

## Man in Contrast with God

Psalm 36.

F. B. Hole.

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The Scriptures are full of contrasts which convey to us very effective teaching. By contrasting this with that the true character of each is made manifest, and we grasp it for our profit. Psalm 36 is a notable example, for in it God and man are set One against the other. The nature of both is made plain. That we should know God is the most important thing of all. Next to that it is important that we should know man.

The first four verses of the psalm describe man. Verses 5 to 9 set God before us. Verse 10 prays for the continued manifestation of all that God is. Verses 11 and 12 pray for the removal of that which man is. We have only to understand what man is and what God is to heartily endorse the prayers of the Psalmist. It is remarkable that in this psalm, man comes first. It begins with what he is, and ends with his removal. In our consideration of the Psalm however, we venture to begin with God and what He is.

Very much is said of this in verses 5 to 9, far more than we can enlarge upon: we think however, that what is celebrated can be summarized under three heads.

1. *The FAITHFULNESS of God.* "Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds," he says, as if to express the fact that it is lifted high above man's reach and all the corruption which he imparts to all that he touches. His faithfulness does not stand alone in these verses, it is coupled with His mercy, righteousness, judgments and lovingkindness. Nor does it stand alone in His character and nature, it is of necessity connected with all that He is. Standing, as we do, in the light of New Testament revelation, we can say that "God is light," and that "God is love." Because He is light we have to speak of righteousness and judgments. Because He is love we can celebrate His mercy and lovingkindness. And both light and love support and maintain His faithfulness.

The faithfulness of God! What a glorious fact this is, and how little have we grasped it. He must ever be faithful to all that He is, and to all that He has said. He cannot deny Himself, nor can He deny the one who stakes everything upon Him and the truth of His Word. Therefore it is that "the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings," as the psalm says. If our souls really hold to the faithfulness of God that is what we must inevitably do. We see that He is wholly true, and therefore He is to be wholly trusted.

In these later times perhaps no one has more stressed the faithfulness of God, and lived in the power of it, than the late Hudson Taylor, who may be termed the apostle of the Chinese. It seems to have been his distinguishing feature. He was accustomed to quote the words, "Have faith in God," as meaning, "Hold God's faithfulness." He had some solid ground for this, inasmuch as a very competent scholar assures us that the Greek word for *faith*, together with the Hebrew and the Latin words, as also the English, "hover between two meanings; **trustfulness**, the frame of mind which relies upon another; and **trustworthiness**, the frame of mind which can be relied upon. Not only are the two connected together grammatically, as active and passive senses of the same word, or logically, as subject and object of the same act; but there is a close moral affinity between them. Fidelity, constancy, firmness, confidence, reliance, trust, belief — these are the links which connect the two extremes, the passive with the active meaning of **faith**." The faithfulness of God, gloriously buttressed by His mercy, His righteousness, His judgment, His loving-kindness, does indeed reach to the clouds, and we may safely

count upon Him.

We venture to quote a few of Hudson Taylor's remarks. He wrote, "Hold God's faithfulness. Abraham held God's faith, and offered up Isaac, accounting that God was able to raise him up. Moses held God's faith, and led the millions of Israel into the waste howling wilderness. Joshua knew Israel well, and was ignorant neither of the fortifications of the Canaanites, nor of their martial prowess; but he held God's faithfulness, and led Israel across Jordan. The Apostles held God's faith, and were not daunted by the hatred of the Jews, nor by the hostility of the heathen . . . Satan too has his creed 'Doubt God's faithfulness. Hath God said? Are you not mistaken as to His commands? He could not really mean so. You take an extreme view — give too literal a meaning to the words.' Ah! how constantly, and alas, how successfully, are such arguments used to prevent whole-hearted trust in God, whole-hearted consecration to God. All God's giants have been weak men, who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them. See the cases of David, of Jonathan and his armour-bearer, of Asa, Jehoshaphat, and many others. Oh! beloved friends, if there is a living God, faithful and true, let us hold His faithfulness."

God is faithful to all that He has revealed Himself to be, to all that He has spoken. If we have His word for it, we can rely upon it. How deeply important then it is that we should be very familiar with His Word — our hearts and minds thoroughly saturated with it.

2. *The FATNESS of God's house.* God's house is the place where He dwells, and fatness signifies fulness of supply. There must of course be an infinite supply of all that is good in the dwelling-place of God, and thence flows what the Psalmist speaks of as, "the river of Thy pleasures." The word for pleasures is really Eden, only it is in the plural — "The river of Thy Edens." The Eden of Genesis 2: 8 had a river, but outside it parted and became four heads. It was a case of one Eden with a plurality of rivers. The psalm speaks of a plurality of Edens with one river.

A river brings with it fertility and refreshment, and where rivers exist all is well. Where they do not exist all is desert. They express in the world around us the bounty of the Creator. In the Scriptures they represent the outflow of the goodness that is in God, whether we consider the river of Eden, or the river that will flow forth from under the threshold of the House in the millennial Jerusalem, as predicted in Ezekiel 47 or the river that is to flow out of "the throne of God and of the Lamb," from the heavenly Jerusalem, as we find in Revelation 22.

Here, then, we have God's house with its infinite supply, and the outflowing river which takes its rise in His many Edens, and the wonderful thing is that all is available for those that put their trust under the shadow of His wings. He is not, as Satan insinuated in Genesis 3 a God who withholds from His creatures that which is for their good and blessing, who desires to repress them. On the contrary He desires to fill them full out of His own fulness, so that they shall be "abundantly satisfied." But this abundant satisfaction must of necessity be restricted to those that put their trust in Him. Those who do not trust Him would not desire it.

We may put this into New Testament language by quoting from the Epistle to the Ephesians. We, who "have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace," may become so acquainted with "**the** unsearchable riches of Christ" that "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man ... Christ may dwell in your [our] hearts by faith." Thus we may be "filled with all the fulness of God." This indeed is abundantly satisfying. All the Divine pleasure is centred in Christ. Every Eden is connected with Him and from Him the river flows.

3. *The FOUNTAIN of life.* This fountain is with God and nowhere else, whether we think of life in its lower manifestations in connection with the natural world around us, or in its higher

manifestations in the world of spirit. That was quite plain to the Psalmist in his day. It should be more abundantly clear to us now that Christ has been revealed. Just think of what we have more especially in the writings of the apostle John.

We open his Gospel, and after reading of the Lord Jesus as the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and who was God, we reach this great statement, "In Him was life." How right then was the Psalmist when addressing God he said, "With Thee is the fountain of life." He, in whom was life, was in the beginning with God.

How truly inspired was the Psalmist when he used the word, *fountain*, in this connection; Life surely lies inherently and equally in each Person of the Godhead, yet He who is the Word is particularly and specially the Fountain of it to others. This becomes more clear when we turn to the first epistle of John. There He stands before us, not simply as the Word in whom was life, but rather as "the Word of life": that is as the One in whom life has been perfectly and exactly expressed. "In Him was life," tells us that the life *existed* in Him. "The Word of life," assures us that the life is *expressed* in Him.

Moreover the life expressed, of which the Epistle speaks, is life of the highest character. The apostle John proceeds to say, "The life was manifested." Life, as we know it in the realms of creation may take many forms, but only one life can be spoken of as THE life, and that is, "the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." The Fountain of life truly was with God, but since the Psalmist's day all has come forth into manifestation in the Son incarnate.

One thing more is needed if we are really to know the full blessedness of this manifestation: we must become possessed of the life which has been manifested. This, thank God, has been **brought to pass for** those of us who believe on the name of the Son of God, as the last chapter of the epistle declares. "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life." Not only therefore do we derive life from the Word as the creatures of His hand — for, "all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" — but we also have eternal life (which is THE life) in having Him.

It may be that some glimpse of these good things to come was granted to the Psalmist, and that this led him to add, "In Thy light shall we see light." The God who dwelt in the thick darkness in connection with the giving of the law has now come forth into the light, giving a full and clear revelation of Himself in Christ. "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

There is the very closest connection between life and light. We not only find them brought together in the ninth verse of our Psalm but they stand connected in the passages we have already referred to in the Gospel and Epistle of John. The statement that "In Him was life," is immediately followed by the complementary words, "and the life was the light of men." So too the statement that, "the life was manifested," is closely followed by "the message . . . that God is light," and also by the fact that, "He [God] is in the light."

The words then were highly prophetic: "In Thy light *shall we see light*." David spoke as a prophet gazing on into the future. As for ourselves, *we have seen* it, thank God! THE life has become THE light. Both life and light as abstract conceptions are beyond us. We cannot attempt to define them. But their display in Christ is wholly for us, and we rejoice in it. As we contemplate the life lived out by Him, God Himself becomes luminous before us. The life has *illuminated us*. And even more, the life has become *ours*, so that in the light of the Fountain of life we shall walk to all eternity.

And now we turn to consider the character of poor man. What a contrast! He is designated, "the wicked" in this Psalm, and also spoken of in the plural as, "the workers of iniquity." It may be that the Holy Spirit had before His mind that sinister personage who is called, "that wicked," in 2 Thessalonians 2: 8, and that therefore he used the singular in verses 1 and 11, while He passed on to the plural in verse 12, inasmuch as both the Antichrist and all his followers will be engulfed in ruin. Verse 3 speaks of his words, and verse 4 of his way; and all are but deceit and mischief. Verse 11 shows that his hand is against God's people because He is against God.

Yet, after all, "that wicked," the "man of sin," is just man at the height of his powers in open defiance of God. So we may take this Psalm as giving us man in contrast with God; and we can again summarize what is stated under a few heads; in this case, four.

1. *No FEAR of God.* The fear of God is commonly referred to in Scripture, and the word mostly used is one having the force of *reverence*. Here, however, a less common word is used signifying, *dread*. Sinful men universally have no proper reverence for God, though they may secretly dread Him. The man we have before us here however has no dread of God. That of course will very precisely be true of Antichrist, who sets himself up as an object of veneration above all that is called God, and even God Himself. It is increasingly true too of the men of our day. They have such large ideas of themselves and of their own powers that thoughts of God — if they believe in His existence — put no fear upon their spirits. They feel that they can safely disregard Him.

2. *He FLATTERETH himself in his own eyes.* Men dearly love a mutual admiration society. Flattery is the commonest thing imaginable in the world, and many a man has been lured on to his overthrow by the fulsome flattery of his fellows. The individual before us, you notice, flatters himself — he does not wait for others to do it for him — and it is in his own eyes rather than in the eyes of his fellows. This, we again remark, will doubtless have a special application to Antichrist, since he will be a terrible tyrant. He will be out to magnify himself, hence self-flattery will be imperative. He will blow his own trumpet first and foremost, leaving others to blow trumpets of flattery in his honour, if they wish to keep in his favour.

Flattery is absolutely impossible when God is in question. All praise and worship offered to Him falls short of that of which He is worthy. We cannot rate Him higher than He is. On the other hand it is almost impossible to avoid flattery when we begin to praise men. We see one or two features, on the surface of their characters or their doings, which appeal to us; but many other features, deep below the surface, which would not appeal but appal, we do not see. Hence our praise of man has in it inevitably an element of flattery even when we have not the slightest desire to flatter. As saints let us beware of the praise of men. By indulging in it we damage each other. though it is very sweet to the flesh.

The average man of the world loves it, and loves it openly. Having no fear of God, he naturally flatters himself. If God shone forth upon him, like Job he would abhor himself.

3. *The FOOT of pride.* Verse 11 refers to this. It is the next step downwards after flattery. The sequence is quite plain. First God is dismissed from his thoughts because he fears Him not. Then he entertains high and mighty ideas as to himself, and he lets others know it. He flatters himself he is this and that. As the direct consequence of this pride fills his heart and he is quite ready to direct "the foot of pride" against those who do entertain the fear of God. He cannot lift the foot of pride against God since He is far beyond his reach; but he will lift it against the saints of God, who are within his reach. The saints however need not cringe in abject fear. There is a limit to his pride and his power.

4. *There are the workers of iniquity FALLEN.* At the end there comes the inevitable crash. Poor little man may look imposing enough for a time, and the godly may cry out, "Let not the hand of the

wicked remove me." It is the wicked who is removed, not the godly. He is to be destroyed by the outshining of the coming of the Lord. He and his helpers are to fall, and once cast down they will not be able to rise.

We may apply all this to man in a more general way. It is really the story of the first man and his race. One of the great sayings of our Lord is, "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The first part of the saying gives as the history of the first man in epitome: the second part has been supremely exemplified in the wonderful story of the holy and blessed One that uttered those words. Who would trust the one? And who would not trust the Other?

The contrast then is complete. GOD: characterized by faithfulness, by fatness, by the fountain of life. Man: characterized by shutting out the fear of God, by flattery, by the foot of pride, and by a terrible fall at the end.

Well did Isaiah say early in his prophecy, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isa. 2: 22.) And well does our Psalm say of God, "Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings."

How happy for us if that is what we are doing in the fullest sense of the words.