

Ephesians - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

Short Papers, Nevertheless (5:33)

The word which forms the heading of this paper occurs in the fifth chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, and the last verse. It is a very important word, as indicating what we are all so prone to forget, that there are two sides to every question, and, in particular, to the great question before the apostle's mind, in this passage. He is speaking of the subject of marriage, and of the relative duties of husband and wife, and he uses as an illustration, "The great mystery of Christ and the Church."

Now, there are two sides to this subject. There is a heavenly side, and there is an earthly side. We want them both. We cannot dispense with either; and the Holy Ghost has, in His infinite wisdom, bound them indissolubly together by the little word "nevertheless;" and, may we not say, what God has joined together let not man put asunder? It is quite true—blessedly true—that the Church's relation to Christ is heavenly: that the Church is called to know, rejoice in, feed upon, walk with, follow, and be conformed to a heavenly Christ.

All this is what we may well call vital and fundamental truth, which cannot, for a moment, be given up or lost sight of, without giving up, so far, the heavenly side of Christianity.

But are we not in danger of forgetting the practical application of all this to our present walk, on the earth, amid the stern realities of actual life, day by day? Are not husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, earthly relationships? Unquestionably. True it is they are formed upon a heavenly model, and to be carried out after a heavenly pattern, as they also rest upon a heavenly base.

But still they are relationships in nature, formed on the earth, and to be carried out in daily life. There will be no such relationships in heaven. They do not belong to the resurrection-state. They belong to nature, to earth, to our time-condition, and we are called to walk in them as christian men, women, and children, and to glorify God by our spirit and temper and manner, our whole deportment therein, from hour to hour, and day to day.

Thus, for example, of what use is it for a man to traffic in lofty theories respecting the heavenly relationship of Christ and the Church, while he fails, every day of his life, in his earthly relationship as a husband? His wife is neglected; it may be treated coldly or harshly; she is not nourished, cherished, sustained and ministered to according to the heavenly model of Christ and His Church.

No doubt, the same pointed question may be asked in reference to the wife, and to all the other sacred relationships of our earthly and natural existence, for "there are two sides to every question."

Hence the very great importance of the apostle's "nevertheless." We may depend upon it, it has a wide application. It is most evident that the Holy Ghost anticipated the need of such a qualifying, modifying, regulating clause, when, having descanted upon the heavenly side of the subject of marriage, He adds, "Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."

Christian reader, let us remember the two sides. Let us deeply ponder the inspired "Nevertheless." We may rest assured there is a need of it. There is the most urgent need of the practical application of divine and heavenly truth to our natural relationships and earthly ways. We have to remember that God recognizes nature, else why have we marriage? Flesh is not recognized, but nature is; and even admitted as a teacher (see Corinthians xi. 14). We are not yet actually in heaven. We are there, thank God, as to our standing, there in spirit, there in principle, there by faith. Our life, our portion, our hope, our home is there, because Christ is there.

But we are here on this earth, called to represent Christ in this world, as He represents us in heaven. God views us as men, women, and children, called to tread the sand of the desert, and to meet the positive realities of daily life. Life is a reality—an actual bona fide practical reality; and our God has provided for us, in view of this fact, by the priestly ministry of Christ, on high; and by the ministry of the Holy Ghost and the teachings of holy scripture here below. We must have what is real to meet what is real. We are not called, thank God, to be occupied with visionary notions, with empty theories, with a powerless sentimentality, nor even with one-sided truth. No; we are called to be real, genuine, sound, practical christian men, women, and children. We are called to display, in our daily history here on this earth, the practical results of that which we know and enjoy by faith in heaven. In one word, we must never forget that when the very highest truths are being unfolded before us, there is a healthful and holy application of these truths indicated by the inspired "Nevertheless."

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 1, Forgiveness of Sins: Part 2 (1:7)

Having, in our number for January, sought to establish the fact that it is possible for one to know, upon divine authority, that his sins are forgiven, we shall now, in dependence upon the teaching of the Spirit of God, proceed to consider the subject of forgiveness of sins, as unfolded in the word, and in doing so, we shall present it under the three following heads, namely:—First, The ground on which God forgives sins; Secondly, The extent to which He forgives sins; and, Thirdly, the style in which He forgives sins. There is value in this threefold presentation, as it gives clearness, fullness, and precision to our apprehension, of the subject, as a whole. The more clearly we understand the ground of divine forgiveness, the more shall we appreciate the extent, and admire the style thereof.

May God the Spirit now be our guide while we ponder, for a little,

The Ground Of Divine Forgiveness.

It is of the very last importance that the anxious reader should understand this cardinal point. It is quite impossible that a divinely convicted conscience can enjoy true repose until the ground of forgiveness is clearly seen. There may be certain vague thoughts respecting the mercy and goodness of God, His readiness to receive sinners and pardon their sins, His unwillingness to enter the place of judgment, and His promptness to enter the place of mercy. All this there may be; but until the convicted soul is led to see how God can be just and yet the Justifier—how He can be a just God and yet a Savior-God—how He has been glorified with respect to sin—how all the divine attributes have been harmonized, it must be a stranger to the peace of God which truly passeth all understanding. A conscience on which the light of divine truth has poured itself in convicting power, feels and owns that sin can never enter into the presence of God—that sin, wherever it is found, can only be met by the just judgment of a sin-hating God. Hence, until the divine method of dealing with sin is understood and believed, there must be intense anxiety. Sin is a reality, God's holiness is a reality, conscience is a reality, judgment to come is a reality. All these things must be looked at and duly considered. Justice must be satisfied—conscience purged—Satan silenced. How is all this to be done? Only by the cross of Jesus.

Here, then, we have the true ground of divine forgiveness. The precious atonement of Christ forms the base of that platform on which a just God and a justified sinner meet in sweet communion. In that atonement I see sin condemned, justice satisfied, the law magnified, the sinner saved, the adversary confounded. Creation never exhibited aught like this. There the creature enjoyed the manifestation of power, wisdom, and goodness; but the fairest fields of the old creation presented nothing like “grace reigning through righteousness”—nothing like a glorious combination of “righteousness and peace, mercy and truth.” It was reserved for Calvary to display all this. There that grand and all-important question, “How can God be just and the Justifier?” received a glorious reply. The death of Christ furnishes the answer. A just God dealt with sin at the cross, in order that a justifying God might deal with the sinner on the new and everlasting ground of resurrection. God could not tolerate or pass over a single jot or tittle of sin; but He could put it away. He has condemned sin. He has poured out His righteous wrath upon sin, in order that he might pour the everlasting beams of his favor upon the believing sinner.

“ On Jesus' cross this record's graved, Let sin be judged and sinners saved.”

Precious record.' may every anxious sinner read it with the eye of faith. It is a record which must impart settled peace to the heart. God has been satisfied as to sin. This is enough for me. Here my guilty, troubled conscience finds sweet repose. I have seen my sins rising like a dark mountain before me, threatening me with eternal wrath; but the blood of Jesus has blotted them all out from God's view. They are gone, and gone forever—sunk as lead into the mighty waters of divine forgetfulness, and I am free—as free as the One who was nailed to the cross for my sins, but who is now on the throne without them.

Such, then, is the ground of divine forgiveness. What a solid ground! Who or what can touch it? Justice has owned it. The troubled conscience may rest in it. Satan must acknowledge it. God has revealed Himself as a Justifier, and faith walks in the light and power of that revelation. Nothing can be simpler, nothing clearer, nothing more satisfactory. If God reveals Himself as a Justifier, then I am justified through faith in the revelation. When the moral glories of the cross shine upon the sinner, he sees and knows, believes and owns that the One who has judged his sins in death, has justified him in resurrection.

Anxious reader, see, I beseech thee, that thou apprehendest the true ground of the forgiveness of sins. There is no use in our proceeding to consider the extent and style, until thy poor troubled conscience has been led to rest upon the imperishable ground of forgiveness. Let me reason with thee. What is to hinder thee from, this very moment, resting on the foundation of accomplished atonement? Say, does thy conscience need something more to satisfy it than that which has satisfied the inflexible justice of God? Is not the ground on which God reveals Himself as a righteous Justifier, sufficiently strong for thee to stand upon as a justified sinner? What sayest thou, friend? Art thou satisfied? Is Christ sufficient for thee? Art thou still searching for something in thyself, thy ways, thy works, thy thoughts, thy feelings? If so, give up the search as utterly vain. Thou wilt never find anything. And even though thou couldst find something, it would only be an encumbrance, a loss, a hindrance. Christ is sufficient for God, let Him be sufficient for thee likewise. Then, but not until then, wilt thou be truly happy.

May God the Holy Ghost cause thee to rest, this moment, upon an all-sufficient sacrifice, as the only ground of divine forgiveness, so that thou mayest be able to enter, with real intelligence and interest, upon the examination of the second point in our subject, namely,

THE EXTENT OF DIVINE FORGIVENESS.

Very many are perplexed as to this. They do not see the fullness of the atonement. They do not grasp the emancipating fact of its application to all their sins. They do not enter into the full force of those lines, which, perhaps, they often sing,

They seem to be under the impression that Christ only bore some of their sins, namely, their sins up to the time of their conversion. They are troubled as to the question of their daily sins, as if these were to be disposed of upon a different ground from their past sins. Thus are they, at times, much cast down and sorely beset. Nor could it be otherwise with them until they see that in the death of Christ, provision was made for the full forgiveness of all their sins. True it is that the child of God who commits sin has to go to his Father and confess that sin. But what does the apostle say, in reference to one so confessing his sins? “God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Now, why does he say, “Faithful and just?” Why does he not say, “Gracious and merciful?” Because he speaks on the ground that the entire question of sin was gone into and settled by the death of Christ who is now up in heaven as the righteous Advocate. On no other ground could God be faithful and just in connection with the forgiveness of sins. The sins of the believer have all been atoned for on the cross. If one had been left out, he should be eternally lost, inasmuch as it is impossible that a single sin, however trifling, can ever enter the precincts of the sanctuary of God. And, further, let me add, if all the believer's sins were not atoned for in the death of Christ, then, neither by confession, nor by prayer, nor by fasting, nor by any other means, could they ever be forgiven. The death of Christ is the only ground on which God could, in faithfulness and justice, forgive sin; and we know He must either do it in faithfulness and justice, or not at all. This is to His praise and our exceeding comfort.

But I can imagine my reader exclaiming, "What! Do you mean to say that my future sins were all atoned for?" To this I reply, that all our sins were future when Christ bore them on the cursed tree. The sins of all believers, for the last eighteen centuries, were future when Christ died for them. Hence, if the idea of future sins presents a difficulty in reference to what we may commit, if left here, it presents just as great a difficulty in reference to what we have committed. But, in truth, all this perplexity about future sins arises, very much, from the habit of looking at the cross from our own point of view, instead of God's—looking at it from earth instead of from heaven. Scripture never speaks of future sins. Past, present, and future are only human and earthly. All is an eternal now with God. All our sins were before the eye of infinite Justice, at the cross, and all were laid on the head of Jesus the Sin-bearer who, by His death, laid the eternal foundation of forgiveness of sins, in order that the believer, at any moment of his life, at any point in his history, at any stage of his career, from the time at which the hallowed tidings of the gospel fall upon the ear of faith until the moment in which he steps into the glory, may be able to say, with clearness and decision, without reserve, misgiving, or hesitation, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." To say this is but faith's response to God's own declaration, when he says "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." "Jehovah hath made to meet on him the iniquities of us all."

Let us, by way of illustration, take the case of the thief on the cross. "When he, as a convicted sinner, cast the eye of faith upon that blessed One who hung beside him, was he not, then and there, rendered fit to enter the paradise of God? Was he not furnished with a divine title to pass from the cross of a malefactor into the presence of God? Unquestionably. Did he need anything more to be done for him, in him, or with him, in order to fit him for heaven? By no means. Well, then, suppose that, instead of passing into heaven, he had been permitted to come down from the cross. Suppose the nails had been extracted and he allowed to go at liberty. He would have had sin in his nature, and having sin in his nature, he would have been liable to commit sin, in thought, word, and deed. Now, could he ever lose his title, his fitness, his meetness? Surely not. His title was divine and everlasting. All his sins were borne by Jesus. That which had fitted him to enter heaven at the first, had fitted him once and forever, so that if he had remained on earth for fifty years, he would, at any moment, have been equally fit to enter heaven.

True it is, if the pardoned sinner commits sin, his communion is interrupted, and there must be the hearty confession of that sin ere his communion can be restored. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." But this is, obviously, a different point altogether. My communion may be interrupted, but my title can never be forfeited. All was accomplished on the cross. Every trace of sin and guilt was atoned for by that peerless, priceless sacrifice. By that sacrifice, the believer is transferred from a position of guilt and condemnation into a position of justification and perfect favor. He is translated from a condition in which he had not a single trace of righteousness, into a condition in which he has not a single trace of guilt, nor ever can have. He stands in grace, he is under grace, he breathes the very atmosphere of grace, and he never can be otherwise, according to God's view. If he commits sin—as who does not?—there must be confession. And what then? Forgiveness and cleansing, on the ground of the faithfulness and justice of God which have had their divine answer in the cross. All is founded on the cross. The faithfulness and justice of God—the advocacy of Christ—our confession—our full forgiveness—our perfect cleansing—the restoration of our communion—all rests upon the solid basis of the precious blood of Christ.

My reader will bear in mind that we are, at present, occupied with the one point, namely, the extent of divine forgiveness. There are other points of great importance,, which might be looked at in connection, such as the believer's oneness with Christ, his adoption into the family of God, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, all of which, necessarily, imply the full forgiveness of sins. But we must confine ourselves to our immediate theme, and having endeavored to set forth the ground and the extent, we shall close with a few words on

THE STYLE OF DIVINE FORGIVENESS.

We are all conscious of how much depends upon the style of an action. Indeed there is frequently far more power in the style than in the substance. How often have we heard such words as these? "Yes, I own he did me a favor; but, then, he did it in such a way as to take away all the good of it." Now, the Lord has His style of doing things, blessed be His name. He not only does great things, but He does them in such a way as to convince us that His heart is in the doing of them. Not only is the substance of His acts good, but the style most charming:.

Let us have a sample or two. Look, for instance, at Christ's touching word to Simon the Pharisee, in Luke 7 "When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." Now, so far as the mere matter of the debt was concerned, the result would have been the same whatever style had been adopted. But what heart does not perceive the moral power of the word, "frankly?" Who would part with it? Who could bear to see the substance stripped of its style? The creditor might forgive with a murmur about the amount. That murmur would, in the judgment of a sensitive heart, rob the act of all its charms. On the other hand, the frankness of the style enhances, beyond expression, the value of the substance.

Again, look for a moment, at that familiar but ever fruitful section of inspiration, Luke 15 Each of the parables illustrates the power and beauty of style. When the man finds his sheep, what does he do? Does he complain of all the trouble, and commence to drive the sheep home before him? Ah! no; this would never do. What then? "He layeth it on his shoulders." How? Complaining of the weight or the trouble? Nay; but "rejoicing" Here we have the lovely style. He showed that He was glad to get His sheep back again. The sheep would have been safe on the shoulder, however it had been placed there; but who would part with the word "rejoicing?" Who could bear to see the substance of the action stripped of its charming style?

So also in the case of the woman and her lost piece of silver. "She lights a candle, sweeps the house, and seeks." How? With dullness, weariness, and indifference? By no means; but "diligently," like one whose whole heart was in her work. It was quite manifest that she really wanted to find the lost piece of silver. Her style proved this.

Lastly, mark the style of the Father in receiving the poor returning prodigal. "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." He does not send out a servant to tell the erring one to turn aside into one of the out offices, or betake himself to the kitchen, or even to confine himself to his own room. No; he himself runs. He, as it were, lays aside his paternal dignity, in order to give expression to his fatherly affection. He is not satisfied with merely receiving the wanderer back. He must prove that his whole heart is in the reception; and this he does, not merely by the substance of the act, but by his style of doing it.

Various other passages might be adduced to illustrate the style of divine forgiveness; but the above will suffice to prove that God graciously recognizes the power which style has to act upon the human heart. I shall, therefore, in closing this paper, make an earnest appeal to my reader, as to what he now thinks of the ground, the extent, and the style of divine forgiveness.

Beloved reader, thou seest that the ground is as stable as the very throne of God itself; that the extent is infinite; and the style all that the heart could possibly desire. Say, therefore, art thou satisfied as to the great question of the forgiveness of sins? Can you any longer doubt God's willingness to forgive when He has set before you, in such a way, the ground on which, the extent to which, and the style in which He forgives sin! Can you hesitate when He actually "Opens His own heart to thee And shows His thoughts how kind they be?"

He stands with open arms to receive thee. He points thee to the cross where His own hand laid the foundation of forgiveness, and assures thee that all is done, and beseeches thee to rest now, henceforth, and forevermore, in that which He has wrought for you. May the blessed Spirit lead thee to see these things in all their clearness and fullness, so that thou mayest not only believe in the forgiveness of sins, but believe also that all thy sins are frankly and forever forgiven!

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 1, Forgiveness of Sins: Part 1 (1:7)

"Oh! the blessedness; transgression forgiven; sin covered." This, truly, is blessedness, and without this, blessedness must be unknown. To have the full assurance that my sins are all forgiven, is the only foundation of true happiness. To be happy without this, is to be happy on the brink of a yawning gulf into which I may, at any moment, be dashed forever. It is utterly impossible that any one can enjoy solid happiness until he is possessed of the divine assurance that all his guilt has been canceled by the blood of the cross. Uncertainty as to this, must be the fruitful source of mental anguish to any soul who has ever been led to feel the burden of sin. To be in doubt as to whether my guilt was all borne by Jesus or is yet on my conscience, is to be miserable.

Now, before proceeding to unfold the subject of forgiveness, I should like to ask my reader a very plain, pointed, personal question, namely, "Dost thou believe that thou canst have the clear and settled assurance that thy sins are forgiven?" I ask this question, at the outset, because there are many, now-a-days, who profess to preach the gospel of Christ, and yet deny that any one can be sure that his sins are forgiven. They maintain that it is presumption for any one to believe in the forgiveness of his sins; and, on the other hand, they look upon it as a proof of humility to be always in doubt as to this most momentous point. In other words, it is presumption to believe what God says, and humility to doubt it. This seems strange in the face of such passages as the following, "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved 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, he beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:46, 47.) "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14.

Here we have remission or forgiveness of sins (the word is the same in the three passages) preached in the name of Jesus, and possessed by those who believed that preaching. A proclamation was sent to the Ephesians and Colossians, as belonging to the "all nations," telling them of forgiveness of sins, in the name of Jesus. They believed this proclamation, and entered on the possession of the forgiveness of sins. Was this presumption on their part? or would it have been piety and humility to doubt the forgiveness of sins? True, they had been great sinners, "dead in trespasses and sins—children of wrath—aliens and foreigners—enemies by wicked works." Some of them had, doubtless, bowed the knee to Diana. They had lived in gross idolatry and all manner of wickedness. But then, "forgiveness of sins" had been preached to them in the name of Jesus. Was this preaching true, or was it not? Was it for them, or was it not? Was it all a dream—a shadow—a mist? Did it mean nothing? Was there nothing sure, nothing certain, nothing solid about it?

These are plain questions, demanding a plain answer from those who assert that no one can know for certain that his sins are forgiven. If indeed no one can know it now, then how could any one have known it in apostolic times? If it could be known in the first century, then why not in the nineteenth? "David describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." (Rom. 4:6-8.) Hezekiah could say, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." (Isa. 38:17.) The Lord Jesus said to one, in His day, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." Matt. 9:2.

Thus, at all times, forgiveness of sins was known with all the certainty which the word of God could give. Any one of the cases adduced above is sufficient to overthrow the teaching of those who assert that no one can know that his sins are forgiven. If I find from scripture that any one ever knew this marvelously precious blessing, that is quite enough for me. Now, when I open my Bible, I find persons, who had been guilty of all manner of sins, brought to the knowledge of forgiveness; and I therefore argue that it is possible for the very vilest sinner to know, now, with divine certainty, that his sins are forgiven. Was it presumption in Abraham, in David, in Hezekiah, in the palsied man, and in numbers besides, to believe in the forgiveness of sins? Would it have been a sign of humility and true piety in them to doubt? It will, perhaps, be argued that these were all special and extraordinary cases. Well, it matters not, so far as our present question is concerned, whether they were ordinary or extraordinary. One thing is plain, they completely disprove the assertion that no one can know that his sins are forgiven. The word of God teaches me that numbers, subject to like passions, like infirmities, like failures, and like sins as the writer and reader, were brought to know and rejoice in the full forgiveness of sins, and hence those who maintain that no one can be sure on this momentous question, have no scriptural foundation for their opinion.

But is it true that the cases recorded in the holy scripture are so special and extraordinary as not to afford any precedent for us? By no means. If any case could be so regarded it is surely that of Abraham, and yet of him we read that "It was not written for his sake alone, that righteousness was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." (Rom. 4:23-25.) "Abraham believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Gen. 15:6.) And the Holy Ghost declares that righteousness shall be imputed to us also, if we believe. "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:38, 39.) "To him give all the prophets

witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Acts 10:43.

Now, the question is, what did the Apostles Peter and Paul mean, when they so unreservedly preached the forgiveness of sins to those who listened to them? Did they really mean to convey to their hearers the idea that no one could be sure that he possessed this forgiveness of sins? When, in the synagogue of Antioch, Paul said to his audience, "We declare unto you glad tidings" did he entertain the notion that no one could be sure that his sins were forgiven? How could the gospel ever be called "glad tidings" if its only effect was to leave the soul in doubt and anxiety? If indeed it be true that no one can enjoy the assurance of pardon, then the whole style of apostolic preaching should be reversed. We might then expect to find Paul saying to his hearers, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that no one can ever know, in this life, whether his sins are forgiven or not." Is there aught like this in the entire range of apostolic preaching and teaching? Do not the apostles every where set forth, in the fullest and clearest manner, remission of sins as the necessary result of believing in a crucified and risen Savior? Is there the most remote hint of that which is so much insisted upon by some modern teachers, namely, that it is a dangerous presumption to believe in the full forgiveness of all our sins, and that it argues a pious and humble frame of soul to live in perpetual doubt? Is there no possibility of ever enjoying, in this world, the comfortable certainty of our eternal security in Christ? Can we not rely upon God's word, or commit our souls to the sacrifice of Christ? Can it be possible that the only effect of God's glad tidings is to leave the soul in hopeless perplexity? Christ has put away sin; but I cannot know it! God has spoken; but I cannot be sure! The Holy Ghost has come down; but I cannot rely upon his testimony! It is piety and humility to doubt God's word, to dishonor the atonement of Christ, and to refuse the faith of the heart to the record of the Holy Ghost! Alas! alas! if this is the gospel, then adieu to peace and joy in believing. If this is Christianity, then in vain has "the dayspring from on high visited us to give the knowledge of salvation through the remission of our sins." (Luke 1) If no one can have this "knowledge of salvation," then to what end has it been given?

And let my reader bear in mind that the question before us is not whether a person may not deceive himself and others. This would be at once ceded. Thousands, alas! have deceived themselves, and thousands more have deceived others. But is that any reason why I cannot possess the absolute certainty that what God has said is true, and that the work of Christ has availed to put away all my sins? Men have deceived themselves, and therefore I am afraid to trust Christ! Men have deceived others, and therefore I am afraid that God's word will deceive me! This is really what it all amounts to, when put into plain language. And is it not well to have things thus put? Is it not needful, at times, to strip certain propositions of the dress in which legality and fleshly pietism would clothe them, so that we may see what they are? Does it not behoove us, when men stand forth as the professed and authorized exponents of a sound and enlightened Christianity, to test what they say by the unerring standard of holy scripture? Assuredly it does; and if they tell us we can never be sure of salvation; and that it is presumption to think of such a thing; and, further, that the very utmost we can attain to in this life is a faint hope that, through the mercy of God, we may get to heaven when we die; we must utterly reject such teaching, as being in direct opposition to the word of God. False theology tells me I can never be sure, God's word tells me I can. Which am I to believe? The former fills me with gloomy doubts and fears; the latter imparts divine certainty. That casts me upon my own efforts; this upon a finished work. To which shall I attend? Is there a shadow of foundation, throughout the entire volume of God, for the notion that no one can be sure of his eternal salvation? I most fearlessly assert there is not. So far from this, the word of God, in every section of it, sets before us, in the clearest way, the privilege of the believer to enjoy the most unclouded certainty as to his pardon and acceptance in Christ.

And, let me ask, is it not due to God's faithful word, and Christ's finished work, that the soul confiding therein should enjoy the fullest assurance? True, it is by faith that any one can so confide, and this faith is wrought in the heart by the Holy Ghost. But all this, in nowise, affects our present question. What I desire is that my reader should rise from the study of this paper with a full and firm conviction that it is possible for him to possess the present assurance that he is as safe as Christ can make him. If any sinner ever enjoyed this assurance, then why may not my reader now enjoy it? Is Christ's work finished? Is God's word true? Yes, verily. Then, if I simply trust therein, I am pardoned, justified, and accepted. All my sins were laid on Jesus when He was nailed to the cursed tree. Jehovah made them all meet on Him. He bore them and put them away; and, now, He is up in heaven without them. This is enough for me. If the One who stood charged with all my guilt is now at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, then, clearly, there is nothing against me. All that divine justice had against me was laid on the Sin-bearer, and He endured the wrath of a sin-hating God that I might be freely and forever pardoned and accepted in a risen and glorified Savior.

These are glad tidings. Does my reader believe them? Say, beloved, dost thou heartily believe in a dead and risen Christ? Hast thou come to Him, as a lost sinner, and put thy heart's full confidence in Him? Dost thou believe that He died for our sins, according to the scriptures, and that He was buried and rose again the third day according to the scriptures? If so, thou art saved, justified, accepted, complete in Christ. True thou art, in thyself, a poor feeble creature, having an evil nature to contend with, every moment; but Christ is thy life, and He is thy wisdom, and thy righteousness, thy sanctification, thy redemption, thy all. He ever lives for thee up in heaven. He died to make thee clean. He lives to keep thee clean. Thou art made as clean as His death can make thee, and thou art kept as clean as His life can keep thee. He made Himself responsible for thee. God sees thee to be what Christ has made thee to be. He sees thee in Christ and as Christ. Wherefore, then, I pray thee, tread no more those gloomy corridors of legalism, pietism, and false theology, which have resounded for ages with the sighs and groans of poor sin-burdened, and misguided souls; but seeing the fullness of thy portion, and the completeness of thy standing in a risen and victorious Christ, rejoice in Him all thy days upon earth, and live in the hope of being with Him forever in His own mansions of heavenly glory.

At some future time, we may pursue the subject of forgiveness of sins; but we are anxious to give a full, clear, and decided testimony in this, our opening number for 1862, to the precious truth so frequently called in question by some of those who profess to preach the gospel, namely, that there is not such a thing as absolute certainty—divine, unclouded certainty—of our eternal security in Christ. May the Holy Ghost impart this certainty to my reader, ere he lays down this paper. May all the people of God be led to see that "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." 2 Tim. 1:7.

Handfuls of Pasture: Volume 1, Seal and the Earnest, The (1:13-14)

" Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Eph. 4:30.

"In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession." Eph. 1:13, 14.

In these verses we have the Spirit of God presented to us in two distinct ways, namely, first, as the seal which God puts upon all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and, secondly, as the earnest of the inheritance which the sealed heirs shall possess ere long.

All true believers are sealed with the Holy Ghost. We must, of course, distinguish between being quickened and sealed. The Holy Spirit quickens dead souls; He seals living believers; that is, He is Himself the seal. God does not seal sinners dead in trespasses and sins; He quickens them, leads them to repentance; and when, through grace, they believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—crucified, risen, and glorified at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens—then He seals them by giving the Holy Spirit to dwell in them. Thus He sets His blessed mark on them, until the day of redemption.

It is very important to be clear as to the difference between quickening and sealing. Many persons find difficulty here, but scripture is as plain as possible on the subject. Take, for example, the opening paragraph of Acts 19: "It came to pass, that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus; and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost"—or rather, "We did not even hear if the Holy Spirit was come." "And he said unto them, Unto what, then, were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him who should come after, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."

Here, then, we have, with great clearness and force, the distinction between quickening and sealing. Here were twelve men, who evidently were disciples, and who had received a measure of truth, but not the full truth of accomplished redemption, of a risen and glorified Savior, and of the Holy Ghost as the witness of these grand and glorious facts.

We are not to suppose that these disciples had never heard of the existence of the Holy Ghost. In this our Authorized Version is manifestly defective. What they had not heard was whether the Holy Ghost had come down as the witness and solid proof of the exaltation and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. John the Baptist, whose disciples they were, knew and spoke of the Holy Spirit, so that they must have known of that divine Person; but he did not, could not, know, and therefore could not speak of Him as the seal put upon all true believers.

And yet they were true disciples, really quickened souls, but not sealed. They were practically in the condition of Old Testament believers, or of the disciples during our Lord's life on earth. There was this difference, that the Holy Ghost had come on the day of Pentecost, and had been working for years, not only in quickening, but in sealing. Thousands of Jews at Jerusalem, many of the Samaritans, the household of Cornelius, had all received the Holy Ghost; and yet the twelve disciples at Ephesus had not even heard of His descent.

Hence, then, it is plain that persons may be quickened, but not sealed. What was true of those Ephesians, years after the day of Pentecost, may be equally true of souls now. How many of the Lord's beloved people, throughout the wide field of christian profession, are in this condition! They do not know what it is to be linked by the indwelling Spirit to a risen and glorified Head in heaven. They are virtually under the law; they do not know the blessedness of settled peace with God; they enjoy not the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free; they are in bondage, filled with doubts and fears. Many go on in this sad condition all their days, and perhaps on their death-bed, for the first time, they get a full view of a risen and glorified Christ, and, believing on Him, are there and then sealed, and brought into the glorious liberty of the gospel of God. They have been robbed all their lifetime of their precious privilege. Through legality, bad teaching, or some other cause, they have been kept in ignorance of "the things which are freely given to us of God;" and thus they have been groping on in darkness and distance, instead of enjoying that blessed nearness to God which is the portion of all those who simply believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ.

However, we shall not dwell farther just now on the important and interesting distinction between quickening and sealing—the former being the work of the Spirit, the latter His personal indwelling—but shall, ere closing this very brief article, call the serious attention of the christian reader to the weighty word of exhortation quoted above, "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

This word assumes that the Christian knows himself to be a sealed one. All christian exhortation is based on the fact of our being in the enjoyment of christian position and privilege. We could not grieve the Holy Spirit, if He were not in us; but when we know what it is to have such an One as the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in us, making our body His temple, what a powerful motive to holy living! How careful we should be not to grieve Him! How we should watch against every thought, word, and act that would be offensive to the divine Guest who has taken up His abode in us! All lightness and frivolity, all unhallowed conversation, all evil speaking, all unkindness, moroseness, and irritability, all selfish ways, all worldly-mindedness, must be judged according to the standard of the Holy One by whom we are sealed unto the day of redemption. It is no longer a question of what is suitable or consistent for us, but for Him. This makes all the difference. Many a thing might be suitable for us which would be very grievous to Him. Our constant inquiry should be, "Will this thing grieve the Holy Spirit who dwells in me?" If so, let us, by the grace of God, judge and reject it with holy decision.

May the Lord enable us to bend our earnest attention to His most precious word of exhortation, that so His holy name may be more fully glorified in our daily life!

And, now, a very few words on the subject of "the Earnest." This is a most precious aspect of the Spirit's office and work. "He is the earnest of the inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." The inheritance is purchased; the price has been paid. But it is not yet redeemed; for this latter we wait; and while waiting, our God has, most graciously, given us the earnest of His Spirit, so that we are as sure of the inheritance as though we were already in possession of it. The earnest is apart of what we are to get. "Now he which stablisheth us with you is Christ"—most precious words!—"and hath anointed us in God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." 2 Cor. 1:21, 22.

We must carefully distinguish between purchase and redemption. Many confound them and thus suffer serious loss. Our Lord Christ has purchased the whole universe. He has paid the redemption price for the inheritance; but He has not yet laid His mighty hand, in redeeming power, thereupon. Redemption by price is one thing; redemption by power, quite another. In the year 1834, the British Legislature voted 20 millions of money to redeem the slaves in our Colonies. This was redemption by price. But then, notwithstanding the payment of this redemption price, some poor slaves might be found huddled together in a slave ship. What was needed in their case? Redemption by power in virtue of the price. British man of war might seize the slave ship and let go all the poor captives. This may, in some feeble manner, illustrate the difference between purchase and redemption.

In Rom. 8 we have a splendid passage which we must quote for the reader. " As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only it, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body"

As regards the body of the believer, as in respect to the inheritance, the redemption price has been paid, but it is not yet redeemed, " we groan within ourselves."

We sigh for the redemption. We wait for the moment of deliverance. " We look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Phil. 3:20, 21.

Glorious prospect! How precious for the weary suffering pilgrim who feels the burden of his poor crumbling tabernacle! The Lord is at hand. The voice of the archangel and the trump of God will soon be heard, and then mortality shall be swallowed up of life. Till then we are sealed with that blessed Spirit of God who is the earnest—not of His love which we possess, but—of the inheritance for which we wait.

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