

Acts - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

Handfuls of Pasture: Volume 1, Obedience: What Is It? and Are We Yielding It?

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It is of the very last possible importance for the Christian to have a clear apprehension of the true character of christian obedience. It is, of course, perfectly evident that I must be a Christian before ever I can yield christian obedience. A child can understand this. I must be in a position in order to discharge the duties which belong to it. I must be in a relationship ere I can know, feel, or display the affections which flow out of it.

If we keep this simple principle in our minds, it will prevent our attaching a legal idea to the word obedience. There is not, and cannot be, a single trace of legality in the obedience to which we are called as Christians, seeing that, ere we can take a step in that most blessed path, we must have divine life. And how do we get this life? "Not by works of righteousness," surely; not by legal efforts of any kind whatsoever, but by the free gift of God—all praise and thanks to His holy name! "The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." And how is this life communicated? How are we quickened, or born again? By the word and Spirit of God, and in no other way. We are by nature "dead in trespasses and sins." There is not in any son or daughter of Adam a single pulsation of divine life. Take the very fairest specimen of mere nature—take the most refined, cultivated, moral, and amiable person in the very highest circle of social life; take the most religious and devout person in mere nature, and there is not so much as one spark of divine or spiritual life.

This, no doubt, is very humbling to the human heart, but it is the plain truth of holy scripture, which must be constantly maintained and faithfully set forth. We are by nature alienated from God, enemies in our minds by wicked works, and hence we have neither the will nor the power to obey. There must be a new life, a new nature, before a single step can be taken in the blessed pathway of obedience; and this new life is communicated to us by the free grace of God, through the operation of the Spirit, who quickens us by the word.

A passage or two of holy scripture will set this matter clearly before the mind of the reader. In John 3 we read, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Here we have the word presented under the figure of water, as we read in Eph. 5 of "the washing of water by the word." Again, in Jas. 1 we read, «Of his own will begat he us, by the word of truth." It is not possible to conceive anything more entirely independent of human effort than the new birth as here set forth. It is wholly of God, of His own will, and by His own power. What has a man to do with his natural birth? Surely nothing. What, then, can he have to do with his spiritual birth? It is of God exclusively, from first to last. All praise to Him that it is so!

Take one more uncommonly fine passage on this great subject. In 1 Pet. 1:23, we read, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away. But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

Nothing can be more precious than this. When the glad tidings of salvation fall with power upon the heart that is the birth moment. The word is the seed of divine life, deposited in the soul by the Holy Ghost. Thus we are born again. We are renewed in the very deepest springs of our moral being. We are introduced into the blessed relationship of sons, as we read in Gal. 4 "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son"—marvelous grace!—"made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

Here, then, we have the true ground of obedience clearly and fully set before us. It is eternal life possessed, and eternal relationship enjoyed. There can be no legality here. We are no more servants on legal ground, but sons, on the blessed and elevated ground of divine love.

But we must remember that we are called to obedience. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" is the very first breathing of a new-born soul. It was the question which emanated from the broken and penitent heart of Saul of Tarsus, when smitten to the ground by the manifested glory of the Son of God. Up to that moment, he had lived in rebellion against that blessed One; but now he was called to yield himself, body, soul, and spirit, to a life of unqualified obedience. Was there aught of the legal element in this? Not a trace, from beginning to end. "The love of Christ," he says, "constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead. And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." 2 Cor. 5

Here, beloved christian reader, lies the grand motive-spring of all christian obedience. Life is the ground; love the spring. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." And again, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." How precious! Who can adequately set forth the blessedness of this manifestation of Christ to the obedient heart? Should we not earnestly long to know more of it? Can we expect it if we are living in the habitual neglect of His holy commandments? It is "he that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." Have we His commandments? And are we keeping them? How utterly worthless is mere lip profession! It is like the son in the parable, who said, "I go, sir, and went not." It is empty, hollow, contemptible mockery. What father would care for loud profession of affection on the part of a son who cared not to carry out his wishes? Could such a son expect to enjoy much of his father's company or confidence? Surely not; indeed it is more than questionable if he could value either the one or the other. He might be ready enough to accept all that the father's hand could bestow to meet his personal wants; but there is a very wide difference indeed between receiving gifts from a father's hand, and enjoying fellowship with that father's heart.

It is this latter we should ever seek, and it is the precious fruit of loving obedience to our Father's words. "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings." Can aught, this side of heaven, be more precious than to have the Father and the Son coming to us, and making their mansion with us? Do we know what it means? Do we enjoy it? Is it common to all? By no means! It is known only to those who know, and have, and keep the words of Jesus. He speaks of "his commandments" and "his words." What is the difference? The former set forth our holy duty; the latter are the expression of His holy will. If I give my child a commandment, it is his duty to obey, and if he loves me, he will delight to obey. But supposing he has heard me saying, "I like so-and-so," and that he does that thing, without being directly commanded to do it, he gives me a much more touching proof of his love, and of his affectionate interest in all my wishes; and this, we may rest assured, is most grateful to a loving father's heart, and he will respond to this loving obedience by making the obedient child his companion, and the depository of his thoughts.

But there is more than this. In John 15 we read, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you."—Amazing truth!—"Continue [or abide] ye in my love." How is this to be done? "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall continue [or abide] in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."

Here we learn the wondrous truth that we are called to the very same kind of obedience as that which our adorable Lord and Savior rendered to the Father, when He walked as a man on this earth. We are brought into full fellowship with Himself, both in the love wherewith we are loved, and the obedience which we are privileged to render. This is most blessedly confirmed by the Spirit in the First Epistle of Peter, where Christians are spoken of as "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Chapter 1:2.

Let the reader carefully note this. We are elected of the Father, and sanctified by the Spirit to obey as Jesus obeyed. Such is the plain teaching of the passage. That blessed One found His meat and drink in doing the Father's will. His only motive for acting was the Father's will. "I delight to do thy will, O my God." There was no opposing element in Him, as there is, alas! in us. But, blessed be His name! He has linked us with Himself, and called us into blessed fellowship, both in the Father's love to Him, and in His obedience to the Father.

Marvelous privilege! Would that we appreciated it more! Oh, that we rendered a more loving obedience to all His precious commandments and sayings, that so He might manifest Himself to us, and make His abode with us. Blessed Lord, do make us more obedient in all things!

Short Papers, Stephen

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(Acts 7:55-60.)

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

But they are peculiar to Christianity. They were never known until redemption was fully accomplished, and the Redeemer took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. Then was seen, for the first time in the annals of eternity, a Man on the throne of God. "Wondrous sight! Magnificent result of accomplished redemption! The enemy seemed to have triumphed when the first man was expelled from Eden; but 10! the second Man has made His victorious way into heaven, and taken His seat on the eternal throne of God.

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

Here we have our two facts linked together in the most direct and positive manner: Christ glorified above; and the Holy Ghost dwelling in man below. The two are inseparably connected; the latter is entirely dependent upon the former; and both together form the two great distinguishing features of that glorious Christianity revealed in the gospel of God.

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

The principal part of this chapter is occupied with a most powerful unfolding of the history of the nation of Israel—a history stretching from the call of Abraham to the death of Christ. At the close of his address, Stephen made a pungent application to the consciences of his hearers, which drew forth all their most bitter animosity and deadly rage. "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." Here we see the effect of religiousness without Christ. These men were the professed guardians of religion, and the guides of the people; but it proved to be religion versus Christianity. In them we have the terrible exponent of a godless, Christless religion; just as in Stephen, we have the lovely exhibition of true Christianity. They were full of religious animosity and rage: he was full of the

Holy Ghost. They gnashed their teeth: his face was like that of an angel. What a contrast!

But we must quote the passage for the reader.

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

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

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

Now, is not all this most deeply practical? Assuredly it is. Stephen was not only lifted above his surroundings in the most wonderful manner, but he was enabled to exhibit to his persecutors the meekness and grace of Christ. In him we see a most striking illustration of 2 Cor. 3:18—a passage of singular depth and fullness. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Lord the Spirit.”¹

Only see how all this is livingly unfolded in the scene before us. The very highest expression of heavenly Christianity is met by the deepest, darkest, and most deadly display of religious rancor. ^{AY0} can see the two culminating in the death of the first christian martyr. “ Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this he fell asleep.”

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

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

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

When the pangs of trial seize us,

When the waves of sorrow roll,

I will lay my head on Jesus -

Pillow of the troubled soul:

Surely none can feel like thee,

Weeping One of Bethany!

“Jesus wept!”—that tear of sorrow

Is a legacy of love.

Yesterday, to-day, to-morrow,

He the same doth ever prove.

Thou art all in all to me,

Living One of Bethany!

Short Papers, Cloven Tongues

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(Acts 2:1-11.)

It will greatly enhance the grace of this lovely passage of scripture to bear in mind what it was that rendered the cloven tongues necessary. In the eleventh chapter of Genesis, we have the inspired record of the first grand effort of the children of men to establish themselves in the earth—to form a great association, and make themselves a name. And all this, be it remembered, without God. His name is never mentioned. He was not to form any part of this proud and popular scheme. He was entirely shut out. It was not a dwelling place for God that was to be erected on the plain of Shinar. It was a city for man—a center round which men were to gather.

Such was the object of the children of men, as they stood together on the plain of Shinar. It was not, as some have imagined, to escape another deluge. There is not a shadow of foundation in the passage for any such idea. Here are their words, “ And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” There is no thought here of escaping another flood. It is sheer imagination, without any scripture basis. The object is as plain as possible. It is precisely similar to all those great confederacies, associations, or masses of flesh, that have been formed on the earth from that day to this. The Shinar Association could vie with any association of modern times, both in its principle and object.

But it proved to be a Babel. Jehovah wrote confusion upon it. He divided their tongues and scattered them abroad, whether they would or not. In a word, divided tongues were sent as the expression of divine judgment upon this first great human association. This is a solemn and weighty fact. An association without God, no matter what its object, is really nothing but a mass of flesh, based on pride, and ending in hopeless confusion. “ Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken, in pieces.” (Isa. 8:9.) So much for all human associations. May we learn to keep clear of them! M ay we adhere to that one divine association, namely, the Church of the living God, of which a risen Christ in glory is the living Head, the Holy Ghost the living Guide, and the Word of God the living Charter!

It was to gather this blessed assembly that the cloven tongues were sent, in grace, on the day of Pentecost. No sootier had the Lord Jesus Christ taken His seat at the right hand of power, amid the brightness of heaven’s majesty, than He sent down the Holy Ghost to publish the glad tidings of salvation in the ears of His very murderers. And, inasmuch as that message of pardon and peace was intended for men of various tongues, so the divine messenger came down prepared to address each “in his own tongue wherein he was born.” The God of all grace made it plain—so plain that it cannot be mistaken—that He desired to make His way to each heart, with the sweet story of grace. Man, on the plain of Shinar, did not want God; but God, on the day of Pentecost, proved that he wanted man. Blessed, forever, be His holy Name! God had sent His Son, and man had just murdered Him; and, now He sends the Holy Ghost to tell man that there is pardon through that very blood which he had shed, for his guilt in shedding it. Matchless, marvelous, overwhelming grace! Oh! that it may subdue our hearts, and bind us to Him who is, at once, its source, its channel, and the power of enjoyment! The grace of God has far out-topped all the enmity of man. It has proved itself victorious over all the opposition of the human heart, and all the rage of hell.

Thus, then, in Gen. 11 divided tongues were sent in judgment. In Acts 2 divided tongues were sent in grace. The blessed God of all grace would cause each one to hear of full salvation, and hear of it in those very accents in which his infant ears had hearkened to the earliest whisperings of a mother’s love. “ His own tongue wherein he was born.” It mattered not whether the tongue were soft or harsh, refined or barbarous, the Holy Ghost would use it as the vehicle for conveying the precious message of salvation right home to the poor heart. If divided tongues had once been given to scatter in judgment, they were again given to gather in grace; not now round an earthly tower, but round a heavenly Christ; not for the exaltation of man, but for the glory of God.

Now, it is well worthy of notice, that when God was giving the law from Mount Sinai, He spoke only in one tongue and to one people. The law was carefully wrapped up in one language, and deposited in the midst of one nation. Not so the Gospel. When that was the burden, God the Holy Ghost Himself descended from heaven, in cloven tongues, to waft the soul-stirring tidings, far and wide, over the whole world, and convey them “to every creature under heaven” in the very dialect wherein he was born. This is a great moral fact. It comes down upon the heart with uncommon weight and power. When God was speaking in terms of requirement and prohibition, He confined Himself to one language; but when He was publishing the message of life and salvation, pardon and peace, through the blood of the Lamb, He spoke in every language under heaven. When man’s duty was to be declared, God spoke in one dialect; but when God’s salvation was to be published, He spoke in every dialect under heaven.

This, surely, tells a tale. It declares plainly which is more in harmony with the divine mind, law or grace. Blessed be His Name, He delights in grace. Law and judgment are His strange work. He has pronounced the feet of those that publish the gospel to be beautiful; whereas, of those who desired to be teachers of the law, He has said, "I would they were even cut off that trouble you." Thus His acts and His words discover the bent of His loving heart towards poor unworthy sinners. He has left nothing undone, nothing unsaid, to prove His perfect willingness to save and bless; and therefore all who die in their sins will perish without excuse, and those awful words will echo through the regions of eternal gloom, forever and ever, "I would, but ye would not!" Reader, think of this! Are you yet in your sins? If so, we earnestly beseech you to flee, now, from the wrath to come. Accept the message of pardon, now sent to you in your own tongue wherein you were born, and go on your way rejoicing.

In conclusion, we might add, that Gen. 11, Acts 2, and Rev. 7:9-17 form a very lovely group of scriptures. In the first, we see divided tongues sent, in judgment; in the second, divided tongues given in grace; and in the third, divided tongues gathered in glory. Well may we say, "Thy testimonies are wonderful, therefore doth my soul love them."

Handfuls of Pasture: Volume 2, Salvation of God, The: Part 1

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'Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear it.' (Acts 28:28.)

What glorious words for us, sinners of the Gentiles! What solemn words for the house of Israel! They form the close of Paul's address to his brethren, according to the flesh, whom he had invited to meet him in his lodging at Rome. It is now eighteen hundred years since these words were uttered by the blessed apostle—that true lover of Israel; but they have lost none of their freshness, none of their living depth, none of their heavenly power, by the lapse of ages. They fall upon our ears with the same force of application as if we had been standing outside the apostle's door at the moment in which he uttered them, "The salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles."

It may be well for the reader to glance at the circumstances under which those precious words were spoken. The apostle Paul, having arrived as a prisoner at Rome—the grand center and scat of Gentile power—the fourth of Daniel's great empires—calls his much loved and longed for brethren together; and when they assembled at Ms lodging, according to appointment, "he expounded unto them, and testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive; for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

Then follows the remarkable clause with which this paper opens—a clause pregnant with the most momentous results to us Gentiles; and these results are all the more precious to us when we are assured that they flow not from the final rejection, hut only from the temporary setting aside of the nation of Israel. Such is the distinct teaching of the apostle, in Romans xi., "I say then, Have they [Israel] stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them he the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness? For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. [How deeply touching!] For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?.... For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits (the very thing winch Christendom has become); that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in¹ And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." Romans xi. 11-27.

Having said thus much to show the true dispensational position of our subject, we shall proceed, in dependence upon divine guidance, to unfold and apply it, in an entirely evangelistic way, to the souls of our readers, In so doing, we shall notice three distinct questions arising out of our brief but comprehensive text, namely, first, What is sent? Secondly, Who sends it? Thirdly, To whom is it sent? And first, then,

WHAT IS SENT?

Salvation! Precious word! Well may we call upon the reader to consider it. Looked at in its full, broad, evangelical sense, as presented by the apostle, in the passage before us, it comprehends all the rich blessings secured to us, sinners of the Gentiles, in the gospel of the grace of God. It reaches from the very heart of God down to the lowest point in our condition; and it lifts us completely out of our guilt and ruin, and places us before God, in the full results of Christ's accomplished redemption. It secures to us, at the very outset, the full and final remission of all our sins; the perfect obliteration of all our guilt; entire deliverance from all wrath and judgment to come; and it introduces us into the unclouded favor of God. It secures to us, not only deliverance from the just consequences of our sins, but from the present dominion of sin, as a ruling principle. It secures to us "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." In short, "The salvation of God" includes, within its blessed compass, all we can possibly want for time and eternity; and not only so, but all that was in the heart of God to bestow.

A passage or two of scripture will serve to illustrate the force of the expression, "salvation of God." In Exod. 14 we find Israel in great pressure. They were surrounded on all sides by difficulties, to them perfectly insuperable. The sea was before them; the mountains around them; Pharaoh's hosts behind them. They were "shut up," in every way. It was a hopeless case so far as they were concerned. But this was just the fitting occasion in the which to enter into the full meaning of "The salvation of God." If there were a single ray—the faintest glimmer of human hope, that ray—that glimmer could only be, so far, a hindrance to the shining forth, in undimmed luster, of God's salvation. But the case was desperate, and hence they were in a position to understand and appreciate those precious words of Moses, "Stand still, and see the

salvation of the Lord."

Thus it is ever. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." It is when all is lost that we can really understand the meaning of salvation. If we have the weight of a feather or the breadth of a hair to lean on or cling to, in the shape of creature confidence, human hope, or earthly expectation, we have only just so much in the way of hindrance to our seeing the clear light of God's salvation.

But let us take another case. Turn, for a moment, to 2 Chron. 20 Here we see Jehoshaphat surrounded with overwhelming difficulties, in the presence of which he is constrained to own that he had no might. What was the word to him? Just the same as it had been to Israel, M Exod. 14 " Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." It needed no might, no knowledge, to " stand still, and see." When a Savior God is moving before us, our proper attitude is to stand still—our suited action, to gaze and worship. All we really want is to come to the end of self and its busy doings, in order that God may fill the vision of the soul, and the beams of His salvation gladden and light up the heart.

This is the deep and precious secret of peace and blessing, at all times, and in all conditions. Would we be truly happy in God's salvation? Then let us cease from our own restless efforts and rest in what He has done for us. It is when we are really brought to cry out, from the very depths of the soul, "no might," that the divine response falls with clearness and power on the ear, " stand still, and see the salvation of God."

Take one more case. Look at Jonah. See him with the weeds wrapped about his head—see him in the very belly of hell: all hope gone; no human hand to reach him; and all this, be it remembered, the fruit of his disobedience. Yet what does he say? What are the accents that reach us from those profound and awful depths? " Salvation is of the Lord!" Precious words! It matters not what the difficulties may be, or how far gone we may be in our ruin and wretchedness, it still holds good that " salvation is of the Lord." Jonah's history furnishes a vivid illustration of this. He brought all the trouble and sorrow on himself. If he had not been willful, if he had yielded himself to the will of his Lord, if he had run in the way of His commandments, he never would have found himself in the whale's belly. But alas! as we so often do, he chose his own way, and he found himself in consequence plunged in the very depths of distress. Still God will be God, spite of all our willfulness and folly; and the very moment Jonah gave utterance to that brief sentence, " Salvation is of the Lord," we are told that "The Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."

The foregoing examples, drawn from the pages of Old Testament scripture, will suffice to illustrate to the reader, in some degree, the true force of the word " salvation." It is God's intervention, in grace and mercy, in man's behalf; it is deliverance wrought by God's own hand when all hope is gone. It is a word of marvelous fullness and completeness. It is, as we know, used in various ways, in scripture. For instance, the apostle exhorts the Philippians to " Work out their own salvation." Here the word is used in an inferior sense, and applies to the difficulties and dangers which surrounded those beloved saints. It cannot be taken in its high and broad sense, as applying to the eternal salvation of their souls, inasmuch as they were saved already, But there was much trial and pressure—they were surrounded by snares and temptations, and passing through a scene in which all was hostile; and, while the apostle was with them, they would naturally lean on him—on his wisdom and spiritual energy; but now, in his absence, he exhorts them to work out their own deliverance, assuring them, however, that it was God who worked in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

We have noticed the passage in Phil. 2:12, because many find difficulty in it; but our present theme is salvation in the fullest, highest, and broadest sense in which it is presented in the word of God—salvation as including everything which a lost sinner can need—salvation stretching like a golden chain, from everlasting to everlasting, and every link in that chain is Christ—salvation overlapping the whole of our history, from first to last, meeting every exigency of our earthly path and conducting us safe to glory. In one word, it is " the salvation of God." This is enough. It is not merely a salvation in every way suited to us, but a salvation in every way worthy of God. It is not only that we are perfectly saved, but God is perfectly glorified.

And be it further noted, that when once the soul has laid hold of this salvation, it can never lose it—no, never. All the rage of hell, all the powers of earth, all the crafty malice of Satan, all the hostile influences that could be brought to bear, could not rob the saved soul of God's Salvation. Oh! no, reader, let no one persuade you to think that a divinely saved soul can ever be lost. This would be a gross dishonor to God. It would tarnish His glory if one whom he has saved could ever perish. Could we admit, for a moment, the horrible thought, that God would, or could, send a defective salvation to the Gentiles? Impossible! Grant me but this, that God has sent me salvation, and I argue, with holy boldness, that it must be a perfect and an everlasting salvation.

(To be concluded in our next, if the Lord will.)

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 2, Lord's Coming, Papers on the: The Two Resurrections - Part 2

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

It may be that some of our readers will feel startled by the title of this paper. Accustomed, from their earliest days, to look at this great question through the medium of Christendom's standards of doctrine and confessions of faith, the idea of two resurrections has never once entered their minds. Nevertheless scripture does speak, in the most distinct and unequivocal terms, of a " resurrection of life," and " a resurrection of judgment"—two resurrections, distinct in character, and distinct in time.

And not only so, but it informs us that there will be, at least, a thousand years between the two. If men teach otherwise—if they build up systems of divinity, and set forth creeds and confessions of faith contrary to the direct and positive teaching of holy scripture, they must settle that with their Lord, as must all who commit themselves to their guidance. But remember, reader, it is your bounden duty and ours to hearken only to the authority of the word of God, and to bow down, in unqualified submission, to its holy teaching.

Let us, then, reverently inquire, what saith the scripture on the subject indicated at the head of this article? May God the Spirit guide and instruct!

We shall first quote that remarkable passage in the fifth chapter of John's gospel: " Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."¹

Here, then, we have, indicated in the most unmistakable terms, the two resurrections. True, they are not distinguished as to time, in this passage; but they are as to character. We have a life resurrection; and a judgment resurrection, and nothing can be more distinct than these. There is no possible ground here on which to build the theory of a promiscuous resurrection. The resurrection of believers will be eclectic; it will be on the same principle, and partake of the same character as the resurrection of our blessed and adorable Lord; it will be a resurrection from among the dead. It will be an act of divine power, founded upon accomplished redemption, whereby God will interpose on behalf of His sleeping saints, and raise them up from among the dead, leaving the rest of the dead in their graves for a thousand years. Rev. 20:5.

There is an interesting passage, in the ninth chapter of Mark, which throws great light on this subject. The opening verses contain the record of the transfiguration; and then we read, " As they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from [U, from among] the dead should mean."

The disciples felt that there was something special, something entirely beyond the ordinary orthodox idea of the resurrection of the dead, and verily so there was, though they understood it not then. It lay beyond their range of vision at that moment.

But let us turn to the third chapter of Philippians, and hearken to the breathings of one who thoroughly entered into and appreciated this grand christian doctrine, and fondly cherished this glorious and heavenly hope. " That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead " [ἵξανάστασιν]. Verses 10,11.

A moment's just reflection will suffice to convince the reader that the apostle is not speaking here of the great broad truth of " the resurrection of the dead," inasmuch as every one must rise again. But there was something specific before the heart of this dear servant of Christ, namely, " a resurrection from among the dead "—an eclectic resurrection—a resurrection formed on the model of Christ's resurrection. It was for this he longed continually. This was the bright and blessed hope that shone upon his soul and cheered him amid the sorrows and trials, the toils and the difficulties, the buffetings and the conflicts of his extraordinary career.

But, it may be asked, " Does the apostle always use this distinguishing little word («) when speaking of resurrection?" Not always. Turn, for example, to the twenty-fourth chapter of the Acts, and fifteenth verse: " And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." Here, there is no word to indicate the christian or heavenly side of the subject, for the simplest possible reason that the apostle was speaking to those who were utterly incapable of entering into the Christian's proper hope—far more incapable than even the disciples in Mark 9 How could he possibly unbosom himself in the presence of such men as Tertullus, Ananias, and Felix? How could he speak to them of his own specific and fondly cherished hope? No; he could only take his stand on the great broad truth of resurrection, common to all orthodox Jews. Had he spoken of " a resurrection from among the dead," he could not have added the words, "which they themselves also allow," for they did not " allow " anything of the kind.

But oh! what a contrast between this precious servant of Christ, defending himself from his accusers, in Acts 24 and unbosoming himself to his beloved brethren, in Phil. 3! To the latter he can speak of the true christian hope in the full orb'd light which the glory of Christ pours upon it. He can give utterance to the inmost thoughts, feelings, and aspirations of that great, large, loving heart, with its earnest throbbings after the life-resurrection in the which he shall be satisfied as he wakes up in the likeness of his beloved Lord.

But we must return, for a moment, to our first quotation, from John 5 It may perhaps present a difficulty to some of our readers in laying hold of the truth of the Christian's hope of resurrection, that our Lord makes use of the word " hour" in speaking of the two classes. " How," it is argued, " can there be a thousand years between the two resurrections, when our Lord expressly tells us that all shall occur within the limits of an hour?"

To this question we have a double reply. In the first place, we find our Lord making use of the self-same word "hour," at verse 25, where He is speaking of the great and glorious work of quickening dead souls. " Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live."

Now, here, we have a work which has been going on for nearly nineteen long centuries. During all that time, here spoken of as an " hour," the voice of Jesus, the Son of God, has been heard calling precious souls from death to life. If, therefore, in the very same discourse, our Lord used the word "hour" when speaking of a period which has already extended to well nigh two thousand years, what difficulty can there be in applying the word to a period of one thousand years?

Surely, none whatever, as we judge. But even if any little difficulty yet remained, it must be thoroughly met by the direct testimony of the Holy Ghost, in Rev. 20 where we read, " But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God, and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." Verses 5, 6.

This settles the question absolutely and forever, for all those who are willing to be taught exclusively by holy scripture, as every true Christian ought to be. There will be two resurrections, the first and the second; and there will be a thousand years between the two. To the former belong all the Old Testament saints—referred to in Heb. 12 under the title of the spirits of just men made perfect—then the Church of the firstborn ones—and finally all those who shall be put to death during " the great tribulation," and throughout the entire period between the rapture of the saints and the appearing of Christ in judgment upon the beast and his armies, in Rev. 19

To the latter, on the other hand, belong all those who shall have died in their sins, from the days of Cain, in Gen. 4 down to the last apostate from millennial glory, in Rev. 20

How solemn is all this! How real! How soul-subduing! If our Lord were to come to-night, what a scene would be enacted in all our cemeteries and graveyards! What tongue, what pen can portray—what heart can conceive—the grand realities of such a moment? There are thousands of tombs in which lie mingled the ashes of the dead in Christ, and the ashes of the dead out of Christ. In many a family vault may be found the ashes of both. Well, then, when the voice of the archangel is heard, all the sleeping saints shall rise from their graves, leaving behind them those who have died in their sins, to remain in the darkness and silence of the tomb for a thousand years.

Yes, reader, such is the direct and simple testimony of the word of God. True, it does not enter into any curious details. It does not furnish any food for a morbid imagination or idle curiosity. But it sets forth the solemn and weighty fact of a first and second resurrection—a resurrection of life and everlasting glory, and a resurrection of judgment and everlasting misery. There is, positively, no such thing in scripture as a promiscuous resurrection—a common rising of all at the same time. We must abandon this idea altogether, like many others which we have received to hold, in which we have been trained from our earliest days, which have grown with our growth and strengthened with our strength, until they have become actually ingrained as part of our very mental, moral, and religious constitution, so that to part with them is like the sundering of limb from limb, or rending the flesh from our bones.

Nevertheless, it must be done, if we really desire to grow in the knowledge of divine revelation. There is no greater hindrance to our getting into the thoughts of God than having our minds filled with our own thoughts, or the thoughts of men. Thus, for example, in reference to the subject of this paper, almost all of us have, at one time, held the opinion that all will rise together, both believers and unbelievers, and all stand together to be judged. Whereas when we come to scripture, like a little child, nothing can be simpler, nothing clearer, nothing more explicit than its teaching, as to this question. Rev. 20:5, teaches us that there will be an interval of a thousand years between the resurrection of the saints and the resurrection of the wicked.

It is of no use to speak of a resurrected On of spirits. Indeed it is a manifest piece of absurdity; for inasmuch as spirits cannot die, they cannot be raised from the dead. Equally absurd is it to speak of a resurrection of principles. There is no such thing in scripture. The language is as plain as plainness itself. "The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection." Why should anyone seek to set aside the plain force of such a passage? Why not bow to it? Why not get rid, at once, of all our old and fondly cherished notions, and receive with meekness the engrafted word?

Reader, does it not seem plain to thee that if scripture speaks of a first resurrection, then it must follow that all will not rise together? Why should it be said, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection," if all are to rise at the same time?

In fact it seems to us impossible for any unprejudiced mind to study the New Testament and yet hold to the theory of a promiscuous resurrection. It is due to the glory of Christ, the Head, that His members should have a specific resurrection—a resurrection like His own—a resurrection from among the dead. And verily so they shall. "Behold, I show you a mystery, we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 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. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Cor. 15

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 30. The Voice of Jesus

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

"J. L." asks for an explanation of the apparent contradiction between Acts 9:7 and Acts 22:9. It would seem from the narrative, that Saul's companions heard, with their outward ear, a voice or sound which conveyed no intelligible, personal message to their hearts. Saul, on the contrary, not only heard with his ear a voice or sound, but heard in the depths of his soul a message—a clear, full, pointed message, which went direct to his heart and conscience. Hence he might well say, "They heard not the voice of Him that spake to me." Here was the point. Jesus of Nazareth had a message which was intended only for the heart of Saul of Tarsus, though the vehicle by which that message was conveyed was a voice which, of necessity, fell on the ears of his companions in travel. The voice fell on the ears of all; the message which that voice conveyed reached the heart of but one.

How often may we see something like this on a smaller scale! A preacher addresses a congregation; his voice is heard by all; but it may happen that a few hear, not only the voice of the preacher, but the voice of Jesus speaking to their hearts. It is one thing to hear a preacher, and quite another thing to hear the voice of the Son of God speaking in quickening power to the soul. This latter is what is needed. Nothing less will do. There is life in the voice of Jesus; and while the vehicle through which that voice is conveyed may be a sound, falling on the outward ear of thousands, yet is the message only brought home to the hearts of those for whom it is intended. The external circumstances of a man's conversion may be visible to all; the voice that converts is heard only by the man himself.

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 5, Publicly and From House to House

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

The sentence which we have just penned is taken from Paul's farewell address to the elders of Ephesus, as recorded in Acts 20. It is a very suggestive sentence, and sets forth in a most forcible manner the intimate connection between the work of the teacher and that of the pastor. "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you," says the blessed apostle, "but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house."

Paul was not only an apostle; he combined, in a truly marvelous manner, the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher. The two last-named are closely connected, as we may learn from Eph. 4:11; and it is of the very utmost importance that this connection should be understood and maintained. The teacher unfolds truth; the pastor applies it. The teacher enlightens the understanding; the pastor looks to the state of the heart.

The teacher supplies the spiritual nutriment; the pastor sees to the use that is made of it. The teacher occupies himself more with the word; the pastor looks after the soul. The teacher's work is, for the most part, public; the pastor's work chiefly in private. When combined in one person, the teaching faculty imparts immense moral power to the pastor, and the pastoral element imparts affectionate tenderness to the teacher.

The reader must not confound a pastor with an elder or bishop. The two things are totally distinct. Elder and bishop are frequently interchangeable, but pastor is never confounded with either. Elder is a local charge; pastor is a gift. We have nothing about elders or bishops in 1 Cor. 12 and xiv., or Eph. 4, though in these scriptures we have the fullest unfolding of the subject of gifts. We must carefully distinguish between gift and local charge. Elders or bishops are for rule and oversight. Teachers and pastors are to feed and edify. An elder may be a teacher or pastor, but he must keep the two things distinct. They rest upon a different footing altogether, and are never to be confounded.

However, our object in this brief article is not to write a treatise on ministry, or to dwell elaborately upon the difference between spiritual gift and local charge, but simply to offer to our readers a few words on the immense importance of the pastoral gift in the church of God, in order that they may be stirred up to earnest prayer to the great Head of the church, that He may graciously be pleased to shed forth this precious gift more abundantly in our midst. We are not straitened in Him. The treasury of spiritual life is no way exhausted; and our Lord Christ loves His church, and delights to nourish and cherish His body, and to supply its every need out of His own infinite fullness.

That there is urgent need of pastoral care throughout the length and breadth of the church of God, few can deny who know what pastorship is, and who are at all acquainted with the true condition of the church. How rare is the true spiritual pastor! It is easy to take the name, and assume the office; but, in point of fact, pastorship is neither a name nor an office, but a living reality—a divinely-imparted gift—something communicated by the Head of the church for the growth and blessing of His members. A true pastor is a man who is not only possessed of a real spiritual gift, but also animated by the very affections of the heart of Christ toward every lamb and sheep of His blood-bought flock.

Yes, we repeat it, "every lamb and sheep." A true pastor is a pastor all over the world. He is one who has a heart, a message, a ministry, for every member of the body of Christ. Not so the elder or bishop. His is a local charge, confined to the locality in the which such charge is entrusted. But the pastor's range is the whole church of God, as the evangelist's range is the wide, wide world. In New Zealand, in London, in Paris, or Canton, a pastor is a pastor, and he has his blessed work everywhere. To imagine a pastor, as confined to a certain congregation to which he is expected to discharge the functions of evangelist, teacher, elder, or bishop, is something altogether foreign to the teaching of the New Testament.

But, ah! how few real pastors are to be found in our midst! How rare is the pastor's gift, the pastor's heart! Where shall we find those who duly combine the two grand and important elements contained in the heading of this paper—"Publicly and from house to house?" A man may, perhaps, give us a brief address on the Lord's day, or a lecture on some week-day; but where is the "house to house" side of the question? Where is the close, earnest, diligent looking after individual souls, from Monday morning till Saturday night? Very often it happens that the public teaching shoots completely over the head; it is the house to house teaching that is sure to come home to the heart. How frequently it happens that something uttered in public is entirely misunderstood and misapplied, until the loving pastoral visit during the week supplies the true meaning and just application.

Nor is this all. How much there is in a pastor's range that the public teacher never can compass! No doubt public teaching is most important; would we had ten thousand times more of it than we have. The teacher's work is invaluable, and when mellowed by the deep and tender affection of a pastor's heart, can go a great way indeed in meeting the soul's manifold necessities. But the loving pastor who earnestly, prayerfully, and faithfully goes from house to house, can get at the deep exercises of the soul, the sorrows of the heart, the puzzling questions of the mind, the grave difficulties of the conscience. He can enter, in the profound sympathy of an affectionate heart, into the ten thousand little circumstances and sorrows of the path. He can kneel down with the tried, the tempted, the crushed, and the sorrowing one, before the precious mercy-seat, and they can pour out their hearts together, and draw down sweet consolation from the God of all grace and the Father of mercies.

The public teacher cannot do this. No doubt, if, as we have said; he has something of the pastoral element in him, he can anticipate in his public address a great deal of the soul's private exercises, sorrows, and difficulties. But he cannot supply the house to house ingredient. He cannot fully meet the soul's individual need. This is the pastor's holy work. It seems to us that a pastor is to the soul what a doctor is to the body. He must be able to feel the spiritual pulse. He must understand disease and medicine. He must be able to tell what is the matter, and what remedies to apply. Alas! how few proper doctors there are. Perhaps they are as rare as proper pastors. It is one thing to take the title, and another thing to do the work.

Christian reader, we earnestly entreat you to join us in fervent believing prayer to God to raise up true pastors amongst us. We are in sad need of them. There is great dearth indeed, both of teachers and pastors. The sheep of Christ are not fed and cared for. We are occupied so much with our own affairs, that we have not time to look after the beloved flock of Christ. And even on these occasions, when the Lord's people assemble in public, how little there is for their precious souls! What long barren pauses!—the silence of poverty! What aimless hymns and prayers! How little leading of the flock through the green pastures of holy scripture, and by the still waters of divine love! And then, all through the week, no loving pastoral call, no tender solicitous inquiry after soul or body. There seems to be no time. Every moment is swallowed up in the business of providing for ourselves and our families. It is, alas! the old sad story—"All seek their own, not the things that

are Jesus Christ's." How different it was with the blessed apostle! He found time to make tents, and also to "teach publicly and from house to house." He was not only the great apostle, ranging over continents and planting churches, but he was also the loving pastor, the tender nurse, the skilful spiritual physician.

Let no one suppose that we advocate idleness. The Lord preserve us from any such moral mischief! We believe there is nothing like abundance of healthful occupation. Indeed, the apostle himself afforded a living example of this, by working with his hands the thing which is good, that he might not be chargeable to any.

But for all that he found time to teach, preach, and pastorize. He had a heart for Christ and for His body, the church, and for every member of that body. Here lies the real secret of the matter. It is wonderful what a loving heart can accomplish. If I really love the church, I shall desire its blessing and progress, and seek to promote these according to my ability.

May the Lord raise up in the midst of His people pastors and teachers after His own heart—men filled with His Spirit, and animated by a genuine love for His church—men competent and ready to teach—"publicly and from house to house"

Short Papers, Let Us Go Again

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

(Acts 15:30.)

"Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do." In a former number of this magazine, we presented to the notice of our readers, a motto for the evangelist, in the expression, "to preach the gospel in the regions beyond." This is the grand object of the evangelist, let his talents or sphere of action be what they may.

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

The order of these things is divinely beautiful. The Lord would not gather out His sheep and leave them to wander uncared for and unfed. This would be wholly unlike His gracious, tender, thoughtful way. Hence, He not only imparts the gift whereby His sheep are to be called into existence, but also that whereby they are to be fed and maintained. He has His own interest in them, and in every stage of their history. He watches over them, with intense solicitude, from the moment in which they hear the first quickening accents, until they are safely folded in the mansions above. His desire to gather the sheep tells itself forth in the large-heartedness of the expression, "the regions beyond;" and His desire for their well-being breathes in the words, "let us go again." The two things are intimately connected. Wherever the word of the Lord has been preached and received, there you have the formation of mysterious, but real and most precious links between heaven and earth. The eye of faith can discern the most beautiful link of divine sympathy between the heart of Christ in heaven, and "every city" where "the word of the Lord" has been preached and received. This is as true now, as it was eighteen hundred years ago. There may be many things to hinder our spiritual perception of this link; but it is there, for all that. God sees it, and faith sees it likewise. Christ has His eye-an eye beaming with intense interest, and radiant with tender love-upon every city, every town, every village, every street, every house in which His word has been received.

The assurance of this is most comforting to every one who feels that he has, in very deed, received the word of the Lord. Were we called upon to prove, from scripture, the truth of our assertion, we should do so by the following quotation: "And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for behold he prayeth." (Acts 9:10, 11.) Can aught be more touching than to hear the Lord of glory giving, with such minuteness, the address of His newly-found sheep? He gives the street, the number, so to speak, and the very occupation, at the moment. His gracious eye takes in everything connected with each one of those for whom He gave His precious life. There is not a circumstance, however trivial, in the path of the very feeblest of His members, in which the blessed Lord Jesus is not interested. His name be praised for such a comforting assurance! May we be enabled to enter, more fully, into the reality and power of such a truth!

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

And observe the force of the words "go again." It does not matter how often you may have been there before. It may be once, or twice, or thrice. This is not the question. "Let us go again," is the motto for the pastoral heart, for there is always a demand for the pastoral gift. Matters are ever and anon springing up, in the various places in which "the word of the Lord" has been preached and received, demanding the labors of the divinely-qualified pastor. This is, in an especial manner, true, in this day of spiritual poverty. There is immense demand—a demand on the evangelist, to think of "the regions beyond"—a demand on the pastor to "go again and visit his brethren, in every city" where "the word of the Lord" has been preached, "and see how they do."

Reader, do you possess aught of pastoral gift? If so, think, I pray you, of those comprehensive words, "let us go again." Have you been acting on them? Have you been thinking of your "brethren"-of those "who have obtained like precious faith"-those who, by receiving "the word of the Lord," have become spiritual brethren? Are your interests and sympathies engaged on behalf of "every city" in which a spiritual link has been formed with the Head above? Oh! how the heart longs for a greater exhibition of holy zeal and energy, of individual and independent devotedness-independent, I mean, not of the sacred fellowship of the truly spiritual, but of every influence which would tend to clog and hinder that elevated service to which each one is distinctly called, in responsibility to the Master alone. Let us beware of the trammels of cumbrous machinery, of religious routine, of false order. Let us beware, too, of indolence, of love of personal ease, of a false economy, which would lead us to attach an undue importance to the matter of expense. The silver and the gold are the Lord's, and His sheep are far more precious to Him than silver and gold. His own words are, "Lovest thou me? feed my sheep." And if only there is the heart to do this, the means will never be wanting. How often may we detect ourselves spending sums of money, unnecessarily, on the table, the wardrobe, and the library, which would be amply sufficient to carry us to "the regions beyond," to preach the gospel, or to "every city," in order to "visit our brethren!"

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

But, allowing the widest possible margin for all righteous claims, let us ask, are we doing all we can for "the regions beyond," and for "our brethren, in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord?" Has there not been a culpable abandonment both of evangelistic and pastoral work? Have we not allowed domestic and commercial ties to act unduly upon us? And what has been the result? What have we gained? Have our children turned out well, and our commercial interests prospered? Has it not often happened that, where the Lord's work has been neglected, the children have grown up in carelessness and worldliness? And as to business, have we not often toiled all the night, and gazed on an empty net in the morning? On the other hand, where the family and the circumstances have been left, with artless confidence, in the hand of Jehovah-jireh, have they not been far better cared for? Let these things be deeply pondered, with an honest heart and a single eye, and we shall be sure to arrive at just conclusions.

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

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

Christian Truth: Volume 25, Jerusalem and Cyprus

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Acts 13:13; 15:38, 39

The four gospels furnish a narrative of the acts of the Lord Jesus Christ; and in the Acts of the Apostles, we have a narrative of the acts of God the Holy Spirit who came down on the day of Pentecost, and has been laboring here ever since. The Lord Jesus acted in His own immediate Person. The Holy Spirit acted in the apostles and others; and in this way we have frequently to bear in mind, as we pass along the inspired missionary record, the infirmity and failure of the various instruments who, though used of God, were in themselves feeble men. Besides, we not only have to take into account the infirmity of man, but also the hostile influence of surrounding circumstances, as used of Satan, for the purpose of hindering the work, and cramping and ensnaring the workmen. Thus, the study of the Acts is most interesting and practical. In it we have men and things, localities and their influences, looked at and presented by the Holy Spirit with direct reference to the great work which He was at that time, and still is, carrying on.

At the close of Acts 12 we read, "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark." In the next chapter we find this same John Mark accompanying Paul and Barnabas on a mission, and continuing with them during their sojourn in the island of Cyprus. However, on leaving there and proceeding to "Perga in Pamphylia," we read that "John departing from them returned to Jerusalem" (chap. 13:13). Home influences as well as religious privileges would no doubt attract the heart of John Mark and induce him to abandon the difficult path of missionary labor. In chapter 12 we read of "the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying."

Here we have two things: the power of natural affection, and the rare spiritual attraction of Christian fellowship. Need we wonder that John Mark vastly preferred a prayer meeting at his mother's house in Jerusalem, to the hardships of a mission in Pamphylia of Pisidia? Ah! my dear reader, the heart is but too well able to understand the preference. There was a vast difference between a comfortable home, regular habits, a mother's love and care, the peaceful charms of well-ordered domestic life, and all the roughness, severity, and hardship of a precarious missionary tour. Furthermore, there was a striking contrast between an assembly of loving and united Christian friends gathered for prayer in the city of Jerusalem, and a synagogue of bigoted Jews at Antioch, or a fickle mob at Lystra.

However, the judgment we form of the actings of John Mark will entirely depend on the point of view from which we contemplate them. In the judgment of mere nature, in its amiability or even in its religiousness, there was nothing reprehensible; but in the judgment of a well-girt, single-eyed servant of Christ, he was all wrong. It is very evident that Barnabas and Paul looked at Mark's conduct from these opposite points. A passage in Acts 15 proves this very clearly. "And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus." Thus we see that Mark, by yielding to the attractive influences of his home at Jerusalem, not only abandoned the work but also snapped the link between two workmen.

But who was in the right, Paul or Barnabas? The sequel answers. "Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches." We hear nothing of Barnabas being recommended to the grace of God, or of his confirming the churches. In fact, his name never again appears in the inspired missionary record. He took his nephew (Col. 4:10) with him, and sailed to Cyprus where, upon his first starting on the Christian course, he had sold his land (Acts 4:36, 37). All this is full of meaning—full of deep and solemn instruction—replete with salutary warning for every one who desires to pursue a path of thorough devotedness to Christ and His service. The voice which it utters is distinctly this: Beware how you allow home influences, nature's soft and enervating attractions, or even spiritual advantages, to draw you off from the stern realities of active labor in the Lord's harvest field. Jerusalem and Cyprus had charms for John Mark and his uncle Barnabas—charms sufficiently powerful to allure them from the side of that ever earnest, ever harnessed, workman Paul.

But some may say, Could not Barnabas and Mark serve the Lord at Jerusalem or Cyprus as well as at Perga or Antioch? Assuredly. Paul himself, as we know, served in both these places. But was it the service of Christ that led Mark back to Jerusalem, or Barnabas back to Cyprus?

This is the question. Let the spiritual reader answer it in the light of the Acts of the Apostles. One thing is plain—they, both traveled out of the current of the Spirit's action, and their names never again appear in the inspired annals of missionary labor. True, they were both children of God and servants of Christ. Barnabas "was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith"; and as to Mark, we find some touching allusions to him in Paul's epistles, which would warrant the conclusion that he had somewhat regained his place in the Apostle's heart. "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him.)" Col. 4:10. And again, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable unto me for the ministry." 2 Tim. 4:11.

It is also well worthy of notice that the Holy Spirit should have selected Mark as His instrument to write that Gospel which so especially presents Christ as the true Workman—the faithful Minister—the self-denying Servant—the One whom no influence whatever could move a single hair's breadth from the straight line of devotedness to God and His work. Doubtless a more enlarged communion with that only perfect Servant had rendered Mark "profitable... for the ministry," so that Paul could say to his devoted son Timothy, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee." Lovely picture! Precious fruit of divine grace on all sides! The Lord had raised up Timothy to be a faithful yokefellow for Paul, when both Mark and Barnabas had forsaken him; and now Timothy is commanded to take this Mark and bring him -to Paul, as a profitable help in the ministry. Such are the marvelous ways of grace!

O for deeper and more abiding communion with the blessed Master! May we live near to Him! May we drink into His spirit and walk in His footsteps! Then shall we be raised above every influence that would tend to withdraw us from His service, whether that influence arise from Jerusalem or Cyprus. May we be enabled, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to gird on the harness, and go forth in wholehearted devotedness to Christ and His cause! The Lord, in His great mercy, grant it! May we be "profitable... for the ministry," in some small degree! Let us aim at a higher character of devotedness than ever we have exhibited. The Lord is worthy of the supreme place in our heart's affections. If therefore His service calls us to endure hardness, roughness, privation, or trial, let us not sigh after the attractions of Jerusalem or Cyprus. Let neither nature nor earth entangle us, but may our language ever be—

"Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my heart, my life, my all."

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 34. On Fasting

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

A correspondent in York inquires, "What place does fasting occupy in the New Testament, with respect to the Christian of the present day?" We believe the exercise of fasting is distinctly recognized in the following passages, namely, Matthew 17:21; Acts 13:2; 1 Corinthians 7:5. It stands in immediate connection with prayer, and we think the connection is most instructive. Fasting implies abstraction from things natural and earthly; prayer implies occupation with things spiritual and heavenly. The former closes the channel of communication between nature and the scene around; the latter opens the channel between the spiritual man and the scene above. That involves the wholesome denial of the old man; this the complete dependence of the new. We must, however, guard carefully against anything like monasticism, asceticism, or legality, which would only tend to puff up that which ought to be kept down. Our own impression has long been, that the moral effect of "fasting" is realized by a constant habit of self-control in all things.

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 1, All-Sufficiency of Christ: Part 2

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Thus far, we have been occupied with that aspect of the work of Christ which bears upon the question of the forgiveness of sins; and we earnestly trust that the reader is thoroughly clear and settled on this grand point. It is assuredly his happy privilege so to be, if only he will take God at His word. "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

If then Christ hath suffered for our sins, should we not know the deep blessedness of being eternally delivered from the burden of those sins? Can it be according to the mind and heart of God that one for whom Christ suffered should remain in perpetual bondage, tied and bound with the chain of his sins, and crying out from week to week, month to month, and year to year, that the burden of his sins is intolerable?

If such utterances are true and proper for the Christian, then what has Christ done for us? Can it be true that Christ has put away our sins, and yet that we are tied and bound with the chain of them? Is it true that He bore the heavy burden of our sins, and yet that we are still crushed beneath the intolerable weight thereof?

Some would fain persuade us that it is not possible to know that our sins are forgiven; that we must go on to the end of our life in a state of complete uncertainty on this most vital and important question. If this be so, what has become of the precious gospel of the grace of God—the glad tidings of salvation? In the view of such miserable teaching as this, what mean those glowing words of the blessed apostle Paul, in the synagogue of Antioch? "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man [Jesus Christ, dead and risen] is preached [not promised as a future thing, but proclaimed now] the forgiveness of sins; and by him all who believe are [not shall be, or hope to be] justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Acts 13:38, 39.

If we were resting on the law of Moses, on our keeping the commandments, on our doing our duty, on our feeling as we ought, on our valuing Christ and loving God as we ought, reason would that we should be in doubt and dark uncertainty, seeing we could have no possible ground of assurance. If we had so much as the movement of an eyelash to do in the matter, then verily it would be the very height of presumption on our part to think of being certain.

But, on the other hand, when we hear the voice of the living God who cannot lie, proclaiming in our ears the glad tidings that through His own beloved Son who died on the cross, was buried in the grave, raised from the dead, and seated in the glory—that through Him alone—through Him without anything whatever of ours—through His one offering of Himself once and forever, full and everlasting remission of sins is preached, as a present reality, to be enjoyed now by every soul who simply believes the precious record of God, how is it possible for anyone to continue in doubt and uncertainty? Is Christ's work finished? He said it was. What did He do? He put away our sins. Are they then put away, or are they still on us—which?

Reader, say which? where are thy sins? Are they blotted out as a thick cloud? or are they still lying as a heavy load of guilt, in condemning power on thy conscience? If they were not put away by the atoning death of Christ, they will never be put away. If He did not bear them on the cross, you shall have to bear them in the tormenting flames of hell forever, and ever, and ever. Yes; be assured of it, there is no other way of disposing of this most weighty and momentous question. If Christ did not settle the matter on the cross, you must settle it in hell. It must be so, if God's word be true.

But glory be to God, His own testimony assures us that Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God; not merely bring us to heaven when we die, but bring us to God now. How does He bring us to God? Tied and bound with the chain of our sins? with an intolerable burden of guilt on our souls? Nay, verily; He brings us to God without spot or stain or charge. He brings us to God in all His own acceptableness. Is there any guilt on Him? No; there was, blessed be His name, when He stood in our stead, but it is gone—gone forever—cast as lead into the unfathomable waters of divine forgetfulness. He was charged with our sins, on the cross. God laid on Him all our iniquities, and dealt with Him about them. The whole question of our sins, according to God's estimate thereof, was fully gone into and definitively, because divinely settled between God and Christ, amid the awful shadows of Calvary. Yes, it was all done, once and forever there. How do we know it? By the authority of the only true God. His word assures us that we have redemption through the blood of Christ, the remission of sins, according to the riches of His grace. He declares to us, in accents of sweetest, richest, deepest mercy, that our sins and our iniquities He will remember no more. Is not this enough? Shall we still continue to cry out that we are tied and bound with the chain of our sins? Shall we thus cast a slur upon the perfect work of Christ? Shall we thus tarnish the luster of divine grace and give the lie to the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the scripture of truth? Far be the thought! It must not be so. Let us rather hail with thanksgiving the blessed boon so freely conferred upon us by love divine, through the precious blood of Christ. It is the joy of the heart of God to forgive us our sins. Yes, God delights in pardoning iniquity and transgressions. It gratifies and glorifies Him to pour into the broken and contrite heart the precious balm of His own pardoning love and mercy. He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up, and bruised Him on the cursed tree, in order that He might be able, in per-feet righteousness, to let the rich streams of grace flow forth from His large, loving heart, to the poor, guilty, self-destroyed, conscience-smitten sinner.

But, should it be, that the reader still feels disposed to inquire how he may have the assurance that this blessed remission of sins—this fruit of Christ's atoning work, applies to him, let him hearken to those magnificent words which flowed from the lips of the risen Savior, as He commissioned the earliest heralds of His grace. "And he said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Luke 24:46, 47.

Here we have the great and glorious commission—its basis, its authority, its sphere. Christ has suffered. This is the meritorious ground of remission of sins. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. But by the shedding of blood, and by it alone, there is remission of sins—a remission as full and complete as the precious blood of Christ is fitted to effect.

But where is the authority? "It is written" Blessed, indisputable authority! Nothing can ever shake it. I know, on the solid authority of the word of God, that my sins are all forgiven, all blotted out, all gone forever, all cast behind God's back, so that they can never, by any possibility, rise against me.

Finally, as to the sphere. It is "all nations." This includes me, beyond all question. There is no sort of exception, condition, or qualification. The blessed tidings were to be wafted, on the wings of love, to all nations—to all the world—to every creature under heaven. How could I exclude

myself from this worldwide commission? Do I question, for a moment, that the beams of God's sun are intended for me? Surely not. And why should I question the precious fact that remission of sins is for me? Not for a single instant. It is for me as surely as though I were the only sinner beneath the canopy of God's heaven. The universality of its aspect precludes all question as to its being designed for me.

And surely if any further encouragement were needed, it is found in the fact that the blessed ambassadors were to "begin at Jerusalem"—the very guiltiest spot on the face of the earth. They were to make the earliest offer of pardon to the very murderers of the Son of God. This the apostle Peter does in those words of marvelous and transcendent grace, "Unto you first, God having raised up his Son, sent him to bless you, by turning away every one of you from your iniquities." Acts 3:26.

It is not possible to conceive anything richer or fuller, or more magnificent than this. The grace that could reach the murderers of the Son of God, can reach any one. The blood that could cleanse the guilt of such a crime can cleanse the vilest sinner outside the precincts of hell.

Anxious reader, do you—can you still hesitate as to the forgiveness of your sins? Christ has suffered for sins. God preaches remission of sins. He pledges His own word on the point. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." What more would you have? How can you any longer doubt or delay? What are you waiting for? You have Christ's finished work and God's faithful word. Surely these ought to satisfy your heart and tranquillize your mind. Do then let us entreat you to accept the full and everlasting remission of all your sins. Receive into your heart the sweet tidings of divine love and mercy, and go on your way rejoicing. Hear the voice of a risen Savior, speaking from the throne of the majesty in the heavens, and assuring you that your sins are all forgiven. Let those soothing accents from the very mouth of God Himself, fall in their enfranchising power upon your troubled spirit, "Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more." If God thus speaks to me; if He assures me that He will no more remember my sins, should I not be fully and forever satisfied? Why should I go on doubting and reasoning when God has spoken? What can give certainty but the word of God that liveth and abideth forever? It is the only ground of certainty; and no power of earth or hell, human or diabolical, can ever shake it. The finished work of Christ and the faithful word of God are the basis and the authority of full forgiveness of sins.

But, blessed forever be the God of all grace, it is not only remission of sins which is announced to us through the atoning death of Christ. This, in itself, would be a boon and a blessing of the very highest order; and as we have seen, we enjoy it according to the largeness of the heart of God, and according to the value and efficacy of the death of Christ, as God estimates it. But, besides the full and perfect remission of sins, we have also

ENTIRE DELIVERANCE FROM THE PRESENT POWER OF SIN.

This is a grand point for every true lover of holiness. According to the glorious economy of grace, the same work which secures the complete remission of sins has broken forever the power of sin. It is not only that the sins of the life are blotted out, but the sin of the nature is condemned. The believer is privileged to regard himself as dead to sin. He can sing, with a glad heart,

This is the proper breathing of a Christian. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." This is Christianity. The old "I" crucified, and Christ living in me. The Christian is a new creation. Old things are passed away. The death of Christ has closed forever the history of the old "I;" and hence, though sin dwells in the believer, its power is broken and gone forever. Not only is its guilt canceled, but its terrible dominion completely overthrown.

This is the glorious doctrine of Rom. 6-8. The thoughtful student of this most magnificent epistle will observe that, from chapter 3:21 to chapter 5:11, we have the work of Christ applied to the question of sins. And, from chapter v. 12 to the end of chapter viii. we have another aspect of that work, namely, its application to the question of sin—"our old man"—"the body of sin"—"sin in the flesh." There is no such thing in scripture as the forgiveness of sin. God has condemned sin, not forgiven it—an immensely important distinction. God has set forth His eternal abhorrence of sin, in the cross of Christ. He has expressed and executed His judgment upon it; and now the believer can see himself as linked and identified with the One who died on the cross, and is raised from the dead. He has passed out of the sphere of sin's dominion into that new and blessed sphere where grace reigns through righteousness. "God be thanked," says the apostle, "that ye were [once, but now no longer are to be] the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that type of doctrine to which ye were delivered. (Margin.) Being then made free from sin [not merely sins forgiven], ye became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men, because of the infirmity of your flesh; for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so, now yield your members servants to righteousness, unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Rom. 6:17-22.

Here lies the precious secret of holy living. We are dead to sin; alive to God. The reign of sin is over. What has sin to do with a dead man? Nothing. Well, then, the believer has died with Christ; he was buried with Christ; he is risen with Christ, to walk in newness of life. He lives under the precious reign of grace, and he has his fruit unto holiness. The man who draws a plea from the abundance of divine grace to live in sin, denies the very foundation of Christianity. "How shall we that have died to sin, live any longer therein?" Impossible. It would be a denial of the whole christian standing. To imagine the Christian as one who is to go on, from day to day, week to week, month to month, and year to year, sinning and repenting, sinning and repenting, is to degrade Christianity and falsify the whole christian position. To say that a Christian must go on sinning because he has the flesh in him is to ignore the death of Christ in one of its grand aspects, and to give the lie to the whole of the apostle's teaching in Rom. 6 viii. Thank God, there is no necessity whatever why the believer should commit sin. "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not." We should not justify ourselves in a single sinful thought. It is our sweet privilege to walk in the light, as God is in the light; and, most surely, when we are walking in the light, we are not committing sin. Alas! we get out of the light and commit sin; but the normal, the true, the divine idea of a Christian is, walking in the light, and not committing sin. A sinful thought is foreign to the true genius of Christianity. We have sin in us, and shall have it so long as we are in the body: but if we walk in the Spirit, the sin in our nature will not show itself in the life. To say that we need not sin, is to state a christian privilege; to say that we cannot sin is a deceit and a delusion.

“ The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: he is Lord of all.” Acts 10.'36.

One of the most momentous questions which can be put to a human being is this, “ Have you peace with God?” It is a question of the deepest solemnity, and it claims a direct and immediate answer from every heart. There is no reason why any truly anxious soul should continue for one hour, yea, for one moment, without settled peace with God. Christ has made peace by the blood of His cross. God is preaching peace by Jesus Christ; and here we have the solid foundation of the believer's peace—Christ's finished work received on the authority of God's word by the power of the Holy Ghost.

This is the divine basis of peace; and the more simply we build thereon, the more solid our peace will be. The reason why so many are in a state of miserable uncertainty is because they do not rest, in artless faith, on God's foundation. They are occupied with themselves, instead of building exclusively on Christ. They are looking to experience, in place of to a risen Savior. Frames, feelings, and attainments engage them, instead of Christ. They are vainly hoping to find some sort of improvement in themselves, and not finding it, to their satisfaction—for what honest soul ever does?—they are filled with gloomy doubts; the heart is oppressed with anxious fear; the spirit overcast with heavy clouds. They have no divine certainty; and the}'• are trying to find comfort in the exercises of a religious life, and inasmuch as imperfection attaches to their very best and most pious exercises, they are ever kept in a condition of spiritual darkness and bondage. Neither in our inward frames and experiences, nor in our outward exercises—of what kind soever these may be—have we the true ground of our peace in the divine presence. God did not send to the children of Israel, nor does He now send to us Gentiles, preaching peace by spiritual experiences or by religious exercises, but simply by Jesus Christ.

The reader cannot be too simple in laying hold of this great truth. He may rest assured that it is God's gracious desire that his soul should find peace. If not, why should God send, preaching—proclaiming—announcing peace. If God sends us a message of peace, He surely means that we should have it. He has provided it for us, by the precious atoning death of His Son, and He declares it unto us by His Spirit, in the holy scriptures. Thus it is all of God, from first to last; and hence it is called the peace of God. It comes forth from His heart. It bears the impress of His hand; and it is to the praise of His own eternal Name. We have nothing to do but to receive, with all thankfulness, this precious peace, and let it flow, like an even river, through our souls.

And here we would turn directly to the reader and press home upon his soul this grand question, “Hast thou peace with God?” Do not, we beseech thee, put it aside. It is a question of eternal importance—a question, in comparison with which all mere earthly questions dwindle into utter insignificance.

But it may be that some one whose eye scans these lines feels really anxious about this grand question, and would give worlds, if he possessed them, for a full, clear, and satisfactory answer. Such an one may feel disposed to ask, “ What is the ground of this peace, and how may I have it for myself?” Two deeply important questions, most surely; and questions which we shall seek, by the grace of God, to answer.

And first, as to the real ground of the soul's peace; if the reader will turn to the last verse of Rom. 4 he will find it set forth in two brief but weighty sentences. In this passage the inspired apostle, in speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ, declares that “ He was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification.”

Here, we have the solid and imperishable foundation of the sinner's peace—the divine ground on which God can preach peace. Jesus Christ was delivered for our offenses. Let this be carefully noted. Let us mark particularly who was delivered; who delivered Him; and for what He was delivered. All these are essential to our enjoyment of peace.

Who, then, was delivered? The Holy One, the spotless One, the Lamb, the Christ, the Son of God, that blessed One who lay in the bosom of the Father from all eternity, the object of the Father's supreme delight from everlasting, the Eternal Son. This blessed One, who lay in the bosom, from before all worlds, lay in the womb of the virgin, in the manger of Bethlehem, was baptized in Jordan, was tempted in the wilderness, was transfigured on the Mount, was bowed down in the garden, was nailed to a tree, buried in the grave, raised from the dead, and is now seated on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

This is He who was “ delivered.” He stood charged with our offenses. He represented us on the cross. He stood in our stead, and received from the hand of Eternal Justice all that we deserved. There was a regular transfer of all our guilt, all our offenses, all our iniquities, all our transgressions to Him who knew no sin, who had no more to do with sin than we had to do with righteousness. He died in our stead. The One whose whole human life was a sweet odor ever ascending to the throne of God, was delivered up to death, charged with all our offenses.

But who delivered Him? This is a cardinal question. Who delivered Jesus up to the death of the cross? Isa. 53 and 2 Cor. 5 furnish the answer: “ It pleased Jehovah to bruise him.” “Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Such is the language of the inspired prophet. And now hear the apostle: “ God hath made him (Christ) to be sin for us.” God has done it. It will not do to say that “ we lay our sins on Jesus.” We want much more than this. If it were merely a question of our laying our sins on Jesus, we could never have peace with God, seeing that we do not know the extent of our sin, the depth of our guilt, the true amount of our liabilities, as God knows it. In order to have peace with God, I must know that He is satisfied. God was the offended party, the aggrieved One, and He must be satisfied, Well, blessed be His name, He is satisfied, for He Himself has found the ransom. He has laid our sins, according to His estimate of them, on the head of the divine Sin-bearer. All that was needful, not merely to meet our condition, but to satisfy His claims, vindicate His majesty, and glorify His name, He Himself has provided in the atoning death of His own Son. Thus He is satisfied, and hence He can preach to us—peace by Jesus Christ, Lord of all. The spotless Christ was judged on the cross, in our stead. God bid His face from that blessed One—turned away His countenance—closed His car—forsook Him for the moment. And why? Because He was delivered for our offenses. God forsook Him that He might receive us. He treated Him as we deserved, in order that He might treat us as He deserved. Jesus took our place in death and judgment, that we might take His place in life, righteousness, and everlasting glory.

And, now, let us ask—though we have in measure anticipated the question—for what was the precious Savior delivered? “For our offenses.” For how many? For all, most surely. When Jesus hung on the cross, all the believer’s offenses were laid upon and imputed to Him. Yes, all; for, albeit they were future, so far as he is concerned, when Christ bore them on the cross, yet is there no such distinction as past, present, or future with Him who spans eternity as a moment. All our sins were laid on Jesus; He answered for them and put them away forever, so that they are gone out of God’s sight, and instead of our sins, there is nothing before God save the Christ who bore them and blotted them forever, and was raised for our justification. Who raised Him? Even the same that delivered Him. And why did He raise Him? Because all was settled for which He had been delivered. Christ glorified God in the putting away of our sins; and God glorified Christ, by raising Him from the dead and crowning Him with glory and honor.]Most marvelous, most precious truth! Christ forsaken on the cross, because our sins were laid on Him. Christ crowned on the throne, because our sins are put away. “ He was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification.” Such is the true, the solid, the everlasting ground of a sinner’s peace in the presence of God.

And now one word as to the question of how the sinner can have this peace for himself. The answer is as simple as God can make it. What is it? Has the sinner to do aught? Has he to be anything but what he is—a poor, lost, worthless, guilty creature? No. He has simply to believe God’s word—to receive into his heart, not merely into his head, the blessed message which God sends to him—to rest in Christ—to be satisfied with that which has satisfied God. God is satisfied with Christ, without anything else whatever. Is the reader satisfied? or is he waiting for something more—something of his own—his vows and resolutions—his frames, feelings, and experiences? If so, he cannot get peace. To be satisfied with Christ, is to have peace with God.

The Lord of Life in death hath lain,

To clear me from all charge of sin;

And, Lord, from guilt of crimson stain

Thy precious blood hath made me clean.

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