

SERMONS OF W RICKARDS

by W. Rickards

Rickards' teaching on Christian living based on 1 Peter, addressing ethical conduct, spiritual growth, and practical Christianity in daily life and relationships.

10 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 00.00. Rickards, W. Articles
2. S. How to See Good Days
3. S. Motives to Holiness
4. S. Peace and No Peace
5. S. Plain Words on Justification
6. S. The Four Evangelists of Samaria.
7. S. The Government of the Father.
8. S. The Ministry of the New Covenant
9. S. The Opened Ear
10. S. The Purposes and Desires of the Heart.

00.00. Rickards, W. Articles

Rickards, W. Articles S. How to See Good Days S. Motives to Holiness S. Peace and No Peace S. Plain Words on Justification S. The Four Evangelists of Samaria S. The Government of the Father S. The Ministry of the New Covenant S. The Opened Ear S. The Purposes and Desires of the Heart

S. How to See Good Days

How to See Good Days.

"Laying aside therefore all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envyings, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the Word, that by it ye may grow up to salvation, if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good." (1 Peter 2:1-2.) As in the first chapter the flesh gets its true estimate in God's sight, so here its activities are distinctly disallowed. God having "condemned sin in the flesh," it is impossible for us to have His thoughts of it and yet tolerate those things which are manifestly its active energies. In so far as the believer allows the works of the flesh, he denies that God has condemned it on Calvary. Nor is the doctrinal assent enough; the Spirit of God commends a practical "laying aside;" for allowed evil in the heart rapidly becomes overt evil in the life. Guile, hypocrisy, and evil speakings are the outward expression of malice and envy working within. Therefore God goes to the root. The inward working and the outward works are alike revolting to God. The practical "laying aside" of both root and branches will alone clear the way for what follows - the earnest desire after that which is divinely provided for the positive growth of the soul. The newborn babe has an instinctive and laudable craving for that which is suited to its healthy development. So also we, if the flesh be indeed judged, and all its activities sternly disallowed, shall need little incitement to draw from the everflowing spring of the word of God that which His grace has so generously furnished for the growth "up to salvation" of those who have tasted of the goodness of the Lord.

There is then the "coming" to Him, the One who, cast away as worthless by men, is chosen and precious to God - His elect and precious corner-stone! To us who have believed and are living stones is that preciousness; and as a race are we chosen too, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for possession, raised up to set forth the excellencies of Him who has called us to His wonderful light, and to be a people unto God, enjoying His mercy; and as a holy priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

"Beloved," says Peter, "I exhort you as strangers and sojourners to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation" (or way of life) "honest among the Gentiles," etc. Again he warns against the energies of the flesh, which "war against the soul;" striking word of admonition indicating the deadly effect of sanctioning the flesh in its lusts. Remembering his own terrible experience of what the flesh is capable of, how could he as a shepherd of the flock of God do other than warn the beloved sheep against every activity of it? Further, the eyes of "the Gentiles" are upon us; nor do they refrain from speaking against us as evil-doers; and the will of God is, that we put their ignorance to silence. Let us take heed, then, that through our good works, themselves being witnesses, they glorify God in the day of visitation, while from nothing short of the whole scope of the works of the flesh we make manifest that we are, "total abstainers."

Next, there are political duties insisted upon. The king is supreme, and rulers are his messengers for vengeance or for praise. Not a word about political rights, nor could there be without doing violence to the character given us by the Spirit of God of "strangers and sojourners." Our political

duties are summed up in two words - "subjection" and "honour." Subjection is to be rendered to the king, whether in his own person or in his representatives; for authority is of God. Honour is to be paid to all men; - for man is the image of God. Pre-eminently, however, to the king; for he is exalted by God. Our freedom and our liberty is as God's bondsmen. Our fear is due to Him. "Happy is the man that feareth alway." (Proverbs 28:14.) Our love is due to the brotherhood.

Such as are servants - another phase of subjection - must be subject with all fear unto their masters; and how needful is the added word, "Not only to the good and gentle, but also to the ill-tempered." Can any master read this, or any one directly or indirectly exercising authority, without being forcibly impressed with the suggestive way in which the Spirit of God here commends goodness and gentleness, and deprecates ill-temper in the treatment of those who are under that authority? That which is distinctly acceptable with God is (1) doing good, (2) suffering for it wrongfully, and (3) taking it patiently; this is acceptable with God. Do you say, Who is sufficient for these things? Why it is that to which we have been called! It shone with divine lustre and lovely grace and peerless perfection in the Master, and He has left us a model that we should follow His steps. In Him was no sin, nor guile, nor reviling, nor threatening; He was the One who, accepting in all points the will of Him who sent Him, and who judgeth righteously, gave Himself up in unreserved, unqualified subjection to suffering and to shame, even unto death.

Wives also are to be subject to their husbands, and husbands to honour their wives; they are heirs together of the grace of life; their prayers are to be unhindered. If the wives have unbelieving husbands, not subject to the Word, it is an occasion for faith to display itself in seeking to win them by godly deportment, chaste conversation, and becoming fear. Their dress too, their hair and their ornaments, are none of them beneath the notice and the solicitude of the Spirit of God, who prescribes for their adorning no outward attire but that which is of the "hidden man of the heart," and for their ornament "a meek and a quiet spirit," which is priceless in the sight of God!

Finally, we are exhorted to oneness of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, tender-heartedness, and humility (or perhaps courtesy), the beautiful fruit of the Spirit among brethren in their relation to one another. No evil for evil, or railing for railing; but, being themselves inheritors of blessing, also blessing others. This is the way to go on quietly, peacefully, happily in this life, and he supports it by quoting Psalms 34:12-14. But should we be called to suffer for righteousness' sake, that also we can take happily. It is blessed thus to suffer. "Be not afraid of their fear, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts, and be always prepared to give an answer to every one that asks you to give an account of the hope that is in you, but with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that (as to that) in which they speak against you as evildoers, they may be ashamed who calumniate your good conversation in Christ." W. Rickards. (Derby).

S. Motives to Holiness

Motives to Holiness. In 1 Corinthians 6:1-20, the apostle deals with wrongs among brethren; gives warning as to the characters which would be shut out of the kingdom of God; deprecates the attaching importance to meats; and, lastly, insists upon personal purity. The course of this teaching gives occasion for the presentation of a remarkable series of motives for the exercise of those principles he presses upon the saints. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" What striking grounds are here presented for absence of litigation among brethren! what a showing cause for arrest of judgment! Causes are pending, cases are waiting for the grand assize, but, far from being those of the saints, they are those of the world and of angels, in which we shall be the adjudicators together with Christ! Again: "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." What a precious cluster is here. The apostle appeals to what the blood of Christ had accomplished. They had been washed in His own blood (Revelation 1:5); had been sanctified by blood (Hebrews 10:29; Hebrews 13:12); and had been justified in the power of that same blood. (Romans 5:9.) The washing was a personal, individual thing; the sanctification was relative, separating them from the world; the justification was Godward; each was by blood, and each was final. It had been in the name of the Lord Jesus too, not for our sakes primarily, but for His; we were but the means to an end - the glory of His name; the bowing to His rights, the owning His authority - according to that eternal purpose which was purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began. Thus also it was "by the Spirit of our God" - by the agency of Him who ever works with a view to that one only end and object, the exaltation and glory of Christ. How blessed to see the Spirit of God thus constituting us parts of that wonderful economy which shall be displayed by-and-by in glory, and using His own work already wrought in view of it as motives for that holiness which is the true and suited expression of it here. Again: "And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by His own power." Here is a new and precious motive for holiness. He is the risen Lord, and His glorified body was the pledge of theirs; these saints were going to be raised too, as surely as He was raised. And thus he says further, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?" Marvellous fact for faith - when He came they would be raised up, because God had already raised Him up, and thus have bodies glorified like His; but meanwhile the very bodies they then had were members of Christ, not of His body (another line of truth altogether), but of Himself, and to this is added also, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." What powerful motives to holiness! Who could resist them? Yet again: "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." How remarkable are these appeals. Six times over in the chapter he says, "Know ye not?" And here in this closing appeal, the strongest of all, he connects these foundation facts (1), that the believer's body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, because (2) he is not his own, but is bought with a price! Purchased with the blood of Christ, and being thus His property, having no vested rights even in our own bodies, but His right being admitted when we truly own Him Lord, the Holy Ghost makes our body His temple; He is in us, for we have received Him from God. **THEREFORE GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR**

BODY.

These seven motives to holiness - precious, powerful, and complete - may thus be clearly traced in the chapter. 1. Saints are going to judge angels and the world. 2. They are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. 3. They are going to be raised up. 4. Meanwhile their very bodies are members of Christ. 5. Being joined to the Lord, they are one spirit. 6. The saint's body is a temple of the Holy Ghost. 7. He is not his own, but bought with a price! May so weighty an appeal by the Spirit of God work in us "that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." W. Rickards. (D).

S. Peace and No Peace

Peace and No Peace.

Divine peace is a wonderful thing to him who has it, and only he knows what it is. He of all others carries a light in thickest darkness, has joy in deepest sorrow, is "calm amid tumultuous motion," quiet amid the strife of tongues, unperturbed and unruffled in the most trying hour, in the deepest waters is not overwhelmed, and in the season of Satan's angriest opposition can look up steadfastly into heaven.

Peace is a higher thing than comfort, a deeper thing than joy, a more solid thing than rest; for while here my comforts may be diminished, my joy be disturbed, my rest be broken, but my peace flows as a river. Interrupt the flow of a river, and it is a river no longer. You may dam up its waters, but you only make them stagnant; you may have widened their area, but you have only distended desolation, for their freshness and their fruitfulness depend upon the continuity of their changeless flow. Thus a river is the scriptural illustration of PEACE. "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river." Again: "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river." (Isaiah 48:18, and Isaiah 66:12.) And "the troubled sea" just as fittingly illustrates the state of those who have no peace. (See Isaiah 57:20-21.) In Isaiah 57:15-21 (Isaiah 57:1-21) we have a beautiful presentation of grace. God speaks of Himself as "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell," says He, "in the high and holy place," but He adds, "with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." What is evident here is, that God's dwelling is in harmony with His own nature. He is high and holy, and He dwells in the high and holy place. But He dwells also with him "that is of a contrite and humble spirit," for He finds there that which is suited to Himself. The highest place in heaven is dignified by the presence of Him who yet condescends to make the lowly heart His throne. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalms 51:17.) The God whom the highest heavens cannot contain is the God whom we may make our Guest, but only by ourselves getting down into the lowest and lowliest place. Thus, if we have never met Him, it is because we have never got down so low as that level of self-judgment on which He is found in grace. But when He takes up His abode in the humble and the contrite, it is in the sweetness of His love, and the tenderness of His mercy, that He may revive the spirit of His humble ones, and revive the heart of His contrite ones. How blessed to be thus humble before Him - lowly enough for the lofty One to dwell with us, contrite (or rubbed down) enough for the Holy One to revive us! The really humble are those who can never be humbled; such, in His own peerless perfection, was the Master Himself. In the next verse, God condescends to remember human frailty, and reflects that if He stay not His hand from judgment man's spirit would fail before Him, and the souls that He had made. Divine compassion is here most touchingly exhibited. Yet (Psalms 51:17) He had been justly wroth for the iniquity of their covetousness, and had smitten them. Again He had been wroth, and had hid Himself, and they had gone on in frowardness of heart. Thus He had seen Israel's sin, and smitten him for it. Again He had seen it, and had refrained from smiting. But He had still to be wroth; for Israel had only taken advantage of His hiding Himself, and their frowardness was

unchecked. Yet again will God act, and in a new way. "I have seen his ways, and will heal him." He shuts not His eyes to his sin, but He adds, "I will heal him." Marvellous grace! Thus are seen God's three ways of acting. (1) Seeing sin, wrath, and judging the sinner. (2) Seeing sin and wrath, but hiding Himself. (3) Seeing sin, and healing the sinner; leading him also, and restoring comforts unto him, etc. The first is seen in principle in the antediluvian world and the judgment of the flood. The second, in the law. The third, in the gospel of our salvation. How happy for us that we live in a day in which God commendeth His love to us by acting in the last of these ways! What wondrous grace! "I have seen his ways, and will heal him." Who can be insensible to such precious words? The One who measures the magnitude of my sin - as I never could, and views its hateful malignity with an abhorrence I have never felt, is the One who has righteously dealt with it suitably to His own glory; for, seeing the extremity and the exigency of my case, the word went forth from His lips of grace, "I will heal him." The One who knows, as none but He, the iniquity of my covetousness, and the frowardness of the way of my heart, is the One who says, "I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him." Adorable, matchless grace! All founded, we need scarcely say, in the blood of Christ.

Again: "I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and" (a second time) "I will heal him." These expressions, "him that is far off," and "him that is near," respectively bring in the purpose of God that Gentile and Jew should both receive the heritage of peace from His hand. For the former, see Zechariah 9:9-10, the One who enters Jerusalem as her King, just and having salvation, speaks "peace unto the heathen;" on the other hand, in Micah 5:2-5, the One whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting, "this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land." So also the Spirit of God by Paul, in Ephesians 2:17, says, He "came and preached peace to you which were far off" (Gentiles, as those to whom he was writing), "and to them that were nigh" (Israel his kinsmen). And, says the apostle (Ephesians 2:14), "He is our peace." So that having made peace by the blood of His cross for the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God, the One who will in a future day speak peace to the heathen, has already spoken it to us; and the One who will be Himself the peace to Israel is our peace now. It is deeply interesting in this, and many another case, to see how the Church, through grace, is in the highest way put in present possession of blessings, many and varied, which will, in another form, be the portion of earthly saints; for, indeed, "all things are yours."

"But the wicked" - solemn word of contrast - "are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." Or, as we read in Jude, "Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame." Graphic picture, drawn by the Holy Ghost, of the state of a soul without God! And at the foot of the canvas He adds but this word, as an eternal inscription, "There is NO PEACE, saith my God, to the wicked."

W. Rickards. (Derby).

S. Plain Words on Justification

Plain Words on Justification. That was a grave question that was propounded by one of the ancients to the patriarch Job more than three thousand years ago, "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" And as it has lost none of its interest by the lapse of centuries we may fittingly inquire, (1) Is there such a thing as justification with God? Evidently Bildad the Shuhite (Job 25:1-6) would have inclined to a negative answer; for he proceeds, in language not a little pathetic, "Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less mortal man, that is a reptile? and the son of Adam, who is a worm?" And if we turn to the words of the psalmist David, we find (Psalms 143:2) that he speaks in a similar strain, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." Happily we live in the meridian light of the New Testament; and as we consult its pages we are at no loss to discover the true answer to our question. That wonderful third of Romans that stops every mouth, and proves every man guilty before God, adds further, that by "deeds of law shall no flesh be justified in His sight." We are consequently forbidden to marvel that the Shuhite of patriarchal days, and the psalmist in Israel's palmier times, should alike - knowing nothing beyond the flesh and the law - conclude there was no justification before God. For us, on the contrary, how blessed it is to find that when the apostle summarily describes man's condition and guilt in the brief words, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," it is but a preparatory clearing of the ground for the gracious assertion that follows in the same breath, "Being justified freely by His grace." We read also in Galatians 3:1-29, "The Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen." And again, in Romans 8:1-39, "Whom He called, them He also justified." These then being God's words, we need not multiply proofs that there is such a thing as justification before God.

Let us now inquire, (2) Who is the justifier? In the nature of things justification involves a justifier. Who then is this justifier? Again we turn to Romans 3:1-31, and in Romans 3:26, read those blessed words, "To declare, at this time His (God's) righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." So also in Romans 8:30, "Whom He (God) called, them He also justified." God, then, is the Justifier, and the importance of this can scarcely be overstated; for whom He justifies must be justified indeed! It is no fallible work, marked and marred by human imperfection, but an altogether divine thing of incontestable and immutable value for eternity. The magnitude and grandeur of this piece of divine truth fired the heart of the apostle when he exclaimed, "It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?"

We prefer as our next inquiry, (3) Who are they who are justified? For if there be such a thing as justification, and, as we have found, God Himself the Justifier, it is of importance for us to understand whom He justifies. Again we turn to Romans 3:26, and read there the conclusive words, that He is "the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." Nothing could be more plain. It is the believer, and the believer only, whom God justifies. We do not hesitate to say that no person can possibly know what it is to be justified who is not a believer in that blessed One - the Man of Calvary once, but the Man of Glory for ever! But perhaps it will be answered, that in the next

chapter we read of God justifying "the ungodly." Perfectly true, but not in his ungodliness; for it instantly adds, "his faith is counted for righteousness," from which it is clear that the word describes his state up to the time when he became a believer, and accordingly - not as then ungodly, but as then a believer - God justified him. This word "ungodly" then describes man's state by nature, and that is fully unfolded in the fifth chapter, where three expressions are used descriptive of our natural condition. In Romans 3:6, "without strength;" in Romans 3:8, "sinners;" and in the tenth, "enemies." The first of these terms is negative, man is powerless for good works; the next is positive, he is practically an evil worker, a sinner; the last is worst of all, he has a heart whose inmost springs are at enmity with God. This was clearly proved when Christ was here on earth; for God Himself was manifest in the flesh, and dwelt among us in perfect love to man, and was hated without a cause. He was the song of the drunkard, and for His love they gave Him hatred. Such is man! Nevertheless, blessed for ever be His name, "By Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Such is God! But it is time we address ourselves to the question, (4) What is justification? Refer, please, to Romans 4:3 for God's answer to our inquiry: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Again, in Romans 4:5 : "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." And also in Romans 4:9 : "Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness." The simple answer then is that justification is judicial righteousness; in other words, God's accounting or adjudging us to be righteous before Himself - on what ground we shall see by-and-by. At present we must be clear as to the thing itself, and would emphatically impress upon the reader's mind this simple, but profoundly important truth, that justification signifies the being accounted by God and before God to be judicially righteous, which is the positive, absolute, and changeless standing of the believer now and eternally. This and this only is justification. Thus it is not merely pardon or forgiveness, which is rather of a negative character, but a positive state of accomplished and ever-subsisting righteousness in Christ before God that we are already brought into by God's own act, as the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

Here let it be noted, parenthetically, that Scripture gives no support to the thought that Christ's practical righteousness in His holy, blameless life on earth, than which nothing down here was ever so divinely perfect in moral beauty, is accredited to our account for justification. That He magnified the law, and put honour upon it in His own person, is fully admitted; but nothing found in Scripture gives countenance to the mistaken notion that this was impute to us; in other words, to the theological dogma of "imputed righteousness." The Scriptural doctrine of righteousness imputed signifies, if Scripture alone is to determine, simply and solely that we are accounted to be righteous apart from law-keeping as to the principle of it (Romans 3:21), and apart from works of any kind practically. (Romans 4:5.) It is our judicial standing, which is signified by this imputation of righteousness, and upon this ground alone, that "we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Romans 4:24); the character of it being, not that law-keeping (which was never really required of Gentile), or other good works done by Christ, are put to our account, which would be to make the life of Christ a vicarious thing, and thus utterly to disturb and distort His relations to God - but that as to sin and death and judgment, "as He is" (the glorified Man in the presence of God), "so are we in this world." This is the scriptural doctrine of the imputation of righteousness, and beautifully exhibits the divine character of our justification.

Further, let us inquire, (5) What is it by which we are justified? Romans 4:25 teaches that Jesus our Lord was raised for our justifying; Romans 5:1, that we are justified on the principle of faith; and, Romans 5:9, that we are justified in the power of His blood. Each of these verses helps us to gather up an answer. In its intrinsic character our justification is according to the value of the blood of Christ to God; by that alone are we justified Godward; and according to its priceless worth is the character of our acceptance and standing in His holy presence. But looked at manward, it is by faith; 1:e. we get it on that principle and not on the principle of works. And practically we are not, and cannot be, justified until faith has been exercised by us. Thus we read in the peculiarly incisive language of Romans 4:5, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Accordingly Abraham, undistinguished for works but pre-eminent for his faith, is presented as the pattern of a justified man. Again, it is in direct connection with resurrection - the resurrection of Christ. He was raised, we read, for our justification; and unless we have part in His resurrection we are not justified. God is our Justifier, and the risen Christ in His presence is our representative in justification, the expression of that state of ever-subsisting accomplished righteousness in which we are set as God's justified ones in virtue of His death. (2 Corinthians 5:21.)

Lastly, let us ask, (6) What are the results of it? The verses we were just now looking at supply the final answer. First, our sins (offences) are all gone; for the One who was thus raised had been delivered for them; 1:e. on account of them and for their putting away, and He having been raised up they can no longer have a place before the God who has righteously dealt with them, that He might be just, and yet have the joy of being Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. Second, having been justified, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Peace is eternally established. between us and Himself! Third, "Being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." The first has to do with the past, for my sins were blotted out by His blood; the text with the present, for it is now that I have peace with God; and the last with the future, for the wrath is the wrath to come; and I am assured, on divine testimony, that I am so cleared before God, and so accepted and established in love, that I am entitled to "have boldness in the day of judgment." (1 John 4:17.)

How wonderful in every point of view is our justification before God! The Lord give us a truly scriptural apprehension of it, "to the praise of the glory of His grace wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." W. Rickards. (Derby).

S. The Four Evangelists of Samaria.

The Four Evangelists of Samaria. The ancient histories preserved in the Old Testament, are not only full of fitting instruction for saints as to the ways of God in discipline, but are often remarkable illustrations of His grace to the world. And not infrequently are they so singularly so, that we cannot but conclude that God permitted the events and inspired the record with that special object. We venture to suggest that the siege of Samaria is a salient instance. (2 Kings 6:7)

Let us trace the intensely interesting narrative. A famine was raging inside the city because of the siege without. In other words, there was an active and powerful enemy outside, and a grievous lack of resources within. It is exactly the state of the natural man, one who is unsaved. Bad enough is it to be under the attack of a foe, vigilant and unrelenting! how much worse to be without resources! Not only powerless to inflict a blow, but unable to bear an assault from the hosts arrayed against us. What a famine it was! Tender women, each of them mothers, confederating together to take the lives of their children, and when one victim had been cooked and eaten, its mother the next day, exasperated because the child of the other was withheld, and the cannibal dish she had looked forward to not forthcoming, appealing then to the king for a redress he was too unnerved to give her! Again we say, What a famine was this, effacing from women the very attributes of their sex - gentleness, tenderness, and love of their offspring! And yet is there not an even more terrible famine raging this moment - a famine of the word of God! Perhaps we shall be told that this is far from the truth; for never was there such a profusion of Bibles in use as now, every year increasing the number of those which issue from the press. True; but the question is not to what extent the word of God issues from the press, but to what extent it enters the human heart. There was corn and flour enough and to spare outside at this time, but not a grain could be found inside the beleaguered city. And so is it in the antitype; the word of God is multiplied without end but, dear reader, how much of it is hid in thine heart (Psalms 109:11), so that, should there be a prolonged attack of the adversary, there shall be no lack of divine resources wherewith to sustain it? Alas! in every unsaved soul there is a famine of the word of God; and there is moreover the active enmity of Satan without answering to the two things which afflicted Samaria at that terrible crisis.

2 Kings 6:1-33 closes in the utter despair that had come upon the heads' of the people. 2 Kings 7:1-20The seventh opens as with a trumpet call, with a message of mercy from the Lord: "Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord." Things being at their very worst, God comes forth to do His best. Oh, how like the cross! When man had proved himself not only to be incorrigibly bad, but to be bereft of all resources, "without strength," and taken captive by the devil at his will, it was at such a moment that God came upon the scene, finding in the deep and dire extremity of the case a coveted opportunity, and a fitting platform for bringing into display the glory of His precious and abounding grace. Surely it is this abundant mercy which is betokened in the way in which His prophet was charged to announce glad tidings to guilty Israel, the famine-stricken and closely-besieged men of Samaria. How truly it indicates that God has resources inconceivable to us, and that we know "not what a day may bring forth!" Had the occupants of the harassed city

been asked as to the next day, would they not have replied, with mournful wail, "Tomorrow shall be even as this day, and worse"? But what a matchless hidden resource, what a male of might, what a Man in reserve, God had by Him in the person of Christ, before all worlds blessed for ever; more than fulfilling now for the hungry soul what was then proclaimed to the hunger-bitten citizens of despairing Samaria, "Thus saith the Lord; tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel in the gate of Samaria." These were the glad tidings for the starving men and women and perishing children of the apparently doomed city. Could anything be finer than this magnificent announcement, which the prophet Elisha had been charged to convey by the God against whom they had so sinfully offended, a proclamation of the abounding supplies which He would pour into their lap on the morrow - in a word, the Lord's salvation. Like their fathers at Pi-hahiroth, they had but to stand still and hold their peace, for the Lord would fight for them. Most emphatically was this announced under the distinct authority of His name: "Hear ye the word of Jehovah; thus saith Jehovah." Did they but believe it, it could not fail to give instant relief to their over-wrought and anguished hearts. It would be a signal then for the rising of that dense dark cloud which had so long enveloped their spirits, converting the tomorrow of their dread and despair into a day to be watched for as a desired haven of peace and plenty. But if there was no faith in Jehovah's testimony, the dark pall would continue to cast its heavy folds over them, their benighted today would be unrelieved by hope, and their dreaded tomorrow unbrightened by a single ray of light. To faith, on the contrary, the harrowing scene of sorrow, suffering, and death would be illuminated with the presence and the word of Israel's God, Jehovah of hosts. And mark - the wondrous announcement was weighted with no restrictions or conditions. Like the gospel of our salvation, it was good news from a Saviour-God that He had entered the scene to meet their lamentable case, according to the deep compassions of His blessed heart, and to effect a complete deliverance for them, as unexpected as it was unasked. How this was received we are not informed, save as to one man, one of the nobles of the kingdom, and a courtier, who answered the man of God with derision. God would have to make windows in heaven before He would bring that about, was the nature of his unbelieving retort. But the prophet was equal to the occasion, being led to make instant answer: "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." The issues of the gospel are here distinctly before us - abundant blessing declared unconditionally; believed in, bringing instant relief, and lighting up all the horizon of the future with gladness; refused, only adding to present misery the certainty of future judgment. Four leprous men are now seen at the entering in of the city. We are not told whether they had heard anything of the prophet's word from heaven or not. But they own with deep anguish their desperate case. Why should they sit there until they die? If they enter the city, it is to die; if they sit still, they will die. Why not give themselves up to the enemy? Peradventure their lives will be spared; and if not, they do but die. Surely it were better to be slain by the hand of the foe than to waste away ignobly by slow starvation. So they creep forth in the twilight hour for the purpose of surrendering to the enemy. What a striking lesson for unbelieving hearts! Their wretchedness drove them to trust their enemies; man's deeper misery fails to induce confidence in God. They cast themselves into the arms, as it were, of a powerful and proved adversary, but man will not trust the One who has demonstrated His precious love by every proof it were possible for even Himself to give! How faithless, how unbelieving is poor, wretched man, who, in spite of the entreaties and the evidences of His mercy, His long-suffering, and His forbearance, is utterly without confidence in a God who is love. Regarding Him as his enemy, man will not trust the One

who can alone bless Him, and who waits upon him in his abject penury with untold mercies for eternity; while these poor lepers, who had a real and mighty enemy in Benhadad and his hosts, nevertheless trusted him, and in result made the wonderful discovery, in answer to the confidence of their hearts - "When they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, no man there!" Not an enemy to be found; no, not one! All that were against them gone; every foe vanished; not a hand uplifted to bar their progress. Nor was that all. From one end of the camp to the other, nothing but a profusion of spoil met their astonished gaze. They enter a tent and feast to repletion, and with new-found strength - carry forth silver and gold and raiment, which they hide for future need; and again they do the same, as much as they would - monarchs of all they survey! Out of the eater has come forth meat, honey - out of the carcase of the lion. What a wondrous reverse of fortune! starvation exchanged for satiety; anxiety and dread of the foe replaced by the discovery that the enemy was gone, and all his treasure was strewn at their feet, spoils of an adversary they had never encountered, a fortune theirs for which they had never toiled! How lovely and how perfect an outline of the grace which bringeth salvation, and of the matchless way in which God acts for His own glory when He delivers from going down into the pit. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Syria being in the ascendant, these loathsome objects of unutterable misery might have fittingly concluded on the forfeiture of their lives to Benhadad; but God had interposed when hope had expired, all being apparently lost, and destruction dogging their steps. The hand of Jehovah was uplifted; with His finger He just troubled the atmosphere, causing the Syrian host to hear a noise as of an approach of armies upon their flanks, and thus in the same twilight hour that the four despairing men came to the end of themselves, saying, as it were, like Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," God dispersed the foe to a man, like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, so that not a foot or a finger opposed their way of life, liberty, and blessing! They found a feast to begin with (Luke 14:16) for present necessity, and a fortune to follow (Ephesians 1:3) for their permanent endowment. Oh, what a God, what a wonder-working God, is ours! But the blessing frightens them by its immensity; God had given them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. All around was profusion of treasure greater than they could ever appropriate, and they spake to one another saying, "We, do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace; if we tarry till the morning light some mischief will come upon us," reminding us of what we read elsewhere, "necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" Accordingly "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;" in a word, they became evangelists! Impelled by the magnitude of their own blessing, and the discovery of its boundless extent spreading out on every side for "whosoever will," as it were, fields "white already to harvest," they re-enter the doomed city now as heralds of divine mercy, announcing to "the king's household" who are perishing with hunger (like those who know not the profusion of blessing waiting: the appropriation of faith), that the siege is raised, and more than heart could wish is within their very reach! They succeed at length in getting the ear of the king; to him the news is too good to be true; he hugs his sackcloth afresh, and (reasoning as he does instead of believing) nothing better than sore misgivings of greater evil fill his soul. His retinue doubt and fear, anon they hope, and at length they try if it can be true. And what a discovery eventually reveals itself to them - all the way to Jordan nothing but peace and plenty, bounty and blessing, for every one who has faith to quit the city of destruction and death for the open plains of God's manifested intervention in goodness; "all the way was full of garments and

vessels;" yes, all the way to Jordan!

Thus the word of the Lord was fulfilled as to His mercy. Fine flour and barley were sold in the gate of Samaria at plenty price, and the very haste and excitement of the people in their joy of heart at such a deliverance was the means of fulfilling upon the king's aide-de-camp the sentence pronounced by the prophet. He saw the bounty and the blessing of the people, but tasted it not; like Dives, lifting up his eyes in hell, beholding Lazarus exalted to Abraham's bosom, but not even a drop of cold water alleviating the depth and intensity of his own eternal misery. Thus was the word of the Lord fulfilled also in judgment. What a graphic picture of abounding grace to the believer and of inevitable judgment to the derider of God's salvation; not "one jot or one tittle" of God's word failing, but all brought to pass as the prophet of Jehovah had spoken. In conclusion, may we remember, dear reader, with solemnized but adoring hearts, that though a false alarm, as men speak, the commotion of a breath of air by the finger of God, may suffice to overthrow the enemies of His people, only the real endurance by the Son of His love of relentless judgment due to us, was sufficient for the blotting out of a single sin. "Oh 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 for ever. Amen." W. Rickards. (Derby).

S. The Government of the Father.

The Government of the Father.

"And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." (1 Peter 1:17.) This passage introduces us to the government of the Father, which, it may be observed, is not exactly the same thing as the government of God. The latter has more direct reference to the earth and the world - that economy of things from which we are morally delivered by the death and resurrection of Christ, that scene in which God's throne has been usurped by Satan, and where the "rights of man" have displaced the rights of God. But if men of the world refuse Him His place of government as God, ought not we as saints with ready hearts so much the more to make space for the government of the Father? In 1 Peter 1:14 we get the beautiful term the Spirit of God uses in speaking of those who answer to His word; viz., "children of obedience." All such will be found calling on the Father. He, in short, who has the Spirit of adoption, cries, "Abba, Father." Well, the Father holds in His hand the sovereign administration of the affairs of His family, and grace and government go along together. It is ever so; for God is sovereign, and He must be. Because through grace God's grace is so precious to us, we are in danger of losing sight of His governmental dealings - this government of the Father. In the present day, the decay of filial piety and of reverence for parents has told upon us seriously, and those marks of the last days which Paul describes to Timothy - "disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection" - are becoming more and more pronounced; so that, even in the natural relationship, children rarely render, and parents as rarely expect, the honour and reverence which are not only morally becoming, but which God accounts to be due from one to the other. In result parental government is relaxed, and often the merest semblance of it prevails even in the families of believers.

Accordingly in divine things the government of the Father is little recognized or understood. The thought of the Father has carried with it, and rightly so, the blessedness of a known relationship of the highest character, which blessedness has been enjoyed according to the degree in which the Spirit has been ungrieved and the affections divinely engaged; but yet in connection with this how little place has been given to the direct government of the Father in that peculiar sphere which is constituted by the saints in their relationship of children. To many such the very thought of government would savour of legality, and possibly be refused as anomalous. But it is an ever-abiding principle, that "the righteous Lord loveth righteousness;" and though grace be regnant now it is true, yet is it still further true that "grace reigns through righteousness." While therefore our souls hold fast to the blessedness of this relationship in respect to the renewed affections, we must no less recognize that it demands of us a wholly surrendered will. If it be true that "mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have embraced each other," then what God hath joined together may not be put asunder, grace and government may not be severed. When the loving heart and the broken will keep company together, the Father will assuredly find His delight in each. But He is no respecter of persons; all man's pretensions must give way; He respecteth no man's person, but judgeth according to every man's work. "His eyes

behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The Lord trieth the righteous." (Psalms 11:4-5.) What then? Then falls upon the opened ear the weighty exhortation, "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

What a mighty motive have we had before us He who has called us has called us to the relationship of children; the Holy Ghost seeks to fashion us as "obedient children;" the children call upon the Father, who respects not our persons, but governs according to our works and ways within His family circle, administering there His own blessed will, that we may give no place to ours. What an appeal this makes to us to walk softly, retiringly, meekly, with guarded footsteps, giving no place to the will of the flesh! In God's government of the earth He is met by Satan's power as god of this world, and by the men of the world carried along in the strong current of utter godlessness. But the Father in His governmental dealings with His children is - alas, how often! - met with the flesh in us - unjudged, uncurbed flesh - the allowance of which is seen in the working of the natural will, which is totally unfruitful toward God, and can only chafe under His government. What marvel if, when this is allowed, the Father has to lay His chastening hand upon His child! Whom He loves He chastens, that He may not condemn with the world. And when the exercised heart has been fittingly broken down before Him, how graciously, in forgiveness of His child, does He remove His afflictive hand, and nothing remains but to reap in lasting result "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." (Note the word.) But in the words, "Forasmuch as ye know," we have coupled with this exhortation of Peter the divine basis of the ways of the Father with His children; viz., that we are redeemed with the precious blood of God's immaculate Lamb - the One who from before the foundation of the world was fore-ordained for this bloodshedding, but now is risen and glorified! Blessed ground upon which the Father claims from us the allegiance of beloved children, that He has redeemed us at the mighty cost of the blood of that spotless Lamb, who from all eternity was the Son of His love!

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." (1 Peter 1:22) Their souls were purified in obeying the truth; this was light, divine light, illuminating their souls; their hearts were purified by faith; and now the apostle exhorts to love, that other thing which in Scripture God Himself is said to be. Their souls were purified, they obeyed the truth, and had genuine love to the brethren, but he urged them to it afresh with purity and with fervency. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God;" it is of His nature, and comes from Him. Thus, when it flows forth from our hearts, it should have for its special objects those who are the special objects of His own love; and when in purity and in fervency, it is only the more like His. For we are born of God by the incorruptible seed of His own word, which liveth and abideth for ever; while, on the contrary, all flesh is before God as transitory as the grass, and all its glory as fading and as fugitive as the flowers of the field!

"But Thy compassions, Lord, to endless years endure, And all Thy people ever find Thy word of promise sure." W. Rickards. (Derby).

Sin existing in the world, to exalt oneself is ministering to it. It is being far from God morally.

S. The Ministry of the New Covenant

The Ministry of the New Covenant.

2 Corinthians 3:6. That God has not put us under covenant need scarcely be affirmed, yet that in some way or other we get new covenant blessing will scarcely be denied. Speaking generally, any terms by which God sets man in relations of a definite character with Himself may be called a covenant. But Scripture speaks especially of three. The "everlasting," that of the bruising of the woman's seed, and the final overthrow of the power of evil; the "old," which was a covenant of works, and thus conditional, which had, however, grace mingled with it, and which was ordered at Sinai; and the "new," which is purely of grace, and thus unconditional. This last is, in Hebrews 8:8, distinctly seen to be one that has to be made "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people, and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that He saith, A new covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." But when we turn to Hebrews 10:1-39, we find this quotation from Jeremiah 31:1-40 summarized in these words: "I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more;" and this is distinctly constituted a part of the blessing of Christian believers. So that while it is not made with us, but with the two houses of Israel, we are participants in the blessings of this new covenant, though evidently neither put, in a forensic sense, under this nor any other.

Now, the Lord spoke of the new covenant as in His blood, and the apostle, in Hebrews 13:1-25, speaks of "the blood of the everlasting covenant," which it is clear was, as much as the other, the precious blood of Christ. The basis, and the only basis, of all unconditional blessing is thus exhibited in connection with these two covenants. God's original promise of blessing to man through the bruised Seed of the woman, and which embraces in its scope all the blessing, of whatever kind, that has or shall come to man in all ages, and the specific blessing which shall by-and-by be enjoyed by Israel and Judah, and by that re-united nation only, are alike unconditional, and could be unconditional because alike founded on the infinite virtue and eternal efficacy of that blood concerning which the Lord said, "This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many." Thus, whenever we partake of the cup, having the remission of our sins, having the sense of their forgiveness so that there is no remembrance of them any more between God and us, having His law in our inward parts, and God a known God, that cup is the pledge of these new covenant blessings, and the blood which it symbolizes is the blood of that new covenant, that blood which is the basis of God's righteousness in grace now, and in glory hereafter.

It is consequently not a little important, inasmuch as to most minds covenant and conditions go along together, and conditions imply competency to fulfil conditions, that we should clearly see that, as believers in Christ, we are not judicially set under any kind of covenant, or under conditions of a covenant character. On the other hand, it is happy for us to observe that we have the blessings which the new covenant, when established, will bring to Israel, every one of them already ours, received from Christ in glory! The apostle could fittingly speak of himself as an able or competent minister of the new covenant; for while it is not yet established, because the veil is upon Israel's heart, it is by anticipation (for all things are ours) ministered to the Church of God. And this is really the character which the gospel takes in the 4th chapter; viz., Paul's ministration of the unconditional blessing of the new covenant to the Gentiles, and which glad tidings, if hid, were hid where Satan had cast a veil of moral blindness over his votaries; but where received, was because God, who spake light out of darkness, had shone into hearts for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Referring to Hebrews 3:1-19, he speaks of those to whom he wrote as Christ's epistle ministered by the apostle, the writing of the Spirit of the living God, not, as of old, upon stone tables and ordained by angels, but on the fleshy tablets of their hearts. And the apostle had confidence before God about this; for, disclaiming personal competency for such service, he avows his competency to be of God, who had made him a competent minister of the new covenant, not of letter, but of spirit. Then rising higher, with one inspired touch he marks the contrast between the two things; the letter condemns, but the Spirit giveth life - thus bringing forward the Spirit of God objectively, to whom he returns in Hebrews 3:17, after the digression of Hebrews 3:7-16, which form a parenthesis, and at which we will now look for a little.

We have here what constitutes the ministry of the new covenant as contrasted with the old. The latter, it is admitted, "began with glory" (see new translation), for it began when Moses' face shone so brightly that the children of Israel could not bear to look upon it. But this was after he had smashed the first tables in holy (may we not say judicial?) indignation, and formed the second in his character as mediator, receiving these written upon with the finger of God on the ground of redemption foreseen. Thus, when he came down this time among the people, he carried the law in his arms and the grace in his face. (Compare 2 Corinthians 4:6.) But the latter was a flash of glory they were unprepared for, for men in the flesh are more at ease under law than under grace. But the veil was not only necessary on their part, seeing they could not bear the glory of the mediator, but on God's part, so that they "should not fix their eyes on the end of that" which in Christ is annulled. (See Hebrews 3:13-14.) The apostle then is speaking in contrast. He does not here say that the old covenant was glorious, but that the glory it was introduced with was merely temporary; and even that was too much for Israel; moreover the flash of glory it began with did not alter the fact that it was a ministry of death. The ministry of the new was that of a life-giving Spirit, and it subsists in glory, having a glory that shall never be done away. Another contrast is between the ministry of condemnation, which had a measure of glory, as we have seen, and the ministry of righteousness which abounds in glory. Thus the former covenant ministered condemnation and death, but God glorified it in grace (on account of mediatorship, and in connection with the person of the mediator) with a measure of temporary glory accompanied with a veil. But for us the new covenant is a ministration of the Spirit. (His person, His gifts, His operations) and of righteousness; is crowned with immeasurable or surpassing glory; and is without a veil either upon our hearts or

upon the face of the Christ who is our Mediator, and the true Moses gone into the presence of the Lord. For, be it remarked, when Moses "went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he took the veil off until he came out." (Exodus 34:34.) Typical there of Christ surely, but also of our own blessed place and portion now in Him; for there is no veil upon our hearts (alas! there is upon Israel's), and there is no veil upon our faces either, any more than there is upon Christ's, when we go in before the Lord. So, also, when Israel shall turn to the Lord, there will be no longer any veil - they will find it is taken away.

There the parenthesis ends, and two things follow connected with Hebrews 13:6, and which form a corollary to our subject; viz., the liberty of the Spirit which His presence, unless He be grieved and restrained, will certainly secure - a thing totally foreign to the law, which only wrought bondage; and secondly, transformation, equally unknown under that covenant. There could be no transformation in the absence of a transforming object. That object could only be a glorified Christ; the Spirit of God could present no other. Beholding whom (having the face upturned like a burnished mirror to Him upon whose face is no veil, but the glory of God shining) His image is produced in us, such transformation from glory to glory being by the Lord the Spirit.

This, then, constitutes Paul's ministry of the new covenant, its present ministrations to the Church before it is yet made; viz., that of the Holy Ghost and of divine righteousness in immeasurable and unending glory from a glorified Christ on high; liberty in the presence of the Holy Ghost, and no veil either on our hearts or on the face of Christ, beholding whom we are transformed by that same Spirit practically into His image from glory to glory! In the higher character it has to us it evidently reaches to the reproduction of a glorified Christ in His saints on the earth; that is to say, not our standing before God in glory, but the direct effect of the glory upon our state here. May the fruit of this wonderful ministry be more and more seen in us, to His present and eternal praise. W. Rickards. (D).

S. The Opened Ear

The Opened Ear. When discoursing with His disciples after His resurrection, the Lord said "that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning" Him, indicating the concurrence of testimony to be found in that threefold division of Old Testament Scripture as to Himself. The subject at the head of this paper will furnish us an instance of this concurrent testimony which we may profitably examine and compare. In Exodus 21:1-36 we have a deeply-interesting Jewish ordinance, and the very first that was enacted in Israel of a judicial character after the law of the Ten Commandments had been promulgated at Sinai, and Jehovah had declared His will as to the altar of burnt-offering. It established that the Hebrew servant who should be bought must fulfil his prescribed term of service, and was afterwards entitled to his liberty; but should he have acquired during his servitude a wife and children, these he must surrender to his master, going out alone. In case, however, his affection to his master, to his wife and to his children, precluded his doing so, provision was made by Jehovah for the Hebrew servant to indulge the yearnings of his heart, but at the expense no less of a painful ordeal than of a perpetual service. It was also enacted that he should voluntarily and emphatically make public declaration of the fact and the grounds of his refusal to be manumitted. His master in presence of the judges should then transfix him with an awl through the ear to the door or door-post, by which procedure his service would be constituted a perpetuity. Who can fail to observe in this striking and significant enactment a beautiful type of that incomparable Servant whose meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him, and to finish His work? - that blessed One whose service to His Father (or master), to His church (or wife), and to His earthly people (or children) will in its unfading and unforgotten moral glory be the eternal expression of a love to Him, to us, and to them, which is and which shall be as perpetual as it is profound - "Love that no tongue can teach, Love that no thought can reach; No love like His!"

If we now turn from "the law of Moses" to "the Psalms" (see Psalms 40:1-17), we find again the opened or digged ear of this devoted Servant. The subject of the psalm is the devotedness of Christ to God: "Blessed is the man" (literally, it has been said, the strong man) "that maketh Jehovah his trust." Though the poor and the needy One, He was mighty to save, and strong to deliver; but is depicted here as the sorrowing, suffering Witness bent upon doing the bidding of God, in the body which had been prepared Him, and waiting patiently upon Jehovah-Elohim, delighting to do His will, whose law was in the midst of His bowels! What a picture is this of the perfect Servant, the Sent-one of God! And in the midst of it we read that beautiful exclamation that forms the divine answer to the exquisite type of Exodus 21:1-36 - "Mine ears hast thou opened" (or digged).

Again, if we add to these the completing testimony of "the Prophets" (see Isaiah 50:4-7), we get a yet fuller delineation of the devotedness and self-abnegation of this peerless Servant - the Servant of God's counsels, of the Father's will, and of Jehovah's glory, but also, of our necessities here, and of our blessedness when we are perfected! "The Lord God," He says, "hath given me the tongue of the learned that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he

wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned" (perhaps more properly learner, compare Isaiah 8:16, disciples, and Isaiah 54:13, children). "The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." Surely no language could more touchingly express how truly He had emptied Himself to become the dependent Man upon earth! And here we may fittingly remark how suitably the ear, being that organ through which commands are received, and instruction acquired, is in the Scriptures referred to made the subject of the ordinance of Jehovah and of the prophetic teaching of David and Isaiah concerning God's faithful Servant, - the Lawgiver, the Psalmist and the Prophet thus uniting their testimony concerning Him who was to come "to do thy will, O God." Nothing could be more beautiful than the attitude of the Lord Jesus as listening morning by morning with the opened ear of a subject will, to take instructions from His Father ere He went forth to fulfil the assiduous service of each recurring day!

Thus also may we understand what otherwise might seem inexplicable, His reluctance or refusal to do at one time what He really does shortly afterwards, three instances of which in John's gospel will probably occur to the reader. In the second chapter His mother, as they sit together at the marriage in Cana, says to Him significantly, "They have no wine." In His answer He affirms, "Mine hour is not yet come." But we seem to gather from the narrative that there was but a short break, a trifling pause, before He wrought the kindly miracle that manifested forth His glory. Also in the seventh chapter, when His brethren suggest His going up to the great feast of tabernacles, "Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready," indicating surely to us that while they gave the rein to their own will, doing as they listed, He of the opened ear waited upon the will of Another. So He abides in Galilee; but a day or two afterwards, probably to be in time for the closing day, which was the feast of ingathering, He goes up to Jerusalem; and what a message He is charged to convey! what an announcement He makes (Jehovah having visited His people) had there but been opened ears to hear! Again in John 11:1-57, after receiving from the beloved sisters of Lazarus the pathetic message concerning the sickness which had invaded the home in Bethany, He abides two days still in the same place where He was. "Then after that" He gives the unexpected word to His disciples, "Let us go into Judea again." May we not say that when the touching appeal from the sorrowing family reached Him He had received no word from the Father, and consequently, resisting the sympathetic impulses of His love, He moves neither hand nor foot? As the girded Servant both hand and foot must wait orders, to be received through an opened ear, and not until then must He allow the generous dictates of a loving heart to bring them into activity, even on behalf of ever so beloved an object. Who then could portray what that tender nature of His sustained at knowing the sickness of His friend and the anguish of the sisters, so affectingly conveyed in the brief word they had sent Him? Who could describe what He felt in His deep human compassion and sympathy, as with omniscient eye He followed the ravages of the disease up to its culmination in death, tarrying throughout the whole two days, rooted, as it were, to the place where He was, intently expecting the word on which He waited? At length He gets this morning note; the Lord Jehovah wakened His ear to hear as the learner, and at length He gives the signal for departure.

Now, however, arises another thing. His disciples, in the timidity of unbelief, bring in their human fears, and would dissuade Him from returning to Judea; there is a lion in the way! How full of divine

wisdom and of heavenly light is the ready reply with which He not only silenced their objections but banished their anxieties! "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world, But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." And thus as He would not be induced by the precious, tender love of His human heart to move towards Judea until He had Jehovah's word in His ear, so on the other hand will He not be deterred from returning thither by any apprehensions of Jewish enmity or Satanic opposition, The will of Him who sent Him had fallen upon His opened ear, and it is enough.

What a lesson in subjection to the Father's will do these scriptures convey to us if we had only His teachableness of spirit! He is unmoved by His mother's suggestions, by His brethren's entreaties; and by His own heart's promptings; and equally is He unhindered by the dissuasions which emanate from His bosom disciples. As the perfect Servant, in absolute submission of will and perfect self-surrender, He waits upon Jehovah's word and having that, He treads the hitherto untrodden path of a perfectly obedient and dependant man. He who was Jehovah's fellow gave Himself unto suffering and servitude, and hid not His face from shame and spitting. Precious, peerless Saviour!

If, in conclusion, we may add a word as to His distinct characters of service to us, three well-known scriptures will bring its past, its present, and its future character divinely before us. In Hebrews 10:1-39 the apostle refers to Psalms 40:1-17, a scripture we have already looked at, where the words "mine ears hast thou opened" are quoted according to the Septuagint, "a body hast thou prepared me." In that body He bare our sins, and by His death - delivered us from the wrath to come. He was serving us there; for this was the will of God, that through such service He should glorify Him, and take spoils from the enemy. In John 13:1-38, before going away, knowing the Father had committed everything to His hand, He disinvests Himself, and becomes the girded Servant of our present daily need, in the same act rebuking His disciples for their unseemly strife (compare Luke 22:24), and setting before them what His ministrations on behalf of His saints should be during the long night of His enforced absence, in which also He would be a pattern for our care and love to one another. And lastly, in Luke 12:1-59, where He gives every true saint the character and the credit of being a watcher for His return, He lovingly cheers their hearts with the hitherto unheard of disclosure, that He had a deeply-cherished purpose to fulfil in the glory, even that of making us to sit down to meat, and coming forth Himself even then also as the girded Servant of those whom He will delight to serve for ever! May the reader and the writer of these lines have the understanding so opened by Him of the opened ear, that through grace we may gather up this lesson from the law of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets concerning Himself, that, being imbued with the like spirit, we may exhibit more of His own self-abnegation to the glory of our Master and God! W. Rickards. (Derby). The Gospel of John. The more we examine the gospel of John, the more, we shall see One who speaks and acts as a divine Person - one with the Father alone could do, but yet always as One who has taken the place of a servant, and takes nothing to Himself, but receives all from His Father. "I have glorified Thee:" "now glorify Me." What language of equality of nature and love! But He does not say, And now I will glorify myself. He has taken the place of man to receive all, though it be a glory He had with the Father before the world was. This is of exquisite beauty. J. N. Darby.

S. The Purposes and Desires of the Heart.

The Purposes and Desires of the Heart.

Genesis 6:5-7. The Spirit of God has been pleased to state two grounds upon which God brought the judgment of the flood upon man. First, because of what he had done - "The wickedness of man was great in the earth;" and further on we read that this had assumed the twofold form of corruption and violence, those parent sins of Genesis 3:1-24; Genesis 4:1-26, which will find their full consummation in the day of the Lord, the former in Jerusalem and the antichrist, and the latter in Babylon and the beast. Second, because of what he was - "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually;" or, as the margin reads, "The purposes and desires of his heart" were such. On account of these two things, then, "it repented the Lord that He made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart." How little are we impressed with the degree to which the heart of God is affected by the sin of His creatures! Now, after the flood, when man was about to get a new start on the earth, after having been sheltered for a hundred and fifty days from judgment, from Satan, and from the world, what does God say? (Genesis 8:21.) Has His estimate of man risen? Has His judgment become modified? Not in the least. He utters not a word about man's conduct, for as yet no space had been given for it to be manifested under His new conditions. But as to the deeper question we read, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." He who "searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts" (1 Chronicles 28:9), needs no waiting for their doings; for He knoweth what is in man, and that He cannot commit Himself to him. But there is here a point of deepest interest; viz., that because of what He saw in man, or, if you please, in spite of it (see margin), He declares that He will not again smite the earth any more for man's sake. And why this comforting word, this assuring promise, as undeserved as it was unsought? The answer is surely obvious to every student of the word; it was simply and solely because of the incoming between Himself and man of all that was signified in the altar and the holocaust of Noah. The first erection on the typically new earth was an altar unto God, probably the earliest ever constructed, and upon this a mighty sacrifice, whole-burnt offering, ascended to Him, definitely referring God's heart to the excellency and the efficacy of Christ's person and work. He is met, as it were, on the threshold of the renewed earth by Him who is the beginning of the creation of God!

Thus, as man's entrance upon the antediluvian world (driven forth from the garden) was as carrying the curse by which he had inaugurated his relations to it when his former relations to God were suspended, so now his entrance upon the typically new creation was marked by restored relations to God, inaugurated by promise and by covenant; so benignant, too, in their character that from that moment to the present his material condition has been substantially and continuously ameliorated. And again we ask, Why was this? Is it not evident that He who saw the end from the beginning so knew, on the one hand, that judgment would work no change in the human heart, and so found, on the other, full and deep satisfaction in what Noah's altar and sacrifice expressed as denoted by the words, "The Lord smelled a sweet savour, or savour of rest" (margin), that He proclaimed, as it were, an amnesty to man, and retired with profound delight to

rest in the Son of His love?

Look we on now to Christianity, and again these thoughts and imaginations of man's heart come before us (2 Corinthians 10:4-5); for, be it as left alone in lawlessness, or under and after divine judgment, or when brought upon Christian ground, man as man is unchanged, no matter what be his dispensation or the character of his calling. But see how the Spirit of God deals in holy peremptoriness with these hidden activities of man's heart in the case of believers. Does grace give license to the flesh and its works? By no means. On the contrary, not satisfied with rigorously controlling all that is overt, we have here the deepest springs of fleshly activity touched in the core. The "strongholds" are to be scaled and pulled down; the "imagination" with every high thing in their train are to be cast down, and "every thought" is to be brought down, "into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Nothing less than this is what Christianity proposes to effect for the believer; for you, dear reader, and for me. Is it so with us? Has the Spirit of God achieved this noiseless and unseen conquest over what He finds in us, for the glory of Christ, as captives in His train? How far-reaching and how deep-searching is that word "every thought" subjugated to Christ! May His grace lead us into real exercise of soul as to the purposes and desires of our hearts, that His eye may behold those hidden springs, which only He surveys, working with true fidelity to Himself under the ceaseless control of His Spirit unto the joy and delight of His own heart. Says the apostle, "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." W. Rickards. (Derby).

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