

Jehoshaphat — Worldliness.

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In tracing the inspired record of the houses of Israel and Judah, from the period of their separation, under Rehoboam, we can without difficulty recognize the marked distinction between them. The line of kings from Jeroboam to Hosea presents only a dark and sorrowful catalogue of evil-doers in the sight of the Lord: we look in vain for an exception. Even Jehu, who manifested so much zeal and energy in the abolition of idolatry, proved, in the sequel, that his heart was far from being right with God. In fact, a dark cloud of idolatry seems to have settled upon the whole house of Israel, until they were carried away beyond Babylon, and scattered amongst the Gentiles.

Not so, however, with Judah. Here we find some happy exceptions — some pleasant rays from that lamp which the Lord so graciously granted in Jerusalem for David His servant's sake. The soul is refreshed by the history of such men as Josiah, Asa, Joash, and Hezekiah — men whose hearts were devoted to the service of the sanctuary, and who therefore exerted a holy influence on their times.

It is on the narrative of one of these blessed exceptions that I desire to dwell for a little, trusting the Lord to give instruction and profit in so doing.

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, is introduced to our notice in 2 Chronicles 17. In this chapter, we find God, in His grace, establishing His servant in the kingdom, and the people of God acknowledging him therein. Jehoshaphat's first act was to "strengthen himself against Israel." This is worthy of notice. Israel and Israel's king were ever a snare to the heart of Jehoshaphat. But in the opening of his course, in the season of his early freshness, he was able to fortify his kingdom against the power of Israel. Now, one frequently observes this in the history of Christians; the evils which in after life prove their greatest snares are those against which there is the greatest watchfulness at first.

Most happy is it when the spirit of watchfulness increases with our increasing knowledge of the tendencies and capabilities of our hearts. But this, alas! is not always the way: on the contrary, how frequently do we find Christians of some years' standing indulging in things which at first their consciences would have shrunk from. This may seem to be but a growing out of a legal spirit; but should it not rather be viewed as a growing out of a tender and sensitive conscience? It would be sad if the result of more enlarged views were to be a careless spirit or a seared conscience; or if high principles of truth did but tend to render those who were once self-denying and separated, self-indulgent, careless, and worldly. But it is not so. To grow in the knowledge of truth is to grow in the knowledge of God, and to grow in the knowledge of God is to grow in practical holiness. The conscience that can let pass without reproof things from which it would formerly have shrunk is, it is much to be feared, instead of being under the action of the truth of God, under the hardening influence of the deceitfulness of sin.

The whole scene presented to us (chap. 17) is full of interest. Jehoshaphat not only retains the conquests of Asa, his father, but goes on to extend, by his personal exertions, the interests of his kingdom. All is well ordered. "The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in *the first ways* of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; but sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in His commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance. And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord: moreover, he took away the high places and groves out of Israel." Here was the true secret of his prosperity: "His heart was lifted up in the ways of the

Lord." When the heart is *thus* lifted up, every thing goes well.

In 2 Chronicles 18, however, we have a very different state of things. Jehoshaphat's prosperity is used by the devil as a snare for him. "Jehoshaphat had riches and honours in abundance, and *Joined affinity with Ahab.*" We have already observed Jehoshaphat fortifying his *kingdom*; but the enemy comes upon him in a way for which Jehoshaphat does not seem to have prepared himself; he does not attack his *kingdom*, he attacks his *heart*. He comes not as the lion, but as the serpent. Ahab's "sheep and oxen" are found more suitable and effectual than Ahab's men of war. Had Ahab declared war against Jehoshaphat, it would only have cast him upon the Lord; but he does not. Jehoshaphat's kingdom is fortified against Ahab's hostilities, but his heart lies open to Ahab's allurements. This is truly solemn! We often make a great effort against evil in one shape, while we are allowing it to get in upon us in another.

Jehoshaphat had at first strengthened himself against Israel, but now he joins affinity with Israel's king. And why? Had any change for the better taken place? Had Ahab's heart become more tender toward the Lord? By no means. *He* was still the same, but Jehoshaphat's conscience had lost much of its early tenderness and sensitiveness: he had come near to the evil, and tampered with it; he had touched the pitch, and was defiled by it. "He joined affinity with Ahab." Here was the evil — an evil which, however slow in its operation, would certainly produce its own fruit sooner or later. "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:8). The truth of this must inevitably be realized. Grace may triumph in the forgiveness of sin, but the legitimate fruit will spring forth in due time. The Lord put away David's sin in the matter of Uriah, but the child died, and Absalom arose in rebellion. So it will ever be. If we sow to the flesh, we must reap corruption; the flesh can produce naught else.

In Jehoshaphat's case, it was not until *after years* that the results of his false steps began to show themselves: "And after certain years, he went down to Ahab to Samaria; and Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead." Satan knows his ground; he knows where the seed of evil has taken root; he knows the heart that is prepared to respond to his temptation; he knew that the "affinity" into which the king of Judah had entered with the king of Israel had prepared him for further steps in a downward course. When a Christian enters into connection with the world, he lays himself open to be "*persuaded*" by the world, to enter upon an unchristian course of action. David took Ziklag from Achish (1 Sam. 27: 6), and the next step was, to join Achish against Israel (1 Sam. 28: 1).

The world will never give any thing to a child of God without making large demands in return. When the king of Judah had allowed Ahab to kill sheep and oxen for him, he would have found it difficult not to meet Ahab's desire in reference to Ramoth-gilead. The safest way therefore is, to be no debtor to the world. Jehoshaphat should have had nothing whatever to do with Ahab; he should have kept himself pure. The Lord was not with Ahab, and though it might seem a desirable thing to recover one of the cities of refuge out of the hand of the enemy, yet Jehoshaphat should have known that he was not to do evil that good might come. If we join with the world in its schemes, we must expect to be identified with it in its convulsions.

Ramoth-gilead had been of old assigned as a city of refuge for the slayer (Deut. 4: 43), and to recover this city from the king of Syria was the object of Ahab's expedition. But behind this we can detect the snare of the enemy, who cared little about the city, provided he could thereby betray a child of God from the path of purity and separation. The devil has always found religious and benevolent objects most effectual in their influence upon the people of God. He does not come at first with

something openly ungodly; he does not tempt a believer to join the world for some wicked design, because he knows that the sensitive conscience would shrink from such a thing; his way is rather to present in the distance some desirable object — to cover his schemes with the cloak of religion or benevolence, and thus ensnare.

There is, however, one truth which would, if realized, effectually deliver the Christian from all connection with the men of this world. The apostle, by the Holy Ghost, teaches us that unbelievers are "unto *every* good work reprobate" (Titus 1: 16). This is enough for an obedient soul. We must not join with those who are so represented. It matters not what they propose — be it a work of benevolence or a work of religion, — Scripture tells us they are reprobate, yes, "reprobate," though they profess that they know God. This should be sufficient. God cannot accept or acknowledge the works or offerings of those whose hearts are far from Him; nor should the Church mingle with such, even though it be for the accomplishment of desirable ends. "Keep thyself pure" is a valuable admonition for us all. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." It would have been infinitely better and more acceptable for Jehoshaphat to have kept himself pure from all contact with Ahab's defilement than to have recovered Ramoth from the Syrians, even had he succeeded in doing so.

However, he had to learn this by painful experience. And thus it is that most of us learn our lessons. We may *speak* much of certain points of truth, while we know but little of having learnt them experimentally. When Jehoshaphat at the commencement of his career strengthened himself against Israel, he had little idea of the way in which he would afterward be ensnared by the very worst of Israelites. The only effectual safeguard against evil is, to be in communion with God about it. When we look at evil in the light of the holiness of God, we not only look at the *act*, but at the *principle*; and if the principle be unsound, no matter what the result may be, we should have nothing to do with it. But to deal thus with evil requires much exercise of soul before God — much spirituality, much self-judgement, much prayer and watchfulness. The Lord grant us these, and also more tenderness and godly sensitiveness of conscience.

We have no idea of the sad consequences of a mistake on the part of a child of God. It is not always that the full results appear to us; but the enemy takes care to make his own use of the matter, not in injury done to the one who makes the mistake merely, but to others who witness and are influenced by it. Jehoshaphat did not only fall into the snare himself, but he led others in also. "I am as thou art," said he; and further, "My people as thy people." What miserably low ground for a man of God to take! and what a place to put the people of God into — "*I am as thou art!*" Thus spake Jehoshaphat, and well was it for him that his words were not verified throughout. God did not judge of *him* as He judged of *Ahab*; here was his real security, even in the midst of the terrible consequences of his unguarded conduct. He was not as Ahab in the close of his career, though he had joined affinity with him for the purpose of carrying out his plans; he was not as Ahab when Ahab was pierced by an arrow; he was not as Ahab when the dogs licked Ahab's blood. The Lord had made him to differ.

But we should remember that when the Christian joins with the world for any purpose whatsoever, whether of religion or of benevolence, he is just saying (as Jehoshaphat said to Ahab), "I am as thou art." Let the Christian reader ask his own heart, Is this right? Is he prepared to say this? It will not do to say, "We are not to judge others." Jehoshaphat ought to have judged, as is manifested from the language of Jehu the prophet, when he met him on his return from Ramoth, "Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?" How was he to know who was ungodly, or who hated the Lord, if he did not exercise judgement? We have certainly no right to judge those that are without, but we are bound to exercise judgement as to those with whom we enter into fellowship. Nor does this in the least involve of necessity the idea of one's own personal superiority in any one

particular. No; it is not, "Stand by thyself: I am holier than *thou*;" but, "I must stand apart, because *God is holy*." This is the true principle. It is upon the ground of what God is (not of what we are) that we separate from known evil. "Be *ye* holy, for I am holy."

Jehoshaphat, however, failed to maintain this separation; and, as has been already remarked, in failing himself, led others into failure. In this we may learn a most solemn lesson. Jehoshaphat had, we may suppose, gained very considerable influence over the hearts of the people by his previous devotedness; he had established himself in their confidence and affections; and, to a certain extent, rightly so. It is right that those who walk devotedly should be loved and confided in; but then we must watch most jealously against the dangerous tendency of mere personal influence. No one save a man of extensive influence could have said, "My people are as thy people." He might have said, "I am as thou art," but no more. His extensive influence, when used out of communion, only made him a more efficient instrument of evil. Satan knew this; he knew his mark; he did not fasten on an ordinary man of Judah, but on the most prominent and influential man he could find, well knowing that if he could only succeed in drawing him aside, others would follow in his train.

Nor was he mistaken. Many would no doubt say, "What harm can there be in joining Ahab's expedition? Surely, if there were any thing wrong in it, such a good man as king Jehoshaphat would not engage in it. So long as we see *him* there, *we* may make our minds easy about the matter." But if this were not the language of some in Jehoshaphat's day, it certainly is of many in our own. How often do we hear Christians say, "How can such-and-such things be wrong, when we see such good men in connection with them, or engaging in them?" Now all that can be said of such reasoning is that it is utterly false; it is beginning quite at the wrong end. We are responsible to God to act upon principle, let others do as they may. We should be able, through grace, humbly, yet decidedly, to render a sound and intelligent reason for whatever course of action we may adopt, without any reference to the conduct of others. Moreover, we know full well that good men go astray, and do wrong things. They are not, therefore, nor can they be, our guides. "To his own master he standeth or falleth." A spiritual mind, a conscience enlightened by the Word of God, a real sense of personal responsibility, together with honesty of purpose, are what we specially need. If we lack these, our path will be defective.

But it may be said, there are few, if any, who occupy a position in which their conduct could exert such an extensive influence as that of king Jehoshaphat. To meet this, it may be needful to dwell a little upon a truth sadly neglected in the present day, namely, that of *the unity of the body of Christ, and the consequent effect which the conduct of each member, however obscure, must produce upon the whole body*.

The great doctrine of the unity of the Church upon earth is, it is to be feared, feebly apprehended and feebly carried out, even by the most spiritually minded and intelligent of the Lord's people. The reason of this is very apparent. The doctrine is viewed rather in the light of the Church's present condition, than of her condition as presented in the New Testament; and this being so, the unity never can be understood. If we simply take Scripture for our guide, we shall have no difficulty about it. There we read, "If *one* member suffer, *all* the members suffer with it." This principle did not hold good in the days of king Jehoshaphat, because the body of Christ, properly so called, had no actual existence. All the members of it were written in God's book; but "as yet there was none of them" — they existed in the purpose of God, but that purpose had not been actualized. Hence, though so many were led astray by the influence of Jehoshaphat, it was not by any means on the principle stated in the above passage; it was not all suffering from the act of one because they were one body, but many being led astray by one because they followed his example. The distinction is very important. There is no member of the Church, how obscure soever, whose path and conduct do not affect, in some measure, all the members.

"By one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Hence, if a Christian be walking loosely or carelessly, — if he be out of communion — if he fail in prayer, in watchfulness, or in self-judgement, he is really injuring the whole body; and, on the contrary, when he is walking in spiritual health and vigour, he is promoting the blessing and interest of all.

It was not without a struggle that Jehoshaphat yielded to the solicitations of Ahab. The working of conscience is observable in the words, "Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today." But ah! how futile was prayer for guidance, when he had already said, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war"! It is but solemn mockery to ask for guidance when we have made up our minds; and yet how frequently we do so! How frequently do we decide on a course of action, and then go and ask the Lord about it! All this is wretched; it is only honouring God with the lips, while the heart is in positive rebellion against Him. Instead of getting that guidance for which we profess to ask, may we not rather expect a lying spirit to be sent forth to us? (verse 21) Ahab was at no loss for counsellors. He speedily "gathered together four hundred prophets," who were ready to counsel him according to his heart's desire: "Go up, for God will deliver it into the king's hand." This was what he wanted. Nor need we marvel at Ahab's being quite satisfied with prophets like these. They suited him well.

But surely Jehoshaphat should not have even appeared to acknowledge them to be prophets of the Lord, as he evidently did, by saying, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord *besides* (or, as the margin reads, "yet one more?") Had he been faithful to the Lord, he would at once have denied the right of these false prophets to give counsel. But, alas! he was giving full countenance to the religion of the world, and to these its ministers. He could not bring himself to hurt Ahab's feelings by dealing faithfully with his prophets. They were all, it would seem, proper men.

How dreadful a thing it is to allow ourselves to get into a condition of soul in which we are unable to bear distinct and faithful testimony against the ministers of Satan! "We must," it is said, "be liberal;" "we must not hurt people's feelings;" "there are good men every where." But truth is truth, and we are not to put error for truth, nor truth for error. Nothing but a secret desire to stand well with the world will ever lead to this careless method of dealing with evil. Now, if we want to stand well with the world, let us do it at our own charges, and not at the expense of God's truth. It is often urged, "We must present truth in such an aspect as will attract," when what is really meant is this, that truth is to be made a kind of variable, elastic thing, which can be turned into any shape, or stretched to any length, to suit the taste and habits of those who would fain put it out of the world altogether.

Truth, however, cannot be thus treated; it can never be made to reduce itself to the level of this world. Those who profess to hold it may seek to use it thus, but it will ever be found the same pure, holy, faithful witness against the world and all its ways. It will speak distinctly, if its voice be not stifled by connection with the practice of its faithless professors. When Jehoshaphat had stooped so low as to acknowledge the false prophets for the purpose of gratifying Ahab, who could observe any distinct testimony for God? All seemed to sink down to the one common level, and the enemy to have it all his own way. The voice of truth was hushed: the prophets prophesied falsely: God was forgotten. Thus must it ever be.

The attempt to accommodate truth to those who are of the world can only end in complete failure. There can be no accommodation. Let it stand upon its own heavenly height; let saints stand fully and firmly with it; let them invite sinners up to them; but let them not descend to the low and grovelling pursuits and habits of the world, and thus rob truth, so far as in them lies, of all its edge and power. It is

far better to allow the contrast between God's truth and our ways to be fully seen, than to attempt to identify them in appearance, when they really do not agree. We may think to commend truth to the minds of the worldly people by an effort to conform to their ways but, so far from commending it, we in reality expose it to secret contempt and scorn. Jehoshaphat certainly did not further the cause of truth by conforming to Ahab's ways, or by acknowledging the claims of his false prophets. The man who conforms to the world will be the enemy of Christ, and the enemy of Christ's people. It cannot be otherwise. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

How fully was this proved in the case of king Jehoshaphat! He became the friend and companion of Ahab, who hated Micaiah, the servant of God; and as a consequence, although he did not himself positively persecute the righteous witness, yet he did what was bad; for he sat beside Ahab, and beheld the Lord's prophet first struck, and then committed to prison, simply because he would not tell a lie to please a wicked king, and harmonise with four hundred wicked prophets. What must have been the feelings of Jehoshaphat when he beheld his brother smitten and imprisoned for his faithfulness in testifying against an expedition in which he himself was engaged! Yet such was the position into which his connection with Ahab had forced him that he could not avoid being a witness of these wicked proceedings; yea, and moreover, a partaker of them also. When a man associates himself with the world, he must do so thoroughly. The enemy will not be satisfied with half measures; on the contrary, he will use every effort to force a saint out of communion into the most terrible extremes of evil.

The beginning of evil is like the letting out of water. Small beginnings lead to fearful results. There is first a slight tampering with evil at a distance; then, by degrees, a nearer approach to it; after this, a taking hold of it more firmly; and finally, a deliberate plunge into it, whence nothing but the most marked interposition of God can rescue. Jehoshaphat "joined affinity with Ahab"; then accepted of his hospitality; after that, was "persuaded" into open association with him; and finally, took *his* place at the battle of Ramoth-gilead. He had said to Ahab, "I am as thou art," and Ahab takes him at his word; for he says to him, "I will disguise myself, and will go to the battle; but put thou on thy robes."

Thus, so completely did Jehoshaphat surrender his personal identity, in the view of the men of the world, that "it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, '*It is the king of Israel.*'" Terrible position for Jehoshaphat! To find him personating, and thus mistaken for, the worst of Israel's kings is a sad proof of the danger of associating with the men of the world. Happy was it for Jehoshaphat that the Lord did not take him at his word when he said to Ahab, "I am as thou art." The Lord knew that Jehoshaphat was not Ahab, though he might personate and be mistaken for him. Grace had made him to differ, and conduct should have *proved* him to be what grace had made him. But, blessed be God, "He knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation," and He graciously delivered His poor servant out of the evil into which he had plunged himself, and in which he would have perished, had not the hand of God been stretched out to rescue him. "Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him."

[The reader will doubtless observe how the inspired writer presents God under two different titles in the above verse. *The Lord*" brings out His connection with His distressed servant — His connection in grace; while the expression "God" shows out the powerful control which He exercised over the Syrian captains. It is needless to say that this distinction is divinely perfect As Lord, He deals with His own redeemed people, — meeting all their weakness, and supplying all their need; but as God, He holds in His omnipotent hand the hearts of all men, to turn them whithersoever He will. Now we generally find unconverted persons using the expression "God," and not "Lord." They think of Him as One exercising an influence from a distance, rather than as One standing in near relationship.

Jehoshaphat knew who it was that "*helped him,*" but the Syrian captains did not know who it was that "*moved them.*"]

Here we have the turning-point in this stage of Jehoshaphat's life. His eyes were opened to see the position into which he had brought himself; at least, he saw his danger, if he did not apprehend the moral evil of his course. Encompassed by the captains of Syria, he could feel something of what it was to have taken Ahab's place. Happily for him, however, he could look up to the Lord from the depth of his distress, — he could cry out to Him in the time of his extremity; had it not been thus, the enemy's arrow, lodged deep in his heart, might have told out the sorrowful result of his ungodly association.

"Jehoshaphat cried out," and his cry came up before the Lord, whose ear is ever open to hear the cry of such as feel their need. "Peter went out and wept bitterly." The prodigal said, "I will arise, and go to my father;" and the father ran to meet him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. Thus is it that the blessed God ever meets those who, feeling that they have hewn out for themselves broken cisterns, which can hold no water, return to Him, the fountain of living waters. Would that all who feel that they have in any measure departed from Christ and slipped into the current of this present world might find their way back, in true humility and contrition of spirit, to Him who says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

How different Ahab's case! He, though carrying in His bosom a mortal wound, propped himself up in his chariot until the evening, fondly desiring to hide his weakness, and accomplish the object of his heart. We find no cry of humility, no tear of penitence, no looking upward. Ah, no; we find not any thing but what is in full keeping with his entire course. He died as he had lived — doing evil in the sight of the Lord. How fruitless were his efforts to prop himself up! Death had seized upon him; and though he struggled for a time to keep up an appearance, yet "about the time of the sun going down he died." Terrible end! — the end of one who had "sold himself to work wickedness." Who would be the votary of the world? Who that valued a life of simplicity and purity would mix himself up with its pursuits and habits? Who that valued a peaceful and happy termination of his career would link himself with its destinies?

Dear Christian reader, let us, with the Lord's help, endeavour to shake off the world's influence, and purge ourselves from its ways. We have no idea how insidiously it creeps in upon us. The enemy at first weans from really simple and Christian habits, and by degrees we drop into the current of the world's thoughts. Oh that we may, with more holy jealousy and tenderness of conscience, watch against the approach of evil, lest the solemn statement of the prophet should apply to us, "Her Nazarites *were* purer than snow, they *were* whiter than milk, they *were* more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing *was* of sapphire: [but such is the sorrowful change, that] their visage *is* blacker than a coal, *they are not known in the streets*, their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick"!

We shall now look a little at 2 Chronicles 19. Here we see some blessed results from all that Jehoshaphat had passed through. "He returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem." Happy escape! The Lord's hand had interposed for him, and delivered him from the snare of the fowler, and, we may say, he would no doubt have his heart full of gratitude to Him who had so made him to differ from Ahab, though he had said, "I am as thou art." Ahab had gone down to his grave in shame and degradation, while Jehoshaphat returned to his house in peace. But what a lesson he had learned! How solemn to think of his having been so near the brink of the precipice! Yet the Lord had a controversy with him about what he had done. Though He allowed him to return in peace to Jerusalem, and did not suffer the enemy to hurt him, He would speak to his conscience about his sin; He would bring him aside from the

field of battle, to deal with him in private. "And Jehu, the son of Hanani the seer, went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, 'Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.'" This was a solemn appeal, and it produced its own effect. Jehoshaphat "went out again through the people, from Beersheba to mount Ephraim, and brought them back unto the Lord God of their fathers." "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

Thus did Peter; thus too did king Jehoshaphat; and blessed is it when lapses and failings lead, through the Lord's tender mercy, to such a result. Nothing but divine grace can ever produce this. When, after beholding Jehoshaphat surrounded by the Syrian captains (2 Chr. 18), we find him here going out through the length and breadth of the land to instruct his brethren in the fear of the Lord, we can only exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" But he was just the man for such a work. It is one who has felt in his own person the terrible fruits of a careless spirit that can most effectually say, "*Take heed what ye do.*" A restored Peter, who had himself denied the Holy One, was the chosen vessel to go and charge others with having done the same, and to offer them that precious blood which had cleansed his conscience from the guilt of it. So likewise the restored Jehoshaphat came from the battle of Ramoth-gilead to sound in the ears of his brethren with solemn emphasis, "Take heed what ye do." He that had just escaped from the snare could best tell what it was, and tell how to avoid it.

And mark the special feature in the Lord's character which engaged Jehoshaphat's attention: "There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, *nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.*" Now his snare seems to have been the gift of Ahab: "Ahab slew sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead." He allowed his heart to be warmed by Ahab's gift, and was thereby the more easily swayed by Ahab's arguments. Just as Peter accepted the compliment of being let into the high-priest's fire, and, being warmed thereby, denied his Lord. We can never canvass, with spiritual coolness, the world's arguments and suggestions, while we are breathing its atmosphere, or accepting its compliments. We must keep outside and independent of it, and thus we shall find ourselves in a better position to reject its proposals, and triumph over its allurements.

But it is instructive to mark how Jehoshaphat, after his restoration, dwells upon that feature in the divine character from the lack of which he had so grievously failed. Communion with God is the great safeguard against all temptation; for there is no sin to which we are tempted, of which we cannot find the opposite in God; and we can only avoid evil by communion with good. This is a very simple but deeply practical truth. Had Jehoshaphat been in fellowship with God, he could not have sought fellowship with Ahab.

May we not say this is the only divine way in which to look at the question of worldly association. Let us ask ourselves, Can our association with the world go hand in hand with our fellowship with God? This is really the question. It is a miserable thing to ask, May I not partake of all the benefits of the name of Christ, and yet dishonour that name by mixing myself up with the people of the world, and taking common ground with them? How easily the matter is settled when we bring it into the divine presence, and under the searching power of the truth of God: "Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?" Truth strips off all the false covering which a heart out of communion is wont to throw around things. It is only when *it* casts its unerring beams on our path that we see things in their true character.

Mark the way in which divine truth exposed the actings of Ahab and Jezebel. Jezebel would fain put a fair cloak on her shocking wickedness: "Arise," said she, "and take possession of the vineyard of

Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money; for Naboth is not alive but dead." Such was her way of putting the matter. But how did the Lord view it? "Thus saith the Lord, 'Hast thou killed, and also taken possession'"(in other words, Hast thou committed murder and robbery?) God deals with realities. In His estimation, men and things get their proper place and value; there is no gilding, no affectation, no assumption — all is real. Just so was it with Jehoshaphat; his scheme which might in human estimation be regarded as a religious one, was in the divine judgement pronounced to be simply a helping of the ungodly, and loving them that hated the Lord. While men might applaud him, "there was wrath upon him from before the Lord."

However, Jehoshaphat had to be thankful for the salutary lesson which his fall had taught him; it had taught him to walk more in the fear of the Lord, and caused him to impress that more upon others also. This was doing not a little. True, it was a sad and painful way to learn; but it is well when we learn even by our falls; it is well when we can tell even by painful experience the terrible evil of being mixed up with the world. Would to God we all felt it more! Would that we more walked in the solemn apprehension of the defiling nature of all worldly association, and of our own tendency to be defiled thereby! we should then be more efficient teachers of others! we should be able to say, with somewhat more weight, "Take heed what ye do;" and again, "Deal courageously, and the Lord shall be with the good."

In 2 Chronicles 20 we find Jehoshaphat in far more healthful circumstances than in chap. 18. He is here seen under trial from the hand of the enemy: "It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them others beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle." We are in far less apprehension for Jehoshaphat when we behold him the object of the enemy's hostilities than when we beheld him the subject of Ahab's kindness and hospitality. And very justly so; for in the one case he is about to be cast simply on the God of Israel, whereas in the other he was about to fall into the snare of Satan. The proper place for the man of God is to be in positive opposition to the enemies of the Lord, and not in conjunction with them.

We never can count upon divine sympathy or guidance when we join with the enemies of the Lord. Hence we observe what an empty thing it was of Jehoshaphat to ask counsel of the Lord in a matter which he knew to be wrong. Not so, however, in the scene before us. He is really in earnest when "he sets himself to seek the Lord, and proclaims a fast throughout all Judah." This is real work. There is nothing like trial from the hand of the world for driving the saint into a place of separation from it. When the world smiles, we are in danger of being attracted; but when it frowns, we are driven away from it into our stronghold; and this is both happy and healthful. Jehoshaphat did not say to a Moabite or an Ammonite, "I am as thou art." No; he knew well this was not so, for they would not let him think so. And how much better it is to know our true position in reference to the world!

There are three special points in Jehoshaphat's address to the Lord (verses 6-12).

1. The greatness of God.
2. The oath to Abraham about the land.
3. The attempt of the enemy to drive the seed of Abraham out of that land.

The prayer is most precious and instructive — full of divine intelligence. He makes it altogether a question between the God of Abraham and the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir. This is what faith ever does, and the issue will ever be the same. "They come," says he, "to cast us out of *Thy possession, which Thou hast given us to inherit.*" How simple! *They* would take what *Thou* hast given! This was putting it, as it were, upon God to maintain His own covenant. "O our God, *wilt Thou not*

judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee." Surely, we may say, victory was already secured to one who could thus deal with God. And so Jehoshaphat felt. For "when he had consulted with the people, *he appointed singers unto the Lord*, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord: for His mercy endureth forever." Nothing but faith could raise a song of praise before even the battle had begun. "FAITH COUNTS THE PROMISE SURE." And as it had enabled Abraham to believe that God would put his seed into the possession of Canaan, so it enabled Jehoshaphat to believe that He would keep them therein, and he therefore did not need to wait for victory in order to praise; he already stood in the full results of victory. Faith could say, "Thou hast *guided* them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation," though they had but just entered upon the wilderness.

But what a strange sight it must have been for the enemies of Jehoshaphat, to see a band of men with musical instruments instead of weapons in their hands. It was something of the same principle of warfare as that adopted by Hezekiah afterward, when he clothed himself in sackcloth instead of armour (Isa. 37: 1).* Yes, it was the same, for both had been trained in the same school, and both fought under the same banner. Would that our warfare with the present age — with its habits, manners, and maxims — were more conducted on the same principle. "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one."

{*"The proud king of Assyria was at the gates of Jerusalem with a mighty conquering host, and one would naturally expect to find Hezekiah in the midst of his men of war, buckling on his armour, girding on his sword, mounting his chariot: but no; Hezekiah was different from most kings and captains — he had found out a place of strength which was quite unknown to Sennacherib — he had discovered a field of battle in which he could conquer without striking a blow. And mark the armour with which he girds himself: 'And it came to pass, when Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and *covered himself with sackcloth*, and went into the house of the Lord.' Here was the armour in which the king of Judah was about to cope with the king of Assyria. Strange armour — the armour of the sanctuary. What would Sennacherib have said had he seen this? He had never met such an antagonist before — he had never come in contact with a man who, instead of covering himself with a coat of mail, would cover himself with sackcloth; and instead of rushing forth into the field of battle in his chariot, would fall upon his knees in the temple. This would have appeared a novel mode of warfare in the eyes of the king of Assyria. He had met the kings of Hamath and Arphad, etc.; but if he had, it was upon his own principle, and in his own way; but he had never encountered such an antagonist as Hezekiah. In fact, what gave the latter such uncommon power in this contest was the feeling that *he* was nothing — that an 'arm of flesh' was of no avail; — in a word, that it was just Jehovah or nothing. This is specially seen in the act of spreading the letter before the Lord. Hezekiah was enabled by faith to retire out of the scene, and make it altogether a question between Jehovah and the king of Assyria. It was not Sennacherib and Hezekiah, but Sennacherib and Jehovah. This tells us the meaning of the sackcloth. Hezekiah felt himself to be utterly helpless, and he took the place of helplessness. He tells the Lord that the king of Assyria had reproached *Him*; he calls upon Him to vindicate His own glorious name, feeling assured that in so doing He would deliver His people. Mark, then, this wondrous scene. Repair to the sanctuary, and there behold one poor, weak, solitary man on his knees, pouring out his soul to Him who dwelt between the cherubim. No military preparations, no reviewing of troops: the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth. pass to and fro from Hezekiah to the prophet Isaiah: all is apparent weakness. On the other hand, see a mighty conqueror leading on a numerous army flushed with victory, eager for spoil. Surely, one might say, speaking after the manner of men, all is over with Hezekiah and Jerusalem! Surely Sennacherib and his proud host will swallow up in a moment such a

feeble band! And observe, further, the ground which Sennacherib takes in all this (Isa. 36: 4-7). Here we observe that Sennacherib makes the very reformation which Hezekiah had effected a ground of reproach; thus leaving him as he vainly thought, no resting-place or foundation for his confidence. Again, he says, 'Am I come up without the Lord against this land to destroy it? *The Lord said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.*' (v. 10) This was indeed putting Hezekiah's faith to the test: faith must pass through the furnace. It will not do to *say* that we trust in the Lord; we must *prove* that we do, and that too when every thing apparently is the king's bearing in the eyes of the people; yea, rather, such is ever the bearing of faith

calm, self-possessed, dignified, in the presence of man; while, at the same time, ready to sink into the very dust in self-abasement in the presence of God. The man of faith can say to his fellow, 'Stand still, and see the salvation of God!' and, at the same moment, send up to God the cry of conscious weakness. (See Ex. 14: 13-15.) So it was with the king of Judah at this solemn and trying crisis. Harken to him while, in the retirement of the sanctuary, shut in with God, he pours out the anxieties of his soul in the ear of One who was willing to hear and ready to help (Isa. 37: 15-20)." — *Practical Reflections on the Life and Times of Hezekiah*]

What a contrast between Jehoshaphat personating Ahab at Ramoth-gilead, and standing with the Lord against his enemies the Moabites! Yes, what a contrast, in every particular! His mode of seeking help and guidance of the Lord was different, his mode of proceeding to battle was different; and oh, how different too the end! Instead of being well-nigh overwhelmed by the enemy, and crying out in the depth of his distress and danger, we find him joining in a loud chorus of praise to the God of his fathers, who had given him a victory without his striking a blow, who had made his enemies destroy one another, and who had graciously conducted him from the dark valley of Achor into the valley of Berachah. Blessed contrast! May it lead us to seek a more decided path of separation, and of abiding dependence on the Lord's grace and faithfulness. The valley of Berachah, or praise, is ever the place into which the Spirit of God would conduct; but He cannot lead us thither when we join ourselves with the "Ahabs" of this world, for the purpose of carrying out their schemes. The word is, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6: 17-18).

It is wonderful how worldliness hinders, yea, rather destroys, a spirit of praise; it is positively hostile to such a spirit, and, if indulged in, it will either lead to deep anguish of soul, or to the most thorough and open abandonment of all semblance of godliness. In Jehoshaphat's case, it was happily the former. He was humbled, restored, and led into larger blessedness.

But it would be sad indeed were any one to plunge into worldliness with the hope that it might lead to an issue similar to that of Jehoshaphat. Vain, presumptuous hope! Sinful expectation! Who that valued a pure, calm, and peaceful walk could for a moment entertain it? "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation," but shall we, on that account, go and deliberately plunge ourselves into it? God forbid!

Yet, ah! who can sound the depths of the human heart — its profound, malignant depths? Who can disentangle its complicated mazes? Could any one imagine that Jehoshaphat would again, after such solemn lessons, join himself with the ungodly, to further their ambitious, or rather their avaricious, schemes? No one could imagine it, save one who had learned something of his own heart. Yet so he did. "He joined himself with Ahaziah, king of Israel, who did very wickedly. And he joined himself with him, to make ships to go to Tarshish; and they made the ships in Ezion-gaber. Then Eliezer, the

son of Dodavah of Mareshah, prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, 'Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works.' And the ships were broken, and they were not able to go to Tarshish" (verses 35-37). What is man! A poor, stumbling, failing, halting creature; ever rushing into some new folly or evil. Jehoshaphat had, as it were, but just recovered from the effects of his association with Ahab, and he forthwith joins himself with Ahaziah. He had with difficulty, or rather through the special and most gracious interference of the Lord, escaped from the arrows of the Syrians, and again we find him in league with the kings of Israel and Edom, to fight against the Moabites.

Such was Jehoshaphat — such his extraordinary course. There were some "good things found in him"; but his snare was, worldly association; and the lesson which we learn from the consideration of his history is, to beware of that evil. Yes; we would need to have sounded in our ears, with ceaseless solemnity, the words, "*Come out, and be separate.*" We cannot, by any possibility, mix ourselves up with the world, and allow ourselves to be governed and led by its maxims and principles, without suffering in our own souls, and marring our testimony.

I would only remark, in conclusion, that it seems like a relief to the spirit to read the words, "Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers" (2 Chr. 21: 1), as we feel assured, that he has at last got beyond the reach of the enemy's snares and devices; and further, that he comes under the Spirit's benediction, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; for they rest from their labours — yes, a rest from their conflicts, snares, and temptations also.