

## AUGUST

Day 1

### GOD CAN BE KNOWN THROUGH THE WORKING OF THE UNIVERSE John Calvin

*"Listen to this, O Job;  
stand still and consider the wondrous works of God."  
Job 37:14*

God shows himself in the structure of the universe so clearly that men need only open their eyes to see him in his works. It is true that men cannot fully grasp his essence, for it is hidden from them. But there are clear and certain marks of his glory in what he has made. We have no excuse for not knowing him. We may turn our eyes to whatever part of creation we wish and see it glisten with something of the glory he has given it. The apostle Paul tells us that God has shown himself to men in the works of his hands, so that the invisible things of him--his eternal power and Godhead--are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.

There are so many things that show his wisdom. It is true that scientists can now search more deeply into the secrets of divine wisdom. They can use their knowledge to observe the movement of the stars and planets, sun and moon. They can measure their distance and admire their grandeur. But that does not mean that we who are not scientists have an excuse for not recognizing the maker of these things. We have eyes. We can see how many, how varied, and how orderly these heavenly bodies are. Quite clearly, God has revealed his wisdom in his wonderful works to ALL mankind.

In the same way, it takes a carefully trained doctor to fully recognize the structure, beauty, and usefulness of the human body. Yet it is admitted by all that the framework of the body proves the great skill of its maker. Truly, *"God is not far from every one of us"* (Acts 17:27). Now, if we only need go as far as our own body to find the handiwork of God, we are inexcusable in our laziness if we refuse to seek him. In fact, this shows just how ungrateful men are. They have within themselves God's great works and immeasurable gifts, and swell with pride that they are so gifted. They should be praising the giver.

Let us admire God's wonderful works. By his power he holds up the heaven and earth. He makes the sky shake with thunder, and lights it up with lightning. He stirs up the air with storms and calms them in a moment. He gives a boundary to the roaring waves of the sea, lashes them up to fury with wild winds and again brings peace. The power of God leads us to think of his eternity. He from whom all things come must be eternal. He must have existence within himself.

We can also see God's work in human affairs. He is kind to all men, and yet he shows his working in such a way that he is plainly and constantly good to the righteous and severe to the wicked. He shows himself in punishment of crime and, just as clearly, as protector and avenger of innocence. The fact that he sometimes allows the wicked to triumph for awhile, and the innocent to suffer hardship and be oppressed by the wicked, does not hide his justice. In contrast to this thought, we should learn when he punishes one crime that he hates all crimes. And when we see that he leaves many for the present unpunished, we should learn that there is a judgment to come when they will be punished.

When we truly know God, we will look forward to the future life. When we know that God's present goodness and severity are incomplete, we must conclude that this life is only the beginning. There will be a fuller display of mercy and judgment in the world to come. When we see godly people suffer affliction from the wicked while the wicked live in comfort, we are right to think there will be another life when both good and bad will receive the treatment that is right for them.

Augustine wisely said, "If every sin were now visited with punishment, we might think that there was no judgment to come; and if no sin were immediately punished, we might think that there was no such thing as divine power and care."

In spite of the fact that God clearly displays his immortal power in his handiwork, mankind does not learn from the lesson. We do not look often on the natural things around and think of their maker. Too often we speak of events as chance instead of realizing they are God's work. The works of creation shine around us like lamps to show forth the glory of their maker. But they shine in vain. We do not take enough notice of them. Yet because they are there, we cannot say we had no way to know God. Notwithstanding, God has most graciously given us another guide, a brighter light, to bring us to the true knowledge of our creator. That light is the scriptures.

### *Biblical Christianity*

Note: This book is a modernized and abridged edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The excerpt here is from Book I, Chapter V.

## Day 2

### GOD'S VISITATIONS TO HIS PEOPLE

R. W. Church

*"Because thou knew not the time of thy visitation."*

Luke 19:44

Jerusalem, the chosen city of God, knew not the time of her visitation, did not understand what was going on and what she was called to do when her Lord came with mercy and judgment to try her heart--and, therefore, that sad prospect of ruin which made the Lord weep when He beheld the city. He saw that the city and people which had been so highly favored had after all missed the great prize which God had set before them, and for which He had been so long preparing them. The Hope of Israel, that for which they had been waiting for hundreds of years, that for which they had endured so much, that which they had all believed in and trusted to so earnestly--the Hope of Israel, the long-promised Saviour had actually come and they would not know Him; they would not receive him. Here was the moment come for the fulfilment of God's promise. Here was given them, here before their very eyes was set forth favor and mercy and grace, far beyond all that their fathers had ever dreamed of. If in former generations they had misunderstood God's dealings, here was a day of redemption and glory, which, if they accepted it, would make up for all that had gone wrong before.

But Jerusalem would not know her hour of mercy and acceptance. It passed away; and the Lord saw, and wept as He saw, that it was gone. It was too late. God had promised great things; the time for them had come; but Jerusalem had not known the time, and now they were hid from her eyes. Now there was nothing left but to meet the disasters and punishments from which her Saviour had come to deliver her; the disasters and punishments which come on those who are too proud and careless to mind when God means to save them. Her enemies were to come and destroy her, and her children within her, and were to leave not one stone upon another--"because thou knew not the time of thy visitation."

Not to know the time of our visitation means not to know when God is giving us opportunities of good, not to feel and be alive to the blessings which His providence is putting within our reach, not to see when the time comes--as it comes to all--which is meant specially to suit our necessities and to open for us the door to peace and mercy. That time of peace comes in very different ways to different persons--the time which brings with it advantages and chances of a special kind for escaping from sin, for turning in earnest to God, for making fresh steps onwards in goodness and holiness. There are many different sorts of these visitations of God to the souls of men. They are always the openings and beginnings of new mercies, more than had been vouchsafed before. But there is about all of them this danger: that those to whom they come should not know the time of their visitation.

There is one sort of visitation from God which many of us are going through now. How many of us are leading a quiet and peaceful life, without anything apparently to try us greatly, anything greatly to disturb and trouble us; no great sorrow, no great pain, no great fear, no great disadvantage to struggle with, no great care to weigh us down. There are the common temptations and burdens which belong to the lot of all men. But those surely are little to speak of when we think what men have had to go through, what might have come upon us and has not. And in this kind of life we go on undisturbed from year to year perhaps. No great change happens in it for worse or, for what the world calls, better. It is even, quiet, safe. We do what we

have to do. We work, if we must work. We have our time to ourselves if we are not bound to work. We look out on the course of other men's lives, on the ups and downs, on the wars and commotions of other lands. But we look on at a distance. None of these things come nigh us to touch us. Peace and quiet is our portion, the regular unbroken order of our lives.

It is not likely that we shall always escape pain or vexation or sickness so entirely as we are doing now. We are still men, and the covenant of sorrow and death is not given us [yet]. And this time of quiet, of leisure, of freedom from the burdens of sorrow and pain is a time of visitation; a time when God is visiting us--visiting us as truly as He visited Jerusalem when He sent His Son to tell of the kingdom of heaven, visiting us by many a blessing as truly as He visits and searches other men by His chastisements and judgments. In this time of peace and regular work, and quiet days and nights of sweet sleep, He is preparing us; He is trying us; He is giving us time--full ample time--to fit ourselves to meet harsher and heavier ways of His providence. He is seeing what is in our hearts, whether we have it in us to be thankful to Him; whether so much mercy and favor will draw our hearts to Him and strengthen our purposes and efforts after goodness; whether we can be made better in the way in which He would make all men better if it were possible--by giving us the desires of our hearts and keeping us in safety from the evil we are afraid of.

Surely it is but too easy in the midst of peace and mercy, fenced in from trouble and with mind and body at ease, to forget the great seriousness of life--where we are going to, whom we have to deal with, what He has given us to do, how we shall one day have to give an account of what we have had and enjoyed. And if we do, we are missing our day of visitation.

Now, in this time of peace, and probably more or less leisure, is the time to fit ourselves to meet trouble when it comes; to arm our souls with that faith and trust in God which will alone keep us up when the weather changes and the storm and winter come on us. It is not when we are sick that we can expect to learn how to bear sickness. It is not when death darkens our doors that we can hope to be taught at once the thoughts and feelings which help the believer in Christ to keep fast his confidence and not to sorrow as those who have no hope. It is those who have learned beforehand to believe in God who are able to put forth their belief when the moment comes when it is wanted.

The soldier who is to fight well must learn his exercise in time of peace; and now is your time of peace, your time of learning. Oh, see that you use it. See that when the time of real trial comes it does not find you unprepared and only beginning to think about putting on your armor, when you want in good earnest to have it on and ready for use. See that with so much goodness and mercy appointed for your lot in life, with so much grace offered you, with the promises and redemption of the Lord of Life continually before you, with the choice blessings of the kingdom of heaven made your heritage--not only without money and without price, but so far without the sacrifices and the tribulations which had to be endured by our elder brethren in Christ and which still have to be endured by so many now alive--with all this lot of loving-kindness and peace appointed you, with your trial made so easy and so gentle instead of being painful and difficult, see that you do not miss recognizing, as it passes over you, "the time of your visitation."

*Village Sermons* (condensed)

### Day 3

## THE SINNER'S REFUGE

Charles Spurgeon

*"Then you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there." (Numbers 35:11)*

There are two things mentioned in Scripture which I do not believe God ever approved, but which, finding they were deep-seated, he did not forbid to the Jews. One was polygamy. The practice of marrying many wives had become so established that though God abhorred the thing himself, yet he allowed and permitted it to his people, the Jews, because he foresaw they would inevitably have broken the commandment even if he had made a command that they should have but one wife. It was even so with this matter of blood vengeance. It was so deeply seated in the mind that God, instead of refusing to the Jews what they regarded as the privilege of taking vengeance, passed a commandment which rendered it almost impossible for a man to be killed unless he were really a murderer. He appointed six cities, at convenient distances, so that when one man killed another by accident, he might at once flee to one of these cities. And though he must live there all his life, yet the avenger of blood could never touch him if he were innocent. He must have a fair trial, but even if he were found innocent, even then he must stay within the city into which the avenger of blood could not by any possibility come.

You must allow me to picture a scene. You see that man in the field? He has been at work and now has taken an ox-goad in his hand to use in some part of his husbandry. Unfortunately, instead of doing what he desires to do, he strikes a companion of his and he falls down dead! You see the poor man with horror on his face. He is a guiltless man, but, oh, what misery he feels when he sees the corpse lying at his feet. A pang shoots through his heart such as you and I have never felt--horror, dread, desolation! Who can describe the horror of a man at seeing his companion fall before him? Words are incapable of expressing the anguish of his spirit. He looks upon him, takes him up, and ascertains that he is really dead.

What next? Do you not see him? In a moment he flies out of the field where he was at labor and runs along the road with all his might. He has many miles before him, six long hours of hard running, and just as he passes the gate he turns his head, and there is the man's brother! He has just come into the field and seen his brother lying dead. Oh, can you conceive how the man's heart palpitates with fear? He has a little start upon the road. He just barely sees the other, with red face, hot and fiery, rushing out of the field with the ox-goad in his hand and running after him. The way lies through the village where the man's father lives, yet how he rushes through the streets. He does not even stop to bid goodbye to his wife nor kiss his children. But on, on he flies for his very life.

The dead man's brother calls his father and his other friends, and they all rush after him. Now there is a troop on the road. The man is still flying ahead, no rest for him. Though one of his pursuers rests, the others still track him. There is a horse in the village. They take it and pursue him. If they can find any animal that can assist their swiftness, they will take it. Can you not conceive him crying, "O, that I had wings that I might fly?" See how he spurns the earth beneath his feet! He stops not even so much as to wet his mouth. The sun is scorching him, but it is still on, on, on! He casts aside one garment after another. Still he rushes on, and the pursuers are behind him. He feels like the poor stag pursued by the hounds. He knows they are eager for his blood and that if they do but once overtake him, it will be a word, a blow--dead!

See how he speeds his way!

Now do you see him? A city is rising into sight. He can see the towers of the city of refuge. His weary feet almost refuse to carry him further, the veins are standing out on his brow like whipcords. The blood spurts from his nostrils, he is straining to the utmost as he rushes on, and faster he would go if he were master of more strength.

The pursuers are after him, they have almost reached him. But see and rejoice! He has just gotten to the outskirts of the city. There is the line of demarcation, and he leaps over it and falls senseless to the ground. There is joy in his heart. The pursuers come and look at him, but they dare not slay him. The knives are in their hands, and the stones too, but they dare not touch him. He is safe, he is secure. His running has been just fast enough. He has just managed to leap into the kingdom of life and avoid death.

Sinner, that picture I have given you is a picture of yourself, in all but the man's guiltlessness, for you are a guilty man. Oh, if you did but know that the avenger of blood is after you! Oh, that God would give you grace that you could have a sense of your danger tonight, then you would not stop a solitary instant without flying to Christ. You would say, "Take me away where mercy is to be found," and you would neither sleep nor slumber until you had found in Christ a refuge for your spirit. Let me pick out one of you to be a case for all the rest. There is a young man here who is guilty. He knows himself to be a great transgressor. Young man, certainly as you are guilty, the avenger of blood is after you. Oh, he is a horrid thing, that avenger--God's fiery law. Did you ever see it? It speaks words of flame. If this avenger gets hold of you, it will not be temporal death merely; it will be death eternally. If the law gets its hand on you, you are damned. Can you describe the billows of eternal wrath, the lake of fire, the bottomless pit? No, you cannot know how dreadful these things are. Surely, if you could, you would be up on your feet and off for life, eternal life. Such stolid stupidity, sottish ignorance, and worse than brutal ignorance that makes men sit down in their sins and rest content!

I may have one here who is just awakened to see his sin as if it were a murdered corpse beneath his feet. God has shown you your guilt, and he sent me tonight to tell you that there is a refuge for you. Though you are guilty, he is good. Though you have revolted and rebelled, he will have mercy on those that repent and trust in the merits of his Son. And now he has bid me say to you, "Fly, fly, fly!" In God's name I say to you, fly to Christ. He has bid me warn you tonight against delays. He has bid me remind you that death surprises men when least they expect it. He has bid me warn you that the avenger will not spare, neither will his eye pity. His sword was forged for vengeance, and vengeance it will have. And he has bid me exhort you by the terrors of the law, by the day of judgment, by the wrath to come, by the uncertainty of life and the nearness of death, this night to fly to Christ.

Remember, none but Jesus can save you. But if God shall enable you to see your danger and fly to Christ, he will have mercy upon you forever, and the avenger of blood will never find you out, no, not even when the red lightnings shall be flashing from the hand of God in the day of Judgment. That city of refuge shall shelter you, and in the heart of Jesus, triumphant, blessed, secure, you shall sing the righteousness and the blood of Christ who sheltered sinners from the wrath to come.

*Spurgeon's Sermons, Vol. 3*

## Day 4

### MEN AND ANGELS

Henry Melvill

*"For you have made him a little lower than the angels."*

Psalm 8:5

Perhaps it was not so much in nature as in position that man, as first formed, was inferior to the angels. At all events, we can be sure that nothing higher could be affirmed of the angels than that they were made in the image of God. If, then, they had originally superiority over man, it must have been in the degree of resemblance. The angel was made immortal, intellectual, holy, powerful, glorious, and in these properties lay their likeness to the Creator. But were not these properties given also to man? Was not man made immortal, intellectual, holy, powerful, glorious? And if the angel excelled the man, it was not, we may believe, in the possession of properties which had no counterpart in the man; both bore God's image, and both therefore had lineaments of the attributes which center in Deity. Whether or not these lineaments were more strongly marked in the angel than in the man, it were presumptuous to attempt to decide.

But it is sufficient for our present purposes that the same properties must have been common to both, since both were modeled after the same divine image. And whatever originally the relative positions of the angel and the man, we cannot question that since the fall man has been fearfully inferior to the angels. The effect of transgression has been to debase all his powers, and so bring him down from his high rank in the scale of creation. But, however degraded and sunken, he still retains the capacities of his original formation, and since these capacities could have differed in nothing but degree from the capacities of the angel, it must be clear that they may be so purged and enlarged as to produce, if we may not say to restore, the equality . . . .

Oh! it may be, we again say, that an erroneous estimate is formed, when we separate by an immense space the angel and the man, and bring down the human race to a low station in the scale of creation. If I search through the records of science, I may indeed find that, for the furtherance of magnificent purposes, God has made man "a little lower than the angels;" and I cannot close my eyes to the melancholy fact, that as a consequence upon apostasy there has been a weakening and a rifling of those splendid endowments which Adam might have transmitted unimpaired to his children. And yet the Bible teems with notices, that so far from being by nature higher than men, angels even now possess not an importance which belongs to our race. It is a mysterious thing, and one to which we scarcely dare allude, that there has arisen a Redeemer of fallen men, but not of fallen angels.

We would build no theory on so awful and inscrutable a truth. But is it too much to say that the interference on the behalf of man and the non-interference on the behalf of angels gives ground for the persuasion that men occupy at least not a lower place than angels in the love and the solicitude of their Maker? Besides, are not angels represented as "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation?" And what is the idea conveyed by such a representation if it be not that believers, being attended and waited on by angels, are as children of God marching forwards to a splendid throne, and so elevated among creatures that those who have the wind in their wings, and are brilliant as a flame of fire, delight to do them honor? And, moreover, does not the repentance of a single sinner minister gladness to a whole throng of angels? And who shall say that this sending of a new wave of rapture throughout the hierarchy of heaven does not betoken such immense sympathy with men as goes far towards proving him the occupant of an

immense space in the scale of existence? We may add also that angels learn of men, inasmuch as Paul declares to the Ephesians that "now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places is made known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God." And when we further remember that in one of those august visions with which the Evangelist John was favored, he beheld the representatives of the church placed immediately before the eternal throne while angels standing at a greater distance thronged the outer circle, we seem to have accumulated proof that men are not to be considered as naturally inferior to angels--that however they may have cast themselves down from eminence and sullied the luster and sapped the strength of their first estate, they are still capable of the very loftiest elevation, and require nothing but the being restored to their forfeited position and the obtaining room for the development of their powers, in order to their shining forth as the illustrious ones of the creation, the breathing, burning images of the Godhead . . . .

The Redeemer is represented as submitting to be humbled--"made a little lower than the angels," for the sake or with a view to the glory that was to be the recompense of his sufferings. This is a very important representation--one that should be most attentively considered; and from it may be drawn, we think, a strong and clear argument for the divinity of Christ.

We could never see how it could be humility in any creature, whatever the dignity of his condition, to assume the office of a Mediator and to work out our reconciliation. We do not forget to how extreme degradation a Mediator must consent to be reduced, and through what suffering and ignominy he could alone achieve our redemption. But neither do we forget the unmeasured exaltation which was to be the Mediator's reward, and which, if Scripture be true, was to make him far higher than the highest of principalities and powers. And we know not where would have been the amazing humility, where the unparalleled condescension, had any mere creature consented to take the office on the prospect of such a recompense. A being who knew that he should be immeasurably elevated if he did a certain thing can hardly be commended for the greatness of his humility in doing that thing. The nobleman who should become a slave, knowing that in consequence he should be made a king, does not seem to us to afford any pattern of condescension. He must be the king already, incapable of obtaining any accession to his greatness, ere his entering the state of slavery can furnish an example of humility. And, in like manner, we can never perceive that any being but a divine Being can justly be said to have given a model of condescension in becoming our Redeemer . . . .

If he could not lay aside the perfections, he could lay aside the glories of Deity; without ceasing to be God he could appear to be man. And herein we believe was the humiliation--herein that self-emptying which Scripture identifies with our Lord's having been "made a little lower than the angels." In place of manifesting himself in the form of God and thereby centering on himself the delighted and reverential regards of all unfallen orders of intelligences, he must conceal himself in the form of a servant; and no longer gathering that rich tribute of homage, which had flowed from every quarter of his unlimited empire, produced by his power, sustained by his providence, he had the same essential glory, the same real dignity, which he had ever had. These belonged necessarily to his nature, and could no more be parted with even for a time than could that nature itself. But every outward mark of majesty and of greatness might be laid aside; and Deity, in place of coming down with such dazzling manifestations of supremacy as would have compelled the world he visited to fall prostrate and adore, might so veil his splendors and so hide himself in an ignoble form that when men saw him there should be no "beauty that they should desire him."



And this was what Christ did in consenting to be "made a little lower than the angels;" and in doing this he emptied himself, or "made himself of no reputation." The very being who in the form of God had given its light and magnificence to heaven appeared upon earth in the form of a servant. And not merely so--for every creature is God's servant, and therefore the form of a servant would have been assumed had he appeared as an angel or an archangel--but in the form of the lowest of these servants, being "made in the likeness of men"--of men the degraded, the apostate, the perishing.

Quoted by Charles Spurgeon in *The Treasury of David*

## Day 5

### SIN AND GRACE Johnathan Edwards

*"Pardon my iniquity, for it is great."*  
Psalm 25:11

David pleads the greatness of his sin, and not the smallness of it. He enforces his prayer with this consideration, that his sins are very heinous. But how could he make this a plea for pardon? I answer: Because the greater his iniquity was, the more *need* he had of pardon. It is as much as if he had said, "Pardon my iniquity, for it is so great that I cannot bear the punishment; my sin is so great that I am in necessity of pardon; my case will be exceedingly miserable unless thou be pleased to pardon me." He makes use of the greatness of his sin to enforce his plea for pardon, as a man would make use of the greatness of calamity in begging for relief. When a beggar begs for bread, he will plead the greatness of his poverty and necessity. When a man in distress cries for pity, what more suitable plea can be urged than the extremity of his case? And God allows such a plea as this; for he is moved to mercy towards us by nothing in us, but the miserableness of our case. He does not pity sinners because they are worthy, but because they need his pity. . . .

Herein does the *glory of grace* by the redemption of Christ much consist; namely, in its sufficiency for the pardon of the *greatest* sinners. The whole contrivance of the way of salvation is for this end--to glorify the free grace of God. God had it on his heart from all eternity to glorify this attribute, and therefore it is, that the device of saving sinners by Christ was conceived. The greatness of divine grace appears very much in this, that God by Christ saves the *greatest* offenders. The *greater* the guilt of any sinner is, the more glorious and wonderful is the grace manifested in his pardon. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). The apostle, when telling how great a sinner he had been, takes notice of the abounding of grace in his pardon, of which his great guilt was the occasion. "Who was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 1:13,14).

The Redeemer is glorified in that he proves sufficient to redeem those who are exceedingly sinful, in that his blood proves sufficient to wash away the greatest guilt, in that he is able to save men to the uttermost, and in that he redeems even from the greatest misery. It is the honor of Christ to save the greatest sinners when they come to him, as it is the honor of a physician that he cures the most desperate diseases or wounds. Therefore, no doubt, Christ will be willing to save the greatest sinners if they come to him; for he will not be backward to glorify himself and to commend the value and virtue of his own blood. Seeing he has so laid out himself to redeem sinners, he will not be unwilling to show that he is able to redeem to the uttermost.

Quoted by Charles Spurgeon in *The Treasury of David*

## Day 6

### SALVATION James Morison

***"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."***

**Ephesians 2:8**

Calvin supposed that it is not faith but salvation that is said in Ephesians 2:8 to be the gift of God. We presume, however, that it is to *faith* that the Apostle parenthetically refers. And we conceive that he is drawing attention to the fact that we are indebted to the grace or lovingkindness of God not only for the Saviour and for the salvation which he procured, but likewise for the link of connection that unites us to the Saviour and thus makes us partakers of the great salvation.

Not that the Apostle means to constrain us into the conviction that we are utterly passive in the matter of faith. It would be no glory to God if we were merely *acted on* and did not *act*. Our responsibility would be gone. We would be things, not persons. It is necessary that we be more than mere recipients and cisterns. We are well-springs of living activity. And assuredly we act, and act voluntarily, when we send out our thought believingly to the Glorious Object who is revealed in the glorious Gospel of God's grace.

There is indeed something involuntary in faith. We cannot absolutely determine what we shall believe and what we shall not believe. *Evidence is sometimes overwhelming, and we must believe*, however strongly we might desire to come to a different conclusion. But in multitudes of cases we are required to go in quest of evidence, or if it is brought to us and spread out before us, we are required to direct our minds to its consideration. We are required to sift and measure it, and to weigh detail after detail. If there be apparently conflicting evidence, we are required to consider it too. *Hence the need for voluntary activity*. And hence it is that men are accountable for their belief or for their unbelief in reference to the Gospel of salvation.

Faith in the Gospel is *the gift of God*, in a sense consistent with our voluntary activity and accountability. The facilities for faith are from God. All the grand inducements are from Him. The chief motives are from Him. It is He who gives the light. It is He who draws the heart, though he will not drag it. "No man can come to me," says Jesus, "except the Father who has sent me *draw him*; and I will raise him up at the last day." But he immediately adds, in a way that is finely explanatory of what he means by *drawing*, "as it is written in the prophets, and they shall be *all taught of God*. *Every man therefore that has heard and has learned of the Father comes unto me*" (John 6:44,45).

It is thus in the way of *teaching* that the Father *draws*. He reveals realities by his Holy Spirit and presses them home upon human attention by the same divine Spirit, so that whenever anyone believes he is ready to lift up his heart adoringly and gratefully to his Heavenly Father and to say, *It is through thy grace that I see, and understand, and believe! It is through thy grace that I am what I am! Unto thee be all the glory.*

*Saving Faith*

## Day 7

### UNDERSTANDING AFFLICTION

Francis Bourdillon

*"I know, O Yahweh, that your judgments are right,  
And that in faithfulness you have afflicted me."*

Psalm 119:75

The text is in the form of an address to God. We often find this in David, that, when he would express some deep feeling, or some point of spiritual experience, he does so in this way--addressing himself to God. Those who love God delight to hold communion with him; and there are some feelings which the spiritual mind finds peculiar comfort and pleasure in telling to God himself. *"I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right."* God orders all things, and his "judgments" here mean his general orderings, decisions, dealings--not afflictions only, though including them. And when the Psalmist says, *"thy judgments,"* he means especially God's judgments towards him, God's dealings with him, and thus all that had happened to him or should happen to him. For in the Psalmist's creed there was no such thing as chance. God ordered all that befell him, and he loved to think so. He expresses a sure and happy confidence in all that God did and would do with regard to him. He trusted fully in God's wisdom, God's power, God's love. *"I know thy judgments are right"*--quite right, right in every way, without one single point that might have been better, perfectly wise and good. He shows the firmest persuasion of this. *"I know,"* he says, not merely *"I think."* But these very words, *"I know,"* clearly show that this was a matter of faith, not of sight. For he does not say, *"I can see that thy judgments are right, but I know."* The meaning plainly is, *"Though I cannot see all--though there are some things in thy dealings which I cannot fully understand--yet, I believe, I am persuaded, and thus I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right."*

*"Thy judgments."* Not some of them, but all. He takes into view all God's dealings with him and says of them without exception, *"I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right."* When the things that happen to us are plainly for our comfort and good, as many of them are, then we thankfully receive what God thus sends to us and own him as the Giver of all, and bless him for his gracious dealing; and this is right. But all the faith required for this (and some faith there is in it) is to own God as dealing with us, instead of thanklessly receiving the gifts with no thought of the Giver. It is a far higher degree of faith that says of all God's dealings, even when seemingly not for our happiness, *"I know that thy judgments are right."*

Yet this is the meaning here, or certainly the chief meaning. For though the word *"judgments"* does mean God's dealings of every kind, yet here the words that follow make it apply especially to God's afflictive dealings, that is, to those dealings of his that do not seem to be for our happiness; *"I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."* The judgments which the Psalmist chiefly had in view, and which he felt so sure were right, were not joys but sorrows; not things bestowed but things taken away; those blessings in disguise, those veiled mercies, those gifts clad in the garb of mourning, which God so often sends to his children. The Psalmist knew, and knew against all appearance to the contrary, that these judgments were *"right."* Whatever they might be--losses, bereavements, disappointments, pain, sickness--they were right, perfectly right; so right that they could not have been better; just what were best; and all because they were God's judgments. That one thing satisfied the Psalmist's mind and set every doubt at rest. The dealings in themselves he might have doubted, but not him whose dealings they were. *"Thy judgments."* That settled all. *"And that thou in*

*faithfulness hast afflicted me."* This means that, in appointing trouble as his lot, God had dealt with him in faithfulness to his word, faithfulness to his purposes of mercy, with a faithful, not a weak love. He had sent him just what was most for his good, though not always what was most pleasing; and in this he had shown himself faithful. Gently and lovingly does the Lord deal with his children. He gives no unnecessary pain; but that which is needful he will not withhold.

Quoted by Charles Spurgeon in *The Treasury of David*

## Day 8

### THE CHRISTIAN'S "THANATOPSIS"

Kenneth S. Wuest

*"Verily, verily, I say unto you,  
if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death."*

**John 8:51**

One of the passages in the English translation which presents difficulties in interpretation is John 8:51, where our Lord says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." We have called this "Golden Nugget," "The Christian's 'Thanatopsis'." The word "thanatopsis" comes from two Greek words which together mean "seeing death." Our Lord here presents the Christian view of death.

The assertion in the Greek is very strong. The idea is, "shall absolutely not see death." Then the statement is made stronger by the addition of a phrase which in other places in the New Testament is translated "forever." Thus, "If any man keep my saying, he shall absolutely not see death, never."

The key to the interpretation of the verse is found in the meaning of the word "see." There are six words in the Greek language which mean "to see." The first refers simply to the act of physical sight (Matt. 12:22). The second refers to physical sight that is accompanied by mental discernment (1 John 1:1, "have seen"). The third means "to look upon, contemplate, view attentively," used, for instance, of a civilian watching a military parade (1 John 1:1, "looked upon"). The fourth means "to scrutinize with the purpose of bringing about the betterment of the person so observed" (Hebrews 2:6, "visitest," Acts 20:28, "overseers"). The fifth word means "to fix one's eyes upon," metaph., "to fix one's mind upon one as an example" (Acts 3:4, "fastening his eyes upon him with John,"). Even Peter and John judged their beggars as to their worthiness to receive alms. The sixth word is the one used in John 8:51. It is used, primarily, not of an indifferent spectator, but of one who looks at a thing with interest and for a purpose. It expresses a fixed contemplation and a full acquaintance.

Now, the death spoken of here is physical death, for the Jews speak of Abraham as being dead, and our Lord does not correct them by saying that He was speaking of spiritual death. He therefore says that when a Christian is being put to sleep in Jesus (1 Thess. 4:14, Greek), as he is dying, he will not look at Death with interest and for a purpose. He will be an indifferent spectator of Death, for he will have his eyes fixed on Jesus. The terrors of that awful thing called death are not experienced by the one who puts his faith in the Lord Jesus. His attention will not be focused on death, nor will he feel its bitterness. This is what Paul means when he says (1 Cor. 15:55), "O death, where is thy sting?" But those that go out of this life rejecting Him, have before them all the terrors of death. Oh, reader, are you sure that you are trusting in the precious blood of Jesus poured out in the substitutionary atonement on the Cross for you personally? We read in Hebrews 2:9 that Jesus tasted death for every man. That is, He not only died, but He experienced all the terror and bitterness of death in order that those who place their trust in Him as Saviour, will not experience the terror and bitterness of it all.

*Treasures from the Greek New Testament*

## Day 9

### SINLESS PERFECTION?

Anthony A. Hoekema

*"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."*

1 John 1:8

There is a passage in John's first epistle which is often quoted as proof that sinless perfection here and now is indeed possible for those who have been born again. The passage reads as follows: *"No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God"* (1 John 3:9). At first glance this text does seem to teach not only the possibility but even the likelihood that those who have been "born of God" will no longer commit any sin. But in order to understand fully what John is saying here, we must first look carefully at some other passages from his first epistle. Note, for example, what he says in 1:8: *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."* In the next verse John clearly implies that believers must still confess their sins: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

The need for repeated confession on the part of believers rules out the possibility of their living without sin. To the same effect are the words of 2:1: *"My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."* If John believed that the Christians to whom he was writing were no longer capable of committing any sin, he would certainly not have written the second half of this verse.

These verses clearly teach that any Christian who claims that he has no sin whatever, and that he no longer needs to confess his sins, is deceiving himself. Obviously, then, when John says in 3:9 that "no one born of God commits sin," he does not mean that the regenerate person is able here and now to live a life which is completely free from sin.

How, then, are we to interpret this puzzling remark? To understand it properly, we need to look carefully at the tenses John is using. In this passage the tenses that are used to describe the kind of sinning which the regenerate person does not and cannot do are present, and the present tense in Greek indicates continued or habitual action. Literally translated, this verse would read, "No one who has been born of God continually lives in sin . . . and he is not able to keep on living in sin because he has been born of God." What this passage teaches, therefore, is that the regenerate person cannot and does not continue to live in sin.

In 2:1, however, the tenses used to describe the kind of sinning which a regenerate person can still do are aorists, and aorists in Greek commonly indicate snapshot action, momentary action. A literal translation of this verse, therefore, might read somewhat as follows: *"My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not commit sin. And if any one does commit a sin, we have an advocate with the Father."* What John is here teaching us is that a regenerate person (for he is writing to believers) can still fall into sin, but that when he does so he should not despair, since he has an Advocate with the Father through whom he may obtain forgiveness. Putting all these passages together, we find John saying something like this: The regenerate person may still *fall* into sin, but he cannot *live* in sin.

*The Christian Looks at Himself*

## Day 10

### CALL TO PERSONAL GRATITUDE

John Stevenson

*"Bless Yahweh, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!  
Bless Yahweh, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."*

Psalm 103:1, 2

What a proof is here of the sincerity of the Psalmist's heart and of the reality and the fervor of his gratitude! The state of his soul formed the grand object of concern to David. He watched over its feelings. He diligently examined into its position as before God. He was jealous over himself with a godly jealousy, and he suffered not his spirit to continue in a listless and lukewarm condition. On the contrary, he pressed it forward to attain higher and still higher degrees of love, and thankfulness, and joy. He called in every faculty, he summoned every emotion of his soul, and he suffered not a word, nor a thought, nor a feeling to remain unemployed in praising his Redeemer. It is as if he would say, "Whatever may be my natural and my spiritual endowments, all that is within me shall love, and laud, and magnify the Author of my being, the Finisher of my salvation, and the Sanctifier of my nature."

Who is there among us that would refuse to follow this example of the Psalmist? Who does not feel his constant need to imitate it? Our hearts within us are dull and selfish by nature. They require to be continually roused to activity and zeal in the Lord's service, and to be effectually stirred up to grateful celebrations of the Divine goodness.

Alas, how prone are we to forget the mercies of our God! Day unto day utters speech of the liberality of the Lord. Night unto night shows forth knowledge of His long-suffering. Year after year proclaims aloud the vastness, the freeness, and the excellency of His love toward us. Oh, that day unto day uttered speech also of our devotedness, that night unto night showed forth knowledge of our gratitude, and that one year after another proclaimed aloud the sincerity, the intensity, and the continual increase of our love to our Redeemer! Surely the burden of every renewed heart is this--that its praises are so cold and lifeless, and its gratitude so grievously inadequate!

Ingratitude is no light sin. Its guilt increases in a fourfold proportion, for it must be estimated by the greatness of the Giver, by the unworthiness of the receiver, and by the number, and by the excellency, of the benefits bestowed. Ingratitude from man to man is odious. Ingratitude from man to God is base and horrible in the extreme. To accept a benefit and to return no acknowledgment is altogether without the shadow of an excuse. In the sight of God and men, the ingrate is most justly despicable.

Some sins have a specious appearance in the eyes of the world, whereby men's minds are oft beguiled to call them virtues. But ingratitude possesses not a single redeeming quality. It has no specious appearance, no fair color, no bright side whatsoever. It is unmixed evil--essential evil--"only evil, and that continually." Historians have not recorded it in any single instance with approbation. Moralists have made no exceptional case in its favor to admit it among the virtues. Poets have not been heard to sing its praises in any nation or language under heaven. Philosophers may have pandered to almost every vice, but none have pandered to ingratitude. Merchants have made gains of innumerable sins, but no man has turned ingratitude to account. It is an unstamped coin of the kingdom of darkness. None acknowledge it in earth or hell. It is a



vice so base that even the vilest of men will turn with indignation when denominated ingrates.

Ingratitude is robbery, for it deprives the benefactor of the acknowledgment that is his due. Ingratitude is rebellion, for the King of Heaven has commanded us in everything to give thanks. Ingratitude is cruel; how many a heart has it not broken? Ingratitude is a monster which, wherever it appears, obtains universal execration, standing unrivaled in its own peculiar turpitude, alike unexcused and inexcusable.

How revolting, therefore, how "exceeding sinful" is ingratitude towards God. It deepens the guilt of all our other sins against Him, and imparts to each of them its own hateful character.

But oh, how good, how pleasant, how comely is gratitude! How just is it, how reasonable! Next in blessedness to giving gifts, is the consciousness of giving thanks. Gratitude is a noble return. It is the highest which man can render either to his God or to his fellows. It is the response of the heart--that very response which God requires, and in which His soul delights.

Why has the Lord made this world of ours so fair--adorned the earth with flowers and crowned the year with goodness? To draw forth our gratitude! Why did he preserve our infancy, guard our youth, and sustain our manhood? To draw forth our gratitude! Any why, in addition to all these temporal mercies, has the Lord loaded us with spiritual benefits so great, so suitable, and so precious, that neither heart can conceive nor tongue can express them? Why, we ask, has the Lord poured forth upon us all the blessings of redemption? Surely, amid other gracious reasons, this is not the least--that He might draw forth from our hearts a full and everlasting gratitude.

Oh gratitude, gratitude! What amount of thankfulness can ever equal infinite obligations? "Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can show forth all His praise?" (Ps. 106:2). Surely "it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High. To show forth Thy loving kindness in the morning and Thy faithfulness every night" (Ps. 92:1,2).

Gratitude adorns the believing soul. "Praise is comely for the upright." A thankful heart must needs be a happy heart. Let us, then, cultivate gratitude. It is one of the fairest and most useful flowers in the garden of the soul. It should be the first to blossom and the last to fade in every believer's breast. Its presence is always pleasant and its odor sweeter than the richest perfumes. Gratitude gladdens the heart in which it dwells, and imparts its gladness to the hearts of others. It dispels melancholy. It dissipates care. It begets cheerfulness, and it throws a charm over all the little incidents of life.

A grateful man is sure to be a contented man. No fretful thought, no murmuring disposition can remain long in the breast of a grateful Christian. Whatsoever his lot in life may be, he will neither envy the position of others nor repine against his own. He will look around him with a contented mind, because he looks upward with a thankful heart.

*Gratitude: An Exposition of The Hundred and Third Psalm (condensed)*

## Day 11

### THE CHARACTER OF FELIX

Harvey Goodwin

***"And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix trembled and answered, Go away for now; when I have a convenient season I will call for you. Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him." (Acts 24:24-26)***

This is a passage which must be familiar to you all. Felix' "convenient season" has become quite a common word in our mouths, and I suppose there is scarcely one amongst us to whom Felix has not been held up, either by parents or ministers or Sunday-school teachers, as a warning of the danger of putting off till tomorrow what ought to be done today.

Nevertheless I must remark that, although the history of Felix is undoubtedly to be regarded in this light, yet it appears to me that the circumstances of his case are not generally rightly understood. Thus I think that when the text speaks of Felix sending away St. Paul and promising to call for him again when he had a convenient season, it is not to be understood that that convenient season never came. I think that this convenient season *did* come--and come again. Yea, I think that it is the very feature of awfulness about the history that Felix *had* convenient seasons such as scarce any man else ever had; that he had not the excuse of having no opportunities of warning and repentance, but contrariwise, [he] had the great Apostle of the Gentiles at his bidding and had interview after interview with him, and heard from those wonderful lips the stern honest denunciation of his sins--and yet never repented. If it had been but once that he had trembled and sent St. Paul away and the subject of their conversation had never been renewed, then we might have wondered that a man should have been made to tremble and not have been made to repent. But the case would not have been so bad as in matter of fact it was, for the text tells us that Felix sent for Paul *often* and communed with him. It was no solitary interview, that in which the text tells us that Felix trembled. No, the same thing happened again and again. Felix thought that Paul would be ransomed, and Felix loved money; and therefore, though he must have hated St. Paul's warning voice, yet he cherished the hope of making gain and on that account sent often to see him.

Now, before I make application of the history to ourselves, let me draw your attention especially to three points. First, note this, that Felix was not a man altogether ignorant of the religion which Paul preached. He is spoken of as one who had a more perfect knowledge of that way, that is, of the religion of Christ. This you are to bear in mind in order that you may not attribute his rejection of St. Paul's warnings to an entire ignorance of the claims which St. Paul had upon his attention. Secondly, you are to note that Felix' heart was not wholly hardened, his conscience not wholly seared. He was a man who had sinned grievously, who sinned against light and knowledge, and therefore was, so to speak, on the high road to utter hardness and blindness of heart. But he had not arrived at that condition. And thirdly, you must remark [note], that although Felix was not ignorant of the claims of the Gospel, and was not utterly beyond hope . . . , still he was able to make the warnings of St. Paul utterly useless. Felix trembled, but he did nothing more. He acknowledged the truth of Paul's words by his present fear and distress, but he gave the lie to his convictions by going on in sin. Felix' mind was disturbed as by the sudden gust of a storm, but there was no abiding impression, no deep lasting effect; and so the

storm passed over and he rested in his sins unchanged.

And the reason why you are to note this is that you may see in Felix a proof that it is possible for a man who has a tolerably perfect knowledge of that way, and whose heart is still susceptible of religious impressions, to render spiritual advantages useless--yea, to hear even the words of an Apostle and still remain without repentance and therefore without holiness.

In conclusion, then, Christian Brethren, I return to the question which I promised to ask. And I ask you whether there is anyone among you who can find in the history and character of Felix some touches of his own religious experience? Is there anyone among you who feels constrained to say in his heart, I am like him? Is there anyone who trifles with his own conscience, and will not look into it but dismisses it continually until a "convenient season" arrives? Or is there any whose heart condemns him for having trembled in this place on the Sunday and forgotten his trembling during the week; or for having heard lessons here and never practised them; or for having received in the Church views of religion which the return to the business of life has dissipated and destroyed? Or is there anyone who is conscious of having made vows to God in trouble and distress, which he has forgotten to pay when the trouble and distress were gone by? And lastly, is there anyone whose heart reproaches him for want [lack] of seriousness in his religion, for suffering other gods in his heart besides the true one, for refusing to the Lord Jesus Christ that central place in his thoughts and affections, which His characters of Redeemer, Saviour, Brother, declare of right to belong to Him? Is there one? Nay, Brethren, do we not all feel ourselves in some way condemned? And if so, shall we not all join in one spirit and say, "O Thou! in whom alone our spirits live, give us grace that we may never fall from Thee, but walking in Thy ways with seriousness and worshipping Thee in spirit and truth, may ever grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

*Parish Sermons* (condensed)

## Day 12

### THREE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ABOUT SIN AND SALVATION

John Warwick Montgomery

*"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5)*

What is the "Unpardonable Sin"?

This expression refers to what the Bible calls "the sin against the Holy Ghost." It consists of refusing to the end the grace that God offers through His Holy Spirit. The man who commits this sin keeps pushing away God's gift of salvation right to the point when it can do him no more good. He rationalizes away God's love and the gift of Christ, and refuses to believe that there are any eternal resources in the divine bank account on which the check of salvation has been drawn in his favor. Think of an airplane flying over the ocean; it can reach the "point of no return," after which there is not enough fuel in the tank to bring it back safely. Make sure that you do not pass this "point of no return" in your spiritual life. Remember: the longer you put off accepting God's offer, the harder it becomes to do so. "The same sun that melts the ice, hardens the clay." But as long as you are willing to respond to the Gospel, you have not committed the unpardonable sin.

Whom Will God Forgive?

Every man, without exception, who seeks forgiveness. There is no sin too great to keep a man from the Cross except the refusal to go to the Cross. Someone has rightly said that the only sin that ever damns is the sin of unbelief. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16). *You* are included in the "whosoever"!

What Must a Man Do to Be Saved?

*Scene:* The Admissions Desk, Heaven.

*Characters:* St. Peter and Mr. Religious (a pillar of community and church for many years).

*St. P:* To enter here you must have earned 1000 points.

*Mr. R:* That doesn't seem excessive. I was a community leader for thirty years and strove for better government and general social improvement.

*St. P:* Excellent! A praiseworthy record. That's one point.

*Mr. R (taken aback):* I was a faithful family man--married to the same woman forty years and the father of three fine children whom we sent to the best schools . . .

*St. P:* You don't say? We don't get many like you these days. That's another point.

*Mr. R (sweating freely by now):* I was a scout leader, attended church every Sunday, was a member of the church board, taught Sunday School . . .

*St. P:* Commendable in every way! What a credit you were to the community. Two points. Now let's see, that makes . . .

*Mr. R* (on his knees, almost prostrate, half mumbling to himself): Good Lord! But for the grace of God, nobody could get in here!

*St. P:* You have just received 1000 points.

To be saved, a man must first recognize that he can't save himself. Why? Because everyone has willfully violated God's perfect standards, and he who "offends in one point of the law is guilty of all" (Jas 2:10). God's standard is perfection, as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, and this means we all desperately need divine grace.

God's grace is given freely in Christ, who died for our sins on the cross. This grace comes to us through the Word (the Bible) and the sacraments or ordinances (Baptism and the Lord's Supper), and we appropriate it through faith. This is the great truth of "justification by grace through faith" that the Reformers proclaimed on the basis of Scripture itself: "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God--not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

Faith, moreover, is not "the magic of believing" (as a book title has it). It is not faith-in-ourselves, or faith-in-faith. It is faith in *Christ*--the faith that cries: "God, be merciful to me a sinner." This never is mere intellectual assent. In the original Greek text of the New Testament "believe in Christ" literally means, "believe into Christ"--"enter into a living, personal relationship of trust with Him." The saved man is the man who (in Augustine's words) accepts God in Christ as the center and circumference of his life.

*How Do We Know There Is a God?*

Day 13

## PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES

J. H. Jowett

***"Before governors and kings shall ye be brought for My sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." (Matthew 10:18-20, R.V.).***

*"Ye shall be brought before governors and kings."* This was said to fishermen who had lived a quiet, unobtrusive life on and by the Galilean lake. It does not require much imagination to enter into the panic occasioned by the Master's words. In our day, to appear before a Court even as a plaintiff makes one limp and weak and useless; to appear as defendant is to suffer collapse. And these humble, toiling men with their horny hands, with their homely dialect, are told that they must appear before kings and governors to answer for their lives! It is no easy experience for obscure people to appear in the presence of the great and mighty. They are often either the victims of awkwardness or the prey of paralyzing fear. They do the wrong thing, they say the wrong thing, things they purposed saying and doing are forgotten. Both in the presence of the august and when they leave it they feel abashed and ashamed. If not the prey of awkwardness they are in the bondage of fear. The pith goes out of their powers, and they feel as though their wills are melting away. It was by no means an easy prospect which the Master held out before them. *"Ye shall be brought before governors and kings."* When they heard the words their secret hearts began to busy themselves with this unspoken question: "What shall we do?" Immediately they became anxious, possessed by worry, thrown into mental and spiritual disorder.

Here, then, are the disciples contemplating a remote emergency. The emergency will come. It is inevitable. The line of their life, at present commonplace and even, will rise into a great crisis. As sure as the morrow comes the emergency will come with it! What shall they do? That was the pregnant question, and the question suggests our present meditation. How shall we prepare for emergencies?

Our life now may be a level, regular road. But tomorrow the character of the road will be changed, and we shall be confronted by some great and unusual task. What shall we do? It may not be ours to stand as culprits before powers of an imperial or ecclesiastical kind. But it is not only kings and governors who make life's crises. There are presences and powers of another kind, great, strong, and inevitable. Other things may stop us, arrest us, imprison us in close bondage. There are other kings beside those who sit on thrones. Tomorrow I may not stand before a king who wears the purple, but I may come into the presence of sickness. I may approach the sudden shadow of calamity. I may come within the chill and loneliness of bereavement. I may meet King Death himself, the king of kings, the king of terror, the shadow feared of man. *"Ye shall be brought before"* sickness, calamity, bereavement, death! These presences are inevitable. What shall we do? How shall we prepare for them?

*Ye shall be brought before kings.* When the disciples heard the words many of them began already to prepare the words which they would address to the king. "No," said the Master, "do not prepare a speech, be not anxious what ye shall speak. Don't prepare a speech, prepare yourselves!" That is the way to meet all emergencies. Not to make little detailed arrangements and little specified plans and finished speeches, but to have our souls in health and to meet all emergencies with the invincibility of a prepared life.

*Be not anxious.* The first step in all wise preparation for emergencies is to cultivate the strength of stillness. Anxiety is mental and spiritual unrest. It always signifies the absence of stillness, the calmness which is the very secret of strength.

Most of us are familiar with the calm people to whom we instinctively turn in times of stress and danger. Among the poor and the working classes, where neighborliness is more alive than among the well-to-do, it is beautiful how some one neighbor is renowned for this quality of calmness. There is nearly always some woman in the locality to whom poor people turn when life passes into the strain of some great emergency. She is sent for in cases of accident, or when bad news is received, or when Death is at the door. The neighbors say one to another, as their first and readiest counsel, "Send for Mrs. So-and-So," and the calm woman comes on the scene of general panic and disorder, and her presence at once begins to restore confidence. She has the strength of stillness. What do we mean by this calmness? We mean that she is self-possessed, that she has everything in hand, that all her powers are at her disposal like the well-arranged tools in the carpenter's shop. We have a very expressive word by which we describe this quality of mind. We call it "collectedness." The opposite of collectedness is distraction, when a man's powers do not work together but one is passive and another is active, one pulling this way and another that, and there is no general aim and direction. The collected man has his faculties about him like well-ordered troops, and he says to one "Go," and he goes, and to another "Come," and he comes, and to all his servants "Do this," and they do it.

These are the people who save us from the perils of panic and turn our crises into advantage. Lord Kitchener is known in the Army as the strong, silent man. There is no flurry or hurry about him. He moves toward seeming disaster as though he were going to a feast. None of his powers are paralyzed by disorder, none are impoverished by anxiety, no strength is wasted, everything is intent upon a quietly seen and deliberate end. Now, if we are to meet the crises of life, this calmness of spirit must be cultivated. It is infinitely better than a prepared speech or a ready-made plan; these may fail us when the crises arrive. The stillness is our friend in the dark and stormy day.

But if we are to obtain the strength of stillness we must practice the art of *living in the present*. "Be not anxious for tomorrow." "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." We must not needlessly go out to anticipate the crisis. We must not meet our trouble half-way. Half-met troubles always appear monstrous. Anticipation makes trifles loom gigantic. The thing that frowns in threatening and terrific guise often ceases to terrify when we draw closer to it.

I saw a picture some time ago which represented a rising storm. Seen at some little distance it appeared as though dark, black, threatening cloud-battalions were speedily covering the entire sky and blotting out all the patches of light and hope. But when I went a little nearer to the picture I found that the artist had subtly fashioned his clouds out of angel faces, and all these black battalions wore the winsome aspect of genial friends. I have had that experience more than once away from the realm of picture and fiction, in the hard ways of practical life. The clouds I feared and worried about, and concerning which I wasted so much precious strength, lost their frown and revealed themselves as my friends. Other clouds never arrived; they were purely imaginary or they melted away before they reached my threshold. "Be not anxious for tomorrow." Live in the immediate moment. Practice the art of omission. Leave out some things and concentrate upon the rest. The best preparation for the morrow is quiet attention today. *"I ask Thee for a present mind, intent on pleasing Thee."*

If I am to be a capable expert, living in the present, I must engage in *the practice of trusting God* in every passing moment of my life. What is this that is nearest to me? What is this duty? What is this task? What is this immediate trouble? Just here and just now let me trust in God. Let me turn this present moment into happy confidence, and in this very season let me hold communion with my God. Let my trust be deliberate, repeatedly deliberate, until by conscious, volitional trust I come to have instinctive confidence in my God. Let me fill the present with holy faith, and "the changes that will surely come I shall not fear to see."

And why shall I not fear them? *"Be not anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."* Lay hold of the last two words of this great promise, "in you." That is the secret of everything. Every act of trust increases your capacity for God. Every time I trust Him I have more room for Him. He dwells within me in ever-richer fullness, occupying room after room in my life. That is a glorious assurance, and one that is filled with infinite comfort. Let me repeat it again, for it is the very music of the soul: little acts of trust make larger room for God. In my trifles I can prepare for emergencies. Along a commonplace road I can get ready for the hill. In the green pastures and by the still waters I can prepare myself for the valley of the shadow. For when I reach the hill, the shadow, the emergency, I shall be God-possessed. He will dwell in me. And where He dwells He controls. If He lives in my life He will direct my powers. It will not be I that speak, but my Father that speaks in me. He will govern my speech. He will empower my will. He will enlighten my mind. He will energize and vitalize my entire life.

Here, then, is the little sequence I have been endeavoring to unfold. Put your trust in the Lord and you will live well in the immediate present; live well in the immediate present and you will have the spirit of calmness which is the secret of strength. The emergency will not frighten you. You will approach it with that quietness which is the essential factor in triumph.

*The Silver Lining*



## Day 14

### THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Matthew Henry

***"So it was that the beggar died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried." (Luke 16:22)***

Death is the common lot of rich and poor, godly and ungodly. There they meet together. One dies *in his full strength*, and another *in the bitterness of his soul*, but they shall *lie down alike in the dust*. Death favors not man for his poverty. Saints die that they may bring their sorrow to an end and may enter upon their joys. Sinners die that they may go to give their account. It concerns both rich and poor to prepare for death, for it waits for them both.

The beggar died first. God often takes godly people out of the world, when he leaves the wicked to flourish still. It was an advantage to the beggar that such a speedy end was put to his miseries, and, since he could find no other shelter or resting place, he was *hid in the grave* where the *weary are at rest*.

The rich man died and was buried. Nothing is said of the interment of the poor man. They dug a hole anywhere and tumbled his body in, without any solemnity. He was *buried with the burial of an ass*. It is well if they that let the dogs lick his sores did not let them gnaw his bones. But the rich man had a pompous funeral, lay in state, had a train of mourners to attend him to his grave and a stately monument set up over it. Probably he had a funeral oration in praise of him, his generous way of living, and the good table he kept--which those would commend who had feasted at it. It is said (in Job) of the wicked man, that he is brought to the grave with no small ado, laid in the tomb, and the clods of the valley, were it possible, are made sweet to him.

The beggar died and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. How much did the honor done to his soul by this convoy of it to its rest exceed the honor done to the rich man by the carrying of his body with so much magnificence to its grave. Observe that his soul existed in a state of separation from the body. It did not die or fall asleep with the body. His candle was not put out with him, but lived, acted, and knew what it did and what was done to it. His soul removed to another world, to the world of spirits. It returned to God who gave it, to its native country. This is implied in its being carried. It was carried by angels. They are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation, not only while they live but when they die, and have a charge concerning them to bear them up in their hands. One angel, one would think, would be sufficient, but here are more, as many as were sent for Elijah. What were the bearers at the rich man's funeral, though probably those of the first rank, in comparison with Lazarus's bearers?

It was carried into Abraham's bosom. The Jews expressed the happiness of the righteous at death in three ways: they go to the garden of Eden, they go to be under the throne of glory, and they go to the bosom of Abraham. This poor Lazarus, who might not be admitted within the rich man's gate, is conducted into the dining room, into the bedchamber, of the heavenly palace.

*"Then he [the rich man] cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me...for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received good things.'" This is a cutting word--remember. The memories of damned souls will be their tormentors, and conscience will then be awakened and stirred up to do its office, which here they would not allow it to do. Now sinners are called upon to remember, but they do not, will not, and find ways to*

avoid it. What a dreadful peal will this ring in our ears, "Son, remember the many warnings that were given you not to come to this place of torment, but which you would not regard. Remember the fair offers made to you of eternal life and glory which you would not accept."

He is now reminded that in his own lifetime he received his good things. Abraham does not tell him that he had abused them, but that he had received them. "Remember what a bountiful benefactor God has been to you, how ready he was to do you good. You cannot therefore say that he owes you anything, no, not a drop of water. What he gave you, you received, and that was all. You never gave a thankful acknowledgment of them, much less did you ever make any grateful return for them or improvement of them. You received them and used them as if they had been your own. They were your reward, your consolation, the penny you had agreed on. You lived for the good things of your lifetime and had no thought of better things in another life, and therefore you have no reason to expect them. The day of your good things is past and gone, and now is the day of your evil things, of recompense for all your evil deeds."

*Matthew Henry's Commentary*

Day 15

THE CHRISTIAN RACE  
Samuel Porter Williams

***"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." (Hebrews 12:1)***

The Christian life is a life of exertion, of holy diligence. Yet because the gospel abounds with expressions of the *freeness* of salvation, the presumptuous mind infers that all human efforts to obtain it are fruitless. And because this practical error agrees with the natural aversion of man to religion, and is congenial to his slothful habits, this delusive and fatal notion has many advocates. But whoever has carefully followed the examples of those great men of the Church through their pilgrimage, examined their principles, inspected their conduct, and observed their spirit, has not been thus deceived. God is not mocked. Human effort, mighty and persevering, he commands; and whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.

Woe, therefore, to him who is at ease. All Christian example, as well as precept, assures us that to work out our salvation is no less necessary than to agonize to enter the way of life. In the doctrine of Christ we are taught that though grace is sovereign and *free*, it is not inoperative; that though eternal life is the *gift* of God, it is a life of service for God, a life of vigilance and a labor of love. God works in us to *do* as well as to will, and imparts grace and strength to his people. This is not to render their efforts *needless*, but to make them *sure* and availing; not to furnish an excuse for standing all the day idle in his vineyard, but to render their work efficacious toward deliverance from moral pollution.

The competitor in the race prepared himself physically, recognizing that the crown would be given only to the one who merited it. And in the Christian realm, the verdict is that no man can make his calling and election sure who does not give *diligence* to this end. Free, therefore, as salvation is, it will not come to the one who does not *seek* the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Indeed, do you not know that in a race men *run*, and that a man cannot run without *toil*, nor advance without *continued effort*, nor reach the goal without *perseverance*--and all this needed until the end of the course? Every page of the gospel enforces some *duty* on man; and can either God or my neighbor do the work assigned *me* to do? Can any duty be performed without an effort of the mind and heart?

The Christian life is a spiritual journey, a passing from one stage of the pilgrimage to another; a progression in knowledge, hope, and holiness; a pressing toward the mark and reaching forth to some point to which we have not attained. And is all this to be gained without any exertion? The cross we are required to bear is not a material burden, nor our daily self-denial a literal yoke. Neither is our life a mere footrace. For as surely as the athlete failed of the garland crown when negligent in preparation, so certainly the sinner, if idle, will fail of salvation. Whatever his hands find to do must be done with all his might. And if the kingdom of heaven is to be taken only by force, he must be unrelenting in the conflict. The lagging traveler and the slumbering virgin are in danger. Without holy activity, no one lives the life of a Christian.

*Sermons on Various Subjects, Chiefly Practical* (condensed and lightly edited)

## Day 16

### THE VISION OF DRY BONES

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

***"The hand of Yahweh came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of Yahweh, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? So I answered, O Lord GOD, You know. Again He said to me, Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live . . . Then He said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel." (Ezekiel 37:1-5, 11)***

In early life the Prophet Ezekiel had been witness to sieges and battlefields, he had himself experienced many of the horrors and calamities of war; and this seems to have tinged his natural character in such a way that his prophecies, more than [those of] any other prophet, are full of terrific images and visions of dreadful things. In these words we have the description of a vision which, for grandeur and terrible sublimity, is perhaps unequaled in any other part of the Bible.

He describes himself as set down by God in the midst of a valley that was full of bones. It seemed as if he were set down in the midst of some spacious battlefield, where thousands and tens of thousands had been slain, and none left behind to bury them. The eagles had many a time gathered over the carcasses, and none frightened them away; and the wolves of the mountains had eaten the flesh of these mighty men and drunk the blood of princes. The rains of heaven had bleached them, and the winds that sighed over the open valley had made them bare. Many a summer sun had whitened and dried the bones. As the prophet went round to view the dismal scene, these two thoughts arose in his mind: "Behold, they are very many; and, lo, they are very dry."

If the place had not been an open valley, it might have seemed to his wondering gaze [like] some vast charnel-house [repository for dead bodies], as if the tombs of all the Pharaohs had been laid bare by some shock of nature to the wild winds of heaven; as if the wanton hand of violence had rifled the vast cemeteries of Egypt and cast forth the mummied bones of other ages to bleach and whiten in the light of heaven. How expressive are the brief words of the seer: "Behold, they are very many; and, lo, they are very dry!"

No doubt there was an awful silence spread over this scene of desolateness and death. But the voice of his heavenly guide breaks in upon his ear, "*Son of man, can these bones live?*"

How strange a question was this to ask concerning dry, whitened bones! When Jesus said of the damsel, "She is not dead, but sleeps," they laughed him to scorn. But here were not bodies newly dead, but bones--bare, whitened bones. They were not even skeletons, for bones were separated from their adjoining bones, and yet God asks, "Can these bones live?" Had he asked this question of the world, they would have laughed a louder laugh of scorn. But he asked it of one who, though once dead, had himself been made alive by God; and he answered, "O Lord God, you know." They cannot live of themselves, for they are dead and dry. But if you will put your living Spirit into them, they shall live. So, then, you only know.

Receiving this answer of faith from the prophet, God bids him to prophesy to these bones, and

say unto them: *"O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones, Behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. I will put sinews on you, and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord."*

Had the prophet walked by sight and not by faith, he would have staggered at this promise through unbelief. Had he been a worshiper of reason, he would have argued, "These bones have no ears to hear, why should I preach to them, 'Hear the word of the Lord?'" But no. He believed God rather than himself. He had been taught "the exceeding greatness of his mighty power," and therefore he obeyed. *"So I prophesied as I was commanded."*

If the scene which Ezekiel first beheld was dismal and desolate, the scene which now opened on his eyes was more dismal and revolting still: *"And as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them."* If it was a hideous sight before to see the valley full of bones all cleansed by the rains and winds and whitened in the summer suns, how much more hideous now to see these slain ones with bone joined to bone, sinews and skin upon them, but no breath in them! Here was a battlefield indeed with its thousands of unburied dead--masses of unbreathing flesh, cold and immovable, ready only to putrify, every hand stiff and motionless, every bosom without a heave, every eye glazed and lifeless, every tongue cold and silent as the grave.

But the voice of God again breaks the silence: *"Prophesy to the wind (or Spirit), prophesy, son of man, and say to the Spirit, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O Spirit, and breathe on these slain, that they may live."*

Before, Ezekiel had bent over the dead, dry bones and preached unto them--a vast but lifeless congregation. Now he lifts his head and raises his eyes, for his word is to the living Spirit of God. Unbelief might have whispered to him, "To whom are you going to prophesy now?" Reason might have argued, "What sense is there in speaking to the invisible wind, to one whom you see not; for it is written, *The world cannot receive the Spirit of God, because it sees him not.*" But he staggered not at the word through unbelief. *"So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army."*

The first application made of this vision is to the restoration of the Jews. (1) It teaches that at present they are like dry bones in the open valley, scattered over all lands, very many, and very dry, without any life to God. (2) It teaches that the preaching of Jesus, though foolishness to the world, is to be the means of their awakening, and that prayer to the all-quickening Spirit is to be the means of their new life. (3) It teaches that when these means are used with them, God's ancient people shall yet stand up and be an exceeding great army, shall be as they used to be when they marched through the wilderness, when God went before them in the pillar of cloud; that they shall then be led back to their own land, and planted in their own land, and not plucked up any more.

*Sermons of the Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne*

Day 17

**STONEWALL JACKSON, A MAN OF PRAYER**

**Rev. J. William Jones**

***"Pray without ceasing."***

**1 Thessalonians 5:17**

Rev. Dr. Wm. Brown, former editor of the *Central Presbyterian*, relates a characteristic anecdote of this "man of prayer." During a visit to the army around Centreville, in 1861, a friend remarked to Dr. Brown, in speaking of General Jackson in the strain in which many of his old acquaintances were accustomed to disparage him, "The truth is, sir, that 'old Jack' is *crazy*. I can account for his conduct in no other way. Why, I frequently meet him out in the woods walking back and forth muttering to himself incoherent sentences and gesticulating wildly, and at such times he seems utterly oblivious of my presence and of everything else." Dr. Brown happened the next night to share Jackson's blanket, and in a long and tender conversation on his favorite theme--the means of promoting personal holiness in camp--the great soldier said to him: "I find that it greatly helps me in fixing my mind and quickening my devotions to give articulate utterance to my prayers, and hence I am in the habit of going off into the woods, where I can be alone and speak audibly to myself the prayers I would pour out to my God. I was at first annoyed that I was compelled to keep my eyes open to avoid running against the trees and stumps. But upon investigating the matter I do not find that the Scriptures require us to close our eyes in prayer, and the exercise has proven to me very delightful and profitable." And thus Dr. Brown got the explanation of the conduct which his friend had cited to prove that "old Jack is *crazy*."

A friend was once conversing with him about the difficulty of obeying the Scripture injunction, "pray without ceasing," and Jackson insisted that we could so accustom ourselves to it that it could be easily obeyed. "When we take our meals there is the grace. When I take a draught of water I always pause, as my palate receives the refreshment, to lift up my heart to God in thanks and prayer for the water of life. Whenever I drop a letter in the box at the post-office, I send a petition along with it for God's blessing upon its mission and upon the person to whom it is sent. When I break the seal of a letter just received, I stop to pray to God that He may prepare me for its contents and make it a messenger of good. When I go to my classroom and await the arrangement of the cadets in their places, that is my time to intercede with God for them. And so of every other familiar act of the day."

"But," said his friend, "do you not often forget these seasons, coming so frequently?"

"No!" said he. "I have made the practice habitual to me; and I can no more forget it than forget to drink when I am thirsty. The habit has become as delightful as regular."

Upon one occasion I called at Jackson's headquarters and found him just going in to a prayer meeting which he was accustomed to hold. I gladly accepted his invitation to attend and shall never forget the power, comprehensiveness, and tender pathos of the prayer he made during that delightful prayer-meeting. Only a few days before the battle of Chancellorsville, I had the privilege (in company with several brother-chaplains) of dining with him at his mess, and of lingering for an hour of most delightful converse in his tent. Military matters were scarcely alluded to, and then he would quickly change the topic. But we fully discussed questions

pertaining to the promotion of religion in the camps--how to secure more chaplains and to induce pastors to come as missionaries to the soldiers, and kindred topics. And then we got on the subject of personal piety, the obstacles to growth in grace in the army, the best means of promoting it, etc., and as the great soldier talked earnestly and eloquently from a full heart, I had to lay aside my office as teacher in Israel and be content to "sit at the feet" of this able theologian, this humble, earnest Christian, and learn of him lessons in the Divine life. More than almost any man I ever met, he accepted fully the precious promises of God's word, walked by a living faith in Jesus, and was guided by the star of hope as he trod firmly the path of duty. How far the glorious revivals with which we were favored were in answer to the prayers, and in blessing on the efforts of "Stonewall" Jackson, and to what extent his influence was blessed to individuals, eternity alone can reveal.

I have it from a well-authenticated source that the conversion of Lieutenant-General Ewell, Jackson's able lieutenant, was on this wise: At a council of war, one night, Jackson had listened very attentively to the views of his subordinates, and asked until the next morning to present his own. As they came away, A. P. Hill laughingly said to Ewell, "Well! I suppose Jackson wants time to pray over it." Having occasion to return to his quarters again a short time after, Ewell found Jackson on his knees and heard his ejaculatory prayers for God's guidance in the perplexing movements then before him. The sturdy veteran Ewell was so deeply impressed by this incident and by Jackson's general religious character, that he said: "If that is religion, I must have it." And in making a profession of faith not long afterwards, he attributed his conviction to the influence of Jackson's piety.

Excerpt from *Christ in the Camp*

## Day 18

### WISDOM FOR MAN

Jonathan Edwards

*"Do not boast about tomorrow,  
for you do not know what a day may bring forth."*

Proverbs 27:1

The design of the wise man in this book of Proverbs is to give us the precepts of true wisdom, or to teach us how to conduct ourselves wisely in the course of our lives. Wisdom very much consists in making a wise improvement of time, and of the opportunities we enjoy. He advises us here to a wise improvement of the present season.

The precept given: *not to boast of tomorrow*. That is, not to speak or act as though it were our own. It is absurd for men to boast of that which is not theirs. The wise man would not have us behave ourselves as though any time were ours but the present.

The reason given for this precept: *for you do not know what a day may bring forth*. We have no hold of future time; we know not whether we shall see the morrow; or if we do know that we shall see it, we know not what we shall see on it. We ought to carry ourselves as though we knew we should not live another day and improve the current one as if it were the last. In particular, we should live every day as conscientiously and in as holy a manner as if we knew it were the last. We should be as careful to avoid all sin as if we knew that this night our souls should be required of us. We should be as careful to do every duty which God requires of us, and take as much care that we have a good account to give to our Judge of our improvement of that day, as if we concluded that we must be called to give an account before another day arrives.

Yet in many other respects, we are not to behave ourselves as though we concluded that we should not live another day. For instance, in such a case it would not be the duty of any person to make provision for his temporal subsistence. It would never be man's duty to plow or sow the field, or to lay up for winter. But these things are man's duty: *"Go to the ant, you sluggard. Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest."*

On the other hand, if we were certain that we should not live another day, some things would be our duty today which now are not so. For instance, it would be proper for us to spend our time in giving our dying counsels, in setting our houses in order, in doing those things which immediately concern our departure. Therefore, the words that forbid us to boast of tomorrow cannot be extended to signify that we ought *in all respects* live as if we knew we should not see another day. Yet they undoubtedly mean that we ought not to behave ourselves as though we *depended* on another day.

Those who act as if they had another day set their hearts on the enjoyments of this life. I do not mean that we cannot have some affection for the enjoyments of this world; otherwise they would cease to be enjoyments. If we might have no degree of rejoicing in them, we would not be thankful for them. Persons may in a degree take delight in earthly friends and other earthly enjoyments. It is agreeable to the wise man's advice that we should do so: *"It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun."* But when we set our hearts on these things, place our happiness in them, turn and fix our



inclinations so much upon them that we cannot enjoy ourselves without them, we show that we have our dependence on another day.

When people are distressed with the loss of any temporal enjoyments or temporal disappointments, it shows that they set their hearts upon them. If they are very much distressed and the comfort of their lives destroyed by it, it shows that those temporal enjoyments were too much the foundation on which their comfort stood. That which makes a building totter and threatens its destruction is not the removal of some of the exterior parts of the superstructure, but the removal of some considerable part of the foundation on which the house stands.

I shall ask you now to examine yourselves and see whether you do not boast of tomorrow. Do you not set your hearts much more on this world than you would if you had no dependence on another day? Is not the language of the rich man in the gospel the secret language of your hearts? "*Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years.*" If you did not depend on having considerably more time in this world, would you spend so much time asking, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Would you not rather ask, "How shall we make our calling and election sure?" Would so much of your time be spent in laying up treasure on earth and so little in laying up treasure in heaven, were it not that you put death at a distance?

God has concealed from us the day of our death partly for this end, that we might be excited to be always ready, and might live as those that are always waiting for the coming of their Lord. Now therefore let me, in Christ's name, renew the call and counsel of Jesus Christ to you: Watch as those that know not what hour their Lord will come. Let me call upon you who are this day in an unsaved condition. Do not depend upon another day; that you will not be in hell before tomorrow morning. You have no reason for any such dependence.

*Works of Jonathan Edwards*

Day 19

## SUCCESSFUL LIVING

Joseph King

***"Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before unknown men."*** (Proverbs 22:29)

***"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life."*** (John 6:27)

***"Storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."*** (1 Timothy 6:19)

Founded on the three passages I have just read in your hearing, there are three thoughts to which I give utterance, and to the unfolding of which I solicit your attention. The first of these is important; the second is more important; the third is most important of all. If you do these three things, your days will be spent happily; your life will be successful. It will not end in disastrous failure as do the lives of so many. You will have your fruit unto holiness, and the end will be everlasting life. (1) Improve your temporal condition. (2) Cultivate your mind. (3) Save your soul. These three, in my judgment, embrace a great deal and cover the whole ground of man's duty in this life. We begin with the lowest, which is by no means unimportant.

(1) *Improve your temporal condition.* Better your worldly circumstances; become independent; get a home and own it if possible; lay up something, don't live from hand to mouth; save money; lift yourself above want, poverty and indigence. You have heard people say, "The world owes me a living, and I mean to have it." A falsehood! The world owes no man a living. It is only lazy, indolent, worthless creatures that talk in that way. It is every man's duty to do two things: [first], to earn a livelihood; [second], to produce in some way or other that is honest, and by some kind of labor, what he consumes--to produce as much at least as will supply his own needs. He who does not, who consumes but earns nothing, is a parasite on the community and ought to be shaken off, and compelled to work if he is able, or starve.

Such is the divine law, and a beneficent wise law it is. *"If any one will not work, neither let him eat. Now such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness working they eat their own bread"*--bread which they have earned by the sweat of their brows, by personal labor of some sort. The whole teaching of the Bible on this subject is against indolence, laziness, thriftlessness. And to labor, prudence, economy and industry it promises prosperity, thrift, an increase of worldly goods, and an abundance of all those things that minister to man's physical welfare and well being.

The second thing a man should do is to add something, even though it be a little, to the stock of the world's wealth. He should leave the world richer and better in every way for having lived in it. He should leave behind him an example of frugality, economy, thrift, and wise upright administration of the affairs of this life, as well as an example of high moral conduct and Christian integrity.

(2) *Cultivate your mind.* Strengthen and improve your understanding. Read, study, think, and add a little every day to your stock of useful information. Grow intellectually. *"Wise men lay up knowledge."* The

knowledge they lay up makes them wise, increases their wisdom, and, in laying up knowledge they act the part of true wisdom; for knowledge is a permanent possession. It becomes a part of our mental constitution, and, therefore, durable and lasting as the mind itself. Riches often take wings and fly away, reverses of fortune come, unforeseen circumstances may reduce a man to poverty; but no change in a man's external condition can rob him of his intellectual possessions.

Alfred the Great, king of England, who lived in the ninth century, was a wise monarch. He gave his people good advice, and studied to promote their best interests, and recommended this division of time for each twenty-four hours: Eight hours for work and business, eight for recreation and mental cultivation, and eight for sleep. Better advice, I think, could not be given as to a wise and judicious division of our time, and what inestimable blessing it would bring to the people if it were followed! The older people will never change materially. They will live on and die as they are now. The bad habits they have formed they will never get rid of. To the young, therefore, I appeal and say, form the habit in early life of reading good books. Acquire knowledge, make yourself intelligent, resolve to improve your mind and to treasure up knowledge. This will be to you a permanent possession, and a source of infinite satisfaction and comfort to you in after life. Let every young person begin to form a library. Save a little out of your earnings to buy books. Read them, take care of them, keep them, have a library of your own. Read history--it will enlarge your mind and acquaint you with what has been done in the world. Read biography--the lives of great and good men. This will show you how they rose to eminence, by what motives they were actuated, what difficulties they overcame, and what good they accomplished.

(3) *Save your soul.* Be a Christian, a whole-hearted, earnest follower of Christ. Take the Bible as your directory and guide in morals, the Christ as your pattern and example; and believing in your own immortality, live for the world to come and build up a character for eternity. Be reconciled to God through Christ. Worship, adore, serve, obey and love the great Creator and Redeemer. Accept Christ's sacrifice as the great atonement for human sin, his death as the great propitiation for human transgression, his word as your rule of duty. And receive him into your heart as its sovereign and your hope of glory. This is most important of all; this is first, highest, and chief of all. He who fails here succeeds nowhere. His life is a failure, and better that he had never been born.

A poor man may be a Christian and get to heaven. An ignorant man may be a Christian and get to heaven, and he will have eternity before him in which to learn. But he who is not a Christian has no hope of heaven--"*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?*" You must be a child of God, a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus, or all is vain. "*Work not for the food that perishes, but for that which endures unto everlasting life.*" What other interest can be compared with that of the soul and its salvation? If a man, having property in youth, squanders it, spends it in riotous living, in prodigality and excesses, and in manhood and old age is poor, is he not greatly to blame? He ought, in youth and early manhood, to have had regard to his needs when old, and made provision for them. If in youth one neglects his opportunities for getting an education and laying the foundation for the acquisition of knowledge in after life, and in old age is ignorant and unhappy, is it not his own fault?

Prepare for eternity. Why, the squirrel in autumn provides for winter. It carries nuts and acorns into holes of hollow trees that it may subsist on them during the cold winter months. The beaver constructs with remarkable ingenuity its lodges or habitations, thus providing for its future comfort. And shall not man, who is to live forever, on whose moral nature eternity is stamped,

make preparation for his future well-being? Be wise. Submit thy heart to God. I call thee to Christ, the one Saviour of sinners. *"Whosoever is willing, let him take of the water of life freely."*

*Sermons* (condensed)

Day 20

**GOD CONTINUES TO GOVERN  
EVERY PART OF HIS UNIVERSE  
John Calvin**

***"For by him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or power. All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things consist."*** (Colossians 1:15-17)

We do not believe that God merely created the universe and then left it to run its own course. This is one of the main points of difference between Christians and unbelievers. We recognize the work of God in the continuous course of nature as much as we do in its origin. Many people are convinced that there is a creator God when they see his work, but it requires faith in the heart to see his continued work.

We must clearly see that the providence of God has nothing to do with fortune or chance. For hundreds of years, and even in our own time, men have thought many happenings were by chance. If a man was attacked by robbers, shipwrecked at sea, found an oasis in a desert or had a hairbreadth escape from death, it was all ascribed to chance. But we know that even the hairs of our head are numbered. We know that the One who cares for us does not allow anything to happen to us just by chance. All events are controlled by the secret counsel of God.

God is not idle now that he has completed creation. He is watchful, powerful, always working. He is all-powerful, not because he set the world going, but because he governs heaven and earth with his kindly care. And this does not mean, merely, that he has set in order the course of nature. His goodness continues in fatherly love to all his people.

Another point that we must have clear in our minds is that God's care is much more than foreknowledge. His care is shown in continued action. To say that God governs the world in general without controlling each individual person is not true. The human being does not move or act by accident nor by his own free will. God's care in the world today means that he continues to work in the affairs of men. The decision about what occurs in the world is not partly God's choice and partly man's--the choice is always God's.

God controls both animate and inanimate things. By his fatherly care we have a good harvest or a bad one, a safe voyage or a shipwreck. God is all-powerful. We must realize that it is by his decision whether we have good times or bad. We know that he is so kind as to provide the good things we need. And when we go through bad times, we must not think that it is because he could not provide anything better for us. Christ has proclaimed as a universal truth that not even so small a creature as a sparrow falls to the ground without the will of the Father in heaven. We know that God made the world for man. We must expect that he governs it for the benefit of man.

The teaching that God controls every part of his world all the time can be made to sound horrible by making it seem as if the world is controlled by "fate." The idea of fate controlling mankind is completely non-Christian. We believe our loving God watches over everything with fatherly care. Often, however, our minds are too dull to reach to the heights of understanding God's actions. Though all things are ordered by God's sure will, to us they appear to happen by chance. The

purpose of many happenings is hidden from us. If we have faith, we will be able to see that what looks to us like chance is the secret working of God's power.

The parts of scripture that say Satan and all wicked people are controlled by the will of God are very difficult to understand. We begin to think that God is to blame when evil is done. Some people have tried to solve this problem by saying that some things God *does*, and some others he *permits*. But we know from the book of Job that God actually did the things that happened to him. Job says, "*The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away.*" Solomon tells us that it is God who turns the mind of a king. The fact that God controls our minds is also clearly stated in the New Testament, where it frequently says that God hardened their hearts or blinded their eyes.

Some people suggest that God must disagree with himself. They say he must want one thing--the good thing--and yet cause the evil to happen. But God has only one will although it may appear divided to us. A saying of Augustine may help us here: "Some men have good wishes which are not according to God's will, and others have bad wishes which are according to God's will. For instance, a good son may rightly wish that his father should live while it is God's will that he should die; and a bad son may wickedly wish that his father should die when it is also God's will that the father should die. And yet the godly son pleases God by wishing what God does not will, while the wicked son displeases God by wishing what God wills."

God sometimes fulfills his own righteous purposes by means of the evil purposes of the wicked. God would not allow evil to be done unless he, as the omnipotent God, were able to bring good out of it. Christ was crucified by God's appointment even though the action was done by wicked men.

Other people object to this teaching and say that if God uses wicked people, even governs their plans, he must be committing their crimes. So people must then be punished merely for obeying God's orders. But this reasoning is wrong. God's commandments must always be obeyed. A person who deliberately breaks a commandment deserves punishment. God's commands are unalterable. God's will is also unalterable. The difficulty comes when it seems that God has willed something that is contrary to his commandments. In this case, perhaps we do not understand the purpose of what he wills. His will may include someone doing a wicked act, but that act is still wicked. God willed that David's adultery should be avenged by Absalom's incest, but it does not follow that God commanded Absalom to commit incest. A wicked man is still guilty--even though he may act in accordance with God's plan--because it was his own wish to act wickedly.

### *Biblical Christianity*

Note: This book is a modernized and abridged edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The excerpt here is from Book I, Chapter XVI.

Day 21

**CONSCIENCE**  
**Alexander Hamilton Vinton**

***"If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?" (Jeremiah 12:5)***

God has placed in every man's heart a great prophetic witness to tell him of his sins, to pronounce upon his character, and foretell the great judgment. *Conscience* is God's viceroy over the realm of human spirit. Man may dethrone it by excessive guilt, and violate and dishonor it in ten thousand ways. But conscience was born to a throne in the human bosom, and a throne it will have, if not in this life then in the next; in this life for his salvation or, if not, then in the next for his deathless torment. When conscience speaks, its voice is always kingly. Even though you chain it, you tremble at the majesty of its expostulation. It is God's eye. It sees your life and reads your heart. It is God's voice counseling your understanding. It is God's power chastising your guilt with stings. Every sin you commit [whether] open or secret, yea every thought of sin, calls forth its indignant reprimand.

You would be happy if you could not remember that you were guilty. But remembering this, oh! what a mockery of happiness is a life like yours. Rich you may be in this life, but poverty-stricken for eternity; honored in men's estimation, but miserably vile in His, who is no respecter of persons; wise in human lore, ruinously blind in Divine things; just in your dealings with men, but defrauding the God who made you; free from all worldly stain, but guilty of the blood of your own soul.

And now, let me ask the searching question of the text: "How will you contend with horses?" "What will you do in the swelling of Jordan?" For there is coming a time when these pungent pains of your soul will seem like the brushing of an insect's wing compared with the searchings of heart that you must then endure. The time is coming when your soul shall be laid bare to the eye of the whole world. Its character will be read aloud by Him who gave your conscience a part of His own power. He will expose your open and your secret sins, with all their aggravation, and bring your whole life to the dreadful ordeal of the Judgment. What will you say when He shall punish you? In that ceasing of forbearance and the swelling forth of justice and judgment, what will you do? When the time for prayer is ended and gone, and the Holy Spirit of conversion has returned to God's bosom never to visit you again, and the day of grace has had its nightfall, and retribution glooms before you through a starless eternity, when the wrath of the Lamb has taken the judgment seat, and the love of the Lamb turns away from you to the saved; oh! you who sometimes blush even in your privacy to think of your guilty ingratitude to your Saviour, how can your hearts be strong then? How can you contend with your God?

My beloved friends, heed the admonishing pains of conscience now! You are wearied with them, I know, because you cannot deny their justice. As you love your own souls, and as you would fear to carry an unforgiven heart to your death-bed and to the judgment, I beseech you to heal your present woe by providing for the more terrible future. Assuage your conscience by saving your soul. To the cross, my dear friend, to the cross of your injured Saviour and the blood that your sins drew forth from his wounds, shall be your peace in the swelling of Jordan.

*Sermons* (condensed)

Day 22

## THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

J. Gresham Machen

*"The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."*

2 Corinthians 3:6

That sentence is perhaps the most frequently misused utterance in the whole Bible. It has indeed in this respect much competition: many phrases in the New Testament are being used today to mean almost their exact opposite . . . .

The words: "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life," are constantly interpreted to mean that we are perfectly justified in taking the law of God with a grain of salt; they are held to indicate that Paul was no "literalist," but a "Liberal," who believed that the Old Testament was not true in detail and the Old Testament law was not valid in detail, but that all God requires is that we should extract the few great principles which the Bible teaches and not insist upon the rest. In short, the words are held to involve a contrast between the letter of the law and "the spirit of the law"; they are held to mean that literalism is deadly, while attention to great principles keeps a man intellectually and spiritually alive.

Thus has one of the greatest utterances in the New Testament been reduced to comparative triviality--a triviality with a kernel of truth in it, to be sure, but triviality all the same. The triviality, indeed, is merely relative; no doubt it is important to observe that attention to the general sense of a book or a law is far better than such a reading of details as that the context in which the details are found is ignored. But all that is quite foreign to the meaning of the Apostle in this passage, and is, though quite true and quite important in its place, trivial in comparison with the tremendous thing that Paul is here endeavoring to say.

What Paul is really doing here is not contrasting the letter of the law with the spirit of the law, but contrasting the law of God with the Spirit of God. When he says, "The letter killeth," he is making no contemptuous reference to a pedantic literalism which shrivels the soul; but he is setting forth the terrible majesty of God's law. The letter, the "thing written," in the law of God, says Paul, pronounces a dread sentence of death upon the transgressor; but the Holy Spirit of God, as distinguished from the law, gives life.

The law of God, Paul means, is, as law, external. It is God's holy will to which we must conform; but it contains in itself no promise of its fulfilment; it is one thing to have the law written, and quite another thing to have it obeyed. In fact, because of the sinfulness of our hearts, because of the power of the flesh, the recognition of God's law only makes sin take on the definite form of transgression; it only makes sin more exceeding sinful. The law of God was written on tables of stone or on the rolls of the Old Testament books, but it was quite a different thing to get it written in the hearts and lives of the people. So it is today. The text is of very wide application. The law of God, however it comes to us, is "letter"; it is a "thing written," external to the hearts and lives of men. It is written in the Old Testament; it is written in the Sermon on the Mount; it is written in Jesus' stupendous command of love for God and one's neighbor; it is written in whatever way we become conscious of the commands of God. Let no one say that such an extension of the text involves that very anti-historical modernizing which we have just denounced; on the contrary it is amply justified by Paul himself. "When the Gentiles," Paul says, "which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law,



are a law unto themselves." The Old Testament law is just a clear, authentic presentation of a law of God under which all men stand.

There is no doubt about what he [Paul] means by "the Spirit." He does not mean the "spirit of the law" as contrasted with the letter; he certainly does not mean the lax interpretation of God's commands which is dictated by human lust or pride; he certainly does not mean the spirit of man. No real student of Paul, whatever be his own religious views, can doubt, I think, but that the Apostle means the Spirit of God. God's law brings death because of sin; but God's Spirit, applying to the soul the redemption offered by Christ, brings life. The thing that is written killeth; but the Holy Spirit, in the new birth, or, as Paul says, the new creation, gives life.

The contrast runs all through the New Testament. Hopelessness under the law is described, for example, in the seventh chapter of Romans. "Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But this hopelessness is transcended by the gospel. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." The law's just sentence of condemnation was borne for us by Christ who suffered in our stead; the handwriting of ordinances which was against us--the dreadful "letter"--was nailed to the cross, and we have a fresh start in the full favor of God. And in addition to this new and right relation to God, the Spirit of God also gives the sinner a new birth and makes him a new creature.

The New Testament from beginning to end deals gloriously with this work of grace. The giving of life of which Paul speaks in this text is the new birth, the new creation; it is Christ who lives in us. Here is the fulfillment of the great prophecy of Jeremiah: "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord [Yahweh], I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." The law is no longer for the Christian a command which it is for him by his own strength to obey, but its requirements are fulfilled through the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. This is the glorious freedom of the gospel. The gospel does not abrogate God's law, but it makes men love it with all their hearts.

How is it with us? The law of God stands over us; we have offended against it in thought, word and deed; its majestic "letter" pronounces a sentence of death against our sin. Shall we obtain a specious security by ignoring God's law, and by taking refuge in an easier law of our own devising? Or shall the Lord Jesus, as He is offered to us in the gospel, wipe out the sentence of condemnation that was against us, and shall the Holy Spirit write God's law in our heart, and make us doers of the law and not hearers only? So and only so will the great text be applied to us: "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

*What Is Faith?*

Day 23

## LOVING THE ENEMY

J. H. Jowett

***"But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High." (Luke 6:35)***

This searching counsel describes a certain pose or posture of the soul. The exposure of a greenhouse is vital and determinative of the quantity and quality of the flowers and fruits. It is even so with the attitude of the soul. Its finished issues are determined by its pose. Dispositions are just the poses of the soul. A soul in the attitude of prejudice is disinclined to the light. A soul in the attitude of jealousy presents a front of unkindly suspicion. A soul in the attitude of hatred bristles with perpetual antagonisms. Love is likewise an attitude of the soul, and is significant of a certain prominent temper in the life.

*Love is the attitude of wooing.* Love seeks to convert the hostile forces into a friendly power. Love is a seeker, that it may be a winner. Its aim is to transform the unfriendly sword into a friendly plowshare. It therefore seeks the conversion of force. Love is that temper of the soul which seeks to change alienation into intimate fellowship. This pose or temper of the soul can only be acquired in the atmosphere of prayer. It is in the ministry of prayer that the crooked become straight. If we entertain feelings of perilous hatred against another, let us force ourselves into the presence of God, and in that all-corrective Presence the foul inclination will be changed, and the posture of the soul will be transformed into the forgiving attitude of God. Love your enemies.

*Love is the instrument of knowing.* We can have no real knowledge of our enemy if we are destitute of love. Love is the posture in which vision becomes possible. It is through love that we have discernment and knowledge. If a man say, "I know my brother," and he loves him not, his knowledge is only pretense. To see anybody aright we require a disposition of love.

*Love reflects the disposition of God.* If I may say it reverently, to love an enemy is the very pose of our God. "While we were yet sinners Christ died." "When we were enemies we were reconciled." God is well disposed towards us and all men. "I know the thoughts that I have towards you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil." To let the mind dwell upon the disposition of God is to unconsciously acquire His pose. It always helps us to be well disposed towards anybody when somebody whom we love is well disposed towards them. The attitude of the one we love imperceptibly fashions our own. Because God loves His enemies, we shall find it possible to love ours. "We love because He first loved us."

*And do them good.* The posture of love will inevitably issue in the doing of good. Let me put three words together which, in their order, suggest a sequence of actual life. Benevolence, Benediction, Benefaction! Benevolence is the pose of love. To be benevolent is to be well-disposed, to be *will*-disposed. To be benevolent is to have the kindly inclination to woo and to win even our fiercest foe. Benevolence will issue in benediction. Benediction is benevolence expressed in speech. Our diction will be ordered and chastened by our benevolence. Unkindly criticism will be checked. Contempt will be changed into eulogy. The art of fault-finding will be changed into the ministry of grace-finding. Malediction becomes benediction. Benevolence will also express itself in benefaction. Benefaction is benevolence expressed in service. It is love testifying to itself in gracious service. In what kind of benefactions does love express itself? I

cannot tell you. Love will discover its own ministry. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him." Love will discover what the enemy's hungers are. Love will interpret and supply the enemy's lacks and gaps. It may not be the hunger for bread. It may be the hunger for comfort and cheer. Whatever the hunger may be, "God shall reveal that unto you." "Do them good." Kill the enemy by unfailing kindness.

*And lend.* I cannot limit the interpretation of this work to the mere content of money. Love is self-impartation, and with self we give all things. Lend to the enemy! Let out your substance, your possessions; make use of everything that may woo and win him. Be liberal in thought, in sympathy, in labors, in prayer. Bleed freely, that by the power of the sacrifice he may be allured into communion.

*Lend, never despairing.* Never say, "I have prayed so long for the enemy, and he is as unfriendly as ever. I shall attempt the insuperable task no more." That is the very opposite to the course of much-enduring love. There are some phrases which love never uses, and I think they ought never to pass over Christian lips. Here are one or two:--"A hopeless case"; "Too far gone"; "A bad job." The despair which is expressed in these phrases ought never to find entrance into the hearts of the disciples of Christ. We never know just how near we are to victory. The chairman of one of our great mining companies was telling us a little while ago how very near they were to overlooking the wealth of a great estate. They had been working for a long period and the labor appeared to be absolutely fruitless, and one day, when the purpose to cease work was almost ripe and the settlement was to be left as quite a hopeless sphere, the manager was at the facings, speaking to one of the workmen, and idly playing with the facing with his walking-stick when a small quantity of the soil tumbled down, and lo! the long-sought-for vein was discovered. They were purposing relinquishing the labor when the gold was only a hand's breadth away. This is even so in the searching for souls. When the work appears hopeless, we may be within an inch of victory. One more try, and we may be at the gold. "Lend, never despairing."

*And your reward shall be great.* To some extent love enshrines its own reward. Even when love is wounded, we would not lose our love to escape the pain. If a mother have daily agony because of her wayward son, if the love she bears him brings her constant sorrow, she would not be willing to lose her love that she might escape the grief. No mother would have the nerve of love deadened in order that her sensitiveness might be benumbed. No, there is something in love itself which has its own reward. But beyond this, to love an enemy brings to man the reward of fellowship with God. "Everyone that loveth . . . knoweth God." We "walk together" because we are "agreed." And beyond all this, to love the enemy brings to the lover a spiritual transformation. "Ye shall be sons of the most High." Our character is to be elevated and sublimed. Our sonship is to be worthy of the father. The child is to be glorified. We are to "awake in His likeness."

*Thirsting for the Springs*

## Day 24

### WEALTH Thomas Scott

***"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58)***

Wealth is a talent entrusted by the great Proprietor of the world to some for the good of many. It is indeed commonly so wasted in gratifying all the senses and appetites--"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," of so hoarded up in idolatrous avarice--that it is considered in Scripture as exceedingly dangerous to the souls of those who possess it. Yet the wise man had reason to say, that "*money answers all things*," as it may be extensively useful to others and thus eventually profitable to the faithful steward himself. And "the wisdom that is from above" will teach the Christian to make this use of it.

The wealthy are not required in Scripture to part with their estates. Nor is it generally advisable to abolish all *distinction* between them and their inferiors in their style of life. Nay, such men as are engaged in lucrative business--provided it be lawful and they are on their guard against its snares--will generally be more useful by carrying it on as the Lord's servant and using its profits as his stewards, than by retiring from it in the prime of life to a situation which, perhaps, has not fewer snares and certainly inferior advantages for doing good.

The confident believer, however, will be influenced by his principles to retrench [curtail] a variety of superfluous expenses, and exceedingly to moderate his desires of providing for his family, that he may raise a fund for charitable and pious uses. And while he shows a readiness for every good work, by which the wants and miseries of men may be relieved, he will especially endeavor to render all his liberality subservient to the more important interests of religion. This may be attempted by disseminating divine truth in the world as the only seed of genuine piety and holiness, dispersing useful books, assisting in the religious education of children, training up pious young men for the ministry, or in various ways promoting the faithful preaching of the gospel.

Wealth gives a man influence also, and the affluent Christian may use this influence to important purposes. And when the leisure it affords is accompanied by a suitable turn of mind, he may do more good by an edifying example, pious converse, and prudent efforts in his own sphere (from which others are often excluded) than by retiring from it, even though he should expend in charity what would be saved by that measure. His conduct may likewise be rendered vary useful among his tenants, domestics, and neighbors. And if he frequently disperses his charity with his own hands, accompanied by his pious exhortations and affectionately serious discourse, it will have a vast effect in conciliating men's minds to his religious principles.

They also, who are in more narrow circumstances, yet have a talent to improve even in this respect. Much might be saved from superfluous expenses by most Christians, to employ in those good works which are "through Christ Jesus to the praise and glory of God."

Time is a universal talent which every Christian should redeem from useless ways of killing, that he may employ it in some beneficial manner, for idleness is intolerable in a disciple of Him who "went about doing good." Every man has influence in his own circle, however contracted, and may approve it to good purposes. For did we duly consider our obligation to God our Saviour, the

great end for which are lives are continued, and the near approach of death, a desire would be excited in our hearts to live to his glory and to serve our generation. And this would influence us to improve all our advantages to this purpose. And were every professor of the gospel "thus steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," the blessed effects that would follow may in a measure be conceived, but can never be fully estimated.

*Essays on the Most Important Subjects in Religion* (condensed)

Day 25

**INTERCESSION: EVERY CHRISTIAN'S DUTY**  
**George Whitefield**

***"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions,  
and giving of thanks be made for all men."***

**I Timothy 2:1**

If we inquire why there is so little love to be found among Christians (why the very characteristic by which everyone should know that we are disciples of the holy Jesus) is almost banished out of the Christian world, we shall find it in a great measure owing to a neglect, or superficial performance, of that excellent part of prayer--*intercession*, or imploring the divine grace and mercy in behalf of others.

Prayer is a duty founded on natural religion. The very heathens never neglected it, though many Christian heathens among us do. It is so essential to Christianity that you might as reasonably expect to find a living man without breath, as a true Christian without the spirit of prayer and supplication. Thus, no sooner was St. Paul converted, but "behold he prays," says the Lord Almighty. And thus will it be with every child of God, as soon as he becomes such, prayer being truly called the natural cry of the newborn soul.

Thus earnest, thus importunate are all sincere Christians in praying for themselves. But then, not having so lively, lasting, and deep a sense of the needs of their Christian brethren, they are for the most part too remiss and defective in their prayers for them. Whereas, was the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, and did we love our neighbor in that manner in which the Son of God our Saviour loved us, and according to his command example, we could not but be as importunate for their spiritual and temporal welfare as for our own, and as earnestly desire and endeavor that others should share in the benefits of the death and passion of Jesus Christ as we ourselves.

Our intercession must be universal. *"I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men."* As God's mercy is over all his works, as Jesus Christ died to redeem a people out of all nations and languages, so we should pray that "all men may come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved."

We should, according to St. Paul's rule, pray for kings, that we may lead quiet lives, in all godliness and honesty. If we consider how heavy the burden of government is, how much the welfare of any people depends on the zeal and godly conversation of those that have the rule over them; if we set before us the many dangers and difficulties to which governors by their station are exposed and the continual temptations they lie under to luxury and self-indulgence, we shall not only pity but pray for them.

We should especially pray for those whom the Holy Ghost has made overseers over us. This is what St. Paul begs, again and again, of the churches to whom he writes: *"Brethren, pray for us."* And again, in his epistle to the Ephesians: *"Praying always, with all manner of supplication, and for me also that I may open my mouth boldly to declare the mystery of the gospel."* If the great St. Paul, that chosen vessel, that favorite of heaven, needed the most importunate prayers of his Christian converts, much more do the ordinary ministers of the gospel stand in need of the intercession of their respective flocks. Shall not they be remembered in your prayers, who daily

feed and nourish your souls? Praying for your ministers will be a manifest proof of your believing, that though Paul plants and Apollos waters, yet it is God alone who gives the increase.

Our friends claim a place in our intercessions; but then we should not content ourselves with praying in general terms for them, but suit our prayers to their particular circumstances. When the nobleman came to apply to Jesus Christ in behalf of his child, he said, "*Lord, my little daughter lies at the point of death. I pray thee come and heal her.*" In like manner, when our friends are under any afflicting circumstances, we should pray for them with a particular regard to those circumstances. Is a friend sick? We should pray that if it be God's good pleasure, it may not be unto death. But if otherwise, that God would give him grace so to take his visitation, that after his painful life is ended, he may dwell with him in life everlasting. Is a friend in doubt on an important matter? We should lay his case before God, as Moses did that of the daughters of Zelophehad, and pray that God's Holy Spirit may lead him into all truth and give all seasonable direction. Is he in need? We should pray that his faith may never fail, and that in God's due time he may be relieved.

We must also pray for our enemies. "*Bless them who curse you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you.*" Jesus enforced this command in the strongest manner by his own example: in the very agonies and pangs of death, he prayed even for his murderers, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" This, it must needs be confessed, is a difficult duty, yet not impracticable to those who have renounced the things of this present life.

I shall now proceed to offer some considerations to excite you to the practice of daily intercession. First, it will fill your hearts with love for one another. He who every day heartily intercedes at the throne of grace for all mankind cannot but in a short time be filled with love and charity to all. Envy, malice, revenge, and such-like hellish tempers can never harbor long in a gracious intercessor's breast. Abound therefore in acts of general and particular intercession; and when you hear of your neighbor's faults, instead of relating them to and exposing them before others, lay them in secret before God, and beg of him to correct and amend them. You cannot imagine what a blessed alteration this practice will make in your heart, and how much you will increase day by day in the spirit of love and meekness toward all mankind!

Consider the many instances in holy scripture of the power and efficacy of intercession. It has stopped plagues; it has opened and shut heaven; it has frequently turned away God's fury from his people. When Daniel humbled and afflicted his soul and interceded for the Lord's inheritance, how quickly was an angel dispatched to tell him his prayer was heard!

Remember that it is the never-ceasing employment of the holy and highly exalted Jesus himself, who sits at the right hand of God to hear all our prayers, and to make continual intercession for us! Imagine therefore, when you are lifting up holy hands in prayer for one another, that you see the heavens opened, and the Son of God in all his glory--as the great High-Priest of your salvation-- pleading for you the all-sufficient merit of his sacrifice before the throne of his heavenly Father! This imagination will strengthen your faith and excite a holy earnestness in your prayers.

*Sermons on Important Subjects (condensed)*

Day 26

## GOD'S ALL-SEEING EYE

R. W. Church

*"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:13)*

There are some things in religion which are among its plainest and most familiar teachings, but which yet, when we come to think what they really mean, seem almost too awful and tremendous to be endured by the mind of man. Among these is the truth that the eye of God is always upon us. The Bible everywhere takes it for granted, and appeals to it. "Thou God sees me." "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, and upon them that put their trust in His mercy."

God sees me always. It must be so; it must be true. Then how awful is the very difficulty which I feel in getting myself really to believe and feel as if it was so! Here I am, standing before His all-seeing eye, never out of its sight, never for an instant hidden. How awful that even when I am on my knees and speaking words of prayer to Him, I yet so often fail to remember that He is listening, that He knows what I am saying and whether I am thinking of Him or not.

God sees me always. Then, to think of all that He knows of me, of all that He has seen--I, who should fear to let my best friend know all that I am; I, who cannot bear to think of the secrets of my heart being broken into by man; I, perhaps, who take so much trouble to keep up appearances and to keep out of sight what I feel in myself will least bear the light--to know that all this secrecy and pains are vain, that all that I am is known to Him who takes the measure of us all! The world may not know it, but it is all "naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

God sees me always. And then to think of the things which I have done without remembering that He was looking on; to compare the number of times when I have remembered that He was seeing me with the number of times that He was utterly out of my thoughts and recollections; to think how differently I should often have spoken if I had only had it in my mind that He observed me and knew what I was saying. Is there any one of us who can steadily fix his thoughts on the simple words, "God sees me always," and who in proportion as the meaning of them opens on him can help having some such feelings as these?

The thought of God's eye upon us is generally looked upon as a thought to restrain and bridle us in, with the fear of His awful strictness and holiness of judgment. And so, of course, it is. It is a terrible thought to have hanging over us when we are inclined to do wrong and to play with sin. But is this all? Does that awful eye of God--ever fixed upon us--speak only of severity, of warning, of reproof? Is it fixed on us only to condemn us, only to make us feel our infinite distance from Him who is our Father and God; only to make us shrink and tremble before Him? Is this the reason why you are afraid to face the thought of God's continual knowledge of you, that you find in it only what disquiets and presses down your soul?

I believe it is the reason very often. And so, in our cowardice and with our slavish love of forbidden things, we miss what is surely meant not merely to restrain us but to be the greatest of our comforts. For if the thought of God seeing us and knowing us through and through to our hearts' depths is a very awful one, it is one on which we can stay and rest with hope and



encourage ourselves, as we can on nothing else.

It seems to me that it is a great comfort to be able to fall back on the thought that there is One who knows us really, knows us without mistake; who has no temptation to misunderstand or misrepresent us; no temptation to think us better, nor yet to think us worse, than we are; who judges us--justly indeed--and yet makes every allowance, with the continual desire to help us, tenderly and lovingly watching over us, and caring for us. Surely this is a thought to retire into for refuge, not only from the "provoking of all men" and "the strife of tongues," but from our own perplexities and doubts about ourselves, our own questionings and uncertainties whether, after all, we are in the right way; whether our wishes and attempts to do right are not all useless and thrown away.

For we are what we are in God's sight; not what men think us, not what we think ourselves, but what He sees and knows that we are--nothing more, nothing less. There is One to whom we can always reveal our cause, knowing that it will be perfectly understood and fairly weighed. To His absolute and perfect knowledge we can make our appeal, even if we can only make it with shame and self-reproach and bitter abasement. Let us learn, awful as it is, to welcome the thought and make it real to ourselves; to believe in it, to face it steadily as often as we can. And so shall we find it what it is meant to be--God's great encouragement and help to His creatures and His children in doing right. There is His eye. Not of a Judge and Ruler only, but of a Shepherd, a Father, a Giver of all good gifts, a Promiser of all blessed hopes, the Lover of the souls of men, even to the not sparing His only Son for them.

*Village Sermons* (condensed)

**Day 27**

**SANCTIFICATION**

**Richard W. Church**

*"This is the will of God, even your sanctification."*

**1 Thessalonians 4:3**

The work of sanctification is the work of that Blessed Spirit of Holiness, One with the Father and the Son, whom the Son promised to send down into the hearts of men. From Him only can come our sanctification, our improvement, our being gradually changed into better men. And He works in wonderful ways. He works in secret, and He works through his appointed instruments. He works in our conscience and in our prayers, in our solemn thoughts and desires and purposes after good. He works in our reading of the Bible, in our meditation on its realities, and in our sacred services of prayer and praise in the House of God. He comes with power deep and unsearchable, with comfort and encouragement, with precious blessings; with light, and heavenly warmth, and transforming power when, at God's Holy Table in the breaking of the Bread, we meet with our unseen Lord and are invisibly joined with Him, "one with Christ, and Christ with us."

He is with us in our temptations. When we waver, it is He who whispers to us still to resist. When we fall, it is His strength which keeps us from utterly giving way. When we triumph, it is He who upholds our heart. It is He who confirms and settles us in winning one more step forward on the road to holiness. Without Him we can do nothing; and those who seek in earnest after better things find His power at their side at every step. They know that without Him they could have done nothing. They know that with Him, and by His help, their labor need never fail.

That is His part in the work of our sanctification. But there is another part which we feel to be our own. When the Apostle says, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification," he means not only that you should be sanctified by the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of holiness, but that the work of sanctification should be done by you for yourselves. This work has its many parts and duties, but there is one most important one. In its root and essence and foundation, your sanctification means this: the taking care of your thoughts.

Take care of your thoughts, and your words and your deeds will almost take care of themselves. Take care that your thoughts are right, and you may depend on it [that] your words and deeds will follow of their own accord. Take care that you do not let wrong things dwell and lurk in your thoughts, and you will be safe from them in your life and dealings. Take care that you chasten and keep in order your heart within--that you restrain its secret angry swellings, that you turn it away from the forbidden and evil thing--and its gentleness and pureness will flow forth of themselves into your temper and character, and your speech and actions.

Be true, be honest, be faithful, be just in what you think with yourself in your inward communings and dealings with your own spirit (where no one is witness but God), and your words will be true of themselves, and the temptation will hardly come to you to deal unkindly and unfairly with your brother. Take care of your thoughts. Let nothing unclean or shameful rest in them. Let your thoughts be really raised above selfish and worldly and double ways. Suffer no hypocrisy in them, nothing low and base. Let it be in your thoughts that you try earnestly to understand, and accept, and carry out the will and mind of Christ. Let it be there that you seek to be in reality what you profess to be outwardly. Let it be there that you try daily

to become better, more truly holy, more truly Christ-like, and the sanctification of your actions and outward life will be no vain struggle. You shall have no divided heart, no doing good with the feeling that inwardly you are only half-minded to do it; no doing right with the secret wish that you might be allowed to do wrong. The good within shall naturally issue forth into the same good without. The vine will bring forth her natural grapes and the fig-tree her figs. "Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things," just as "an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil things." "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks," and the man does his works.

Let us remember that there is no word or law in heaven or earth that can override this great saying, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification"--your separation from all sin, your growth in all goodness. As the Apostle says, we have been forewarned indeed in every conceivable way: forewarned by the life and example of Christ, forewarned by the solemn words of His apostles, and forewarned by our own consciences which witness that it must be so. Do and say what we will, let us remember this, that "God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despises, despises not man but God, who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit."

*Village Sermons* (condensed)

Day 28

**THE ABUSE OF POWER**  
**Ralph Wardlaw**

*"Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there. I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." (Ecclesiastes 3:16,17)*

The possession of power invariably brings along with it a temptation to its perversion and abuse; a temptation so strong that many who previous to their advancement have appeared to "walk uprightly," "doing justly and loving mercy," have no sooner been raised to the perilous eminence than they have fallen before it, and to the surprise and disappointment of all have assumed the character of unrighteous and ruthless oppressors.

As the seat of power, then, is not always the seat of true honor, and as it is surrounded with temptations to such conduct as may cover its possessor with infamy and execration, let aspiring ambition be repressed. Let the man who is seeking happiness in the attainment of power pause and bethink himself, and not indulge too cheerful optimistic expectations and assurances of finding what he seeks. Let him not deride the warning, and in self-confident presumption pronounce it impossible, that *he* should ever act a part which so many, who had quite as good a ground for vaunting, have acted before him.

No man knows what is in his heart till his heart has been tried by the eliciting powers of temptation. Besides, even the upright and conscientious ruler may suffer by his official connection with others, and by that generalizing principle of association which attaches the character of the individual magistrate to the office which he holds, and which from the delinquency of a few condemns or suspects all and loads them with indiscriminate censure. We know well how unfairly this principle frequently operates, and how difficult it is for a man--even of the purest integrity and the most consummate prudence--to avoid incurring his share, however undeserved, of this official odium, and to preserve his reputation unsullied.

*Lectures on the Book of Ecclesiastes*

Day 29

A DIVINE CORDIAL

Thomas Watson

*"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God,  
to those who are the called according to His purpose."*

**Romans 8:28**

If the whole Scripture be the feast of the soul, as Ambrose said, then Romans 8:28 may be a dish at that feast, and with its sweet variety may very much refresh and animate the hearts of God's people. In the preceding verses, the apostle had been wading through the great doctrines of justification and adoption, mysteries so arduous and profound that without the help and conduct of the Spirit, he might soon have waded beyond his depth. In this verse, the apostle touches upon that pleasant string of consolation, "*We know that all things work together for good, to them that love God.*" Not a word but is weighty; therefore I shall gather up every filing of this gold, that nothing be lost.

Here are two things to be considered: (1) The certainty of the privilege--"*We know.*" (2) The excellency of the privilege--"*All things work together for good.*"

"*We know.*" It is not a matter wavering or doubtful. The apostle does not say, we hope, or we conjecture, but it is like an article in our creed, *We know* that all things work for good. Hence observe that the truths of the gospel are evident and infallible. A Christian may come not merely to a vague opinion, but to a certainty of what he holds. As axioms and aphorisms are evident to reason, so the truths of religion are evident to faith.

"*We know,*" says the apostle. Though a Christian has not a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the gospel, yet he has a certain knowledge. "*We see through a glass darkly,*" therefore we have not perfection of knowledge; but "*we behold with open face,*" therefore we have certainty. The Spirit of God imprints heavenly truths upon the heart, as with the point of a diamond. A Christian may know infallibly that there is an evil in sin, and a beauty in holiness. He may know that he is in the state of grace.

"*We know that we have passed from death to life.*" He may know that he shall go to heaven. "*We know that if our earthly tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*" The Lord does not leave His people at uncertainties in matters of salvation. The apostle says, "*We know.*" We have arrived at a holy confidence. We have both the Spirit of God and our own experience, setting seal to it.

"*All things work together for good.*" This is as Jacob's staff in the hand of faith, with which we may walk cheerfully to the mount of God. What will satisfy or make us content if this will not? All things work together for good. This expression "*work together*" refers to medicine. Several poisonous ingredients put together, being tempered by the skill of the apothecary, make a sovereign medicine, and work together for the good of the patient.

So all God's providences being divinely tempered and sanctified, do work together for the best to the saints. He who loves God and is called according to His purpose may rest assured that every thing in the world shall be for his good. This is a Christian's cordial. Why should a Christian destroy himself? Why should he kill himself with care, when all things shall sweetly concur, yea,

conspire for his good? The result of the text is this: All the various dealings of God with His children do by a special providence turn to their good. *"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant."* If every path has mercy in it, then it works for good.

We shall consider what things work for good to the godly, and here we shall show that both the best things and the worst things work for their good. We begin with the best things.

God's attributes work for good to the godly. God's power works for good. It is a glorious power, and it is engaged for the good of the elect. God's power works for good in supporting us in trouble. *"Underneath are the everlasting arms."* What upheld Daniel in the lion's den? Jonah in the whale's belly? The three Hebrews in the furnace? Only the power of God. Is it not strange to see a bruised reed grow and flourish? How is a weak Christian able, not only to endure affliction, but to rejoice in it? He is upheld by the arms of the Almighty. *"My strength is made perfect in weakness."*

The power of God works for us by supplying our needs. God creates comforts when means fail. He that brought food to the prophet Elijah by ravens will bring sustenance to His people. God can preserve the *"oil in the cruse."* The power of God subdues our corruptions. *"He will subdue our iniquities."* Is your sin strong? God is powerful, He will break the head of this leviathan. Is your heart hard? God will dissolve that stone in Christ's blood. *"The Almighty makes my heart soft."* When we say as Jehoshaphat, *"We have no might against this great army,"* the Lord goes up with us and helps us fight our battles. He strikes off the heads of those goliath lusts which are too strong for us.

The wisdom of God works for good. God's wisdom is our oracle to instruct us. We are oftentimes in the dark, and, in matters intricate and doubtful know not which way to take. Here God comes in with light. *"I will guide thee with mine eye."*

The goodness of God works for good to the godly. God's goodness is a means to make us good. *"The goodness of God leads to repentance."* The goodness of God is a spiritual sunbeam to melt the heart into tears. Oh, says the soul, has God been so good to me? Has He reprieved me so long from hell, and shall I grieve His Spirit any more? Shall I sin against goodness?

The promises are notes of God's hand. They are as cordials to a soul that is ready to faint. Are we under the guilt of sin? There is a promise, *"The Lord is merciful and gracious."* God is more willing to pardon than to punish. Are we under the defilement of sin? There is a promise working for good. *"I will heal their backslidings."* God will not only bestow mercy, but grace. Are we in great trouble? *"I will be with him in trouble."* God does not bring His people into troubles and leave them there. He will stand by them. He will hold their heads and hearts when they are fainting. Either He will make His hand lighter, or our faith stronger. Do we fear outward needs? There is a promise, *"They that seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing."* If it is good for us, we shall have it; if it is not good for us, then the withholding of it is good.

Christ's intercession works for good. Christ is in heaven, and He prays for all believers as He did for the apostles. *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for all them that shall believe in me."* When a Christian is weak and can hardly pray for himself, Jesus Christ is praying for him. He prays for three things. First, that the saints may be kept from sin. *"I pray that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."* We live in the world as in a pest house. Christ prays that His saints may not be infected with the contagious evil of the times. Second, for His people's progress in holiness.

*"Sanctify them."* Let them have constant supplies of the Spirit and be anointed with fresh oil. Third, for their glorification. *"Father, I will that those which thou hast given me, be with me where I am."* Christ is not content till the saints are in His arms. What a comfort is this! When Satan is tempting, Christ is praying!

*All Things for Good*

Day 30

**THE EVIL OF AFFLICTION  
WORKS FOR GOOD TO THE GODLY  
Thomas Watson**

***"It is good for me that I have been afflicted,  
that I may learn Your statutes."***

**Psalm 119:71**

It is one heart-quieting consideration in all the afflictions that befall us, that God has a special hand in them. Instruments can no more stir without God giving them a commission than the ax can cut of itself without a hand. Job eyed God in his affliction. Therefore, as Augustine observes, he does not say, "The Lord gave, and the devil took away," but "*The Lord has taken away.*" Whoever brings an affliction to us, it is God that sends it.

Another heart-quieting consideration is that afflictions work for good. Afflictions to the godly are medicinal. Out of the most poisonous drugs God extracts our salvation. Afflictions are as needful as ordinances. No vessel can be made of gold without fire; so it is impossible that we should be made vessels of honor unless we are melted and refined in the furnace of affliction. I shall show you several ways how affliction works for good.

Affliction is our preacher and tutor--"*Hear ye the rod,*" Micah 6:9. Luther said that he could never rightly understand some of the Psalms until he was in affliction. Affliction teaches what sin is. In the word preached, we hear what a dreadful thing sin is, that it is both defiling and damning, but we fear it no more than a painted lion. Therefore, God lets loose affliction, and then we feel sin bitter in the fruit of it. A sickbed often teaches more than a sermon. In prosperity we are for the most part strangers to ourselves. God makes us know affliction that we may better know ourselves. We see the corruption in our hearts in the time of affliction, which we would not believe was there.

Afflictions work for good as they are the means of making the heart more upright. In prosperity the heart is apt to be divided, cleaving partly to God and partly to the world. Now God takes away the world that the heart may cleave more to him in sincerity. Oh how good it is, that when sin has bent the soul awry from God, affliction should straighten it again!

Afflictions work for good as they put to silence the wicked. How ready are they to malign the godly, that they serve God only for self-interest. Therefore, God will have his people endure sufferings for religion, that he may put a padlock on the lying lips of wicked men.

Afflictions work for good as they make way for glory. Not that they merit glory, but they prepare for it. As plowing prepares the earth for a crop, so afflictions prepare and make us meet for glory. The painter lays his gold upon dark colors, so God first lays the dark colors of affliction and then lays the golden color of glory. The vessel is first seasoned before wine is poured in. The vessels of mercy are first seasoned with affliction and the wine of glory is poured in. Thus we see that afflictions are not prejudicial but beneficial to the saints. We should not so much look at the evil of affliction as the good; not so much at the dark side of the cloud as the light. The worst that God does to his children is to whip them to heaven.

*All Things for Good*



Day 31

## SIN AND SHAME

Job Orton

*"And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. Then he said: 'Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren.' And he said: 'Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant.' " (Genesis 9:20-23)*

We learn hence how odious a sin drunkenness is. Though many excuses may be urged in behalf of Noah, and we know not that he ever repeated this crime, yet what dreadful consequences followed! *"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"* (1 Cor. 10:12). Let professing Christians walk circumspectly, and carefully guard against whatever might prove the occasion of sin and folly.

The apostle not only delivered that prohibition, *"Be not drunk with wine wherein there is excess"* (Eph. 5:18), but adds, *"Abstain from all appearance of evil"* (1 Thess. 5:22). In order to avoid criminality in this as well as in other things, it is good to keep out of the way of temptation. *"Look not on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper"* (Pr. 23:30,31). This was strikingly illustrated in the case of Noah; it exposed him to shame. If men did but see what beasts they make of themselves when they are in liquor, how unbecoming a situation it often places them in, and what folly it occasions them to utter, surely they would abhor the thought of being guilty of this vice. *"Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame"* (Rev. 16:15).

See the scandal and sin of disobedience to parents and how heinous it is in the sight of God. Ham, one of Noah's sons, was of so depraved a disposition that he made sport of his good father's weakness and publicly told his brethren of it in the streets. He secretly rejoiced, it may be, to see the good old man overtaken in a fault for which Noah had severely reproved others, and perhaps Ham himself. Herein he showed himself to be one of those fools which Solomon speaks of, who make a *"mock at sin"* (Pr. 14:9). It is no uncommon thing for the wicked to make a jest of the sins of others as well as their own, and to make the sins and weaknesses of good men in particular the subjects of their ungodly mirth. But it shows a dreadful degree of hardness in those who are capable of it, and especially in children, to mock at the weakness of their pious parents. Let young people carefully guard against everything of this kind; and let good men take care that they give them no occasion.

The conduct of the other two sons of Noah, who so decently and kindly laid a covering over their father, was much to their honor, and affords an example well worthy of imitation. True charity, or love, will hide a multitude of sins and cast a veil over a thousand infirmities of good parents, neighbors, and friends. Those who are thus kind and dutiful may expect a blessing; but wicked scoffers, and especially wicked children of pious parents, shall be cursed with Canaan.

What a striking proof have we here of the foreknowledge of God and the divine origin of the Scriptures! This prophecy has been most remarkably accomplished in the history of Noah's sons and their posterity. We all know in what an awful manner the curse denounced upon Ham was executed in the total extermination of the Canaanites. And we know also that the blessing pronounced upon the other two sons of Noah was as remarkably fulfilled, particularly in the descent of the glorious Redeemer from the posterity of Shem. Let us with Noah devoutly say, "*Blessed be the God of Shem,*" for the covenant of grace established in the Redeemer and all the spiritual blessings conveyed through him.

Once more, let us who are of the race of Japheth be thankful that we have been persuaded to dwell in the tents of Shem, and that the Lord God has dwelt in our tents; that we sinners of the Gentiles, who were once strangers and foreigners, are made fellow-citizens with the saints and heirs of the promise. Let us be thankful that we have still the tokens of the divine presence among us, and especially if any of us have been persuaded to open to him the door of our hearts. Let us pray in faith for the accomplishment of the prophecies concerning the universal establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom, that all the sons of Noah may become holiness to the Lord, and the whole earth be filled with his glory.

*Short and Plain Exposition of The Old Testament, with Devotional and Practical Reflections for the Use of Families*