

Short Papers — Section 6 of 10.

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ALONE WITH JESUS

John 8: 1-11.

The more closely and prayerfully we study the four Gospels, the more clearly do we see the distinct design of the Holy Spirit in each, and the perfect way in which He has pursued and carried out that design even in the most minute details. The grand theme of each is Christ, but in no two of the Gospels is He presented in the same way. In Matthew we have Him as the Messiah, Son of Abraham, Son of David, a Jew, heir of the promises made to the fathers, heir of the throne of David, fulfiller of the prophecies, presented to Israel according to their own Scriptures and deliberately rejected.

Such is the distinct object of the Holy Spirit in Matthew — such is His marked design. This He pursues throughout with unswerving faithfulness. To this end everything is made subservient. With a view to this He culls, groups and arranges His materials. For this, chronological order is set aside without hesitation and without apology. Scenes and circumstances, separated by many months, are grouped together by the skillful hand of the Holy Spirit for the specific purpose of presenting His subject in perfect keeping with the scope and design of the entire Gospel, from which He never diverges the breadth of a hair. In a word, Matthew groups *for dispensational ends* what we may call the great dispensational Gospel.

In Mark we have our blessed Lord as the Servant, the perfect Workman, the divine Minister, the diligent Preacher and Teacher whose days were given to work and His nights to prayer. He could hardly find time to eat or sleep — the most laborious Worker who ever worked in God's great harvest field. Mark tells us by the Holy Spirit what the Savior did and how He did it. His gospel is a marvelous record of *work* from first to last. We have no record of our Lord's birth — no genealogical chain stretching back to David, to Abraham or to Adam. There was no need to trace the pedigree of One who came to serve, to work, to toil night and day. The question in Mark is not so much who He was as *what He did*. We are simply told He was “Jesus Christ the Son of God.” Then the inspired penman plunges into his subject and gives a rapid survey of a life of unparalleled labor — a path of service pursued with unflinching decision from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary, and resumed in resurrection and carried on from the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. See Mark 16: 19-20.

Thus much as to Mark who observes throughout the strict historical order. It is important for the reader to note this, as it will enable him to see the instances in which both Matthew and Luke depart from strict chronological sequence.

Luke gives us “The *Man* Christ Jesus.” Such is preeminently his theme. Hence he gives us the pedigree traced up, not merely to David and Abraham, but to Adam and to God. It is not the Messiah nor the Jew nor the worker, but the Man. All that which is exquisitely human we have in Luke, just as we have all that is purely Jewish in Matthew and all that is directly ministerial in Mark. Luke groups *for moral ends* as Matthew *for dispensational purposes*. Mark does not group; he simply records *in historic order* the facts of our Lord's marvelous ministry.

Now, before turning to that gospel from which the subject of this paper is selected, we would request the reader's earnest attention to what we have stated in reference to the three *synoptic Gospels* as they have been called. We would ask him to study the Gospels for himself, to compare the passages

diligently, to seek to understand why Matthew or Luke departs in any given case from the exact order of time, to ask God to teach him by His Holy Spirit the true reason for every such departure. In this way we feel persuaded he will reap a rich harvest of blessing. He will obtain a deeper insight into the infinite wisdom that dictated those peerless documents. He will rise from his study with a more profound faith in the complete inspiration of these wonderful narratives.

Furthermore, he will see that those very passages in which the rationalist, the skeptic or the infidel has sought to find flaws and discrepancies, present the most striking and exquisite proofs of divine wisdom and marked design. He will be convinced that there is no standing-ground between these two conclusions, that the evangelists were either divinely inspired or they were the most senseless narrators that ever put pen to paper. That they were divinely inspired is proved in every page, in every paragraph, in every line. The internal evidence is irresistible. Hence it follows that these inspired writers could no more clash one with another than two heavenly bodies while pursuing their divinely appointed orbits, could come into collision. If there seems to be a discrepancy, it is simply because of our ignorance. Let us devoutly own this and wait for further light.

We shall now proceed with our immediate theme.

The Gospel of John has a character uniquely its own. In it the Holy Spirit unfolds to our view the Person of the Son of God, the Word, the Eternal Life, the true God. It is not the Messiah as in Matthew — not the Minister as in Mark — not the social Man as in Luke, but *the Son* — what He was in Himself from all eternity; what He was though rejected by Israel and the world at large; what He was to any poor way-worn, heavy laden, sin-burdened creature who crossed His blessed path.

Such is the lofty theme of the divinely inspired John. And what is so uniquely touching is that while John gives us the very highest possible view of the Blessed One — the most glorious revelation of the Person of the Son — he nevertheless continually shows Him to us alone with the sinner. This surely is a fact full of sweetness, comfort and divine power for us.

Let us look at the opening paragraph of John 8, a paragraph that bears upon its every clause the stamp of divine inspiration. Our blessed Lord, having spent His night on the lonely mountain top, is found early in the morning at His post, teaching the people in the temple. Into His holy and gracious presence, the scribes and Pharisees bring a poor convicted sinner — one respecting whom there could be no possible mistake, one who had openly and flagrantly broken the law of Moses. They quote the law against her. “Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned, but what sayest Thou?”

Here then was a case. These men, no doubt, thought to involve our Lord in a dilemma. They wanted to bring Him into collision with Moses — to make it appear that He was throwing the law overboard. This might seem very clever, but what is cleverness in the presence of God? Still their purpose was obvious. If He had said, “Stone her,” they might pronounce Him no better than Moses. If He had said, “You must not stone her,” then He was making void the law. But He said neither. “The law was given by Moses,” and the Lord allows it to stand in all its majesty, in all its stringency, in all its force. He came not to destroy the law, but to magnify it in the very highest possible manner, both in His life and in His death.

It is a very grave error indeed to suppose the law is set aside. So far from this, the apostle in 1 Timothy declares that “The law is good if a man use it lawfully.” If the law were dead or set aside, it could not be said to be good for anything, for that which is dead is good for nothing. What then is the law good for? Not for justification, but for conviction — not as a rule of life, but as a rule of death.

It is thus our Lord uses it in the scene now before us. He turns the sharp edge of the law right

back against the men who had quoted it against a poor fellow sinner. With those men He could have no sympathy whatever. They had conducted this woman into His presence to have judgment pronounced and executed upon her. But He had not come to judge, but to save. Yet, as He says at verse 16, if He judged, His judgment was true: oh! how true in the case of the scribes and Pharisees! They had accused the sinner and were eager to accuse the Savior, but He makes them accuse themselves. “Jesus stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground.” There was the great Lawgiver Himself, the very One whose finger wrote on the ground. There was the great Lawgiver Himself, the very One whose finger had written the first set of tables. How little they knew this! They were quoting the law against a fellow sinner to find occasion against the Lawgiver. What a position for men to find themselves in! In the presence of the Lawgiver, quoting the law, themselves guilty before Him!

There is something very interesting here. Indeed there is not such a scene anywhere else in the sacred canon. It is unique! Little did these men know what they were doing for the poor convicted one and for untold millions besides, when they led her into the presence of Jesus. Her very best friends could not have done better for her. Let us pursue the marvelous narrative.

“So, when they continued asking Him, He lifted up Himself and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” They were determined to have an answer, and truly He let them have one. If they would place Him, before the time, in the judgment seat, He must judge all. He could not give a partial judgment. He could not judge one and let another pass. In point of fact, He judged no man. The object of His blessed mission to a world of sinners was not judgment but salvation. He came not to cast a stone at a poor guilty sinner. They could never get Him to engage in such work, blessed forever be His glorious name. How could a divine Savior cast the stone of judgment at a lost convicted sinner? Impossible. If there was a sinless one among them, let him proceed to do the work of judgment. No doubt the sinner was guilty and the sentence of Moses was as distinct as possible, but where was the executioner? This was the puzzling question. Who would dare to lift the first stone?

What a complete turning of the tables! What becomes of all the cleverness! What an intensely interesting moment! What principle was at stake? There is the sinner; there is the law; there too is the Lawgiver; but who will presume in His presence to execute the sentence? This is the point. “And again He stopped down and wrote on the ground.” Does this remind us of the writing of the second set of tables that were enclosed in the ark and covered with the mercy seat? Is there anything significant, anything suggestive in these two writings on the ground? One thing is clear — conscience was set to work. “They which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, unto the last: and Jesus was left alone and the woman standing in the midst.”

Nothing can exceed the moral power of all this. These scribes and Pharisees are driven out by the intense power of the light that was shining upon them. They could not stand it. Neither human cleverness nor human righteousness can stand the test of the divine presence. These men were wrapped up in the cloak of their own fancied sanctity. Hence they could not endure the light. To be able to abide in the presence of God, we must take our true place as utterly lost, guilty and undone — no cloak, no righteousness, no holiness, no wisdom, not one jot or tittle of anything good in ourselves. But the scribes and Pharisees were not on this ground at all. They were men of character, men of weight, men of reputation in the world. But the light of what God is — God in Christ — was shining in full blaze upon them, and they dare not say they were without sin. All that remained was for them to make their escape as speedily as possible from the action of a light that was reading them through and through.

Why did they begin with the eldest? Why was he the first to retreat? Because he had the greatest

reputation to maintain, the character of highest standing to support! No one who has a reputation to maintain — a name or a character to keep up among his fellows — can stand for a moment in the light of the presence of God. Such an one can do well enough in the presence of his fellows. He can get on in the world inasmuch as *there*, such are highly esteemed. A man of character is respected among men. But let us remember these solemn and salutary words, “That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” God values a broken heart, a contrite spirit, a lowly mind. “To this man will *I* look, even to him who is of a broken and contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word.” Now the scribes and Pharisees were the direct opposite of all this. Hence they could find no place in the presence of Jesus.

“They went out,” not in a crowd, but “one by one.” Conscience is an individual thing. Had they remained, they must strip off their cloaks and cry out, “Just as I am without one plea.” For this they were not prepared. They were thoroughly confounded and went about their business. The Light of the world was shining in the full luster of His heavenly beams, and these muffled men could not endure His brightness. So they went out and left the poor sinner alone with Jesus.

Blessed moment for her! The whole scene cleared. No answer, no sentence, no executioner — not a single stone of judgment. How was this? Was she not a sinner? Yes, a flagrant one. Was not the law against her? No doubt. How was it then? Jesus was there — the divine embodiment of “grace and truth,” and He was not going to stone a poor convicted sinner. It was not for such an object that He had left that bright and blessed world above. Had it been only a question of stoning the sinner, Moses could have managed that. There was no need for Moses' Master to come down into this world to do that.

But oh! there was grace in the heart of Jesus — yes, grace and truth and truth and grace. Both shine out with unique luster in this truly unequalled scene. “Truth” in its mighty moral force had driven the accusers from the scene. Now “grace” in all its sweetness and soothing power, rises with healing in its wings upon the soul of the poor trembling sinner and sounds in her ears these precious words, “Neither do I condemn thee.” Precious words! sweet, wonderfully sweet to a broken heart and contrite spirit! They are gladdening beyond expression to one who had, a moment before, been expecting the stones of judgment to fall thick upon her guilty head. Mercy rejoices over judgment and grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Yes, that blessed One knew what it would cost Him to speak such words in the ear of a sinner. It was to cost Him His life. That woman deserved to die. There was no question about that. “The soul that sinneth shall die” was the stern sentence of God's law, the solemn enactment of His government. Was Jesus going to reverse this sentence? No, but He was going to bear it in the sinner's stead. He, the sinless One who alone had the right to cast the stone at the sinner, was to expose Himself to the stroke of justice and have the stone cast at Him.

Such is the solid basis on which the glorious ministry of reconciliation rests — the atoning death of Christ, His giving Himself the Just for the unjust. It will perhaps be said that there is nothing about *atonement* in John 8. True. The great subject of the entire Gospel of John is the *Person*, not the atoning work of the Son. But it is essential for us to know the ground on which our blessed Lord could speak those words of balm and consolation in a sinner's ear, “Neither do I condemn thee.” That ground is His sacrificial atoning death. In no other way, on no other ground, could sin be passed, remitted or blotted out. “Without shedding of blood is no remission.” Solemn yet glorious words! Solemn, as letting us know what sin is; glorious, as letting us know what remission is.

But let us carefully mark the authority on which the woman knew she was not condemned. What was it? Simply the word of Jesus. She knew it because He said it. Blessed authority — nothing like it,

none other but it. Christ's work is the basis, His word the authority. How simple! How solid! How satisfactory! Nothing can touch it. All the powers of earth and hell, of men and demons, cannot shake this foundation — the foundation of a divine work, a divine word — a foundation on which the reader who needs and desires it, may rest this moment and forever.

The scribes and Pharisees knew nothing of this ground or this authority. If they had met the woman on her way out from the Lord's presence and questioned her as to the outcome of her interview, how they would have scorned the idea of “no condemnation!” They would have sent her to a reformatory or a penitentiary, and after some years of moral reform they might begin to admit that there was some faint hope for such a wretched creature. But ah! what a sorry basis is moral reform! What a poor authority is a human certificate! No, reader, it will never do, never stand, never suit either for God or for your precious soul. It must be all divine. And so it is, blessed be God! Christ did the work, God speaks the word, faith believes and fills the heart with peace, and gives power over sin in all its workings. For let it never be forgotten that an indissoluble link binds together these two utterances, “No condemnation” and “Sin nor more.” Grace shines in the one, holiness breathes in the other.

A SLEEPLESS NIGHT

(Read Esther 6)

“On that night could not the king sleep.” How was this? What was it that drove sleep from the monarch's eyes and slumber from his eyelids? Why could not the mighty Ahasuerus enjoy a mercy which was the portion of the very least of his subjects? Some may say, “The heavy cares of royalty robbed him of that which 'a laboring man' enjoys.” This might be so on other nights, but “on that night” we must account for his restlessness in quite another way. The finger of the Almighty was in that sleepless night. “The Lord God of the Hebrews” had a mighty work to accomplish on behalf of His beloved people and in order to bring that about, He drove “balmy sleep” from the luxurious couch of the monarch of 127 provinces.

This brings out in a marked way the character of the Book of Esther. The reader will observe that, throughout this interesting section of inspiration, the name of God is never heard. Yet His finger is visibly stamped upon everything. The most trivial circumstances displays His “wonderful counsel and excellent working.” Nature's vision cannot trace the movement of the wheels of Jehovah's chariot, but faith not only traces it, but knows the direction in which it moves. The enemy plots, but God is above him. Satan's every movement is seen to be but a link in the marvelous chain of events by which the God of Israel was bringing about His purpose of grace respecting His people. Thus it has been, thus it is and thus it shall ever be. Satan's malice, man's pride, the most hostile influences, are all but so many instruments in the hand of God for the accomplishment of His gracious purposes. This gives the sweetest rest to the heart amid the ceaseless tossings and fluctuations of human affairs. “The end of the Lord” shall assuredly be seen. “His counsel shall stand, and He will do all His pleasure.” Blessed be His name for this soul-sustaining assurance! It quiets the heart at all times. Jehovah is behind the scenes. Every wheel, every screw, every pivot in the vast machine of human affairs is under His control. Though His name be not known or acknowledged by the children of earth, His finger is seen, His word is trusted and His end expected by the children of faith.

How clearly is all this seen in the Book of Esther. Vashti's beauty, the king's pride therein, his unseemly command, her indignant refusal, the advice of the king's counselors, are all but the unfolding of Jehovah's ripening purposes. Of “all the fair young virgins gathered at Shushan the palace,” not one must be allowed to win the king's heart except Esther, the daughter of an obscure Jewish house, a desolate orphan. Again, of all the officers, ministers and attendants about the palace, not one must be

allowed to discover the conspiracy against the king's life except “a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai.” And on that sleepless night, nothing must be brought to while away the monarch's weary hours except “the book of the records of the chronicles.” Strange recreation for a sensuous king! But God was behind all this. There was a certain record in that book about “a certain Jew” which must be brought immediately under the eye of the restless monarch. Mordecai must come into notice. He must be rewarded for his fidelity, and so rewarded as to cover with overwhelming confusion the face of the proud Amalekite. At the very moment that this record was passing under review, none other than the haughty and wicked Haman must be seen in the court of the king's house. He had come to ensure the death of Mordecai, but is forced by the providence of God to plan for Mordecai's triumph and dignity. He had come to get him hanged on a gallows, but, he is made to clothe him with the king's robe, to set him on the king's horse and like a footman, to conduct him through the streets of the city, and like a mere herald, to announce his triumph.

“Oh! scenes surpassing fable, and yet true.”

Who could have imagined that the noblest lord in all the dominions of Ahasuerus — a descendant of the house of Agag — should be compelled thus to wait upon a poor Jew, and such a Jew, at such a moment? Surely the finger of the Almighty was in all this. Who but an infidel, an atheist or a skeptic could question a truth so obvious?

Thus much as to the providence of God. Let us now look at the pride of Haman. Despite all his dignity, wealth and splendor, his wretched heart was wounded by one little matter, not worth a thought in the judgment of a really great mind or a well-regulated heart. He was rendered miserable by the simple fact that Mordecai would not bow to him! Although he occupied the nearest place to the throne and was entrusted with the king's ring — although possessed of princely wealth and placed in a princely station, “yet” he says, “all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate” (Esther 5: 13). Miserable man! The highest position, the greatest wealth, the most extensive influence, the most flattering tokens of royal favor all “availed nothing” just because a poor Jew refused to bow to him! Such is the human heart! Such is man! Such is the world!

But “pride cometh before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Haman proved this. At the very moment when he seemed to be about to plant his foot on the loftiest summit of his ambition, a just and retributive providence so brought it about that he was obliged to wait upon Mordecai, and the very gallows which he had ordered to be prepared for his intended victim was used for his own execution!

Let us ask why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman? Did it not seem like a blind obstinacy to refuse the customary honor to the king's noblest lord — his highest officer? Assuredly not! Haman was the highest officer of Ahasuerus, but he was the greatest “enemy of Jehovah,” being the greatest “enemy of the Jews.” He was an Amalekite, and Jehovah had sworn that He would “have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Ex. 17: 16). How then could a true son of Abraham bow to one with whom Jehovah was at war? Impossible! Mordecai could save the life of an Ahasuerus, but he never could bow to an Amalekite. As a faithful Jew, he walked too closely with the God of his fathers to pay attention to one of the seed of Amalek.

Hence Mordecai's stern refusal to bow to Haman was not the fruit of a blind obstinacy and senseless pride, but of lovely faith *in* and high communion *with* the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He could never relinquish the dignity which belonged to the Israel of God. He would abide by faith under Jehovah's banner, and while so abiding he could never do obeisance to an Amalekite. What though His people were “scattered and peeled” — “though their beautiful house” was in ruins —

though Jerusalem's ancient glory was departed — was faith therefore to abandon the high position assigned by God's counsels to His people? By no means. Faith would recognize the ruin and walk softly. At the same time, faith laid hold of God's promise and occupied in holy dignity the platform which that promise had opened up for all who believed it. Mordecai was made to feel deeply the ruin. He clothed himself in sackcloth, but he would never bow to an Amalekite.

What was the result? His sackcloth was exchanged for royal apparel. His place at the king's gate was exchanged for a place next to the throne. He realized in his own happy experience the truth of that ancient promise that Israel should be “the head and not the tail.” Thus it was with this faithful Jew of old. He took his stand on that elevated ground where faith ever places the soul. He shaped his way, not according to nature's view of things around, but according to faith's view of the Word of God. Nature might say, “Why not lower your standard of action to the level of your circumstances? Why not suit yourself to your outward condition? Had you not better acknowledge the Amalekite, seeing that the Amalekite is in the place of power?” Nature might speak thus, but faith's answer was simple: “Jehovah hath sworn that He will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” Thus it is ever. Faith lays hold of *the living God and His eternal Word*, and abides in peace and walks in holy elevation.

Christian reader, may the hallowed instruction of the Book of Esther be brought home to our souls in the power of the Holy Spirit. In it, we see the providence of God, the pride of man, the power of faith. Moreover we are furnished with a striking picture of the actings of Jehovah on behalf of His people Israel — the sudden overthrow of their last proud oppressor, their restoration and their everlasting blessedness, rest and glory.

“HAVE FAITH IN GOD”

How prone we are in moments of pressure and difficulty to turn the eye to some creature resource! Our hearts are full of creature confidence, human hopes and earthly expectations. We know comparatively little of the deep blessedness of looking simply to God. We are ready to look anywhere and everywhere rather than unto Him. We run to any broken cistern and lean on any broken reed, although we have an exhaustless Fountain and the Rock of Ages ever near.

And yet we have proved times without number that “creature streams are dry.” Man is sure to disappoint us when we look to him. “Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?” And again, “Cursed is the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the shrub in the desert and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited” (Jer. 17: 5-6).

Such is the sad result of leaning upon the creature — barrenness, desolation, disappointment. Like the shrub in the desert. No refreshing showers, no dew from heaven, nothing but drought and sterility. How can it be otherwise when the heart is turned away from the Lord, the only source of blessing? It lies not within the range of the creature to satisfy the heart. God alone can do this. He can meet our every need and satisfy our every desire. He never fails a trusting heart.

But He must be trusted in reality. “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man *say*” he trusts God, if he does not really do so? A sham faith will not do. It will not do to trust in word, neither in tongue. It must be in deed and in truth. Of what use is a faith with one eye on the Creator and another on the creature? Can God and the creature occupy the same platform? Impossible. It must be God *or* the creature, and the curse that ever follows creature-confidence.

Mark the contrast. “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For

he shall be as a tree planted by the waters and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”

How blessed! How bright! How beautiful! Who would not put his trust in such a God? How delightful to find oneself wholly and absolutely cast upon Him! To be shut up to Him. To have Him filling the entire range of the soul's vision. To find all our springs in Him. To be able to say, “My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved.”

Note the little word “only.” It is very searching. It will not do to say we are trusting in God while the eye is all the while upon the creature. It is much to be feared that we frequently *talk* about looking to the Lord while in reality, we are expecting our fellow-man to help us. “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the Lord search the heart. I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”

How needful to have the heart's deepest motive-springs judged in the presence of God! We are so apt to deceive ourselves by the use of certain phrases which, so far as we are concerned, have no force, no value, no truth whatever. The language of faith is on our lips, but the heart is full of creature confidence. We talk to men about our faith in God so they may help us out of our difficulties.

Let us be honest. Let us walk in the clear light of God's presence where everything is seen as it really is. Let us not rob God of His glory and our souls of abundant blessing by an empty profession of dependence upon Him, while the heart is secretly going out after some creature stream. Let us not miss the deep joy, peace and blessing, the strength, stability and victory that faith ever finds in the living God, in the living Christ of God and in the living Word of God. Oh! Let us “have faith in God.”

“WHAT WAIT I FOR?”

(Psalm 39: 7)

This is a searching question for the heart, but it is oftentimes a most necessary one, inasmuch as we may constantly detect ourselves in an attitude of waiting for things which, when they come, prove not to be worth waiting for.

The human heart is very much like the poor lame man at the gate of the temple in Acts 3. He was looking at every passerby “expecting to receive something.” And the heart will ever be looking out for some relief, some comfort or some enjoyment in passing circumstances. It may be found sitting by the side of some creature-stream, vainly expecting some refreshment to flow along its channel.

It is amazing to think of the trifles on which nature will fix its expectant gaze — a change of circumstances, change of scene, a journey, a visit, a letter, a book. Anything is sufficient to raise expectations in a poor heart which is not finding its center, its spring, its all, in Christ.

Hence the practical importance of frequently turning sharp round upon the heart with the question, “What wait I for?” Doubtless, the true answer to this enquiry would at times furnish the most advanced Christian with matter for deep humiliation and self-judgment before the Lord.

In Psalm 39: 6 we have three great types of character as set forth in the “vain show,” “vain disquietude” and “heaping up.” These types may sometimes be found combined, but very often they have a distinct development.

There are many whose whole life is one “vain show,” whether in their personal character, their

commercial position, their political or religious profession. There is nothing solid about them, nothing real, nothing true. The glitter is the most shallow gilding possible. There is nothing deep, nothing intrinsic. All is surface work — all the merest flash and smoke.

Then we find another class whose life is one continued scene of “vain disquietude.” You will never find them at ease — never satisfied, never happy. There is always some terrible thing coming — some catastrophe in the distance, the mere anticipation of which keeps them in a constant fever of anxiety. They are troubled about property, about friends, about trade, about children, about servants. Though placed in circumstances which thousands of their fellow-creatures would deem most enviable, they seem to be in a perpetual fret. They harass themselves in reference to troubles that may never come, difficulties they may never encounter, sorrows they may never live to see. Instead of remembering the blessings of the past and rejoicing in the mercies of the present, they are anticipating the trials and sorrows of the future. In a word, “*they are disquieted in vain.*”

Finally, you will meet another class, quite different from either of the preceding — keen, shrewd, industrious, money-making people who would live where others would starve. There is not much “vain show” about them. They are too solid, and life is too practical a reality for anything of that sort. Neither can you say there is much disquietude about them. Theirs is an easy-going, quiet, plodding spirit, or an active, enterprising, speculating turn of mind. “They heap up, and know not who shall gather.”

But remember, on all three alike the Spirit has stamped “*vanity.*” Yes, “all” without any exception, “under the sun,” has been pronounced by one who knew it by experience and wrote it by inspiration, “*vanity and vexation of spirit.*” Turn where you will “under the sun” and you will not find anything on which the heart can rest. You must rise on the steady and vigorous pinion of faith to regions “above the sun,” to find “a better and an enduring substance.” The One who sits at the right hand of God has said, “I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause them that love Me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures” (Prov. 8: 20-21). None but Jesus can give “substance.” None but He can “fill.” None but He can “satisfy.” There is that in Christ's perfect work which meets the deepest need of conscience. There is that in His glorious Person which can satisfy the most earnest longings of the heart. The one who has found Christ on the cross and Christ on the throne, has found all he can possibly need for time or eternity.

Well might the psalmist, having challenged his heart with the question, “What wait I for?” reply, “My hope is in Thee.” No “vain show,” no “vain disquietude,” no “heaping up” for him. He had found an object in God worth waiting for. Therefore, turning away his eye from all beside, he says, “My hope is in Thee.”

This, my beloved reader, is the only true, peaceful and happy position. The soul that leans on, looks to, and waits for Jesus will never be disappointed. Such an one possesses an exhaustless fund of present enjoyment in fellowship with Christ. At the same time he is cheered by “that blessed hope” that when this present scene, with all its “vain show,” its “vain disquietude” and its vain resources shall have passed away, he shall be with Jesus where He is, to behold His glory, to bask in the light of His countenance and to be conformed to His image forever.

May we, then, be much in the habit of challenging our earth-bound, creatures-seeking hearts with the searching enquiry, “What wait I for?” Am I waiting for some change of circumstances or “for the Son from heaven?” Can I look up to Jesus and with a full and an honest heart, say, “Lord, my hope is in Thee?”

May we be more thoroughly separated from this present evil world and all that pertains thereto, by the power of communion with those things that are unseen and eternal.

*“From various cares my heart retires,
Though deep and boundless its desires,
I'm now to please but One;
He before whom the elders bow,
With Him is all my business now,
And with the souls that are His own.
“With these my happy lot is cast,
Through the world's deserts rude and waste,
Or through its gardens fair;
Whether the storms of trouble sweep,
Or all in dead supineness sleep,
Still to go on be my whole care.”*

AN EARNEST APPEAL

Christian reader, I feel constrained to make an earnest appeal to your heart and conscience in the presence of Him to whom you and I are responsible and to whom our hearts and ways are fully known. I do not mean to judge you or speak ill to you. Neither do I wish to write in a bitter or complaining spirit. I only desire to stir up your pure mind — to wake up the energies of your new nature — to exhort and encourage you to a more earnest zeal and whole-hearted devotedness in the service of Christ.

The present is a deeply solemn moment. The day of God's long-suffering is rapidly drawing to a close. The day of wrath is at hand. The wheels of divine government are moving onward with a rapidity truly soul-subduing. Human affairs are working to a point. There is an awful crisis approaching. Immortal souls are rushing forward along the surface of the stream of time into the boundless ocean of eternity. The end of all things is at hand. “The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.”

Now, my reader, seeing these things are so, let us ask each other how are we affected thereby? What are we doing in the midst of the scene which surrounds us? How are we discharging our fourfold responsibility — our responsibility to God, our responsibility to the Church, our responsibility to perishing sinners, and our responsibility to our own souls? This is a weighty question. Let us take it into the presence of God and there survey it in all its magnitude. Are we really doing all we might do for the advancement of the cause of Christ, the prosperity of His Church, the progress of His gospel? I candidly confess to you, my friend, that I very much fear we are not making a right use of all the grace, the light and the knowledge which our God has graciously imparted to us. I fear we are not faithfully and diligently trading with our talents or occupying till the Master returns. It often occurs to me that people with far less knowledge, far less profession, are far more practical, more fruitful in good works, more honored in the conversion of precious souls, more generally used of God. How is this? Are you and I sufficiently self-emptied, sufficiently prayerful, sufficiently single-eyed?

You may reply, “It is a poor thing to be occupied with ourselves, our ways or our works.” Yes; but if our ways and our works are not what they ought to be, we *must* be occupied with them. *We must judge them.* The Lord, by His prophet Haggai, called upon the Jews of old to “consider their ways.” The Lord Jesus said to each of the seven churches, “I know thy works.” There is a great danger of

resting satisfied with our knowledge, our principles, our position, while at the same time we are walking in a carnal, worldly, self-indulgent, careless spirit. The end of this will be terrible. Let us consider these things. May the apostolic admonition fall with divine power on our hearts. “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward” (2 John 8).

“LET US GO AGAIN”

(Acts 15: 36)

“Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the Word of the Lord and see how they do.”

A motto for the evangelist is the expression, “to preach the gospel in the regions beyond.” This is the grand object of the evangelist, let his talents or sphere of action be what they may.

But the pastor has his work as well as the evangelist, and we desire to also furnish a motto for him. Such a motto we have in the words, “let us go again.” We are not merely to regard this expression as the narrative of what was done, but a model of what *ought* to be done. If the evangelist is responsible to preach the gospel in the regions beyond, so long as there are regions to be evangelized, the pastor is responsible to “go again and visit his brethren,” so long as there are brethren to be visited. The evangelist forms the vital connection; the pastor maintains and strengthens that connection. The one is the instrument of creating the beautiful link, the other of perpetuating it. It is quite possible that the two gifts may exist in the same person, as in Paul's case, but whether this be so or not, each gift has its own specific sphere and object. The business of the evangelist is to call out the brethren; the business of the pastor is to look after them. The evangelist goes first and preaches the Word of the Lord; the pastor goes again and visits those upon whom that Word has taken effect. The former calls out the sheep, the latter feeds and takes care of them.

The order of these things is divinely beautiful. The Lord will not gather out His sheep and leave them to wander uncared for and unfed. This would be wholly unlike His gracious, tender, thoughtful way. Hence, He not only imparts the gift whereby His sheep are to be called into existence, but also that gift whereby they are to be fed and maintained. He has His own interest in them and in every stage of their history. He watches over them with intense care from the moment in which they hear the first quickening words until they are safely in the mansions above.

His desire to gather the sheep tells itself forth in the large-heartedness of the expression, “the regions beyond.” His desire for their well-being is seen in the words, “let us go again.” The two things are intimately connected. Wherever the Word of the Lord has been preached and received, there you have the formation of mysterious but real and most precious links between heaven and earth. The eye of faith can discern the most beautiful link of divine sympathy between the heart of Christ in heaven and “every city” where “the Word of the Lord” has been preached and received. This is as true now as it was then. There may be many things to hinder our spiritual perception of this link, but it is there. God sees it and faith sees it likewise. Christ has His eye — an eye beaming with intense interest and radiant with tender love — upon every city, every town, every village, every street, every house in which His Word has been received.

The assurance of this is most comforting to every one who feels that he has truly received the Word of the Lord. Were we called upon to prove from Scripture the truth of our assertion, we should do so by the following quotation: “And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto

him, Arise and go into the street which is called Straight and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus: for behold he prayeth” (Acts 9: 10-11). Can anything be more touching than to hear the Lord of glory giving, with such minuteness, the address of His newly-found sheep? He gives the street, the number (so to speak) and Saul's very occupation at the moment. His gracious eye takes in everything connected with each one of those for whom He gave His precious life. There is not a circumstance, however trivial, in the path of the very feeblest of His members in which the blessed Lord Jesus is not interested. His name be praised for such a comforting assurance! May we be enabled to enter more fully into the reality and power of such a truth!

Now, our gracious Shepherd would fill the heart of each one acting under Him with His own tender care for the sheep. It was He who animated the heart of Paul to express and carry out the design embodied in the words, “let us go again.” It was the grace of Christ flowing down into the heart of Paul and giving character and direction to the zealous service of that most devoted and laboring apostle.

Observe the force of the words “go again.” It does not matter how often you may have been there before. It may be once or twice or thrice. This is not the question. “Let us go again” is the motto for the pastoral heart, for there is always a demand for the pastoral gift. Matters are always springing up in the various places in which “the Word of the Lord” has been preached and received, demanding the labors of the divinely-qualified pastor. This is especially true in this day of spiritual poverty. There is immense demand on the pastor to “go again and visit his brethren in every city” where “the Word of the Lord” has been preached, “and see how they do.”

Reader, do you possess anything of a pastoral gift? If so, think of those comprehensive words, “let us go again.” Have you been acting on them? Have you been thinking of your “brethren” — of those “who have obtained like precious faith” — those who, by receiving “the Word of the Lord,” have become spiritual brethren? Are your interests and sympathies engaged on behalf of “every city” in which a spiritual link has been formed with the Head above? Oh! how the heart longs for a greater exhibition of holy zeal and energy, of individual and independent devotedness — independent, I mean, not of the sacred fellowship of the truly spiritual, but of every influence which would tend to clog and hinder that elevated service to which each one is distinctly called in responsibility to the Master alone.

Let us beware of the restraints of cumbrous religious machinery, of religious routine, of false order. Let us beware, too, of indolence, of love of personal ease, of a false economy which would lead us to attach an undue importance to the matter of expense. The silver and the gold are the Lord's and His sheep are far more precious to Him than silver and gold. His own words are, “Lovest thou Me? feed My sheep.” And if only there is the heart to do this, the means will never be wanting. How often may we detect ourselves spending sums of money unnecessarily on the table, the wardrobe and the library, which would be amply sufficient to carry us to “the regions beyond” to preach the gospel, or to “every city” to “visit our brethren”!

May the Lord grant unto us an earnest self-denying spirit, a devoted heart to Him and to His most holy service, a true desire for the spread of His gospel and the prosperity of His people. May the time passed of our lives be sufficient for us to have lived and labored for self and its interests, and may the time to come be given to Christ and His interests. Let us not allow our treacherous hearts to deceive us by plausible reasonings about domestic, commercial or other claims. All such should be strictly attended to, no doubt. A well-regulated mind will never offer to God a sacrifice arising out of the neglect of any just claim. If I am at the head of a family, the claims of that family *must* be duly responded to. If I am at the head of a business, the claims of that business must be duly met. If I am a hired servant, I must attend to my work. To fail in any of these would be to dishonor the Lord instead of

serving Him.

But, allowing the widest possible margin for all righteous claims, let us ask, are we doing all we can for “the regions beyond” and for “our brethren in every city where we have preached the Word of the Lord?” Has there not been a blameworthy abandonment both of evangelistic and pastoral work? Have we not allowed domestic and commercial ties to act *unduly* upon us? And what has been the result? What have we gained? Have our children turned out well and our commercial interests prospered? Has it not often happened that, where the Lord's work has been neglected, the children have grown up in carelessness and worldliness? And as to the business, have we not often toiled all the night and gazed on an empty net in the morning? On the other hand, where the family and the circumstances have been left with absolute confidence in the hand of Jehovah-Jireh (the Lord will provide), have they not been far better cared for?

Let these things be deeply pondered with an honest heart and a single eye, and we shall be sure to arrive at just conclusions.

I cannot lay down the pen without calling the reader's attention to the fullness of the expression, “see how they do.” How very much is involved in these words! “How they do” publicly, socially, privately. “How they do” in doctrine, in association, in walk. “How they do” spiritually, morally, relatively — “how they do” in every way. Be it well remembered that this seeing how our brethren do must *never* resolve itself into a curious, prying, gossiping, busybody spirit — a spirit that wounds and heals not, that meddles and mends not. To all who would visit us in such a spirit as this we should assuredly say, “be yet far from here.” But to all who would carry out Acts 15: 36, we desire to say, “our hands, our hearts, our houses are wide open; come in, ye blessed of the Lord. 'If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide.' ”

O Lord, be pleased to raise up evangelists to visit “the regions beyond” and pastors to visit, again and again, “the brethren in every city.”

JOHN THE BAPTIST

It is not our object in the following pages to dwell upon the ministry of the Baptist, nor yet upon the place which he filled in the history of God's dealings with Israel, deeply interesting as all this might be and profitable too, inasmuch as his ministry was solemn and powerful, and his dispensational position full of the very deepest interest. But we must confine ourselves to two or three of his utterances as recorded by the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John, in which we shall find two things very strikingly presented to our view — his estimate of himself and his estimate of his Lord.

These are points worthy of our attention. John the Baptist was, according to the testimony of his blessed Master, the greatest “among them that are born of women.” This is the very highest testimony that could be borne to anyone, whether we consider the source from which it came or the terms in which it is stated. He was not only a prophet, but the greatest of prophets — the forerunner of the Messiah, the harbinger of the King, the great preacher of righteousness.

Such was John, officially. Hence it must be of the deepest interest to know what such an one thought of himself and what he thought of Christ — to hearken to his fervent utterances on both these points as given on the page of inspiration. Indeed we shall find herein a mine of most precious practical instruction.

Let us turn to John 1: 19. “And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet?

And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am *the voice* of one crying in the wilderness.”

They were determined to have an answer, and he gives them one. They would compel him to speak of himself, and he does so. But mark his answer! Who or what was he? Nobody. He was only “a voice.” This is morally lovely. The self-emptiness of this most honored servant is beautiful. It does the heart good to be brought in contact with such practical grace as this. Here was a man of real power and dignity, one of Christ's most illustrious servants, occupying the very highest position, whose preaching had stirred the hearts of thousands, whose birth had been announced by angels, whose ministry had been foretold by prophets, the herald of the kingdom, the friend of the King. Yet this remarkable man, when forced to speak of himself, can merely be induced to say, “I am a voice.” Not even a man, but only a voice.

What a lesson is here for us! What a wholesome “corrective” for our lamentable self-occupation, self-complacency and self-exaltation. It is truly wonderful to think of the Baptist's brilliant career, of his powerful ministry, of his widespread influence, extending even to the heart of Herod the king, of the place he occupied and the work he did. Yet, notwithstanding all this, when forced to give out what he had to say of himself, he sums it all up in that one self-emptied word, “A voice.”

This contains a volume of deep practical instruction for the heart. It is precisely what is needed in this day of busy self-importance — needed by each — needed by all; for have we not, each and all, to judge ourselves on the ground of our inordinate tendency to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think? Are we not all prone to attach importance to any little work with which we ourselves happen to stand connected? Alas! it is even so. Hence it is that we so deeply need the wholesome teaching furnished by the lovely self-emptiness of John the Baptist, who when challenged to speak of himself, could retire into the shade and say, “I am only a voice.”

Now this was a very remarkable answer to fall on the ears of the Pharisees who were the messengers sent to question the Baptist, as we read, “They which were sent were of the Pharisees.” Surely it is not without meaning that this fact is stated. Pharisees know very little of self-hiding or self-emptiness. Such rare and exquisite fruits do not thrive beneath the withering atmosphere of Pharisaism. They only grow in the new creation and there is no Pharisaism there. Pharisaism, in all its phases and in all its grades, is the moral direct opposite of self-denial. Therefore, John's reply must have sounded strange in the ears of the questioners.

“And they asked him and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not the Christ nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water, but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.”

Thus, the more this dear servant of Christ is forced to speak of himself or of his work, the more he retires into the shade. When asked about himself, he says “I am a voice.” Then asked about his work, he says, “I am not worthy to unloose my Master's shoe-latchet.” There is no puffing up or exalting of self, no making much ado of his service, no parading of his work. The greatest of prophets was, in his own eyes, merely a voice. The most honored of servants deemed himself unworthy to touch his Master's shoe.

All this is truly refreshing and edifying. It is most healthful for the soul to breathe such an atmosphere as this in a day like the present of so much contemptible egotism and empty pretension. John was a man of *real* power, *real* worth, *real* gift and grace. Therefore he was a lowly unpretending man. It is generally thus. Really great men are fond of the shade. If they must speak of themselves, they

make short work of it. David never spoke of his wonderful feat with the lion and the bear until compelled to do so by Saul's unbelief. Paul never spoke of his rapture to paradise till it was drawn forth by the folly of the Corinthians; and when forced to speak of himself or his work, he apologizes and says again and again, "I speak as a fool."

Thus it is ever. True worth is modest and retiring. The Davids, the Johns and the Pauls have delighted to retire behind their Master and lose sight of themselves in the blaze of His moral glory. This was their joy. Here they found and ever shall find their deepest, fullest, richest blessing. The very highest and purest enjoyment which the creature can taste is to lose sight of self in the immediate presence of God. Oh! to know more of it! It is what we want. It would effectively deliver us from the tendency to be occupied with and influenced by the thoughts and opinions of men. It would impart a moral elevation to the character and a holy stability to the course which is for the glory of God and for our souls' true peace and blessing.

But we must gather up further instruction from the history of John the Baptist. Let the reader turn to John 3: 25: "Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying." There were questions then as there are questions now, for our hearts are full of questions. "And they came unto John and said unto him, Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth and all men come to Him."

Here was something calculated to test the heart of the Baptist. Could he bear to lose all his disciples? Was he prepared for desertion? Was he really up to the height of his own words? Was he merely a voice, a nothing and a nobody? These were pertinent questions, for we all know it is one thing to talk humbly and another thing to *be* humble. It is one thing to speak about self-emptiness and quite another to *be* self-emptied.

Was the Baptist, then, up to the mark? Was he prepared to be superceded and set aside? Was it of any importance to him *who* did the work, provided the work was done? Harken to his reply: "John answered and said, A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." This is a great practical truth. Let us seize it and hold it fast. It is an effective remedy for self-confidence and self-exaltation.

If a man can "take unto himself" nothing, if he can do nothing, if he is nothing, it ill becomes him to be boastful, pretentious or self-occupied. The abiding sense of our own nothingness would ever keep us humble. The abiding sense of God's goodness would ever keep us happy. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." The remembrance of this would ever keep us looking up. Whatever good there is in us or around us, comes from heaven, comes from God — the living and ever flowing Source of all goodness and blessedness. To be near Him, to have Him before the heart, to serve in His holy presence is the true secret of peace, the unfailing safeguard against envy and jealousy.

The Baptist knew something of this. Hence he had an answer ready for his disciples. "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled. *He must increase, but I must decrease.*"

Here lay the deep and precious secret of John's happiness and peace. His joy was not in his own work, not in gathering a number of disciples round himself, not in his personal influence or popularity, not in any or all of these things put together. His pure and holy joy was to stand and hear the voice of the Bridegroom and to see others including his own disciples, flocking to that blessed One and finding

all their springs in Him.

*“This is my joy, which ne'er can fail,
To see my Savior's arm prevail.
And mark His steps of grace;
Now new-born souls convinced of sin,
His blood revealed to them within,
Extol the Lamb in every place.”*

Such was the Baptist's estimate of himself and of his Lord. As to himself, he was but a voice and must decrease. As to his Lord, He was the Bridegroom, He was from heaven, He was above all, the center of all, whose glory must increase and fill with its blessed beams the whole universe of God when all other glory shall have faded away forever.

But we have further testimony from the lips of this beloved and honored servant of God. This testimony is drawn forth, not by any “question” about purifying or any appeal to his personal feelings on the subject of his ministry, but simply by his intense admiration of Christ as an Object for his own heart. “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him and saith, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me: for He was before me. And I knew Him not, but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God” (John 1: 29-36).

Here was what occupied John's heart. *The Lamb of God*. Peerless, precious Object! Satisfying portion! Christ Himself — His work, His Person. In verse 29 we have one great branch of His work — “He taketh away the *sin* of the world.” His atoning death is the foundation of everything. It is the propitiation for His people's sins and for the whole world. In virtue of this precious sacrifice, every stain is removed from the believer's conscience, and in virtue thereof every stain shall yet be obliterated from the whole creation. The cross is the divine pedestal on which the glory of God and the blessedness of man shall rest forever.

Then in verse 33 we have another branch of Christ's work. “He baptizeth with the Holy Spirit.” This was made good on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down from the risen and glorified Head to baptize believers into one body. We do not attempt to enter upon these weighty subjects here, inasmuch as our object is to present to the heart of the reader the great practical effect of occupation with Christ Himself, the only true object of all believers. This effect comes very strikingly out in the following verses. “Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God” (vv. 35-36).

Here the Baptist is wholly engrossed with the *Person* of his Lord. Hence we have no reference to His work. This is a point of the deepest possible interest and importance. “John stood” — fixed — riveted — gazing upon the most glorious Object that had ever fixed the gaze of men and angels — the Object of the Father's delight and of heaven's adoration, “*the Lamb of God*.” Mark the effect. “The two disciples heard Him speak and they followed Jesus.” They felt there must be something uniquely

attractive in One who could so command their master's heart. Therefore, leaving him, they attached themselves to that glorious Person of whom he spoke.

This is full of instruction for us. There is immense moral power in true occupation of heart with Christ and in the testimony which flows from thence. The positive enjoyment of Christ — feeding upon and delighting in Him, the heart going out in holy adoration after Him, the affections centered in Him — these are the things that tell powerfully upon the hearts of others because they tell upon our own hearts and ways. A man who is finding his delight in Christ is lifted out of himself and lifted above the circumstances and influences which surround him. Such an one is morally elevated above the thoughts and opinions of men. He enjoys a holy calmness and independence. He is not thinking about himself or seeking a name or a place for himself. He has found a satisfying portion and is therefore able to tell the world that he is wholly independent of it.

Was John troubled by the loss of his disciples? No, it was the joy of his heart to see them finding their center and their object where he had found his own. He had not sought to make a party or to gather disciples around himself. He had borne witness to another, and that other was “the Lamb of God” in whom he himself delighted, not only because of His work, but because of His worth — His moral glory, His intrinsic, peerless, divine excellence. He heard the Bridegroom's voice and saw His face, and his joy was full.

Now we may well inquire, What can the world offer to a man whose joy is full? What can circumstances, what can the creature do for him? If men slight and desert him, if they wound and insult him, what then? Why, he can say, “My joy is full. I have found all I want in that blessed One who not only has taken away my sins and filled me with the Holy Spirit, but who has drawn me to Himself and filled me with His own divine preciousness and eternal excellency.”

Reader, let us earnestly seek to know more of this deep blessedness. Rest assured we shall find therein an effective cure for the thousand and one ills that afflict us in the scene through which we are passing. How is it that *professors* so often exhibit a gloomy and unlovely temper? Why are they peevish, fretful and irritable in the domestic life? Why so ruffled and put about by the petty annoyances of their daily history? Why so easily upset by the most contemptible trifles? Why put out of temper if the dinner be not properly and punctually served up? Why so touchy and tenacious? Why so ready to take offense if self be touched or its interests intruded upon? Ah! the answer is easily given. The poor heart is not finding its center, its satisfying portion in “the Lamb of God.” Here lies the secret of our failure. The moment we take our eye off Christ, the moment we cease to abide in Him by a living faith, that moment we get under the power of every passing current of circumstances and influences. We become feeble and lose our balance; self and its surroundings rise into prominence and fill the heart's vision. Thus, instead of exhibiting the beautiful features of the image of Christ, we exhibit the very reverse, even the odious and humiliating tempers and dispositions of unsubdued nature.

May God enable us to lay these things seriously to heart, for we may depend upon it that serious damage is done to the cause of Christ, and grievous dishonor brought upon His holy name by the uncomely manners, tempers and ways of those who profess to belong to Him.

WHAT SHOULD I READ?

A Question for the Times

The question which forms the heading of this paper is one of real weight and practical importance. There is much more involved in it than we might want to admit. It is a common saying, “Show me your company and I will tell you *what* you are.” It may, with equal truth, be said, “Show me

your library and I will tell *where* you are.” Our reading may be taken as the great indicator of our moral, intellectual and spiritual condition. Our books are our mental and spiritual food, the material on which the inner man feeds. Hence the seriousness of the entire question of Christian reading. Indeed we may freely own to our readers that this subject has engrossed us much of late. Therefore, we feel constrained in faithfulness to the Lord and to the souls of our readers, to offer a few words of admonition in reference to what we regard as a matter of real importance to all Christians.

We observe with deep concern a growing distaste for solid reading, specially among young Christians, although it is not confined to them. Newspapers, religious novels, sensational tales, all sorts of poisonous and trashy literature are eagerly devoured, while volumes of most weighty and precious truth lie neglected on the bookshelf.

All this we consider most deplorable. We look upon it as a most alarming indication of a low spiritual condition. Indeed it is difficult to conceive how anyone possessing a single spark of divine life can find pleasure in such defiling rubbish as one sees now-a-days in the hands of many who occupy the high ground of Christian profession. The inspired apostle exhorts all Christians, “As newborn babes, to desire the sincere milk *of the Word* that ye may grow thereby.” How can we grow if we neglect the Word of God and yet devour newspapers and light, worthless books? How is it possible for any Christian to be in a healthy condition of soul who can barely find a few hasty moments to run his eye over a verse or two of Scripture, but can give hours to light and useless reading? We may depend upon it: our reading proves beyond question what we are and where we are. If our reading is light and frivolous, our state is the same. If our Christianity is of a solid and earnest type, it will be distinctly evidenced by our habitual and voluntary reading — the reading to which we turn for our recreation and refreshment.

Some may say, “We cannot be always reading the Bible and good books.” We reply plainly that *the new nature would never care to read anything else*. Now the question is, whether we wish to minister to the old nature or the new? If the latter, we may rest assured that newspapers and light literature are not the means to be used. It is impossible that a truly spiritual, earnest Christian can find enjoyment in such reading. It may be that a Christian engaged in business or in public official life will have occasion, in connection with his business or his official duty, to refer to a newspaper, but this is another thing altogether from finding his actual enjoyment and recreation in such reading. He will not find the hidden manna or the old corn of the land of Canaan in the newspaper. He will not find Christ in the sensational novel.

It is a poor, low thing to hear a Christian say, “How can we be always reading the Bible?” or “What harm is there in reading a story book?” All such questions evidence the fact that the soul has got far away from Christ. This is what makes it so very serious. Spiritual decline must have set in and made alarming progress before a Christian could think of asking such questions. Hence there is little use in arguing about the right or the wrong of things. There is no ability to argue aright, no capacity to weigh evidence. The whole spiritual and moral condition is wrong. “There is death in the pot.” What is needed is thorough restoration of soul. You must “bring meal,” or in other words, apply a divine remedy to meet the diseased state of the constitution.

We feel pressed in spirit to call the serious attention of the Christian reader to this great practical question. We deem it to be one of deepest seriousness. The extremely low spiritual tone of Christianity among us is owing, in many cases, to the reading of light and worthless literature. The moral effect of all such is most harmful. How can a soul prosper, how can there be growth in the divine life where there is no real love for the Bible or for books which unfold the precious contents of the Bible to our

souls? Is it possible that a Christian can be in a healthy condition of soul who really prefers some light work to a volume designed for true spiritual edification? We cannot believe it. We are persuaded that all true-hearted, earnest Christians — all who truly desire to get on in divine things, all who really love Christ and desire heaven and heavenly things — all such will be found diligently reading the Holy Scriptures and thankfully availing themselves of all good, helpful books which come within their reach. They will have neither time nor taste for newspapers or light literature. With them it will not be a question as to the right or the wrong of such reading: they simply have no desire for it, do not want it, would not have it. They have something far better. “With ashes who would grudge to part, when called on angels' bread to feast?”

We trust our readers will bear with us in writing thus plainly and pointedly. We feel constrained in view of the judgment-seat of Christ to do so. Would that we could write as earnestly as we feel on the subject. We consider it one of the weightiest and most practical questions which can engage our attention. We entreat the Christian reader to shun and discontinue all light reading. Let us each ask the question, when about to take up a book or a paper, “Should I like my Lord to come and find this in my hand? or can I take this into the presence of God and ask His blessing upon the reading of it? Can I read it to the glory of the name of Jesus?” If we cannot say “Yes” to these questions, then by the grace of God, let us fling the paper or the book away and devote our spare moments to the blessed Word of God or to some spiritual volume written thereon. Then shall our souls be nourished and strengthened; we shall grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the fruits of righteousness shall abound in our practical life, to the glory of God.

It may be that some of our friends would repudiate altogether the habit of reading human writings. Some there are who take the ground of reading nothing but the Bible. They tell us they find all they want in that peerless volume and that human writings are a hindrance rather than a help.

Well, as to this, each one must judge for himself. No one can be a rule for another. But we certainly cannot take this high ground. We bless the Lord each day more and more for all the gracious helps given us by means of the writings of His beloved servants. We look upon them as a most precious stream of refreshment and spiritual blessing flowing down from our glorified Head in the heavens, for which we can never praise Him enough. We should just as soon think of refusing to hear a brother speak in the assembly as of refusing to read his writings, for what is either but a branch of ministry given of God for our profit and edification?

We do need to exercise care lest we make too much of ministry, whether oral or written, but the possible *abuse* of a thing is no valid argument against the *use* of it. There is danger on every side, and most surely it is a very dangerous thing to despise ministry. None of us are self-sufficient. It is the divine purpose that we should be helpful one to another. We cannot do without “that which every joint supplieth.” How many will have to praise God throughout eternity for blessing received through books and tracts! How many there are who never get an atom of spiritual ministry except what the Lord sends them through the press. It will be said, “They have the Bible.” True, but all have not the same ability to fathom the living depths or seize the moral glories of the Bible. No doubt, if we cannot have either oral or written ministry, the Spirit of God can feed us directly in the green pastures of Holy Scripture. But who will deny that the writings of God's servants are used by the Holy Spirit as a most powerful agency in building up the Lord's people in their most holy faith? It is our firm conviction that God has made more use of such agency during the last forty years than ever before in the entire history of the Church.

Cannot we praise Him for it? Truly so. We should praise Him with full and glowing hearts. And we should earnestly pray Him to grant still further blessing on the writings of His servants — to deepen

their tone, increase their power and widen their sphere. Human writings, if not clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit, are just so much waste paper. In like manner the voice of the public preacher or teacher, if not the living vehicle of the Holy Spirit, is but a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. But the Holy Spirit *does* make use of both agencies for the blessing of souls and the spread of the truth, and we deem it a serious mistake for anyone to despise an agency which God is pleased to adopt. Indeed we have rarely met anyone who refused the help of human writings who did not prove exceedingly narrow, crude and one-sided. This is only what we might expect, inasmuch as it is the divine method to make us mutually helpful one to another. Hence, if anyone claims to be independent or self-sufficient, he must sooner or later find out his mistake.

THE WORK OF GOD IN THE SOUL

We have from time to time written about the work of God for us. This work lies at the very foundation of all true practical Christianity and personal religion. The knowledge of what has been accomplished by the atoning death of Christ is essential to the soul's peace and liberty. We cannot too frequently reiterate or too strongly insist upon the fundamental truth that it is the work wrought *for* us and not the work wrought *in* us that saves us. Nor should we ever forget that faith is the soul's outward, not its inward look.

All this is of the deepest importance and the reader may rest assured that nothing is further from our thoughts than to pen a single line which might tend to lessen its importance. But this grand and interesting line of truth has been largely unfolded. Therefore, we feel the more free to enter in this article upon a subject which ought ever to hold a prominent place in our minds — the work of God *in* us. May God's Spirit guide our thoughts as we dwell upon this theme!

In tracing the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul of a sinner, there are three distinct things to be noticed. First, *He creates a need*. Secondly, He reveals an Object to meet that need. And thirdly, He enables the soul to lay hold on that Object. These are the three stages of the Spirit's work in the soul and nothing can be more interesting than to trace them. There are various other branches of the work of the Holy Spirit, but we now confine ourselves to that special branch which bears upon the individual soul in its passage from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

This need may develop itself in several ways. In some cases it takes the form of a deep sense of guilt; in others, a sense of the utter vanity and emptiness of all beneath the sun. Doubtless, in many instances, we may find all ways operating.

Let us take an example or two from the pages of inspiration. Look at Peter by the lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5). No sooner had a ray of divine light entered his soul in convicting power, than he exclaims, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Here we have a sense of guilt — a deep, keen sense of personal sinfulness and unworthiness, the result of a divine operation in the soul of Peter. This is very important. It is well to remember that the question of sin must be raised and settled in the human conscience. Sin is a serious thing in God's judgment and it must be felt as such in the soul of the sinner. Peter felt he had no right or title to be in the presence of that blessed One whose glory had just shone upon him. He felt himself utterly unfit to be there. He felt that sin and holiness could not be together, any more than light and darkness.

This was a right feeling in Peter; it is a right feeling in every case. It is always a good thing to begin with a profound sense of personal guilt. It is well to have the arrow of conviction piercing to the very center of the soul. It is well to have the plough-share breaking up the fallow ground and making a deep furrow in the heart. We invariably find that the steadiest and most solid Christians are those who have, at the first, gone through the deepest waters and endured the keenest exercises.

We do not mean to say that the soul's exercises have anything to do with the ground of the soul's salvation, anymore than the feelings of a man in a house on fire have to do with the fire escape by which he descends from the burning building. But still we believe it is a good thing for the soul to begin with a very clear and full sense of its guilt and ruin — *a just apprehension of the judgment of God against sin*. The more keenly one has felt his awful position in the burning house, the more thoroughly will he appreciate the fire escape, the mind that planned it and the hand that provided it. And so in the case of the sinner; the more he feels his guilt and unworthiness, the more will he prize the precious blood that cancels his guilt and brings him without spot into the presence of a holy, sin-hating God.

It is to be feared that, in many cases, the work of conviction or repentance is very superficial. It strikes us, too, that at times, in our great anxiety to bring the soul into peace, we interfere with the work of conviction. We go before, in stead of following after the Holy Spirit. This is very serious. It is a perilous thing to tamper with God's work in the soul. It is most marvelous grace that deigns to use us, but let us beware not to run before the Holy Spirit. It is our place to mark His operations, not to mar them.

If, for example, we meet a soul under conviction of sin, it may be that the work is not yet complete; it may be only in progress. What should we do? Seek to hasten the individual into a confession of faith in Christ, to extract from him an acknowledgment of peace with God? By no means; to do so would be to damage the precious work of God in the soul. What then should we do? Seek to follow in the wake of the Holy Spirit, to be His instrument in carrying on the work which He has in hand. He will assuredly perfect His own work. If we are waiting on Him, He will teach us what to do and how to do it, what to say and when to say it. If Ananias had gone to Saul one hour before the close of the "three days," he would have gone too soon. Those days were serious days — days which left their imprint on the whole of the apostle's history — days never to be forgotten. They were days during which his eyes, closed upon the external world, were turned inward upon himself and backward upon his ways. And are we not warranted in asserting that it would have been an injudicious if not an unhallowed intrusion, had Ananias gone to interfere with the deep and holy work which was going on in the soul of that remarkable man? Unquestionably; and so it is in every case. We may depend upon it, that we only injure souls if we attempt to urge them by our work, one hair's breadth beyond the actual point to which the work of God has conducted them.

All true spiritual ministry will tend to deepen in the soul that special character of work which the Holy Spirit is carrying on at the moment. Hence, if we come in contact with one in whom the work of conviction or repentance is in progress, we should not seek too hastily to urge the soul into a confession of having found peace. If we aim at being co-workers with God, it will be our place to watch, with earnest prayer and holy diligence, the progress of the divine work — to wait much on God that He may be pleased to use us as His instruments in carrying out the purposes of His grace. This is most blessed work, but it is most solemn and demands much spirituality, much nearness to Christ, much self-denial. The most serious mistakes are committed by unskillful hands undertaking to deal with cases in which the work of God's Spirit is going on. We must remember that God's work is sometimes very slow, but it is always very sure. We, on the contrary, are often impetuous. In our desire to reach speedy results, we may often unduly hasten on the soul to a professed position far beyond its actual practical state. We may often urge from the lips more than the Holy Spirit has worked in the heart. This is very serious for all who have to deal with souls.

But the grace of God is all-sufficient for every case. Nothing can be more interesting than to watch the unfoldings of the Spirit's work in the soul — to mark the stages of God's new creation, the

establishment and progress of His kingdom in the heart. Far be it from us to urge or encourage cold heartless indifference as to precious souls in their deep and varied spiritual exercises — a species of most miserable fatalism which, under the plea of leaving souls entirely in the hands of the Holy Spirit, in reality throws off all sense of responsibility. God forbid that we should lend any approval to anything of this kind. We deeply feel ourselves responsible to care for souls. We believe all Christians are responsible. Hence arises the need of skill and spiritual tact in dealing with souls so we may not in any way retard, but by all means further the blessed work of God's Spirit in them.

But we have been rather digressing from our immediate line, to which we shall now return.

We have stated that the Spirit of God sometimes produces in the soul a sense of danger. He presses upon the heart and conscience the awful reality of the Lake of Fire and the worm that never dies. He at times sees fit to draw aside the curtain and reveal what awaits all those who die in their sins. The sense of guilt and the sense of danger frequently go together, but they are distinct exercises, and in many cases the latter is the more prominent of the two. The soul is filled with horror at the thought of burning forever and ever in the flames of hell. The Holy Spirit uses this horror to make the heart feel its need of Christ.

Many object to the preaching of everlasting punishment as a means of leading souls to Christ. Not that they deny the truth on this subject, but they question the propriety or usefulness of it. They deem it wiser to dwell only upon the love of God in giving His Son, and the love of Christ in giving Himself. They judge it better and more effective to dwell upon the joys and glories of heaven than the woes and horrors of hell. Well, we do not mean for a moment to compare the two themes; no intelligent person could think of so doing. But we must bear in mind that our blessed Lord again and again addressed His hearers on the awful subject of hell fire. Read Matthew 5: 22-30. Three times in this brief passage He warns His hearers against the danger of hell.

So also in that most solemn passage at the close of Luke 16. Who can read this without feeling pressed with the weight and seriousness of the parable? What a presentation of the past, the present and the future! "Son, remember." Here memory is flung back upon the past. And what a past! Memory will be terribly active in hell. "But now thou art tormented." Here the lost soul is called to contemplate the present. And what a present! Tormented in the flames of hell! But is there no end, no faint hope of cessation? None whatever. "There is a great gulf *fixed*." Here is the future. And what a future! Hell is an eternal reality. If hell fire is not everlasting, what would be the force of the word "fixed"?

Are not the above Scriptures quite sufficient to prove that the Holy Spirit uses the truth of everlasting punishment to create a need in the immortal soul? Most surely. And if He does so, should not we? Did not the Apostle Paul reason before Felix on the subject of judgment to come, and in such a manner as to make that sensuous man tremble on his throne? Ah! yes; it is a wholesome thing for the soul of a sinner to be impressed with a deep sense of his danger of hell. And when we find a soul so impressed, what should we do? Should we not seek to deepen the impression? Would it not be our wisdom to follow up what the Holy Spirit is manifestly doing? Truly so. To act otherwise would be to hinder instead of furthering the work of God in the soul. The blessed Spirit will teach us the proper moment to present the divine Object to meet the need of the exercised soul. The Master will at the right moment issue the command, "Loose him and let him go." God will do His work and use us therein, if we wait on Him. All we desire is to press upon the reader the reality of God's work in the soul and the necessity of guarding against anything like undue haste in urging souls beyond the measure of the Spirit's operation. We should beware of healing the wound slightly and of crying Peace, where there is no peace, yes, where there is not even true preparedness for that blessed peace which Jesus has made

by the blood of His cross, which God proclaims in His Word and which the heart enjoys by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Having glanced at two of those modes in which the Spirit of God works in the soul to produce a sense of need — by convincing the conscience of guilt and by pressing upon the spirit the just dread of danger — it remains for us to consider a third method which is by making the heart to feel the utter vanity and dissatisfaction of all that this poor world can offer in the way of pleasure or enjoyment.

This is by no means uncommon. We frequently meet with very matured Christians who say they were brought to Christ, not so much by a sense of guilt or a dread of danger, as by an intense longing after a certain undefinable something — a painful void in the heart, a sense of weariness, loneliness and desolation. They felt an emptiness which nothing in this world could fill. They were heartsick and disappointed. No doubt they felt and acknowledged the broad truth that they were sinners. Moreover, when they looked in the direction of the future they felt there was nothing for them but eternal misery and torment. But then the great prominent feature of the divine work in them was not so much conviction of sin or a fear of punishment as a feeling of utter desolation and dissatisfaction. They found themselves in that condition of soul in which the study of the book of Ecclesiastes shows. They had tried the world in every shape and form, and like the royal Preacher had found it to be “vanity and vexation of spirit.”

Now we must be prepared for this variety in the ways of the Spirit of God. We are not to suppose that He will confine Himself in His blessed operations to any one particular type. Sometimes He produces in the soul the most overwhelming sense of guilt so the heart is crushed to the earth, and nothing is felt, seen or thought of but the vileness, the heinousness, the blackness of sin. The dark catalog of sins rises like a great mountain before the vision of the soul and nearly sinks it into despair. The soul refuses to be comforted. Shame and confusion, sackcloth and ashes, are felt to be the only suited portion of the guilty one.

At other times God sees fit to bring before the soul the terrors of hell and the awful reality of spending an eternity in that region of unutterable gloom and misery. The dark shadow of the future is made to fall upon the brightest scenes of the present. The thought of the wrath to come so presses upon the heart that nothing seems to yield the smallest relief or comfort. All is deep, deep gloom and horror.

Finally, in other cases, the divine Worker is pleased to awaken the soul to the painful discovery and consciousness that it is not within the boundaries of earth to furnish a satisfying portion for an immortal spirit, that all under the sun wears the stamp of death upon it, that human life is but a vapor that speedily vanishes away, that if a man were to live a thousand years and possess the wealth of the universe and concentrate in his own person all the honors and all the dignities which this world could bestow — were he at the very highest pinnacle of power and be renowned throughout the world for genius, intellect and moral worth, if he had all that earth could yield or mortal man possess — the heart would still want something. There would still be a painful void. There would still be the cry, “Oh! for an object.”

Thus varied are the operations of the Spirit of God in the souls of men. No doubt, there may be a sense of guilt, a fear of danger and a painful consciousness of the emptiness and vanity of all earthly possessions and enjoyments, altogether apart from any divine work in the soul, but we are now occupied only with this latter, and we feel the deep importance of being able to discern and appreciate the work of God's Spirit in the human heart, as also of seeking to help it on. We greatly dread anything like human interference with the progress of the kingdom of God in the soul. There is danger on all sides. There is danger of casting a damper on converts and there is danger of mistaking the mere

workings of nature for the action of the Spirit of God. Nor is this all. We are frequently in danger of running directly counter to the object which the Lord has in view in His dealings with the soul. We may, for example, be seeking to extract the arrow which He is sending home to the very center of the soul. We may be seeking to cover up a wound which He would have probed to the very bottom.

All these things demand the utmost vigilance and care on the part of those who take an interest in souls. We are, all of us, liable to make the most serious mistakes either in the way of discouraging and repulsing souls that ought rather to be fostered and cheered, or of recognizing and accrediting as of God what is merely the fruit of religious nature working. In short, it is a serious thing to seek to do the work of God in any way. He alone can give the needed wisdom and grace in each case as it arises. And He will, blessed be His name, give abundantly to all who simply wait on Him. "He giveth more grace." Precious word! There is absolutely no limit to it. It shines as an exhaustless motto on our Father's treasury door, assuring us of the most ample supply "for the urgent need of every hour."

Let us not, therefore, be discouraged by the magnitude and seriousness of the work, or the danger attending it. God is sufficient. The work is His. If He deigns in His marvelous grace to use us, as He surely does, as His co-workers, He will liberally furnish us with all that is needed for each case as it arises. But we must wait patiently, humbly and trustfully on Him. We must seek to lay self aside with its bustling self-importance and excitement. We must seek through grace to get rid of that spirit which would be continually thrusting forward that wretched "I, I, I." In a word, nature must be kept in the shade and Christ alone exalted. Then, assuredly, the Spirit of God will use us in the glorious work which He is carrying on in souls. He will give us the needed skill and ability for each specific case. He will lead us along that path in which He is moving and in which, too, He is displaying the precious mysteries of His new creation.

Nothing can be more wonderful, nothing more intensely interesting, than to mark the progress of the work of God in the soul. A poet has given expression to this when he says

*"This is my joy that ne'er can fail,
To see my Savior's arm prevail,
To mark the steps of grace:
Now new born souls convinced of sin,
His blood revealed to them within,
Extol the Lamb in every place."*

But in order to discern and appreciate — to say nothing of cooperating in — this most precious and sacred work, there must be the anointed eye, the circumcised heart, the unshod foot, the clean hands. The Spirit of God is very sensitive, very easily grieved, quenched and hindered. He does not like to have a noise made about His work. We have seen the work of the Holy Spirit interrupted altogether by reason of the unhallowed excitement of those who were engaged in it.

It is well to remember this. Unbelief hinders the commencing of the Spirit's work. Undue interference also hinders its progress. The slightest mark of the human finger is apt to soil the mysterious and beautiful work of God. True it is, the Lord will use us if we really look to Him in humility of mind and self-emptiness. Indeed, we constantly find that, in carrying on His work, He allows us to do just as much as we can do, while He Himself, adored be His holy Name, only does what we cannot. This is strikingly illustrated in the scene at the tomb of Lazarus in John 11. There, the Lord commands those around Him to "take away the stone" because it was something they could do. But it

is He who cries, "Lazarus, come forth," because this was something which only He could do. Then again He says, "Loose him and let him go," thus allowing them to cooperate so far as they were able.

It strikes us that we have in all this a sample of the Lord's gracious way with His servants. In every little thing in which He can use them He does. But oh! let us be careful not to meddle with His work. Let it be ours to gaze and worship, to mark the marvelous unfoldings of that new creation in which "all things are of God." His work shall endure throughout all generations. All which bears the stamp of His hand shall abide forever. Hence it is our wisdom as well as our blessing, just to mark His hand and follow where He leads.

*Carry on Thy new creation -
Faithful, holy, may we be,
Joyful in Thy full salvation,
More and more conformed to Thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Then to worship and adore Thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise!*

Before entering upon the second division of our subject, we feel constrained to put a pointed question or two to the reader. We trust he will bear with us in so doing. We are aware that some persons do not like close, personal dealing. They prefer the simple unfolding of truth and leaving it to do its own work. Well, we also value the unfolding of truth in saving or edifying power to the heart and conscience of the reader or the hearer.

But we believe it to be the absolute duty of the writer or speaker to do his very utmost in the way of appeal, exhortation and pointed enquiry to affect the heart, reach the conscience and enlighten the understanding of his reader or hearer. We must remember we have a double duty to perform. We have to unfold truth and we have to deal with the soul. All preachers, teachers and writers should remember this. If a man occupies himself only with abstract truth, his ministry is apt to prove unpractical and unfruitful. If he occupies himself only with souls, his ministry will prove unfurnished and uninteresting. If he occupies himself duly with both, he will prove "a good minister of Jesus Christ."

Hence, beloved reader, we feel we should be leaving one half of our work undone, did we not from time to time turn from our subject to make an earnest appeal to you; and we would now earnestly entreat of you, as in the immediate presence of Him with whom we have to do, to give your undivided attention to the following question. Be honest with yourself, be earnest, be real, and rest assured that God will bless you.

Have you, dear friend, been led to feel your need? Has the Spirit of God worked in your heart to produce a sense of guilt, a dread of judgment or a consciousness of the utter vanity of all under the sun? Can you say from your very heart, "Woe is me! for I am undone," "Behold, I am vile," "I am a sinful man?" All these are distinct utterances of men like yourself — men of like passions — but of men under the quickening visitation of the Holy Spirit and the convicting action of the truth of God. Be assured of it, they are good words, the fruit of most precious exercises in the soul, such exercises as we delight to see.

It is a grand thing to see the soul thoroughly broken down before God, thoroughly sensible of its

lost and ruined condition, of its deep guilt, and of its exposure to the just judgment and wrath of a holy, sin-hating God. It was no mere surface work with Job, Isaiah or Peter when they said the words we have just transcribed. The ploughshare had entered the very depths of the soul. The whole moral being was permeated by the light of divine holiness. The arrow of conviction had pierced to the very center of the heart. It was real work. Not one of those beloved saints of God could have rested in the flippant wordy confession of the fact that “we are *all* sinners.” No mere empty generalities would do for them. All was deep, real and personal. They were in the presence of God, and this is always a real and a solemn matter.

Now we would here distinctly state, once for all, that the exercises of the soul have nothing to do with the ground of salvation or peace. We cannot possibly be too simple and clear as to this. Job did not rest in his own words, “Behold, I am vile,” but in God's declaration, “I have found a ransom.” Isaiah did not build upon a “Woe is me!” but upon “This hath touched thy lips.” Peter did not find relief in his own exclamation, “I am a sinful man,” but upon those two sweet and soothing words of Jesus, “Fear not.”

All this is most true. Far from us be the thought of leading any soul to build upon its exercises, however deep, real and spiritual they may be. No, we must build only and altogether on Christ. “Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa. 28: 16). This “stone” is not an exercise of any sort. It is not even the work of the Holy Spirit, essential as that is. It is not even the Holy Spirit Himself. It is the One to whom the Holy Spirit ever delights to bear witness, even Christ who is the “tried,” the “precious,” the “sure foundation” who died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and rose again for our justification, according to the Scriptures.

Still, while we not only fully admit, but earnestly and constantly insist upon all this, we must be allowed to give expression to our deep and ever deepening sense of the value of a profound work of the Spirit of God in the soul. We fear there is an appalling amount of unbroken material to be found in the ranks of Christian profession, a quantity of truth floating about as so much unpractical and uninfluential theory in the region of the intellect, a large amount of mental traffic in unfelt truth, a great deal of what is unreal. We question if, in many cases, the head is not far in advance of the heart — the mind more at work than the conscience. This is the secret of much of the unreality, the hollowness and the inconsistency so grievous to contemplate. We are convinced of this. Hence it is that we so earnestly desire to deal faithfully with the heart and conscience of the reader. He need not be the least afraid to look this weighty matter straight in the face. Let him not be afraid of the knife. Let him beware of mere intellectualism which is bringing about the temporary reign of superstition and infidelity.

We shall now proceed to consider

The Object Unfolded

Inasmuch as pointed reference has already been made to Isaiah and Peter — a prophet of the Old Testament times and an apostle of the New — we can hardly do better than to look at the mode in which our thesis is illustrated in the history of these two remarkable men. First, let us contemplate the case of Isaiah the prophet. We have seen in his case how the need was created; let us now consider how the object was revealed.

No sooner had the convicted soul given utterance to the cry, “Woe is me! for I am undone,” than the angelic messenger was dispatched with all the earnestness and energy of divine love from the very throne of the eternal thrice holy Jehovah. “Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth and

said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged” (Isa. 6: 6-7).

There are two things in the foregoing quotation demanding our attention. First, the substance; secondly, the style of the action recorded. The substance is the thing that was done; the style is the way of doing it. The prophet had been led to see himself in the light which came from the throne of God. This was a serious moment. It could not possibly be otherwise. It is deeply solemn to be brought to the discovery of what we are in the presence of God. When so brought, nothing but divine provision can meet our need, nothing but a divine object can satisfy the heart. Had Isaiah seen only the throne, his condition would have been hopeless. But there was the altar as well, and here lay the secret of life and salvation for him as for every other convicted and self-destroyed sinner. If the throne had its claims, the altar had its provision. The one stood over against the other — two prominent figures in this most sublime vision, two grand realities in the glorious economy of divine grace. The light of the throne revealed the sinner's guilt; the grace of the altar removed it.

Most assuredly, nothing else could have done for Isaiah, nothing else for the reader. It must be this in every case. The measure may vary, but the great fact is always the same. “Woe is me!” and “This hath touched thy lips” must go together. The former is the effect of the throne; the latter, the fruit of the altar. The former is the need created; the latter is the object revealed. Nothing can be more simple, nothing more blessed. It is only the One who creates the need who can unfold the object to meet it; the former He does by the action of truth; the latter by the provision of grace.

“This hath touched thy lips.” Mark the words, reader! Note them carefully. See that you understand their force, their meaning and their application to yourself. “This” — what is it? It is the provision — the rich, ample, perfect provision of divine grace. It has wrapped up in its comprehensive folds all a poor guilty, hell-deserving, broken-hearted sinner can need to meet his guilt and ruin. It is not anything from within, but something from without. It is not a process, it is not an exercise, it is not a feeling; it is a divine provision to meet the sinner's deepest need, to remove his guilt, to hush his fears, to save his soul. All was contained in that mysterious “live coal from off the altar.”

We may have occasion to return to this scene again in connection with the last point in our subject — the soul's taking hold of the object. We shall here just refer to the *style* of that wonderful action which spoke peace to the troubled soul of Isaiah. There is no one who is not conscious of the immense power of style over the heart. Indeed, we may almost say that the style of an action is more influential than the substance. And is it not most blessed to know that our God has His own unique style? Truly so. Adored forever be His holy Name, He not only meets our need, but He does it in such a way as to let us know without a shadow of a doubt, that “His whole heart and his whole soul” are in the act. He not only pardons our sins, but does it after such a fashion as to convince our souls that it is His own richest joy to do it.

The style of the divine action in Isaiah 6 shines forth in that little word “flew.” It is as though God was in haste to apply the divine balm to a wounded spirit. Not a moment was to be lost. That bitter cry, “Woe is me!” coming forth as it did from the very depths of a sinner's broken heart, had gone straight to the ear and heart of God, and with the intense rapidity of a seraph's wing, must a divine response be sent from the sanctuary of God to purge the convicted conscience and tranquilize the troubled heart.

Such is the way of our God. Such is the manner of His love. Such is the style of His grace. He not only saves us, but He does it in such a way as to assure us that it makes Him far happier to save us than it makes us to be saved. The poor legal, doubting, reasoning heart may often be full of fear as to how God will deal with us. In spite of all the precious assurances of His love, all the proofs of His mercy and goodness, all the pledges of His readiness to save and bless, still the heart doubts and hangs back. It

still refuses to listen to that voice of love speaking in ten thousand touching and eloquent strains. It still proves its readiness to lend a willing ear to the dark suggestions of the arch enemy — to its own wretched reasonings, to anything and everything but the whispers of divine love. In vain does a Savior God stand before the sinner, beseeching him to come; in vain does He open His very heart to the sinner's view, "showing His thoughts how kind they be"; in vain He points to the sacrifice of His own providing — the Lamb of His free giving, the son of His bosom. Still the heart will harbor its dark and depressing suspicions. It will not give God credit for love so full so free. It will not admit that God delights to save, delights to bless, delights to make us happy.

Oh! beloved reader, are you a doubter? Do you still hang back? Do you still continue to wrong and wound that deep, tender, marvelous love of God that stopped not short of giving His only begotten Son from His bosom and bruising Him on Calvary's cursed tree? Why, oh why, do you hesitate? What are you waiting for? What more do you want? Say not, we beseech you, "I cannot believe; I would if I could, but I cannot. I am waiting for power." Hear these words. "If we receive the testimony of man, the testimony of God is greater." Have you not, many a time, received the testimony, the record, the witness of man? If you were to tell a fellow man that you could not believe him, what would he say to you? Would he not tell you that you were calling him a liar? Will you make *God* a liar? You have done it long enough. Do it no longer, we beseech you, but come now, just as you are, and behold the manner of the love of God — its substance and its style. Come now with all your guilt, all your wretchedness, all your misery, all your need, and you will find in that object which God unfolds in His Word, all you can need for time and eternity. Not only so, but you will receive a welcome as hearty as the God of all grace can give. Do come!

For further illustration of our theme, look to the case of Peter at the Lake of Gennesaret as recorded in the opening paragraph of Luke 5. He, too, like the prophet Isaiah, was made to feel his need — his deep, deep need. The same convicting light which had entered the soul of the prophet, here penetrates the heart of the future apostle and elicits those earnest words, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Here we have the need created, the sense of guilt produced. But mark in passing the strange yet lovely inconsistency! Peter has not the least idea of making his escape from the light which had shone upon him; no, he actually draws nearer and nearer to it. He felt he had no right to be there and yet he would not be anywhere else. And why? Because mingled with that powerful convicting light, there was the equally powerful converting grace which irresistibly drew the heart of the "sinful man" toward it. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." "And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1). What could be more suited to a man full of sin than a Savior full of grace? Surely nothing and no one. Though that blessed Savior was full of truth likewise, and truth puts everything and everyone in the right place, yet the grace was amply sufficient to meet all the need which the truth revealed. Hence, although the poor convicted sinner cries out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," he nevertheless feels that the only place for him is "at Jesus' knees."

It is ever thus in cases of true conviction. In every instance in which the genuine work of God's Spirit is worked in the soul, we notice more or less of what we have called this strange yet lovely inconsistency, this seeming contradiction, the striking phenomenon of a sinner confessing his utter unfitness to be in the presence of a holy God and yet having a certain inward consciousness that it is the only place he can be in.

This is very beautiful and touchingly interesting. It is the sure evidence of the work of God in the

soul. There is the profound sense of sinfulness and guilt and yet that marvelous and mysterious clinging of the heart to the One whose moral glory has humbled us in the dust. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But where were these glowing words said? At the knees of a Savior-God. Blessed place! Did Peter imagine that Jesus was going to depart from him? Did he really think that the gracious One who had deigned to make use of his ship and then given him such a miraculous draught of fish, would leave him in the depth of his misery? We do not and cannot believe it. Ah! no; the Spirit of God, in His most precious operations in the soul, always combines these two elements — the consciousness of utter unworthiness and an earnest clinging to and breathing after Christ. The former is conviction; the latter conversion. By the former, the furrow is made; by the latter, the seed deposited. In short, it is the need created and the object revealed. The two things go together. As in the case of Isaiah, "Woe is me!" is instantly followed by "This hath touched thy lips". So in the case of Peter, "Depart from me" is followed by the gracious words, "Fear not."

This is divine. The object revealed is perfectly adequate to meet the need created. It must be so because the creation of the need and the unfolding of the object are both operations of one and the selfsame Spirit. And not only so, but the object so unfolded is found to be adequate to meet all the claims of God Himself. Therefore it must be adequate to meet all the claims of the convicted and exercised soul. If God is satisfied with the Person and work of Christ, we may well be so likewise. How did Isaiah learn that he was undone? By light from on high. How did he learn that his sin was purged? By grace from on high. He rested upon the testimony of God and not upon his own feelings or notions. If at the close of the beautiful scene recorded in chapter 6, anyone had asked Isaiah, "How do you know your sin is purged?" what would have been his reply? Would he have said, "I *feel* it is so?" We believe not. We are persuaded that this man of God rested upon something far better, far deeper, far more solid than any mere feeling of his own mind. Doubtless he did feel. But why? Just because he did not make feeling the ground of his faith, but faith the ground of his feeling, and divine revelation the ground of his faith.

Such is the divine order, an order so constantly reversed to the serious damage of souls, the subversion of their peace and the dishonor of their Lord. When we turn to Scripture, when we examine the various cases which it records for our learning, we invariably find the order to be, first, the Word; secondly, faith; thirdly, feeling. On the other hand, when we turn to the history of souls today and examine their exercises and experiences, we constantly find they *begin* with their feelings. As a consequence, they rarely enjoy a right sense of the nature and foundation of true Christian faith.

All this is greatly to be deplored. It claims the earnest attention of those who take an interest in souls and are called to watch the progress of the work of God therein. It is of the greatest importance to lead all exercised souls to the sure foundation of Holy Scripture and to teach them that faith is simply taking God at His word. It is believing what He says, not because we feel it, but because He says it. To believe because we feel, would not be faith in God's Word at all, but faith in our own feelings, which is a worthless faith that will not stand for a moment in the presence of the enemy. The Word of God is settled forever in heaven. "He has magnified His Word above all His name." This is the solid foundation of Christian faith.

True, it is by the Holy Spirit that the soul is led to rest on this foundation, but the foundation is Scripture and Scripture alone. It is not feelings or experiences, but the plain testimony of Holy Scripture. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; He was buried and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures." Here lies the true foundation of Christian faith, yea, of faith in all ages. Abraham believed God and thus found rest for his soul. So with Isaiah, so with Peter, so with all. Patriarchs, prophets, apostles and saints of every age, every condition and every clime rested upon the

stable rock of divine revelation, and if the reader will only do the same, he will possess a peace which no power of earth or hell can ever disturb.

But we must draw this paper to a close, and this we shall do by a very brief reference in the third and last place, to

The Object Laid Hold Of

We may be brief on this point as a good deal has already been said which bears upon it. But we would specially call attention to the practical results which are sure to follow in every case in which the soul lays hold of Christ. Our two examples, Isaiah and Peter, will serve us here as well as in the other branches of our subject.

No sooner was Isaiah's need met, his guilt purged, than we see in him a whole-hearted consecration of himself to God and His service which may well stir the very depth of the soul and humble us, too, at the thought of how little we imitate him therein. No sooner does he hear that Jehovah wants a messenger, than the ready response comes forth from his heart and expresses itself in those ardent words, "Here am I; send me." He was ready now to go forth in service to the One who had made him see his own ruin and revealed also the divine remedy. The order is beautiful. We have, first, "Woe is me;" secondly, "This hath touched thy lips"; and thirdly, "Here am I."

So also in Peter's case, we have precisely the same lovely moral order. His "Depart from me" is followed by Christ's "Fear not." And then the practical result follows, "He forsook all and followed Him." This truly was a laying hold of the Object. Peter evidently felt at this moment that Christ was worthy of all he was and all he had. In the early bloom of divine life in his soul, all was readily let go. Secular occupations, however right in themselves; natural ties, however important, are all surrendered for the one absorbing Object which had been revealed to, and laid hold of by his new-born and emancipated soul. Christ was more to Peter than boats and nets, father and mother, sisters and brothers.

He forsook all. Nor was it difficult in the freshness of first love to let go those natural ties and occupations. The difficulty at such a moment would be to retain them or cling to them. Regretfully that we should ever have been called to hear from Peter's lips such words as these, "I go a fishing," and that too after three years of marvelous companionship with that blessed One who had once commanded his whole moral being and drawn him off from all earthly cares and natural relationships.

But we shall not dwell upon this painful and humbling theme. We shall think of Peter at the Lake of Gennesaret; we shall dwell upon the moments of his first love — those charming moments when Peter could, without reserve, say, "Jesus, my all in all Thou art." This is what we all want to look to. We want to understand the real secret, the mighty moral power, the true motive spring of all genuine devotedness and personal consecration. We want to bend our whole attention to the question, "How can I be most effectively drawn off from all those things which so readily and powerfully attract this wandering heart of mine?" What is the answer? Simply this: "Keep the heart fixed on Christ, filled with Christ, dedicated to Christ. Nothing else will do. Rules and regulations will not do, vows and resolutions will not avail. It must be "The expulsive power of a new affection.' "

This is the grand requirement, the special lack of our souls, but the only effective preservative against the ten thousand fascinations and allurements of the scene through which we are passing. The moment we begin to ask, "What harm is there in this or that?" it is all over with personal devotedness. Decline has set in, our hearts have gotten away from Christ. Peter, at the Lake of Gennesaret, never thought of asking "What harm is there in fishing? What sin is there in boats and nets? Why should I not tarry with my father and friends? There was no harm in fishing, nothing sinful in boats and nets, looked

at in themselves. But why did Peter give them up? Because he was called to something better. He abandoned the inferior because he had laid hold of the superior. And we may rest assured of this, if Peter returned to the inferior again, it was only because the superior had, for the moment, lost its power over his heart.

Here we must stop. We had no intention of dwelling at such length upon the subject of “The work of God in the soul,” but we have found it intensely interesting and we fondly hope it has been profitable to the reader.