

New Years' Address, January 1865

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God's glory and the good of his people in the ministry, and highlights the need for vital godliness in churches and individuals.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:7

Topics: "Divine Sovereignty", "Pastoral Ministry"

Description

J.C. Philpot delivers a sermon emphasizing the importance of ministers of the gospel being vessels chosen by God to display His sovereignty and grace. He highlights the need for ministers to acknowledge that all their sufficiency and gifts come from the Lord. Philpot encourages both strong and weak ministers to rely on God's grace and power, reminding them that sovereignty and grace determine their standing. He urges ministers to seek the glory of God and the good of His people, to preach boldly and faithfully, and to uphold sound doctrine in a time when many turn away from the truth.

Transcript

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It is part of the wisdom of God in a mystery that he has seen fit to entrust the ministry of the gospel to men of like passions with their fellow men. (Acts 14:15; Eph. 3:8, 9; 1 Thess. 2:4.) In this he displays both his sovereignty and his grace; his sovereignty in choosing the vessel, his grace in filling it with his hidden treasure. And as this is true of the greatest and highest, so is it true also of the least and lowest of the servants of God. None are more, none are less than God makes them to be. Whatever they possess of light or life, grace or gift, experience or utterance, unction or power, knowledge or wisdom, usefulness or acceptability, their sufficiency to every good word and work is wholly of the Lord, wrought in them by that one and the self-same Spirit who gives to every man individually as he will. (1 Cor. 12:4-11; 2 Cor. 3:5, 6.)

This, as it stops all boasting in the strong, gives all encouragement to the weak. If any are strong in faith, clear in knowledge, ripe in judgment, deep and rich in experience, well instructed to understand, well enabled rightly to divide the word of truth, bold and faithful in testimony, ready and powerful in utterance, and blessed with abundant success in their work, to them may be addressed, to quell all exaltation of self, all despising of others, Paul's pregnant question- "Who makes you to differ from another? and what have you that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:1.)

If, on the other hand, any be weak in faith, deficient in knowledge, feeble in gift, bound in utterance, limited in usefulness or acceptance, and feeling, from a sense of these things, the heavy burden of the ministry and their own insufficiency, are ready to faint in the work, to them are suitable Christ's words- "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness;" and Paul's response, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Cor. 12:9.) Thus, whether they are strong or whether they are weak, minister to hundreds or minister to a handful, are known and esteemed through the length and breadth of the land or are hidden in corners- sovereignty and grace equally determine the standing and position of every minister of Christ.

But there is another view of the question not less worthy of consideration by all the sent servants of Christ- the obligation under which grace lays them to seek the glory of God and the good of his people. As bought with a price, and therefore not their own, but the Lord's; (1 Cor. 6:19, 20;) as graciously brought under the constraining influence of the love of Christ, and therefore bound not to live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again; (2 Cor. 5:14, 15;) as set in an honorable and conspicuous place in the mystical body of Christ, that they should have a care for their fellow-members, and seek their spiritual profit, not their own glory or advantage, (1 Cor. 12:7, 18, 25) the servants of God are bound by the strongest ties, the ties of the atoning blood, dying love, and effectual grace of the Lord Jesus, to study to show themselves approved unto God, to preach the word boldly and faithfully, to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine, knowing that the time is not to come, but even now has come, when men will not endure sound doctrine, but are turning away their ears from the truth, and are turned unto fables. (2 Tim. 2:15; 4:2-4.)

Now what is true of those who labor for the profit of the Church of God with their tongue is true also, in good measure, of those who labor for the same end and in the same spirit with their pen. We say "in good measure," for we by no means intend or wish to place the tongue and the pen on the same level. The preaching of the gospel, as the special ordinance of the Lord, (Mark 16:15) stands apart by itself, and claims the just pre-eminence over every other means of edifying the body of Christ. (Eph. 4:11, 12.) It is the especial display both of the wisdom and of the power of God by "the foolishness of preaching," as men deem it, "to save those who believe." (1 Cor. 2:18-25.) The ministry of the gospel is a divinely appointed means of communicating faith, (Rom. 10:17) and through the means of faith thus given to become the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes. (Rom. 1:16.)

Writing cannot stand upon this foundation, nor rise to this level, for it has not the same divine appointment, and therefore does not inherit the same promised blessing. And yet few who fear God, and have derived benefit from the works of good men, would wish to deny that writing has, in the hands of the blessed Spirit, been made an instrument of edification to the Church of God only second to the ministry of the preached word. Indeed, in some respects the works of men of God have been made of greater and more enduring service to the Church of Christ even than their words, as being both more widely spread and more enduringly permanent. Whatever abundant blessing in their day rested upon their ministry, Bunyan and Owen would have been now mere names, if so much; Deer and Huntington but traditions, had not these men of God been writers as well as preachers. But by means of their writings the light and knowledge, grace and gifts, which were blessed to their generation are also blessed to ours, and will be handed down to our children's children when we shall have passed away.

Assuming, then, that writing, when the Holy Spirit inspires the pen, is an instrument of edification to the Church of Christ only inferior to preaching, when the Holy Spirit inspires the tongue, does not this conclusion follow, that those whose place and calling it is to write should as much seek the glory of God

and the profit of his people as those whose place and calling it is to preach? If the ministry of the gospel were not a divine institution, it would be an act of presumption to be tolerated neither by God nor man that a sinner, even a saved sinner, should stand up publicly to instruct, comfort, warn, and rebuke his fellow-sinners and fellow-saints. But the special ordinance of God and the power with which, as such, he himself clothes it, make what else would be an act of presumption an act of willing service for the minister and of blessing for the hearer. To be thus owned and blessed to the family of the living God; to be the honored instrument of communicating light, life, liberty, and love to those for whom Christ died; to set forth the Person and work, blood and righteousness of the Son of God, and, by thus exalting his worthy name, to advance his kingdom and endear him to believing hearts; this is, or should be, the aim and object, the reward and crown of every servant of Christ, whether tongue or pen be the instrument employed.

If these views be correct, in harmony with the word of truth and the experience of the saints, may not a writer, let him be only the editor of a short-lived and fleeting periodical which may die tomorrow and leave no trace behind- may not even a writer who occupies so temporary a position, yet who feels the life and power of God in his soul, and who seems, in the providence and by the grace of God, called to the work of the pen, equally labor to the same end and in the same spirit, equally seek the glory of God and the good of his people, equally desire to set forth the same gospel, exalt the same dear Redeemer, and find his main reward in the blessing of God upon his labors?

Or, to bring the preceding train of thought into a narrower compass, and direct it more clearly and closely to our present subject, may not even we, without presumption, address a few words at the opening of another year to our numerous readers, as seeking their spiritual profit? So far as we are taught by the same Spirit, have one faith and hope, feel the same love, and are of one accord, of one mind with the living family of God, we may look not on our own things only, but also on the things of others. (Eph. 4:4, 5; Phil. 2:2-4.) And if in this spirit, at the opening of another year, we seek to lay before our spiritual readers a word of counsel or of exhortation, giving them no other advice than we feel willing to take ourselves, and laying no other burden on them than we desire ourselves to bear, may it not be a word in season to both writer and reader? And surely these are days when friendly counsel is required, keen reproof needed, and stirring up of the graces of the Spirit in the hearts of God's people needed.

All who have any good measure of divine light and life, of gracious discernment, of daily experience, of almost continual exercise about themselves or others; all who know for themselves the power, the reality, the blessedness of that kingdom of God which is within us, and are struggling often through a sea of trials, afflictions, and temptations to find and enjoy in their own bosom that secret of the Lord which is with those who fear him; all thus taught, thus led, thus exercised, see and cannot but see, feel and cannot but feel at what a low ebb vital godliness everywhere is. It is with this as with many other matters of practical observation. The outward appearance may seem fair and good until the thing itself, as it really stands, is measured by a proper standard, or put to some searching, practical test. So long, then, as we are content to measure ourselves by ourselves, and compare ourselves with ourselves, (2 Cor. 10:12,) our profession may appear fair and good. But how does it stand when examined by the searching, practical test of the word of God?

Take, for instance, the ministry, we will not say of the day, but even of many whom we desire to esteem for their work's sake. Where is the preceptive part of the gospel brought forward, and insisted upon as we find it declared in the words of our Lord, and in the epistles of the New Testament? Where is doctrine so set forth as to have an experimental bearing upon the inward life, and a practical influence on the outward walk? Where is experience traced out, not only in its inward feelings, but in its outward fruits? Now in

Scripture doctrine is never held forth in what we may call its dry form. It is always blended either with an experience of its power, or with a declaration of its practical fruits. Thus, for instance, we are declared to be "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," but it is "through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:2.) How graciously blended here is the doctrine of election with the experience of the blood of sprinkling and the practice of obedience. And so experience in the word is never held up as a mere matter of feeling, that is, mere abstract feeling as dissociated from all effects and fruits, but is blended either with some practical influence on the heart, or some gracious fruit in the life.

And are not churches as faulty, in some of these respects, as ministers? How many of our Baptist churches can "bear with the word of exhortation?" (Heb. 13:22.) What an outcry there would be of "legality" if any minister of truth were to exhort husbands, wives, and children, masters and servants, individually and specially, as Paul exhorts them. The ministers may preach Paul's doctrine with the utmost clearness, and Paul's experience of law and gospel in its depths and heights with the greatest acceptance; but may they preach Paul's practice with the same faithfulness and with the same favor? If this be so, and we leave it to our readers to judge for themselves whether our words are true or false, is not that one thing a sufficient evidence that vital, practical godliness is with us all, for we put ourselves among the number of the defaulters, at a low ebb?

If, then, we speak these things and bear this testimony, it is not, we trust, from a spirit of bitterness, or censoriousness, or spiritual pride, or fleshly holiness, or self esteem under a garb of humility- it is not from monkish austerity, or self-inflicted seclusion, or narrowness of mind, and absence of what are called large and liberal views; it is not from lack of charity, or of allowance for human infirmity; from dimness of eye to see, or slowness of foot to march on with the advance of society and the times- that a conviction has been lodged in our breast how low the life of God for the most part is in churches and individuals. So far from this being the case, we can say for ourselves, and we believe for many others, that we would not shut ourselves up in a narrow corner and make all we can see from thence our spiritual horizon, or draw a kind of magic circle round our feet, inside which all is light and life, outside which all is darkness and death.

On the contrary, we are only too glad to see and welcome the grace of God in ourselves and others, not to hail with joy every appearance of divine life. As he who is lost at night on a lonely moor welcomes the first streak of light in the eastern sky; as the sailor whose ship is on a sandbank gladly marks the rising tide which he hopes will bear her off; so all who truly fear God hail with joy the dawnings of divine light and the springings of heavenly life, whether in themselves or in others. So without putting light for darkness and darkness for light, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, we may look around and see, and as we see gratefully acknowledge, that there are still golden candlesticks amid which the Lord walks, and still stars in his right hand. There is a love of sound experimental truth in many churches. The glorious doctrines of grace are not wholly hidden in a corner. In many places there is a good spirit of hearing, and in our own connection especially there has been for many years a greater desire for men of truth, or greater difficulty in obtaining their services.

Thus though we cannot but feel, and must, as feeling it, declare our conviction that vital godliness is almost everywhere at a low ebb, yet it gladdens our eyes and hearts to see and thankfully acknowledge that all is not ebbed out, that though on every side wide and deep are the mud banks, yet between runs in a scanty stream the river of the water of life. God has a people yet in this land, bless his holy name, whom he loves, and who both love and fear him. And though these be, for the most part, but men that sigh and cry for all the abominations they feel within and see without, yet have they a mark set upon their

foreheads, known and recognized by the Lord, and known and recognized by each other. (Ezek. 9:4.) It is to such we write. It is for such we labor. It is with such we wish to live, and with such to die. We have no union with the dead, be they dead in sin, or dear in a profession. "The living, the living," these are they, and only they, who "shall praise God" here or hereafter. "Death cannot celebrate him" on earth or in heaven; and "those who go down into the pit" of error or of perdition "cannot hope for his truth," (Isa. 38:18, 19) for it is hidden from them, either in its purity or in its power.

Will, then, the living among our readers; will those who have received not merely the truth, but the love of the truth; will those who, for lack of clearer and higher evidences, can only say they "desire to fear God;" (Neh. 1:11;) will those who, deeply convinced of their lost and undone condition, are seeking to realize the fullness of salvation in their own breast, bear with and listen to a fellow-traveler in the way, who, with all his sins and infirmities, would wish to deceive neither himself nor them? And if he does not come with soft and honeyed words, according to the fashion of the day, as if the gospel had no other voice or sound but, "Peace, peace,"- peace at any price, peace at any rate, peace in every state, however worldly, carnal, or covetous in which churches or individuals may be sunk, let it be borne in mind that there is a coming "with a rod" as well as "in the spirit of meekness," (1 Cor. 4:21;) and that, so far as we are true soldiers of Christ, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds- casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5.) In this spirit, then, the spirit of faithfulness and love, let us seek to address ourselves to the hearts and consciences of those who are willing to receive a few words from us in the simplicity of truth.

It is but too evident that we cannot be mixed up with the profession and the professors of the day without drinking, in some measure, into their spirit and being more or less influenced by their example. In this we too much resemble the chosen people, of whom the Holy Spirit testifies- "They mingled among the pagans and adopted their evil customs. They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them." (Ps. 106:35, 36.) We can scarcely escape the influence of those with whom we come much and frequently into contact. If these be dead, they will often benumb us with their corpse-like coldness; if light and trifling, they will often entangle us in their carnal levity- if bitter and censorious, they will breathe into us a measure of their condemning spirit- if angry and quarrelsome, they will provoke us to wrath in word or feeling; if worldly and covetous, they may afford us a shelter and an excuse for our own worldliness and covetousness.

Nothing but being well weighed with trials and afflictions, and bowed down with burdens and exercises, yet finding in and by them the life of God maintained with some power and vigor in the heart, will keep us from being corrupted by these evil companions. But as few escape their influence, let us simply state what we believe to be, if not the only, yet the safest way to obtain deliverance, from a path to walk in which will surely sooner or later, bring sorrow and grief to every living soul.

1. Now the first step out of a wrong path is to see and feel that it is wrong. The carnal professors of the day see nothing wrong, nothing amiss, nothing inconsistent in their conduct or spirit. They have no inward checks of conscience, no keen reproofs from the word, no trembling fears about their state before God, no solemn apprehensions of the Majesty and presence of the heart-searching Jehovah, no believing views of the Person and sufferings of Christ, no desire to know and do the will of God from the heart. But where there is divine life, where the blessed Spirit moves upon the heart with his sacred operations and secret influences, there will be light to see and a conscience to feel what is wrong, sinful, inconsistent, and improper. These convictions may for a time be resisted. Sin is of a hardening nature, and we may for a while be so caught in the net, and so held down by it, that our very struggles against it, may end only in

fuller and further entanglement.

How few, for instance, see their own covetous spirit until they find themselves so entangled in it that they fear they shall be utterly given up to its dominion, and yet cannot deliver themselves from it. How often when brother falls out with brother, or a spirit of strife and division gets into a church, every attempt at reconciliation, every effort after peace fans the flame instead of extinguishing it. How, again, we may sink into a cold lifeless state, neglect reading the word, and have a relish for the throne of grace, until our very profession seems to stench in our own nostrils as well as of others.

Now where there is divine life in the soul, the Lord often sets his hand as it were a second time to revive his work upon the heart. The snare is broken either by his providence or his grace. By some affliction or trial the heart is made tender to receive the word, even if it be a keen reproof, for "to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet," and there is that yearning after the Lord which nothing can satisfy but the manifestations of his pardoning love.

2. If this simple sketch meets the experience of any of our spiritual readers, let them next allow from us the word of exhortation, as couched in the words of the apostle- "Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed." (Heb. 12:13.)

We read in the word of truth- "These people turn from right ways to walk down dark and evil paths. They rejoice in doing wrong, and they enjoy evil as it turns things upside down. What they do is crooked, and their ways are wrong." (Prov. 2:13-15.) And as we read their character in the word, so do we also read their end- "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity; but peace shall be upon Israel." (Ps. 125:5.) Such warnings have their place not only in the word, but in the heart that is made tender in the fear of God; nor are they put away as if we stood so firmly and strongly in the right road that there could be no danger of our ever making a crooked path for our feet.

On the contrary, surrounded as we are with a crooked generation, professing and profane, whose ways we are but too apt to learn; beset on every hand by temptations to turn aside into some crooked path, to feed our pride, indulge our lusts, or gratify our covetousness- blinded and seduced sometimes by the god of this world, hardened at others by the deceitfulness of sin; here misled by the example, and there bewitched by the flattery of some friend or companion; at one time confused and bewildered in our judgment of right and wrong; at another entangled, half resisting, half complying, in some snare of the wicked one; what a struggle have some of us had to make straight paths for our feet, and what pain and grief that we should ever have made crooked ones.

But there is one mark of a crooked path which will ever stand both as a warning and a direction to those who fear God. "They have made them crooked paths- whoever goes therein shall not know peace." (Isa. 59:8.) It is this lack of finding peace in the crooked path which alarms and terrifies those who are possessed of a living conscience, and often summons up against them a whole host of doubts and fears lest they be deceived altogether. These convictions and these fears plainly and clearly show them their sin and folly in leaving the paths of uprightness to walk in any crooked way; and as the Lord is pleased sometimes by terrible things in righteousness, sometimes by laying affliction upon their loins, sometimes by his keen reproofs under the word preached or applied in secret, sometimes by a startling stroke in providence, to make them know and see that it is an evil thing and bitter to forsake the Lord their God, repentance is wrought in the heart, with self-loathing and self-detestation, issuing in humble and honest

confession.

This is the first step to return, for with this confession comes the forsaking of every evil way; and to this confession and forsaking, the promise of mercy and forgiveness is annexed. (Prov. 28:13- 1 John 1:9.) When, then, the mercy and goodness of God are thus inwardly felt and realized; when a view by faith of the suffering Son of God manifests at one and the same time the dreadful nature of sin, and the way, the only way whereby it is freely put away; when the super-aboundings of grace over the aboundings of inward and outward evil make the soul at once tremble and rejoice- tremble at the floods of sin, rejoice at the overflowings of the higher tides of grace above them all, then there is a making of straight paths for the feet, and that which was lame and so turned out of the way become healed.

3. Closely connected with this is the affectionate counsel before God and man. This Paul's exercise- "And herein do I exercise myself, to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men." (Acts 24:16.) There is no greater blessing than a conscience purged by the blood of sprinkling; and few greater miseries than a conscience loaded with guilt. As the one enables us to look up, so the latter compels us to look down before God and man. Nothing inconsistent or unbecoming may have appeared in our walk and conduct, and yet the 'silent monitor' may make the tongue falter, the knee tremble, and the countenance be dejected. Here, then, is the main exercise, first to OBTAIN, secondly to MAINTAIN a conscience so sprinkled by atoning blood as to be void of offence toward God; and then to walk so tenderly in the fear of God, in that sincerity and godly simplicity, in that uprightness of conduct, in that integrity of life, which shall preserve us from giving just cause of offence to, or putting a stumbling-block in the way of our fellow-men, and thus follow out that comprehensive precept- "Whether, therefore, you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offence, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God." (1 Cor. 10:31, 32.)

4. Our next word of counsel shall be that which the Lord himself gives to the virgin of Israel- "Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Mark well the path by which you came. Come back again, my virgin Israel; return to your cities here." (Jer. 31:21.) To look at the past is often a blessed encouragement for the future. If we are travelers in the way Zionward, we shall have our various road signs. A conspicuous call, or a signal deliverance, or a gracious manifestation of Christ; a promise applied here, or a marked answer to prayer there; a special blessing under the preached word; a soft and unexpected assurance of a saving interest in the blood of the Lamb; a breaking in of divine light when walking in great darkness; a sweet sip of consolation in a season of sorrow and trouble; a calming down of the winds and waves without and within by "It is I, be not afraid"- such and similar road signs are most blessed to be able to set up as evidences that we are in the road.

And if many who really fear God cannot set up these conspicuous road signs, yet are they not without their testimonies equally sure, if not equally satisfying. The fear of God in a tender conscience, the 'Spirit of grace and supplication' in their breast, their cleaving to the people of God in warm affection, their love for the truth in its purity and power, their earnest desires, their budding hopes, their anxious fears, their honesty and simplicity making them jealous over themselves lest they be deceived or deluded, their separation from the world, their humility, meekness, quietness, and general consistency often putting to shame louder profession and higher pretensions- these and similar evidences mark many as children of God who cannot read their title clear to such a privilege and such a blessing. But whether the road signs be high or low, shining in the sun or obscure in the dawn, the virgin of Israel is still bidden to "Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Mark well the path by which you came. Come back again, my virgin Israel; return to your cities here."

5. This, then, shall be another word of counsel, that we should be ever setting our heart toward the high way. Christ is the way, there is no other. "I am the way" stands written in letters of beaming light at the head, in the middle, at the end of the path to guide the child, to nerve the man, to sustain the father. The first ray of light which beams on the soul to guide it heavenward shines from the Person and work of Jesus- should it wander, by this it is brought back- should it faint and stagger, by this it is held up and held on, the eye still turning, the feet still moving, the heart still yearning towards the way, the only way out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of confusion into clearness, out of restlessness into quietness, out of bondage into liberty, out of sorrow into joy, out of trouble into peace- in a word, out of hell into heaven.

Blessed be God, not only that Jesus should be the way, but that the dear Redeemer said himself, in the days of his flesh, "I am the way;" for as these his own blessed words drop with power into the heart, they raise up such a faith in him; (John 6:47;) such a looking unto him, even at times from the very ends of the earth; (Isa. 45:22;) such a coming out of all the rags and ruins of SELF, to take hold of and hide ourselves in him; (Isa. 27:5; Ps. 17:8; 143:9;) such a cleaving to him with purpose of heart; (Acts 11:23;) such a hanging upon him, (Isa. 22:24,) that, by the gentle attractions of his Spirit and grace, (Song 1:4; Jer. 31:3; John 6:44,) he is received and walked in at every step heavenward. (Col. 2:6.)

And now our limits as well as the fear of wearying our readers warn us to draw to a close. Yet would we still press a few more thoughts on their notice, seeking to condense them as much as we can; and if our words of counsel assume a preceptive form, those to whom they are addressed will kindly bear in mind that we do not mean thereby to imply any power in us or them, but that of grace to put them into practical execution.

6. Keep yourselves separate from the shallow, light, loose profession of the day. Beware of resting on those shallow evidences whereby so many are built up, from both pulpit and press, on an insecure if not unsound foundation. Rest on nothing short of God's own testimony in your conscience, and the witness of his Spirit to your spirit that you are his child. Hate that spirit of levity, whether in the pulpit or in the pew, which is not only death to every gracious, godly feeling in the soul, but which would turn the most solemn truths of our most holy faith, the very sufferings of Christ himself, into an entertainment for the carnal mind. Abhor that loose profession, that ready compliance with everything which feeds the pride, worldliness, covetousness, and lusts of our depraved nature, which so stamps the present day with some of its most perilous and dreadful characters.

7. Choose for your companions, and let them be few in number, the humble, sober-minded, exercised, tender-hearted, spiritual children of God; those whose company and conversation you find to do you good and to leave a sweet savor on your spirit- whose life and conduct approve themselves to you as conforming to the gospel; whose walk in the church and before the world is evidently under the influence of grace; and with whom you feel you can live and die in the close and firm union of brotherly affection and love.

8. Learn to be patient, meekly bearing with the infirmities of Christian brethren. There is a time in our Christian life when we desire to set everybody right and make everything square. But we begin to find after a while that we cannot set our own selves right, nor make our own spirit and conduct square with the word of truth. This conviction, forced increasingly upon us, makes us less keen to see the mote and more willing to take out the beam; less desirous to condemn others, more willing to condemn ourselves; less sure of the sins of our friends, more certain of our own. Besides which we sooner or later learn that it is one thing

to wink at our brethren's sins, another to bear with our brethren's infirmities. We see that we naturally differ from one another, and that though grace changes the heart, the natural disposition is rather subdued by it than altered. Thus our natural tempers, stations and occupations, education, and bringing up, modes of thought and feeling, views of men and things, family and business connections, prejudices and prepossessions, besetting sins and infirmities, our very knowledge and experience of the truth of God, our various stages in the divine life, our afflictions, trials, and temptations, and many other circumstances which we cannot now enumerate, all so widely differ that you can scarcely find two Christians alike, each having his own peculiar infirmities. As, then, we expect others to bear with our infirmities, let us learn to bear with theirs, loving them for the grace that we see in them, and thus, "Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love." (Eph. 4:2.)

9. Expect a path of increasing rather than diminishing tribulation. Lay your account with a daily cross within or without, with bodily afflictions, sharp trials, and painful conflicts. Anticipate no easy road in providence or in grace, in the church or in the world, in the family or in the business, in your dealings with sinners or in your dealings with saints. God means to make us thoroughly sick of this world and of everything in it, that, wearied and worn out with trials, temptations, and conflicts, we may find all our rest in himself, and thus, as through much tribulation we enter into his kingdom of grace, so through much tribulation we may enter into his kingdom of glory.

10. And yet, amid all your tribulations, seek ever to hang upon the faithfulness at God to his promises. With all your exercises, doubts, misgivings, and fears, you cannot deny that he has been a good God to you, both in providence and grace. You have for many years watched his hand in both, and can bear testimony that he has never failed you in the hour of need, and that though he has deeply tried you, yet he has hitherto proved faithful to every promise he has spoken upon your heart, or enabled you to believe and plead. Are not these so many pledges that he will never leave you nor forsake you even to the end?

"Brethren, pray for us." We present you with our New Year offering. Accept it in love. Weigh it in the balances of the sanctuary. Compare it with the word of truth and the experience of the saints; and while you pardon all in it that is amiss, as savoring of human infirmity, receive in the spirit of meekness what is commended to your conscience as a suitable word of counsel or encouragement. And join your supplications with ours, that if we be still spared to continue our monthly labors, our services may be accepted of God, and be made a blessing to an increased number of his people.

Your unworthy, but affectionate Friend and Servant in the path of tribulation,

The Editor

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