

## Short Papers — Section 2 of 10.

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### AUTHORITY AND POWER

If ever there was a moment in the history of the professing Church in which it was vital for people to have divine authority for their path and divine power to pursue it, this is the moment. There are so many conflicting opinions, so many jarring voices, so many opposing schools, so many contending parties, that we are in danger at all points of losing our balance and being carried we know not where. We find the very best of men ranged on opposite sides of the same question — men who seem to have a single eye to the glory of Christ and who take the Word of God as their sole authority in all things.

What is an unlearned soul to do? How is one to get on in the face of all this? Is there no peaceful haven in which to anchor one's tiny boat, away from the wild tossing of the stormy ocean of human opinion? Yes, blessed be God, there is; and the reader may know the deep blessedness of casting anchor there this very moment. *It is the sweet privilege of the very simplest child of God, the merest babe in Christ, to have divine authority for his path and divine power to pursue it — authority for his position and power to occupy it — authority for his work and power to do it.*

What is it? Where is it? The authority is found in the divine Word; the power is found in the divine presence. Each and all may know it — ought to know it for the stability of their path and the joy of their heart.

In contemplating the present condition of professing Christians generally, one is struck with this very painful fact, that so very few are prepared to face Scripture on all points and in all matters, personal, domestic, commercial and ecclesiastical. If the question of the soul's salvation be settled — and alas! how rarely it is settled — then people consider themselves at liberty to break away from the sacred domain of Scripture and launch forth upon the wild watery waste of human opinion and human will where each one may think for himself, choose for himself and act for himself.

Now, nothing is more certain than this, that where it is merely a question of human opinion, human will or human judgment, there is not a shadow of authority — not a particle of power. No human opinion has any authority over the conscience, nor can it impart any power to the soul. It may have some worth, but it has neither authority nor power for me. I must have God's Word and God's presence, else I cannot move forward. If anything, no matter what, comes between my conscience and the Word of God, I do not know where I am, what to do or where to turn. And if anything, no matter what, comes between my heart and the presence of God, I am perfectly powerless. The Word of my Lord is my only guide; His dwelling in me and with me, my only power. “Have not I commanded thee? Lo, I am with thee.”

The reader may ask, “Is it really true that the Word of God contains ample guidance for all the details of life? Does it tell me, for instance, where I am to go on the Lord's day and what I am to do from Monday morning till Saturday night? Does it direct me in my personal path, in my domestic relationships, in my business position, in my religious associations and opinions?”

Most assuredly. The Word of God furnishes you thoroughly for all good works, and any work for which it does not furnish you is not good but bad. Hence, if you cannot find authority for where you go on Lord's day — no matter where it is — you must at once give up going. And if you cannot find

authority for what you do on Monday, you must at once cease to do it. “To obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams.” Let us honestly face Scripture. Let us bow down to its holy authority in all things. Let us humbly and reverently yield ourselves to its heavenly guidance. Let us give up every habit, every practice, every association, be it what it may, or be it sanctioned by whom it may, for which we do not have the direct authority of God's Word and in which we cannot enjoy the sense of His presence.

This is a point of the gravest importance. Indeed, it would be impossible for human language to set forth with due force or in adequate terms, the importance of absolute and complete submission to the authority of Scripture in *all* things.

One of our greatest practical difficulties in dealing with souls arises from the fact that they do not seem to have any idea of submitting in all things to Scripture. They will not face the Word of God or consent to be taught exclusively from its sacred pages. Creeds and confessions, religious formularies, the commandments, the doctrines, the traditions of men — these things will be heard and yielded to. Our own will, our own judgment, our own views of things will be allowed to bear sway. Expediency, position, reputation, personal influence, usefulness, the opinion of friends, the thoughts and example of good and great men, the fear of grieving or giving offense to those whom we love and esteem and with whom we may have been long associated in our religious life and service; the dread of being thought presumptuous, intense shrinking from the appearance of judging or condemning many at whose feet we would willingly sit — all these things operate and exert a most harmful influence upon the soul and hinder full surrender of ourselves to the paramount authority of God's Word.

May the Lord graciously stir up our hearts in reference to this weighty subject! May He lead us by His Holy Spirit to see the true place and the real value and power of His Word! May that Word be set up in our souls as the one all-sufficient rule so that everything, no matter what, may be unhesitatingly and utterly rejected that is not based upon its authority. Then we may expect to make progress. Then will our path be as the path of the just, like a shining light that shines more and more unto the perfect day. May we never rest satisfied until, in reference to all our habits, all our ways, all our associations, our religious position and service, all we do and all we do not do, where we go and where we do not go, we can truly say we have the sanction of God's Word and the light of His presence. Here and here alone lies the deep and precious secret of *Authority and Power*.

## **OBEDIENCE AND DEPENDENCE**

We saw in the previous article that our God has, in His infinite mercy, provided for His people in this dark and evil world both authority and power — the authority of His Word and the power of His Spirit — for the path which they are called to tread and the work they are called to do. We have ample guidance in the Word, and we have the power of God to count upon for all the difficulties and demands of the scene through which we have to pass home to our eternal rest above. We have authority and power for all.

But we must remember that if God has furnished us with authority, we must be obedient. And if He has provided the power, we must be dependent. Of what use is authority if we do not obey it? I may give my employee the plainest and fullest directions as to where he is to go, what he is to do and what he is to say, but if, instead of acting simply upon my directions, he begins to reason and think and draw conclusions, to use his own judgment and act according to his own will, of what use are my directions? None whatever, except to show how entirely he has departed from them. Clearly, the business of an employee, of a servant, is to obey, not to reason — to act according to his master's directions, not according to his own will or judgment. If he only does exactly what his master tells him, he is not

responsible for the consequences.

The one grand business of a servant is to obey. This is the moral perfection of a servant. Alas! how rare! There has been only one absolutely obedient and perfectly dependent servant in the entire history of this world — the man Christ Jesus. His food and His drink were to obey. He found His joy in obedience. “Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; Mine ears hast Thou opened: burnt-offering and sin-offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart” (Ps. 40: 6-8).

Our blessed Lord Jesus found the will of God to be His only motive for action. There was nothing in Him that needed to be restrained by the authority of God. His will was perfect and His every movement was of necessity — the very necessity of His perfect nature — in the current of the divine will. “Thy law is within My heart,” “I delight to do Thy will,” “I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.”

Now, what could Satan do with such a Man as this? Absolutely nothing. He tried to withdraw Him from the path of obedience and the place of dependence, but in vain. “If Thou be the Son of God, command these stones to be made bread.” Surely God would give His Son bread. No doubt, but the perfect Man refuses to make bread for Himself. He had no command, no authority, and therefore no motive for action. “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.” So throughout the entire temptation. Nothing could withdraw the blessed One from the path of simple obedience. “It is written” was His one unvarying answer. He would not, could not act without a motive, and His only motive was found in the will of God. “I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart.”

Such was the obedience of Jesus Christ — an obedience perfect from first to last. And not only was He perfectly obedient, but perfectly dependent. Though God over all, blessed forever, yet, having taken His place as a Man in this world, He lived a life of perfect dependence on God. He could say, “I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. The Lord God hath given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth Mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath opened Mine ear and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave My back to the smiters and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help Me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed” (Isa. 50.) And again, “Preserve Me, O God, for in Thee do I put My trust.” And again, “I was cast upon Thee from the womb.” He was wholly and continually cast upon God from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary; and when He had finished all, He surrendered His spirit into the Father's hand and His flesh rested in hope. His obedience and dependence were divinely perfect throughout.

We must now ask the reader to turn with us to two examples of the very opposite of all this — two cases in the which, through lack of obedience and dependence, the most disastrous results followed. Let us first turn to 1 Kings 13. Doubtless, the case is familiar to us, but let us look at it in connection with our present theme.

“And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord, unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord.” Thus far all was right. He spoke by the Word of God and the power of God accompanied the testimony. The spirit of the king was humbled and subdued for the moment.

More than this, the man of God was enabled to refuse the king's invitation to come home with

him and refresh himself and receive a reward. “And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place. For so it was charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest.”

All this was lovely — perfectly delightful to dwell upon. The feet of the man of God stand firm in the bright and blessed path of obedience, and all is victory. The offers of the king are flung aside without a moment's hesitation. Half the royal house cannot tempt him off the narrow, holy, happy path of obedience. He rejects every overture and turns to pursue the straight path opened before him by the word of the Lord. There is no reasoning, no questioning, no hesitation. The word of the Lord settles everything. He has but to obey, regardless of consequences. And so far he does, and all is well.

But mark the sequel. “Now there dwelt an old prophet in Bethel.” Beware of old prophets! This old prophet followed the man of God and said unto him, “Come home with me and eat bread.” This was the devil in a new shape. What the word of a king had failed to do, the word of a prophet might accomplish. It was a wile of Satan for which the man of God was evidently unprepared. The garb of a prophet deceived him and threw him completely off his guard: we can at once perceive his altered tone. When replying to the king he speaks with vividness, force and bold decision: “If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee.” And then he adds, with equal force, his reason for refusing: “For so was it charged me by the word of the Lord.”

But in his reply to the prophet, there is manifest decline in the way of energy, boldness and decision. He says, “I may not return with thee nor go in with thee.” And in assigning the reason, instead of the forcible word “charged,” we have the feeble expression, “It was said to me.”

In short, the whole tone is lower. The Word of God was losing its true place and power in his soul. That Word had not changed. “For ever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven”, and had that Word been hidden in the heart of the man of God, had it been dwelling richly in his soul, his answer to the prophet would have been as distinct and decided as his answer to the king. “By words of Thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.” The spirit of obedience is the great moral safeguard against every scheme and every snare of the enemy. The enemy may shift his ground, he may change his tactics, he may vary his agency, but obedience to the plain and simple Word of God preserves the soul from all his wicked schemes and crafty devices. The devil can do nothing with a man who is absolutely ruled by the Word of God and refuses to move the breadth of a hair without divine authority.

Note how the enemy urges his point with the man of God. “He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art: and an angel spoke unto me by the Word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house.”

What should the man of God have said to this? If the Word of his Lord had been abiding in him, he would at once have said, “If ten thousand prophets and ten thousand angels were to say, bring him back, I should regard them all as liars and emissaries of the devil sent forth to allure me from the holy, happy path of obedience.” This would have been a wonderful reply. It would have the same heavenly ring about it as exhibited in these glowing words of the apostle: “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let him be anathema.”

But, alas! the man of God stepped off the path of obedience. Then the very man whom Satan had used to draw him off, became the mouthpiece of Jehovah to announce in his ears the terrible consequence. He lied when Satan used him. He spoke truth when God used him. The erring man of God was slain by a lion because he disobeyed the word of the Lord. Yes; he stepped off the narrow path of obedience into the wide field of his own will, and there he was slain.

Reader, let us beware of old prophets and angels of light! Let us, in the true spirit of obedience, keep very close to the Word of our God. We shall find the path of obedience both safe and pleasant, holy and happy.

Now, let us glance at Joshua 9, which records for our admonition the manner in which even Joshua was ensnared through lack of simple dependence upon God. We do not quote the passage or enter into any detail. The reader can turn to the chapter and ponder its contents.

Why was Israel beguiled by the craft of the Gibeonites? Because they leaned to their own understanding and judged by the sight of their eyes instead of waiting upon God for guidance and counsel. He knew all about the Gibeonites. He was not deceived by their tattered rags and moldy bread; and neither would Israel have been, had they only looked to Him.

But here they failed. They did not wait on God. He would have guided them. He would have told them who these crafty strangers were. He would have made all clear for Israel had they simply waited on Him in the sense of their own ignorance and feebleness. But no; they would think for themselves and judge for themselves, and reason from what they saw and draw their own conclusions. All these things they would do. Hence the tattered garments of the Gibeonites accomplished what the frowning bulwarks of Jericho had failed to do.

We may be quite sure that Israel had no thought of making a league with any of the Canaanites. No, they were in terrible indignation when they discovered that they had done so. But they did it and had to abide by it. It is easier to make a mistake than to rectify it, and so the Gibeonites remained as a striking memorial of the evil of not waiting on God for counsel and guidance.

May the Holy Spirit teach us, from all that has passed before us, the solemn importance of “obedience and dependence.”

### **STABILITY AND PEACE**

(JOSHUA 1: 9)

“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee wheresoever thou goest.”

Here lies the true secret of stability and peace at all times and under all circumstances. The authority of God for the ground we occupy, and His presence with us thereon — the Word of the Lord as the warrant for what we are doing, and the light of His countenance in the doing of it. There is no possibility of getting on without these two things. It will not do merely to be able to give chapter and verse for a certain position which we have taken up; we must realize the Lord's own presence with us. And it will not do to say we have the Lord's presence with us, unless we can give a divine warrant, a “Thus saith the Lord” for what we are doing and for the path we are treading.

Joshua could never have faced the difficulties of his day without these two things. And although we may not have to meet the same things that lay in his path, yet we may rest assured of this, we shall never get on in these days without the Word of God as our authority and His presence as our strength. Our lot is cast in a time of special confusion. A multitude of conflicting voices fall on the ear. Men are taking sides. We see apparently the best and holiest, the most devoted and intelligent men ranged on opposite sides of the same question and pursuing opposite ways, though professing to follow the same Lord. What are we to think? What are we to do? What do we want? We want to hear, deep down in our very inmost soul, these two weighty and imperishable sentences, “Have not I commanded thee?” — “Lo, I am with thee.” These are grand realities which the feeblest and most unlettered saint may enjoy,

and without which none can possibly make headway against the tide of evil at present rising around us.

Never, perhaps, in the annals of Christianity was there a moment which more imperatively demanded the most direct personal dealing of the soul with God and His truth. It will not do for anyone to pin his faith to the sleeve of another. God is testing souls in a very remarkable manner. The sieve is doing its solemn work in the midst of the Church. Those who are enabled to go through the sifting and testing with God will reap a rich harvest of blessing, *but we must go through it*. It is being made manifest just now in a very special way, whose faith is standing merely in the wisdom of men and whose in the power of God. All that is hollow is being exposed and will be so more and more, but God will keep those whose hearts are true to the name of Jesus. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

This is the soul's unfailing refuge at all times. It was to this the apostle Paul directed the elders of Ephesus at the close of his touching and pathetic address in Acts 20. "And now, brethren, I commend you to *God* and to the *Word* of His grace." He does not commend them to any order of men, not even to apostles or their successors, or to general councils or their decrees, or to fathers or their traditions, or to doctors or their dogmas. No, none of these would avail in the presence of the "grievous wolves" which were about to enter in among them, and amid the "perverse things" which some from among themselves would give utterance to. Nothing but God Himself and the Word of His grace could stand in an evil day, or enable a soul to stand.

There is something beautiful in the jealous care of the apostle Paul lest any should lean upon him or upon anything except the living God Himself. Harken to the following glowing passage, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2: 13). That devoted, single-hearted workman only sought to connect souls with God by means of His Word. This is the object of all true ministry. Where the ministry is not true, not of God, it will connect souls with itself; and in that case human influence will be brought to bear — weight of character, education, mental power, wealth, position, a thousand things which are all used to form a foundation for the soul's confidence and shut it out from God. Thus the faith of the soul is made to rest in the wisdom of men and not in the power of God.

Christian reader, we want you to ponder this matter deeply. Be assured it demands your serious attention. See that your soul is resting on the deep and solid foundation of God's Word — that you have His direct and positive authority for where you are and what you are doing. And then see also that you have His presence with you. These two things will impart sweet peace to your spirit and holy stability to your path, come what may. "Have not I commanded thee?" — "Lo, I am with thee." It is your happy privilege to know the reality of these things, just as fully and just as distinctly in your day as did Joshua in his day, Jeremiah in his day, and the apostles in their day. The measure of apprehension may vary — the circumstances may differ — but the ground of principle is the same always.

Do not, therefore, we entreat you, be satisfied with anything less than God's authority and God's presence. Be not troubled or perplexed about the conflicting opinions of men. You must expect these. They are nothing new. But remember that, far above all the din and confusion, the strife and controversy, the opposition of sects and parties — far above all these things, in the clear light of the divine presence, in the calmness of the inner sanctuary, faith can hear with distinctness those precious, soul-sustaining words, "Have not I commanded thee?", "Lo, I am with thee."

These things can never fail: they are imperishable. See that you possess them just now. Be able, in the calm dignity of a faith that rests only in the power and on the authority of God, to give a reason

for the path you tread, the work you do, the niche you fill. This is not highmindedness or haughtiness, dogmatism or pride, self-confidence or vainglory. It is the very reverse. It is self-denial and confidence in God. "With the lowly is wisdom." Precious truth! May we all remember it! It is the lowly mind that really possesses heavenly wisdom. It is not the learned, the astute, the intelligent or clear-headed among men who can thread their way through the labyrinths of the present moment. No, it is the lowly, the simple, the self-distrusting, the childlike, the unpretending. These are they who will have wisdom to guide them in darkest times. These are they who will possess peace in their souls and stability in their ways. May God's Spirit lead us into these things!

### **OBEDIENCE: WHAT IS IT?**

### **AND ARE WE OBEDIENT?**

It is of the greatest importance for the Christian to have a clear apprehension of the true character of Christian obedience. It is evident that I must be a Christian before ever I can obey Christ. 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 before 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 obedience. There is not, and cannot be, a single trace of legality in the obedience to which we are called as Christians, seeing that, before 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," 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 best 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 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 Ephesians 5 of "the washing of water by the Word." Again, in James 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 passage on this great subject. In 1 Peter 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 Spirit. 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 Galatians 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.

We must remember 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 came 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 anything 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 who 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? 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 didn't care 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 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 big 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 anything this side of heaven be more precious than to have the Father and the Son coming to us and making their "mansion" (abode) 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 so he does that thing without being directly commanded to do it. He thus gives me a much

more touching proof of his love and of his affectionate interest in all my wishes. This is most pleasing 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 in the obedience which we are privileged to render. This is most blessedly confirmed by the Spirit in 1 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" (1 Peter 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 food 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 sadly is 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, so He might manifest Himself to us and make His abode with us. Blessed Lord, do make us more obedient in all things!

### **PREACHING CHRIST: WHAT IS IT?**

"Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8). This brief and simple statement embodies in it a grand characteristic feature of Christianity — a feature which distinguishes it from every system of religion that now exists or ever was propounded in this world. Christianity is not a set of abstractions — a number of dogmas — a system of doctrines. It is preeminently a religion of living facts, of divine realities — a religion which finds its center in a divine Person, the Man Christ Jesus. He is the foundation of all Christian doctrine. From His divine and glorious Person all truth radiates. He is the living fountain from which all the streams issue forth in fullness, power and blessing. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." Apart from Him all is death and darkness. There is not one atom of life, not one ray of light in all this world except what comes from Him. A man may possess all the learning of the schools; he may bask in the most brilliant light that science can pour upon his understanding and his pathway; he may garnish his name with all the honors which his fellow mortals can heap upon him, but if there is the breadth of a hair between him and Jesus — if he is not in Christ and Christ in him — if he has not believed on the Name of the only begotten Son of God, he is involved in death and darkness. Christ is "the true Light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world." Hence no man can, in a divine sense, be termed an enlightened man except "a man in Christ."

It is well to be clear as to this. It is needful to press it, in this day of man's pride and pretension. Men are boasting of their light and intelligence, of the progress of civilization, of the research and discovery of the age in which our lot is cast, of the arts and sciences and what has been done and produced by their means. We do not want to touch these things. We are quite willing to let them stand

for what they are really worth, but we are arrested by these words which fell from the Master's lips, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Here it is, "He that followeth Me." Life and light are only to be had in Jesus. If a man is not following Jesus, he is plunged in death and darkness, even though he is possessed of the most commanding genius and enriched with all the stores of science and knowledge.

We will be deemed narrow-minded in thus writing. We will by many, be regarded as men of very contracted views indeed — men of one idea, and even that one idea presented in a one-sided way. Well, be it so. We are men of one idea; and we heartily desire to be more so. But what is that one idea? Christ! He is God's grand idea, blessed be His Name forevermore. Christ is the sum and substance of all that is in the mind of God. He is the central object in heaven, the grand fact of eternity, the object of God's affection — of angels' homage — of saints' worship — of demons' dread — the alpha and the omega of the divine counsels — the keystone of the arch of revelation — the central sun of God's universe.

All this being so, we need not marvel at Satan's constant effort to keep people from coming to Christ and to draw them away from Him after they have come to Him. He hates Christ and will use anything and everything to hinder the heart in getting hold of Him. Satan will use cares or pleasures, poverty or riches, sickness or health, vice or morality, profanity or religion; in short, he cares not what it is, provided he can keep Jesus out of the heart.

On the other hand, the constant object of the Holy Spirit is to present Christ Himself to the soul. It is not something *about* Christ, doctrines respecting Him, or principles connected with Him merely, but His own very self in living power and freshness. We cannot read a page of the New Testament without noticing this. The whole book, from the opening lines of Matthew to the close of the Revelation, is simply a record of facts respecting Jesus. It is not our purpose to follow out this record; to do so would be interesting beyond expression, but it would lead us away from our immediate thesis to which we must now address ourselves. May it be unfolded and applied in the power of the Holy Spirit!

In studying Scripture in connection with our subject, we shall find the Lord Jesus Christ presented in three ways — as a test, as a victim and as a model. Each of these points contains in itself a volume of truth, and when we view them in their connection, they open to our souls a wide field of Christian knowledge and experience. Let us then consider what is meant when we speak of

### **Christ As a Test**

In contemplating the life of the Lord Jesus as a Man, we have the perfect exhibition of what a man ought to be. We see in Him the two grand creature perfections, namely, obedience and dependence. Though God over all, the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of the wide universe; though He could say, "I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering," yet so thoroughly and absolutely did He take the place of a Man on this earth that He could say, "The Lord God hath given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth Mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord hath opened Mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back" (Isa. 1: 4-5).

The Lord never moved one step without divine authority. When the devil tempted Him to work a miracle to satisfy His hunger, His reply was, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord." He would readily work a miracle to feed others, but not to feed Himself. Again, when tempted to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple, He replied, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." He had no command from God to

cast Himself down, and He could not act without it; to do so would be a tempting of Providence. So also, when tempted with the offer of all the kingdoms of this world, on condition of doing homage to Satan, His reply was, "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

The Man Christ Jesus was perfectly obedient. Nothing could tempt Him to diverge the breadth of a hair from the narrow path of obedience. He was the obedient Man from first to last. It was the same to Him where He served or what He did. He would act by the authority of the divine Word. He would take bread from God; He would come to His temple when sent of God, and He would wait for God's time to receive the kingdoms of this world. His obedience was absolute and uninterrupted from the manger to the cross, and in this He was well pleasing to God. It was creature perfection; and nothing in any wise different from this could be agreeable to God. If perfect obedience is pleasing to God, then disobedience must be hateful. The life of Jesus, in this one feature of it, was a continual feast to the heart of God. His perfect obedience was continually sending up a cloud of the most fragrant incense to the throne of God.

Now, this is what a man *ought* to be. We have here a perfect test of man's condition, and when we look at ourselves in the light of this one ray of Christ's glory, we must see our entire departure from the true and only proper place of the creature. The light that shines from the character and ways of Jesus reveals, as nothing else could reveal, the moral darkness of our natural state. We are not obedient; we are willful; we do our own pleasure; we have cast off the authority of God; His Word does not govern us. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8).

It may be asked, "Did not the law make manifest the wilfulness and enmity of our hearts?" No doubt, but who can fail to see the difference between a law *demanding* obedience and the Son of God, as Man, *exhibiting* obedience? Well then, in so far as the life and ways of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ transcend in glory the entire legal system, and in so far as the Person of Christ transcends in glory and dignity the person of Moses, just so far does Christ, as a test of man's condition, exceed in moral power the law of Moses. And the same holds good of every test that was ever applied and every other standard that was ever set up. The Man Christ Jesus, viewed in the one point of perfect obedience, is an absolutely perfect test by which our natural state can be tried and made manifest.

Take another ray of Christ's moral glory. He was as absolutely dependent upon God as He was obedient to Him. He could say, "Preserve Me, O God, for in Thee do I put My trust" (Ps. 16). And again, "I was cast upon Thee from the womb" (Ps. 22). He never for one moment abandoned the attitude of entire dependence upon the living God. It is befitting to be dependent upon God for everything. The blessed Jesus ever was! He breathed the very atmosphere of dependence from Bethlehem to Calvary. He was the only Man who ever lived a life of uninterrupted dependence upon God, from first to last. Others have depended partially, He did it perfectly. Others have occasionally or even mainly looked to God; He never looked anywhere else. He found *all* His springs, not some of them or most of them, in God.

This, too, was most pleasing to God. To have a Man on this earth whose heart was never, for one single moment of time, out of the attitude of dependence, was very precious to the Father. Hence, again and again, heaven opened and the testimony came forth, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Since this dependence in the perfect life of the Man Christ Jesus was infinitely agreeable to the mind of God, it also furnishes an infinitely powerful test of the natural state of man. We can here see, as

we can see nowhere else, our apostasy from the creature's only proper place — the place of dependence. True, the inspired historian informs us in Genesis 3 that the first Adam fell from his original place of obedience and dependence. True also, the law of Moses makes manifest that Adam's descendants are, every one of them, in a condition of revolt and independence, but who can fail to see with what superior power all this is brought out in this world by the life and ways of Jesus? In Him we see a Man perfectly obedient and perfectly dependent in the midst of a scene of disobedience and independence, and in the face of every temptation to abandon the position which He occupied.

Thus the life of Jesus in this one particular point of perfect dependence, tests man's condition and proves his entire departure from God. Man in his natural state always seeks to be independent of God. We need not go into any detailed proof of this. This one ray of light, emanating from the glory of Christ and shining into man's heart, lays bare every chamber thereof, and proves beyond all question — proves in a way that nothing else could prove — man's departure from God and the haughty independence which marks our natural condition.

The more intense the light which you bring to bear upon an object, the more perfectly you can see what it is. There is a vast difference between looking at a picture in the dim morning twilight and examining it in broad daylight. Thus it is in reference to our real state by nature. We may view it in the light of the law, in the light of conscience, in the light of the loftiest standard of morality known among men, and in so viewing it, we may see that it is not what it ought to be, but it is only when we view it in the full blaze of the moral glory of Christ that we can see it as it really is. It is one thing to say, "We have done those things which we ought not to have done, and left undone those things which we ought to have done," and it is another thing altogether to see ourselves in that perfect light which makes everything manifest. It is one thing to look at our ways in the light of law, conscience or morality, and another thing to look at our nature in the light of that all-powerful test, namely, the life of the Man Christ Jesus.

We will refer to one more feature in the character of Christ, and that is His perfect self-emptiness. He never once sought His own interest in anything. His was a life of constant self-sacrifice. "The Son of Man has come to serve and to give." These two words "serve" and "give" formed the motto of His life and were written in letters of blood upon His cross. In His marvelous life and death, He was the Servant and the Giver. He was ever ready to answer every form of human need. We see Him at Sychar's lonely well, opening the fountain of living water to a poor thirsty soul. We see Him at the pool of Bethesda, imparting strength to a poor impotent cripple. We see Him at the gate of Nain, drying the widow's tears and giving back to her bosom her only son.

All this and much more we see, but we never see Him looking after His own interests. No, never! We cannot too deeply ponder this fact in the life of Jesus, nor can we too thoroughly scrutinize ourselves in the light which this wondrous fact emits. If in the light of his perfect obedience, we can detect our terrible wilfulness; if in the light of His absolute dependence, we can discern our pride and haughty independence; then surely, in the light of His self-emptiness and self-sacrifice, we may discover our gross selfishness in its ten thousand forms, and as we discover it, we must loathe and abhor ourselves. Jesus never thought of Himself in anything He ever said or did. He found His food and His drink in doing the will of God and in meeting the need of man.

What a test is here! How it proves us! How it makes manifest what is in us by nature! How it sheds its bright light over man's nature and man's world, and rebukes both the one and the other! For what, after all, is the great root-principle of nature and of this world? Self! "Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself" (Ps. 49). Self-interest is really the governing principle in the life of every

unrenewed man, woman and child in this world. Nature may clothe itself in very amiable and attractive forms; it may assume a very generous and benevolent aspect; it can scatter as well as hoard; but of this we may rest assured that the unregenerate man is wholly incapable of rising above self as an object. In no way could this be made so thoroughly manifest — in no way could it be developed with such force and clearness — in no way could its vileness and hideousness be so fully detected and judged as in the light of that perfect test presented in the self-sacrificing life of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. It is when that penetrating light shines upon us that we see ourselves in all our true depravity and personal vileness.

The Lord Jesus came into this world and lived a perfect life — perfect in thought, perfect in word, perfect in action. He perfectly glorified God, and not only so, but He perfectly tested man. He showed what God is, and He showed also what man ought to be — showed it not merely in His doctrine, but in His walk. Man was never so tested before. Therefore, the Lord Jesus could say, “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father” (John 15: 22-24).

Again, He says, “I judge no man; and yet if I judge, My judgment is true” (John 8: 15-16). The object of His mission was not judgment but salvation, yet the effect of His life was judgment upon everyone with whom He came in contact. It was impossible for anyone to stand in the light of Christ's moral glory and not be judged in the very center and source of His being. When Peter saw himself in that light, he exclaimed, “Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5).

Such was the certain result of a man's seeing himself in the presence of Christ. Not all the thunderings and lightnings of Mount Sinai, not all the condemnations of the legal system, not all the voices of the prophets could produce such an effect upon a sinner as one single ray of the moral glory of Christ darting into his soul. I may look at the law and feel I have not kept it, and own I deserve its curse. Conscience may terrify me and tell me I deserve hell-fire because of my sins. All this is true, but the very moment I see myself in the light of what Christ is, my whole moral being is laid bare — every root, every fiber, every motive spring, every element, all the sources of thought, feeling, desire, affection and imagination are exposed to view, and I abhor myself. It cannot possibly be otherwise. The whole book of God proves it. The history of all God's people illustrates it. To cite cases would fill volumes.

True conviction is produced in the soul when the Holy Spirit lets in upon it the light of the glory of Christ. Law is a reality, conscience is a reality, and the Spirit of God may and does make use of the former to act on the latter, but it is only when I see myself in the light of what Christ is, that I get a proper view of myself. Then I am led to exclaim with Job, “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; therefore I abhor myself.”

Reader, have you ever seen yourself in this way? Have you ever really tested yourself by the perfect standard of the life of Christ? It may be you have been looking at your fellow man and comparing yourself with that imperfect standard, and trying yourself by that imperfect test. This will never do. Christ is the true standard, the perfect test, the divine touchstone. God cannot have anything different from Christ. You must be like Him — conformed to His image — before you can find your place in the presence of God. Do you ask, “How can this ever be?” By knowing Christ as the Victim and by being formed after Him as the Model!

It is most needful, before we proceed with the subject which has been engaging our attention, that

the whole world and each human heart should be seen and judged in the light of the moral glory of Christ — that divine and perfect test by which everyone and everything must be tried. Christ is God's standard for all. The more fully and faithfully the world and self are measured thereby, the better. The grand question for the whole world and for each human heart is this, "How has Christ been treated? What have we done with Him?" God sent His only begotten Son into the world as the expression of His love to sinners. He said, "It may be they will reverence My Son when they see Him." Did they do so? Sadly, no. "They said, This is the heir; come let us kill Him." This is how the world treated Christ.

Be it observed, it was not the world in its dark pagan form that so treated the blessed One. No; it was the world of the religious Jew and of the polished and cultivated Greek. It was not into the dark places of the earth, as men speak, that Jesus came, but into the very midst of His own highly favored people "who were Israelites; to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." It was to them He came in meekness, lowliness and love. It was among them He lived and labored and "went about doing good, healing all who were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him." How did they treat Him? This is the question; let us ponder it deeply, and ponder the answer. They preferred a murderer to the holy, spotless, loving Jesus. The world got its choice. Jesus and Barabbas were set before it and the question was put, "Which will you have?" What was the answer — the deliberate, determined answer? "Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber."

Tremendous fact! — a fact little weighed, little understood, little entered into — a fact which stamps the character of this present world and tests and makes manifest the state of every unrepentant, unconverted heart beneath the canopy of heaven. If I want a true view of the world, of nature, of the human heart, of myself, where shall I turn? To police reports? To the calendars of our Grand Juries? To the various statistics of the social and moral condition of our cities and towns? No; all these may set before us facts which fill us with horror, but let it be distinctly seen and deeply felt that all the facts ever recorded of crime in its most fearful forms, are not to be compared with that one fact, the rejection and crucifixion of the Lord of glory. This crime stands out in bold relief from the background of man's entire history and fixes the true condition of the world, of man, of nature, of self.

Now, it is this we are anxious to urge upon the heart of the reader before we proceed to the second division of our subject. It is the only way to get a right sense of what the world is and of what the human heart is. Men may speak of the vast improvement which has taken place in the world and of the dignity of human nature, but the heart turns back to that hour in when the world, when called to make a choice between the Lord of glory and a murderer, deliberately selected the latter and nailed the former to a tree, between two thieves. This crime of crimes remains, so far as the world is concerned, uncanceled, unforgiven. It stands recorded on the eternal page. Not only is this so as regards the world as a whole, but it also holds good for the unrepentant, unconverted reader of these lines. The solemn question still remains to be answered — answered by the world — answered by the individual sinner — "What have you done with the Son of God? What has become of Him? How have you treated Him?"

Of what use is it to point to the progress of the human race, to the march of civilization, to the advance of the arts and sciences, to improvements in transportation and communication, to modern weapons, to the ten thousand forms in which human genius has tasked itself in order to minister to human lust, luxury and self-indulgence? All these things are far outweighed by the misery, the moral degradation, the squalid poverty, the ignorance and vice in which more than nine-tenths of the human race are involved.

But we do not attempt to put barbarism against civilization, poverty against luxury, grossness against refinement, ignorance against intelligence. We have only one test, the one standard, the one gauge, and that is the cross to which Jesus was nailed by the representatives of this world's religion, its science, its politics and its civilization.

It is here we take our stand and ask this question, Has the world ever yet repented of this act? No; for had it done so, the kingdoms of this world would have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. It is here we take our stand and ask the reader, Have *you* repented of this act? He may say, "I never did it. It was done by wicked Jews and wicked Romans nearly 2000 years ago. How could I be counted guilty of a crime which was committed so many centuries before I was born?"

We reply, It was the act of the world and you are either part of that world which stands before God under the guilt of the murder of His Son, or you have, as a repentant and converted soul, found refuge and shelter in the pardoning love of God. There is no middle ground, and the more clearly you see this the better, for in no way can you have a just sense of the condition of this world or of your own heart except in the light which is cast thereon by the life and death of Christ *as a test*. We cannot stop short of this mark if we would form a true estimate of the character of the world, the nature of man and the condition of the unconverted soul. As to the world, there can be no real improvement in its condition, no radical change in its state, until the sword of divine judgment has settled the question of its treatment of the Son of God. As far as the individual sinner is concerned, the divine testimony is, "Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out." This leads us, in the second place, to contemplate

### **Christ As A Victim**

This is a much more pleasing subject to dwell upon, though the other must never be omitted in preaching Christ. It is too much lost sight of in our preaching. We do not sufficiently press home upon the conscience of the sinner, Christ both in life and death, as a test of nature's true condition and a proof of its irremediable ruin. The law may be used, and rightly so, to do its testing work in the conscience. Yet, through the blindness and folly of our hearts, we may attempt to take up that very law to work out a righteousness for ourselves — that law by which, when rightly viewed, is the *knowledge* of sin. But it is impossible for anyone to have his eyes opened to see the death of Christ as the terrible exhibition of the enmity of the heart against God, and not be convinced that he is utterly and hopelessly ruined and undone. This is true repentance. It is the moral judgment, not merely of my acts, but of my nature in the light of the cross as the only perfect test of what that nature really is.

All this is fully brought out in the preaching of Peter in the earlier chapters of the Acts. Look at the second chapter where we find the Holy Spirit presenting Christ both as a test and as a victim. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know. Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain; whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that He should be holden of it ... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Here we have solemn and bitter dealing with conscience as to the way they treated the Lord's Anointed. It was not merely that they had broken the law; that was true; nor yet that they had merely rejected all the witnesses that had been sent to them; that was equally true, but that was not all. They had actually crucified and slain "a Man approved of God," and that Man was none other than the Son of God Himself. This was the naked and startling fact which the inspired preacher urges home with

solemn emphasis upon the consciences of his hearers.

Mark the result! “Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” No marvel that they were pierced to the very heart. Their eyes were opened and what did they discover? Why, that they were actually against God Himself — the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And about what were they at issue? About the law? No. About the prophets? No. About the rites and ceremonies, the statutes and institutions of the Mosaic economy? No. All this was true and bad enough. But there was something far beyond all this. Their guilt had reached its culmination in the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus, whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.”

This truly was and is the climax of man's guilt, and when brought home in the mighty energy of the Holy Spirit to any heart in all this world, it must produce true repentance and evoke from the depths of the soul, the earnest inquiry, “Men and brethren, what shall I do?” “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” It is not merely that we have failed in keeping the law, in doing our duty to God and our duty to our neighbor in living as we should. Sadly, all this is too true. But oh! we have been guilty of the dreadful sin of crucifying the Son of God. Such is the measure of human guilt, and such was the truth pressed home by Peter on the consciences of the men of his time.

What then? When the sharp edge of this powerful testimony had penetrated the hearts of the hearers, when the arrow from the quiver of the Almighty had pierced the soul and drawn forth the bitter penitential cry, “What shall we do?,” what was the answer? What had the preacher to say? “Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” So also in the third chapter, he says, “And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

Here we have the two things very distinctly presented, namely, Christ as a test and Christ as a victim — the cross as the exhibition of man's guilt and the cross as the exhibition of the love of God. “Ye killed the Prince of life.” Here was the arrow for the conscience. “But those things which God before had showed that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled.” Here was the healing balm. It was the determinate counsel of God that Christ should suffer, and while it was true that man had displayed his hatred of God in nailing Jesus to the cross, yet no sooner is any soul made to see this and thus is brought to divine conviction, than the Holy Spirit holds up to view that very cross as the foundation of the counsels of redeeming love and the ground of the full remission of sins to every true believer.

Thus it was in that most touching scene between Joseph and his brethren as recorded in Genesis 44 and 45. The guilty brethren are made to pass through deep and painful exercises of heart, until they stand in the presence of their injured brother with the arrow of conviction piercing their inmost soul. Then, but not until then, these soothing words fall upon their ears, “Now, therefore, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life.... So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.”

Exquisite, matchless grace! The moment they entered the place of confession, Joseph was in the place of forgiveness. This was divine. “He spoke roughly to them” when they were thoughtless as to

their sin, but no sooner did they say these words, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother," than they were met by the sweet response of grace, "It was not you, but God."

Thus it is, beloved reader, in every case. The very instant the sinner takes the place of contrition, God takes the place of full and free forgiveness; and most assuredly, when God forgives, the sinner is forgiven. "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. 32).

Would we have it otherwise? Surely not. An hard heart, an unbroken spirit, an unreached conscience could not understand or make a right use of such words as, "Be not grieved; it was not you, but God." How could it? How could an unrepentant heart appreciate words which are only designed to soothe and tranquilize a broken and contrite spirit? Impossible. To tell a hard-hearted sinner not to be grieved, would be fatally false treatment. Joseph could not possibly have said to his brethren, "Be not grieved with yourselves" until they had said and felt "We are verily guilty."

Such is the order, and it is well to remember it. "I will confess and Thou forgavest." The moment the sinner takes his true place in the presence of God, there is not one syllable said to him about his sins except it be to tell him that they are all forgiven and all forgotten. "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." God not only forgives but forgets. The convicted sinner stands and gazes upon the cross, and sees himself in the light of the glory of Christ as the divine and perfect test, and cries out, "What shall I do?" How is he answered? By the unfolding of Christ as a victim, slain by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Who can define the feelings of a soul that has been convicted of desiring a murderer and crucifying the Son of God, when he learns that that very crucified One is the channel of pardon and life to him — that the blood which was shed puts away forever the guilt of shedding it? What language can adequately set forth the emotion of one who has seen his guilt, not merely in the light of the ten commandments, but as shown out in the cross of a world-rejected Jesus; and yet knows and believes that his guilt is all and forever put away? Who could attempt to embody in language the feelings of Joseph's brethren when they felt his tears of affection dropping upon them? What a scene! Tears of contrition and tears of affection mingled! Precious mixture! The mind of God alone can duly estimate its value and sweetness.

But here let us just guard against misunderstanding. Let no one suppose that tears of contrition are the *cause* of pardon or the meritorious ground of peace. Far, far away be the thought from the reader's mind! All the tears of contrition that ever gushed forth from the fountains of broken hearts, from the days of Joseph's brethren to the days of the third of Acts and to the present moment, could not form the just foundation of a sinner's acceptance and peace with God or wash away a single stain from the human conscience. The blood of the divine Victim and that alone, in prospect from the fall of man to Calvary and in retrospect, from Calvary till this moment — nothing except that precious blood, that atoning death, that peerless sacrifice — could justify a holy God in forgiving one sin. But, blessed be God, so perfectly has that sacrifice vindicated and glorified His Name, that the moment any sinner sees his true state, his guilt, his rebellion, his enmity, his base ingratitude, his hatred of God and of His Christ; the very moment he takes the place of true contrition in the divine presence — the place of one utterly broken down, without plea of moderation — that moment, infinite grace meets him with those healing, soothing, tranquilizing words, "Be not grieved," "your sins and iniquities will I remember no more," "Go in peace."

Some might suppose that we attach undue importance to the measure of contrition, or that we mean to teach that everyone must feel the same character or degree of conviction as was produced by

Peter's powerful appeal in Acts 2. Nothing is further from our thoughts. We believe there must and there will be conviction and contrition. Further, we believe the cross is the only adequate measure of human guilt — that it is only in the light of that cross that anyone can have a just sense of the vileness, sinfulness and loathsomeness of his nature. But all may not see this. Many never think of the cross as a test and proof of their guilt, but merely as the blessed ground of their pardon. They are bowed down under a sense of their many sins and shortcomings, and they look to the cross of Christ as the only ground of pardon. Most surely they are right! But there is a deeper view of sin, a deeper sense of what human nature in its fallen state really is, a deeper conviction of the utterly godless and christless condition of the heart. Where is this to be reached? At the cross and there alone. It will never do to look back at the men of the first century and say what terrible sinners they were to crucify the living embodiment of all that was holy and good, gracious and pure. No; what is needed is to bring the cross forward into our century and measure nature, the world and self thereby.

This, be assured of it, reader, is the true way to judge the question. There is no real change. “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” is as positively the cry of the world of today as it was of the world of the first century. The cross was then and is now the only true measure of human guilt. When anyone, man, woman or child, is brought to see this, he has a far deeper sense of his condition than ever he can have by looking at his sins and shortcomings in the light of conscience or of the ten commandments.

And to what will all this lead the soul? What will be the effect of seeing self in the light which the cross, as a test, throws upon it? The deepest self-aborrence. Yes, and this holds good in the case of the most refined moralist and amiable religionist who ever lived, just as much as in the case of the grossest and vilest sinner. It is no longer a question of grades and shades of character, to be settled by the graduated scale of human conscience or the moral sense. Oh no; the cross is seen as the only perfect standard. Nature, the world, the heart, self, is measured by that standard, and its true condition reached and judged.

We are intensely anxious that the reader should thoroughly enter into this point. He will find it to be of immense moral power in forming his convictions, both as to his own heart and as to the real character of the world through which he is passing — its moral foundations, its framework, its features, its principles, its spirit, its aim, its end. We want him to take the cross as the perfect measure of himself and all around him. Let him not listen to the suggestions of Satan or to the thoughts that spring up in his own heart, to the vapourings of philosophy and science, falsely so-called, to the infidel vauntings of this preeminently infidel age. Let him listen to the voice of Holy Scripture which is the voice of the living God. Let him use the test which Scripture furnishes — a crucified Christ. Let him try all that and see where it will lead him. One thing is certain, it will lead him down in his own self-consciousness into those profound depths where nothing can avail him except Christ as the divine Victim who bore the judgment of God against sin and opened heaven to the sinner.

Having sought to present Christ as a test and Christ as a victim, we shall now, in dependence upon divine guidance and teaching, proceed to consider Him as

### **The Model**

to which the Holy Spirit seeks to conform every true believer. This will complete our subject and open up a wide field of thought to the Christian reader. God has predestinated His people to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8). But how can we ever be formed after such a model? How can we ever think of being conformed to such an image? The answer to these questions will unfold more fully the blessedness and infinite value of the truth which has already passed before us.

If the reader has followed the line of thought we have been pursuing; if he has experimentally entered into it or if it has entered into him in the power of the Spirit of God; if he has made it his own, he will see and feel and own that in himself, by nature, there is not a single atom of good, not one point on which he can rest his hopes for eternity. He will see that, so far as he is concerned, he is a total wreck. He will see that the divine purpose as revealed in the gospel is not to reconstruct this moral wreck, but to erect an entirely new thing. Of this new thing, the cross of Christ is the foundation.

The reader cannot ponder this too deeply. Christianity is not the old nature made better, but the new nature implanted. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3). "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5).

The effect of the mission of Christ to this world was to prove, as nothing else could have proved, man's totally irremediable ruin. When man rejected and crucified the Son of God, his case was proved to be hopeless. It is of the deepest importance to be thoroughly clear as to this. It solves a thousand difficulties and clears the prospect of many a dark and heavy cloud. As long as a man is possessed with the idea that he must improve his nature by any process whatever, he must be a total stranger to the fundamental truth of Christianity.

Sadly, there is a fearful amount of darkness and error in the professing Church as to this simple truth of the gospel. Man's total ruin is denied or reasoned away in one way or another, and the very truths of Christianity as well as the institutions of the Mosaic economy, are made use of to improve fallen nature and fit it for the presence of God. Thus the true nature of sin is not felt; the claims of holiness are not understood; the free, full and sovereign grace of God is set aside; and the sacrificial death of Christ is thrown overboard.

The sense of all this makes us long for more earnestness, power and faithfulness in setting forth those foundation truths which are constantly affirmed and maintained in the New Testament. We believe it to be the solemn duty of every writer and every speaker, of all authors, editors, preachers and teachers to take a firm stand against the strong current of opposition to the simplest truths of divine revelation, so painfully and alarmingly apparent in every direction. There is an urgent demand for faithfulness in maintaining the standard of pure truth, not in a spirit of controversy, but in meekness, earnestness and simplicity. We want to have Christ preached as a test of all that is in man, in nature, in the world. We want Christ preached as a victim, bearing all that was due to our sins; and we want Him preached as a model on which we are to be formed in all things.

This is Christianity. It is not fallen nature trying to work out righteousness by keeping the law of Moses. Neither is it fallen nature striving to imitate Christ. No; it is the complete setting aside of fallen nature as an utterly good-for-nothing thing and the reception of a crucified and risen Christ as the foundation of all of our hopes for time and eternity. How could the unrenewed sinner get righteousness by keeping the law, by the which is the knowledge of sin? How could he ever set about to imitate Christ? Utterly impossible! "He must be born again." He must get new life in Christ before he can exhibit Christ. This cannot be too strongly insisted upon. For an unconverted man to think of imitating the example or walk in the footsteps of Jesus, is the most hopeless thing in the world. Ah! no; the only effect of looking at the blessed example of Jesus is to put us in the dust in self-abasement and true contrition. And when from this place we lift our eyes to the cross of Calvary to which Jesus was nailed as our surety, our sin-bearer, our substitute, we see pardon and peace flowing down to us through His most precious sacrifice. Then, but not until then, we can calmly and happily sit down to study Him as

our model.

If I look at the life of Jesus apart from His atoning death; if I measure myself by that perfect standard; if I think of working myself into conformity to such an image, it must plunge me into utter despair. But when I behold that perfect, spotless, holy One bearing my sins in His own body on the tree — when I see Him laying in His death and resurrection the everlasting foundation of life and peace and glory for me — then, with a peaceful conscience and liberated heart, I can look back over the whole of that marvelous life and see therein how I am to walk, for “He has left us an example that we should follow His steps.”

Thus, while Christ as a test shows me my guilt, Christ as a victim cancels that guilt, and Christ as a model shines before the vision of my soul as the standard at which I am to aim continually. In a word, Christ is my life and Christ is my model, and the Holy Spirit, who has taken up His abode in me on the ground of accomplished redemption, works in me for the purpose of conforming me to the image of Christ. True, I must always feel and own how infinitely short I come of that lofty standard, but still, Christ is my life, though the manifestation of that life is sadly hindered by the infirmities and corruptions of my old nature. The life is the same, as the apostle John says, “which thing is true in him and in you, because the darkness is past and the true light now shineth” (1 John 2: 8). We can never be satisfied with anything less than “Christ our life, Christ our model.” “For me to live is Christ.” It was Christ reproduced in the daily life of Paul by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is true Christianity. It is not flesh turned religious and leading a pious life. It is not unrenewed, fallen, ruined nature trying to recover itself by rites and ceremonies, prayers, alms and vigils. It is not the old man turning from “wicked works” to “dead works,” exchanging the beer parlor, the theatre, the gaming table and the race course, for the monastery, the pew, the meeting house or the lecture hall. No reader, it is “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” and Christ reproduced in your daily life by the powerful ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

Be not deceived! It is of no possible use for fallen nature to clothe itself in forms of religion. It may become involved in the attractive things of ritualism, sacred music, pious pictures, sculpture, architecture, dim religious light. It may scatter the fruits of a large-hearted benevolence: it may visit the sick, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shed on all around the sunshine of a genial philanthropy. It may read the Bible and go through every form of religious routine. It may even attempt a hollow imitation of Christ: schoolmen may discipline it, others may subdue it, mystics may enwrap it in their cloudy reveries and lead it into quiet meditation with nothing to contemplate. In short, all that religion, morality and philosophy can do for it and with it, may be done *but all in vain*, inasmuch as it still remains true that, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” “It cannot see or enter the kingdom of God,” for “ye must be born again.”

Here lies the deep and solid, the divine and eternal foundation of Christianity. There must be the life of Christ in the soul — the link with “the Second Man, the last Adam.” The first man has been condemned and set aside. The Second Man came and stood beside the first. He proved him and tested him, and showed most fully that there was not a single ingredient in his nature, his character or his condition which could be made available in that new creation, that heavenly kingdom which was about to be introduced — that not a single stone or timber in the old building could be worked into the new — that “in my flesh dwelleth no good thing” — and that the ground must be thoroughly cleared of all the rubbish of ruined humanity, and the foundation laid in the death of the Second Man who in resurrection has become, as the last Adam, the Head of the new creation. Apart from Him there can be no life. “He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5: 12).

Such is the conclusive language of Holy Scripture, and this language must hold good in spite of all the reasonings of those who boast themselves in their liberal and enlightened views, in their intellectual powers and in the breadth of their theology. It matters little what men may think or say; we have only to hearken to the Word of our God which must stand forever, and that Word declares, “Ye must be born again.” Men cannot alter this. There is a kingdom which can never be moved. In order to see or enter this heavenly kingdom, we must be born again. Man has been tried in every way and proved wanting. Now, “Once, in the end of the ages, hath Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9: 26).

This is the only ground of life and peace. When the soul is firmly settled thereon, it can find its delight in studying Christ as its model. It is finished with all its own poor efforts to obtain life, pardon and the favor of God. It flings aside its “deadly doings;” it has found life in Jesus, and now its grand business is to study Him, to mark His footsteps and walk therein — to do as He did, to aim always at being like Him, to seek in everything to be conformed to Him. The great question for the Christian on all occasions is not, “What harm is there in this or that?” but, “Is this like Christ?” He is our divine pattern. Are husbands exhorted to love their wives? It is “As Christ loved the Church.” What a model! Who can ever come up to it? No one, but we are still to keep it before us. Thus we shall enter into the truth of those lines of our own poet,

*“The more Thy glories strike mine eyes,  
The humbler I shall lie,  
Thus while I sink, my joys shall rise  
Immeasurably high.”*

The Christian reader will at once perceive what a wide field of practical truth is opened up by this closing point in our subject. What an unspeakable privilege to be able, day by day, to sit down and study the life and ways of our Great Example to see what He was; to mark His words, His spirit, His style; to trace Him in all the details of His marvelous path; to note how “He went about doing good”; how it was His food and His drink to do the will of God and to minister to the need of man. And then to think that He loves us, that He died for us, that He is our life, that He has given us of His Spirit to be the spring of power in our souls to subdue all that is of the old root of self and produce in our daily life the expression of Christ.

What mortal tongue can unfold the preciousness of all this? It is not living by rules and regulations. It is not pursuing a dead round of duties. It is not subscribing to certain dogmas of religious belief. No; it is union with Christ and the manifestation of Christ. This we repeat and reiterate and would impress upon the reader. This and nothing less, nothing different, is true, genuine, living Christianity. Let him see that he possesses it, for if not, he is dead in trespasses and sins, he is far from God and far from the kingdom of God. But if he has been led to believe on the name of the only begotten Son of God, if as a consciously ruined and guilty sinner he has fled for refuge to the blood of the cross, then Christ is his life, and it should be his one unvarying object, day by day, to study his model, to fix his eye on the headline and aim at coming as near to that as possible. This is the true secret of all practical godliness and sanctification. This alone constitutes a living Christianity. It stands in vivid contrast with what is commonly called “a religious life” which, alas! very often resolves itself into a mere dead routine, a rigid adherence to lifeless forms, a barren ritualism which, far from exhibiting anything of the freshness and reality of the new man in Christ, is a distortion of nature itself.

Christianity brings a living Christ into the heart and into the life. It diffuses a divine influence all

around. It enters into all the relations and associations of human life. It teaches us how to act as husbands and wives, as fathers and mothers, as masters, as children, as servants. It does not teach us by dry rules and regulations, but by setting before us, in the Person of Christ, a perfect model of what we ought to be. It presents to our view the very One who, as a test, left us without a single plea, and as a victim, left us without a single stain, and who now, as our model, is to be the subject of our admiring study and the standard at which we are ever and only to aim. It does not matter where we are or what we are, provided Christ is dwelling in the heart and exhibited in the daily life. If we have Him in the heart and before the eye, He will regulate everything; if we don't have Him, we have nothing.

We will here close our paper, not because our theme is exhausted, but because it is inexhaustible. We believe that the Spirit of God alone can open the subject and apply it in living power and freshness to the soul of the reader and thus lead him into a higher type of Christianity than is ordinarily exhibited in this day of worldly profession. May the Lord stir up all our hearts to seek greater nearness to Himself and more faithful conformity to Him in all our ways! May we be enabled to say with a little more truth and sincerity, "Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto His body of glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

### **JONATHAN**

(1 Samuel 18: 1-4)

"And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David: and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.... Then Jonathan and David made a covenant because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow and to his girdle."

What an exquisite picture we have here! A picture of love stripping itself to clothe its object. There is a vast difference between Saul and Jonathan in this scene. Saul took David home with him to magnify himself by keeping such an one near to himself in his house. But Jonathan stripped himself to clothe David. This was love in one of its charming activities. Jonathan, in common with the many thousands of Israel, had watched the scene in the valley of Elah. He had seen David go forth, single handed, to meet the terrible foe Goliath, whose height, demeanor and words had struck terror into the hearts of the people. He had seen that haughty giant laid low by the hand of faith. He participated with all in the splendid victory.

But there was more than this. It was not merely the victory but the *victor* who filled the heart of Jonathan — not merely the work done, but the one who had done it. Jonathan did not rest satisfied with saying, "Thank God, the giant is dead and we are delivered and may return to our homes and enjoy ourselves." Ah! no; he felt his heart drawn and knit to the conqueror. It was not that he valued the victory less, but he valued the victor more. Therefore, he found his joy in stripping himself of his robes and his armor in order to put them upon the object of his affection.

Christian reader, there is a lesson here for us, and not only a lesson but a rebuke. How prone are we to be occupied with redemption rather than the Redeemer, with salvation rather than with the Savior! No doubt we should rejoice in our salvation, but should we rest there? Should we not, like Jonathan, seek to strip ourselves in order to magnify the Person of Him who went down into the dust of death for us? Assuredly we should, and all the more because He does not demand anything of us. David did not ask Jonathan for his robe or his sword. Had he done so, it would have robbed the scene of all its beauty. No, it was a purely voluntary act. Jonathan forgot himself and thought only of David. Thus it

should be with us and the true David. Love delights to strip itself for its object. “The love of Christ constraineth us.” And again. “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ” (Phil. 3: 7-8).

Oh! for more of this spirit! May our hearts be drawn out and knit more and more to Christ in this day of hollow profession and empty religious formality! May we be so filled with the Holy Spirit that with purpose of heart we may cling to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

### **THE ALABASTER BOX**

(Matthew 26: 6-13)

It is needful to bear in mind in this day of busy doing and restless activity that God looks at everything from one standpoint, measures everything by one rule, tries everything by one touchstone, and that touchstone, that rule that standpoint is Christ. He values things just so far as they stand connected with the Son of His love, and no farther. Whatever is done to Christ, whatever is done for Him, is precious to God. Everything else is valueless. A large amount of work may be done and a great deal of praise drawn forth thereby, from human lips, but when God comes to examine it, He will simply look for one thing and that is the measure in which it stands connected with Christ. His great question will be, has it been done *in* and *to* the Name of Jesus? If it has, it will stand approved and be rewarded; if not, it will be rejected and burned up.

It does not matter in the least what men's thoughts may be about any particular piece of work. They may praise a person to the skies for something he is doing; they may parade his name in the public journals of the day; they may make him the subject of discourse in their circle of friends; he may have a great name as a preacher, a teacher, a writer, a philanthropist, a moral reformer, but if he cannot connect his work with the name of Jesus — if it is not done for Him and to His glory — if it is not the fruit of the constraining love of Christ, it will all be blown away like the chaff of the summer threshing floor, and sink into eternal oblivion.

A man may pursue a quiet, humble, lowly path of service, unknown and unnoticed. His name may never be heard, his work may never be thought of, but what has been done, has been done in simple love to Christ. He has worked in obscurity with his eye on his Master. The smile of his Lord has been quite enough for him. He has never thought for one moment of seeking man's approval; he has never sought to catch man's smile or shun his frown; he has pursued the even tenor of his way, simply looking to Christ and acting for Him. His work will stand. It will be remembered and rewarded, though he did not do it for remembrance or reward, but from simple love to Jesus. It is work of the right kind, a genuine coin which will abide the fire of the day of the Lord.

The thought of all this is very solemn, yet very comforting. It is solemn for those who are working in any measure under the eye of their fellows, but comforting for all those who are working beneath the eye of their Lord. It is an unspeakable mercy to be delivered from the time-serving, menpleasing spirit of the present day and to be enabled to walk before the Lord — to have all our works begun, continued and ended in Him.

Let us look at the lovely and most touching illustration of this, presented to us in “the house of Simon the leper” and recorded in Matthew 26. “Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto Him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on His head as He sat at meat.”

If we enquire as to this woman's object as she walked to Simon's house, what was it? Was it to display the exquisite perfume of her ointment or the material and form of her alabaster box? Was it to obtain the praise of men for her act? Was it to get a name for extraordinary devotedness to Christ in the midst of a little group of personal friends of the Savior? No, reader, it was none of these things. How do we know? Because the Most High God, the Creator of all things, who knows the deepest secrets of all hearts and the true motive of every action was present, and He weighed her action in the balances of the sanctuary and affixed to it the seal of His approval. He was there in the person of Jesus of Nazareth — He the God of knowledge by whom actions are weighed. He sent her action forth as a genuine coin of the realm. He would not, He could not, have done this if there had been any alloy, any admixture of base metal, any false motive, any undercurrent. His holy and all-penetrating eye went right down into the very depths of this woman's soul. He knew, not only what she had done, but how and why she had done it, and He declared, "She hath wrought a good work upon Me."

In a word, Christ Himself was the immediate object of this woman's soul, and it was this which gave value to her act and sent the odor of her ointment straight up to the throne of God. Little did she know or think that untold millions would read the record of her deep personal devotedness. Little did she imagine that her act would be engraved by the Master's hand on the very pages of eternity, and never be obliterated. She thought not of this. She neither sought nor dreamed of such marvelous notoriety; had she done so, it would have robbed her act of all its beauty and deprived her sacrifice of all its fragrance.

But the blessed Lord to whom the act was done, took care that it should not be forgotten. He not only vindicated it at the moment, but handed it down into the future. This was enough for the heart of this woman. Having the approval of her Lord, she could well afford to bear the "indignation" even of "the disciples" and to hear her act pronounced "waste." It was sufficient for her that His heart had been refreshed. All the rest might go for what it was worth. She had never thought of securing man's praise or of avoiding man's scorn. Her one undivided object from first to last, was Christ. From the moment she laid her hand upon that alabaster box, until she broke it and poured its contents upon His sacred Person, it was of Himself alone she thought. She had an intuitive perception of what would be suitable and pleasing to her Lord in the solemn circumstances in which He was placed at the moment, and with exquisite tact she did that thing. She had never thought of what the ointment was worth; or, if she had, she felt that He was worth ten thousand times as much. As to "the poor," they had their place and their claims also, but she felt that Jesus was more to her than all the poor in the world.

In short, the woman's heart was filled with Christ, and it was this that gave character to her action. Others might pronounce it "waste," but we may rest assured that nothing is wasted which is spent for Christ. So the woman judged, and she was right. To put honor upon Him at the very moment when earth and hell were rising up against Him, was the very highest act of service that man or angel could perform. He was going to be offered up. The shadows were lengthening, the gloom was deepening, the darkness thickening. The cross with all its horrors was at hand; this woman anticipated it all and came beforehand to anoint the body of her adorable Lord.

Mark the result. See how immediately the blessed Lord comes to her defense and shields her from the indignation and scorn of those who ought to have known better. "When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me. For ye have the poor always with you, but Me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My burial. Verily, I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

Here was a glorious vindication in the presence of which all human indignation, scorn and misunderstanding must pass away like the vapor of the morning before the beams of the rising sun. “Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me.” It was this that stamped the act — “a good work upon Me.” This marked it off from all else. Everything must be valued according to its connection with Christ. A man may traverse the wide world to carry out the noble objects of philanthropy; he may scatter with a princely hand the fruits of a large-hearted benevolence; he may give all his goods to feed the poor; he may go to the utmost possible length in the wide range of religiousness and morality and yet never do one single thing of which Christ can say, “It is a good work upon Me.”

Reader, whoever you are or however you are engaged, ponder this. See that you keep your eye directly upon the Master in all you do. Make Jesus the immediate object of every little act of service, no matter what. Seek to do your every work so He may be able to say, “It is a good work upon Me.” Do not be occupied with the thoughts of men as to your path or as to your work. Do not mind their indignation or their misunderstanding, but pour your alabaster box of ointment upon the person of your Lord. See that your every act of service is the fruit of your heart's appreciation of Him. Then be assured He will appreciate your work and vindicate you before assembled myriads.

Thus it was with the woman of whom we have been reading. She took her alabaster box and made her way to the house of Simon the leper with one object in her heart, namely, Jesus and what was before Him. She was absorbed in Him. She thought of none beside, but poured her precious ointment on His head. As a result, her act has come down to us in the gospel record, coupled with His blessed Name. No one can read the gospel without reading also the memorial of her personal devotedness. Empires have risen, flourished and passed away into oblivion. Monuments have been erected to commemorate human genius, greatness and philanthropy, and these monuments have crumbled into dust, but the act of this woman still lives and shall live forever. The hand of the Master has erected a monument to her, which shall never perish. May we have grace to imitate her; and in this day when there is so much of human effort in the way of philanthropy, may our works, whatever they are, be the fruit of our heart's appreciation of an absent, rejected, crucified Lord!

There is nothing which so thoroughly tests the heart as the doctrine of the cross — the path of the rejected, crucified Jesus of Nazareth. This probes man's heart to its deepest depths. If it be merely a question of religiousness, man can go an amazing length, but religiousness is not Christ. We need not travel farther than the opening lines of our chapter (Matt. 26) to see a striking proof of this. Look at the palace of the high priest and what do you see? A special meeting of the heads and leaders of the people. “Then assembled together the chief priests and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest who was called Caiaphas.”

Here you have religion in a very imposing form. We must remember that these priests, scribes and elders were looked up to by the professed people of God as the great depositories of sacred learning, as the sole authority in all matters of religion and as holding office under God in that system which had been set up of God in the days of Moses. The assembly in the palace of Caiaphas was not composed of the pagan priests and prophets of Greece and Rome, but of the professed leaders and guides of the Jewish nation. What were they doing in their solemn meeting? They were “consulting that they might take Jesus by subtlety, and kill Him.”

Reader, ponder this. Here were religious men, men of learning, men of weight and influence among the people; and yet these men hated Jesus, and they met in council to plot His death — to take Him craftily and kill Him. Now those men could have talked to you about God and His worship, about

Moses and the law, about the Sabbath and all the great ordinances and solemnities of the Jewish religion. But they hated Christ. Remember this most solemn fact. Men may be very religious; they may be the religious guides and teachers of others and yet hate the Christ of God. This is one grand lesson to be learned in the palace of Caiaphas the high priest. Religiousness is not Christ; on the contrary, the most zealous religionists have often been the most bitter and vehement haters of that blessed One.

But, it may be said, "Times have changed. Religion is now so intimately associated with the Name of Jesus, that to be a religious man is, of necessity, to be a lover of Jesus. You could not now find anything answering to the palace of Caiaphas." Is this really so? We cannot believe it for a moment. The name of Jesus is as thoroughly hated in Christendom now as it was in the palace of Caiaphas. And those who seek to follow Jesus will be hated too. We need not go far to prove this. Jesus is still a rejected one in this world. Where will you hear His name? Where is He a welcome theme? Speak of Him where you will, in the drawing-rooms of the wealthy and the fashionable, in the railway car, in the saloon of a cruise-boat, in the coffee-house or the dining hall, in short, in any of the resorts of men, and you will, in almost every case, be told that such a theme is out of place.

You may speak of anything else — politics, money, business, pleasure, nonsense. These things are always in place, everywhere; Jesus is never in place anywhere. We have seen in our streets, times without number, the public thoroughfares interrupted by German bands, ballad-singers and puppet-shows, and they have never been molested, reprov'd or told to move on. But let a man stand in such places to speak of Jesus and he will be insulted or told to move on and not interfere with traffic. In plain language, there is room everywhere in this world for the devil, but no room for the Christ of God. The world's motto as to Christ is, "Oh! breathe not His Name."

But, thank God, if we see around us much that answers to the palace of the high priest, we can also see here and there, that which corresponds with the house of Simon the leper. There are, blessed be God, those who love the name of Jesus and who count Him worthy of the alabaster box. There are those who are not ashamed of His precious cross — those who find their absorbing object in Him and who count it their chief joy and highest honor to spend and be spent for Him in any little way. It is not with them a question of work, of religious machinery, of running here and there, of doing this or that: No, it is Christ, it is being near Him and being occupied with Him; it is sitting at His feet and pouring the precious ointment of the heart's true devotion upon Him.

Reader, be well assured that this is the true secret of power both in service and testimony. A proper appreciation of a crucified Christ is the living spring of all that is acceptable to God, whether in the life and conduct of an individual Christian or in all that goes on in our public assemblies. Genuine attachment to Christ and occupation with Him must characterize us personally and collectively, else our life and history will prove of little worth in the judgment of heaven, however it may be in the judgment of earth. We know of nothing which imparts such moral power to the individual walk and character as intense devotion to the Person of Christ. It is not merely being a man of great faith, a man of prayer, a deeply taught student of Scripture, a scholar, a gifted preacher or a powerful writer. No; it is being a lover of Christ.

So as to the Assembly; what is the true secret of power? Is it gift, eloquence, fine music or an imposing ceremonial? No; it is the enjoyment of a present Christ. Where He is, all is light, life and power. Where He is not, all is darkness, death and desolation. An assembly where Jesus is not, is a tomb, though there be all the fascination of oratory, all the attraction of fine music and all the influence of an impressive ritual. All these things may exist in perfection, and yet the devoted lover of Jesus may have to cry out, "Alas! they have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him." But,

on the other hand, where the presence of Jesus is realized — where His voice is heard and His very touch felt by the soul — there is power and blessing, though to man's view, all may seem the most thorough weakness.

Let Christians remember these things, let them ponder them, let them see to it that they realize the Lord's presence in their public assemblies, and if they cannot say with full confidence that the Lord is there, let them humble themselves and wait upon Him, for there must be a cause. He has said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst" (Matt. 18: 20). But let us never forget that, in order to reach the divine result, there must be the divine condition met.

### **RESPONSIBILITY AND POWER**

The question of man's responsibility seems to perplex many minds. They find it difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile it with the fact of his total lack of power. If, it is argued, man is completely powerless, how can he be responsible? If he cannot of himself repent or believe the gospel, how can he be responsible? And if he is not responsible to believe the gospel, on what ground can he be judged for rejecting it?

Thus the mind reasons and argues. Sadly, theology does not help to solve the difficulty but, on the contrary, increases the mist and confusion. On the one hand, a certain school of divinity teaches, and rightly so, man's utter powerlessness, that he will and cannot come if left to himself, that it is only by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit that anyone ever does come — that, were it not for free, sovereign grace, not a single soul would ever be saved, for if left to ourselves, we would only go wrong and never do right.

From the above, this school infers that man is not responsible. Its teaching is right, but its inference is wrong. Another school of divinity teaches, and rightly so, that man is responsible; that he will be punished with everlasting destruction for rejecting the gospel; that God commands all men everywhere to repent; that He beseeches sinners, all men, the world, to be reconciled to Him; that He will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

From this, the second school infers that man has power to repent and believe. Its teaching is right; its inference, wrong. Hence it follows that neither human reasonings nor the teachings of mere theology can ever settle the question of responsibility and power. The Word of God alone can do this, and it does it in a very simple and conclusive manner. It teaches, proves and illustrates from the opening of Genesis to the close of Revelation, man's utter powerlessness for good, his ceaseless proneness to evil. It declares in Genesis 6 that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only and continually evil. It declares in Jeremiah 17 that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. It teaches us in Romans 3 that there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Further, not only does Scripture teach the doctrine of man's utter and hopeless ruin, his incorrigible evil, his complete powerlessness as to good and his invariable proneness to evil, but it furnishes us with an array of unanswerable evidence in the shape of facts and illustrations drawn from man's actual history, to prove the doctrine. It shows us man in the Garden of Eden, believing the devil, disobeying God and driven out. It shows him, when thus driven out, going on in wickedness until God had to send the flood. Then in the restored earth, man gets drunk and degrades himself. Man is tried without law and proves himself a lawless rebel. He is tried under law and becomes a wilful transgressor. Prophets are sent, he stones them; the Baptist is sent, he beheads him; the Son is sent, he crucifies Him; the Holy Spirit is sent, he resists Him.

Thus, in every volume of man's history — the history of the human race — in every section, every page, every paragraph, every line, we read of his total ruin, his utter alienation from God. We are taught in the most distinct manner possible that, if left to himself, he never could and never would — though most surely he should — turn to God and do works proper for repentance. And in perfect keeping with all this, we learn from our Lord's parable of the great supper in Luke 14 that not so much as a single merely invited guest will be found at the table. All who sit down there are “brought” or “compelled.” Not one ever would come if left to himself. Grace, free grace, must *force* them in; and so it does, blessed forever be the God of all grace!

On the other hand, side by side with all this, and taught with equal force and clearness, stands the solemn and weighty truth of man's responsibility. In creation, under the law and in the gospel, man is addressed as a responsible being, for such he is. Further, his responsibility is in every case measured by his advantages. Thus, in the opening of the Epistle to the Romans, the Gentile is viewed as without law, but responsible to listen to the testimony of creation, which he has not done. The Jew is viewed as under law and responsible to keep it, which he has not done. Then in Romans 11, Christendom is viewed as responsible to continue in the goodness of God, which it has not done. And in 2 Thessalonians 1 we read that those who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be punished with everlasting destruction. Finally in Hebrews 2, the apostle urges home this most solemn question, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?”

The Gentile will not be judged on the same ground as the Jew, nor the Jew on the same ground as the nominal Christian. Each will be dealt with on his own distinct ground and according to his light and privilege. There will be the few stripes and the many stripes as in Luke 12. It will be “more tolerable” for some than for others, as in Matthew 11. The Judge of all the earth will do right, but man is responsible and his responsibility is measured by the light and advantage afforded him. All are not huddled together carelessly, as though they were all on one common ground. On the contrary there is the most accurate discrimination, and no one will ever be condemned for slighting and refusing advantages which were not within his reach. But the very fact that there will be a judgment at all, proves, even were there no other proof, that man is responsible.

By whom is the very highest type of responsibility incurred? By the rejecter or the neglecter of the gospel of the grace of God! The gospel brings out all the fullness of the grace of God. All His resources are there displayed — the love of God, the precious work and glorious Person of the Son, the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, God is seen in the gospel, in the marvelous ministry of reconciliation, actually beseeching sinners to be reconciled to Him.\* Nothing can exceed this. It is the very highest and fullest display of the grace, mercy and love of God. Therefore all who reject or neglect it incur the most solemn responsibility and bring down upon themselves the very heaviest judgment of God. Those who refuse the testimony of creation are guilty. Those who break the law are guiltier still, but those who refuse God's freely-offered grace are the guiltiest of all.

{\*Some teach that the expression, "We pray, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God," refers to Christians who are exhorted to be reconciled to the dealings of God. What a mistake! What a complete overlooking of the plain sense and actual terms of the passage! God was in Christ, not reconciling believers to His dealings, but reconciling the world unto Himself. And now the word of reconciliation is committed to Christ's ambassadors, who are to beseech sinners to be reconciled unto God. The force and beauty of this most lovely passage are sacrificed to support a certain school of doctrine which cannot face the full teaching of Holy Scripture. How much better to abandon every school and every system of theology, and come like a little child to the boundless and bottomless ocean of divine inspiration.}

Will any still object and say they cannot reconcile the two things, man's powerlessness and man's responsibility? Let them bear in mind that it is none of our business to reconcile them. God has done that for us by placing them side by side in His own eternal word. It is ours to submit and believe, not to reason. If we listen to the conclusions and deductions of our own minds, or to the dogmas of conflicting schools of divinity, we shall be ever in a muddle and a jumble, perplexed and confused. But if we simply bow to Scripture we shall know the truth. Men may reason and rebel, but the question is whether man is to judge God or God to judge man? Is God sovereign or is He not? If man is to sit in judgment on God, then God is no longer God. "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

This is the great question. Can we answer it? The plain fact is, this difficulty as to the question of power and responsibility is a complete mistake, arising from ignorance of our own true condition and our lack of absolute submission to God. Every soul in a right moral condition will freely own his responsibility, his guilt, his utter powerlessness, his exposure to the just judgment of God, and that were it not for the sovereign grace of God in Christ, he should inevitably be damned. Anyone who does not own this from the very depths of his soul, is ignorant of himself and virtually sitting in judgment upon God. Thus it stands if we are to be taught by Scripture.

Take a case. A certain man owes me a hundred pounds, but he is unprincipled and extravagant and thus has rendered himself quite unable to pay me. And not only is he unable, but he is unwilling. He has no desire to pay, no desire to have anything to do with me. If he sees me coming along the street, he slips away down the first alley to avoid me. Is he responsible? And am I justified in taking legal proceedings against him? Does his total inability to pay do away with his responsibility?

Further, I send my servant to him with a kind message; he insults him. I send another; he knocks him down. I send my son to beg of him to come to me and to own himself my debtor, to confess and take his proper place, and that I will not only forgive him his debt, but take him into partnership with myself. He insults my son in every possible way, heaps all sorts of indignity upon him and finally murders him.

All this is only a very feeble illustration of the actual condition of things between God and the sinner, yet some will reason and argue about the injustice of holding man responsible. It is all a fatal mistake, and such it will yet be found to be in every case. There is not a soul in hell that has any difficulty in the matter. And, most surely, there is no difficulty felt by any in heaven. All who find themselves in hell will own that they received the due reward of their deeds, and all who find themselves in heaven will own themselves "debtors to mercy alone." The former will have to thank themselves; the latter will have to thank God. Such we believe to be the only true solution to the question of responsibility and power.