is connected collaterally with so many other truths of deep and vital moment, that we need not wonder (in a day of so much ignorance of Scripture, and worldliness, as at present) if the enemy should succeed in leading many to deny and pervert it. A holy unity in the Spirit, and such it is, can be denied in more ways than one. Readiness of separation may work in some the self-will of the flesh, which cannot understand either the holiness or the unity of the Church of God, or the Spirit's presence with the body. Worldliness in others may appreciate union, for according to the world's motto (and motto for the day), "In union there is strength," but the eagerness of its tolerance will, before God, amount to unholiness, and the presence of the Spirit it must surely, practically deny, for it sees Him not, neither knows Him. If Satan be more immediately at work, there will be a holiness according to the letter of Scripture, perhaps, admitted; but unity will be so put as to shut out grace, or truth, or the Holy Ghost.

A basket of good fruit, however precious, is not the emblem by which the Church's unity could be illustrated, but the branch-bearing fruit-is rather the picture.

In vain will man essay to make that; God, and God alone, can do it.

The Valley of the Shadow of Death

An inquiry is often raised whether "the valley of the shadow of death" is death, or the world lying in the shadow of it. We believe it is the latter. If it meant death itself, "the valley of death" would have been, it seems to us, the expression used; but "the shadow" of death presents to the mind the idea of danger of death, or of what leads into it, and brings the anticipation or dread of it upon the soul. A comparison of other places where the term is used in the Psalms, makes this plain. In Psalm 44:19, the remnant of Israel speak of themselves, under the government of God, as "sore broken... in the place of dragons, and covered... with the shadow of death." So again in Psalm 107:10 and 14, when "redeemed from the hand of the enemy," they recall the mercy that reached those that sat "in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron," and that when they had cried to Jehovah, "He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death."

From these scriptures it would appear that "the valley of the shadow of death" was, to the psalmist, the path where the gloom and danger of death was especially in question, but where the protection and support of Jehovah were his comfort, so that he feared no evil, as one who would be preserved from death itself. What follows in the Psalm supports this thought.

For the believer now, the world, or rather his pathway through it, is "the valley of the shadow of death." How truly was this so to the blessed Lord! Death's dark shadow ever rested on the path He trod - especially in Gethsemane, where He says, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death." But He tasted death itself in all its bitterness, unprotected and unsupported, on the cross. The shadow of death, where His rod and staff comfort us, is all we can know, for the rest we await His coming, and not death itself.

A Wise Choice ... That Good Part

There is a "part" which the Lord Himself calls "good"; and this, be it observed, is not salvation with all its blessings; neither is it service with all its rewards.

True, salvation delivers the soul from judgment and brings it to God; salvation relieves the soul from the awful load of sin and its consequences, placing it in the favor of God and giving it to rejoice in Him; salvation sets the soul free and fits it to render a service of love and thanksgiving, as the Apostle writes in Titus 2: "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Thus, grace not only brings salvation, but it likewise teaches the denial of our ungodliness and worldly lusts. It saves, and then leads the soul in paths of holiness, enabling it to serve in the joy and liberty of redemption.

But, however "good" salvation may be, or however blessed and becoming is the service that the saved and happy soul delights to render, there is yet another "good" which lies within the reach of that soul.

In the closing verses of the 10th chapter of Luke, we find the Lord Jesus a guest at the house of a certain woman called Martha. A beautiful scene! Not that the Lord declined the invitation of Simon the Pharisee, or refused to enter the house of Zacchaeus the publican; not that He disdained the feast of Levi, with its crowd of publicans and sinners; or again that He found no shelter in the house where Peter's wife's mother lay sick of a fever. We find Him in each of these houses suiting Himself to the circumstances of each, but in this Bethany house there is an air of friendliness, of homely and holy intimacy, or repose and freedom, that is not to be met with in the others. "The ever homeless Stranger" found more than a welcome there. Within this house He could reckon on one who found it her delight to serve Him, and, in His own words, to serve Him "much" too. He could also count on that which, as I have already suggested, is better than service, and which as the story declares is now highly appreciated by Him. Mary had chosen "that good part." And what is this good part if it be not salvation, and if it be better than service?

We read that Martha "had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word." It was the position and occupation of Mary that drew forth His praise. She placed herself at His feet, and sitting there she heard His word. But it was not so with Martha. She was equally dear to the Lord, but not equally near to Him. And this made all the difference. The place we hold in personal communion with Christ determines our spiritual character, and forms our spiritual status. Martha was occupied with His service-Mary with Himself. To serve Him is right indeed, but service must subserve communion. To be ever occupied with service is to become "careful and troubled about many things"; but to abide in heart communion with the Master-to sit at His feet and hear His

word-is to make choice of "that good part, which shall not be taken away." And surely, beloved, in a day of such widespread religious activity as the present -unprecedented perhaps since the times of the apostles- when the door is widely opened of the Lord-is there not the danger of quantity rather than quality marking our services? The surface is broad, but is the character of the work proportionately deep? Are we looking for extent or reality? Is there not room for pride when we can tabulate large results? Have we grasped in our souls the truth of Luke 14:25-35: "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple"? Have we in spirit and in truth entered ourselves into such discipleship?

But then what is the secret of all this? If there be much service with little fruit that is pleasing to Him-if, as in another day, there be much sowing and little brought in that really bears the stamp of His approval-where can we find the key to that spiritual sacrifice that is acceptable to God?

Grace instructed Mary, and she discovered that key. It lay at Jesus' feet, and she accordingly laid herself there. Let us trace, briefly, the result of her career.

In John 11 we again find her "down at His feet." While her more restless sister had gone to meet the Lord on His approach to Bethany, Mary "sat still in the house" and calmly awaited the Master's call. When it sounded she "rose up hastily and went out.... She fell down at His feet," and there, may I say, found herself at home. She did not need to retire from His presence. She had learned the blessedness of being there. She could tarry beside Him and let Him unfold His tenderest thoughts and feelings. Oh! the blessedness of that seat! Oh! how rich are the unfoldings of divine love and truth to the soul that has found its abode there.

I will quote one more episode in Mary's life. In John 12 we have the crowning act of her truly acquired intelligence. The feast is spread before Him. His disciples are also present. Martha, true to her character, serves; Lazarus sits at meat; but Mary takes a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anoints the feet of Jesus, and wipes His feet with her hair, and the house is filled with the odor of the ointment. So rich a libation appeared prodigal and superfluous in the covetous eyes of Judas Iscariot. He would rather have seen the ointment turned into money and then given to the poor. Judas was a would-be philanthropist, "not that he cared for the poor," still less for the Lord, but money was his idol, and the love of it, his curse. At any rate, Mary's deeply significant action was nothing more in his estimation than a "waste." Poor man, blind as he was to all that was spiritual, how totally unconscious was he of the intense delight that this sacrifice occasioned to the Lord. "Let her alone," said Jesus, "against the day of My burying hath she kept this."

But which of His disciples had apprehended the fact of His burial? Had the beloved John or the bold and energetic Peter? No, Mary alone had matured this solemn truth, and the faith which she had gathered at His feet now shone conspicuously. She alone entered into the truth of His death and burial; and now she anoints His feet with ointment, and wipes them with the hair of her head. She lays her glory at His feet!

A beautiful history is that of Mary. On each occasion, whether in Luke 10, John 11, or 12, we find her "at His feet," and therefore the quality of her service was exceedingly rich. She had found the secret of true service. She had learned that quality is to be valued above quantity. She engaged her affections with the Lord Jesus Himself, and found her fruit from Him.

I do not seek to discountenance quantity. Far be the thought. Can we do too much? Look around on the broad fields that are "white already to harvest." Hearken to a hundred Macedonian cries that reecho in our ears! Shame upon us that our feet are so tardy and our tongues so fettered. O for energy of heart and soul in seeking the salvation of the lost multitudes around us, and for the blessing of the lambs and sheep of our Shepherd's flock. Can we not say,

"My heart is full of Christ, and longs

My glorious Master to declare;

Of Him I'd make my loftiest strains;

I cannot from His praise forbear."

But what I seek to advocate and press on myself and on all is that we should habituate ourselves to "the feet of Jesus"; to that place of self-renunciation and self-concealment; to that place of divine enlightenment and surest blessing; to that place of divine enlight-power; so that it may be less a question of giving to the poor, whatever claim they may have upon us, than one of doing it "unto Me."

If only our object be right, our service will not be wrong. If the eye be single, the whole body will be full of light, and this is needed.

The Lord give us to choose "that good part, which shall not be taken away."

The Word "Godhead" in Scripture

"For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Col. 2:9.

This verse sets forth the grand foundation truth of the essential deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. We repeat, His deity, and not merely His divinity. It is worthy of note that this is the only instance in the entire New Testament in which this word really occurs. It seems to an English reader that the same word occurs in Rom. 1:20, but it is not so. In this latter the Apostle uses the Greek word *theiotees*; whereas in Col. 2:9 he uses the word *theotees*. Now although the two words differ only by a single letter, yet we may be quite sure that the Holy Ghost had His own reason for the distinction. 'What then is the difference? We believe it to be this: In Romans 1 the Apostle is speaking of creation, and showing that the heathen ought to have learned that there was something superhuman, something divine therein. But in Colossians 2 the Apostle is speaking of the Person of the Son, and for Him he claims essential deity. "In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." He was God "manifested in the flesh"- "God with us"-very God and very man. It is remarkable that the words above referred to, namely, *theotees* and *theiotees* only occur once - the former in Col. 2:9, and the latter in Rom. 1:20. That might be rendered "deity"; this, "divinity."

The Word of God

All facts and all science must confirm the Word of God; but the Word of God does not need them to prove that itself is divine. If it did, what would become of those who understand nothing of science and history? Persons who dabble much in either one or the other, for the purpose of confirming the Scriptures, have never reaped anything but the scantiest gleanings as far as the Scripture harvest is concerned. It is another thing if a person feeds upon the Word, grows in the knowledge of the Scripture, and then is called on, in the course of duty, to take up what men say about it: he will find that there is nothing, even down to the most recent discoveries of science, which does not pay unwitting obeisance to Scripture. A believer that takes his stand on Scripture, looking up to God and using whatever means are given through the Word and Spirit of God, has the real vantage ground; his confidence is in God, and not in the discoveries or the thoughts of men. The man that is searching here below is subject to all the uncertainty and mists of this lower world. He who derives his light from the Word of God has a sun brighter than that at noonday; and therefore just as far as he is subject to it, he will not, cannot, stray. And the Spirit of God is able and willing to produce this subjection in us. We all do stray, more or less, as a fact; but the reason is not from any defect in the Word of God, or any lack of power to teach on the part of the Holy Ghost. If we err, it is because we have not sufficiently simple faith in the perfection of Scripture, and in the blessed guidance which the Spirit loves to exercise in leading us into all truth.

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Most likely this text has not been proofread. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net