

The Doctrine of God

By C.D. Cole

1944

“Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace,
thereby good will come to you.” Job 22:21

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INTRODUCTION

Pastor C.D. Cole has a doctrinal mind. He thinks doctrine, preaches doctrine, and loves doctrine. He is logical and methodical in all he does. But most of all he is a diligent student of the Scriptures, and knows how to correlate and systematize its teachings. There are few men who are so able along this line. His writings are easily grasped and readily understood. The teachings in this book are popular and most profitable. We had many testimonies of approval when his articles on doctrine were run in the Florida Baptist Witness. They created a wide interest among the readers. There were many requests for these articles to be put in book form. Brother Cole is a clear thinker, a ready writer, a strong preacher, and a man of positive convictions. We most heartily commend this book.

E. D. Solomon, Editor
Florida Baptist Witness.

PREFACE

It requires the space of only one generation for a people to drift from their doctrinal moorings. One generation which knew not Joseph loosed its persecution on the children of Israel, reversed the national policy and started Egypt to her doom, hence the vital necessity of reiterating and confirming the doctrines of our faith in every generation. Truth crushed to earth will rise again, but only as it is known and believed by men who have the conviction and courage to proclaim it. That is why the apostle Paul said to his student Timothy: "And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit you to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). As every generation must be evangelized, so must every generation be indoctrinated.

Pastor C.D. Cole renders a timely and an invaluable service to the people of God in the message of this marvelous book. He calls us back to a Scriptural study of the person, nature, and glorious attributes of our great God. The author wisely says, "The foundation of true religion is to have proper thoughts about God. The man who thinks right about God will not be far wrong in his thinking about other things. A thousand evils grow out of wrong conceptions about God." The present tendency is to emphasize the doctrines which deal with man. Psychology and Sociology are more popular than Theology. Such popular expressions as, "Competency of the human soul," "Creative thinking," "The dignity of man," "The value of human personality," "Social implications of the Gospel," "Enlisting our man power," and "Building a new world" indicate the tendency to magnify man and minimize God in religious thought and activity.

The small conception which some have of God makes them mere apologists for God. They speak of God's wanting to do this and trying to do that, of giving God a chance, of letting God have His way, as if God were the suppliant and man the sovereign. I heard a preacher say in pathetic tone, "I am sorry for God" as he pleaded with his congregation to give God a better deal. My dear brethren, study this book, read it's Scriptural references and absorb its message and you will never be sorry for God. He is revealed as One who is amply able to take care of Himself. You will pity those who discount His power, resist His will, and belittle His universal sovereignty.

Deep things of God as set forth here are not seen by the natural mind and are seldom discerned by the Christian who is superficial in study. The ponderous mass of the doctrines of our faith, like the submerged two thirds of an iceberg, is below the surface of popular thought and appreciation. Worldly statesmen praise the work of missionaries because they have built a reservoir of good will for America among the nations while they are blind to God's eternal purpose to visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. Five thousand ate loaves and fishes and wanted to make Jesus king, but only a dozen remained to hear Him preach on election, effectual calling, and the sovereignty of God. For lazy minds looking for ready material for popular sermons and pep talks this book will have little appeal, but for those whose hearts yearn for a deeper acquaintance with their God, it will be worth its weight in gold. My heart has thrilled, my soul has rejoiced, all that is within me has blessed the Lord, as I have read the manuscript. What a wonderful God is our God!

Such conception of God, as revealed in this book, will promote humility and reverence in our worship as no soft music, are, glass windows, mellow lights, or psychological schemes ever will. It will melt pride and banish formalism and ritualism from the churches. It will establish the preacher on solid ground of assurance and save him from despair in the presence of seeming failure by bringing him to rest the results of his ministry on the unfailing purpose of God. It will safeguard our evangelism against spurious methods and high pressure salesmanship. It will relax the spiritual tension in our religious activity. It will put triumph in the soul and cause us to shout with Paul, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

To the saints everywhere and especially to my Baptist brethren, I commend this book; May God speed it on its way to bless and strengthen our people in "The Once Delivered Faith."

Yours by Sovereign Grace,
D. F. Sebastian

THE AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

The author of this book claims one qualification for offering a work on theology, his love for the subject. Any man who decries doctrine as impractical and uninteresting can't be qualified to deal with the teachings of the Bible. The person who speaks of solemn doctrine with a solemn sneer is at once disqualified as a teacher of the Scriptures. He who puts the Bible in the crucible of human reason and twists it to say what his reason thinks it ought to say, has no place in a Christian pulpit.

More than twenty years ago the writer delivered addresses on the Divine Attributes in his own pulpit and at Bible Institutes in various churches. Some years later he taught theology to a group of ministers and included lectures on the attributes. And still later he wrote for the Florida Baptist Witness under the general caption "Definitions of Doctrine"; and this is the name given to the work on theology, which he expects to publish in three or four volumes. His first volume treats of THE DOCTRINE OF GOD, than which there is no greater or grander theme for study and meditation.

Bacon says that some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. He who merely tastes this book is apt to disrelish it; it might not be safe to swallow it; but if it is chewed and digested, the writer believes it will strengthen the faith of the reader by revealing to him how great and wonderful is our God.

C.D. Cole

December 19, 1944.

Chapter 1—The BEING of God

We have no intention of making labored and elaborate arguments for the existence of God. We start where the Bible starts. The Bible assumes the existence of God, and we assume that our readers will do the same. There are so many witnesses to His existence that the Bible makes no effort to prove it. There is the outer witness in nature. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). The voice of these witnesses has been heard in every language and in all places of the earth. It is true that in times past God “Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14:16). “Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from Heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). His eternal power and Deity are clearly seen in the visible things He has created: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:” (Romans 1:20).

There is also the inner witness of the human conscience. “For when the Gentiles (heathen), which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;” (Romans 2:14,15). The voice of nature in creation and in conscience proclaims loudly the existence of the true and living and eternal God. And so, for all practical purposes, there is no necessity for proving the existence of God.

THE SOUL FEELS GOD

A man once sought to ridicule the idea of God. He asked his Christian neighbor if he had ever seen God. The believer admitted he had not. He was then asked if he had ever heard God speak, or if he had ever tasted God, or if he had ever smelled God. The believer admitted that with the physical senses he had never apprehended God, and then shut the mouth of the atheist by asking him if he had ever told a lie. And when he confessed he had, he was further asked how he felt. He admitted that he had an uneasy or apprehensive feeling. Now this feeling was the testimony of conscience telling him there was a God, a moral Lawgiver, to whom he must give account. This is the meaning of conscience money and other things men do to ease their conscience and placate an offended Deity. Every man feels God whose conscience has not been seared or otherwise tampered with. The atheist is the educated fool. There are no theoretical atheists among the heathen. There are no atheists among the demons; they believe and tremble: “You Believe that there is one God; you do well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19).

SIN ORIGINATED IN THE AFFECTIONS

The Scriptures do not reason with the atheist, but rather reprove him. “The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that does good” (Psalm 14:1). The error is not so much in the understanding as in the heart. The theoretical atheist (the man who denies the existence of God) has tampered with his mind until he has made it agree with his heart. It is a case of the wish being father to the thought. While there are comparatively few theoretical atheists, every man in his natural and fallen state is a practical atheist, he does not want the true God. The fool of Psalms fourteen and fifty-three is the typical fool; he represents every unregenerate man. In the context the plural is used: “They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that does good” (Psalm 14:1). “The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that does good” (Psalm 53:1). Sin originated in the affections or desires, and the darkened understanding is one of the effects by way of Divine punishment. “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;” (Romans 1:28). The true God, when known, was not the God men wanted. “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Romans 1:21).

MORAL DEVOLUTION

The true evolution, morally, takes sin into account, and is the development or unfolding of a human nature that hates the true God. It is moral devolution. The progress of sin is given “For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became

vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to impurity through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” (Romans 1:18-32).

First, men suppressed or held down the truth about God. They had the truth about God in the book of nature. His eternal power and Deity were clearly revealed in the things He had made, but men did not like this truth. They turned away from revelation and turned aside to their own reasonings. Second, they changed the truth about God into a lie, and made images or representations of God in the form of man and birds and beasts and creeping things. There was the Apollo of the Greeks, the eagle of the Romans, the bull of the Egyptians, and the serpent of the Assyrians. Men knew God and refused to worship Him, and idolatry followed as a psychological necessity. And third, idolatry was followed by sensuality. God gave them up to impurity and vile affections. He withdrew His restraining grace and suffered human nature to go its full length in immorality. The closing verses of Romans one reveal the terrible things men and women will do when given up by God. They not only do these things themselves, but are glad to see others do them. The lowest stage in depravity is reached when men take pleasure in seeing others sin.

NO SAVING LIGHT IN NATURE

The witnesses of God in nature do not constitute Gospel light. They are sufficient to render all men without excuse, but they are not efficient as means of salvation. They are sufficient to make men know they are sinners, but they have nothing to say about a Savior. There must be a further revelation of God before men can know Him in the forgiveness of sins. And this revelation is His written Word as a witness to the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, by the knowledge of Whom many shall be justified. “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:11).

MAN IS A RELIGIOUS BEING

Man is by nature a religious being. By training, apart from Bible teaching and the new birth, he will either become an atheist or an idolater. This is the best education can do apart from the grace of God. A mere cultural religion deifies humanity, denies the fall, and talks only of upward development. This is the religion of the evolutionist. The God of the sensualist is his belly, his inward desires. The only law he recognizes is the craving of a depraved nature. “Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (Philippians 3:19). This is the religion of the godless business man as well as of the drunkard and libertine.

It is as bad to invent a God in the imagination as it is to make one with the hands. The old form of idolatry had its gods made with hands; the new form of idolatry has its gods spun out of the imagination and harbored in the mind. The unknown God is still the true God. The Athenians of Paul’s day had monuments to many gods, and in their religious zeal had a monument to the unknown God. The unknown God was the God Paul preached to them. The true God was unknown to them. (Acts 17:22-32): “Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, You men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore you ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of Heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshiped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he gives to all life, and breath, and all things; And has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of

this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent: Because he has appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all men, in that he has raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear you again of this matter.”

It is the purpose of the following pages to present the God of the Bible in His nature and personal perfections. The reader is asked to test what is written herein with what is revealed in Holy Writ. And may the Spirit of truth guide us into the truth!

Chapter 2—The NATURE of God

What is God? What constitutes the Divine nature? What is God's mode of being? These questions bring us to the burning bush and upon holy ground. We must tread softly, walk humbly, and avoid speculation. But we can go as far as Divine revelation goes.

There is a Divine nature. By nature we mean that particular character of being which makes one kind of being differ from another kind of being. Thus we speak of angelic nature, of human nature, and of brute nature. That nature may be predicated of God is suggested by Paul who says that the Galatians, before their conversion, served those which by nature were no gods. "Howbeit then, when you knew not God, you did service unto them which by nature are no gods" (Galatians 4:8). This clearly implies that one does exist who by nature is God.

1. GOD IS A PERSONAL BEING.

As a person God is distinguished from pantheism, the belief that all things in the aggregate are God, God is everything and everything is God. As a personal Being God is both immanent and transcendent, that is, He is both in and above His creation. He is a person in His creation, but separate and distinct from it. He is also above His creation, that is, He is bigger than creation, distinct from it and not a part of it. In his prayer dedicating the temple, Solomon paid tribute to the transcendent greatness of God in these words: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the Heaven and Heaven of heavens cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built?" (1 King 8:27).

There are three marks of personality: self-consciousness, self-determination, and moral consciousness, and all these qualities belong to God.

2. GOD IS A SPIRITUAL BEING.

God is exclusively Spirit: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). The reader must grasp this truth firmly, or he will have trouble in understanding the trinity of persons in the Godhead. As a Spirit God can neither be divided nor compounded. As a Spirit He is invisible and intangible. "No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him." (John 1:18)

ARGUMENT:

1. He is creator of spirits, and since a spirit being is the highest order of being, He must have the nature that belongs to that order.

2. The scriptures ascribe spirituality to God. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" (Hebrews 12:9).

3. His spirituality may be argued from His immensity and eternity. He is infinite as to space and time. Matter is limited as to space and time, but God is both omnipresent and eternal.

4. His spirituality may be argued from his independency and immutability. That which is material can be divided, added to, or diminished. Matter is subject to change, but God is the unchangeable one. "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6).

5. His spirituality may also be argued from His absolute perfections. A material body imposes limitations, and is not consistent with absolute perfection. We use the word perfection in a wider sense than sinlessness. The Savior, in his human body, had his limitations although He was sinless. He was not everywhere at the same time. He was not immune to hunger and thirst, weariness and pain.

OBJECTION:

Many passages of scripture ascribe bodily parts to God. They speak of His eyes, face, hands, feet, arms, etc. In reply it may be said that the language is figurative, and is used in an accommodation to human understanding. Such language is called anthropomorphism, the ascription of human characteristics to things not human.

3. GOD IS A TRIUNE BEING.

There is one Divine essence of being subsisting in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is a tri-unity, three in one. In the early part of the fourth century when Arianism threatened to prevail, a young theologian named Athanasius

formulated the statement that was incorporated in the Nicene Creed. He said, "We worship one God in trinity and trinity in unity, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance." This is a remarkable statement, profound in its clarity and simplicity. The Arian notion made the Father the Supreme God and the Son only Divine in a subordinate sense. The Son was like but not of the same substance with the Father, according to Arius.

The Sabellian notion is that God is one person, manifesting Himself sometimes as Father, sometimes as Son, and sometimes as Holy Spirit. But this would make Him cease to exist as Father when manifested as Son.

If God were a physical being as a trinity, He would be in three parts, and if these parts were persons, each person would be only a part of God. But as a Spirit He is three persons, but only one substance, and each person is all of God. Of the Son we read: "For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9). And again He is called: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature" (Colossians 1:15).

God is not three persons in the same sense that Father, mother, and daughter are three persons in one family. It could not be said of any one of three persons in a human family that he is all of the family.

God has three modes of Being, three centers of personal consciousness. He is one essentially, but three persons relatively. And in these relations He exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Dr. Strong puts it like this: In the matter of source, origin, and authority, He is the Father. In the matter of expression, medium, and revelation, He is the Son. In the matter of apprehension, accomplishment, and realization, He is the Spirit. Dr. Strong also sums up the characteristic differences between the work of the Son and the work of the Spirit in four statements, as follows:

1. All outgoing seems to be the work of Christ; all return to God the work of the Spirit.
2. Christ is the organ of external revelation; the Holy Spirit is the organ of internal revelation.
3. Christ is our advocate in Heaven; the Holy Spirit is our advocate in the soul.
4. In the work of Christ we are passive; in the work of the Holy Spirit we are made active.

THE TRIUNITY A REVEALED DOCTRINE

Just as man without the Bible has never discovered the one true God, without the Bible he has never discovered a trinity of persons in the Godhead. The triunity is undiscoverable by human reason, neither is there any rational proof of it.

It is said that on one occasion Daniel Webster and a friend listened to a sermon upon the Trinity. As they walked home from church the friend said: "Mr. Webster, is not that doctrine a mathematical impossibility?" Said Mr. Webster: "According to the mathematics of earth it seems to be; but I'm not acquainted with the mathematics of Heaven."

The Bible gives us heavenly mathematics, and to it we should go in proof of the Triunity of God.

1. We have triunity in the plural names of God. The first name of God we meet with in the Bible is plural: "In the beginning God (Elohim, plural) created (singular) the Heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). The plural noun with the singular verb shows trinity acting in unity. Charles Smith says the Bible begins with a forgery; that this first verse should read: "In the beginning the gods." Not so; the singular verb shows there was one Being acting, while the plural noun reveals three persons in one Divine essence. The plural for God occurs far more often than does the singular.

2. We have triunity in the plural expressions used by God when speaking of Himself. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the bird of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26); "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." (Genesis 11:7), etc.

3. A trinity of Divine persons was manifested at the baptism of Jesus. There was the incarnate Son being baptized; the Father was manifested by audible voice; and the Spirit appeared in the form of a dove. "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up immediately out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from Heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16,17).

4. We have triunity in the baptismal formula: "Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:" (Matthew 28:19). It does not say, "baptizing them in the names (plural) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Nor does it give us the equivalent of the plural by saying, "In the name of the Father, and in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit." Nor, on the other hand, does it say, "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as if the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit might be taken as merely three designations of one person. Here is the reading: "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

THE TRIUNITY REFLECTED IN CREATION

While there is nothing in creation to explain or account for the tri-unity of God, the tri-unity does explain creation. This is a tri-universe, a three-in-one creation. One of the truly great books of our day is that book by Nathan R. Wood entitled

“The Secret of the Universe.” In this remarkable book the author shows that the universe is what it is because it was created by the triune God. He first shows that the physical or outer universe is a triunity. The basic things are space, matter, time; three modes of existence and, like God, each is all of the whole. And each of these basic things is a triunity. Space has three dimensions: length, breadth, and height. Each is the whole of space and yet there are three distinct dimensions. Matter is composed of three things: energy, motion, phenomena; three modes of existence; distinct and yet one, and each is all of the whole. And as a time universe there is absolute threeness: past, present, future; distinct and yet each is the whole. All of time is or has been future, the future includes it all. All of time is or has been or will be present. And all of time is or will be past.

The author then takes the soul or what he calls the inner universe, and shows that the soul of man is a triunity, that is, three modes of existence. He calls them nature, person, personality; distinct and yet each is the whole of the soul, absolute threeness and absolute oneness. And here the author shows how man as a soul reflects the triune God in a way that the physical creation does not. He makes God the key that unlocks the riddle of the universe. He says in a sort of summary: “The structure of the universe, the nature of space, of matter, of time, of human life, attest the Trinity. They reflect the Trinity. They demand the Trinity. The Trinity explains them.”

The author knocks the Einstein theory of relativity with the argument for the fourth dimension into the proverbial cocked hat. The difference between Einstein and Wood is the difference between the atheistic and the Christian approach to the secret of the universe.

Chapter 3—The NAMES of God

The aim of this volume is to better acquaint its readers with the true and living God. If any of our readers feel that the author is lopsided, and does not maintain the balance of truth by emphasizing the responsibility of man, we would remind him that our thesis is God, not man.

There are several sources of knowledge about God. The heavens and the earth, the things He has made, reveal His eternal power and Deity, and declare His glory. The human conscience also testifies to His existence, as do the laws of nature. But the Bible is the chief source of information about God in His character and work.

The various names and titles given to God in the Bible reveal much concerning His character and government. In the Bible the names of persons, places, and things are of great significance; the names were chosen because of their meaning! We give names to our children today without any thought of what the name means, and very often the name is not appropriate to the character that wears it. Many men have worn the name Jesus, but to only one Man, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God, is the name appropriate. All the names of God in the Bible are most appropriate and much can be learned about Him through the study of His names.

The study of names given to persons and places in the Bible is so entrancing that we must pursue it a little further before coming to our main theme—THE NAMES OF GOD. In the Bible names reveal the character of persons, and commemorate important events. To illustrate we are taking a number of names somewhat at random. At the battle of Aphek Israel was defeated by the Philistines, losing thirty thousand footmen; Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain; the ark of God was taken by the Philistines; and when the sad news came to the wife of Phinehas, giving her life in childbirth, on her death bed she named the child Ichabod, which means "inglorious," thus signifying that the glory had departed from Israel: "And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband" (1 Samuel 4:21). The name Moses means "drawer out," and was given him by Pharaoh's daughter, as "she said, because I drew him out of the water" (Exodus 2:10). The name Samuel was given to the son of Elkanah and Hannah as a memorial to answered prayer. Samuel means "heard of God," and was given him by his mother: "Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD" (1 Samuel 1:20). The human name of Jesus was given to our Lord because it means "Jehovah saves." When the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph to quiet his fears and suspicions concerning his espoused wife, Mary, he announced the birth of a son, and said "And she shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The name Abraham means "father of a multitude," and was given to Abraham by God when He promised him a numerous progeny. "Neither shall your name any more be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made you" (Genesis 17:5). Adam called the creature, taken from his side, woman: "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:23).

When Adam and his wife became sinners by transgressing the law of God, the gospel was preached to them by God, the gospel that the seed of woman should bruise the serpent's head: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15); whereupon, in faith, Adam named the woman Eve, which means "living," "And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20). Eve's firstborn was named Cain, which means "acquired," "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD" (Genesis 4:1). The word for man in the Hebrew is "ish," which means a man of high degree, and it is probable that Eve believed Cain to be the promised Redeemer. If so, she was sadly disappointed, and when her next son was born, it must have been in a spirit of despair that she named him Abel, meaning "vanity or vapor." When Samuel had defeated the Philistines on a field of battle between Mizpeh and Shen, he planted a stone on the very spot of victory and called it Ebenezer, meaning "the stone of help," "Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto has the LORD helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12).

THE NAMES OF GOD

Some names of God respect Him as subject: Jehovah, Lord, God; others are predicates, spoken of Him and attributed to Him: holy, just, good, etc. Some express the relations between the persons of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Spirit; and some express the relation of God to the creatures: Creator, Preserver, Governor, etc. Some names or titles are common to the three persons, as Jehovah, God, Father, Spirit. And some are proper names used to express His character and work.

The name of God is what He IS; it stands for His character. But the Creator is so great that no one name can possibly be adequate to His greatness. If the Heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, how can a name describe the Creator? So the Bible contains a number of names of God which reveal Him in the several aspects of His marvelous personality.

ELOHIM (Pronounced El-lo-heem)

This is the first name of God in Scripture: “In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Here it is in the plural form with a singular verb, denoting plurality of persons in unity of essence or being. This name is expressive of God’s greatness and power. It is the creatorial name of God, and is used exclusively in the account of creation, Genesis 1:1-2:1-4.

Elohim is always translated “God” in our English Bible. According to the prevailing opinion of scholars the word is derived from a root in the Arabic language which means to worship. Weight is given to this opinion when we observe that the word is sometimes used improperly of angels, of men, and of false deities. In Psalm 8:5 “For you have made him a little lower than the angels, and have crowned him with glory and honor” the word for angels is elohim, and angels are sometimes improperly worshiped. In Psalm 82:1,6: “God stands in the congregation of the mighty; he judges among the gods...I have said, You are gods; and all of you are children of the most High” elohim is translated gods, and is used of men. Also in John 10:34,35: “Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, You are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken”. In Jeremiah 10:10-12 “But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall you say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. He has made the earth by his power, he has established the world by his wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens by his discretion.” we have the true God (elohim) in contrast with “the gods (elohim) that have not made the heavens and the earth, “thus implying that none but the Creator is the proper object of worship.

EL-SHADDAI (Pronounced el Shad-di)

This compound word is translated God Almighty (El for God and Shaddai for Almighty). The title EL is for God in the singular, and means strong or mighty. EL is translated God 250 times in the Old Testament. The title is generally connected with some attribute or perfection of God; as, “Almighty God”: “And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him” (Genesis 17:3); “Everlasting God”: “And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God” (Genesis 21:33); “A jealous God”: “You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Exodus 20:5); “The living God”: “And Joshua said, Hereby you shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites” (Jos. 3:10).

SHADDAI, always translated Almighty, means sufficient or resourceful. It is thought the word comes from SHADDAY, meaning breasts. The word breast is used in the scriptures as an emblem of blessing and nourishment. In pronouncing his dying blessing upon Joseph, Jacob, among other things, said, “Even by the God (EL) of your father, who shall help you; and by the Almighty (Shaddai), who shall bless you with blessings of Heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:” (Genesis 49:25). Isaiah, describing the future excellence and blessings of Israel, says, “You shall also suck the milk of the Gentiles (nations), and shall suck the breast of kings: and you shall know that I the LORD am your Savior and your Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob” (Isaiah 60:16). The people of God shall draw upon the resources of nations and kings because their God is EL-SHADDAI the One mighty to bless.

Satan is a competitor of God and a counterfeiter of His works. Therefore, we may expect to find in heathen religions imitations of God in the several aspects of His character and government. This point is well illustrated in the following quotation taken from the book by Nathan J. Stone on the “Names of God in the Old Testament.”

“Such a conception of a God or deity was not uncommon to the ancients. The idols of the ancient heathen are sometimes termed sheddim in the Bible. It is no doubt because they were regarded as the great agents of nature or the heavens, in giving rain, in causing the earth to send forth its springs, to yield its increase, its fruits to maintain and to nourish life. There were many breasted idols worshiped among the heathen. One historian points out that ‘the whole body of the Egyptian goddess Isis was clustered over with breasts because all things are sustained or nourished by the earth or Nature.’ the same was true of the idol of the Ephesian goddess Diana in the nineteenth chapter of Acts, for Diana signified nature and the world with all its products.”

This name of God first appeared in connection with Abram: “And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be you perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly” (Genesis 17:1,2).

Years before and on different occasions, God promised Abram that He would make of him a great nation and a numerous progeny. The years came and passed and no child was born to Abram and Sarah. Then he resorted to that

fleshly expedient which brought Ishmael and Mohammedanism into the world. And God's promise was still unfulfilled. And now, according to the laws of nature, it is too late, Abram is ninety-nine and Sarah ninety. And then it was that God appeared to him as God- Almighty (EL-SHADDAI), and repeated the promise. And here it was that his name was changed from Abram to Abraham, meaning "father of many nations." "Neither shall your name any more be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made you" (Genesis 17:5). Here was a staggering promise, but it did not stagger Abraham, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;" (Romans 4:20). Abraham's strong faith was based upon this new revelation of God as God-Almighty (EL-SHADDAI). "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:" (Romans 4:19). His thoughts were upon an All-sufficient God. Here is a fine illustration of the difference between nature's law and nature's God. The laws of nature could not produce an Isaac, but it was not too much for nature's God. It matters not if everything is against God; He is all-sufficient in Himself.

ADONAI (Pronounced A-do-ni)

This name or title of God is in the plural, denoting a plurality of persons in the Godhead. It is translated Lord in our King James version, and expresses the relationship of a master and slave. When used in the possessive it is an acknowledgment of God's ownership and authority. Slavery is a blessing when God is the Owner and Lord. And in the days of Abraham when slavery was the order between man and man it was not an unmitigated evil. The purchased slave had the protection and privileges not enjoyed by the hired servant. The bought slave was to be circumcised and allowed to eat the Passover: "But every man's servant that is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof" (Ex 12:44).

This word in the singular (ADON) is applied to man more than two hundred times in the Old Testament, and is variously translated lord, master, owner. This name for God is first used in the Old Testament in connection with Abraham. Abraham was the first man to address God as ADONAI. Abraham as a slave owner also acknowledges God as his Master and Owner. When Abraham had returned from the slaughter of the king's, and had rescued Lot, the king of Sodom wanted to reward him, but he refused the reward. "After these things the word of the LORD (Jehovah) came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD (Adonai Jehovah) what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" (Genesis 15:1,2). He who had slaves acknowledged himself to be the slave of God.

JEHOVAH (Pronounced Je-ho-vah)

This is the most famous of the names of God, and is predicated of Him as a necessary and self-existent Being. The meaning is: HE WHO ALWAYS WAS, THAT ALWAYS IS, AND THAT EVER IS TO COME. We have it thus translated in Revelation 1:4: "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne."

Jehovah is the personal, proper, and incommunicable name of God. In Psalm 83:18 we read: "That men may know that you, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, are the most high over all the earth." The other names of God are sometimes applied to creatures, but the name Jehovah is used exclusively of the true and living God.

The Jews had a superstitious reverence for this name of God and would not pronounce it when reading, but would substitute other names as Adonai and Elohim. This is the name of God in covenant relation with man. It occurs about seven thousand times and is usually translated "Lord" in our King James version. As already noted it includes all tenses, past, present, and future. The name comes from a root which signifies to be.

Of the relation between Elohim and Jehovah, A. W. Pink has some illuminating remarks in his book, "The Divine Inspiration of the Bible," and we quote:

"The names Elohim and Jehovah are found on the pages of the Old Testament several thousand times, but they are never employed loosely or used alternately. Each of these names has a definite significance and scope, and were we to substitute the one for the other the beauty and perfection of a multitude of passages would be destroyed. To illustrate: the word God occurs all through Genesis 1, but 'Lord God' in Genesis 2. Were these two Divine titles reversed here, a flaw and blemish would be the consequences. 'God' is the creatorial title, whereas 'Lord' implies covenant relationship and shows God's dealings with His own people. Hence, in Genesis 1, 'God' is used, and in Genesis 2, 'Lord God' is employed, and all through the remainder of the Old Testament these two Divine titles are used discriminately and in harmony with the meaning of first mention. One or two examples must suffice. "And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life. And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God (Elohim, C. D. C.) had commanded him." 'God' because it was the Creator commanding with respect to His creatures, as

such; but in the remainder of the same verse, we read, “and the Lord (Jehovah, C.D.C.) shut him in” (Genesis 7:15,16), because God’s action here toward Noah was based upon covenant relationship. When going forth to meet Goliath David said “This day will the LORD (Jehovah) deliver you into mine hand (because David was in covenant relationship with him); and I will smite you, and take your head from you; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the birds of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth (which was not in covenant relationship with Him) may know that there is a God (Elohim) in Israel. And all this assembly (which were in covenant relationship with him) shall know that the LORD (Jehovah) saves not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD’S, and he will give you into our hands” (1 Samuel 17:46,47). Once more: “And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD (Jehovah) helped him; and God (Elohim) moved them to depart from him” (2 Chronicles 18:31). And thus it is all through the Old Testament.”

THE JEHOVAH TITLES

The name Jehovah is often used as a compound with other names to set forth the true God in some aspect of His character in meeting the needs of His people. There are fourteen of these Jehovah titles in the Old Testament, but there is not space in this volume to treat each one separately. It must suffice for us to present them and give a few references where they are used:

1. JEHOVAH-HOSEENU, “Jehovah our Maker” “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker” (Psalm 95:6).
2. JEHOVAH-JIREH, “Jehovah will provide” “And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen” (Genesis 22:14).
3. JEHOVAH-ROPHECA, “Jehovah that heals you” “And said, If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD your God, and will do that which is right in his sight, and will give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon you, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that heals you” (Exodus 15:26).
4. JEHOVAH-NISSI, “Jehovah my banner” “And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi” (Exodus 17:15).
5. JEHOVAH-M’KADDESH, “Jehovah that does sanctify you”: “Speak you also unto the children of Israel, saying, Truly my sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that you may know that I am the LORD that does sanctify you” (Exodus 31:13); “And you shall keep my statutes, and do them: I am the LORD which sanctify you” (Leviticus 20:8).
6. JEHOVAH-ELOHEENU, “Jehovah our God” “Exalt you the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy...He spoke unto them in the cloudy pillar: they kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them. You answered them, O LORD our God: you were a God that forgave them, though you took vengeance of their inventions” (Psalm 99:5,7,8).
7. JEHOVAH-ELOHEKA, “Jehovah your God” “I am the LORD your God, which have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage: ...You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me...You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain” (Exodus 20:2,5,7).
8. JEHOVAH-ELOHAY, “Jehovah my God” “And you shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yes, you shall flee, like as you fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with you” (Zechariah. 14:5).
9. JEHOVAH-SHALOM, “Jehovah send peace”: “Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites” (Jude. 6:24).
10. JEHOVAH-TSEBAHOTH, “Jehovah of hosts” “And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there” (1 Samuel 1:3); “And as Isaiah said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto Gomorrah” (Romans 9:29); “Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, cries: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth” (James 5:4).
11. JEHOVAH-ROHI, “Jehovah my shepherd” “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1).
12. JEHOVAH-HELEYON, “Jehovah most high” “I will praise the LORD according to his righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the LORD most high” (Psalm 7:17); “For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King

over all the earth” (Psalm 47:2); “For you, LORD, are high above all the earth: you are exalted far above all gods” (Psalm 97:9).

13. JEHOVAH-TSIDKEENU, “Jehovah our righteousness” “In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jeremiah 23:6); “In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name with which she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness” (Jeremiah 33:16).

14. JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH, “Jehovah is there” “It was round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there” (Ezekiel 48:35).

THE NAMES OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. THEOS. In the Greek New Testament this is the general name of God, and corresponds with Elohim of the Hebrew Old Testament. It is applied to all three persons of the Trinity, but especially to God the Father.

2. PATER. This title corresponds with Jehovah of the Old Testament and expresses the relationship we have with God through Christ. It is applied to God two hundred and sixty five times and is always translated Father.

3. DESPOTEES (English Despot). This title sets forth God in His absolute sovereignty, and is similar to Adonai of the Old Testament. It occurs only five times in the New Testament: “Lord, now let you your servant depart in peace, according to your word” (Luke 2:29); “And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, you are God, which have made Heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is” (Acts 4:24); “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1); “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4); “And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Revelation 6:10).

4. KURIOS. This word is found hundreds of times and is translated lord, Lord, master, Master, owner, and sir. In quotations from the Hebrew it is often used for Jehovah. It is a title of the Lord Jesus as master and owner.

5. CHRISTOS. This word means the Anointed and is translated Christ. It comes from chrio to anoint. It is the official name of the long promised and long expected Messiah or Savior. The New Testament applies this title to Jesus of Nazareth exclusively.

From all these names of the Supreme Being we learn that He is the eternal, immutable, self-existent, self-sufficient, and all-sufficient being; and is the supreme object of fear, trust, adoration, and obedience.

To the author this study has been interesting, and at the same time tedious and difficult, and the reader will have to be a patient plodder if he is to get the most out of it. What a marvelous revelation we have of the great God in these various names!

Chapter 4—The DECREES of God

By the decree of God is meant His purpose or determination with regard to future events. It means that things come to pass according to a Divine purpose rather than by a fixed natural law or blind fate or capricious chance. To deny the decrees or foreordination of God is practically to dethrone Him. It puts Him on the sidelines as an interested but helpless spectator to what is going on.

“A universe without decrees would be as irrational and appalling as would be an express train driving on in the darkness without headlight or engineer, and with no certainty that the next moment it might not plunge into the abyss” (A. J. Gordon).

“Plan and purpose as we may, the plans and purposes will turn only to the final end which God has predetermined” (Henry).

“We give thanks to God for blessings which come to us through the free actions of others, but if God has not purposed these blessings, we owe thanks to others and not to God” (A. H. Strong).

“The Scriptures make mention of the decrees of God in many passages and under a variety of terms. The word ‘decree’ is found in Psalm 2:7: “I will declare the decree: the LORD has said unto me, You are my Son; this day have I begotten you.” In Ephesians 3:11 we read of His ‘eternal purpose’: “According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord”; In Acts 2:23 ‘determinate counsel and foreknowledge’: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain”; In Ephesians 1:9 of his ‘good pleasure’: “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself.” God’s decrees are called His ‘counsel’ to signify they are consummately wise. “Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength” (Peter 8:14). They are called God’s ‘will’ to show He was under no control, but acted according to His own pleasure. “Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians 1:5). When a man’s will is the rule of his conduct; it is usually capricious and unreasonable; but wisdom is always associated with ‘will’ in the Divine proceedings, and, accordingly, God’s decrees are said to be the ‘counsel of His own will” (A. W. Pink).

“Victor Hugo, recognizing the overruling divine hand, said, ‘Waterloo was God.’ God in the exercise of His infinite wisdom and power, so personally directs and controls the free actions of men as to determine all things in accordance with His eternal purpose” (E. H. Bancroft).

POSITIVE AND PERMISSIVE DECREES

All things were not decreed in the same sense. Sinful acts of men were not decreed in the same sense as were righteous acts. God is the efficient cause of all that is good, while evil is only permitted and directed and overruled for His glory. The sinful acts of men which God decreed permissively will certainly be done, but in doing them men are giving expression to their own inherent depravity. “Surely the wrath of man shall praise you: the remainder of wrath shall you restrain” (Psalm 76:10). The good deeds of men are decreed efficiently, which means that God works in them “For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13).

“Careless seems the great avenger;
History’s pages but record
One death grapple in the darkness,
Twixt old systems and the Word.
Truth forever on the scaffold;
Wrong forever on the throne;
But that scaffold sways the Future;
And, behind the dim unknown
Stands God, within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own.” —Lowell.

GOD’S SECRET AND REVEALED WILL

The decrees of God belong to His secret will; the commands of God belong to His revealed will. “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29). God’s secret will is the rule of His actions; His revealed will is the rule of our actions. God’s secret will embraces all things; His revealed will embraces all we ought to do. The secret

will of God is His program, according to which all things come to pass; His revealed will gives us our program according to which we are to work.

The decrees of God are not addressed to men, and have nothing to do with human responsibility. It may be that God has decreed a poor crop year, but that is no reason for failure to plant and cultivate. God may have decreed a famine, but that does not justify idleness. God may have decreed the death of the writer this year, but that does not keep him from regarding the laws of health and safety. God decreed the death of His Son, but that did not make it the duty of men to crucify Him.

GOD'S DECREES AND FREE AGENCY

God's decrees determine the free actions of men, that is, the decree makes their actions certain but not a necessity. God's decrees are not executed by compelling man's will, therefore they are not inconsistent with man's freedom. "For of a truth against your holy child Jesus, whom you have anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatever your hand and your counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27,28). God's decree made the death of Christ certain, but it laid no necessity upon any man. None of the men were compelled to do the foul deed. In crucifying the Lord of glory they were giving free expression to their thoughts and feelings toward Him. They were fulfilling the Scriptures, and executing God's eternal purpose, without knowing it: "Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8). "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me" (John 13:18). "But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate says unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

GOD'S DECREES ARE ETERNAL

If God has any purpose concerning the happenings of the universe it must, of necessity, be eternal. To deny this is to suppose some unforeseen event that made it necessary for God to change His purpose. All of God's purposes were formed in wisdom, and since he has power to execute them, there is no reason for any change. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:" (Isaiah 46:9,10).

PRACTICAL VALUE OF THE DOCTRINE

It magnifies God in His wisdom, power, and sovereignty. It puts Him on the throne where He should be and is ever and always. There are no crises with God, no perplexing problems to ponder, no forces beyond His control. He moves with majestic step toward the consummation of His eternal purpose in Christ to the praise of His glory.

The believer is humbled at the sight of such a great God, and his soul is bowed in adoring wonder and worship. It will save the believer from undue familiarity with God in prayer and other acts of devotion. Some men pray as if God were on their level; to them He is not the August Being the Scriptures represent Him to be. Much of the poetry and other literature coming out of this war is too irreverent and merely represents God as a sort of comrade in arms. But the Scriptures say that "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him" (Psalm 89:7).

"This doctrine is one of those advanced teachings of Scripture which requires for its understanding a matured mind and a deep experience. The beginner in the Christian life may not see its value or even its truth, but with increasing years it will become a staff to lean upon. In times of affliction, obloquy, and persecution, the church has found in the decrees of God, and in the prophecies in which these decrees are published, her strong consolation. It is only upon the basis of the decrees that we can believe: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28) or pray: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven" (Matthew 6:10)." A. H. Strong.

Chapter 5—The WORD of God

Christianity is the religion of a Book. Without this Book Christianity cannot be perpetuated. Wherever this Book has not gone there is no evidence of anything Christian. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ, and people cannot believe in Him of whom they have not heard: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14). And we are shut up to this Book for news about Jesus Christ. This Book is the Bible, and, in its original, is God’s word to us today. Efface the teachings of the Bible from human thought and Christianity passes into oblivion. The Bible is an infallible Book, sufficient and authoritative in all matters of religious faith and practice: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:16,17)

“Bring me the Book!” cried Sir Walter Scott on his death bed. “What Book?” he was asked. And this genius of the Scottish people replied, “There is but one Book; bring me the Bible!” When Queen Victoria was asked the secret of England’s greatness, she took down a copy of the scriptures and said, “This Book explains the power of Great Britain.”

SCRIPTURE VERSUS TRADITION

The word for Scripture in the Greek is “graphe” and means “a writing, “or “anything written.” The expression “holy scriptures” occurs only twice in the New Testament: “(Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)” (Romans 1:2); “And that from a child you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15); but wherever the Scriptures are referred to, the Divine writings are meant. The usual reference is to the Old Testament writings, but Peter speaks of Paul’s epistles as Scripture: “As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16).

The Scriptures of our Lord’s day were the writings of the Old Testament. The Bible of that time was the Septuagint, which was the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament. To our Lord and the apostles the Old Testament was the word of God. This was the Book Christ challenged the Jews to search: “Search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). This was the Book He meant when He said “If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;” (John 10:35). This was the Book the Bereans searched to see if what Paul preached was true. “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Our Savior charged that the “traditions of men” were against the Scriptures. The Scriptures were the verbally inspired writings of God; the traditions of men were the teachings handed down by the Jewish elders. When the scribes and Pharisees charged Jesus with transgressing “the traditions of the elders,” He turned on them with this question: “Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” (Matthew 15:2,3). Before Saul of Tarsus became a believer in Jesus Christ: He was “exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers” (Galatians 1:14). But when he became a believer he renounced the traditions and turned to the Scriptures. There are many traditions which need to be given up today, things handed down that are contrary to Scripture.

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

These two words must not be confused. The word of God came to the prophets; that was revelation. Inspiration is the method by which the word came through them to us. It is by inspiration that the revelation to them became a revelation to us. Without inspiration we would have no revelation, for the word of God does not come today as it came to men of old. This inspiration has given us a written revelation. God’s word which we have today is in the form or nature of a Book, the Bible.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:” (2 Timothy 3:16). This does not say the prophets were inspired; inspiration has to do with the words; the words of scripture came from God; they were God breathed. It is not our purpose to enter the controversy about theories of inspiration, except to say that we believe in the verbal inspiration of the scriptures, which means that the very words were selected by God, and the men spoke as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit. They were not given conceptions or ideas of truth; they were given words of truth and directed by the Spirit to put those words of truth in writing.

The human element in the production of the Bible is fully recognized, the Book came to us through human agency, but the human element was not allowed to hazard the accuracy or infallibility of the Book. The Bible is as accurate and infallible as if God had written it without the human agent. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" (Hebrews 1:1). The Old Testament is the Divine record of what God said at different times and in different ways to Israel through their prophets. The New Testament is the Divine record of God speaking in the Son. The comparison between the prophets and Christ is to point a contrast. God was using the prophets to give His word to Israel; but in Christ it was God Himself speaking. The prophets were many; the Son is one. The prophets were servants; the Son is the Lord. The prophets were temporary; the Son abides forever. The prophets spoke the word; Christ is the Word.

The Bible is in two editions, commonly called the Old and the New Testaments. They are not two but one book. The Old Testament is the New enfolded; the New Testament is the Old unfolded. In the Old Testament the New is concealed; in the New Testament the Old is revealed. The Old is patent in the New; the New is latent in the Old. The Old is prediction; the New is fulfillment. The two Testaments have the same Author: God; they have the same subject: Christ. The crimson thread runs through the whole Bible. You can begin anywhere and, preach Jesus. In both Testaments it is recorded that the Lord said: "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me" (Psalm 40:7); "Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7). And in Revelation 19:10: "And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See you do it not: I am your fellow-servant, and of your brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Martin Luther quaintly compared the two testaments to the two men who brought the branch with the cluster of grapes from the promised land. They were both bearing the same fruit; but the one in front did not see it, but knew what he was carrying. The other saw both the fruit and the man who was helping him. The prophets who came before Jesus testified of Him, although they did not see Him; and we who live since He came, see both Him and them.

ARGUMENTS THAT THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD

1. There is a presumption in its favor. Man needs a revelation from God, and if the Bible is not this revelation we have none. To be sure there are the sacred books of other religions, but they are like the gods they witness to, and are obviously not the revelation of the true and living God. Man needs the kind of revelation we have in the Bible. There is a revelation of God in nature, but this revelation is inadequate; it does not cover enough subjects. Nature reveals His eternal power and Deity, but has nothing to say about His moral qualities. Nature tells us there is a God, but it does not tell us what He is. A savage on an island far removed from civilization, finding a watch, might reach the conclusion that it was made by man, but he could not, by examining the watch, learn anything about the character of the maker. And man cannot learn the character of the Creator through the study of geology, biology, and astronomy. The Bible makes no effort to prove the existence of God, but it goes to great lengths in telling us what God is. He is revealed in His mode of existence and in His many moral perfections.

Man is in darkness about himself. He needs a written revelation to tell him what he is, whence he came, and, where he is bound. The Bible answers every question concerning the eternal welfare of the human soul. It convicts every man of sin and tells him how to be saved. Yes, there is a presumption in favor of the Bible. Man needs a revelation; God is able to give it, and the Bible is the kind of revelation man needs. The Bible satisfies the thirsty soul.

2. The Bible claims to be the Word of God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). If the Bible is not what it claims to be it is a bad book. It is utterly inconsistent to extol the Bible as a good book, and at the same time deny its infallibility. All through the Bible runs the expression, "Thus says the Lord." This expression or its equivalent is used fully two thousand times in the Old Testament.

3. The testimony of Christ argues for the authenticity of the Bible. The Old Testament was in existence in His day, and He accepted it and quoted it as the word of God. The very book most frequently attacked by the critics (the book of Deuteronomy) was the book from which He made every quotation when tempted by Satan: "And he humbled you, and suffered you to hunger, and fed you with manna, which you knew not, neither did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD does man live" (Deuteronomy 8:3); "You shall not tempt the LORD your God, as you tempted him in Massah" (Deuteronomy 6:16); "You shall fear the LORD your God, and serve him, and shall swear by his name" (Deut 6:13), and compare with: Luke 4:4-12: "And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give you, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whoever I will I give it. If you therefore will worship me, all shall be your. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get you behind me, Satan: for it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve. And he

brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If you be the Son of God, cast yourself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you: And in their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.”

4. The uniqueness of the Bible attests its Divine origin. It is different from all other books. To drink at this fountain of Truth is to taste the difference. It is unique in its teaching about God, about creation, about man, about sin, and about salvation. It has been said that man could not have written such a book if he would, and he would not if he could. Any honest man, who knows much about the Bible, will readily admit that it cannot possibly be a human production.

5. The frankness with which this Book deals with its heroes and authors, gives abundant evidence that it is the word of God. Human biographies give only the bright and best side of a man’s life. They extol his virtues and praise his achievements, but say little or nothing about his weak points. But the characters of the Bible are painted in the colors of truth. The Bible does not whitewash.

6. The wonderful unity of the Bible is an argument for its inspiration. This is a miracle within itself. Penned on two continents, written in three languages, its composition and compilation extending through the slow progress of sixteen centuries, having about forty different authors; parts of it written in tents, palaces, dungeons, in cities and deserts; written in times of danger and in seasons of ecstatic joy; among its writers were judges, priests, kings, prophets, prime ministers, herdsmen, scribes, soldiers, physicians, and fishermen; yet in spite of these varying circumstances, conditions, and workmen, the Bible is one Book. It holds together. There is affinity one part for the other. The more this truth is pondered the more amazing is the Bible.

“Imagine forty persons of different nationalities, possessing various degrees of musical culture, visiting the organ of some great cathedral and at long intervals of time, and without any collusion whatever, striking sixty-six different notes, which when combined yielded the theme of the grandest oratorio ever heard: would it not show that behind these forty different men there was one presiding mind, one great Tone-Master? As we listen to some great orchestra, with its immense variety of instruments playing their different parts, but producing melody and harmony, we realize that at the back of these many musicians there is the personality and genius of the composer. And when we enter the halls of the Divine Academy and listen to the heavenly choirs singing the Song of Redemption, all in perfect accord and unison, we know that it is God Himself who has written the music and put this song into their mouths” (A.W. Pink).

7. Fulfilled prophecies give testimony to the Divine origin of the Bible. Prophecy is the foretelling of events before they come to pass. This is the acid test of Divine revelation. God’s appeal to fulfilled prophecy is made all through the Bible: “When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken, but the prophet has spoken it presumptuously: you shall not be afraid of him” (Deuteronomy 18:22); “Produce your cause, says the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, says the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and show us what shall happen: let them show the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods: yes, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together” (Isaiah 41:21-23); “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-21). Men may make some general predictions about the future, but the Bible contains hundreds of prophecies, which have been literally fulfilled hundreds of years after they were written.

7a) Prophecies about Christ. He is the one great subject of prophecy: “And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See you do it not: I am your fellow-servant, and of your brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10); “Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do your will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7). Micah predicted His birthplace: “But you, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2). Isaiah said his mother would be a virgin: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). We have many things about His death predicted in Psalm 22:1-22 and Isaiah 53:1-12. And in Psalm 16:10: “For you will not leave my soul in Hell; neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption” we have His resurrection foretold.

7b) Prophecies about the Jews. These like the prophecies about Christ, are too many to enumerate. Frederick the Great once demanded of one of his marshals, who was a devout believer, proof of the truth of the Bible in one word. “The Jew,” was the laconic, unanswerable reply. The destruction of their royal city, Jerusalem, was foretold years in advance. “And Jesus answered and spoke unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of Heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my

dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city” (Matthew 22:1-7 24:1,2): “And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See you not all these things? truly I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” and Luke 21:5,6: “And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which you behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. Read the account of the destruction of Jerusalem by Josephus, who was with Titus in this campaign and afterwards wrote the history of it. The wandering Jew has long been a proverb in human history, but it was a Divine prophecy a long time before.

7c) Prophecies about Babylon. “And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellence, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces — and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged” (Isaiah 13:19-22); “For I will rise up against them, says the LORD of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, says the LORD. I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction, says the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 14:22,23); “Therefore hear you the counsel of the LORD, that he has taken against Babylon; and his purposes, that he has purposed against the land of the Chaldeans: Surely the least of the flock shall draw them out: surely he shall make their habitation desolate with them. At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth is moved, and the cry is heard among the nations” (Jeremiah 50:45-46). Of all the cities in prophecy apart from Jerusalem, Babylon figures most prominently. Babylon is mentioned in Genesis and in Revelation. This city is Divinely threatened through Isaiah; at great length through Jeremiah, and there are further threatenings through John in the book of Revelation. It would be interesting and profitable for the student, by the use of concordance, to read all the Bible says about Babylon.

7d) One of the most interesting bits of prophecy is that concerning Josiah, the boy king of Judah, who reigned from 637-608 B.C. When Jeroboam stood by his altar at Bethel to burn incense, an unknown prophet of God came out of Judah “And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus says the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon you shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon you, and men’s bones shall be burnt upon you” (1 King 13:2). The date of this prophecy was 975 BE. Here is the prediction of the birth, and name, and deed of a later king of Judah, which took place three and one-half centuries later. The fulfillment is recorded in 2 King 23:15,16: “Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove. And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words”. (2 King 23:15,16). The fulfillment took place 624 BE, or 351 years after the prophecy was spoken.

SOME GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BIBLE AS A DIVINE REVELATION

1. It is a religious Book. It is not a textbook on natural science, but a revelation of moral and saving truth. It was not written to tell men how to get on here, but to tell them how to prepare for the hereafter.

2. The Bible is an open Book. Its truths are not veiled in scientific language, but are given in the popular language of the people. If the Bible had been written in the scientific language of the first century it would have been out of date in the twentieth century. If it had been written in the language of the twentieth century nobody could have understood it until a few years ago. If written in scientific language only the scholars could understand it. The Bible was not written for scholars but for men. It is the people’s Book. It was delivered to the saints, not to the pope, or priest, or cleric. If the gospel is veiled the veil is not on the Book but on the human heart. The best qualification for understanding it is a sincere and honest and Spirit-enlightened mind.

3. The Bible is a practical Book. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable” (2 Timothy 3:16). The value of the Bible is beyond human appraisal. This book came from God and takes us to God. I know it came from God because it treats the subjects beyond the human intellect. The Bible shows the way to God, and how to become righteous before his Holy law. It is a manual of life and conduct. It was not given to adorn a table, but to direct a life. Read this Book to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. As another has said, “know it in the head, store it in the heart, show it in the life, and sow it in the world.”

4. The Bible is an immortal Book. All other books die. It can be said of the Bible as was said of Christ: "Your people shall be willing in the day of your power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: you have the dew of your youth" (Psalm 110:3). Time writes no wrinkles on the brow of the eternal Word. The Bible is the world's best seller and at the same time the most hated of all books. Every weapon from the arsenal of Hell has been used against it. All the strategists of Satan's empire have collaborated in an effort to destroy it. But the Bible is a living and indestructible Book. It has survived the fires of pagan and papal Rome, and the sophistries of all opposing philosophers. It triumphed over the arguments of Ingersoll, the ridicule of Voltaire, and the reasonings of Tom Paine. "Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in Heaven" (Psalm 119:89). The Bible is like the bush which Moses saw burning but not consumed, for God was in it. It is like the anvil that wears out all the hammers.

"Yes, like a solid anvil the sacred Scripture stands, And fiercely is it beaten by unbeliever's hands; With noise and show of learning they make a large display, But, like the blacksmith's hammer they wear themselves away."

5. The Bible is an expensive Book. The cost to us is not much. We enter a book store and ask for a Bible; we lay down the price, one dollar, two dollars, or ten dollars as the case may be. But is that the cost of the Bible? God in providential mercy has made the costliest of all books cheap to us. We estimate the value of an article by the cost of producing it. The Bible is a costly Book in its human aspect. Men sank their lives in medieval monasteries to make copies of it for future generations. Then there was the cost to martyrs who laid down their lives for love of the truth when pope or pagan would try to sweep away every copy of it. The Bible also represents a cost to God. From Genesis to Revelation it is written in the blood of His Son. The Old Testament is the finger of prophecy pointing forward to Calvary; the New Testament is the finger of history pointing back to Calvary. To write the message of love we have in the Bible God broke the heart of His Son on the cross. In olden times the word of God was inscribed on parchment which was the skin of sheep and today it is written on paper. The parchment speaks of the Lamb slain that its skin might clothe and its blood might atone, and that its skin might also bear the news of gracious love to sinners. The paper made from wood crushed into pulp reminds us that the Tree of Life was cut down and crushed on Calvary, crushed and marred beyond all the sons of men, that He might bear the glad tidings of God's love.

METAPHORS OR SYMBOLS OF THE WORD

It is both interesting and instructive to study the symbols or figures under which the Word of God is set forth.

1. It is likened to a lamp or light: "Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path...The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding unto the simple" (Psalm 119:105,130); "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life:" (Proverbs 6:23). The word of God is to man morally what a lamp is physically. This world is in a state of moral darkness; ignorant of how to become righteous before God, but God's word is a light shining in a dark place, and every believer delights to say, "The entrance of Your words gives light" (Psalm 119:130).

2. The Bible is a mirror: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18); "But whoever looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:25). This cannot be said of any other book. I look into the Bible and see myself, not as I think I am, but as I really am, guilty and ruined: "Now we know that what things soever the law says, it says to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Romans 3:19). The Bible is a mouth stopper. The least way to stop a man's boasting is to have him look at himself in the mirror of God's holy word.

3. The word of God is a laver or wash basin: "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26). The very Book that reveals moral dirt also provides for washing. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to your word" (Psalm 119:9). "Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3).

4. The Bible is represented as food: "Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). Every man by nature is a prodigal away from the Father's house and perishing with hunger; in the word of God we find the gospel table laden with soul satisfying food. There is milk for babes, and strong meat for men. There is bread for the hungry and honey for those who can take the sweets. The fat soul is the one who feeds upon the word of God.

5. The word of God is compared to a hammer: "Is not my word like as a fire? says the LORD; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29). The best way to break stony hearts is to quote Scripture. There is no heart too hard for the word when wielded by the Spirit. It caused the hard hearted jailer to cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).

6. The word is called the sword of the Spirit: “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:” (Ephesians 6:17). It is a perfect weapon with which to resist Satan. And the Holy Spirit knows how to use it in cutting the sinner to the heart and killing his self-righteousness.” For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

7. The word is likened to seed: “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). In spiritual as in natural farming the seed must be sown. It is the commission of our Lord to sow this world down with the word of God. We must sow beside all waters, and at all seasons. “In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand: for you know not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good” (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

“He who goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:6).

“Say, Christian, would you thrive
In knowledge of your Lord?
Against no Scripture ever strive,
But tremble at His word.
“Revere the sacred page;
To injure any part
Betrays with blind and feeble rage,
A hard and haughty heart.

“If anything there dark appear,
Bewail your want of sight;
No imperfection can be there,
For all God’s words are right.

“The Scriptures and the Lord
Bear one tremendous name;
The written and the Incarnate Word
In all things are the same.

“For Jesus is the Truth,
As well as Life and Way;
The two-edged sword that’s in His mouth
Shall all proud reasoners slay.

“Why do you call Him Lord,
And what He says resist?
The soul that stumbles at the Word,
Offended is at Christ.

“The thoughts of man are lies,
The Word of God is true.
To bow to that is to be wise;
Then hear, and fear, and do.”
—Joseph Hart.

Chapter 6—The ATTRIBUTES of God

(Introduction)

By the attributes of God is meant those qualities and characteristics of the Divine nature which are essential to God as the Supreme Being. His attributes are His personal perfections without which He would not be the true and living God, the God of the Bible. The Divine attributes explain what God is and what He does.

The greatest and most important of all sciences is theology, the science that treats of God. The being of God is the foundation of all religion. If there is no God, religion is a foolish and unnecessary evil. If there is no God, who is the supreme Lawgiver and Ruler and Judge, then man is not a responsible and accountable being, and the logic is inescapable that every man may do that which is right in his own eyes, insofar as the eternal future is concerned. If there is no God, “Who will render to every man according to his deeds” (Romans 2:6), then every man may act according to his own pleasure without fear of future retribution.

Religion is true or false as it embodies the true conception of the true God. Religion must have a true God to tie to, or it is worthless. Mere belief in a supreme being is not enough. God must be known in His glorious attributes, and these are revealed to us in the Bible.

OUR PROPER STUDY

It has been said that the proper study of mankind is man. But Job felt otherwise. He says, “Acquaint now yourself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto you” (Job 22:21). Jeremiah thought that a spiritual and saving knowledge of God is the greatest need of men: “Thus says the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, says the LORD” (Jeremiah 9:23,24).

Our Savior said, “And this is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Daniel tells us that: “And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits” (Daniel 11:32). Spurgeon wrote that “Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity.”

May we quote further from this prince of preachers: “The proper study of the Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can engage the attention of a child of God — is the existence of the great God which he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can comprehend and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-contentment, and go our way with the thought, ‘Behold I am wise.’ But when we come to this master science, finding our plumbline cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height — we turn away with the thought, ‘I am but of yesterday and know nothing!’” (Sermon on Malachi 3:6) “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed.”

A study of the Divine nature should be attended with humility, caution, and reverence. The more we learn about God in His holy Word, the fuller we realize that He is incomparable and incomprehensible. Strikingly did the Puritan John Howe declare: “The notion therefore we can hence form of His glory, is only such as we may have of a large volume by a brief synopsis, or of a spacious country by a little landscape. He has given us a true report of Himself, but not a full; such as will secure our apprehensions from error, but not from ignorance.” The writer is saying that through the study of the Bible we may be saved from error concerning God, but not from ignorance. The finite mind will never be able to fully know the Infinite God. God is the most overwhelming of all truths.

HOW GOD IS KNOWN

Two things are necessary to man’s knowledge of the true God. There must be a revelation of God, and man must have a capacity to know God. One of these without the other will not suffice. The Bible gives a revelation of God, and a regenerated man is the only person who has the capacity to know God. Both of these are the results of the Holy Spirit’s work. The Bible was written by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit, and the regenerate man has been born of the Spirit. There is thus, for the believer, a twofold revelation of God; a revelation to him in the word of truth, and a revelation in him by the Spirit’s illumination.

Wherever the Bible has not gone, men have searched in vain for the true God. Job asked: "Can you by searching find out God? can you find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (Job 11:7). Paul tells us that the worldly wisdom knew not God "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). This was after the philosophers of Greece had tried and failed. One of the philosophers being asked the question, "What is God?" required a day to think it over. When the day was up, he requested more time. The reason being asked for his delay, he replied that the longer he considered the question the more obscure it became to him.

But a mere objective revelation of God is not all that is needed. There must also be a subjective revelation. The Spirit must put light in the soul which has been darkened by sin. Many have the Bible who do not know God. "Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5); "But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14); "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whoever the Son will reveal him" (Matthew 11:27).

VALUE OF THE STUDY

1. The study of the Divine attributes will go far toward delivering us from error on many doctrinal points. For example, opposition to the doctrine of eternal punishment comes from a perversion of His goodness and a denial of His wrath and justice. Opposition to the doctrine of election comes from a misunderstanding of the grace of God, a denial of human depravity, and a disregard for the sovereignty of God.

2. The study of the personal perfections of the Godhead will give a just view of God. The God of the masses is not the God of the Bible. The God of the imagination is not the true God. A. W. Pink uses strong words but we believe he speaks the truth when he says: "The God of this twentieth century no more resembles the supreme Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The 'God' who is now talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday School, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so called Bible Conferences is the figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside the pale of Christendom form 'gods' out of wood and stone, while the millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a 'God' out of their own carnal mind. In reality, they are but atheists, for there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely Supreme God, and no God at all. A God whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to Deity, and so far from being a fit object of worship, merits nothing but contempt."

3. A contemplation of God in His personal attributes will promote humility and reverence. When Job got a vision of God, he cried out, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). When Isaiah saw the Lord on His throne, he cried, "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). The better view we have of God, the better will we know ourselves. In the light of His holiness we can better see our vileness. Humility is the effect of being occupied with those sterner attributes of God, such as His justice, wrath, holiness, and power. There has been such a lop sided view of the love of God, and neglect of the wrath of God, that there is little fear and reverence of God today.

4. To be occupied with thoughts about God as He is revealed in the Scriptures will increase our faith. Much that passes current for faith today is either sentiment or presumption. Faith must be based upon a true revelation of God, and we have this revelation in the Bible. The way to have strong faith is to have a great and mighty God. Nobody's faith can be stronger than he believes his God to be. I cannot have strong faith in a God who, I think, is weaker than men. If my God is weak, my faith of necessity will be correspondingly weak. I cannot have much faith in God if I believe He is being defeated on most battle fields. I cannot have much faith in God if I believe He is trying and failing; if I believe His will is being thwarted by the will of men; if I believe He is doing the best He can to accomplish as much good as He can, and to save as many as He can. But if like Job, I believe "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desires, even that he does" (Job 23:13); then with Paul I can say "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Ephesians 3:20).

WHAT KIND OF A GOD DO WE PRAY TO?

Do we pray for the conversion of loved ones or friends or even enemies? Then we must pray in faith that God is able to convict and convert them. But if we are to pray in faith we must believe that God is almighty, that nothing is too hard for Him. We must believe that God is irresistible whether He works in grace or in justice; in salvation or in judgment.

With Isaac Watts we must say:

“His very word of grace is strong,
As that which built the sky;
The voice that rolls the stars along,
Proclaims it from on high.”

And may grace be given both writer and reader to believe in grace as did Philip Doddridge when he wrote:

“Grace led my roving feet
To tread the heavenly road;
And new supplies each hour I meet,
While pressing on to God.”

CLASSIFICATION OF THE ATTRIBUTES

The Divine attributes are variously distinguished by theologians. Perhaps the best classification is that which divides them into communicable and incommunicable. The communicable attributes are those which God, in some measure, communicates or imparts to men, as love, power, wisdom, and holiness. The incommunicable attributes are qualities that belong exclusively to God, as infinity, independency, and immutability. These qualities distinguish the Creator from His creation.

Chapter 7—The INFINITY of God

INFINITY, when applied to God, means that He is unbounded, unlimited, unsearchable, immeasurable, incomparable, and incomprehensible. These are big words, both in size and meaning, and big words are needed to describe such a great and glorious God. God is so great that in comparison with Him. “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he does according to his will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What do you?” (Daniel 4:35). Infinity contrasts God with His creatures. God is infinite; man is finite. God is infinite in all His attributes, but infinity has chief respect to His omnipresence and eternity. God is not bound by space, therefore He is everywhere; nor by time, therefore He is eternal.

1. HIS ETERNITY.

God’s infinity as to duration is called His eternity. He has neither beginning nor end. “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, says the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8). This attribute is possessed by each of the three persons, who have a common and undivided nature. He is eternal whether you look backward or forward. God’s nature is not subject to the law of time. God is not in time; time is in God. God gave existence to time. There is no succession of time with God; to Him past, present, and future is “one eternal now.”

“But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). It has been well remarked that God is no older now than in the days of David, or when the world was created; for time makes no changes in Him. “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of Heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him” (Daniel 7:13), But not ancient in days. “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God” (Psalm 90:1,2).

He is without end. This is not difficult to understand. We think of men as existing forever, so it is easy to believe this of God. That which has no beginning, obviously could have no end. “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Revelation 22:13).

He is without beginning. At this point God is incomprehensible. But whether we can conceive of life without beginning or not, we are bound to attribute this kind of existence to God. This may be argued:

1. From His necessary self-existence. The existence of God is either arbitrary or necessary. If arbitrary, it must lie from His own will or from the will of another. If from His own will, this would suppose His previous existence, which would be a contradiction. If His existence is from the will of another, that other would be both prior and superior, and so be God. This would involve another contradiction. God then must necessarily exist. “You are my witnesses, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me” (Isaiah 43:10).

2. That God is without beginning may be argued from His immutability. If God is not eternal, He must have passed from nonexistence into being, and this would involve a change. “But you are the same, and your years shall have no end” (Psalm 102:27). “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Malachi 3:6).

3. The eternity of God may also be argued from His attributes, several of which are said to be eternal. His power is expressly said to be eternal: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:” (Romans 1:20). His knowledge is from eternity: “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). His mercy is said to be from everlasting to everlasting: “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children” (Psalm 103:17). His purposes are eternal: “According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:” (Ephesians 3:11). His love is called everlasting: “The LORD has appeared of old unto me, saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you” (Jeremiah 31:3).

4. The eternity of God may be concluded from the covenant of grace which is styled an everlasting covenant: “Although my house be not so with God; yet he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow” (2 Samuel 23:5). It is called the everlasting covenant not only because it will endure immovable forever, but because it was from everlasting. It is sometimes called a new covenant, not because newly made, but because it is always new and never grows old.

5. The incommunicable name of God is Jehovah, which means “The Existing One.” “That men may know that you, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, are the most high over all the earth” (Psalm 83:18). God exists naturally and necessarily, which means that there is no cause of His existence. He is the great First Cause, and therefore cannot be the effect of any other cause. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). There are no wrinkles on the brow of the eternal God. There is no febleness of old age with Him.

2. HIS OMNIPRESENCE.

This means that God is everywhere. He is not bound by space. "Where shall I go from your spirit? or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, you are there: if I make my bed in Hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall your hand lead me, and your right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:7-10). There is no escape from Him for the wicked and no separation from Him for the righteous. This may be proven:

1. From His power, which is everywhere, as appears in creation and providence. "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:" (Hebrews 1:3).

2. From His knowledge. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13); "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). The presence of God may be considered in different ways. He is not present everywhere in the same sense or way. His glorious presence is in Heaven, where He displays Himself to angels and to the spirits of just men made perfect. His powerful and providential presence is with all His creatures, "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3). His gracious presence is with His people, regenerating, sanctifying, comforting, and blessing them. His wrathful presence is in Hell, inflicting punishment upon the wicked. "If I ascend up into Heaven, you are there: if I make my bed in Hell, behold, you are there" (Psalm 139:8). "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

God's omnipresence is particularly and fully expressed in Psalm 139: "O LORD, you have searched me, and known me. You know my down sitting and mine uprising, you understand my thought afar off. You compass my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, you know it altogether. You have beset me behind and before, and laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Where shall I go from your spirit? or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, you are there: if I make my bed in Hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall your hand lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yes, the darkness hides not from you; but the night shines as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to you. For you have possessed my reins: you have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise you; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are your works; and that my soul knows right well. My substance was not hid from you, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in your book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with you. Surely you will slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, you bloody men. For they speak against you wickedly, and your enemies take your name in vain. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate you? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." This speaks of His essential presence. So immense is God that the Heaven of heavens cannot contain Him: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the Heaven and Heaven of heavens cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built?" (1 Kings 8:27). "Thus says the LORD, The Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that you build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?" (Isaiah 66:1).

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE

It has been urged in objection to the omnipresence of God that Cain went out from the presence of the Lord: "And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden" (Genesis 4:16), and that Jonah fled from God's presence: "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (John 1:3). But in reply it may be said that Cain only went away from the place of worship where God's gracious presence was manifested. And Jonah was fleeing from the service of God, foolishly supposing that he could avoid being urged to do his duty. He soon found that God was everywhere, and could meet with him on the sea as well as on the land.

The God with whom we have to do has no limitations. One of the sins charged against Israel was that they limited the Holy One of Israel: “Yes, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel” (Psalm 78:41), that is, they thought there were some things too much for Him; they circumscribed Him in their thoughts and in lack of faith.

There are no crises with God, and no secret places to Him. All things are naked and open to His eyes. “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13). There is no hiding from Him, and no withstanding Him when His anger is aroused and when He chooses to execute His wrath.

May both writer and reader say with the Psalmist: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23,24).

Chapter 8—The INDEPENDENCE of God

GOD is the one and only independent Being. We speak of rich men as being independent, but in reality no creature is independent. Webster defines the adjective “independent” as follows: “Not dependent; free; not subject to control by others; not relying on others; not subordinate; self-governing; sovereign; not contingent or conditioned,” etc. Now God is the only Being to whom this definition can be absolutely applied.

The independency of God does not preclude the employment of His creatures in accomplishing His will, but it means that He does not depend upon them; He does not have to use them. The popular expression, “God is depending on us,” “makes Him weaker than we are. God may use us in furthering His cause, but what He does with us He could as easily do without us. God derives no power or wisdom from His creatures. “For who has known the mind of the Lord? or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?” (Romans 11:34,35).

Paul says: “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). The Gospel is proclaimed by lips of clay, but the power of conversion is not in the man who speaks: “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:4,5). Faith is not the result of man’s persuasive powers; it is a fruit of the Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,” (Galatians 5:22). The new birth is not the result of man’s will, or the will of the flesh: “Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13), “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures” (James 1:18). For success in the ministry God does not depend upon the preacher; the preacher must depend upon God.

THAT WORN-OUT FARM

The story is told of a man who bought a run-down farm in Virginia. For three years he worked hard and finally was able to produce the necessities of life. One day he was visited by his pastor. As he took him over the farm, pointing out here and there patches and fields of good crops, the pastor remarked several times that it looked as if he and the Lord were partners in farming. As the preacher took his leave, the old farmer said, “Reverend, I agree with all you say about me and the Lord being in partnership. I agree with every word. But reverend, I just wishes you could a seen this place when the Lord was running it by Himself!” This irreverent joke has no place in the pulpit as teaching that God had to depend upon the farmer for good crops. That worn out land was not God’s exhibit of what He was able to do. It was natural retribution for the abuse of what God had made. The thorns and briars and weeds that had grown on that run down farm were a reminder of sin. “And unto Adam he said, Because you have hearkened unto the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it: cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to you; and you shall eat the herb of the field” (Genesis 3:17,18). They did not speak of what God could produce, but of what man deserves. God made the earth fruitful of good; sin caused it to abound in thorns and thistles. A run down farm does not represent the best God can do. God used the farmer in producing good crops, but He did not depend on Him.

Moses cautioned Israel against saying: “And you say in your heart, My power and the might of mine hand has gotten me this wealth. But you shall remember the LORD your God: for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto your fathers, as it is this day” (Deu. 8:17,18). Also our Savior taught us to pray: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11).

There must be some way to preach the truth of human responsibility without begetting pride in the creature and without dethroning God. We must not preach one truth at the cost of another truth. Man is a responsible creature. He is responsible to do all God commands. Man is responsible to work for his bread, but after all his work he is dependent upon God for his bread. No man, who can work, has the right to expect bread apart from work; not because God cannot give bread without work, but because He will not put a premium on laziness. “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). That God can give food apart from human work is seen in the fall of the manna in the wilderness, “And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they knew not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat” (Exodus 16:14-15) and the feeding of Elijah by the ravens. “And it shall be, that you shall drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there” (1 Kings 17:4).

Of God we can truly sing:

“He sits on no precarious throne,
Nor borrows leave to be.”

To further amplify the subject of God's independence, let us divide it into two branches: Self-existence and Self-sufficiency.

GOD IS SELF-EXISTENT

Every being must have a ground for its existence, either in or out of itself. The ground of man's existence is outside of himself; he does not cause himself to exist. Man is dependent on something outside of himself for existence, but God is not thus dependent. To be sure the self-existence of God is incomprehensible to us, too much for the finite mind to grasp. But a self-existent person is not as great a mystery as a self-existent thing such as Herbert Spencer supposes the universe to be. It is easier to see how matter is derived from mind than to see how mind is derived from matter.

The ground of God's existence is not in His will, but in His nature. He did not will Himself into being; it is His nature to exist. He exists naturally and therefore necessarily.

GOD IS SELF-SUFFICIENT

The self-existent Being must, of necessity, be self-sufficient. God is sufficient for His own support, glory, and happiness. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36). God comprehends in Himself all excellencies, perfections, and happiness. "For by him were all things created, that are in Heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him" (Colossians 1:16).

It is very necessary to distinguish between what God is in His essential being, and what He is declared to be by His creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1), but they add nothing to it. Men are to ascribe glory to God in their eating and drinking: "Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31), but this is not any addition to His glory, but a mere recognition and acknowledgment of it. In Judges we have the exhortation, but this does not denote that God was in need of man's help, but that it is man's duty to serve God. "Yes, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel" (Psalm 78:41), but this only imports their attitude of mistrust. They acted as though God was limited in power and could not take care of them in the wilderness. Moreover, they limited Him in His authority, that is, they acted as if He did not have the right to make certain commands upon them; they showed by their murmurings that they were displeased with His providences. "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (Exodus 16:2); "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me" (Numbers 14:27). In the same passage it is charged that they tempted God, "Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice" (Numbers 14:22) that is, they acted as if He could be tempted. In unbelief they put Him to the proof.

GOD IS ESSENTIALLY BLESSED

He is called the blessed or happy God, "According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust" (1 Timothy 1:11); "Which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;" (1 Timothy 6:15). This happiness can neither be added to nor destroyed. Sin merits and receives His displeasure, but it does not destroy His happiness. Righteousness in His moral creatures may and does receive His approbation, but it adds nothing to His essential happiness and glory. He was happy and glorious before there were any creatures, and He will remain happy even when Hell is filled with the wicked. God's happiness rests upon three facts:

1. There is no moral conflict in God.

"Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite" (Psalm 147:5). God is at peace with Himself. He is infinite in wisdom and spends no time in grieving over mistakes. He is infinite in holiness and knows no remorse for sin. While there are three persons in the Godhead, they are an absolute unity and in perfect accord. Peace is the great desideratum of the human race, but it belongs essentially to God. He is called the God of peace: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Hebrews 13:20). And there is harmony among all His attributes. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10).

2. God knows no limitations.

He is never at the end of Himself. His resources are never diminished. He never faces an emergency. He knows nothing of crises. He never resorts to any new deal, for His plans and purposes are all eternal. Wisdom designed all His

plans, and His power executes them, therefore “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). There never was a time when God wondered what He would or could do. He has no experiment station where He learns what is best, for He naturally knows what is best. In all these points man is in striking contrast to God. We are straitened in ourselves, often at our wit’s end and helpless. We are limited in power and wisdom. We are limited in time, but God is the King of Eternity. Joshua wanted time to get his day’s work done, and God lengthened the day for him. “Then spoke Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand you still upon Gibeon; and you, Moon, in the valley of Avalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of Heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day” (Jos. 10:12,13). Napoleon, at Waterloo, saw the shadows of the evening falling upon his defeated army and is reported to have said, “O that I had the power of Joshua to retard the march of the sun one hour!”

3. God’s happiness consists of His holiness.

Sin destroys happiness. Look at Adam and Eve in Eden “And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed” (Genesis 2:8), before and after their sin. “And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8). Nothing to mar their happiness until sin came. Sin promises happiness but cannot produce it. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). Sin is breaking with God, and since God is the fountain and source of all true happiness, when man broke with Him, he lost peace and joy. No man in his natural state, as a sinner, has any true peace and joy. These are fruits of the Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith” (Galatians 5:22). The people of God will not be perfectly happy until they are completely saved, and this will not be until they are

conformed to the image of Christ in resurrection glory. “As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with your likeness” (Psalm 17:15). “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Romans 4:8). Satan gives a counterfeit happiness. He has built a fool’s paradise in this world for his dupes. But the ever happy God will make His children genuinely and eternally happy in a real and lasting paradise. His grace has satisfied us with the imputed righteousness of His Son for justification, and has also created a thirst within us for personal righteousness, and that thirst will be satisfied when we are glorified. Here is His promise: “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). What a joy to know that we shall someday be as good as we now want to be!

Chapter 9—The IMMUTABILITY of God

“For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Malachi 3:6). Mutability belongs to all creation; immutability belongs to God alone. The visible heavens often change their appearance; sometimes they are clear, at other times they are covered with clouds and darkness. The face of the earth appears different at the various seasons of the year. The earth has undergone one great change by the flood, and will undergo another great change by fire: “For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Peter 3:5-10). The angels in their original state were subject to change, as the apostasy of many of them has shown. The elect angels have not changed, they have been confirmed in holiness but this is not due to their nature, but to the electing grace of God in Christ, Who is the Head of all principality and power: “I charge you before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that you observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21). “And you are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.” (Colossians 2:10). And when we consider man, the very acme of creation, his changeableness is so evident that no argument is needed to prove it. What man of us has not grieved at human fickleness? Many of us know what it is to be praised today and slandered tomorrow by the same pair of lips.

“Abide with me!
Fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

“Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day;
Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O You Who change not, abide with me!” —H.F. Lyte, 1847

The author of the foregoing lines was not a fool optimist, thinking of this present world as a “Utopia.” Nor was he a sour pessimist, viewing the future without hope. But the ground of His hope was in the unchanging God, Who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN HIS NATURE

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). God cannot change for worse, for He is the eternally Holy One. He cannot change for better, for He is already the Holy and Perfect One. Time effects no changes with the eternal One. The self-existent, and self-sufficient, and ever-existing God is not bowed down with age, neither is there any faltering to His stately steppings. “Have you not known? have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding” (Isaiah 40:28).

GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN HIS ATTRIBUTES

The power of God is ever the same, for we read of His eternal power: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20). There is no increase to His knowledge, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). His love is unchangeable: “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (John 13:1); “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For your sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors

through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39); “The LORD has appeared of old unto me, saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you.” (Jeremiah 31:3), and His mercy endures forever: “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endures forever. O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endures forever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endures forever. To him who alone does great wonders: for his mercy endures forever. To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endures forever. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endures forever. To him that made great lights: for his mercy endures forever: The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endures forever: The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endures forever. To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endures forever: And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endures forever: With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endures forever. To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endures forever: And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endures forever: But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endures forever. To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endures forever. To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endures forever: And slew famous kings: for his mercy endures forever: Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endures forever: And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endures for ever: And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endures forever: Even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endures forever. Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endures forever: And has redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endures forever. Who gives food to all flesh: for his mercy endures forever. O give thanks unto the God of Heaven: for his mercy endures forever” (Psalm 136). His veracity (truthfulness) is immutable, for He cannot lie “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;” (Titus 1:2). His holiness cannot be sullied (ill-tempered), and His faithfulness never fails. “Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor allow my faithfulness to fail” (Psalm 89:33). Though there has been such a profusion of blessings bestowed upon His creatures, and so many good and perfect gifts made to them, His goodness is still the same without any abatement.

GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN HIS DECREES

The purposes of God are eternal. No new resolutions are ever formed, and no new decrees are ever made by Him, for His counsels are of old. There is no Happy New Year with Him, for He is ever the blessed or happy God. His purpose cannot be frustrated, “The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations” (Psalm 33:11). “There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand” (Proverbs 19:21). “The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.” (Isaiah 14:24). “But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desires, even that he does” (Job 23:13).

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED AND ANSWERED

1. It has been offered in objection to the immutability of God that He must have changed at creation. But this is to confound change with manifestation. As I now write the sun is shining into my study; directly it will be gone, but this does not mean a change in the sun, the sun is the same; there is only a change in its manifestation. Then, too, a change in activity does not imply a change in character or nature. What God’s activities were before creation we are nowhere told, but since He ceased from the work of creation He has been engaged in the work of administration and salvation, and in the future He will take up the work of judgment.

This is the day of salvation: “(For he says, I have heard you in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored you: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)” (2 Corinthians 6:2), “But after your hardness and impenitent heart treasures up unto yourself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;” (Romans 2:5); “Because he has appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all men, in that he has raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). This is the day of God’s patience, the day in which He tolerates the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: “What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:” (Romans 9:22); the day in which men defy God and seem to get by with it. The saddest story the writer ever heard from human lips was told him by a young woman whose father committed double homicide and suicide, killing the husband and mother of this daughter, and then taking his own life. According to the story this man had years before renounced his Christian profession, and had become a student of “black are.” Confessedly selling himself to the devil, he would often defy God in the presence of his family and boast that God was not “man enough to handle him.” And to all appearances he got by with his defiance of God, but in the coming day of judgment God will deal with all such

rebels and boasters. "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). In that day His wrath, now held back, will be manifested. But the changes in Divine activity do not argue a change in the Divine character and purpose.

2. It has been argued also that the incarnation of Christ involved a change in the Divine nature. But the incarnation was an assumption of human nature by the second person of the Godhead. The divine nature was in no wise affected. The Divine nature was not changed into human nature, nor the human nature into the Divine, nor a third nature made out of the two. In the incarnation Christ assumed what He was not, and remained what He was. The incarnation was necessary for His work of making atonement. The divine nature, as such, cannot suffer, so Christ assumed human nature that He might be capable of suffering. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man...Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:9,14). But in His suffering there was no change in the Divine nature.

3. It is objected that the Scriptures represent a change in God by ascribing repentance to Him. "And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (Genesis 6:6); "And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and the LORD repented that he had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Samuel 15:35); "And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies" (Psalm 106:45); "The LORD repented for this: It shall not be, says the LORD" (Amos 7:3); "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not" (John 3:10). But there are other Scriptures which plainly and positively deny that God repents. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: has he said, and shall he not do it? or has he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19); "And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent." (1 Samuel 15:29). We would not make one Scripture recant before another, but putting all the passages together we conclude that repentance with God is not what it is with men. Repentance on the part of men is on account of sin and involves a change of mind and purpose, but with God, it cannot be because He has sinned, and therefore does not involve a change of mind and will. Repentance with God means a change of manifestation and activity, and this change is always in line with His immutable character and purpose. The immutability of God's holiness requires a change in attitude and treatment when the righteous become wicked. The sun is not changeable because it melts the wax and hardens the clay, the difference is not in the sun but in the objects it shines upon.

"Nor is the immutability of God, in His promises and threatenings, affected in that the promised good and threatened evil are not always done. For it should be considered, that they are either absolute or conditional. That anything promised or threatened, absolutely and unconditionally, is not performed, must be denied. In all cases where God does not do what He said He would do, a condition is either expressed or implied. "If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, with which I said I would benefit them." (Jeremiah 18:8-10). Thus "For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation. This is my rest forever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it" (Psalm 132:13,14), and the people of Israel should dwell in their land, and eat the good of it; but then it was provided they were obedient to God, abode in His service and worship, and kept His laws and ordinances: "If you be willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land:" (Isaiah 1:19). But failing on their part. He departed from them, and suffered them to be carried away captive. There was a change of His dispensations, but none of His will. He threatened the Ninevites with the destruction of their city within forty days, that is, unless they repented. They did repent, and were saved from ruin, God repenting of what He had threatened; which, though a change in His outward conduct towards them, was no change of His will; for both their repentance and their deliverance were according to His unchangeable will "And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown: And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not" (John 3:4,10). In the case of Hezekiah, II Kings 20:1-6: "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amos came to him, and said unto him, Thus says the LORD, Set your house in order; for you shall die, and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, I beseech you, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before you in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in your sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears: behold, I will heal you: on the third day you shall go up unto the house of the LORD. And I will add unto your days fifteen years; and I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake" the outward

declaration ordered to be made to him, was, that he should die and not live, as he must have done quickly, according to the nature of second causes, his disease being mortal; but the secret will of God was that he should live fifteen years longer, as he did; which implies neither contradiction nor change. The outward declaration was made to humble Hezekiah? to induce him to pray, and make use of means; whereby the unchangeable will of God was accomplished” (Dr. John Gill).

“God’s immutability is not that of a stone, that has no internal experience, but rather of mercury, that rises and falls with ever change of temperature. (The mercury does not change; it only reflects the change in the weather, C.D.C.) When a man bicycling against the wind turns about and goes with the wind instead of going against it, the wind seems to change, though it is blowing just as it was before” (Strong).

4. It is sometimes claimed that prayer changes God. We gladly subscribe to the blessed truth that God hears and answers prayer, but we deny emphatically that prayer changes God. This would make man sovereign and supreme rather than God. This would make prayer dictation rather than supplication. Prayer is a means of grace the results of which are always in harmony with God’s will. “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will (1 John 5:14). In prayer we seem to conquer God, but in reality it is He who conquers us. “Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26), therefore the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us according to the will of God. We even say in praying, “Not our will, but Your will be done.”

Chapter 10—The KNOWLEDGE of God

When Massillon arose to deliver the funeral oration of Louis 14, his opening sentence was: “Only God is great.” Luther once told Erasmus that his thoughts of God were too human. A person criticized a certain preacher by saying that he did not make God big enough. We believe this is a general fault of the ministry in this, our day: we do not make God big enough in our preaching. God is great, incomprehensibly great, in every attribute. The Psalmist says that “Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5).

The knowledge of God is called His omniscience, which means that His knowledge is universal, reaching to all things, to all persons, and to all events. The contrast between God and man is very marked. Man knows very little; his understanding has been darkened by sin. He begins his earthly career in almost complete ignorance, and after a lifetime of study knows nothing as he ought to know it: “And if any man think that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.” (1 Corinthians 8:2). While in this world the wisest of men can hardly turn over the first page in the book of knowledge. And the smarter the man is, the more he realizes his ignorance. It is the fool who thinks he knows it all. Moreover, the more valuable a truth is, the denser is the ignorance of man concerning it. The truth about God and eternal things is the most valuable of all truth, and yet the ignorance of man is more evident here than on any other subject. Moral and spiritual truths are hid to the eyes of the wise and prudent and revealed to babes: “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank you, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in your sight” (Luke 10:21). God has made foolish the wisdom of this world with regard to spiritual things: “Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (1 Corinthians 1:20). The world by its own wisdom cannot know God: “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” (1 Corinthians 1:21). To be wise every man must become a fool, that is, he must renounce his own reasonings and accept God’s revelation about eternal things. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

Paul preached the gospel to both Jew and Greek alike to the natural, prejudiced Jew it was a scandal, and to the natural, proud Greek it was foolishness: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greek foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). Before they could see the wisdom and power of God in the gospel of Christ, they had to be called; by which call their minds were illuminated by the Holy Spirit, so that the Gospel was no longer hid to them: “But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:24); “In whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:4,6).

God’s understanding is infinite: “Great is our Lord, and of great power — his understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5). The original reads, “Of His understanding there is no number.” The objects of God’s knowledge are beyond computation. The mind of man does not have a mind that can fathom the knowledge of God. David wrote concerning the knowledge of God and, after a few lines, said, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psalm 139:6).

“You know my down sitting and mine uprising, you understand my thought afar off” (Psalm 139:2). God observes us when we sit down to meditate, and when we arise to pursue the activities of life and He knows the thoughts that regulate all our ways. He knows our thoughts before we know them. Before a thought is our own, it is foreknown to God. God said of Israel, “And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swore” (Deu. 31:21). God knew what their thoughts and actions would be before He brought them into Canaan. Christ knew what Peter’s thoughts and words would be and predicted that he would deny Him. “And Jesus says unto him, Truly I say unto you, That this day, even in this night, before the rooster crow twice, you shall deny me thrice...And the second time the rooster crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the rooster crow twice, you shall deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept” (Mark 14:30,72).

“You compass my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.” (Psalm 139:3). God knows our path and our pallet. He knows us when we awake and when we are asleep. “For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, you know it altogether” (Psalm 139:4). God knows our speech. He knows when men take His Name in vain, and has declared that He will not hold such a man guiltless: “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). He knows when men deny His word and “poke fun” at what He has caused to be written. And He hears the lowest whisper as well as the loudest cry. Men whisper when they wish to conceal their words, but God can hear our whispers, yes, even the mutterings of our heart.

“You have beset me behind and before, and laid your hand upon me” (Psalm 139:5). David felt himself hemmed in by God. Truly there is no escape from God! “Where shall I go from your spirit? or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, you are there: if I make my bed in Hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall your hand lead me, and your right hand shall hold me” (Psalm 139:7-10). He is behind us, recording our sins; or in grace blotting them out. He is before us, knowing all our deeds, and providing for all our needs. God is a prison house of punishment to the wicked, and a haven of rest to His weary people. Every person has to have dealings with God, therefore “prepare to meet your God.”

“O Lord, in me there lies not but to
Your search revealed lies;
For when I sit, You mark it; no less
You notest when I rise;
Yes, closest closet of my thought has
Open windows to Your eyes.”

HOW DOES GOD KNOW?

1. God does not have to acquire knowledge. His knowledge is not the result of observation, consultation, or laborious study. It is no effort for God to know. Knowledge with man is attended with much labor; with man lifetime is school time.
2. God does not increase in knowledge. He knows no more now than He did centuries ago. His understanding is infinite from all eternity. He has always had perfect knowledge of all things. God does not need to enroll in any man's university. There are no school days with God.
3. God knows naturally. Omniscience belongs to the very nature of God; it is one of His personal perfections. Calvin defines Omniscience as “that attribute whereby God knows Himself and all other things in one eternal and most simple act.” God's knowledge is all direct and without any intermediaries: “For who has known the mind of the Lord? or who has been his counselor?” (Romans 11:34).

THE OBJECTS OF GOD'S KNOWLEDGE

1. God knows Himself. Rational creatures are endowed by God with capacity to know themselves. Even fallen men know something about themselves, of the composition of their bodies, and of the faculties of the soul. And if creatures know something of themselves, then the Creator, whose understanding is infinite, must know Himself perfectly. Moreover, there is perfect acquaintance among the three persons of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit knows the mind of God, and can make intercession for the saints according to the will of God: “Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8:26,27). Jesus, speaking of God the Father, said, “Yet you have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying.” (John 8:55).
2. God knows His creation. He knows everything in nature. “He counts the number of the stars; he calls them all by their names.” (Psalm 147:4). The sparrow does not fall without His knowledge and consent. God knows everything in the realm of human experience. He knows the thoughts of men, and the ways of men, and the words of men. “Before men we stand as opaque bee-hives. They can see the thoughts go in and out of us, but what work they do inside of a man, they cannot tell. Before God we are as glass bee-hives, and all that our thoughts are doing within us, He perfectly sees and understands.” (Henry Ward Beecher). God knows the deeds of men. Men can hide their deeds from one another, but they cannot hide them from God. No human eye saw Cain murder Abel, but God witnessed the crime. “And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel your brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What have you done? the voice of your brother's blood cries unto me from the ground” (Genesis 4:9,10). Achan no doubt thought he had committed the perfect crime when he stole the wedge of gold and hid it in the earth, but God brought his sin to light. “And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray you, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what you have done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done” (Joshua 7:19,20). David covered up his sin with Bathsheba, but God uncovered it, “You are the man!” “And Nathan said to David, You are the man. Thus says the LORD God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul; ...Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your

house; because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife” (2 Samuel 12:7,10). There are no secret sins to God; “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13).

God knows the sorrows and trials of His people. “And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; “ (Exodus 3:7). Let us tell our sorrows to our Heavenly Father, for “Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal.”

God knows all events, past, present, and future. He knows all the past and never forgets. “When he makes inquisition for blood, he remembers them: he forgets not the cry of the humble” (Psalm 9:12). Here is a verse for Hitler and all other war lords. It is merciful that we can forget some things of the past. Some men brood over the past until they are driven insane. This is not the proper attitude for the believer. “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13,14). There is forgiveness with God through faith in His Son, and when God forgives us He remembers our sins against us no more forever. “Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but you have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for you have cast all my sins behind your back” (Isaiah 38:17). “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed you” (Isaiah 44:22).

God knows the present and the future. He knows the future better than men can know the past. God’s perfect knowledge of the future is illustrated in the hundreds of fulfilled prophecies. Prophecy is the recording of events before they come to pass.

THE CONTEMPLATION OF GOD’S KNOWLEDGE

There is no better exercise for the soul than the contemplation of the perfection’s of God. Here is the secret of all true godliness. He who would live godly must be occupied with thoughts about God.

“The wicked hate the truth of God’s knowledge. They wish there might be no Witness of their sins, no Searcher of their hearts, no Judge of their deeds” (A. W. Pink).

The wicked fail to remember that God remembers all their wickedness: “And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face” (Hos. 7:2)

The contemplation of the knowledge of God should fill the soul with adoring wonder. How great must be the One who knows all things! None of us knows what a day may bring forth, but God knows all that will take place in time and in eternity.

The infinite knowledge of God ought to fill men with holy fear. Everything we think, or say, or do, is known to Him to Whom we must give account. “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36). Meditation upon this divine perfection will be a mighty check upon the waywardness of the flesh. In times of temptation we need to say as Hagar did, “And she called the name of the LORD that spoke unto her, You God see me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that sees me?” (Genesis 16:13).

To be occupied with the infinite knowledge of God will fill the child of God with humility, adoration, and praise. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” (Romans 11:33).

The truth before us is an encouragement to prayer. There is no danger that our petitions will not be heard, or that our sighs and tears will escape the notice of God. No danger of the individual saint being overlooked amidst the throng of suppliants. An infinite Mind is capable of paying attention to millions as though only one man was seeking its attention. And we do not jeopardize our prayers by using inappropriate language, because God knows the thoughts and reads the intents of the heart. “Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26).

Chapter 11—The FOREKNOWLEDGE of God

“For whom he did foreknow (Gk. *proginosko*), he also did predestine to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29).

“God has not cast away his people which he foreknew (Gk. *proginosko*). Know you not what the scripture says of Elijah? how he makes intercession to God against Israel” (Romans 11:2).

“You therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before (Gk. *proginosko*), beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Peter 3:17).

“Which knew (*proginosko*) me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee” (Acts 26:5).

“Who truly was foreordained (Gk. *proginosko*) before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,” (1 Peter 1:20).

“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge (Gk. *prognosis*) of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:” (Acts 2:23).

“Elect according to the foreknowledge (Gk. *prognosis*) of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Peter 1:2).

In the foregoing Scriptures we have given every passage in the New Testament where the word “foreknowledge” is used. It will be noted that it is used five times in the verb form and two times in the noun form. In the verb form it is used three times of God and two times of man. One time when used of God it is translated “foreordain” (1 Peter 1:20).

It is our candid judgment that there is hardly any doctrine more generally and more woefully misunderstood than the doctrine now before us. It is well to remember that the meaning of Bible terms is not determined by their current and popular use, or by reference to human dictionaries, but by their usage in the Scriptures. We are apt to assume that we know the meaning of a particular word and fail to test our assumption by the use of the concordance. Ask the average person what the word “flesh” means, and he will be quick to reply that it means the body of man or beast. But the word does not always have that meaning. It often refers to the sinful and fleshly nature. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Romans 7:18); “But put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14); “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3). Most people think the word “world” stands for the human race, when, in fact, the word is seldom so employed in the Scriptures. “If the world hate you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18,19); “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which you have given me; for they are your” (John 17:9); “And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness.” (1 John 5:19). Spurgeon says that the word “world” is used in some seven or eight different senses in the Bible. Again, take the word “immortality.” The popular idea is that it refers to the indestructibility of the soul. But the word is never used of the soul; it always refers to the body. “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:53,54); “But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2 Timothy 1:10).

FOREKNOWLEDGE A DIVINE ATTRIBUTE

A fresh study of the subject before us raised the question as to whether “foreknowledge” should be classed as one of the Divine attributes. A Divine attribute is a quality belonging to the nature of God, one of His personal perfections, something which belongs inherently to His character or nature. For example, love, mercy, grace, and wisdom are qualities of the Divine nature, and are therefore attributes. Our conclusion, after further study, is that “foreknowledge” is both an attribute and an act of God. When the word is used in the popular sense, in the sense most people use it, it refers to God’s knowledge of events before they actually happen. In this sense “foreknowledge” is one of the Divine attributes like love, mercy, wisdom, grace, etc.

FOREKNOWLEDGE A DIVINE ACT

The word foreknowledge as used in the Bible can hardly be made to refer to a quality or attribute of the Divine nature. It is used in the sense of a Divine act rather than a Divine quality.

We would not say that predestination and election are Divine attributes, but rather Divine acts. Foreknowledge, when used of events, is an attribute; when used of persons, it is an immanent act of God, an act remaining and operating within the divine nature. It is the difference between God's nature and God's activities; between what He is, and what He does. Foreknowledge, when considered as an attribute, is a branch of the Divine omniscience; and when considered as an act it is a branch of the doctrine of the Divine decrees.

After writing the foregoing paragraph, we turned to the article on "Foreknowledge" in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, written by Dr. Hodge. And he states exactly what we have been trying to say. Let the reader study his statement along with what we have already written.

"The word 'foreknowledge' has two meanings. It is a term used in theology to denote the prescience or foresight of God, that is, His knowledge of the entire course of events which are future from the human point of view; and it is also used in AV and RV to translate the Greek words *proginoskein* and *prognosis* in the AT, in which instances the word 'foreknowledge' approaches closely the idea of foreordination. In the sense of prescience foreknowledge is an aspect of God's omniscience. God's knowledge, according to the Scriptures, is perfect, that is, it is omniscience." (Hodge).

FOREKNOWLEDGE AND FOREORDINATION

When foreknowledge is used as a divine act, it is practically the same as foreordination. Let Dr. Hodge speak again: "While, therefore, the foreknowledge of God in the sense of prescience is asserted in the New Testament, this is not the meaning of the term when used to translate the Greek words *proginoskein* and *prognosis*. These words which are translated in the AV and RV by the word 'foreknowledge' and once by the word 'foreordain'. "Who truly was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." (1 Peter 1:20). This means much more than mere intellectual foresight or prescience. Both the verb and the noun approach the idea of foreordination and are closely connected with that idea in the passages where these words occur."

When "foreknowledge" is applied to events, including the free action of men, it means God's foresight or knowledge beforehand. But when it refers to persons it signifies to regard with favor, denoting not mere cognition but an affection for the person in view. The word "foreknowledge" is not in the Old Testament, but the word "know" occurs often, and frequently means to love or choose or ordain.

"They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not: of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off" (Hos. 8:4). "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet unto the nations." (Jeremiah 1:5). "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). "For the LORD knows the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (Psalm 1:6). In these passages it is not acquaintance but affection or appointment that is meant. And the word "know" is often used in the New Testament in the same sense. "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:23). This means He did not know them savingly. "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine" (John 10:14). "But if any man love God, the same is known of Him" (1 Corinthians 8:3). And again, "The Lord knows them that are his" (2 Timothy 2:19). In these verses the knowledge of Christ is limited to the saved, and therefore, cannot signify an acquaintance with, but rather an affection for. God is acquainted with everybody; there is no limit to His knowledge about people.

Now, the "foreknowledge of persons" means to foreknow with a benignant purpose. It means to know with the intention of blessing. For God to foreknow a person is to regard that person with favor and with a purpose to save. The foreknown are to be finally glorified, because God foreknew them for this purpose. God's first act of benevolence towards sinners was to foreknow them. And His foreknowledge of them is the foundation (historically speaking) of all subsequent blessings. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestine to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29).

God looked upon some poor sinners with gracious favor and determined to make them like His glorious Son. "God has not cast away his people which he foreknew. Know you not what the scripture says of Elijah? how he makes intercession to God against Israel" (Romans 11:2). On this verse Dr. A. T. Robertson, in his Word Pictures, makes this comment: "Probably the Hebrew sense of choice beforehand. The nation of Israel was God's chosen people and so all the individuals in it could not be cast off."

Here Dr. Robertson makes the word "foreknow" mean to choose beforehand. Those whom God looked upon with gracious favor, back in eternity, will not be cast away either in the present or in the future. They are the "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied." (1 Peter 1:2). In this verse election is based upon the foreknowledge of God the Father. Those whom the Father looked upon with gracious favor were elected unto the obedience of faith and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. And this obedience is the result of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. And may the reader note and remember, that while election is unto salvation, this salvation is not without

faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. The elect are to be justified, but they are to be justified by faith. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:” (Romans 5:1); “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28); “But to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5), et al.

To be exact and critical, the writer believes that, although divine foreknowledge is close akin to and associated with such words as election, predestination, and foreordination, it has a distinct meaning of its own. The divine order in “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestine to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestine, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Romans 8:29,30), is foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.” (1 Peter 1:2). The order is foreknowledge, election, and sanctification. So the foreknown are elected, predestined, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. And since every aspect of salvation is of grace, God’s foreknowledge of persons is His gracious regard and love for poor sinners. And because of this gracious regard for them, He chose them unto salvation, predestined them unto the adoption of sons, calls them by His grace, justifies them by grace through faith in the blood of His Son, sanctifies them by His Spirit, and will glorify them when the Lord comes. May every reader “give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10).

Chapter 12—The POWER of God

“Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways — and how small a whisper we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand?” (Job 26:14).

Job gives a few illustrations of the power of God, and then says that these are only parts of His ways; and not withstanding His manifest greatness there is but little heard of Him. In Job’s day men gave little attention to God; He was not in their thought and speech. And it is much the same today, for human nature never changes of itself. Man is ever the same proud, hateful, rebellious creature, apart from the in wrought grace of God. There is not much heard about God today, even in the average pulpit. And in most social gatherings the very name of God is taboo. Man is the theme of the popular discourses of the day; it is human virtues that are praised and human achievements that are celebrated. God is in His world providentially, but the world knows Him not.

God’s power takes two directions and has two objectives: salvation and judgment. God’s power in salvation is gracious; His power in judgment is righteous. God’s power in salvation is the expression of His love; His power in judgment is the expression of His holy wrath. And God’s power in grace is equal to His power in wrath, for “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who are you that judge another?” (James 4:12). If God is unable to save (convert)

“the vessels of mercy, “He might also be unable to judge (punish) the “vessels of wrath.” Those who deny irresistible grace cannot logically or consistently ask God to save (convert) sinner’s; they can only ask Him to try to convert them, or to spare sinners who convert themselves. They cannot ask Him to bring sinners to the Savior; they can only ask Him to try to draw them, or deliver from punishment those who, of themselves, come to the Savior.

The popular view of God’s power in grace is given by one writer after this fashion: “The banners of God’s army halt outside the little fortress of our hearts inviting us to surrender; His mighty love and grace and power wait for our decision.” This statement ignores the truth of the depravity of human nature, denies the need of any inward work of grace, and overlooks the truth of the power of the Holy Spirit. It is inconsistent in talking about the “little fortress of our hearts, “and at the same time talking about “His mighty love and grace and power.” To the same effect are the words of another popular preacher: “We are bidden to make a choice. No man can choose for us. God Almighty cannot choose for you and me. I can put God who made me, and who gives me the breath I breathe at arm’s length and say, ‘I will not’; or I can turn to Him, through the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, and receive His salvation.” What a strange medley of truth and error! We are bidden to choose and we ought to choose Christ as our Lord and Savior, but because of inherent depravity nobody makes such a choice apart from the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in conviction and conversion. It is true that the sinner resists God until his resistance is overcome by the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit; an operation that makes the sinner willing to take Christ as Savior and Lord; an operation that imparts to the sinner a new mind and a new heart. As another has said: “It is simply preposterous to speak of God Almighty, and with the same breath to say, ‘I can put God at arm’s length.’”

But still another writer takes the prize for his description of a helpless God: “Omnipotence itself is powerless (a new definition of omnipotence, C. D. C.) in the presence of obduracy. Even a child can raise its hand and shake its tiny fist in the face of God Almighty, and God Almighty can do nothing.” In Proverbs 21:1 we are told that “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turns it wherever he will, “ but the foregoing statement makes Him helpless in the face of a child.

The power of God is a truth that ought to give peace and joy to the heart of the believer, and strike terror to the heart of the unbeliever. Whether Savior or Judge He is the Almighty. Both salvation and judgment call for a mighty God.

THE NATURE OF GOD’S POWER

1. God’s power is absolute. There is nothing impossible with Him that is an object of power. He is able to do more than He does do. The exercise of His power is limited only by His desire. Job says, “But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desires, even that he does” (Job 23:13). John the Baptist tells us “And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (Matthew 3:9). He could have kept Satan out of the garden and thereby spared our parents the temptation which resulted in the terrible ruin of the race but He did not desire to do so. Paul says “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,” (Ephesians 3:20). And Christ assures us: “But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

2. God’s power is original and essential. The power of man is a derived power, but power belongs inherently to God. The power of human governments lie in their armies and natural resources of the country. It is God’s nature to be almighty. His power is not derivative, but creative and original. He gives power to His creatures, but derives none from

them. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Romans 13:1,2).

3. God's power is the life and activity of all His other attributes. All other attributes would be worthless without His power. Without power His mercy would be feeble pity; His justice would be a slighted scarecrow; His promises would be but empty sound; and His love would be as helpless as was the love of Darius for Daniel. And vain would be all His eternal counsels if power did not step in to execute them.

THE MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD'S POWER

Whatever qualities or characteristics inherent in the Divine nature will sooner or later be manifested or exercised, for there are no idle dispositions in God. His power has been marvelously exemplified in the past as it will be in the future.

1. Divine power appears in creation. "Ah Lord GOD! behold, you have made the Heaven and the earth by your great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for you:" (Jeremiah 32:17). At God's word nothing began to be something. He spoke and it was done. He willed and it came to pass. "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for you have created all things, and for your pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11). The word for create means to make out of nothing. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Hebrews 11:3). "For by him were all things created, that are in Heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:" (Colossians 1:16). And yet all this work of creation did not make Him tired, for He is the Almighty. "Have you not known? have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding" (Isaiah 40:28).

2. God's power is seen in the sustentation of all creation. "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:" (Hebrews 1:3). By Him all things consist (are held together): "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Colossians 1:17). In Him we live and move and have our being: "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:28). He gives rain from Heaven and fruitful seasons "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from Heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). We are to look to Him for our daily bread: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). But somebody says that all things happen according to natural laws. But God created the law of nature and can use it or work beyond it, and without it. His hands are not tied with any rope of nature.

3. The power of God may be seen in human redemption.

3a) In the birth of the Redeemer: "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35). What mighty power it took to bring a clean thing out of an unclean! But the Holy Spirit was equal to the task of the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity, who became God with us; yes, God manifest in the flesh.

3b) In the miracles of Christ. They were all manifestations of Divine power. The blind saw, the lame leaped, the dead lived, because He willed it so.

3c) In the death of Christ. Here is the greatest of all miracles; the most stupendous and amazing act of power ever exercised: the power to die. Our minds are staggered at this thought: the power to die! Death among men is the very emblem of helplessness. The lives of men are taken from them in the ordeal of death, but Christ had power to lay down His life. He said, "No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (John 10:18). The Lord Jesus Christ was the Actor in the drama of the ages, when He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself: "For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world has he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26). Let nobody think of Him as the helpless victim of human hate. In His death He was performing the task assigned Him by the Father, as He said, "No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (John 10:18).

3d) In the resurrection of Christ. He who had power to lay down His life had power to take it again. He triumphed over death, men, and demons. "For you will not leave my soul in Hell; neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16:10); "Because you will not leave my soul in Hell, neither will you allow your Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27).

3e) In His ascension. Our Savior had the power to overcome the law of gravitation and ascend bodily to the Father. "And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven" (Luke 24:50,51). Hallelujah! what a Savior!

4. Almighty power is manifested in the regeneration of sinners. In regeneration men have new hearts and new desires created in them; new principles imparted to them; they are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, being made willing in the day of God's power. When we consider the natural blindness and opposition of the sinner, and the weakness of the human agent (the preacher), and the means used (the foolishness of preaching), the work of conversion appears to be the effect of the power of God. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7); "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Ephesians 1:19).

5. The final perseverance of every believer is proof of the power of God. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). We are kept by the power of God: "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:5). No one is able to pluck us out of His hand: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28). "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

6. Divine power will be displayed in the resurrection. What but the voice of the Almighty will be able to awake the dead? "And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he who was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus says unto them, Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:43,44). What but Almighty power can change this ugly, vile, humiliated, diseased body into a glorious, beautiful, and deathless body? "For our conversation is in Heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Philippians 3:20,21). What is it that can give us hope as we stand by the side of the open grave and see it swallow up the one so dear to our heart but the thought of an Almighty God who can and will raise the dead by the word of His power? "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

7. The power of God will be manifested in the day of judgment. In that day it will appear how pitifully weak man is, and how great is the power of God's anger. Think of the power necessary to put down the rebellion of innumerable men and demons! But God will be equal to the task, "To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he arises to shake terribly the earth" (Isaiah 2:21). "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He who sits in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2:1-6).

"Great God, what do I see and hear?
The end of things created!
'The judge of all men does appear,
On clouds of glory seated:
The trumpet sounds; the graves restore
The dead which they contained before;
Prepare my soul to meet Him.
"The dead in Christ shall first arise
At the last trumpet's sounding
Caught up to meet Him in the skies,
With joy, their Lord surrounding:
No gloomy fears their souls dismay,
His presence sheds eternal day
On those prepared to meet Him.
"But sinners filled with guilty fears,
Behold His wrath prevailing;
For they shall rise, and find their tears
And sighs are unavailing:
The day of grace is past and gone;

Trembling, they stand before the throne,
All unprepared to meet Him.”

Chapter 13—The GRACE of God

For every Christian God is to be thanked. “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Romans 1:8). “But God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Romans 6:17). Salvation is of grace both in its planning and working. God who made the plan also works the plan. And all is of grace, the unmerited and unmeritable favor of God. God is both the Architect and Builder of the house made of living stones. “You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Christ said, “I will build My church.” If we may change the figure, God sets the Gospel table and also gives appetite for the bread of life. The Holy Spirit fills the Father’s house by compelling them to come in. This is not external compulsion, which would destroy human free agency, but an inward compulsion by which the sinner becomes willing. “Your people shall be willing in the day of your power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: you have the dew of your youth” (Psalm 110:3). And this willingness is the result of the Spirit conviction of sin and His revelation in the sinner of Christ as Savior and Lord. In a word men believe through grace. “For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). When Apollos came into Achaia, bearing letters of recommendation to the disciples there this was recorded: “And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace” (Acts 18:27).

A man was once speaking of himself as a self-made man. One who heard him in his boasting, said, “It’s quite noble of you to say so. Most men would have blamed their luck, or their wives, or even laid the responsibility on the shoulders of the Creator.” It seems natural and easy for a man to worship his Maker, and therefore, the self-made man naturally worships himself. But every believer is a grace made man. Paul, as a Christian, delighted to say, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). In an experience of grace, the Holy Spirit, by the convicting power of the word, gives the sinner a sight of self, and then relieves the resultant distress by giving him, through the Gospel, a sight of Christ. An old Puritan once cried out, “Oh, where had I been if I had not spied out Christ?”

DEFINITIONS OF GRACE

The Greek word “charis” occurs in the New Testament more than one hundred and fifty times and is usually translated “grace” in our English Bible. It is not easy to take a word employed so many times and with such a diversity of application and develop a doctrine that will be uniform and consistent. Moreover, all the truth about grace cannot be compressed into a single sentence. Grace is one of the Divine perfections or attributes in the nature of God which is exercised in the salvation of sinners. Great and good men have grappled with the subject of grace in an effort to define and describe it. May we prayerfully ponder some of them:

Dr. Dale: “Grace is love which passes beyond all claims to love.” Grace is not the sinner’s due; it is not something he earns; it is not something he can lay claim to.

Alexander Whyte: “Grace and love are essentially the same, only grace is love manifesting itself and operating under certain conditions, and adapting itself to certain circumstances. As, for example, love has no limit or law such as grace has. Love may exist between equals, or it may rise to those above us, or flow down to those in any way beneath us. But grace, from its nature, has only one direction it can take. Grace always flows down. Grace is love indeed, but it is love to creatures humbling itself. A king’s love to his equals, or to his own royal house, is love; but his love to his subjects is called grace. And thus it is that God’s love to sinners is always called grace.” This quotation deserves repeated readings.

Alexander Maclaren: “The word grace is a kind of shorthand for the whole sum of unmerited blessings which come to men through Jesus Christ. Primarily, it describes what we, for want of a better expression, have to call a ‘disposition’ in the Divine nature; and it means the unconditioned, undeserved, spontaneous, eternal, stooping, pardoning love of God. But there are no idle dispositions in God. They are always energizing, and so the word glides from meaning the disposition, to meaning the manifestations and activities of it, and the grace of our Lord is that love in exercise. And then, since the Divine energies are never fruitless, the word passes over further, to mean all the blessed things in the soul which are the consequences of the Promethean truth of God’s loving hand, the outcome in life of the inward bestowment which has its cause, its sole cause, in God’s ceaseless, unexhausted love, unmerited and free.” This quotation must be studied to get the most out of it.

Phillips: “Grace is something in God which is at the heart of all His redeeming activities, the downward stoop and reach of God, bending from the heights of His majesty, to touch and grasp our insignificance and poverty.”

In analyzing all these definitions and descriptions of grace, we find that the word is applied to three things in the Scriptures. First, God’s attitude or disposition of love and favor towards a sinner is grace. It is said that “Noah found grace

in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8). God’s attitude towards him was a disposition of favor and love, and inasmuch as Noah was a sinner, that disposition of love was grace. Second, when God does something for the sinner’s good, that is grace. “By grace have you been saved” (Eph.2:5.). Third, the effects or fruit of the inwrought grace in the believer is also called grace. The graces or virtues in the saints are produced by the grace of God working in them. The disposition of the Macedonians to give so liberally is called grace: “Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia” (2 Corinthians 8:1); and the money given for the poor saints at Jerusalem is also called grace: “For it has pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem” (Romans 15:26). The changed lives of the people whom Barnabas saw at Antioch is called the grace of God. “Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23).

“Grace is a charming sound,
Harmonious to the ear;
Heaven with the echo shall resound
And all the earth shall hear!”

HOW TO BETTER UNDERSTAND GRACE

Perhaps the best way to understand the meaning of grace is to see how it is contrasted in the Bible with other things:

1. It is contrasted with law in its origin and nature. “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Moses was the voice of law; Christ was the spokesman for grace. It is the nature of law to make demands; it is the nature of grace to bestow blessings. The law is a ministry of condemnation; grace is the ministry of forgiveness. The law puts man at a guilty distance from God; grace brings the sinner near to God. The law condemns the best man; grace saves the worst man. The law says, “Do and live;” grace says, “Believe and live.” The law demands righteousness; grace provides righteousness. The law curses; grace redeems from the curse. As long as a man is under the law he is lost; the only way to get out from under the law is through faith in Christ, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes” (Romans 10:4). “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14).

2. Grace is contrasted with sin in its issue. Sin reigns unto death; grace reigns unto eternal life: “That as sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:21). Sin gets its damning power from the law: “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:56); grace robs sin of its damning power by giving Christ for the satisfaction of the law: “But thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). The one and only source of real danger is from violated law; the one and only way of escape is through a satisfied law. Christ satisfied the law for His people, that the law might be satisfied with them. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

3. Grace is contrasted with works in the plan of salvation. “For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9). Salvation is by the grace of the Creator rather than by works of the creature. Salvation by grace precludes the idea of any works either great or small, moral or ceremonial. Salvation by grace excludes boasting and gives all praise to God. “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Romans 11:6). “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith” (Romans 3:27).

“Grace first contrived the way
To save rebellious man;
And all the steps that grace display
Which drew the wondrous plan!”

4. Grace is contrasted with debt or obligation as to the moving cause of salvation. “Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:4,5). The thought here is this: the man who draws wages for his work does not have any grace shown him, but a debt or obligation paid to him. There is no grace where a man gets what he deserves or earns. Grace excludes the principle of debt or obligation. Salvation by grace means that God is not obligated to save. If there is obligation to save then salvation is not by grace as the moving cause. It was grace in God, and not a debt He was under, that caused Him to provide salvation for sinners. Toplady well says: “The way to Heaven lies not over a toll-

bridge, but over a free-bridge; even the unmerited grace of God in Christ Jesus. Grace finds us beggars but leaves us debtors.”

“High as the heavens are raised
Above the ground we tread,
So far the riches of His grace
Our highest thoughts: exceed.”

GRACE IN THE TRINITY

All three persons in the Godhead are equally gracious towards sinners. The grace of the Father, Son, and Spirit are equal in degree and extent, but distinct in operation and administration.

1. The Father is the fountain of all grace. He proposed the fact and plan of grace. He formulated the covenant of grace, and devised the means “whereby His banished should not be expelled from Him.” He made choice by grace of the subjects of grace, and then in fullness of time sent His Son into the world to be the medium of grace. “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4,5).

2. The eternal Son is the channel of grace. The only way the grace of God can reach the sinner is through the Lord Jesus Christ. “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Let no rejecter of God’s Son think himself to be the beneficiary of God’s grace! His work reconciled Grace and Justice, as it is written, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psalm 85:10). John Bunyan, blissfully lost in the contemplation of the matchless grace of the Son of God, cried out in these words: “O You Son of the Blessed! Grace stripped You of Your glory; grace brought You down from Heaven; grace made You bear such burdens of sin, such burdens of curse as are unspeakable; grace was in Your heart; grace came bubbling from Your bleeding side; grace was in Your tears; grace was in Your prayers; grace streamed from Your thorn crowned brow! Grace came forth with the nails that pierced You, with the thorns that pricked You! Oh, here the unsearchable riches of grace! Grace to make sinners happy! Grace to make angels wonder! Grace to make devils astonished!”

3. The Holy Spirit is the administrator of grace. Without the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion no sinner would ever become a beneficiary of grace. He takes of the things of Christ and gives them to the sinner. He quickens all the souls of the Father’s choice, and leads to Jesus Christ all the sheep for whom the dear Shepherd laid down His life. “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). He conquers the stoutest hearts, and cleanses the foulest spiritual leper. He opens sin blinded eyes and unstops sin closed ears. The blessed Holy Spirit reveals the grace of the Father and applies the grace of the Son.

“We may listen to the preacher,
God’s own truth be clearly shown;
But we need a greater teacher
From the everlasting throne;
Application is the work of God alone.”

Chapter 14—The GRACE of God

(Continued)

In the preceding chapter we gave several good and harmonious definitions of grace by others, and added our own thoughts in an attempt to help our readers understand the meaning of grace. In this chapter we wish to lead our readers into the various aspects of grace. Wherever grace operates it has a throne, and so we shall write on:

THE REIGN OF GRACE

“That as sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:21). Paul personifies SIN and GRACE and speaks of them as two royal figures, two queens on their thrones. He then shows what each gives to her subjects. Sin has death in her painted hand, while grace has eternal life in her white and charming hand.

1. Grace is more powerful than sin. Here is the sinner’s only hope, although until quickened by the Spirit of grace, he does not know it. No man can rescue himself from the tyranny of sin. Sin is too much for any man. Men are taken captive by the devil: “And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Timothy 2:26). Men may reform, but they cannot regenerate themselves. They may give up their crimes and their vices, but they cannot give up their sins. “Can the Ethiopian change

his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may you also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jeremiah 13:23).

2. Grace reigns lawfully. The reign of grace is a righteous reign. Grace is not against the law. Grace does not seek to destroy justice that would be to divide God against Himself. Grace honors the law by giving the Lord Jesus Christ, who satisfied the law by becoming our Surety, and bearing the guilt of our sins in His own body on the tree. God dealt with His Son in justice that He might deal with sinners in grace.

3. Grace reigns by Jesus Christ our Lord. Christ is not the source but the medium of grace. Grace has its source in the heart of God, and operates according to the sovereign will of God. The word reign suggests a king or a queen on a throne. And a throne speaks of power, and resources. The power of grace is the power of God. This makes it fitting to speak of irresistible grace. Surely we can speak of an irresistible God! The resources of grace are to be found in God. The blood of God’s Son is the capital stock of grace. When His blood loses its value then grace has become bankrupt and the believer will be lost. But this shall never be!

“Dear dying Lamb, your precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Until all the ransomed church of God
Be saved to sin no more.”

4. Grace reigns in every phase and step of salvation. “Twas grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.” Salvation is a comprehensive term, including within its scope all the aspects and stages of deliverance from sin. Every aspect and every stage of salvation is of grace, and this precludes human merit at any and every point. Salvation from beginning to end is of grace.

4a) Grace reigns in foreknowledge. The first thing God ever did for His people was to foreknow them. In His foreknowledge He set His affection upon them. He foreknew them with the intention of blessing them. He loved them with an everlasting love, and this love was a gracious love, and in no wise was it merited.

4b) Grace reigns in election. Election is of grace: “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5). Election was not on the ground of foreseen merit in sinners, but of gracious love in God. In II Thessalonians 2:10 Paul speaks of “them that perish because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; “and then exclaims with reference to the saints: “But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). We have two things in this text: first, why men are saved; and second, how they are saved. They are said to be saved because God chose them unto salvation. And they are saved by being sanctified by the Spirit and by believing the truth, the truth of the Gospel. This is what made them differ from “them that perish: “because they received not the love of the truth.” Had it not been for the choice of God and the sanctification of the Spirit, the Thessalonians would also have rejected the truth. Therefore, God is to be thanked for their salvation. Now, why did God choose them? Was the ground of God’s choice foreseen faith, or some other good in them: or was it grace in Himself? Romans 11:5,6 gives the answer: “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to

the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”

“Tis not that I did choose Thee,
For, Lord, that could not be;
This heart would still refuse Thee,
But You have chosen me.”

4c) Grace reigns in predestination. To predestine is to determine destiny beforehand. Predestination is never said to be unto damnation, but unto salvation. God causes nobody to be damned; sin is the thing that damns men. But God is the cause of salvation. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestine to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). Why were people predestined to such glory? Was it because of their foreseen faith or goodness? In Ephesians 1:5,6 we have the answer: “Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved.”

4d) Grace reigns in our calling. “Moreover whom he did predestine, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Romans 8:30). The word “called” is never in the New Testament applied to those who are the recipients of a mere external invitation of the gospel. It always signifies an inward and effectual call, a call that brings to Christ and salvation. And this call is of grace according to II Timothy 1:9: “Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, “and in Galatians 1:15: “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace.”

“Twas sovereign mercy called me,
And taught my opening mind;
The world had else enthralled me,
To heavenly glories blind.”

4e) Grace reigns in justification. Justification may be defined as the judicial act of God in which He declares the believer to be no longer under condemnation, but to have a standing of righteousness before Him. Justification and condemnation are antonyms. The justified person is free from the guilt of sin. Is this blessing a matter of merit or of grace? Romans 3:24: “Being justified freely (without any cause in me, C.D.C.) by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” “Moreover whom he did predestine, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Ro 8:30).

4f) Grace reigns in conversion. In conversion a change is wrought in the sinner. There is a change from darkness to light, from death to life, and from the power of Satan unto God. There is a change of opinion so that he believes what he once rejected; a change of affection so that he loves what he once hated. What explains such a change? Does the sinner convert himself? Does darkness create light? Does death beget life? Does filth produce purity? Then, and not until then, can the sinner convert himself. If God converts the sinner, does He do it as a matter of obligation or grace? Paul gives grace credit for his conversion. After speaking of himself as a persecutor of the saints, he says, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

“O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I’m constrained to be!”

4g) Grace reigns in glorification. “Whom he justified them he also glorified” (Romans 8:30). Glorification is the complete deliverance from every aspect and vestige of sin. It is the crowning work of redemption by which we will become personally glorious and in glorious surroundings. It takes in the body as well as the soul. Our salvation is not complete as long as these bodies of ours remain in the grave or, if living, continue mortal. Let time write wrinkles upon the brow; let sorrow’s scalding tears wet the cheeks; let sickness and pain twist and torture this body into a shapeless mass; and let death turn it into a veritable dust-heap; still grace shall win for us and fashion it into a glorious body like unto that of our dear Lord. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13). “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2).

PROVISIONS OF GRACE

Grace, like the Good Samaritan, not only meets the present emergency, but provides for future and eternal blessings. Let the trembling sinner be told that there are ample provisions of grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. Every one who feels the plague of his own heart may come to Jesus Christ for healing. He gives all a gracious invitation and assures a hearty welcome. Hear His words: "All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). Though vile as Manasseh, filthy as Magdalene, guilty as the cross thief, He will not turn away the poor in spirit. He turns no real beggar from his gate, though full of sores and vermin. His heart is lined with sweet compassion, and His hands are filled with the richest gifts. He has supplies for all needs: legs for a lame beggar, eyes for a blind one, cordials for a faint one, garments for a naked one, a fountain for a filthy one; Yes, and a rope for a sham beggar who asks for mercy and talks of merit. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief!" (1 Timothy 1:15).

"How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word;
What more can He say than to you He has said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"

GOD'S GRACE IS MANIFOLD

There is sustaining grace for seasons of sorrow, triumphing grace for times of temptation, persevering grace for days of discouragement. There is teaching grace, living grace, and dying grace. But time and paper would fail me to tell of the sin of frustrating grace by teaching salvation by works, and of abusing grace, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, by pleading grace as a license to sin. Grace has delivered every believer from the guilt of sin, from the love of sin, and will yet deliver from the very presence of sin. Until the dear Lord returns to complete His work of grace, every believer will experience with Paul the inward workings of sin, and confess with him, that "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I" (Romans 7:15).

"Grace all the work shall crown,
Through everlasting days;
It lays in Heaven the topmost stone,
And well deserves the praise."

Chapter 15—The Grace of God

(Concluded)

Practically all professing Christians profess to believe that salvation is of grace. You can hardly find a member of any denomination who will out and out deny that salvation is by grace. The Bible so often and so positively declares salvation to be by grace that few men will boldly deny it. But the trouble is that many think and speak of grace in such a way as to frustrate it. The grace they think of and talk about is not grace at all. It is so mixed with human work and merit that it is no more grace. “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Romans 11:6). There is quite as much in Roman Catholic literature about grace as there is in Baptist literature, but there is wide difference as to what the two groups mean by grace. In preceding chapters we have sought to tell what grace is, and where grace reigns, and what grace provides; and in this chapter we shall endeavor to show:

HOW GRACE SAVES

Before coming directly to the question, we shall lay down some principles from which to reason:

1. Salvation by grace destroys all room for boasting. No man is sound on grace who boasts of anything he has ever done or can do as the ground of his salvation. If your idea of salvation

allows you to boast you may be sure it is wrong. No man can even boast of his repentance and faith, for they are the gifts of His grace. “Him has God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31); “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17); “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to every man” (1 Corinthians 3:5); “And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power” (Ephesians 1:19); “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.” (1 John 5:4). All of our graces are fruit of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22,23).

2. Salvation by grace means that God is to have all the praise for our salvation. The Father is to have all praise for providing the Savior; the Son is to have all the praise for performing the work of salvation; and the Holy Spirit is to have all the praise for promoting salvation in us by convicting us of sin and bringing us to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Salvation by grace does not give license to sin. There are two dangers concerning grace: one is the danger of frustrating it, the other is the danger of abusing it. We frustrate grace when we teach that righteousness comes by keeping the law: “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Galatians 2:21). We abuse grace when we use it to justify a life of sin. One is the danger of Arminianism, the other is the danger of Antinomianism. The one sets grace aside, the other uses grace wrongly.

He who justifies his sinning on the ground that he is not under law but under grace, does not have the grace of God in him. “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Romans 6:14,15). The child of grace hates sin and strives against it, and when he falls into it, confesses it and forsakes it. Sin is not the habit and practice of his life. There is no sin that he hugs to his bosom and takes to glory with him. There is no sin that is a sweet morsel under his tongue. The man of grace neither boasts of keeping out of sin, nor justifies himself when he falls into sin.

In approaching our question, “HOW DOES GRACE SAVE?”

We make a negative approach:

1. Grace does not save by enabling us to perfectly keep the law of God. It is our judgment that this is the way many people think grace saves. They confess that no man can of himself keep the law, but that grace enables him to keep it, and in this way grace saves. To be logical and consistent, and to have any place for grace in their plan, this must be the position of all who believe in salvation by keeping the law. Now, it is admitted, that if God should eradicate every vestige of our sinful nature, and cause us to live without sin, that would be grace indeed that would be the unmerited favor of God. It would be grace for it would be doing for us that which we do not deserve. But this is not the way grace saves, and we must voice our objections to it:

1a) That would not satisfy justice for sins already committed. God is just as well as gracious, and grace never acts contrary to justice. If the sinner should quit sinning justice would condemn him for sins he had committed in the past.

1b) That would rob Christ of any part in our salvation. If grace saves by making us sinless in character and conduct, then salvation would be by grace, but apart from Jesus Christ, for “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Galatians 2:21).

1c) If grace saves by enabling us to keep the law, then the Holy Spirit would be the Savior rather than Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Administrator of inward grace; it is by His strength we worship and serve God. The Holy Spirit, through the word, shows us the Savior, and makes Him precious to us, but the Holy Spirit is not the Savior. In announcing the birth of the Savior, the angel said, "And she shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

1d) In the new birth the sinful nature is not eradicated, but a sinless nature is implanted. In the saved man there is a warfare between two conflicting natures; "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would" (Galatians 5:17). And Paul said, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." (Romans 7:21). And this is the testimony of every true child of God, for "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8).

2. Grace does not save by overlooking our sins. If God took no account of our sins, that would be grace indeed but in doing that He would abdicate His throne in favor of His enemies. Our sins deserve punishment, but if God overlooked them and never punished them, that certainly would be grace that would be the unmerited favor of God. But this is not the way grace saves, for several reasons:

2a) Because it would be at the expense of justice. There can be no sacrifice of justice in salvation. Sin must and will be punished. If God overlooked sin He would be gracious, but at the same time unjust.

2b) There would have been no need of Christ's coming to earth and dying on the cross. There is forgiveness with God, but it is on the ground of satisfied justice. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:11). Grace saves by satisfying justice. "In whom have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

2c) It would cause man to admire one attribute of God and despise another attribute. If grace saves apart from the satisfaction of Divine justice, the sinner would naturally admire the grace of God, and at the same time despise His justice. To deal with sinners in such a way, God would be putting a premium on sin. We would not think much of a human judge who would overlook the crimes of men and let them all go free. Such a judge would be despised and deposed. Such procedure would be an invitation for everybody to commit all the crimes he pleased, because they would be overlooked, and no harm would come to the criminal. How would you, dear reader, like to live in a country like that?

3. Grace does not save by giving us ordinances to observe. The ordinances of ceremonies of Christ are for those already saved. They are declarative and symbolical; not procurative and sacramental. They are for the saints; not for the world. The most terrible heresies have come from false conception of the ordinances. Millions of men have lost their lives because they would not subscribe to these false conceptions. I quote from an article on "The Sacraments," as found in the Roman Catholic Mass Book published by the Paulist Press, New York City:

"The sacraments are the ordinary means whereby God's grace is brought to one's soul. We depend on the grace of God not only to reach Heaven after death, but to lead a life well pleasing to God on this earth. What the winds are to the sailing vessel, grace is to our soul."

"The Sacraments are seven different ways by which special graces are applied to our soul. They are all instituted by Christ. By His death on the cross our Blessed Lord created a great reservoir of grace. From this reservoir there are seven channels, each carrying grace of a special quality, and when we need a particular kind of Divine help we go to the Sacrament which provides it. Baptism regenerates the soul and makes us children of God. It has the effect of washing away the sin we were born in, as well as any other sin we have committed. Confirmation strengthens the soul so as to enable it to fight valiantly. Holy Eucharist, being Christ Himself, the Living Bread, is the Food and Nourishment of the soul. Penance brings us God's pardon. Extreme Unction gives us grace to die well. Holy Orders raises men to the dignity of God's service and gives them strength to persevere. Matrimony gives grace to husband and wife to love each other and bring up their children in the grace and knowledge of God. Throughout our life on this earth the Sacraments provide spiritual nourishment without which it is impossible for us to merit the happiness and the glory which God has prepared for us in Heaven."

What a strange medley of truth and error! What a frustration of the true grace of God! What an awful misrepresentation of grace! What a travesty of the truth! The article speaks of grace enabling one "to merit the happiness and the glory" of Heaven. To merit a thing is to deserve it, or to get it by way of debt, and whatever is reckoned as a debt is not of grace. "Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (Romans 4:4). The Bible says that salvation is of faith that it might be by grace: "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all" (Romans 4:16). "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8), but this article does not have the word faith in it.

We will now attempt a positive answer to our question: How Does Grace Save?" What is the "modus operandi" of grace? What does grace do in salvation?

1. Grace saves from the guilt and penalty of sins by placing them on Christ. Grace saves by punishing Christ instead of the sinner. He put away the guilt of our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. "For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world has he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26). He bare our sins in His own body on the tree. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). He died as the Just One for the unjust ones that He might bring them to God, that is, into His favor. "For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

Justice says that my sins must be punished, and they have been punished in my Surety, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Surety of that better covenant "But now has he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (Hebrews 8:6). "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). It was in matchless grace that the Lord Jesus liquidated our sin debt, and He shall have all the praise.

"Our sins, our quilt, in love Divine
Confessed and bourne by Thee;
The gall, the course, the wrath were Thine,
To set Your members free!"

"Grace!" cried Spurgeon, "is everything for nothing — Christ free, pardon free, Heaven free!"

2. Grace saves us from the love of sin and from a darkened understanding. This may be called internal salvation, and is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. In this work the Holy Spirit opens the soul's blinded eyes to see the truth of the Gospel. Paul said that his gospel was hid to the lost because their minds were blinded. "In whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The death of Christ does not benefit the man who lives and dies without faith in it. And every man of us would so live were it not for the light giving and life giving work of the Spirit. Spiritual truths are foolishness to the natural man, "But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14), even though he be a university professor, and none but the Holy Spirit can make a man spiritual.

By nature and training Saul of Tarsus was a proud, persecuting, self-righteous Pharisee, but grace wrought in him the graces of repentance and faith. It was grace that made him sick of self and fond of Christ. He had been depending for salvation upon his Hebrew ancestry and the rite of circumcision, and upon his orthodoxy as a Pharisee, his zeal as a persecuting patriot, and his law righteousness; but when grace revealed Christ to Him in all His worth, he counted all these things as "dung, " rejoicing in the righteousness which is by faith in Jesus Christ. "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinks that he has whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yes doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:" (Philippians 3:1-9).

Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, and His work in us is as much of grace as was the work of Christ for us on the cross. Christ wrought for us on the cross to liquidate our sin debt; the Holy Spirit wrought in us conviction for sin, and faith in the blood of Christ as the one and only remedy for sin. "Grace," said Spurgeon again, "is the morning and evening star of our experience. Grace puts us in the way, helps us by the way, and takes us all the way."

Anna Steele, (1760), has memorialized the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the following lines:

"How helpless guilty nature lies,
Unconscious of its load;
The heart, unchanged, can never rise
To happiness and God.
"Can ought beneath a power divine
The stubborn will subdue?"

'Tis Thine, eternal Spirit, Thine
To form the heart anew.
"Tis your the passions to recall,
And upward bid them rise,
And make the scales of error fall
From reason's darkened eyes.
"To chase the shades of death away,
And, bid the sinner live;
A beam of Heaven, a vital ray,
'Tis your alone to give.
"O change the wretched hearts of men,
And give them life divine;
Then shall their passions and their powers,
Almighty Lord, be Thine."

Chapter 16—The MERCY of God

“Therefore has he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens” (Romans 9:18).

It is not the author’s aim to attempt an exhaustive treatment of this text, but rather to write in a more general way on the Divine attribute of mercy. The text does make it plain, however, that the mercy of God is not universal; it does declare that God is sovereign in bestowing mercy; it does affirm that He consults His own pleasure as to the objects of mercy. This does not mean, however, that mercy will be denied any sinner who comes to Jesus Christ. This cannot be, for Christ has said, “All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). Every sinner who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ will find mercy with God, and “whoever will” may come.

Let it be observed that the text puts the exercise of mercy in opposition to hardening as divine acts. It will, therefore, aid us in understanding one action if we can understand the opposite action. Whatever God does in hardening a sinner, He does the opposite in exercising mercy. Observe also that the context speaks of “vessels of wrath,” and “vessels of mercy.” “What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory” (Romans 9:22,23).

THE HARDENING OF SINNERS

In hardening sinners, God does not put any sinful principle in them; this would make Him the author of sin. The sinful principle is already there; we are children of wrath by nature: “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesians 2:3). But in hardening sinners, God leaves them to act out their own sinful desires, only controlling them so that their sinful desires shall not produce those particular actions that might overthrow the purpose of God. To illustrate: In the death of Christ, His murderers were acting out their own sinful wishes, but they were controlled by God, so that their deeds were the fulfillment of His prophetic word and the accomplishment of His eternal purpose. This explains why they parted His garments and cast lots for His vesture and gave Him vinegar mingled with gall to drink. It also explains why His bones were not broken, and why His side was pierced. God was in control of those who put His Son to death so that they did the particular things that the prophets had predicted. “But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he who saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knows that he says true, that you might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken” (John 19:33-36); “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” (Psalm 22:18); “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psalm 69:21); “And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots” (Matthew 27:35).

In Acts 14:16 we read that God “who in times past suffered (permitted) all nations to walk in their own ways, which means that He left them to their own depraved wills. Now, the showing of mercy is the very opposite of leaving sinners to act out their own sinful natures. It is the putting of something good in them, a holy disposition and a good principle, by which they repent of their sins and believe on Christ. Showing mercy to those who come to Christ and plead His blood is objective mercy; “For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13), is subjective mercy. “Therefore has he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens” (Romans 9:18).

In Ephesians 2:3-5: “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ, (by grace you are saved;)” And in Titus 3:5: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” It was in mercy that Christ died for us, and it was also in mercy that the Spirit enlightened our sin darkened understanding.

HUMILITY VERSUS PRIDE

The contemplation of God’s mercy fills the redeemed soul with humility and praise, two virtues of great value in the sight of God. And whatever God values ought to be sought after by us. If God hates pride, I ought to seek to be humble. If God is pleased with a spirit of thankfulness, I ought to seek after a thankful spirit. It is natural to seek those things which are prized by men; it is supernatural to seek that which God approves. The world admires the proud and self-sufficient spirit, and therefore, it is men like Napoleon and other men of war who are the world heroes. But it is the meek and quiet

spirit that is of great price in the sight of God: “But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Peter 3:4). And there is nothing that will make us more humble and thankful than the contemplation of divine mercy. Mercy reminds us of our miserable condition as children of wrath. Mercy explains our salvation: Without mercy we would be consumed by the wrath of God’s justice.

MERCY DEFINED

Webster defines mercy as the compassionate treatment of an enemy. Robert Haldane says that mercy is that adorable perfection in God by which He pities and relieves the miserable. Men are in a miserable condition because they are in rebellion against God and deserve punishment. Mercy implies that the sinner has nothing to say in his own defense. We understand the meaning of mercy when the defendant throws himself on the mercy of the court. That means that he is guilty and has nothing of merit to plead before the law. And this is exactly the condition of every man before the bar of divine justice. Mercy is our only hope. We may plead for justice before our fellow-man, but to ask God for justice (to ask God to give us what we deserve) is the same as asking for a room in the regions of the damned.

MERCY DESCRIBED

The mercy of God is variously described. His mercy is said to be great: “And Solomon said, You have showed unto your servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked

before you in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with you; and you have kept for him this great kindness, that you have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.” (1 Kings 3:6), and plenteous “For you, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon you” (Psalm 86:5), and tender: “Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high has visited us” (Luke 1:78), and abundant: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3), and rich: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us” (Ephesians 2:4), and everlasting: “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children” (Psalm 103:17). It is so comforting for us poor sinners to know that God is so rich and abundant in the very thing we so greatly need as sinners. No wonder the Psalmist said, “But I will sing of your power; yes, I will sing aloud of your mercy in the morning: for you have been my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble” (Psalm 59:16).

MERCY DISTINGUISHED

1. Mercy and grace have much in common, and yet there are shades of distinction between them. Grace views man without merit; mercy views him as miserable. Grace can be exercised where there is no sin; mercy can be shown only to sinners. This distinction is seen in the divine dealings with the unfallen angel. God has never exercised any mercy towards them, for they have never sinned, and are not, therefore, in a miserable condition. And yet they have been the objects of grace. It was in grace that God chose them out of the whole angelic race: “I charge you before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that you observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21). It was in grace that He made Christ their Head: “And you are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:10); “Who is gone into Heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him.” (1 Peter 3:22). And it was in grace that He gave them such honorable commissions: “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14). God has dealt with the holy angels in grace, for they have not merited His favors. If holy angels cannot merit His favors, what hope is there that sinful men can do so?

2. Mercy and love are distinguished in the Scriptures. Love may be for an equal; mercy can only exist for an inferior. Mercy goes no further than giving relief from misery; love predestined is unto the adoption of sons. Mercy may cause a king to pardon a traitor; it would require love in the king to make the traitor his adopted son.

3. There is also a distinction to be made between mercy and patience. There is a general mercy of God which is more nearly like patience. This mercy is temporal and is over all His works: “The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works” (Psalm 145:9). This general mercy belongs to His essential nature by which He supplies the needs of His entire creation, “That you may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven: for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). But His covenant mercy is exercised sovereignly through Christ and is everlasting.

MERCY DEMONSTRATED

1. The mercy of God is demonstrated in the gift of His Son to die for sinners. “Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high has visited us” (Luke 1:78). It was not justice but mercy that sent Christ to redeem us from the curse of the law. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree” (Galatians 3:13). Christ did not bring the mercy of God to us; it was the mercy of God that brought Christ to us. Christ is the channel of mercy, but not the cause of mercy. The death of Christ makes it possible for God to righteously bestow covenant mercies on His people, justice having been fully satisfied by Christ the Surety. Mercy comes from God, but it comes only through Jesus Christ.

2. The mercy of God is also seen in the regeneration of sinners. Making us alive when we were dead in sins was as truly an act of mercy as was the giving of Christ to die for us. “And you has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ, by grace you are saved” (Ephesians 2:1-5). This does not picture the sinner as doing something to cause God to regenerate him, but it pictures mercy triumphing over human depravity. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). As a sinner we did no more to merit the new birth than we did to merit the death of Christ.

We have a concrete example of the mercy of God in the regeneration of Saul of Tarsus. He attributes his conversion to the mercy of God. “According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” (1 Timothy 1:11-13). This does not mean that ignorance and unbelief were the ground of mercy, but the evidence that his salvation was an act of mercy. Ignorance and unbelief cannot merit salvation, therefore, Paul’s conversion was an act of mercy. Paul was the chief of sinners, but he obtained mercy. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” (1 Timothy 1:15). There is no sinner too bad for mercy to save.

Here is the obligation of saints: we owe our salvation to the mercy of God in Christ. No man can appreciate the mercy of God who feels that he deserves salvation. Deserving mercy is a contradiction of terms. In humility and praise let us attribute our salvation to the mercy of God!

The mercy of God is the proper appeal of the pastor to his people. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). The order in Romans is sin, misery, mercy, and grateful service. The first chapters are devoted to the sinful and miserable condition of sinners; the next section is devoted to the great doctrines of grace, which Paul calls “the mercies of God, “and the closing chapters give exhortation to practical Christian living because of the mercy of God. The pastor is not a man with a big stick; he is God’s man with a big Book, and a mighty appeal.

Psalms 136 is a threefold exhortation to give thanks for the mercy of God. From God’s side the punishment of the wicked is an act of justice. From the sinner’s side it is an act of equity; he gets what he deserves. But from the standpoint of the redeemed, the punishment of the wicked is an act of mercy. The redeemed Israelites were told to give thanks, “To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endures forever” (Psalm 136:10).

THE MERCY-SEAT

The mercy seat of the Old Testament, and the mercy seat of the New Testament are quite distinct, and must not be confused. The one is the type; the other is the antitype. Under the ceremonial law the mercy-seat was the lid or covering to the ark of the covenant: “And over it the cherubim of glory shadowing the mercy-seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly” (Hebrews 9:5). This mercy seat was the meeting place between God and Israel. Without this provision of mercy, His presence among them would have been their doom, they would have been consumed by His holy wrath. He could show them mercy and let them live because His justice had found satisfaction in the death of their sin offering, the lamb upon whose head their sins had been confessed and in this way transferred from the sinner to the lamb. The lamb thus made responsible for their sins had to die. Its blood on the mercy seat was the basis of peace between a sinful people and a holy God. Now this blood of the bulls and goats could not take away sins except in a typical and ceremonial sense, and then only for a year. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4).

Its value was in pointing to a better sacrifice, "The next day John sees Jesus coming unto him, and says, Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The New Testament mercy seat is not a place but a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no place to which a sinner can flee to escape the justice of God. Men may flee to other countries to escape the judgment of human courts, but there are no fugitives from divine justice. God has jurisdiction in all countries, for He is judge of all the earth. There are no sacred spots of mercy on this earth. Salvation is not a matter of geography. If one could find the very tomb in which Jesus lay, and hide in it in the hope of mercy, the hounds of justice would find him and punish him. A sinner might kneel at the very foot of the cross of wood on which Jesus died and yet not find mercy with God.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the true Mercy Seat and sinners must flee to Him for mercy. The very word that describes the Old Testament mercy seat: "And over it the cherubim of glory shadowing the mercy-seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly" (Hebrews 9:5) is applied to Christ in Romans 3:25: "Whom God has set forth to be a atoning sacrifice (mercy seat) through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" The word means that which appeases the wrath of God. Christ made appeasement by bearing the wrath of God on the cross. The wrath due us fell on Him. The mercy seat, therefore, is Christ in His atoning death. He could not remain in glory and be our mercy seat. He could not be a mercy seat in His infancy or as a man going about doing good. His vicarious death was an absolute necessity. He was speaking of Himself when He said, "Truly, truly, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone: but if it die, it brings forth much fruit" (John 12:24).

There is no physical approach to Christ, the true Mercy Seat. It is a mental and heart approach. If the mercy seat were a material object like a seat of wood, or stone, or gold, then the approach would be physical. We come to Christ, the true Mercy Seat, when we look to Him and trust Him for acceptance with God.

We fear many people are hoping in the general mercy of God apart from Christ. They reason that a merciful God will not send anybody to Hell. This was once the best hope the author had, but he came to see that it was a vain hope. A minister once visited a sick man and sought to interest him in Christ. But the man was indifferent, telling the minister that he had no fear, that he was depending on a merciful God and did not believe such a God would send him to Hell. The preacher left with a sad heart. But a few days later the same sick man sent for the minister who, when he came, found the sick man greatly disturbed. Said the sick man: "I have been depending on the mercy of God, but it has just occurred to me that God is just as well as merciful, and if He should deal with me in Justice instead of showing mercy, I would certainly be damned for my sins. Oh tell me how I can be sure He will deal with me in mercy!" Then the minister presented Christ crucified as the one and only mercy-seat.

Chapter 17—The FAITHFULNESS of God

“Know therefore that the LORD your God, he is God, the faithful God, which keeps covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;” (Deu. 7:9).

Faithfulness is one of the sweetest and most comforting of the divine attributes. Faithfulness belongs to God; fickleness characterizes sinful men. The faithfulness of God is a practical truth for the believer. It is a pillow for his weary head, a stimulant for his fainting heart, and a brace for his feeble knees. In all the exigencies of life God can be safely relied upon. He will never disappoint the trusting soul. He will never suffer His faithfulness to fail. The faithfulness of God coupled with His mighty power is our everlasting hope. Men disappoint us because they are lacking either in faithfulness or power. But we can look above the wreck and ruin caused by the unfaithfulness of men and behold One who is great in faithfulness. “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)” (Hebrews 10:23).

Unfaithfulness is one of the outstanding characteristics of these evil days. Who has not suffered at the hands of unfaithful men? And where is the man who has not been guilty, in some measure at least, of this very sin? In the economic world nearly all failures are the results of unfaithful debtors or employees. In the social realm marital infidelity has become a terrible scourge; the sacred bonds of wedlock are broken with the ease of discarding an old garment. In the political world pre-election promises are broken as flippantly as they are made. In international affairs treaties between nations are treated as mere scraps of paper. There is fear and alarm everywhere as men learn that they cannot trust one another. And in the religious realm unfaithfulness is as evident as anywhere else. Multitudes who profess to believe the Bible are ignoring great portions of it, pronouncing other parts out of date, and withal seeking to explain much of it away.

SICK OF HUMANITY

A reporter for one of the big American dailies, who, witnessed the battle of the Alcazar in war torn, bullet riddled and blood soaked Spain, lying upon his hospital bed in France, spoke to his manager across the ocean, and said, “I’m sick of humanity!” The human race began its downward career in the garden of plenty by unfaithfulness to its Creator, and by the same sin is destroying itself. Here is a question for heart searching: Have we been the cause of grief to others by our unfaithfulness? Has wife, husband, child, parent, neighbor, pastor, brother, or anyone else been brought to grief by our unfaithfulness? Remember the tears caused by wrong doing are kept in God’s bottle to be brought as evidence in the day of judgment.

THE FAITHFUL GOD

There is One who is great in faithfulness. Faithfulness is a perfection in God by which He is true to His word and to all His covenant engagements. He never breaks a contract with Himself or with His creatures. What He has purposed that will He do, and what He has promised that will He perform. Lying is one of the most prevalent sins of all times. It was the belief of a lie that caused the ruin of the human race. Adam and Eve turned away from God’s word and followed the father of lies. And all their children have followed in their steps. The children of Israel, in the long ago, would actually beg their prophets to preach lies to them. “Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits:” (Isaiah 30:10). In our day lying has been camouflaged with the big word propaganda.

It is said that in Siam they have a law, that when man lies his mouth is sewed up for three days. Bro. R. G. Lee says that if such law were in effect in this country many business men would not be able to answer the telephone and some of the women would be going around with pretty embroidered mouths.

The proneness to tell and believe lies is one of the most startling facts of human history. Of only one man has it ever been truthfully said that there was no deceit in His mouth. And this was the God man, Christ Jesus, the Truth incarnate. “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth” (Isaiah 53:9).

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIMSELF

Of God we read “If we believe not, yet he abides faithful: he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). This means that He will faithfully perform all that He has purposed. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Back in eternity there was a people foreknown and predestined whom God purposed to call and justify and glorify. This was a secret purpose known only to God and not

a promise made to men, for as yet man had no actual being. Now, if God should fail to call and justify and glorify the foreknown and predestined, He would not be faithful or true

to Himself. It would be as if a man purposed to do something and then failed through lack of constancy or ability. God is faithful to His own purpose, and has ample power to execute all His plans. "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he does according to his will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What do you?" (Daniel 4:35).

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS SON

There were certain promises made to Jesus Christ, the spiritual David, on condition that He perform His duties as Mediator of the better covenant. And God has sworn that He will not lie unto David, that is, Christ, the spiritual David. He was to see His seed and the travail of His soul and be satisfied. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:11). Concerning the covenant of grace entered into by the three persons of the Godhead, we can do no better than to quote B. H. Carroll: "Before there was any world, a covenant of grace and mercy was entered into between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the evidences of which covenant are abundant in the New Testament and the parts to be performed by each Person of the Godhead are clearly expressed, namely: The Father's grace and love in agreeing to send the Son, His covenant obligations to give the Son a seed, His foreknowledge of this seed, His predestination concerning this seed, His justification and adoption of them in time. The Son's covenant was the obligation to assume human nature in His incarnation, voluntarily renouncing the glory He had with the Father before the world was, to become obedient to the death of the cross. The consideration held out to Him, as a hope set before Him, inducing Him to endure the shame of the cross, and the reward bestowed upon Him because of that obedience, was His resurrection, His glorification, His exaltation to the royal priestly throne and His investment with the right of judgment. And the Spirit's covenant-obligations were to apply this work of redemption in calling, convincing, regenerating, sanctifying, and raising from the dead the seed promised to the Son, the whole of it showing that the plan of salvation was not an afterthought; that the roots of it in election and predestination are both in eternity before the world was, and the fruits of it are in eternity after the judgment. The believer is asked to consider this chain, test each link, shake it and hear it rattle, connected from eternity to eternity. Everyone that God chose in Christ is drawn by the Spirit to Christ. Everyone predestined is called by the Spirit in time, justified in time, and will be glorified when the Lord comes."

THE DEATH OF CHRIST NO EXPERIMENT

The death of Christ was not an experiment, uncertain in its results. The work of the Holy Spirit is not a mere trial to see what can be accomplished. We cannot subscribe to the doctrine of an unfaithful Father, a defeated Holy Spirit, and a disappointed Son. We believe in a faithful God, an invincible Spirit, and a victorious Christ. Spurgeon says: "That every soul for whom Christ shed His blood as a substitute He will claim as His own and have as His right, I firmly believe. I love to hold and I delight to proclaim this precious truth. Not all the powers of earth or Hell, not the obstinacy of the human will, nor the deep depravity of the human mind, can ever prevent Christ seeing the travail of His soul and being satisfied."

But better still are the words from the lips of incarnate Truth; Hear you Him: "All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from Heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which has sent me, that of all which he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which sees the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:37-40). And again He said, "As you have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him" (John 17:2).

THE GROUND OF OUR SECURITY

The ground of our security is God's faithfulness to His Son. "God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor. 1:9). According to covenant engagements Jesus Christ was to have fellows or companions. Now, by the calling of God (the effectual call of the Spirit by the word) we were first admitted into fellowship with Christ, and the ultimate objective is our presence with Him in glory. And this is guaranteed by the faithfulness of God, "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:8), for the called are to be justified and glorified. The called and justified are safe as long as God

keeps His word to His Son. Freedom from chastisement depends upon the believer's good behavior, but certainty of glory rests upon God's faithfulness to His Son.

"If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me" (Psalm 89:30-36).

What a firm foundation for our faith! Our safety does not rest upon our faithfulness to God, but upon God's faithfulness to His Son. Hallelujah!

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS SAINTS

God has made promises to poor, helpless, mourning believers in Christ and He will faithfully perform every promise He has made. "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:29). This means that God is true to His covenant promises, and will not fail to glorify all the called. "For all the promises of God in him are yes, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

PRESERVATION

God is faithful in preserving His people. "For the LORD loves judgment, and forsakes not his saints; they are preserved forever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off" (Psalm 37:28). "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:27-29). Whatever is preserved is helpless to keep itself. The saints are weak, but they are kept by the power of God: "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). God's promise to the believer is everlasting life. And this is not everlasting existence, but everlasting favor or justification so that he will never come under condemnation again. "Truly, truly, I say unto you, He who hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he who calls you, who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23,24). Here the believer's complete sanctification and deliverance from sin is made to depend upon the faithfulness of God. The called are not only justified; they will also be glorified, for God is faithful. God is not going to call sinners with the effectual, life giving call and then leave them stranded on the highway to glory. There is no "coffin corner" for the souls of the saints. Neither will their evacuation be a "Dunkirk." Those who have fled to Jesus Christ as a refuge from the storm of Divine wrath have God's word and His oath, "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Hebrews 6:18).

"There's never a heartache and never a groan,
Never a tear drop, and never a moan;
Never a danger, but there on His throne,
Moment by moment He thinks of His own."

DISCIPLINE

God is faithful in disciplining His people. The psalmist cries: "I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right, and that you in faithfulness have afflicted me" (Psalm 119:75). Here David submits to God's dealings with him and acknowledges that they are right and good. In David's creed there was no place for luck or chance. He believed that God ordered all that befell him. His afflictions were most painful, but He saw God's hand in them and believed they were for his good. But he goes further and says that God was faithful in sending them. God was acting in the best interests of David and knew what he needed. God was as faithful to His own in chastening as He is in preserving them. God is no unfaithful and indulgent Eli. He will not allow His children to sin without correction. "He who spares his rod hates his son: but he who loves him chastens him early" (Proverbs 13:24).

We ought to praise God for His faithfulness in using the rod to bring us back to Himself and into the path of obedience. The saints have the wayward nature of a sheep and are prone to go astray. God is a faithful Shepherd who knows how to

use the rod to bring us back. Hear David again: “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept your word” (Psalm 119:67). And the doctrine is the same whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament. In Hebrews 12:11 we read, “Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

As the saint grows in knowledge of the truth about God and man, he will become more and more sick of self and fond of Him. When the truth about God and self reaches the inward parts, then will we do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God. “He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

Oh, how much do we, His blood-bought people, need to be more faithful to Him who never suffers His faithfulness to fail toward us! This is what He requires of us as stewards of His goods. “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). It will not matter much when we come to die whether we have had much of this world’s goods and honor or not, but it will matter much whether or not we have been faithful to our Redeemer. May the faithfulness of God become a spring in us from which shall flow waters of faithful service to Him!

“O love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul on Thee;
I give You back the life I owe,
That in Your ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.”

Chapter 18—The WISDOM of God

“O LORD, how manifold are your works! in wisdom have you made them all: the earth is full of your riches” (Psalm 104:24).

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

The foundation of true religion is to have proper thoughts of God. Of the wicked it is said that God is not in all his thoughts: “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts” (Psalm 10:4). Malachi tells of a remnant that think upon His name: “Then they that feared the LORD spoke often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name” (Malachi 3:16). The man who thinks right about God will not be far wrong in his thinking about other things. A thousand evils grow out of wrong conceptions about God.

Wisdom belongs to God as an intelligent Spirit. It is a more comprehensive attribute than knowledge; it not only supposes knowledge, but directs and uses it in the best manner. There are men who know much, so much that they may be regarded as walking encyclopedias, but they have little wisdom; they do not know how to use their knowledge. This is what is meant when a man is referred to as a man of book learning, but without common sense. He knows a lot, but he is without wisdom. But God is both all-knowing and all wise. “For the LORD gives wisdom: out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6).

1. WISDOM IS A PERSONAL PERFECTION IN GOD.

An unwise being cannot be the true God. Even Pythagoras, a heathen philosopher, said: “No man is wise, but God only.” And Job declares, “With him is wisdom and strength, he has counsel and understanding” (Job 12:13). “Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God forever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changes the times and the seasons: he removes kings, and sets up kings: he gives wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding” (Daniel 2:20,21). He is three times called the only wise God: “To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen” (Romans 16:27); “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Timothy 1:17); “To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 25). The angels when compared with Him are charged with folly: “Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly” (Job 4:18). His wisdom is unsearchable: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out” (Romans 11:33).

2. WISDOM APPEARS IN THE DECREES OF GOD.

God’s purposes and decrees are called His counsels. “O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things; your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth” (Isaiah 25:1). Resolutions and determinations of men are the wisest which are formed after mature deliberation and consultation. “Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14). But God’s counsels are without consultation, and His determinations are without deliberation. Being naturally and infinitely wise, He requires no time to deliberate; nor does He need someone with whom to counsel. “For who has known the mind of the Lord? or who has been his counselor” (Romans 11:34); “For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:16).

God’s counsels are immutable. There is no change necessary, for they were formed in wisdom. “There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand” (Proverbs 19:21). “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isaiah 46:10). God can declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things to pass, and nothing can overthrow His counsel or thwart His will. “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Hebrews 6:17,18).

3. THE WISDOM OF GOD IS MANIFESTED IN CREATION.

“In wisdom have you made them all” (Psalm 104:24). We look into the starry heavens and there see a marvelous display of wisdom. Man, after centuries of gazing into the heavens with the naked eye, and after decades of poking at the

stars with the telescope, is still a mere tyro in the subjects of astronomy and astrology. We look into the airy region, from whence comes rain and snow, which God wisely distributes on the earth. We look upon the earth and everywhere we see design that testifies to the wisdom of God: "cattle upon a thousand hills;" pastures covered with flocks; valleys clothed with grass for beasts and herbs for men. We look into the affections of the earth, and we see coal here, oil there, gold yonder, all wisely distributed for the use of men. Truly all His works praise Him!

4. THE WISDOM OF GOD IS SEEN IN PROVIDENCE.

There are returning seasons: seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, night and day, all of which evidences supernatural wisdom. This world is not run by capricious chance, in or by cold fate, nor by natural law; it is run by its Maker. "It is he who sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretches out the heavens as a curtain, and spreads them out as a tent to dwell in" (Isaiah 40:22) and wisely orders all things for His own glory. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36). Providence may be defined as God's superintendence of His creation. It is God at work bringing to pass what He eternally purposed should come to pass. Purpose is the determination of His will; prophecy is the declaration of His will; and providence is the execution of His will.

Providence is mysterious because it is the expression of infinite wisdom. A finite being cannot understand the ways of an infinite God. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" (Romans 11:33).

5. THE WISDOM OF GOD IS DISPLAYED IN THE WORK OF HUMAN REDEMPTION.

Paul says that in our redemption by Christ, "Wherein he has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence" (Ephesians 1:8). It was in wisdom that "Grace first contrived the way to save rebellious man." Salvation was not planned by human wisdom. And when planned by God and plainly revealed by Him in His word, it is foolishness to the natural man. "But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The wisdom of God is seen:

5a) In the discovery of the person to be our Redeemer. Here stands a sinner, just any sinner! He has violated the law of God; he has rebelled against the Divine government; he has tried to dethrone the Judge of all the earth. What is to be done with this sinner? Justice says, Cut him down; he deserves to die. Truth says, He or I must perish, for I have declared that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Holiness says, I hate the workers of iniquity. Mercy, in soft and plaintive tones, cries, Spare him! What? is there to be a conflict among the Divine attributes? Yes! unless Wisdom had come, leading One like unto the Son of Man saying, "Then he is gracious unto him, and says, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom" (Job 33:24). When man was wallowing in his own blood, it was Wisdom that said, "Then you spoke in vision to your holy one, and said, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people" (Psalm 89:19). Who but God, infinite in wisdom, could have discovered such a fit Redeemer as we have in Christ Jesus? Our Redeemer was not a sinful man, nor a holy angel, but the Son of God, who is every way qualified to save us. And the discovery of such a person must be ascribed solely to the wisdom of God. Had all men been called together, and told that God was willing that they should be redeemed, if they could find a proper person for this gigantic task; and had all the holy angels been called into consultation upon the matter; they would never have been able to propose one fit for such a tremendous task.

Ponder these thoughtful words of Jonathan Edwards:

"Who would have thought of a trinity of persons in the Godhead; and that one should sustain the rights of the Godhead; and another should be the Mediator; and another should make the application of redemption? Who would have thought of a way for answering the law, the law that threatened eternal death, without the sinner suffering eternal death? And who would have thought of any such thing as a Divine Person suffering the wrath of God? And if they had who would have contrived a way how he should suffer, since the Divine nature cannot suffer?"

5b) The wisdom of God appears in the persons fixed upon to be redeemed. Redemption is not universal. There its no redemption for the Devil and his angels. If redemption were universal, then salvation would likewise be universal. Revelation 5:9 is explicit and conclusive as to the truth of particular redemption, even among fallen men: "And they sung a new song, saying, You are worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Christ redeemed particular persons. We cannot understand why one was selected rather than another, for all were by nature children of wrath, and of the same common clay. "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Ephesians 2:3); "Has not the potter

power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" (Rom. 9:21). Distinguishing grace is a profound mystery, but it is a Scriptural doctrine. Our Savior memorialized the wisdom of God in distinguishing grace, when He said, "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank you, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in your sight." (Matthew 11:25-26).

5c) The wisdom of God may be seen in the time of man's redemption. The Redeemer came in the fullness of time, the time agreed upon between the Father and the Son. Four thousand years of human history fully revealed the need of a redeemer. It is an inexorable truth "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). And all the blood on Jewish altars had been to no avail, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). It was not because of the value of animal sacrifices, but "through the forbearance of God, "that sins of Old Testament saints were remitted: "Whom God has set forth to be a atoning sacrifice through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Romans 3:25).

The blood of beasts only typified and adumbrated the blood of God's Lamb, the only blood that could be the righteous basis for redemption. When the Gentile world was covered with dankness, superstition, ignorance, and wickedness of all kinds when immorality, formality, hypocrisy, and contempt for the word of God among the Jews prevailed then Christ said "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

Chapter 19—The LOVE of God

Henry Drummond says that love is the greatest thing in the world. And from our point of view love is the greatest thing in God. Without love His justice would cut us off; His holiness would put us out of His sight; and His power would destroy us. Love is the one hope of sinners, and our great concern should be to discover God's love to us.

With regard to His moral nature, God is said to be two things: light and love. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5). In Scripture, "darkness" stands for sin and ignorance, and "light" is a symbol of holiness and understanding. "God is love": "He who loves not knows not God; for God is love." (1 John 4:8). Light and love are balancing perfections in the Divine nature. Because God is light, His love is not amiable weakness or good natured indulgence. Because God is light, His love is a holy love and not a mere sickly sentiment. God's love never conflicts with His holiness. Because God is light, He never overlooks sin even in His own people, "For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives" (Hebrews 12:6).

The love of God may be defined as that eternal principle of His nature by which He is moved to bestow eternal and spiritual blessings. Love is the moving cause of all His acts of mercy and grace. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us" (Ephesians 2:4). The love of God is the guarantee that all things work together for the ultimate good of His people; it is the basis of all His redeeming activities.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD'S LOVE

1. It is eternal. "I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you" (Jeremiah 31:3). Here we have the secret drawing of the sinner to the Savior explained. He draws because He loves. "Blessed is the man whom you chose, and causes to approach unto you, that he may dwell in your courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, even of your holy temple" (Psalm 65:4). The love that bought us also sought us and brought us to the place of safety, even to the Mercy Seat; Jesus Christ. There was never a time when God did not love His people, and there will never be a time when He will not love them. He loved us as much before we were saved as He does since we have been saved, "But God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

2. God's love is immutable. God changes not and there can be no change in His love. "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John. 13:1). God's love for His people had no beginning and blessed be His Name, it shall have no ending. It is like Himself, from everlasting to everlasting. Paul's grand argument for the security of the believer is based upon the fact that nothing can separate us from the love of God nothing in the grave of the past, nothing in the perils of the present, and nothing in the womb of the future. The love of God is subject to no vicissitude.

"His love no end nor measure knows,
No change can turn its course,
Eternally the same it flows
From one eternal source."

3. God's love is sovereign. This is self-evident. God Himself is a Sovereign, consulting His own imperial pleasure, and working all things after the counsel of His own will. And it necessarily follows that His love is sovereign. He alone selects the objects of His love. If He loves Jacob and hates Esau, who is to criticize Him? If He loves fallen sinners of the human race and hates fallen angels, who is to gainsay His right to do so. "Therefore has he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens" (Romans 9:18); "Nay but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus?" (Romans 9:20).

There is absolutely nothing in sinners to cause God to love them; nobody can claim the right to God's love; His love is sovereign and free. What was there in this poor sinner to attract the heart of God? Absolutely nothing! On the other hand there was everything to merit His hatred; everything for which He might have loathed me.

"What was there in me that could merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?
'Twas even so, Father, I ever must sing,
Because it seemed good in Your sight."

4. The love of God is effectual. This is obvious, for it is the love of the Almighty. It means something; yes, it means everything, to be loved by God. We are often loved by those who are helpless to help us. They are powerless to do for us what they would like to do. Their love is helpless because they lack power to make their love effectual. Darius loved Daniel but was powerless to save him. But we are loved by the Almighty, with whom nothing is too hard. The objects of God's love are eternally safe. He who can make sure that God loves him may also be assured of a home in Heaven. Here is a most important question: How may I know that God loves me? How can I be assured that all things work together for my good? By making sure that I love God. My love for God is inward evidence of His love for me. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). His love for us created our love for Him. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is (Gk. has been) born of God." (1 John 4:7).

MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD'S LOVE

God is love and He manifests what He is. There are no idle attributes in God. There is no such thing as secret love. Love will win out, whether it is the love of God or the love of man. Love is an acting, working principle of life.

1. God's love to sinners was manifested in the gift of His Son. Love gives. Love gives the best. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Christ so loved the church that He gave Himself for it: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). As a typical Jew, Nicodemus thought God loved nobody but Jews, but our Lord told him that "God so loved the world (Gentile as well as Jew), that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever (Gentile or Jew) believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Until they were taught better, Christ's own apostles thought all the sheep were among the Jews, but the Savior corrected them by saying, "As the Father knows me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:15,16). The sheep among the Jews were in a fold, a ceremonial enclosure which distinguished them from the Gentiles. The sheep among the Gentiles had not been subjected to ceremonial laws. In saving the sheep among the Jews Christ led them out of the fold (Judaism), and made them one with the Gentile sheep that heard His voice, so that there is only one flock and one Shepherd. All of God's people are one in Christ, for "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). This does not teach that there are no distinct spheres of service, but it means that all the saved have a common salvation.

2. God's love is manifested in the new birth. By nature we are children of wrath; by a supernatural birth we become the children of God. "That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Romans 9:8). John says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew Him not" (1 John 3:1). We are not only named children, but we are made children of God by the new birth. We are children by a Divine call; that effectual call which comes in connection with the new birth.

3. God's love is manifested in discipline. Discipline is an expression and proof of love. "For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives" (Hebrews 12:6).

Here is ample evidence that none of God's children are perfect. They all need the Father's chastening rod. The word for "chasten" means to train as a child, and the word for "scourge" means to whip or flog. Children need training and whipping, and the love of God will give us what we need. Chastisement is from the loving hand of a wise Father; condemnation is from the truthful lips of a just Judge. "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned." (1 Corinthians 11:32). Chastisement is not pleasant, but it is profitable; it increases the fruit of righteousness and makes us partakers of His holiness: "For they truly for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Hebrews 12:10,11).

VARIOUS ASPECTS OF GOD'S LOVE

Some theologians speak of several kinds of Divine love, but we prefer to think of one Divine principle with varying emotions, according to the object upon which the love is bestowed.

We like what Dr. Kerfoot has to say on this point: "If the object loved is lovely, then the emotion of loving is that of complacency. If the object loved is one needing kindness or beneficence, the emotion is that of benevolence. If the object is in distress, the emotion is that of compassion or pity, etc. Just as the active principle of fire is the same, whatever may be the character of the material upon which it lays hold, so the principle of love is always the same."

1. When God's love terminates upon Himself or upon innocent creatures, it is the love of complacency. This is the aspect of His love for His Son with Whom He is always well pleased, "And he who sent me is with me; the Father has not left me lone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). "And lo a voice from Heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17), and in whom He ever takes delight. His love for the holy angels is likewise a love of complacency and delight.

2. When the love of God is towards sinners as objects of misery, then it is the love of compassion or pity. "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ, (by grace you are saved)" (Ephesians 2:3-5). In mercy He quickens dead sinners into life, and this marvelous mercy is on account of His great love. Great love for sinners fruits in "plenteous mercy, "and "abounding grace."

A dirty, drunken, ragged harlot, howling and filling the air with obscene language, was being dragged down the street by policemen. A refined and elegantly dressed woman stepped out into the street and kissed the vile wretch. Startled into sobriety for the moment, the vile creature asked in surprise: "What made you do that?" "Because I love you," was the prompt reply. Are you surprised at this example of love? Then remember that the moral distance between God and the sinner, any and every sinner, is far greater than that between these two women; and yet He stoops to give us the kiss of reconciliation.

"I've found a Friend; O such a Friend!
He loved me before I knew Him;
He drew me with the cords of love,
And thus He bound me to Him.
And round my heart still closely twine
Those ties which naught can sever;
For I am His and He is mine,
Forever and forever."

Chapter 20—The WILL of God

In all intelligent beings there is a will, men and angels and God have wills. In men the will is the faculty of the mind by which choice is made of a future action determined upon. In willing a man has the purpose of action in view. And his will is the cause of the action, else he would be a mere machine or automation. If I take a gun and shoot another man, the will worked before the hand did; the purpose was before the act. But if I am held by another man, and a gun is placed in my hand, and another hand moves my finger to pull the trigger, that is not my act because I did not will or choose to do it. In that act I was not a responsible being, but a mere machine or tool of another.

In God the will is the attribute by which He determines and executes future events. “And this is the Father’s will which has sent me, that of all which he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (John 6:39). His will includes “whatever comes to pass, “hence everything that comes to pass is providential and not accidental so far as God is concerned. “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1:11). The sparrow does not fall without the will of God.

Webster defines Providence as an event divinely ordained. Now it is well known that events happen in sequence, that is, they are related in order of time and one event is the cause of another event. So it seems evident, that if some events are ordained then all events are ordained. It is usual for men to distinguish events as providential and accidental. Even Christians are prone to classify their experiences either as providential or accidental. They associate providence with good things, and accident with evil things; therefore, they speak of having an accident. The Rickenbacker party regarded their rescue at sea as providential, but the writer regards the whole of their experiences as providential. The fall of their plane into the sea was as much providential as was their rescue. We need to see God’s will in our afflictions as well as in our blessings. Job was speaking of both “And said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). And when his wife pleaded with him to curse God and die, “But he said unto her, You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips” (Job 2:10). And when he had lost all earthly comforts; seeing God’s hand in it all he said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him” (Job 13:15).

The will of God includes the wicked actions of sinful men, but does not take away their blame worthiness. We may not see how this can be, but the Scriptures declare it and we should believe it. The Scriptures were not written to confirm our reasoning but rather to correct it. On the day of Pentecost Peter said, concerning Jesus, “Him being delivered by the determinate counsel (will) and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23). And on a later occasion he said that “For of a truth against your holy child Jesus, whom you have anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatever your hand and your counsel (will) determined before to be done” (Acts 4:27,28). We may not be able to see how God can will or determine a sin without becoming the author of sin, but the fact remains that the greatest of all sins, the slaying of the Son of God, was divinely ordained.

DISTINCTIONS IN THE WILL OF GOD

Theologians have made many distinctions in the will of God; some of them are false, others are vain and useless, but there is one distinction that is necessary, and which will prove helpful in rightly dividing the word of truth. This is that which distinguishes between God’s decretive will and His preceptive will, or His will of purpose and His will of command. God’s will of purpose is always done; His will of command is often left undone. God’s will of purpose cannot be thwarted, for this would mean His dethronement; His will of command is often violated, for men are in rebellion against Him. If the human will is greater in power than the Divine will then, of course, this human rebellion will succeed and God will be dethroned. If human rebellion can overthrow the government of God, we have no supreme Being at all. To further amplify the distinction between God’s decretive and preceptive wills we will consider each separately.

GOD’S WILL OF PURPOSE

1. It is eternal. God is not forming any new purposes, for His counsels are of old: “O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things; your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth” (Isaiah 25:1). His purpose in Christ is said to be eternal: “According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our

Lord.” (Ephesians 3:11). What is to be will be, therefore, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18).

2. It is effectual. God's will of purpose is always accomplished. God is not man that He should engage in wishful thinking. There are no mere wishes with Him which He cannot perform. "The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: That I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders. This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" (Isaiah 14:24-27). For example, back in eternity God willed or determined the death of His Son, and centuries after time began we see Him controlling and directing the free actions of sinful men to bring this event to pass. Moreover, He predestined and predicted the detail when, where, and how His Son should die. And so in the four gospels we are told that this and that was done to Him that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

3. It is immutable. God never changes His will of purpose. There are only two possible reasons for anybody changing his will; it must be either because he sees that what he purposed was not wise, or that he sees it cannot be accomplished. But neither of these reasons can apply to God. He was All wise in planning and is All powerful in performing.

Prayer does not change God's will, but it does change things. Changes wrought by prayer are all within the circle of God's purposing will. "And he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27). Answered prayer is made in the energy of the Holy Spirit. A man may pray without the Spirit and get what he asks for, but it would not be in answer to prayer. Two generals on opposing sides may pray for victory in the coming battle, but both could not be praying in the Holy Spirit, and it is possible that neither of them are. In all true prayer this thought is implied or expressed: Not my will but Your be done.

"Your way, not mine, O Lord,
However dark it be;
O lead me by Your own right hand,
Choose out the path for me.
"I dare not choose my lot;
I would not if I might;
But choose You for me, O my God,
So shall I walk aright.
"O take my cup, and it
With joy or sorrow fill;
As ever best to You may seem,
Choose You my good and ill.
"Not mine, not mine the choice,
In things of great or small;
O be my guide, my guard, my strength,
My wisdom, and my all."

4. God's will of purpose was the cause of our conversion. I am a converted or saved man. I have been born again. What is the explanation of this tremendous change? Back of every performance or action there must be a will. Did I will myself into a new man? Did some other man effectually will my second birth? "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12,13). Saving faith does not originate with our parents, nor with ourselves, nor with some other man; it is the gift and work of God. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (James 1:18).

GOD'S WILL OF COMMAND

1. God's preceptive will refers to what He has prescribed as our rule of thought and conduct. The will of God is expressed in all Divine law. In Eden it was God's will that determined what kind of law would be given to Adam and Eve. At Sinai God did not consult Moses or the children of Israel about what laws they would be under. In a democracy the people make their own laws through chosen representatives who serve in legislative halls. This gives rise to pressure groups and class legislation because men are selfish; they do not love their neighbors as themselves. But in our relation to God we are not dealing with a democracy but with a Theocracy. In God's will of command we have the sovereignty of authority; in God's will of purpose we have the sovereignty of power.

2. It is God's will of command and not His will of purpose that men are responsible to perform. It was His will of purpose that Christ should be crucified, but it was not His will of command. In putting Jesus Christ to death men were fulfilling the purpose of God, but they were not obeying any command of God. There can be no sin in doing what God has commanded. Peter tells us that they put Christ to death with wicked hands; "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23); therefore, they were not obeying a command of God. What God purposes is the determining factor; what He commands is our duty. It seems easy for men to see this distinction in everything except religion. A man who can see only one side of the truth will say, "If it is God's will or purpose to save me, He will save me; therefore, I will sit down and do nothing about it." Now this same man would not dare reason this way about other things. Concerning this year's crop, God's will of purpose determines the harvest, but His command is to plow and plant, cultivate and reap. God's will of purpose determines whether we live or die: "For that you ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:15), but it is His will of command that we regard the laws of health. Nobody quits eating because he believes God's will of purpose determines whether he lives or dies. God's will of purpose will determine the outcome of this war, but it would be foolish to sit down and say: "If it is God's will we will win, if not we will lose; therefore, let us strike and stop mining coal and producing steel." God's will of purpose determines the result of our witnessing for Christ. "In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand: for you know not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good" (Ecclesiastes 11:6). "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from Heaven, and returns not thither, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10,11). It is God's will of command that we sow beside all waters, to preach the Gospel to every creature, and His will of purpose will take care of the results and make it accomplish what He pleases.

It is God's will of purpose that determines whether I am saved or not, but it is folly to sit down and say that if I am one of the elect I will be saved; therefore, I need not take any interest in the matter. God's will of command is to repent and believe, and this is every man's responsibility. We are commanded, "Therefore brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall." (2 Peter 1:10). We are commanded to "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke 13:24). The man who takes no interest in his soul and has no concern for his salvation; if he persists in this attitude will surely land in the lake of fire; for he who believes not shall be damned. Much of God's will of purpose belongs to His secret will, "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deu. 29:29).

Chapter 21—The SOVEREIGNTY of God

“Whatever the LORD pleased, that did he in Heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Psalm 135:6).

“But our God is in the heavens — he has done whatever he has pleased” (Psalm 115:3).

We have been writing without conscious fear or favor of men. We endeavor to write each chapter as if the Lord were present personally, looking over our shoulders and passing judgment upon what He sees. We believe the honest reader will agree that what we have been, and are writing is honoring to God our Creator and Lawgiver. We are trying to magnify Him in the eyes of the reader and show what a great God we have to fear and love and worship and serve.

The writer is an old-fashioned Baptist without any frills or modern notions. He has lived in spirit with, and has learned much from such men as Paul, Augustine, Bunyan, Gill, Fuller, Carey, Judson, Spurgeon, Graves, Jeter, Boyce, Strong, Carroll, and Mullins. He is in fellowship with those who wrote our various Confessions of Faith, such as the London, the Philadelphia, and New Hampshire.

We began our Christian career, as most men do, in Arminian thought, but with an inward experience that made us susceptible to Calvinistic teachings. It should be well known that there are two and only two schemes or systems of divine grace, unalterably opposed to each other, and mutually exclusive.

The two systems represent the only two possible positions or views on the subject of grace. Whether or not one is willing to wear either name, does not alter the fact that he is either Calvinistic or Arminian in his views. Calvinism stands for the truth that salvation is of the Lord; Arminianism makes salvation the result of human merit. The one system postulates irresistible grace; the other postulates inherent human goodness.

A good way to locate or label oneself is to turn to Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary, where the two systems are fairly set forth. Here are the five points of Calvinism: unconditional election or predestination, limited atonement or particular redemption, total depravity necessitating prevenient grace, effectual calling or irresistible grace, and preservation or perseverance of the saints. And the writer does not hesitate to subscribe to all five points. Nor does holding the five points cause him to deny human responsibility or to be lax in missionary endeavor.

If we may judge by Confessions of Faith or public utterances of their leaders, the champions of Arminianism are the Catholics, the Methodists, the disciples of Mr. Campbell, the Free Will Baptists, and many other smaller groups. Judging by the same standards, the champions of Calvinism are the Missionary Baptists, the Anti-Mission Baptists, the Episcopalians, the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, and a few smaller bodies. It is doubtless true that many preachers in the Calvinistic bodies have departed from their historic faith, and no longer teach what they took an oath to teach. In many cases it is a Calvinistic creed and an Arminian clergy.

SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD A BIG DOCTRINE

Sometime ago we read where somebody called for “big doctrines.” Well, the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty is a big doctrine. It is almost too big for us to attempt to define. But the two texts (as do many others) at the head of this chapter declare and affirm it. Mr. Spurgeon delighted to proclaim this big doctrine, and he could do it about as well as anybody we know. The reader will do well to read and ponder the following paragraph from the pen of this prince among preachers:

“There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God’s sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained afflictions, that Sovereignty over rules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. On the other hand there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of God. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense alms and bestow blessings. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of Heaven, or rule the waves of the ever moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures gnash their teeth, and when we proclaim an enthroned God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the matter, then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on the throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon the throne we love to preach. It is the God upon the throne Whom we trust.”

Oh for a Spurgeon today to reach the masses with this God honoring and man humbling truth! God is nothing more than a big man with a lot of people, and with many He is not even a very big man. Of old God complained to an apostate Israel, “These things have you done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was altogether such an one as yourself: but I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes” (Psalm 50:21). This is the trouble today: people’s conception of God is too human. And we believe this accounts for much of the alarming irreverence in the average congregation. “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him. O LORD

God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto you? or to your faithfulness round about you? You rule the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, you stillest them” (Psalm 89:7-9).

THE MEANING OF SOVEREIGNTY

The Sovereignty of God may be defined as the exercise of His supremacy. God is the one supreme and independent Being. He is the only one in all the universe who has the right and the power to do absolutely as He pleases. He sits on no precarious throne, nor borrows leave to be. He is the only one who has the right to act for His own glory. The sovereignty of God means that He does as He pleases, always as He pleases, and only as He pleases. God is in control of all things and people, and is directing all things after His own will and to the praise of His own glory. He even makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and the wrath of man that does not praise Him, He does not allow. “Surely the wrath of man shall praise you: the remainder of wrath shall you restrain” (Psalm 76:10).

There is no alternative between an absolute sovereign God and no God at all. A man once wrote that he believed God was a sovereign, but not an absolute sovereign. A woman once talked of two supreme beings. But we believe in a sovereign God whose will is not subject to veto by His creatures.

In his poem, “There Always Will Be God,” Albert Leonard Murray describes Him as a Sovereign:

“They cannot shell His temple,
Nor dynamite His throne;
They cannot bomb His city,
Nor rob Him of His own.
“They cannot take Him captive,
Nor strike Him deaf and blind,
Nor starve Him to surrender,
Nor make Him change His mind.
“They cannot cause Him panic,
Nor cut off His supplies;
They cannot take His kingdom,
Nor hurt Him with their lies.
“Though all the world be shattered,
His truth remains the same,
His righteous laws still potent,
And ‘Father’ still His name.
“Though we face war and struggle
And feel their goad and rod,
We know above confusion
There always will be God.”

SOVEREIGNTY IN CREATION

God acted as a Sovereign in His work of creation. He did not create from necessity, but from His own imperial pleasure. And in creating, He was free to create whatever He pleased. He did not create for the sake of creatures, for creatures in view must exist for their Creator, and not the Creator for the creature. “The LORD has made all things for himself: yes, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Proverbs 16:4). “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36). “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for you have created all things, and for your pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

SOVEREIGNTY IN ADMINISTRATION

God is the Sovereign Ruler in His universe. He is in control of all things and of all men, of demons and the Devil. He rules everywhere as seems good to Himself. He seeks counsel from none. He controls and directs in the realm of nature. The Scriptures rarely ever use the expression “it rains”; they speak of God sending rain. “That you may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven: for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45); “Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from Heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17); “When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder” (Job 28:26).

The Bible does not ascribe the recurring seasons to the laws of nature; it says that God changes the times and the seasons: “And he changes the times and the seasons: he removes kings, and sets up kings: he gives wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding” (Daniel 2:21). Job did not talk about his disease as the cause of death, but looked up to God and said, “For I know that you will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living” (Job 30:23). In the face of the many foes, who sought his life, David cried to God and said, “My times are in your hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me” (Psalm 31:15).

And there have been demonstrations of God’s control over, and direction of, irrational creatures. He locked the jaws of the lions so that Daniel was not hurt. “My God has sent his angel, and has shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocence was found in me; and also before you, O king, have I done no hurt” (Daniel 6:22). He directed the rooster to crow just when He said it would. “Peter then denied again: and immediately the rooster crew” (John 18:27). He caused the cows, contrary to natural instinct, to leave their calves and make a “beeline” for the borders of Israel with the ark of God. “And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? tell us with which we shall send it to his place. And they said, If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return him a trespass offering: then you shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you. Then said they, What shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to him? They answered, Five golden tumors, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines: for one plague was on you all, and on your lords. Wherefore you shall make images of your tumors, and images of your mice that mar the land; and you shall give glory unto the God of Israel: perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land. Wherefore then do you harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed? Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milk cows, on which there has come no yoke, and tie the cows to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which you return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goes up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then he has done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us: it was a chance that happened to us. And the men did so; and took two milk cows, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home: And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their tumors. And the cows took the straight way to the way of Bethshemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Bethshemesh” (1 Samuel 6:1-12).

God also controls men, all men, whether good or bad, individually or collectively. He exerts upon the wicked a restraining power. He does not allow them to do all their nature would lead them to do. God said to Abimelech, “And God said unto him in a dream, Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart; for I also withheld you from sinning against me: therefore suffered I you not to touch her” (Genesis 20:6). How often it is said that God will not infringe upon man’s free will. But if God had not controlled the will of Abimelech, that heathen king would have harmed Sarah. Yes, even “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turns it wherever he will” (Proverbs 21:1). God was controlling and directing the will of Cyrus, king of Persia, when he ordered the building of the temple at Jerusalem: “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he has charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.” (Ezra 1:1,2). God was controlling and directing Titus and his army in the destruction of Jerusalem; yes, they are called “His armies”: “And Jesus answered and spoke unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of Heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city” (Matthew 22:1-7).

SOVEREIGNTY IN SALVATION

By this we mean that God was under no obligation to save His rebellious creatures. His purpose to save was entirely free to the praise of His grace. He could send every sinner to Hell and remain absolutely just. Salvation cannot be of grace and of debt too. “Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt” (Romans 4:4). Sovereignty in

salvation also means that God saves whom He pleases. “Therefore has he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens” (Romans 9:18). “As you have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him” (John 17:2).

“Tis not that I did choose Thee
For Lord, that could not be;
This heart would still refuse Thee,
But You have chosen me.

“Twas sovereign mercy called me,
And taught my opening mind;
The world had else enthralled me,
To heavenly glories blind.”

SOVEREIGNTY IN PHYSICAL HEALING

We believe most heartily and sincerely in Divine healing, but we have neither patience nor respect for men who pose as Divine healers. All healing is Divine, whether with or without the use of medicine. God’s usual method is to bless the means that are used, but sometimes He heals without medicine. Moreover, He heals some and keeps others on the sick bed, or brings them to death. “For I know that you will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living” (Job 30:23). “And said, If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD your God, and will do that which is right in his sight, and will give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon you, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that heals you” (Exodus 15:26). He is sovereign both as to whom and how He heals.

In the days of public miracles, Paul had the gift of healing, but he could not always exercise that gift. “And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them” (Acts 19:11,12), we read of special miracles God wrought by the hands of Paul, but “Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletus sick” (2 Timothy 4:20). Isaiah prescribed a fig poultice for Hezekiah’s boil and God blessed it to his cure. “For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover” (Isaiah 38:21). Paul prescribed a little wine for Timothy’s poor stomach. “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your often infirmities” (1 Timothy 5:23).

God heals whom and when and how He pleases. Let the sick saint pray, “Lord, if You will you can heal me.” “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:14,15). It may be His will for you to be sick for your good and for His glory. It may be His will for the thorn in the flesh to remain to the praise of the sufficiency of grace.

The very order and safety of creation itself rests upon the sovereignty of God. If God is not in control, working all things after the counsel of His own will, then an absolute blackout is ahead for all of us!

Chapter 22—The LONGSUFFERING of God

The most stupendous and overwhelming subject for human study is the Godhead. The contemplation of the Divine perfections will warm the very cockles of the heart, provided, of course, that we are His children, born of His Spirit. God is a perfectly balanced person. All His attributes work harmoniously to the praise of His glory. Every man of us by reason of sin is in some measure unbalanced. The prodigal is typical of all of us by nature, and he had to come to himself before he would say, “I will arise and go to my father” (Luke 15:18). Sin is a form of insanity; in conversion we get a sound mind. “Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid” (Luke 8:35). All of God’s attributes are perfectly blended and go to make Him the great and glorious Being He is and ever shall be. God is so great that we can study only one perfection or attribute at a time.

God cannot be found by searching. You may sail the unclouded sky and soar to the greatest heights and yet not find God: “It is he who sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretches out the heavens as a curtain, and spreads them out as a tent to dwell in” (Isaiah 40:22). You may sail upon all the seas and circle the globe without finding Him. You may study bugs and flowers and still be ignorant of the God who made them. You may take samples of His works into the laboratory and study them without coming to know Him, Whom to know is life eternal. God cannot be discovered by the physical senses.

All of God’s works give witness to His existence, but they have nothing to say about His character or moral perfections. His works tell us that He is, but do not tell us what He is. God, in His character, can only be found where He has revealed Himself, and this is in His word, the Bible. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1), but they give no testimony about Him as moral Lawgiver. In the study of what the Bible has to say about God, we find that the attribute of patience or longsuffering belongs to His very nature. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith” (Galatians 5:22).

GOD REVEALED HIMSELF TO MOSES

When God gave Moses the tables of the law the second time, He came down and stood with him on the mount and proclaimed His Name, that is, He described His character in moral government. And this is what God said to Moses: “And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6). God did not reveal Himself in any physical features, but in His perfections as a Spirit. And when Israel sinned by murmuring against God, and God threatened to exterminate them, and offered to make of Moses a greater nation; Moses, the typical mediator, pleaded the character of God as revealed to him on the mount. And this is what Moses said to God: “And now, I beseech you, let the power of my Lord be great, according as you have spoken, saying. The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” (Numbers 14:17,18). God as a moral Governor is patient or longsuffering.

“LONG OF NOSE”

The longsuffering of God is a quality in the Divine nature that makes Him slow in dealing with His enemies. God does not fly into a rage at the least provocation. The Hebrew word, which is sometimes translated “longsuffering, “and sometimes “Blow of anger, “literally means “long of nose” (or “breathing”). Anger is indicated by rapid and violent breathing through the nostrils, and the opposite is longsuffering or slow of anger. A snorting, charging bull is an emblem of passionate anger. But God is not like a bull or prancing horse, eager to go, in the work of judgment. God is in no hurry to punish His foes. He is not like a cruel, nervous dictator, in a hurry to have his enemies shot at dawn. God is patient with rebels, and this patience belongs to His nature. A general or universal atonement is not necessary to account for the long delay in the punishment of a wicked and rebellious. The devil, as well as man, has defied God for ages and is still at large, not because Christ died for him, but because God is patient. God is waiting to judge, not until His patience runs out, but for the human cup of iniquity to fill. The time of judgment is left to His sovereign will and does not depend upon any degree of His patience. “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the gardener waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain” (James 5:7). He is infinite in patience, and judgment will not be an act of impatience, but of stern justice.

POWER OF SELF-CONTROL

Longsuffering may be defined as God's power of self-control. This is what Moses meant when he said, "And now, I beseech you, let the power of my Lord be great, according as you have spoken, saying, The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation" (Numbers 14:17,18). God's great power is not only seen in His control over His creatures, but over Himself as well. God is not quick tempered; He does not lose His head and fly off the handle. He has perfect poise and balance. He knows nothing of impatience. His justice, to be sure, is inexorable, but He does not have to be in a hurry to judge His enemies. He waits in perfect patience to vindicate His honor and satisfy His justice. Arthur W. Pink says "Divine patience is that power of control which God exercises over Himself, causing Him to bear with the wicked and forbear so long in punishing them."

And Charnock, one of the noblest of the Puritans said: "Men that are great in the world are quick in passions and are not so ready to forgive an injury, or bear with an offender, as one of the meaner rank. It is want of power over that man's self that makes him do unbecoming things upon provocation. A prince that can bridle his passions is a king over himself as well as over his subjects. God is slow to anger because great in power. He has no less power over Himself than over His creatures."

ILLUSTRATIONS

There are many illustrations of Divine patience in Bible history as well as in events of general observation. God's patience has been signally exhibited through the long centuries of human and satanic rebellion.

1. The time of Noah was a period of Divine longsuffering. "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved through water" (1 Peter 3:20). Those were wicked days, but God was slow to punish. Even after He announced His purpose to destroy the world, He waited one hundred and twenty years before sending the flood. "And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years" (Genesis 6:3). Those were days when sexual immorality ran riot; days when Divine warning was ignored; days of fun poking at God's preacher of righteousness; "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:11), yet God waited to punish because He is a patient God.

2. The whole of the Old Testament dispensation was an era of Divine forbearance. "Whom God has set forth to be a atoning sacrifice through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Romans 3:25). We learn that the sins of that dispensation were remitted through the forbearance of God. The sins of the Old Testament believers were passed over until Christ should come and make atonement. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul" (Leviticus 17:11). God did not punish them for their sins because He was waiting to punish them in the person of His Son. Their sins were remitted before they were paid for. It was like this: Christ, in eternity past, became the Surety for those given to Him by the Father in the everlasting covenant, agreeing to assume human nature, pay their debts and thus make satisfaction for their sins to Divine justice. This was announced immediately after the fall: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15), but it was four thousand years to the fullness of time, when Christ, the Surety of the better covenant, should come to obtain redemption of transgressions that were under the first covenant: "And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15). And all this time was one of patience or forbearance. God did not stir up His wrath and execute judgment upon sinners because He had reserved it for His Son, their Surety. And while waiting for the Surety to come and make satisfaction for sins, He appointed animal sacrifices, which could not satisfy justice and take away sin. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4).

3. God's dealing with Pharaoh is another instance of His longsuffering. Paul defends God from criticism in His dealing with Pharaoh, by saying, "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Romans 9:22). The will of God referred to here is His will of purpose. God's will of purpose, concerning vessels of wrath, is to display His wrath and power in their judgment, but in longsuffering He endures or tolerates them until by their sins they are fitted to destruction.

"How often do men wonder that God endures so much sin as appears in the world. Why does not God immediately cut off transgressors? Why does He not make an end of them at once? The answer is, He endures them for His own glory, and in their condemnation He will be glorified. To short sighted mortals, it would appear preferable if God would cut off in childhood all whom He foresaw would continue in wickedness. But God endures them to old age, and to the utmost bounds of wickedness for the glory of His own name" (Robert Haldane).

4. God's dealing with Paul illustrates His longsuffering towards "vessels of mercy." "And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory" (Romans 9:23). We will let him tell it: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (1 Timothy 1:16). Of all the unbelieving Jews, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus seemed the most unlikely, "Who was before a blasphemers, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorant in unbelief." (1 Timothy 1:13). But in the purpose of God he was a vessel of mercy afore prepared unto glory, and in dealing with him God gives a pattern of His longsuffering.

And Peter has these same vessels of mercy in view when he explains the long delay of our Lord's return. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Most certainly the reference is to His will of purpose that none of those denominated "us" should perish. The "us" of the text are the same as the "beloved" of verse one, and are distinguished from the "scoffers" of verse three. And verse fifteen lends weight to this interpretation: "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." God's longsuffering issues in the salvation of the vessels of mercy. It is like this: We who are now saved were by nature children of wrath, even as others, and needed to repent. If Christ had returned before we repented we would have perished. When He returns, the day of salvation will be over and judgment will begin; and if He had come five, ten, or twenty years ago many of those now saved would have perished in their sins, and God's will would have been thwarted.

GOD'S PATIENCE IS GREATLY ABUSED

The exercise of this attribute leads men to sin more boldly. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Men confound the patience of God with their belief in His non-existence. Because they sin and get by with it for a time, they conclude there is no moral Lawgiver to Whom they must give account. A farmer thought he had proven there is no God. He selected a certain piece of ground on his farm for an experiment. He broke the ground on Sunday, he planted the seed on Sunday, he did all the cultivating on Sunday, and on the first Sunday in October he reaped a larger harvest than on any other part of the farm. He wrote to his newspaper editor the results of his experiment, scoffing at the idea of any God. The editor replied briefly but to the point in these words: "May I remind you that God does not settle His accounts on the first Sunday in October."

Bob Ingersol thought he had demonstrated there is no God when he challenged Him and gave Him five minutes by the watch to strike him dead. When a great preacher in England heard what the upstart had done, he remarked: "Does the gentleman from America think he can exhaust the patience of God in five minutes?"

If the believer does not understand this attribute of longsuffering, he will fretfully wonder why God does not crush His enemies and put an end to so much wickedness. Blessed be His Name! He will, but in longsuffering waits for His purposes to ripen. And while He waits some are fitting themselves to destruction, and some are being fashioned by His grace to be vessels of glory. "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which has great recompense of reward. For you have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he who shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10:35-37). "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

In much humility and gratitude may both writer and reader say with the poet:

"Lord, we have long abused Your love,
Too long indulged in sin,
Our aching hearts e'en bleed to see
What rebels we have been."

Chapter 23—The HOLINESS of God

“Who is like unto you, O LORD, among the gods? who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11). “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity: wherefore look you upon them that deal treacherously, and hold your tongue when the wicked devours the man that is more righteous than he?” (Habakkuk 1:13).

We are living in a day of mental and moral and spiritual indolence, and therefore a time of superficial thinking in things relating to God and eternal matters. The Divine attributes have been discarded, even in the theological schools, to the junk heap of dry and uninteresting and unprofitable subjects. The feeling largely prevails that the proper study of mankind is man. In the popular mind the God who does wonders is eclipsed by man whose breath is in his nostrils. This is a restless, nervous, and jittery age, and the very atmosphere seems surcharged with enemies to the quiet, meditative, and studious spirit.

THE FUNDAMENTAL OR BASIC ATTRIBUTE

The holiness of God is the purity and rectitude of His nature. He is necessarily and essentially holy. His very being is the sole source and standard of right; therefore, whatever He wills is ethically right. There is no standard for God; He Himself is the standard of holiness. God is under no law of holiness; He Himself is the law of holiness.

The attribute of holiness gives glory and harmony to all the rest of His attributes. Without holiness, wisdom and knowledge would be but craft and cunning. Without holiness, power would be but tyranny, oppression, and cruelty. “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

There is an emphasis given to this attribute above all the other attributes. There are certain attributes we prefer, because of personal benefit derived from them. We esteem God’s love, mercy, and grace before His justice, wrath, and anger. But, in the Bible, the holiness of God has preeminence over all others.

1. No other attribute is spoken of with such solemnity and frequency by the angels: “And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3); “And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8).

2. God singles out this perfection to swear by. “Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David” (Psalm 89:35). “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath” (Hebrews 6:17). Here is a grand argument for the security of the believer: God says, in effect, “I will lay My holiness in pawn for your security. If I fail to keep you safe, then I will cease to be holy.”

God’s holiness is the beauty and glory of His being. He is “glorious in holiness.” “Who is like unto you, O LORD, among the gods? who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11). We also read about the “beauty of holiness.” “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of His holiness.” (1 Chronicles 16:29). “And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endures forever” (2 Chronicles 20:21). “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29:2). When we take a picture of a man we take the most beautiful part, his face, which is the member of the greatest excellence, and that which distinguishes his personality. So when God is pictured in the Bible, He is drawn in this attribute as being the most beautiful perfection. Power is His hand; “The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand” (John 3:35). omniscience His eye; “The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD’S throne is in Heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men” (Psalm 11:4), mercy His affections, “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affections and mercies” (Philippians 2:1), eternity His duration; “For thus says the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isaiah 57:15), and holiness is His beauty. “O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth” (Psalm 96:9). Moral distance from Divine holiness is sin. His holiness is in view when it is said that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). In sinning man was deprived of the glory or holiness of God.

THE HOLY TRINITY

Holiness belongs equally to the three persons of the Godhead, they partake of the same common and undivided nature. The Spirit is usually called the Holy Spirit. Our Lord Jesus Christ addresses the Father under the endearing title of “holy Father”: “And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to you. Holy Father, keep through

your own name those whom you have given me, that they may be one, as we are” (John 17:11). The Lord Jesus is called “the holy One of Israel” more than thirty times in Isaiah alone. “Cry out and shout, you inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of you” (Isaiah 12:6). The devil himself said to Him, “Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with you, you Jesus of Nazareth? are you come to destroy us? I know you who you are, the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24). The Holy Spirit is the Author of holiness in men. Man, in his natural and fallen state, is chaotic morally; his understanding is darkened, “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Ephesians 4:18): and he is spiritually deformed and ugly. The Holy Spirit is the Divine Person who restores to normalcy; He brings order and beauty out of chaos; He dispels the darkness and diffuses spiritual light by means of the gospel. The saved man is indebted to the blessed Holy Spirit for all the light he has on spiritual things. “But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:9-14).

THE MANIFESTATION OF DIVINE HOLINESS

1. The Holiness of God appears in creation. There was not a flaw in creation when it came from His hand. Everything was beautiful and glorious. “And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.” (Genesis 1:31). And again, “The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” (Psalm 145:17). So far as is known there are only two kinds of moral beings: angels and man, and these were created morally holy. But sin has marked and defaced God’s handiwork, so that nothing is like it was when created except, perchance, the holy angels. Man is ruined and fallen, by nature a child of wrath. And the whole creation groans and travails in pain, waiting to be delivered from the curse of sin. “For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now” (Romans 8:22).

2. God is seen in His holiness as a Lawgiver. A holy God gave a law that was just and holy and good. Any other standard for His creatures would be inconsistent with His holiness. We are not commanded to be as wise or powerful as He is, but we are commanded to be as holy as He is holy: “But as he which has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of conversation. Because it is written, Be you holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15,16).

3. There is a display of Divine holiness in redemption. His holy nature will not allow Him to look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. Salvation is not at the expense of His holiness. The Redeemer must bear the wrath due the sinner, for wrath is the exercise of His holiness. God’s hatred of sin was as much manifested in redemption as it will be in judgment. The only difference is that in redemption the guilt of the sinner is transferred to the Savior. The wrath that fell upon the Savior on Calvary had its source in the holiness of God.

4. God’s holiness appears in human conversion. “And that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).

5. Holiness will be displayed in the glorification of the believer. When our salvation is consummated we will be restored to the holiness of God. We will not have His power, nor His wisdom, but we will have His holiness. The Psalmist said, “As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with your likeness” (Psalm 17:15). This likeness will be both moral and physical, and the moral likeness to God will be holiness. The believer, while here on earth, struggling against sin, rejoices in hope of the glory of God. “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:2). Sin is an awful burden to the believer; salvation is the restoration to his original holiness in creation.

6. The holiness of God will appear in all its purity in the day of judgment. Because God is holy, His wrath will be hot. His holy face will be too much for sinners to look upon. “And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:16).

EXHORTATIONS TO HOLINESS

The Scriptures abound in exhortations to holiness. “Because it is written, Be you holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). We are exhorted to lift up holy hands in prayer: “I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8). “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). “Be you therefore followers of God, as dear children” (Ephesians 5:1). All these exhortations to

holiness are addressed to believers, and show that we are not personally 'holy.' "As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with your likeness" (Psalm 17:15). We are holy in Christ now; we will be personally holy when we are glorified, for our glorification will be our personal holiness.

It is a principle of universal recognition that all imitation of others is from an intense love and admiration of their persons. And we become like those with whom we associate. The heathen are so wantonly wicked because their gods are represented as vulgar and wicked. It is said that Plato wanted to have all the poets banished, because, in their poems, they dressed the gods in such wicked and wicked garb, thus encouraging the people to commit crime.

TAKE TIME TO BE HOLY

Believers, in the pursuit of holiness, must take time to meditate upon the holiness of God. "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law does he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:1-2). It takes time to be holy. Sin cannot be banished by a single gesture or an occasional look at the good and beautiful. Meditation upon the holiness of God will develop a spirit of meekness and humility, "But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great of great price." (1 Peter 3:4). Comparing ourselves with ourselves may lead to pride and boastfulness, but when we are occupied with thoughts of the holiness of our Savior we will be filled with reverence and godly fear. "What torch can be proud of its own light when compared with the light of the sun?"

The temple of Incas at Cuzco, Peru, consisted of three walls, north, south, and west. The eastern side of the structure was open. The walls were smoothly plastered, and overlaid with finely hammered gold. These people were sun worshipers, and this was the way they worshiped: they would come to the temple just before dawn and stand in the opening to the east, facing the western wall. In front of them and on either side was a golden mirror. The sun would rise at their backs, and long before they could see it directly they could see its reflection in the western wall, and be covered with its golden light. Their faces would be illuminated, and their bodies would be literally bathed in light. Now the Gospel covenant is a mirror into which the believer looks with unveiled face at the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and ultimately will be entirely conformed to His image. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Occupation with the holiness of the Lord will change us from one degree of holiness to another degree of Holiness." and the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may establish your hearts unblamably in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13). "For God has not called us unto impurity, but unto holiness." (1 Thessalonians 4:7). "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14)

"Holy God, we praise Your name!
Lord of all, we bow before Thee;
All on earth Your scepter claim,
All in Heaven above adore Thee;
Infinite Your vast domain,
Everlasting is Your reign.

"Hark! the loud celestial hymn,
Angel choirs above are raising:
Cherubim and Seraphim
In unceasing chorus praising,
Fill the heavens with sweet accord
Holy! holy! holy! Lord!

"Holy Father, Holy Son,
Holy Spirit, three we name Thee,
While in essence, only one,
Undivided God, we claim Thee;
And, adoring, bend the knee,
While we own the mystery."

Chapter 24—The PROVIDENCE of God

Polytheism, Tritheism, Dualism, Monotheism, and Atheism are religious terms to express the varying beliefs of humanity about God. Polytheism is the doctrine of many gods; tri-theism is the belief that there are three gods; dualism is the teaching that the universe is under the dominion of two opposing forces or principles; monotheism is the belief in one God; and atheism is the teaching that there is no God at all. These varying beliefs witness to the sad fact of human depravity, and prove that the human mind is in a state of darkness concerning the true God. If I, myself, were not a Christian with the Bible, I would probably be a dualist. I look about me and see a world of conflict. I see two opposing forces, one good and the other evil. Or I might be an atheist as a result of pure reason, for there really seems to be no Supreme Being. Nobody appears to be in control, but there seems to be many powers competing for dominion. On every hand when people begin to reason, independent of the Scriptures, they ask, If there is a God, who is good and almighty, why does He allow things to be as they are? Why does He not triumph over evil? Why does He not kill the devil? Why does He not stop this war? and so on, ad infinitum.

The Christian believes what he does because he has the Bible and a certain inward experience. And God is the Author of both. The Bible is God's objective or external revelation, and the experience is God's subjective or internal revelation.

The Bible without this inward experience (truth in the inward parts) will not make one a Christian. On the other hand a religious experience which is out of harmony with the Bible is both false and dangerous. Saul of Tarsus was religious long before he became a Christian, and thought that he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus Christ. People may be subject to evil spirits as well as to the Holy Spirit. Paul judged the Thessalonians to be the elect of God, : "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance; as you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." (1 Thessalonians 1:5). As a Christian with the Bible, I am a monotheist, a believer in the one true and living God who is absolutely supreme. The monotheistic religions are the Jewish, the Mohammedan, and the Christian, and all three have at least a part of the Bible. Thus it appears that no people will be monotheistic without the Bible. Man is a religious being by intuition, but he is not a believer in one God by intuition. The idea of one God is a revealed doctrine, found only in the Bible. The cultured and educated Athenians of Paul's day believed in a plurality of gods. And many of the self-styled intelligentsia of this century have gone to the opposite extreme and contend there is no God at all. So without the Bible and a God wrought experience men range in their beliefs all the way from many gods to no God.

WHO IS RUNNING THIS WORLD?

There are four distinct views of the happenings of this world, four theories of how things come to pass. There is the view that things come to pass according to a fixed law, called the law of nature. Those who hold this view are rationalists, and refuse to believe anything that cannot be explained on natural grounds. Their so-called faith is the result of looking through a microscope or examining a test tube. Then there is the view that things happen by a sort of chance. According to this view there is nothing fixed or certain; one thing is as likely to happen as another. There is the third position that everything comes to pass by a cold, impersonal force called fate. And finally there is the Christian view that things come to pass by the Providence of God. According to this view the Creator is also the Administrator.

DEFINITION

Providence may be defined as God's government of His creation. The government of God in the affairs of the world is a subject of deep importance to the Christian, for by proper views of Providence the believer will learn to look for and will be able to see God's hand and heart in all his experiences. He will not talk like the uncircumcised Philistine when they said, "it was a chance that happened to us." (1 Samuel 6:9); but with Job "And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

God is not idle. The Savior said, "My Father works hitherto and I work" (John 5:17). God is the one person always on the job. He is not like the football squad that must take time out to rest and plan the next day. He is not like the tired farmer who must sleep and eat to recuperate strength for another days work. He is not like the prize fighter who must go to hi corner between rounds to be worked over and patched up. Our God knows nothing of weariness and emergencies. "Have you not known? have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding" (Isaiah 40:28). He is never at wits end; He always knows what to do, and how to do it, and when to do it. He is the one and only person qualified to govern and control His creation.

There are a lot of people who might think that God is doing a bad job in governing this world. Men might propose a lot of changes. Some may think the present situation calls for a new deal. Some might suggest that God kill the devil, and put

men like Hitler and other war lords out of the way and replace them with peace loving men. If God is the Almighty and in control, He could easily do any one or all of these things. But He will not be dictated to; "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1:11).

If God is not running this world, who is? If we judge by sight, by appearances, we might think the devil is running things. From another view it appears that the politicians are in command; or, since there are so many "rackets" in the world, it might seem that the racketeer are in the saddle. There is no doubt but that Hitler meant to rule this world, and make all countries contribute to his personal glory, and to the good of his so called superior race. Obviously there is a lot of competition among men for positions of authority. The lust for power is everywhere evident. Now it is freely admitted that Satanic and human agencies have their place and do their work, but over and above all, God is on the throne, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise you: the remainder of wrath shall you restrain" (Psalm 76:10). Men rule; God overrules. Men turn; God overturns.

If He who created the world is not running it, why isn't He? It must be either because He does not want to, or is unable to. The thinking man will have to admit that God is running the world; otherwise He has either lost interest in it or control over it. Men manufacture articles and lose control over them. A man may be killed in an airplane he builds. He may be poisoned by a medicine he compounds. A mother may be disgraced by a daughter or son born to her. But God is in no danger from His creation. He cannot be disgraced by His creatures, while all who oppose Him will sooner or later find themselves in disgrace and forever ruined.

THE KIND OF WORLD GOD IS RUNNING

It will help us to understand and appreciate Divine Providence if we will take a look at the world God is governing. It has a devil in it, and the devil is more popular with the citizens of this world than is God the Creator. Satan is called the God of this age, and the prince of this world. In the very dawn of human history our first parents deliberately and of their own accord rebelled against the will of God and became the devil's ally. "And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where are you? And he said, I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded you that you should not eat?" (Genesis 3:8-11). They transferred their allegiance from the God of truth to the father of lies. The Lord Jesus told the hypocrites of His day that they were of their father the devil, and were doing his will. "In whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

It must be remembered that the devil operates through Divine sufferance. He is only tolerated not endorsed by God. His activities are circumscribed and ordained for Divine ends. He had to get Divine permission before he could afflict Job, "Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Does Job fear God for nought? And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself put not forth your hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD" (Job 1:9,12), or sift Peter, "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31).

The world God is running is filled with depraved men and women. Every man, apart from inwrought grace, is an enemy of God. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). None but the born again people are lovers of the true God: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He who loves not knows not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7,8). Now listen to the lips of incarnate truth: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands defiles not a man" (Matthew 15:19,20).

The world God is running is overrun by fallen angels or demon spirits. "How are you fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how are you cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations!" (Isaiah 14:12). "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;" (2 Peter 2:4). "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that you should have fellowship with devils" (1 Corinthians 10:20). "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:11,12).

Now we should be able to understand that God is not running this world as He would run it if there were nobody in it but good people, people in love with Him, and delight to do His will. Our prisons are not run like our children's homes. Earth is not run like Heaven, although God is running both places.

THE NATURE OF PROVIDENCE

1. IT IS MYSTERIOUS.

Everything seems to be in disorder and confusion. As we look at the world we see conflict and there seems to be no plan or order. The world appears to be one vast battle field of conflicting wills and opposing forces. There seems to be no order in the movement of bees to and from the hive, but examine the honey and you will see plan and arrangement and order. And just as bees gather their stores of sweets against a time of need, but are colonized by man for his own good; so men plan and work and yet are overruled by the infinite wisdom of God to His praise and glory.

God tells us that we cannot understand His dealings with us. "There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God" (Romans 3:11). The psalmist says that the judgments of God are a great Deep. "Your righteousness is like the great mountains; your judgments are a great deep: O LORD, you preserve man and beast" (Psalm 36:6). Paul declares "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" (Romans 11:33). Providence is mysterious and perplexing because the God of Providence is incomprehensible to finite minds, and therefore His ways are too deep for us to understand. We must take Him at His word and I believe that He is too wise to err, and too good to afflict His children without a reason. This is a time of perplexity and many hearts are crying out, "Why doesn't God do something?"

Well, dear heart, God is doing something, but we can't understand His ways. We have to walk by faith that He does all things well. Remember, dear reader, that God keeps the key to all life's problems.

"Is there some problem in your life to solve,
Some passage seeming full of mystery?
God knows, who brings the hidden things to sight.
He keeps the key.

"Is there some door closed by the Father's hand
Which widely opened you had hoped to see?
Trust God and wait for when He shuts the door
He keeps the key.

"Is there some earnest prayer unanswered yet,
Or answered NOT as you had hoped 'Would be?
God will make clear His purpose by and by.
He keeps the key."

2. PROVIDENCE IS MINUTE.

It covers all things, little things as well as great things. Providence has been defined as God's attention concentrated everywhere. Man is finite and has such limitations that he can only concentrate his attention on one thing and in one place; God is infinite in space and power and wisdom and can concentrate on everything in every place. His providence is microscopic as well as telescopic. God is interested in the hairs of our head, and in the fall of the little sparrow. A preacher once remarked to his congregation, that the Bible said the hairs of their heads were numbered, but he was afraid some of them did not even think their heads were numbered.

2a) God is in control of inanimate matter. Scriptures abound in illustrations of this. "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). "And God said, Let the waters under the Heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so" (Genesis 1:9). At God's word the waters of the Red Sea were divided and stood up in walls; "And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left" (Exodus 14:22); at His word they came together again. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen" (Exodus 14:26). At God's word the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up Korah and his rebellious partners. "And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and

the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation” (Numbers 16:32,33). At His word the fires of Babylon’s furnace were rendered harmless to His faithful servants. “Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spoke, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was accustomed to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace” (Daniel 3:19,20). The very elements are under His control. He sends the rain. “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from Heaven, and returns not thither, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater” (Isaiah 55:10). He calls for a famine. “And the famine was sore in the land” (Genesis 43:1). He withholds the harvest, “For these two years has the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be plowing nor harvest” (Genesis 45:6), or gives abundance at His will. “And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (Genesis 45:7).

2b) God has control over irrational creatures. He formed the beasts of the field and brought them to Adam to be named. “And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the bird of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:20). He caused two of every unclean animal to come to Noah into the ark, to perpetuate their kind in the earth; and seven pairs of clean beasts, that Noah might have sufficient for sacrifice. “Of every clean beast you shall take to you by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of birds also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth...There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah” (Genesis 7:2-3,9.) God’s control over irrational life was manifested in the plagues visited upon Egypt. “And the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt” (Exodus 7:21). At His biddings swarms of flies invaded the homes of the Egyptians, “And the LORD did so; and there came a grievous swarm of flies into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants’ houses, and into all the land of Egypt: the land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of flies” (Exodus 8:24), while none came into the homes of the Israelites. “And I will put a division between my people and your people: tomorrow shall this sign be” (Exodus 8:23). At His will Egypt was plagued with frogs and locusts. Daniel was cast into the den of lions, “Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spoke and said unto Daniel, Your God whom you serve continually, he will deliver you” (Daniel 6:16), but God locked their jaws and Daniel was not devoured. “My God has sent his angel, and has shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocence was found in me; and also before you, O king, have I done no hurt” (Daniel 6:22). God opened the mouth of the donkey to rebuke Balaam, “and the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto you, that you have smitten me these three times?” (Numbers 22:28). Jonah did not want to be a foreign missionary, so he took a ship to Tarshish; “But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD” (John 1:3). God sent a great wind that rocked the boat, “But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken” (John 1:4), and when the sailors threw Jonah overboard, “So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging” (John 1:15). God had a big fish ready for Jonah. “Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (John 1:17). He caused the fish to vomit up Jonah just as it reached the shore. “And the LORD spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land” (John 2:10). At God’s will the rooster crowed three times just when the Lord told Peter it would, “Jesus said unto him, Truly I say unto you, That this night, before the rooster crow, you shall deny me thrice” (Matthew 26:34). “The LORD has prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19).

2c) God’s control extends to men, all men, both good and bad. We have no trouble in seeing that God is in control of the good; “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). The difficult thing for many is to see that He reigns everywhere; “And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto you: for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” (1 Samuel 8:7); that He is in control over the wicked as well as the good. God allows sin because He is able to overrule it for His own glory. God is not the author of sin, but He is the Controller and Director of it.

Augustine has a very helpful word on this point: “Men’s sin proceeds from themselves; that in sinning they perform this or that action, is from God who divides the darkness according to His pleasure.”

God is not the causative force, but the directing force in the sins of men. Men are rebellious, but are not out from under the control of God. God’s decrees are not the necessitating cause of the sins of men, but the foredetermined and prescribed boundings and directings of men’s sinful acts. “You men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves also

know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:22,23).

An English brother, Percy W. Heard, puts the truth clearly. He says: “The wishes of sin are the wishes of man; Man is guilty; man is to be blamed. But the all wise God prevents those wishes from producing actions indiscriminately. He compels those wishes to take a certain Divinely narrowed course. The floods of iniquity are from the hearts of men, but they are not allowed to cover the land; they are shut up to the channel of God’s sovereign appointment, and men unwittingly are thus held in bounds, so that not one iota of God’s purpose shall fail. He brings the floods of the ungodly into the channel of His providence to turn the mill of His purpose.”

A PRACTICAL AND COMFORTING DOCTRINE

It is a joy to know that God, our Heavenly Father, is ruling this world. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). This truth would not be possible were He not in control. He can and does assure His children that all things work together for their good;

“The world is wide in time and tide,
and God is guide;
Then do not hurry.

“The man is blessed who does his best,
and leaves the rest;
Then do not worry.”

Let us take another illustration: Here is a farmer who has an artesian well on his place, a huge stream of water that will ruin his place if left alone to spread itself over the farm. There must be a channel for that water to flow through or it must be capped and the water checked. This well can be made an asset if the water can be controlled. He decides to make a channel for that water; he will control it and make that which would injure him to serve him. So he runs a pipe line from that well to his house and with the turn of a faucet he gets water for cooking and drinking and bath. He runs another line to the barn and with the turn of a spigot waters hundreds of cattle and hogs. He runs another line to his grove and keeps it in excellent condition in time of drought. Wherever he needs water he runs a line to it from that well. Now, the human heart is an artesian well of sin. If God did not control it, it would destroy His purpose and overthrow His government. So He makes it run through channels of His purpose. And that which He does not turn to His glory, He holds back. “Surely the wrath of man shall praise you: the remainder of wrath shall you restrain” (Psalm 76:10).

One pipe line from the well of sin ran to Calvary. Human sin is seen at its worst when wicked men nailed the Lord of glory to the tree of the cross. And yet God’s purpose was fulfilled. The death of God’s sinless Son required a terrible amount of sin, but the carnal mind that hates God was equal to it. So God turned human hatred in that direction. He fixed all the details about the death of Christ. “Who has believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he has no form nor loveliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief: when you shall make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he has poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:1-12). He was to be crucified between two wicked men. “Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst” (John 19:18). His garments were to be divided among the soldiers, His vesture was to be the prize in gambling, “And they crucified him, and parted

his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots” (Matthew 27:35). “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” (Psalm 22:18). He was to be given vinegar with gall to drink, “They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink” (Matthew 27:34). His bones were not to be broken and it all came to pass just as it had been Divinely planned and predicted. “For of a truth against your holy child Jesus, whom you have anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatever your hand and your counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:27,28). What a motley and mighty crowd! And yet all they could do was what God had predestined to be done.

Yes, dear child of God, our Father rules. Our times are in His hand, so that we can say with the poet:

“Yes, leave it with Him;
The lilies all do,
And they grow
They grow in the rain,
And they grow in the dew
Yes, they grow:
They grow in the darkness, all hid in the night
They grew in the sunshine, revealed by the light
Still, they grow.

“Yes, leave it with Him,
‘Tis more dear to His heart,
You will know,
Than the lilies that bloom,
Or the flowers that start
‘Neath the snow:
Whatever you need, if you seek it in prayer,
You can leave it with Him, for you are His care
You, you know.”

Chapter 25—The PROVIDENCE of God

(Concluded)

In the preceding chapter we sought to define and explain Divine Providence, and to show that God is reigning in every place and over everything.

God rested from His work of creation, not because He was tired, but because He was satisfied with His work and could pronounce everything good. “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made” (Genesis 2:1-2). His rest did not mean cessation from work, but satisfaction with His work. Since creation He has been at work in sustaining and administering the affairs of His creation. “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17); “Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3); “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1:11).

THE TWO ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

If God is not running the world, it is either because He does not wish to or because He is not able to. Let us examine these two alternatives separately.

1. If God does not wish to run the world it means that He has lost interest in it, and the world may be considered an abandoned project. To such a premise no believer can subscribe. The voice of Scripture is against such an idea. God would not give His Son to die for a world He had no interest in.

2. The view that God is not able to run the world is also unreasonable in the light of Scripture. We believe, however, this to be the position many people take, and it is because they do not know or do not believe in the God of the Bible. How often we hear people talk about God trying to do this and trying to do that! This view puts God in the position of a boy with a pair of runaway horses. Any boy who has had horses to run away with him knows what a feeling of helplessness came over him. Now the Scriptures do not at all, in any sense, represent God as distracted and helpless. “He is able, “is the happy refrain of Scripture.

The three Hebrew worthies, when facing the wrath of a heathen king, said: “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king” (Daniel 3:17).

“And when he (Darius) came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spoke and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is your God, whom you serve continually, able to deliver you from the lions?” (Daniel 6:20). And from the den of lions, Daniel answered and said, “My God has sent his angel, and has shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before you, O king, have I done no hurt” (Daniel 6:22).

To those Jews who thought natural kinship to Abraham was all they needed, the Lord Jesus said, “And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (Matthew 3:9).

To the Ephesian elders at Miletus, Paul said, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

James tells us that: “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who are you that judge another?” (James 4:12).

In beautiful blessing Jude says; “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 1:24,25).

Either of the two alternatives makes prayer useless. There is no use praying to a God who has no interest in His creation, nor to a God who is helpless to deliver us.

HOW IS GOD GOVERNING THE WORLD?

In running the world God is not openly and publicly manifesting Himself. He is running the world in Providence and Providence is secret and mysterious.

1. In running the world God is giving the devil an opportunity to reveal himself and to show what he would do if he could.

What would the devil do if he were able? He would do exactly what he has tried to do. He has tried to usurp the place and prerogatives of God in government. In the long ago, he said, "For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into Heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north" (Isaiah 14:13). Satan was perhaps the most beautiful and most exalted being in the original creation. If anybody should have been satisfied with his place and position it was he. But he was lifted up with pride because of his beauty and craved more authority. He had a lust for power and sought to seize the reins of government in his own hands.

2. In Providence God is allowing man to reveal himself and show what he would do if he had the power. What has man tried to do? He has followed the example of Satan and has tried to be like God in the matter of authority. In the garden of Eden there were two trees which stood as symbols of two very important truths. There was the tree of life, "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Genesis 3:22). symbolizing the truth that man is not self-sufficient, that he is dependent upon God for everything; and there was the tree of knowledge of good and evil, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17), symbolizing the truth that man is not sovereign, that he is not allowed to do as he pleases, that he cannot determine for himself what is right and what is wrong, but that God's word is to determine that. That tree stood as a solemn reminder that God is Lord of creation. God determined what Adam and Eve could have, not they themselves. God had said, You may have this, but you must not eat that. Your life and happiness will depend upon obedience to my word.

Now, Satan came into the garden and told Eve that God had lied; "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yes, has God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1); that the truth was, that to do what God had forbidden would mean their good, that to eat the fruit would mean opened eyes (eyes of the understanding), so that they could know for themselves what was right and what was wrong. They would no longer be tied to God's word about the question of good and evil. He told Eve they would become as gods, knowing (determining) what is good and what is evil.

We are told that Eve was deceived by Satan. She believed his lie and trespassed on God's authority. She believed that great benefit would come from eating the forbidden fruit. Here is the divine record of the first human sin: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (Genesis 3:6). From this simple but tragic story we get a definition of sin. Sin is entering into competition with God for authority. John says that sin is the transgression of the law of God, and the law of God is His word on any and every subject. Sin is setting God's word aside as the law of my life, and doing what I please. After the fatal step had been taken by Adam and Eve, "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know (determine) good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever:" (Genesis 3:22). This can only mean that man had become like God in spirit and aim. He had the spirit of independency and aimed to compete with God for sovereignty and do that which was right in his own eyes; moreover, he would determine for himself what was right.

How often we hear some person ask, "What is the harm of it?" or say, "I do not see any harm in it," "when the thing referred to is expressly forbidden in God's Word. Why was it wrong for Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? Only because God had said "you shall not eat of it." What harm was there in Moses striking the rock at Kadesh? It was wrong only because God had told him to speak to the rock. "And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather you the assembly together, you, and Aaron your brother, and speak you unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and you shall bring forth to them water out of the rock: so you shall give the congregation and their beasts drink.. .And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also" (Numbers 20:7,8,11). What was wrong with Uzzah putting forth his hand to stay the ark, and keep it from falling off the cart? "And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God" (2 Samuel 6:6-7). It was wrong only because God had said that only the priests were to carry the ark, and no human hands were to touch it. What was the harm of King Saul sparing Agag, and the best of the sheep when he destroyed the Amalekites? "But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly." (1 Samuel 15:9). It was wrong only because God had commanded otherwise. And so when Saul offered the excuse that he had saved the sheep and oxen to sacrifice unto the Lord, "And Samuel said, Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." (1 Samuel 15:22). Insofar as assigning any reason for them, many of God's commandments are arbitrary, that is, they have their source in the sovereign pleasure of God. To be sure, God has a reason for all He commands, but as an absolute Sovereign He is under no necessity to make them known to His creatures.

PROVIDENCE IS PREVENTIVE

In governing the world God prevents much sin which would otherwise be committed. When we think about the awful amount of sin, and the terrible degree to which sin has gone, and the awful effects of sin, we are apt to think that it would be impossible to draw any more or any worse sins from the heart, the fountain of sin. But God does exert a restraining influence on the wicked so that they do not commit all the sins possible to them. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise you: the remainder of wrath shall you restrain" (Psalm 76:10). To Abimelech He said, "And God said unto him in a dream, Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart; for I also withheld you from sinning against me: therefore suffered I you not to touch her" (Genesis 20:6). If this heathen king had been left to his own heart's lust, he would have harmed Sarah. A young man, holding an important position and handling much money, was tempted to take a large sum with seemingly no danger of detection; it would be the perfect crime. But on the very day he planned to take the money he found a card on his desk, saying "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust does corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal" (Matthew 6:19). He was stopped cold in his plan, and always regarded the incident as an act of Providence to keep him from taking the money. And, no doubt, the reader as well as the writer can think of times when he, too, was restrained from executing the designs of his heart.

PROVIDENCE IS PERMISSIVE

God permits sinful men to manifest the evil of their hearts. In II Chronicles 32:31, we are told that God left Hezekiah: "Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." In Psalm 81:12,13, we find God speaking concerning Israel: "So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!" Also: "Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16); "Wherefore God also gave them up to impurity through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves:... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Romans 1:24,28). A woman, who had been slandered, protested when told that God had permitted it for her good. She maintained that Satan had inspired her accuser. But she needed to learn that God had permitted the work of Satan.

PROVIDENCE IS DIRECTIVE

God directs the sinful acts of evil men to the accomplishment of His own purpose. When God permits the evil in the human heart to come out, He directs its flow in one direction rather than another for the fulfillment of His purpose. In this way sinful acts of men become the holy acts of God. Joseph's brethren sinned in selling him into slavery, but because of an overruling Providence, he could and did say to them: "So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 45:8). That which made their act a sinful act was their motive. Joseph says to

them again: "But as for you, you thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

PROVIDENCE IS DETERMINATIVE

God determines the bounds reached by the evil passions of His creatures and the measure of their affects. God set the bounds to which Satan could go in afflicting Job. "And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself put not forth your hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD." (Job 1:12). And to Satan's second challenge concerning Job, God said, "Behold, he is in your hand; but save his life" (Job 2:6). This illustrates what we have in I Corinthians 10:13: "There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it."

THE DIVINE OBJECTIVE

What is the Divine objective or purpose in administration? To what end is God running the world? For whose pleasure and profit is the world being governed? What will be the ultimate and manifest results of God's government?

NEGATIVELY

1. The objective in Divine Providence is not the pleasure and profit of the devil. If we take a short sighted view of the happenings of this world we might think that God is catering to the devil; that His policy toward the devil is one of appeasement. The devil does seem to have a lot of power. Peter likens him to a roaring lion in search of prey. He does seem to be enjoying much success. But look at his latter end, and it will be seen that God is not governing for his pleasure and profit. Go to a farm and look at a pen of fattening hogs. It might seem that the whole farm is being run for the benefit of those hogs. They have nothing to do but eat and rest, they have all that a hog can want. But follow those same hogs to the abattoir and your view will be corrected.

2. Nor is the world being run for the good of humanity as such. God is making all things work together for the good of His people, but not for the sake of humanity as a whole. Let us face some facts: millions of people are born in poverty, live in poverty, die in poverty, and will spend eternity in the poverty of Hell. And again: millions are born in sin, live in sin, die in sin, and will spend eternity in the Hell of sin. We make so bold as to say, that if God is running the world for the good of humanity, He is a colossal failure. Think of the millions of young men under arms today, not of their own choosing, but because of circumstances beyond their control. God's objective is not human happiness. If it were there would be no bombed and burning cities; there would be no wailing women, starving and crying children, bleeding and dying men on a thousand battlefields.

POSITIVELY

God is governing the world for the highest good; for the greatest and noblest objective. What is the highest good? What is the greatest objective possible? What is the most important thing in the universe? Who is the most important being in the universe? These questions will put us on the right track for the answer to our query, or search for the Divine objective.

1. The highest good is not the pleasure and profit of the devil. He is the enemy of God and of the good. He is not the most important person, and his welfare is not even a part of the Divine objective.

2. The highest good is not the welfare of the human race. Man is the acme of creation, but as compared with God "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he does according to his will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What do you?" (Daniel 4:35). Paul, speaking of himself and Apollos as workmen of God, confessed they were nothing: "So then neither is he who plants anything, neither he who waters; but God that giveth the increase." (1 Corinthians 3:7).

3. The highest good, the greatest possible objective in Divine government is the glory of God. We reach this conclusion by following two lines of approach: first, the duty of man, and second, the testimony of Scripture.

3a) The chief duty of man must be the same as the Divine objective. What God demands of man is equal to what He aims at in government. God would not require one thing from man and pursue another end or objective in His administration. To illustrate: Our government demands from its citizens an all-out effort for victory in this war, and what the government demands from its subjects is exactly what the government has for its objective: the winning of the war. Now the chief duty of man is to glorify God. "Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31). "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Colossians 3:23); "For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:20). We are to put God first in our prayers. His glory comes before our needs. "After this manner therefore pray you: Our Father which are in Heaven, Hallowed be your name" (Matthew 6:9).

3b) The Scriptures declare the Divine objective in running the world to be the glory of God. "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for you have created all things, and for your pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11), tells us that all things exist for the pleasure of God. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36) gives us this truth in marvelous language. Weymouth translates it like this: "For all proceeds from Him, and exists by Him, and for Him. To Him be the glory forever! Amen." :Dr. Robertson, in his "Word Pictures," says, "By these three prepositions Paul ascribes the universe (ta panta) with all the phenomena concerning creation, redemption, providence to God, as the source (ex), the agent (di), the goal (His)." He also says that Alford terms this doxology in verses 33 to 36 "the sublimest apostrophe existing even in the pages of inspiration itself."

God is the one and only person in all the universe who has the right to act for His own glory. His glory is the rule of all His actions, and His glory is the rule of human conduct. Yes, the chief duty of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Salvation is not primarily for our good, but for His glory. In Ephesians 1:6 we read, "Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ". And in Ephesians 1:11,12: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will. That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ." God is saving

sinner that He might exhibit the trophies of His grace to an onlooking universe in the ages to come: "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

If the writer knows his heart at all, there are two things he is eminently satisfied with. First, he is satisfied with what Jesus Christ did at Calvary, when He put away the guilt of our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. We are satisfied with it because we believe God was satisfied with it. We own no theory of the atonement except the "satisfaction theory," by whatever name it may be called. Second, we are satisfied with the providence of God in our life. The road has not always been plain nor pleasant, but we believe His way has been profitable for us.

"God holds the key
If all unknown,
And I am glad,
And I am glad.

If other hands should hold the key,
Or if He trusted it to me,
I might be sad,
I might be sad.

"What if tomorrow's cares were here
Without its rest,
Without its rest?
I'd rather He'd unlock the day,
And, as the hours swing open, say,
My will be best,
My will be best.

"The very dimness of my sight
Makes me secure,
Makes me secure.
For, groping in my misty way,
I feel His hand; I hear Him say,
My help is sure,
My help is sure.

"I cannot read His future plan,
But this I know,
But this I know:
I have the smiling of His face,
And all the refuge of His grace,
While here below,
While here below.

"Enough this covers all my need,
And so I rest,
And so I rest;
For, where I cannot, He can see,
And in His care I safe shall be,
Forever blessed,
Forever blessed."

Chapter 26—The SILENCE of God

“And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled” (Revelation 6:10,11).

“Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him” (Psalm 50:3).

The first of the foregoing passages gives us the cry of martyred souls John saw under the altar in the heavenly temple. Their appeal is for justice against their murderers. Here is proof that the soul does not lie in unconscious sleep during the intermediate state. These souls are conscious. They cry for Judgment to fall upon the earth.

In response to their cry, they are given white robes, indicating that they are justified in their desire for vengeance on the wicked. While on earth the saint is to pray for his enemies, but after death he may pray against them. These martyred souls are told that they must rest until the martyrdom of all the others, who are to be killed, shall have been accomplished. All this indicates that this dispensation of mercy is to end in bitter persecution of the people of God. It would seem that there are days of martyrdom ahead for the saints as well as behind. And nobody knows when he may be called upon to seal his faith with his blood. Who knows but that in the near future some governmental decree might put us to the test as to whether we will obey God or man?

The second text is a sequel to the first. It points to the time when the cry of the martyr is heard and vengeance is executed. “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him” (Psalm 50:3). It looks to the time when the longsuffering of God is at an end, and Christ comes in judgment, “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

THE PROBLEM OF A SILENT GOD

By the silence of God we mean that God is not openly and publicly manifesting Himself as in other days. By the silence of God we mean that God is not performing public miracles as of old. Webster defines a miracle as “an event which cannot be accounted for as produced by any of the known forces of nature and which is therefore attributed to a supernatural force.” And by a “public miracle” we mean an event that demonstrates, beyond dispute, the existence of a personal God. Sir Robert Anderson has said that “Since apostolic times, the finger of God has never been openly at work upon the earth, never once has a public miracle been witnessed, nor a single public event to compel the belief that there is a God at all.”

A silent Heaven is the greatest mystery of our existence. A silent Heaven is the greatest trial of the faith of the saint. The atheist does not believe in the possibility of miracles because he does not believe in the existence of a personal and powerful God. The believer’s problem is the absence of miracles. As a believer in a personal and powerful and loving Heavenly Father he cannot understand why miracles are not common today.

If there is a God why does He allow things to be as they are? Why does He not step in and put down all the wrong and rebellion that covers the face of the earth? Why does He suffer the wicked to oppress the righteous? If there is an almighty God, why doesn’t He do something? is the despairing cry of many a mother whose son wades the mud and fights on foreign soil. How is the existence of a good and powerful God consistent with such a long period of silence in the face of the defiance of His enemies and the cries of His people? If there is a personal and all-powerful God, why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper? In the face of these questions the infidel plies his trade and the believer is filled with anxiety and perplexity.

In the days of Moses God was so manifestly at work in performing miracles that even the wicked magicians of Egypt had to confess, “Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said” (Exodus 8:19). And in the days of our Lord’s earthly ministry miracles were common and were not even disputed by His enemies. Christ’s miracles made Him famous, but they won no genuine converts. “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him:” (John 12:37). “Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did” (John 2:23). Those who believed because of what they saw could not be trusted. Miracles continued through the days of the apostles, but became less common towards the close of the apostolic age. The gift of miracles, was sovereignly bestowed upon and distributed among the members of the early churches.

NO PUBLIC MIRACLES TODAY

It is obvious that we do not have public miracles today at least in such unmistakable manner as in ancient times. I know there are people today who claim to be able to perform miracles of healing and talking (their claims are usually limited to these two things), but there is something so manifestly lacking in their so called miracles that their claims are not above suspicion. And when they are investigated there is room for question, which was not the case in the days of Christ and the apostles.

There is a problem in the silence of God. When Peter was in jail waiting to be executed, God sent an angel to deliver him. "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed" (Acts 16:26). And Paul was miraculously delivered at Philippi. But since those days millions of saints have been martyred, and their cries for deliverance have not been answered. The heavens above them have been as brass.

"And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). God accepted the proud monarch's challenge and demonstrated His power over him in terrible judgments; but in these days men challenge and even ridicule the very idea of a personal God; and Heaven says not a word. Charles Smith, and other theoretical atheists have just about used up all the bad words in decrying religion, denying God, and heaping abase upon the Bible; and to all their bombast God is silent.

THE EXPLANATION OF A SILENT GOD

God's silence in the face of defiant foes, challenging Him to combat, can be explained. God's silence to the cries of His helpless children does have an explanation. What is it?

NEGATIVELY ANSWERED:

1. It is not because God is helpless. He is never helpless, in the face of opposition. There are no crises with Him. "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desires, even that he does" (Job 23:13). He is able to deliver His children from every danger.

We can sing in all faith:

"Tis the grandest theme through the ages rung;
Tis the grandest theme for a mortal tongue;
Tis the grandest theme that the world e'er sung,
'Our God is able to deliver you."

2. It is not because He does not care. The Heavenly Father is the wisest and best of all fathers. He never makes any mistakes in the care of His children. "Casting all your care upon him; for he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). When we cry to Him in our troubles, and He does not give us what we ask for, we must not think that He does not care. It is because He does care for us that He does not always give us what we ask for. He is wiser than we are in asking. It is our love and interest in our own children that keeps us from giving them all they want. When we are sick and beg God to heal us and He does not do it, we may be sure that it is better for us to be sick. God teaches us some things on the sick bed that we cannot learn while well. Some lessons are better learned on the back than on the feet. The Bible is a sweeter Book in the sick room than in the workshop. If we pray to be delivered from our enemies and He does not deliver us, it is in order that we may hear Him say, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:10). The greatest homage which wickedness can pay to righteousness is to persecute it. It is a gift from God to be allowed to suffer for His Name. "Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matthew 5:11). Spurgeon writes: "Not because of any personal fault, but simply on account of their godly character, the Lord's Daniels are hated: but they are blessed by that which looks like a curse."

3. It is not because God does not know. The omniscience of God is one of the sweetest attributes to the believer. One of the sweetest psalms of David is the one hundred and thirty ninth in which he celebrates the omniscience of God: "O LORD, you have searched me, and known me. You know my down sitting and mine uprising, you understand my thought afar off. You compass my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, you know it altogether. You have beset me behind and before, and laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Where shall I go from your spirit? or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, you are there: if I make my bed in Hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall your hand lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yes, the

darkness hides not from you; but the night shines as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to you. For you have possessed my reins: you have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise you; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are your works; and that my soul knows right well. My substance was not hid from you, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in your book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with you. Surely you will slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, you bloody men. For they speak against you wickedly, and your enemies take your name in vain. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate you? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against you?

I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Here is a good way to test my spirituality. Am I glad that God knows all about me? It does make me happy to know that He knows how I hate sin and struggle against it. He knows that His people are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). Yes, He will fill us with goodness, for He Himself created this hunger within us. Some sweet day every saint will be as good as he wants to be.

4. God's silence does not mean that He has vacated His throne. God is still on His throne. He is still reigning, and working all things after the counsel of His own will. But He is not ruling openly and publicly. He is staging the drama of human history from behind the scenes. His reign is secret rather than public. He rules through Providence and Providence is always mysterious. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" (Romans 11:33). The finger of God is at work today, but the world does not see it. He is performing miracles today, but not of a public character.

5. God's silence is not due to the lack of faith on the part of His people. This is not the reason for the absence of public miracles today. We are often told that if God's people had the faith of Peter and Paul and other early saints, that miracles would be as common now as then. We do not believe it. We are not arguing that any of us has the faith he ought to have, but this is not the reason for lack of miracles. Miracles were limited to the time of witnessing to Israel as a nation, and when the nation was turned from and the Gentiles were turned to, miracles ceased. Miracles were for the purpose of accrediting Christ to the Jews as their Messiah. Miracles were Christ's credentials to His people Israel. We give one incident to illustrate this: "And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If you will, you can make me clean...And says unto him, See you say nothing to any man: but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them" (Mark 1:40,44). In this way he would be witnessing to the nation, through its priesthood, that there was one among them who could cure leprosy, and therefore, must be their Messiah. In spite of all the miracles, attesting the presence of their Messiah, the nation rejected Christ in His personal ministry and in the ministry of His apostles and then public miracles ceased.

THE QUESTION POSITIVELY ANSWERED:

1. The nature of God's work in this age does not require open and public miracles. If it did we may be sure that He would perform them. He is just as able to perform miracles by the hand of His servants today as when He performed them by the hands of the apostles and other saints long ago. This is the day of salvation, and miracles are not necessary to faith. I mean public miracles, such as the rich man in hades wanted performed when he begged that Lazarus might rise from the dead and preach to his five brothers, still living in unbelief in this world. He contended that if one should go unto them from the dead that they would repent. But he was advised that if they refused to hear Moses and the prophets, if they would not believe the Word of God, they would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead. "Then he said, I pray you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham says unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:27-31). "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Miracles are not necessary to faith. A woman holding to unscriptural theories, was trying to convince D. F. Sebastian of the truthfulness of her position. Somewhat petulant at his diffidence, she said, "If you could see what I have seen, you would believe as I do." This quick-witted and deeply taught man of God promptly replied: "If you could hear what I have heard, you would believe as I do."

2. Miracles are not necessary to prove God's love for sinners. We have no right to ask God to perform miracles in proof that He loves us. The very request for such proof would be unbelief. We have His word that He loves sinners, and if we take the place of sinners and trust the Savior He has provided, we may be sure that He loves us. God has given ample

proof of His love for sinners in giving His Son to die for them, “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” And to perform a miracle for that purpose would be to put a premium on unbelief. (1 John 4:9). Miracles did not save anybody in the days when they were common. Judas lived with Christ and saw most of His miracles, but he was not saved. Where most of His mighty works were done, the people were rebuked for their unbelief. Of the people of Jerusalem it is written: “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him” (John 12:37).

3. Public miracles have usually been associated with judgment. The miracles of Egypt were miracles of judgment. And miracles in the future are to be associated with judgment. When God gets ready to judge this wicked world, then he will begin to work miraculously. The finger of God will again appear on the earth. “Our God shall come and shall not keep silence” (Psalm 50:3). He now manifests Himself to His people they see His miraculous hand in their affairs, but He hides Himself from unbelievers. His word satisfies His people, and He will not satisfy the idle curiosity of the wicked with miracles.

4. The Bible reveals that there will be miracles of a public nature during the last days of this dispensation, but they will be of the devil and not of God. Our Lord, in speaking of the signs of His coming, said “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24). The word for “sign” in the passage is the same word usually translated miracle. “And he does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from Heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceives them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live” (Revelation 13:13,14). In 2 Thessalonians 2:9: “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” we learn that the coming of the “man of sin” will be after the working of Satan with all power and signs (miracles) and lying wonders. If there is anybody performing miracles today, the gift is not from God, but from Satan, and is a sign of the end time.

There is a clamor today in religion for the miraculous and sensational and spectacular. And this is because people tire of the word of God. People who are looking for miracles as a sign or proof of God’s presence and favor are putting themselves in a good position to be deceived. What is supernatural is not necessarily Divine.

THIS IS NOT THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

This is the day of salvation, not the day of judgment. This is the day of the longsuffering of God. The only person who has the right to judge is Christ, and He is now on the throne of Grace. When He next breaks the silence it will be to speak in wrath and let loose the judgments that shall engulf the world. “Our God shall come and shall not keep Silence” (Psalm 50:3). He is silent now, in this day of grace, so far as the public manifestation of Himself is concerned, but the day is coming when He shall speak unto them in His wrath and enemies to be made His footstool. He has spoken the last word to vex them in His sore displeasure. “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He who sits in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion” (Psalm 2).

A SILENT HEAVEN!

Yes, but it is not the silence of a helpless and defeated God. A silent Heaven! Yes, but it is not the silence of a callous and indifferent Father. A silent Heaven! Yes, but it is not the silence of a Father who forgets His children. It is the silence which is the pledge and proof that the way is still open for the guiltiest sinner to draw near to God in Christ. It is the assurance that we are still living in the day of salvation. When the believer faints, and the infidel revolts, and men beg God to break His silence and show His hand on the earth, they little realize what that will mean. It will mean the withdrawal of amnesty; it will mean the end of the reign of grace; it will mean the closing of the day of mercy; it will mean the shutting of the door to the Ark of salvation; it will mean the dawning of the day of wrath, the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences” (2 Corinthians 5:11). “Because there is wrath, “ we would warn men to flee the wrath to come. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

God has spoken to us in His Son. We have the message about His Son in the Bible. It tells us that eternal life is in Jesus Christ. It tells us that the Son was punished that sinners might not perish. Despise this message and reject the Son, and

when God speaks again you will hear Him speak in tones of judgment. “I am come a light into the world, that whoever believes on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects me, and receives not my words, has one that judges him — the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:46-48).

“Day of judgment, day of wonders
Hark! the trumpet’s awful sound,
Louder than a thousand thunders,
Shakes the vast creation round:
How the summons
Will the sinner’s heart confound!
“See the Judge, our nature wearing,
Clothed in majesty Divine;
You who long for His appearing
Then shall say, ‘This God is mine:’
Gracious Savior,
Own me in that day for Thine.
“At His call the dead awaken,
Rise to life from earth and sea;
All the powers of nature, shaken
By His looks, prepare to flee:
Careless sinner,
What will then become of thee?
“But to those who have confessed,
Loved and served the Lord below,
He will say, ‘Come near, you blessed;’
You forever
Shall my love and glory know.”