

You can make an **optional donation** of R5 to help with the printing costs. You can place the donation in the collection box.

PRETORIA NORTH BAPTIST CHURCH



from [monergism.com](http://monergism.com)

---

# *THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD*

*PART 3*

by A.W. Pink

## Outline

<b>1. The Guidance of God</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>2. The Blessings of God</b>	<b>Page 14</b>
<b>3. The Cursings of God</b>	<b>Page 15</b>
<b>4. The Love of God to Us</b>	<b>Page 17</b>
<b>5. The Gospel of the Grace of God</b>	<b>Page 19</b>
<b>6. The Fullness of Christ</b>	<b>Page 22</b>

The full document can be downloaded through <https://www.monergism.com> or follow the link below directly:

[https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/attributes\\_online.html#chapter1](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/attributes_online.html#chapter1)

## 1. The Guidance of God

There Is A Need to amplify the positive aspect of divine guidance. There are few subjects which bear on the practical side of the Christian life, and that believers are more exercised about, than that they may be "led of the Lord" in all their ways. Yet when some important decision has to be made, they are often puzzled to know how "the Lord's mind" is obtained. Great numbers of tracts and booklets on this subject have been written, but they are so vague that they offer little help. There certainly exists a real need today for some clear, definitive treatment of the subject.

For some years I have been convinced that one thing which contributes much to shrouding this subject in mystery is the loose, misleading terms generally employed by those who refer to it. While such expressions are used, "Is this according to God's will?", "Do I have the prompting of the Holy Spirit?", "Were you led of the Lord in that?", sincere minds will continue to be perplexed and never arrive at any certainty. These expressions are so commonly used in religious circles that probably quite a few readers will be surprised at our challenging them. We certainly do not condemn these expressions as erroneous, but rather we wish to point out that they are too intangible for most people until more definitely defined.

What alternative, then, have we to suggest? In connection with every decision we make, every plan we form, every action we execute, let the question be, "Is this in harmony with God's Word?" Is it what the Scriptures enjoin? Does it square with the rule God has given us to walk by? Is it in accord with the example which Christ left us to follow? If it is in harmony with God's Word, then it must be "according to God's will," for His will is revealed in His Word. If I do what the Scriptures enjoin, then I must be "prompted by the Holy Spirit," for He never moves any one to act contrary thereto. If my conduct squares with the rule of righteousness (the precepts and commands of the Word), then I must be "led of the Lord," for He leads only into the "paths of righteousness" (Ps. 23:1, 3). A great deal of mystical vagueness and puzzling uncertainty will be removed if the reader substitutes for, "Is this according to God's will?" the simpler and more tangible, "Is this according to God's Word?"

God, in His infinite condescension and transcendent grace, has given us His Word for this very purpose, so that we need not stumble along blindly, ignorant of what pleases or displeases Him, but that we might know His mind. That divine Word is given to us not simply for information, but to regulate our conduct, to enlighten our minds, and to mold our hearts. The Word supplies us with an unerring chart by which to steer through the dangerous sea of life. If we sincerely and diligently follow, it will deliver us from disastrous rocks and submerged reefs, and direct us safely to the heavenly harbor. That Word has all the instructions we need for every problem, every emergency we may be called upon to face. That Word has been given to us "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17). How thankful we should be that the Triune God has favored us with such a Word.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). The metaphor used here is taken from a man walking along a dangerous road on a dark night, in urgent need of a lantern to show him where to walk safely and comfortably, to avoid injury and destruction. The same figure is used again in the New Testament. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place" (2 Pet. 1:19). The dark place is this world, and it is only as we take heed to the Word, to the light God has given us, that we shall be able to perceive and avoid "the broad road which leadeth to destruction," and discern the narrow way which alone "leadeth unto Life."

It should be observed that this verse plainly intimates God has placed His Word in our hands for an intensely practical purpose, namely, to direct our walk and to regulate our deportment. At once this shows us what is the first and principal use we are to make of this divine gift. It would do a traveler little good to diligently scrutinize the mechanism of a lamp, or to admire its beautiful design. Rather he is to take it up and make a practical use of it. Many are zealous in reading "the letter of Scripture," and many are charmed with the evidences of its divine Authorship. But how few realize the primary purpose for which God gave the Scriptures, how few make a practical use of them—ordering the details of their lives by its rules and regulations. They eulogize the lamp, but they do not walk by its light.

Our first need as little children was to learn to walk. The mother's milk was only a means to an end: to nourish the infant's life, to strengthen its limbs so that they should be put to a practical use. So it is spiritually. When we have been born again and fed by the Spirit on the pure milk of the Word, our first need is to learn to walk, to walk as the children of God. This can be learned only as we ascertain our Father's will as revealed in Holy Writ. By nature we are totally ignorant of His will for us and of what promotes our highest interests. It is solemn and humbling that man is the only creature born into this world devoid of intelligence as to how to act, and who needs to be taught what is evil and what is good for him.

All the lower orders of creation are endowed with an instinct which moves them to act discreetly, to avoid what is harmful, and to follow what is good. But not so man. Animals and birds do not have to be taught which herbs and berries are poisonous; they need no curbs upon them not to overeat or over drink—you cannot even force a horse or a cow to gorge and make itself sick. Even plants turn their faces to the light and open their mouths to catch the falling rain. But fallen man has not even the instinct of the brutes. Usually he has to learn by painful experience what is harmful and injurious. And, as it has been well said, "Experience keeps an expensive school"—her fees are high. Too bad that so many only discover this when it is too late, when they have wrecked their constitutions beyond repair.

Some may answer to this, "But man is endowed with a conscience." True, but how well does it serve him until he is enlightened by the Word and convicted by the Spirit? Man's understanding has been so darkened by sin, and folly is so bound up in his heart from childhood (Prov. 22:15), that until he is instructed he does not know what God requires of him, nor what is for his highest good. That is why God gave us His Word: to make known what He justly demands of us; to inform us of those things which destroy the soul; to reveal the baits which Satan uses to capture and slay so many; to point out the highway of holiness which alone leads to heaven (Heb. 12:14); and to acquaint us with the rules which must be observed if we are to walk that highway.

Our first duty, and our first aim, must be to take up the Scriptures to ascertain what is God's revealed will for us, what are the paths He forbids us to walk, what are the ways pleasing in His sight. Many things are prohibited in the Word which neither our reason nor our conscience would discover. For example, we learn, "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15); "the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4); "he that hasteth with his feet sinneth" (Prov. 19:2). Many things are also commanded which can only be known if we acquaint ourselves with its contents. For example, "Lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5); "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help" (Ps. 146:3); "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

The above are but samples of hundreds of others. It is obvious that God's Word cannot be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path unless we are familiar with its contents, particularly until we are informed on the practical rules God has given us to walk by. Hence it should be obvious that the first need of the Christian is not to delve into the intricacies and mysteries of Scripture, study the prophecies, nor entertain himself with the wonderful types therein. Rather he needs to concentrate on what will instruct him as to the kind of conduct which will be pleasing to the Lord. The Scriptures are given us, primarily, not for our intellectual gratification, nor for emotional admiration, but for life's regulation. Nor are the precepts and commands, the warnings and encouragements contained therein simply for our information. They are to be reduced to practice, they require unqualified obedience.

"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:8). God will be no man's debtor. In keeping His commands there is "great reward" (Ps. 19:11). Part of that reward is deliverance from being deceived by the false appearances of things, from forming erroneous estimates, from pursuing a foolish policy. Part of that reward is acquiring wisdom so that we choose what is good, act prudently, and follow those paths which lead to righteousness, peace, and joy. He who treasures in his heart the divine precepts and diligently seeks to walk by their rule will escape those evils which destroy his fellows.

"If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world" (John 11:9). To walk in the day means to be in communion with One who is Light, to conduct ourselves according to His revealed will. Just so far as the Christian walks in the path of duty, as defined for him in the Word, will he walk surely and comfortably. The light of that Word makes the way plain before him, and he is preserved from falling over the obstacles with which Satan seeks to trip him. "But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him" (verse 10). Here is the solemn contrast: he who walks according to the dictates of his lusts and follows the counsel and example of the ungodly, falls into the snares of the devil, and perishes. There is no light in such an one, for he is not regulated by the Sun of righteousness.

"I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). It is one thing to have "life," it is another to enjoy the "light of life" that is only obtained by following Christ. Notice the tense of the verb: it is "he that followeth me," which signifies a steady, continuous course of action. The promise to such a one is, "he shall not walk in darkness." But what does it mean to follow Christ? First and foremost, to be emptied of self-will, for "even Christ pleased not himself" (Rom. 15:3). It is absolutely essential that self-will and self-pleasing be mortified if we are to be delivered from walking in darkness.

The unchanging order is made known by Christ, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Christ cannot be followed until self is denied and the cross accepted as the distinguishing mark of discipleship. What does it mean to deny self? It means to repudiate our own goodness, to renounce our own wisdom, to have no confidence in our own strength, to completely set aside our own will and wishes, that we should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto [Him] who died for us (2 Cor. 5:15). What does it mean to "take up our cross"? It signifies a readiness to endure the world's hatred and scorn, to voluntarily surrender our lives to God, to use all our faculties for His glory. The cross stands for unreserved and loving obedience to the Lord, for of Him it is written, that "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." It is only as self with all its lustings and interests is denied, and as the heart is dominated by the spirit of Calvary, that we are prepared to follow Christ.

And what is signified by "follow" Christ? It means to take His yoke upon us (Matthew 11:29), and live in complete subjection to Him; to yield fully to His Lordship, to obey His commands, and thus truly serve Him. It is seeking to do only those things which are pleasing in His sight; to emulate the example which He left us, and He was in all things subject to the Scriptures. As we follow Him, we "shall not walk in darkness." We will be in happy fellowship with Him who is the true light. For our encouragement for they were men of like passions—it is recorded of Caleb and Joshua, "they have wholly followed the LORD" (Num. 32:12). Having put their hand to the plow, they did not look back. Consequently, instead of perishing in the wilderness with their disobedient fellows, they entered the promised land.

Thus the great business, the task of the Christian, is to regulate his life by and conform his conduct to the precepts of the written Word and the example left us by the Incarnate Word. As he does so, and in proportion as he does so, he is emancipated from the darkness of his natural mind, freed from the follies of his corrupt heart, delivered from the mad course of this world, and he escapes the snares of the devil. "Through knowledge shall the just be delivered" (Prov. 11:9). Yes, great is the reward of keeping God's commandments. "Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee" (Prov. 2:9-11).

It is well for those who are sensitive to both their own weakness and fallibility, and the difficulties with which they are surrounded in life, that the Lord has promised to guide His people with His eye, to cause them to hear, "This is the way, walk ye in it," when they are in danger of turning aside. For this purpose He has given to us the written Word as a lamp to our feet, and encourages us to pray for the teaching of His Holy Spirit so that we may rightly understand and apply it. However, too often many widely deviate from the path of duty and commit gross, perplexing mistakes, while they profess a sincere desire to know the will of God, and think they have His warrant and authority. This must certainly be due to misapplication of the rule by which they judge, since the rule itself is infallible. The Scriptures cannot deceive us, if rightly understood; but they may, if

perverted, confirm us in a mistake. The Holy Spirit cannot mislead those under His influence; but we may suppose that we are so, when we are not.

Many have been deceived as to what they ought to do, or into forming a judgment beforehand of events in which they are closely concerned, by expecting direction in ways which the Lord has not warranted. Here are some of the principal ones:

Some, when two or more things were in view, and they could not immediately determine which to prefer, committed their case to the Lord in prayer. Then they have proceeded to cast lots, taking it for granted, after such a solemn appeal, that the turning up of the lot might be safely rested on as an answer from God. It is true, the Scripture (and right reason) assures us that the Lord disposes the lot. Several cases are recorded in the Old Testament where lots were used by divine appointment. But I think neither these, nor the choosing of Matthias to the apostleship by lot, are proper precedents for our conduct. In the division of the land of Canaan, in the affair of Achan, and in the nomination of Saul to the kingdom, recourse to lots was by God's express command. The instance of Matthias likewise was singular, since it can never happen again (namely, the choice of an apostle).

All these were before the canon of Scripture was completed, and before the full descent and communication of the Holy Spirit, who was promised to dwell with the Church to the end of time. Under the New Testament dispensation, we are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, to make our request known to the Lord, and to cast our cares upon Him. But we have neither precept nor promise respecting the use of lots. To have recourse to them without His appointment seems to be tempting Him rather than honoring Him, and it savors more of presumption than dependence. Effects of this expedient have often been unhappy and hurtful, a sufficient proof of how little it is to be trusted as a guide of our conduct.

Others, when in doubt, have opened the Bible and expected to find something to direct them to the first verse they should cast their eye upon. It is no small discredit to this practice that the heathens used some of their favorite books in the same way. They based their persuasions of what they ought to do, or what should befall them, according to the passage they happened upon. Among the Romans, the writings of Virgil were frequently consulted on these occasions, which gave rise to the well-known expression of the *Sortes Virgilinae*. Indeed, Virgil is as well adapted to satisfy inquiries in this way as the Bible itself. For if people will be governed by the occurrence of a single text of Scripture without regarding the context, or comparing it with the general tenor of the Word and with their own circumstances, they may commit the greatest extravagances. They may expect the greatest impossibilities, and contradict the plainest dictates of common sense, and all the while they think they have the Word of God on their side. Can opening to 2 Samuel 7:3, when Nathan said unto David, "Do all that is in thine heart, for the LORD is with thee," be sufficient to determine the lawfulness or expediency of actions? Or can a glance of the eye upon our Lord's words to the woman of Canaan, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (Matthew 15:28), amount to proof that the present earnest desire of the mind (whatever it may be) shall be surely accomplished? Yet it is certain that big matters with important consequences have been engaged in, and the most sanguine expectations formed, upon no better warrant than dipping (as it is called) upon a text of Scripture.

A sudden strong impression of a text that seems to have some resemblance to the concern on the mind has been accepted by many as an infallible token that they were right, and that things would go just as they would have them. Or, on the other hand, if the passage bore a threatening aspect, it has filled them with fears which they have found afterwards were groundless. These impressions have been more generally regarded and trusted to, but have frequently proved no less delusive. It is true that such impressions of a precept or a promise that humble, animate, or comfort the soul, by giving it a lively sense of the truth contained in the words, are both profitable and pleasant. Many of the Lord's people have been instructed and supported (especially in a time of trouble) by some seasonable word of grace applied and sealed by His Spirit to their hearts. But if impressions or impulses are received as a voice from heaven, directing to particular actions that could not be proved to be duties without them, a person may be inwardly misled into great evils and gross delusions. Many have been so. There is no doubt that the enemy of our souls, if permitted, can furnish us with Scriptures in abundance for these purposes.

Some persons judge of the nature and event of their designs by the freedom they find in prayer. They say that they commit their ways to God, seek His direction, and are favored with much enlargement of spirit. Therefore they cannot doubt but what they have in view is acceptable in the Lord's sight. I would not absolutely reject every plea of this kind, yet without other corroborating evidence I could not admit it as proof. It is not always easy to determine when we have spiritual freedom in prayer. Self is deceitful. When our hearts are much fixed upon a thing, this may put words and earnestness into our mouths. Too often we first determine secretly for ourselves, and then ask counsel of God. In such a disposition we are ready to grasp at everything that may seem to favor our darling scheme. And the Lord, for the detecting and chastisement of our hypocrisy (for hypocrisy it is, though perhaps hardly perceptible to ourselves), may answer us according to our idols (see Ezekiel 14:3-4). Besides, the grace of prayer may be in exercise when the subject matter of the prayer may be founded upon a mistake, from the intervention of circumstances with which we are unacquainted. Thus, I may have a friend in a distant country. I hope he is alive, I pray for him, and it is my duty to do so. The Lord, by His Spirit, assists His people in their present duty. If I can pray with much liberty for my distant friend, it may be a proof that the Spirit is pleased to assist my infirmities, but it is no proof my friend is alive at the time I pray for him. If the next time I pray for him I should find my spirit straitened, I am not to conclude that my friend is dead, and therefore the Lord will not assist me in praying for him any longer.

Once more, a remarkable dream has often been thought as decisive as any of these methods of knowing the will of God. True, many wholesome and seasonable admonitions have been received in dreams. But to pay great attention to dreams, or especially to be guided by them, to form our sentiments, conduct our expectations upon them, is superstitious and dangerous. The promises are not made to those who dream, but to those who watch.

The Lord may give to some upon occasion a hint or encouragement out of the common way. But to seek His direction in such things as just mentioned is unscriptural and ensnaring. Some presumed they were doing God's service while acting in contradiction to His express commands. Others were infatuated to believe a lie, declaring themselves assured beyond the shadow of a doubt of things which never came to pass. When they were disappointed, Satan improved the occasion to make them doubt the plainest and most important truths, and to count their whole former experience as a delusion. These things have caused weak believers to stumble, offenses against the Gospel have multiplied, and evil spoken of the way of truth.

How, then, may the Lord's guidance be expected.? After all these negative premises, the question may be answered in a few words. In general, He directs His people by affording them, in answer to prayer, the light of His Holy Spirit, which enables them to understand and love the Scriptures. The Word of God is not to be used as a lottery, nor is it designed to instruct us by shreds and scraps, which detached from their proper places have no determined import. But it is to furnish us with just principles, right apprehensions, to regulate our judgments and affections thereby to influence and regulate our conduct. Those who study the Scriptures in humble dependence upon divine teaching are convinced of their own weakness. They are taught to make a true estimate of everything around them and are gradually formed into a spirit of submission to the will of God. They discover the nature and duties of their situations and relations in life, and the snares and temptations to which they are exposed. The Word of God dwelling in them is a preservative from error, a light to their feet, and a spring of strength and consolation. By treasuring up the doctrines, precepts, promises, examples, and exhortations of Scripture in their minds—and daily comparing them with the rule by which they walk—they grow into an habitual frame of spiritual wisdom. They acquire a gracious taste which enables them to judge right and wrong with a degree of certainty, as a musical ear judges sounds. They are seldom mistaken, because they are influenced by the love of Christ which rules in their hearts, and a regard for the glory of God.

In particular cases, the Lord opens and shuts for them, breaks down walls of difficulty which obstruct their path, or hedges up their way with thorns when they are in danger of going wrong. They know their concerns are in His hands; they are willing to follow where and when He leads but are afraid of running before Him. They are not impatient. Because they believe, they will not be hasty, but wait daily upon Him in prayer, especially when they find their hearts engaged in any pursuit. They are jealous of being deceived by appearances, and dare not move farther or faster than they can see His light shining upon their paths. I express at least their desire, if not their attainment. Though there are seasons when faith languishes, and self

prevails too much, this is their general disposition. And the Lord does not disappoint their expectations. He leads them on a right way, preserves them from a thousand snares, and satisfies them that He is and will be their Guide even unto death.

The positive side of the subject probably needs some amplification. The general rule may be stated thus: if we are daily concerned in seeking to please God in all the details, great and small, of our lives. He will not leave us in ignorance of His will concerning us. But if we are accustomed to gratify self and only turn up to God for help in times of difficulty and emergency, then we must not be surprised if He mocks us and allows us to reap the fruits of our folly. Our business is to walk in obedient subjection to Christ, and His sure promise is, "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness" (John 8:12). Make sure you sincerely endeavor to follow the example Christ left us, and He will not leave you in uncertainty as to which step you should take when you come to the place of decision.

"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). From this verse it is clear that it is both the right and the duty of the Christian to know the Lord's will for him. God can neither be pleased nor glorified by His children walking in ignorance or proceeding blindly. Did not Christ say to His beloved disciples, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what His lord doeth: but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15). If we are in the dark as to how we ought to proceed in anything, it is clear that we are living far below our privileges. No doubt the majority of our readers will give hearty assent to these statements, but the question which concerns most of them is, How are we to ascertain the Lord's will concerning the varied details of our lives?

First, notice this exhortation, that we should be understanding "what the will of the Lord is," is preceded by "Wherefore be ye not unwise." That word unwise does not signify bare ignorance or lack of knowledge, otherwise the two halves of the verse would merely express the same thought in its negative and positive forms. No, the word "unwise" there means "lacking in common sense," (or "be not ye foolish" (RV). Nor does the word "foolish" signify no more than it now does in common speech. In Scripture the fool is not simply one who is mentally deficient, but is the man who leaves God out of his life, who acts independently of Him. This must be borne in mind as we arrive at the meaning of the second half of Ephesians 5:17.

Observe that Ephesians 5:17 opens with the word "Wherefore," which points back to what immediately precedes: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (vv. 15-16). Unless those exhortations are prayerfully and diligently heeded, it is impossible that we "understand what the will of the Lord is." Unless our walk be right there can be no spiritual discernment of God's will for us. This brings us back to a central thought. Our daily walk is to be ordered by God's Word. In proportion as it is so we will be kept in His will and preserved from folly and sin.

"A good understanding have all they that do His commandments" (Ps. 111:10). A good understanding may be defined as spiritual instinct. We all know what is meant by the instinct with which the Creator has endowed animals and birds. It is an inward faculty which prompts them to avoid danger and moves them to seek what is for their well-being. Man was endowed originally with a similar instinct, though of a far superior order to that of lower creatures. But at the fall, he, to a large extent, lost it. As one generation of depraved beings followed another, their instinct has become more and more weakened, until now we see many conducting themselves with far less intelligence than the beasts of the field. They rush madly to destruction, which the instinct of the brutes would avoid. They act foolishly, yes, madly, contrary even to common sense, in conducting their affairs and concerns without discretion.

At regeneration, God gives His elect "the spirit . . . of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7), but that spirit has to be cultivated. It needs training and direction. The necessary instruction is found in the Word. From that Word we learn what things will prove beneficial to us, and what will be injurious; what things to seek after, and what to avoid. As the precepts of Scripture are reduced to practice by us, and as its prohibitions and warnings are heeded, we are able to judge things in their true light. We are delivered from being deceived by false appearances, we are kept from making foolish mistakes. The closer we walk by the Word, the more fully this



will prove to be the case with us: a good judgment or spiritual instinct will form in us, so that we conduct our affairs discreetly and adorn the doctrine we profess.

So highly does the saint prize this spiritual instinct or sound mind, that he prays "Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments" (Ps. 119:66). He realizes it can only be increased as he is divinely taught by the Spirit applying the Word to his heart, opening to him its meaning, bringing it to his remembrance when needed, and enabling him to make a proper use of it. But note that in this prayer the petition is backed up with a plea, "for I have believed in Thy commandments." "Believed" is not merely an intellectual assent, but approved with the affections. Only when that is the case is such a petition sincere. There is an inseparable connection between these two things. Where God's commandments are loved by us, we can count upon Him to teach us good judgment.

As we said, the "fool" is not the mentally deficient, but the one who leaves God out of his thoughts and plans, who cares not whether his conduct pleases or displeases Him. The fool is a godless person. Contrariwise, the "wise" (in Scripture) are not the highly intellectual or the brilliantly educated, but those who honestly seek to put God first in their lives. God "honors" those who honor Him (1 Sam. 2:30). He gives them "good judgment." True, it is not acquired all in a day, but "here a little and there a little." Yet the more completely we surrender to God, the more the principles of His Word regulate our conduct, the swifter will be our growth in spiritual wisdom. In saying that this good judgment is not acquired all at once, we do not mean that a whole lifetime has to be lived before it becomes ours, though this is often the case with many. Some who have been converted but a few years are often more spiritual, godly, and possess more spiritual wisdom than those who were converted years before.

By treasuring up in his mind the doctrines, precepts, promises, exhortations, and warnings of Scripture, and by diligently comparing himself with the rule by which he is to walk, the Christian grows into a habitual frame of spiritual wisdom. He acquires a gracious taste which enables him to judge of right and wrong with a degree of readiness and certainty, as a musical ear judges sounds, so that he is rarely mistaken. He who has the Word ruling in his heart is influenced by it in all his actions. Because the glory of God is the great aim before him, he is not permitted to go far wrong. Moreover, God has promised to show Himself strong on behalf of the one whose heart is perfect toward Him. He does this by regulating His providences and causing all things to work together for his good.

"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matthew 6:22). The language is figurative, yet its meaning is not difficult to ascertain. What the eye is to the body, the heart is to the soul, for out of the heart are "the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). The actions of the body are directed by the light received from the eye. If the eye is single, that is, sound and clear, perceiving objects as they really are, then the whole body has light to direct its members, and the man moves with safety and comfort. In like manner, if the heart is undivided, set on pleasing God in all things, then the soul has clear vision, discerning the true nature of things, forming a sound judgment of their worth, choosing wisely, and directing itself prudently. When the heart is right with God, the soul is endowed with spiritual wisdom so that there is full light for our path.

"But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness"! (Matthew 6:23). Here is the solemn contrast. If the vision of our bodily eye is defective, a cataract dimming it, then nothing is seen clearly. All is confusion, the man stumbles as if in the dark, as if continually liable to lose his way and run into danger. In like manner, where the heart be not right with God, where sin and self dominate, the whole soul is under the reign of darkness. In consequence, the judgment is blinded so that it cannot rightly discern between good and evil, cannot see through the gild of Satan's baits, and thus is fatally deceived by them. The very light which is in fallen man, namely his reason, is controlled by his lusts, so, great is his darkness.

The verses we have just considered were spoken by Christ immediately after what He had been saying about the right laying up of treasures (Matthew 6:19-21). It was as though He both anticipated and answered a question from His disciples. If it is so important for us not to lay up treasures in earth, but rather treasures in heaven, why is it that the men commonly regarded as the shrewdest, and considered to be the most

successful, seek after earthly treasures, rather than heavenly? To this Christ replied: marvel not at this—they cannot see what they are doing: they are like blind men gathering pebbles supposing that they are valuable diamonds.

Christ casts much light on what we now see on every side. They who have set their hearts on things of time and sense, are but spending their energies for that which will stand them in no stead when they come to their deathbeds. They labor for that which satisfieth not (Isa. 55:2). The reason they conduct themselves so insanely—pursuing so eagerly the pleasures of this world, which will bear nothing but bitter regrets in the world to come—is because their hearts are evil. God has no real place in their thoughts, and so He gives them up to the spirit of madness. There must be the single eye—the heart set upon pleasing God—if the soul is to be filled with heavenly wisdom, which loves, seeks, and lays up heavenly things. That wisdom is something which no university can impart. It is "from above" (Jam. 3:17).

It should be noted that our Lord's teaching upon the "single eye," with the whole body "full of light," and the "evil eye" with the whole body "full of darkness," is immediately followed with, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). This at once establishes the meaning of the preceding verses. Christ had been speaking (in a figure) of setting the Lord supremely before the heart, which necessarily involves casting out worldly things and fleshly considerations. Men think to compound with God and their lusts, God and mammon, God and worldly pleasures. No, says Christ. God will have all or nothing. He that serveth Him must serve Him singly and supremely. Are you willing to pay the price to have divine light on your path?

We have not attempted to enter into specific details and state how a person is to act when some difficult or sudden emergency confronts him. Rather we have sought to treat of basic principles and thoroughly establish them. Though it might satisfy curiosity, it would serve no good purpose for a teacher to explain an intricate problem in higher mathematics to a student who had not already mastered the elementary rules of arithmetic. So it would be out of place to explain how particular cases or circumstances are to be handled before we have presented those rules which must guide our general walk.

Thus far we have dealt with two main things: the absolute necessity of being controlled by the Word of God without, and the having a heart within which is single to God's glory and set upon pleasing Him—if we are to have the light of heaven on our earthly path. A third consideration must now engage our attention: the help of the Holy Spirit. But at this point we most need to be on our guard, lest we lapse into a vague mysticism on the one hand, or become guilty of wild fanaticism on the other. Many have plunged into the most foolish and evil courses under the plea they were "prompted by the Spirit." No doubt they were prompted by some spirit, but most certainly not by the Holy Spirit. HE never prompts anything contrary to the Word. Our only safety is to impartially bring our inward impulses to the test of Holy Writ.

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). This divine Guide is perfectly acquainted with the path God has ordained for each celestial traveler. He is fully conversant with all its windings and narrowness, its intricacies and dangers. To be led by the Spirit is to be under His government. He perceives our temptations and weakness, knows our aspirations, hears our groans, and marks our strugglings after holiness. He knows when to supply a check, administer a rebuke, apply a promise, sympathize with a sorrow, strengthen a wavering purpose, confirm a fluctuating hope. The sure promise is, "He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). He does so by regulating our thoughts, affections and conduct; by opening our understandings to perceive the meaning of Scripture, applying it in power to the heart, enabling us to appropriate and reduce it to practice. Each time we open the sacred volume, let us humbly and earnestly seek the aid of Him who inspired it.

Note that Romans 8:14 opens with "for." The apostle introduces a confirmation of what he had affirmed in the previous verses. They who "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (verse 4), they who mind "the things of the Spirit" (verse 5); they who "through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body" (verse 13), are the ones who are "led by the Spirit." As the Spirit of holiness, His aim is to deepen the imprint of the restored image of God in the soul, to increase our happiness by making us more holy. Thus He leads to nothing but what is

sanctifying. The Spirit guides by subduing the power of indwelling sin, by weaning us from the world, by maintaining a tender conscience in us, by drawing out the heart to Christ, by causing us to live for eternity.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5-6). Note the order: the promise at the close of the passage is conditional upon our meeting three requirements. First, we are to have full confidence in the Lord. The Hebrew verb for "trust" here literally means "to lean upon." It conveys the idea of one who is conscious of feebleness turning unto and resting upon a stronger one for support. To "trust in the Lord" signifies to count upon Him in every emergency, to look to Him for the supply of every need, to say with the psalmist, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Ps. 23:1). It means that we cast all our cares upon Him, draw from Him strength hour by hour and thus prove the sufficiency of His grace. It means for the Christian to continue as he began. When we first cast ourselves upon Him as lost sinners, we abandoned all our own doings and relied upon His abounding mercy.

But what is meant by "trust in the Lord with all thine heart?" First, the giving to God our undivided confidence, not looking to any other for help and relief. Second, turning to Him with childlike simplicity. When a little one trusts, there is no reasoning, but a simple taking of the parent's words at face value, fully assured that he will make good what he said; he does not dwell on the difficulties in the way, but expects a fulfillment of what is promised. So it should be with us and our heavenly Father's words. Third, it means with our affections going out to Him, "love believeth all things, hopeth all things," (1 Cor. 13:7). Thus, to trust in the Lord "with all our heart" is love's reliance in believing dependence and expectation.

The second requirement is, "and lean not unto thine own understanding," which means we are not to trust in our own wisdom or rely upon the dictates of human reason. The highest act of human reason is to disown its sufficiency and bow before the wisdom of God. To lean unto our own understanding is to rest upon a broken reed, for it has been deranged by sin. Yet many find it harder to repudiate their own wisdom than they do to abandon their own righteousness. Many of God's ways are "past finding out." To seek to solve the mysteries of Providence is the finite attempting to comprehend the Infinite. Philosophizing about our lot, or reasoning about our circumstances, is fatal to rest of soul and peace of heart.

Third, "in all thy ways acknowledge Him." This means, first, we must ask God's permission for all that we do, and not act without His leave. Only then do we conduct ourselves as dutiful children and respectful servants. It means, second, that we seek God's guidance in every undertaking, acknowledging our ignorance and owning our complete dependence upon Him. "In every thing by prayer and supplication" (Phil. 4:6). Only so is God's lordship over us owned in a practical way. It means, third, seeking God's glory in all our ways, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). If we only did so, how very different many of our ways would be! If more frequently we paused and inquired, Will this be for God's glory? we would be withheld from much sinning and folly, with all its painful consequences. It means, fourth, to seek God's blessing upon everything. Here is another simple and sufficient rule: anything on which I cannot ask God's blessing is wrong.

"And He shall direct thy paths." Meet the three conditions just mentioned and this is the sure consequence. The need to be directed by God is real and pressing. Left to ourselves we are no better off than a rudderless ship or an auto without a steering wheel. It is not without reason that the Lord's people are so often termed "sheep," for no other creature is so apt to stray or has such a propensity to wander. The Hebrew word for "direct" means "to make straight." We live in a world where everything is crooked. Sin has thrown everything out of joint, and in consequence confusion abounds all around us. A deceitful heart, a wicked world, and a subtle devil ever seek to lead us astray and compass our destruction. How necessary it is, then, for God to "direct my paths."

What is meant by "He shall direct thy paths?" It means, He will make clear to me the course of duty. God's "will" always lies in the path of duty, and never runs counter to it. Much needless uncertainty would be spared if only this principle were recognized. When you feel a strong desire or prompting to shirk a plain duty, you may be assured it is a temptation from Satan, and not the leading of the Holy Spirit. For example, it is contrary to God's revealed will for a woman to be constantly attending meetings to the neglect of her children and home. It is shirking his responsibility for a husband to get off alone in the evenings, even in religious exercises,

and leave his tired wife to wash the dishes and put the children to bed. It is a sin for a Christian employee to read the Scriptures or "speak to people about their souls" during business hours.

The difficulty arises when it appears we have to choose between two or more duties, or when some important change has to be made in our circumstances. There are many people who think they want to be guided by God when some crisis arrives or some important decision has to be made. But few of them are prepared to meet the requirements intimated in the Scriptures. The fact is that God was rarely in their thoughts before the emergency arose. Pleasing Him did not exercise them while things were going smoothly. But when difficulty confronts them, when they are at their wits end on how to act, they suddenly become very pious, turn to the Lord, earnestly ask Him to direct them and make His way plain.

But God cannot be imposed upon in any such manner. Usually such people make a rash decision and bring themselves into still greater difficulties. Then they attempt to console themselves with, "Well, I sought God's guidance." God is not to be mocked like that. If we ignore His claims on us when the sailing is pleasant, we cannot count upon Him to deliver us when the storm comes. The One we have to do with is holy, and He will not set a premium upon godlessness (called by many "carelessness"), even though we howl like beasts when in anguish (Hos. 7:14). On the other hand, if we diligently seek grace to walk with God day by day, regulating our ways by His commandments, then we may rightfully count upon His aid in every emergency that arises.

But how is the conscientious Christian to act when some emergency confronts him? Suppose he stands at the dividing of the ways. Two paths, two alternatives, are before him, and he does not know which to choose. What must he do? First, let him heed that most necessary word, which as a rule of general application is ever binding upon us, "he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28:16). To act from a sudden impulse never becomes a child of God, and to rush ahead of the Lord is sure to involve us in painful consequences. "The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation [deliverance] of the LORD" (Lam. 3:25-26). To act in haste generally means that afterward we repent at leisure. How much each of us needs to beg the Lord to daily lay His quietening hand upon our feverish flesh!

Second, ask the Lord for Him to empty your heart of every wish of your own. It is impossible for us to sincerely pray, "Thy will be done" until our own will has, by the power of the Holy Spirit, been brought into complete subjection to God. Just so long as there is a secret (but real) preference in my heart, my judgment will be biased. While my heart is really set upon the attainment of a certain object, then I only mock God when I ask Him to make His way plain; and I am sure to misinterpret all His providences, twisting them to fit my own desire. If an obstacle is in my path, I then regard it as a "testing of faith"; if a barrier is removed, I at once jump to the conclusion that God is undertaking for me, when instead He may be testing, on the eve of giving me up to my own "heart's lust" (Ps. 81:12).

This point is of supreme importance for those who desire their steps to be truly ordered of the Lord. We cannot discern His best for us while the heart has its own preference. Thus it is imperative to ask God to empty our hearts of all personal preferences, to remove any secret, set desire of our own. But often it is not easy to take this attitude before God, the more so if we are not in the habit of seeking grace to mortify the flesh. By nature each of us wants his own way, and chafes against every curb placed upon us. Just as a photographic plate must be blank if it is to receive a picture upon it, so our hearts must be free from personal bias if God is to work in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

If you find that as you continue to wait upon God, the inward struggle between the flesh and the spirit continues, and you have not reached the point where you can honestly say, "Have Thine own way, Lord," then a season of fasting is in order. Ezra 8:21 reads, "Then I proclaimed a fast there . . . that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones." This is written for our instruction, and even a glance at it shows it is pertinent. Nor is fasting a religious exercise peculiar to Old Testament times. Acts 13:3 records that before Barnabas and Saul were sent forth on their missionary journey by the church at Antioch, "When they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." There is nothing meritorious in fasting, but it expresses humility of soul and earnestness of heart.

The next thing is to humbly and sincerely acknowledge to God our ignorance, and request Him not to leave us to ourselves. Tell Him frankly you are perplexed and do not know what to do. But plead before Him His own promise, and ask Him for Christ's sake to make it good to you. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and up-braideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:5-6). Ask Him to grant the wisdom you need so much, that you may judge rightly, that you may discern clearly what will promote your spiritual welfare, and therefore be most for His glory.

"Commit thy way unto the LORD, trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:5). In the interval if you go to fellow-Christians for advice, most probably no two will agree, and their discordant counsel will only confuse. Instead of looking to man for help, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2). Be on the lookout for God's answer. Mark attentively each movement of His providence, for as a straw in the air indicates which way the wind is blowing so the hand of God may often be discerned by a spiritual eye in what are trifling incidents to others. "And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD go out before thee" (2 Sam. 5:24).

Finally, remember that we need not only light from the Lord to discover our duty in particular cases, but when that has been obtained, we need His presence to accompany us, so that we may be enabled to rightly follow the path He bids us go. Moses realized this when he said to the Lord, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Ex. 33:15). If we do not have the presence of God with us in an undertaking—His approval upon it, His assistance in it, His blessing upon it—then we find it a snare if not a curse to us.

As a general rule it is better for us to trouble our minds very little about guidance. That is God's work. Our business is to walk in obedience to Him day by day. As we do so, there works within us a prudence which will preserve us from all serious mistakes. "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts" (Ps. 119:100). The man who keeps God's precepts is endowed with a wisdom which far surpasses that possessed by the sages or the learned philosophers. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness" (Ps. 112:4). The upright man may experience his days of darkness, but when the hour of emergency arrives light will be given him by God. Serve God with all your might today, and you may calmly and safely leave the future with Him. A duteous conformity to what is right will be followed by luminous discernment of what would be wrong.

Seek earnestly to get the fear of God fixed in your heart so that you tremble at His Word (Isa. 66:2) and are really afraid to displease Him. "What man is he which feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose" (Ps. 25:12). "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28). "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD" (Hos. 6:3). The more we grow in grace the fuller our knowledge will be of God's revealed will. The more we cultivate the practice of seeking to please God in all things, the more light we will have for our path. "The pure in heart shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). If our motive is right, our vision will be clear.

"The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them" (Prov. 11:3). The upright man will not willingly and knowingly go aside into crooked paths. The honest heart is not bewildered by domineering lusts nor blinded by corrupt motives. Having a tender conscience he possesses keen spiritual discernment; but the crooked policy of the wicked involves them in increasing trouble and ends in their eternal ruin. "The righteousness of the perfect [sincere] shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness" (Prov. 11:5). An eye single to God's glory delivers from those snares in which the ungodly are taken. "Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD understand all things" (Prov. 28:5). Unbridled passions becloud the understanding and pervert the judgment until men call good "evil" and evil "good" (Isa. 5:20); but he who seeks to be subject to the Lord shall be given discretion.

"The Lord shall direct thy paths." First, by His Word: not in some magical way so as to encourage laziness, nor like consulting a cookbook full of recipes for all occasions, but by warning us of the byways of sin and making known the paths of righteousness and blessing. Second, by his Spirit: giving us strength to obey the precepts of God, causing us to wait patiently on the Lord for directions, enabling us to apply the rules of Holy Writ to the

varied duties of our lives, bringing to our remembrance a word in due season. Third, by His providences: causing friends to fail us so that we are delivered from leaning upon the arm of flesh, thwarting our carnal plans so that we are preserved from shipwreck, shutting doors which it would not be good for us to enter, and opening doors before us which none can shut.

## 2. The Blessings of God

"The Blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (Prov. 10:22). Temporal blessing, as well as spiritual, comes from Him. "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich" (1 Sam. 2:7). God is the sovereign disposer of material wealth. If it is received by birth or inheritance, it is by His providence, If it comes by gift, He moved the donors to bestow. If it accumulates as the result of hard work, skill, or thrift, He bestowed the talent, directed its use, and granted the success. This is abundantly clear in the Scriptures. "The LORD hath blessed my master greatly . . . he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold" (Gen. 24:35). "Isaac sowed in that land, and received the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him" (Gen. 26:12). So it is with us. Then say not in your heart, "The might of my hand or brains has gotten me this temporal prosperity." "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deut. 8:18). When riches are acquired by God's blessing by honest industry, there is no accusing conscience to sour the same. If sorrow attend the use or enjoyment of them, it is due entirely to our own folly.

"Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts" (Ps. 65:4). There is no doubt that the primary reference there (though not the exclusive one) is to "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), for as God-man He is what He is by the grace of election, when His humanity was chosen and foreordained to union with one of the Persons in the Godhead. None other than Jehovah proclaimed Him, "mine elect, in whom my soul delighted" (Isa. 42:1). As such He is, "The man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 13:7), the "heir of all things." Christ was not chosen for us, but for God; and we were chosen for Christ, to be His bride. "Christ is My first elect He said, then chose our souls in Christ the Head." The essence of all blessings is to be in Christ, and those who partake of it do so by the act of God, as the fruit of His everlasting love unto them.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:3-4). In that initial blessing of election all others are wrapped up, and in due course we are partakers of them. "As the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Ps. 133:3). It is both the duty and privilege of every sin-laden soul to come to Christ for rest, nevertheless it is equally true that no man can come to Him except the Father draw him (John 6:44). Likewise it falls upon all who hear the Gospel to respond to that call. "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live" (Isa. 55:3), yet how can those who are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) do so? They cannot. They must first be divinely quickened into newness of life. A beautiful figure of that divine operation is here before us. In eastern lands the earth is hard, dry, barren. So are our natural hearts. The dew descends from above silently, mysteriously, imperceptibly and moistens the ground, imparting vitality to vegetation, making the mountainside fruitful. Such is the miracle of the new birth. Life is communicated by divine fiat; not a probationary or conditional one, not a fleeting or temporal one, but spiritual and endless, for the stream of regeneration can never dry up. When God commands, He communicates (cf. Psalm 42:8; 48:28; 111:9). As the blessing is a divine favor, so the manner of bestowing it is sovereign. That is solely His prerogative, for man can do nothing but beg. Zion is the place of all spiritual blessings (Heb. 12:22-24).

"Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of Thy countenance" (Ps. 89:15). This is one of the blessed effects of Divine quickening. When one has been born of the Spirit, the eyes and ears of his soul are opened to recognize spiritual things. It is not merely that they "hear the joyful sound," for many do that without any experiential knowledge of its charm; but know from its message being brought home in power to their hearts. That joyful sound is the "glad tidings of good things" (Rom. 10:15), namely, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Such souls as inwardly know that heavenly music are indeed blessed. As they are assured of free access unto God through the blood of Christ, the

beneficent light of the divine countenance is now beheld by them. There is probably an allusion in Psalm 89:15, First to the sound made by Aaron as he went into the holy place and came out (Ex. 28:33-35), which was indeed a "joyful sound" unto the people of God. It gave evidence that their high priest was engaged before the Lord on their behalf. Second, a general reference to the sound of the sacred trumpets which called Israel to their solemn feasts (Num. 10:10). Third, a more specific one to the trumpet of jubilee (Lev. 25:9-10), which proclaimed liberty to bondmen and restoration of their inheritance to them who had forfeited it. So the announcement of the Gospel of liberty to sin's captives is music to those who have ears to hear.

"Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (Ps. 2:12). The critical reader observes that we follow a strictly logical order. First, election is the foundation blessing, being "unto salvation" and including all the means thereof (2 Thess. 2:13); second, the bestowal of eternal life which capacitates the favored recipient to welcome experientially the joyful sound of the Gospel. Now there is a personal and saving embracing thereof. Note that the words of our present text are preceded by "Kiss the Son," which signifies, "Bow in submission before His scepter, yield to His Kingly rule, render allegiance to Him" (1 Sam. 10:1; 1 Kings 19:18). It is most important to note that order, and still more so to put it into practice. Christ must be received as Lord (Col. 2:6) before He can be received as Savior. Note the order in 2 Peter 1:11; 2:20; 3:18. The "put their trust in Him" signifies to take refuge in. They repudiate their own righteousness and evince their confidence in Him by committing themselves to His keeping for time and eternity. His Gospel is their warrant for doing so, His veracity their security.

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Ps. 32:1). This is an intrinsic part of the blessedness of putting our trust in Him. The joyful sound has assured them that "Christ died for the ungodly," and that He will by no means cast out anyone who comes unto Him. Therefore do they express their faith in Christ by fleeing to Him for refuge. Blessed indeed are such, for, having surrendered to His lordship and placed their reliance in His atoning blood, they now enter into the benefits of His righteous and benevolent government. More specifically, their "iniquities are forgiven and their sins are covered"—"covered by God, as the ark was covered with the mercycase; as Noah was covered from the flood; as the Egyptians were covered by the depths of the sea. What a cover that must be which hides forever from the sight of the all-seeing God all the filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit" (Charles Spurgeon). Paul quotes those precious words of Psalm 32:1 in Romans 4:7, as proof of the grand truth of justification by faith. While the sins of believers were all atoned for at the cross and an everlasting righteousness procured for them, they do not become actual participants until they believe (Acts 13:39; Gal. 2:16).

"Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them" (Ps. 84:5). This is another accompaniment of the new birth. The regenerated receives the spirit of "a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7) so that he now sees himself to be not only without any righteousness of his own, but also is conscious of his weakness and insufficiency. He has made the name of the Lord his strong tower, having run into it for safety (Prov. 18:10). Now he declares, "in the LORD have I righteousness and strength" (Isa. 45:24), strength to fight the good fight of faith, to resist temptations, to endure persecution, to perform duty. While he keeps in his right mind, he will continue to go forth not in his own strength, but in complete dependence upon the strength in Christ Jesus. Those ways of God's strength are the divinely appointed means of grace to maintain communion: feeding on the Word, living on Christ, adhering to the path of His precepts.

"Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways" (Ps. 128:1). Here is another mark of those under divine benediction: to have such a deep reverence of the Spirit as results in regular obedience to Him. The fear of the Lord is a holy awe of His majesty, a filial dread of displeasing Him. It is not so much an emotional thing as practical, for it is idle to talk about fearing God if we have no deep concern for His will. It is the fear of love which shrinks from dishonoring Him, a dread of forgetting His goodness and abusing His mercy. Where such fear is, all other graces are found.

### 3. The Cursings of God

It is solemn to learn that these blessings and cursings proceed from the same mouth. Yet a little reflection will convince the reader that such must be the case. God is light as well as love, holy as well as gracious, righteous as well as merciful. Therefore He expresses His abhorrence of and visits His judgments upon the wicked, as truly as He blesses and manifests His approval on those who are pleasing in His sight. An eternal heaven and an eternal hell are the inevitable and ultimate pair of opposites. This awesome duality is displayed in the natural world. On one hand our senses are charmed by the golden sunsets, the flowering gardens, the gentle showers and the fertile fields. On the other hand, we are shocked and terrified by the fearful tornado, the devouring blights, the devastating flood, and the destructive earthquake. "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God" (Rom. 11:22). From Mt. Ebal were announced the divine curses (Deut. 27), and from Mt. Gerizim the divine blessings (Deut. 28). The one could not be without the other. Thus too it will be in the last day, or while Christ will say unto His brethren, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," yet to those who despised and rejected Him shall He say "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" (Matthew 25:34, 41).

"Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life" (Gen. 3:17). That was one of the consequences which attended Adam's apostasy from God, a part of the divine vengeance which fell upon him. Because the first man stood as the covenant head and legal representative of his race, the judgment which came upon him is shared by all his descendants. Adam was the vice-regent of God in this scene. He was given dominion over all things mundane, and when he fell the effects of his awful sin were evident on every hand. His fair inheritance was blasted. The very ground on which he trod was cursed, so that henceforth it brought forth "thorns and thistles," compelling him to toil for his daily bread in the sweat of his face. Every time we cultivate a plot of land, the numerous weeds it produces hinder our efforts and supply very real proof of the divine sentence pronounced in Genesis 3 and evince that we belong to a fallen race.

"Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD" (Jer. 17:5). A thorough acquaintance with ourselves ought to render the warning of this solemn passage unnecessary, yet sad experience proves otherwise. Have we not sufficient knowledge of ourselves—our changeableness and utter unreliability -- to discover that "he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Prov. 28:26)? Then why should we suppose that any of our fellows are more stable and dependable? The best of Adam's race, when left to themselves, are spectacles of fickleness and frailty. "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity" (Ps. 62:9). To seek either the patronage or protection of man is an affront to the Most High, for it puts that confidence in the creature to which the Creator alone is entitled. The folly of such wickedness is emphasized in "and maketh flesh his arm," leaning upon that which is frail and helpless (2 Chron. 32:8; Matthew 26:41; Romans 8:3). The Christian needs to turn this awful malediction into prayer for deliverance from the temptation to look to man for help or relief! Indirectly, yet powerfully, this verse proves that Christ is far more than man; for if it calls down a divine curse for one to put his trust in man for any temporal advantage, how much more so if he trusts in a mere creature for eternal salvation!

"If ye will not hear, and ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart" (Mal. 2:2). The Lord is very tender of His honor and will not share His glory with another (Isa. 48:11), and those who do not take that fact to heart are certain to call down divine wrath upon themselves. Those words (Mal. 2:2) were addressed in the first instance to the priests of Israel. The prophet had reproved them for their sins. Now he declared that if they would not seriously attend to his warnings, and glorify God by repentance and reformation of conduct, then He would blight their temporal mercies. It is a signal favor for man to be called to minister publicly in the name of the Lord. But infidelity entails the most dreadful consequences. Often they are given up to blindness of mind, hardness of heart, seared consciences. The principle of this malediction has a much wider bearing and applies both to those who hear the Gospel and a nation blessed with its light.

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). God is very jealous of His Gospel, and this verse should also convince His servants and people of the solemn responsibility resting upon them to preserve it in its purity.



The Gospel of God makes known the only true way of salvation, and therefore any corrupting of it is not only dishonoring to its Author, but also most dangerous and disastrous to the souls of men. The apostle was censuring those who were repeating an impossible mixture of Law and Gospel, insisting that circumcision and compliance with the ceremonial rites of Judaism were as necessary as faith in Christ for justification. His was not the language of intemperate zeal, for he repeats the same in the next verse, but a holy fidelity which expressed his detestation of an error which not only insulted the Savior but also would prove fatal to those who embraced it. The single foundation of a sinner's hope is the merits of Christ, His finished work of redemption. Those who would add to the same by any doings of their own are headed for eternal destruction. Therefore any who teach men to do so are cursed of God and should be abhorred by His people.

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). The first part of this verse means: all who count on being saved by their own performances, or rely upon their own obedience for acceptance by God, are under the curse of His Law and exposed to His wrath. Justification by keeping the Law is an utter impossibility for any fallen creature. Why so? Because God's Law requires flawless and perpetual conformity, sinless perfection in thought and word and deed, and because it makes no provision for failure to comply with its holy and righteous terms. It is not sufficient to hear about or know the requirements of God's Law. They must be met. Thus it is obvious that a Law which already condemns cannot justify, that any who hope to merit God's favor by their faulty attempts to obey it are badly deceived. "To expect to be warmed by the keen northern blast, or to have our thirst quenched by a draught of liquid fire, were not more, were not so, incongruous" (J. Brown). This statement (Gal. 3:10) was made by the apostle to show that every man is under divine condemnation until he flees to Christ for refuge.

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). Here is the glorious Gospel summed up in a brief sentence. The curse has been borne for all those who believe, visited upon the Savior. A way has been opened where guilty sinners may not only escape from the curse of the Law, but actually be received into the favor of God. Amazing grace! Matchless mercy! All who put their trust in Christ are delivered from the Law's sentence of doom so that they shall never fall under it. We are righteously delivered, because as the Surety of His people Christ was born under the Law, stood in their law place, had all their sins imputed to Him, and made Himself answerable for them. The Law, so finding Him, charged Him with the same, cursed Him, and demanded satisfaction. Accordingly He was dealt with by the supreme Judge, for "God spared not His own Son," but called upon the sword of justice to smite the shepherd (Zech. 13:7). By His own consent the Lord Jesus was "made a curse" by God Himself. Because He paid the ransom price all believers are "redeemed"—delivered from God's wrath and inducted into His blessing.

"But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned" (Heb. 6:8). This is in sharp contrast with the previous verse. The good-ground hearer "bringeth forth"—the Greek signifying a production of what is normal and in due season. The graceless professor "beareth thorns"—the Greek word connoting an unnatural and monstrous production. There, "herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed"; here, worthless "thorns and briers." The one "receiveth blessing from God", the other is "nigh unto cursing" '—about to be visited with divine judgment.

#### **4. The Love of God to Us**

By "Us" We Mean His People. Although we read of the love "which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39), Holy Writ knows nothing of a love of God outside of Christ. "The LORD is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9), so that He provides the ravens with food. "He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:35), and His providence ministers unto the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). But His love is reserved for His elect. That is unequivocally established by its characteristics, for the attributes of His love are identical with Himself. Necessarily so, for "God is love." In making that postulate it is but another way to say God's love is like Himself, from everlasting to everlasting, immutable. Nothing is more absurd than to imagine that anyone beloved of God can eternally perish or shall ever experience His everlasting vengeance. Since the love of God is "in Christ Jesus," it was attracted by nothing in its objects, nor can it be repelled by

anything in, of, or by them. "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). The "world" in John 3:16 is a general term used in contrast with the Jews, and the verse must be interpreted so as not to contradict Psalm 5:5; 6:7; John 3:36; Romans 9:13.

The chief design of God is to commend the love of God in Christ, for He is the sole channel through which it flows. The Son has not induced the Father to love His people, but rather was it His love for them which moved Him to give His Son for them. Ralph Erskine said:

God hath taken a marvelous way to manifest His love. When He would show His power, He makes a world. When He would display His wisdom, He puts it in a frame and form that discovers its vastness. When He would manifest the grandeur and glory of His name, He makes a heaven, and puts angels and archangels, principalities and powers therein. And when He would manifest His love, what will He not do? God hath taken a great and marvelous way of manifesting it in Christ: His person, His blood, His death, His righteousness.

"All the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God" (2 Cor. 1:20). As we were chosen in Christ (Eph. 1:4), as we were accepted in Him (Eph. 1:6), as our life is hid in Him (Col. 3:3), so are we beloved in Him—"the love of God which is in Christ Jesus": in Him as our Head and Husband, which is why nothing can separate us therefrom, for that union is indissoluble.

Nothing so warms the heart of the saint as a spiritual contemplation of God's love. As he is occupied with it, he is lifted outside of and above his wretched self. A believing apprehension fills the renewed soul with holy satisfaction, and makes him as happy as it is possible for one to be this side of heaven. To know and believe the love which God has toward me is both an earnest and a foretaste of heaven itself. Since God loves His people in Christ, it is not for any amiableness in or attraction about them: "Jacob have I loved." Yes, the naturally unattractive, yes, despicable, Jacob—"thou worm Jacob." Since God loves His people in Christ, it is not regulated by their fruitfulness, but is the same at all times. Because He loves them in Christ, the Father loves them as Christ. The time will come when His prayer will be answered, "that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:23). Only faith can grasp those marvelous things, for neither reasoning nor feelings can do so. God loves us in Christ: What infinite delight the Father has as He beholds His people in His dear Son! All our blessings flow from that precious fountain.

God's love to His people is not of yesterday. It did not begin with their love to Him. No, "we love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We do not first give to Him, that He may return to us again. Our regeneration is not the motive of His love, rather His love is the reason why He renews us after His image. This is often made to appear in the first manifestation of it, when so far from its objects being engaged in seeking Him, they are at their worst. "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest [manifestatively] mine" (Ezek. 16:8).

Not only are its objects often at their worst when God's love is first revealed to them, but actually doing their worst, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus. Not only is God's love antecedent to ours, but also it was borne in His heart toward us long before we were delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son. It began not in time, but bears the date of eternity. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3).

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). It is clear from those words that God loved His people while they were in a state of nature, destitute of all grace, without a particle of love towards Him or faith in Him; yes, while they were His enemies (Rom. 5:8, 10). Clearly that lays me under a thousand times greater obligation to love, serve, and glorify Him than had He loved me for the first time when my heart was won. All the acts of God to His people in time are the expressions of the love He bore them from eternity. It is because God loves us in Christ, and has done so from everlasting, that the gifts of His love are irrevocable. They are the bestowal of "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." The love of God indeed makes a change in us when it is "shed abroad in our hearts," but it makes none in Him. He sometimes varies the dispensations of His

providence toward us, but that is not because His affection has altered. Even when He chastens us, it is in love (Heb. 12:6), since He has our good in view.

Let us look more closely at some of the operations of God's love. First, in election. "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit [His quickening] and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). There is an infallible connection between God's love and His selection of those who were to be saved. That election is the consequence of His love is clear again from Deuteronomy: "The Lord did not [1] set His love upon you, nor [2] choose you, because ye were more in number than any people" (Deut. 7:7). So again in Ephesians: "In love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:4-5).

Second, in redeeming. As we have seen from 1 John 4:10, out of His sovereign love God made provision for Christ to render satisfaction for their sins, though prior to their conversion He was angry with them in respect to His violated Law. And "how shall He not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32)—another clear proof that His Son was not "delivered up" to the cross for all mankind. For He gives them neither the Holy Spirit, a new nature, nor repentance and faith.

Third, effectual calling. From the enthroned Savior the Father sends forth the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). Having loved His elect with an everlasting love, with lovingkindness He draws them (Jer. 41:3), quickens into newness of life, calls them out of darkness into His marvelous light, makes them His children. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1). If filiation does not issue from God's love as a sure effect, to what purpose are those words?

Fourth, healing of backslidings: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely" (Hos. 14:4), without reluctance or hesitation. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (Song 8:7). Such is God's love to His people—invincible, unquenchable. Not only is there no possibility of its expiring, but also the black waters of backslidings cannot extinguish it, nor the floods of unbelief put it out.

Nothing is more irresistible than death in the natural world, nothing so invincible as the love of God in the realm of grace. Goodwin remarked:

What difficulties does the love of God overcome! For God to overcome His own heart! Do you think it was nothing for Him to put His Son to death? . . . When He came to call us, had He no difficulties which love overcame? We were dead in trespasses and sins, yet from the great love wherewith He loved us, He quickened us in the grave of our corruption: "lo, he stinketh"—even then did God come and conquer us. After our calling, how sadly do we provoke God! Such temptations that if it were possible the elect should be deceived. It is so with all Christians. No righteous man but he is "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18), and yet saved he is, because the love of God is invincible: it overcomes all difficulties.

An application is hardly necessary for such a theme. Let God's love daily engage your mind by devout meditations on it so that the affections of your heart may be drawn out to Him. When cast down in spirit, or in sore straits, plead His love in prayer, assured that it cannot deny anything good for you. Make God's wondrous love to you the incentive of your obedience to Him—gratitude requires nothing less.

## 5. The Gospel of the Grace of God

"To Testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24) formed part of the farewell address of the apostle Paul to the leaders of the church at Ephesus. After he reminded them of his manner of life among them (vv. 18-21), he tells them of his forthcoming trip to Jerusalem, which was to culminate in his being carried prisoner to Rome. He says, "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me" (vv. 22-23). And, then, in a truly characteristic word he says, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of

the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (v. 24). Wherever the providence of God might take him, whatever his circumstances might be, whether in bonds or in freedom, this should be his mission and message. It is to this same ministry that the Lord of the harvest still appoints His servants: to "testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

There is a continual need to return to the great fundamental of the faith. As long as the age lasts the Gospel of God's grace must be preached. The need arises out of the natural state of the human heart, which is essentially legalistic. The cardinal error against which the Gospel has to contend is the inveterate tendency of men to rely on their own performances. The great antagonist to the truth is the pride of man, which causes him to imagine that he can be, in part at least, his own savior. This error is the prolific mother of a multitude of heresies. It is by this falsehood that the pure stream of God's truth, passing through human channels, has been polluted.

Now the Gospel of God's grace is epitomized in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." All genuine reforms or revivals in the churches of God must have as their basis a plain declaration of this doctrine. The tendency of Christians is like that of the world, to shy away from this truth which is the very sum and substance of the Gospel. Those with any acquaintance with Church history know how sadly true this is. Within fifty years of the death of the last of the apostles, so far as we can now learn, the Gospel of God's grace almost ceased to be preached. Instead of evangelizing, the preachers of the second and third centuries gave themselves to philosophizing. Metaphysics took the place of the simplicity of the Gospel.

Then, in the fourth century, God mercifully raised up a man, Augustine, who faithfully and fearlessly proclaimed the Gospel. So mightily did God empower both his voice and pen that more than half of Christendom was shaken by him. Through his instrumentality came an heaven-sent revival. His influence for good staved off the great Romish heresy for another century. Had the churches heeded his teaching, popery would never have been born. But, they turned back to vain philosophy and science, falsely so-called.

Then came the Dark Ages, when for centuries the Gospel ceased to be generally preached. Here and there feeble voices were raised, but most of them were soon silenced by the Italian priests. It was not until the fifteenth century that the great Reformation came. God raised up Martin Luther, who taught in no uncertain terms that sinners are justified by faith, and not by works.

After Luther came a still more distinguished teacher, John Calvin. He was much more deeply taught in the truth of the Gospel, and pushed its central doctrine of grace to its logical conclusions. As Charles Spurgeon said, "Luther had, as it were, undammed the stream of truth, by breaking down the barriers which had kept back its living waters as in a great reservoir. But the stream was turbid and carried down with it much which ought to have been left behind. Then Calvin came, and cast salt into the waters, and purged them, so that there flowed on a purer stream to gladden and refresh souls and quench the thirst of poor lost sinners."

The great center of all Calvin's preaching was the grace of God. It has been the custom ever since to designate as "Calvinists" those who emphasize what he emphasized. We do not accept that title without qualification, but we certainly are not ashamed of it. The truth Calvin thundered forth was identical with the truth Paul had preached and set down in writing centuries before. This was also the substance of Whitefield's preaching, which God honored so extensively as to produce the great revival in his day. Let us now consider:

The Gospel Is a Revelation of the Grace of God.

The "Gospel of the grace of God" is one of the Holy Spirit's appellations of that Good News which the ambassadors of Christ are called upon to preach. Various names are given to it in the Scriptures. Romans 1:1 calls it the "gospel of God," for He is its Author. Romans 1:16 terms it the "gospel of Christ," for He is its theme. Ephesians 6:15 designates it the "gospel of peace," for this is its bestowment. Our text speaks of it as the "Gospel of the Grace of God," for this is its Source.

Grace is a truth peculiar to divine revelation. It is a concept to which the unaided powers of man's mind never rises. Proof of this is in the fact that where the Bible has not gone "grace" is unknown. Very often missionaries

have found, when translating the Scriptures into native tongues of the heathen, they were unable to discover a word which in any way corresponds to the Bible word "grace." Grace is absent from all the great heathen religions—Brahmanism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism. Even nature does not teach grace: break her laws and you must suffer the penalty.

What then is grace? First, it is evidently something very blessed and joyous, for our text speaks of the "good news of the grace of God." Secondly, it is the opposite of Law: Law and Gospel are antithetical terms: "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). It is significant that the word "Gospel" is never found in the Old Testament. Consider a few contrasts between them:

The Law manifested what was in man—sin; grace manifests what is in God—love, mercy. The Law speaks of what man must do for God; grace tells of what Christ has done for men. The Law demanded righteousness from men; grace brings righteousness to men. The Law brought out God to men; grace brings in men to God. The Law sentenced a living man to death; grace brings a dead man to life. The Law never had a missionary; the Gospel is to be preached to every creature. The Law makes known the will of God; grace reveals the heart of God!

In the third place, grace, then, is the very opposite of justice. Justice shows no favor and knows no mercy. Grace is the reverse of this. Justice requires that everyone should receive his due; grace bestows on sinners what they are not entitled to—pure charity. Grace is "something for nothing."

Now the Gospel is a revelation of this wondrous grace of God. It tells us that Christ has done for sinners what they could not do for themselves—it satisfied the demands of God's Law. Christ has fully and perfectly met all the requirements of God's holiness so that He can righteously receive every poor sinner who comes to Him. The Gospel tells us that Christ died not for good people, who never did anything very bad; but for lost and godless sinners who never did anything good. The Gospel reveals to every sinner, for his acceptance, a Savior all-sufficient, "able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him."

The Gospel Is a Proclamation of the Grace of God.

The word "Gospel" is a technical one, employed in the New Testament in a double sense: in a narrower, and in a wider one. In its narrower sense, it refers to heralding the glorious fact that the grace of God has provided a Savior for every poor sinner who feels his need, and by faith receives Him. In its wider sense, it comprehends the whole revelation which God made of Himself in and through Christ. In this sense it includes the whole of the New Testament.

Proof of this double application of the term Gospel is found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-3, a definition of the Gospel in its narrower sense: "that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again." Then Romans 1:1 uses the term Gospel in its wider sense: there it includes the whole doctrinal exposition of that epistle. When Christ bade His disciples, "Preach the Gospel to every creature," I do not think He had reference to all that is in the New Testament, but simply to the fact that the grace of God has provided a Savior for sinners. Therefore we say that the Gospel is a proclamation of the grace of God.

The Gospel affirms that grace is the sinner's only hope. Unless we are saved by grace we cannot be saved at all. To reject a gratuitous salvation is to spurn the only one that is available for lost sinners. Grace is God's provision for those who are so corrupt that they cannot change their own natures; so averse to God, they cannot turn to Him; so blind they cannot see Him; so deaf they cannot hear Him; in a word, so dead in sin that He must open their graves and bring them on to resurrection-ground, if ever they are to be saved. Grace, then, implies that the sinner's case is desperate, but that God is merciful.

The Gospel of God's grace is for sinners in whom there is no help. It is exercised by God "without respect of persons," without regard to merit, without requirement of any return. The Gospel is not good advice, but Good News. It does not speak of what man is to do, but tells what Christ has done. It is not sent to good men, but to bad. Grace, then, is something that is worthy of God.

The Gospel Is a Manifestation of the Grace of God.

The Gospel is the "power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." It is the chosen instrument which God uses in freeing and delivering His people from error, ignorance, darkness, and the power of Satan. It is by and through the Gospel, applied by the Holy Spirit, that His elect are emancipated from the guilt and power of sin. "For the preaching of the cross is to them which perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God . . . But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:18, 23). Where evolution is substituted for the new birth, the cultivation of character for faith in the blood of Christ, development of willpower for humble dependence on God, the carnal mind may be attracted and poor human reason appealed to, but it is all destitute of power and brings no salvation to the perishing. There is no Gospel in a system of ethics, and no dynamic in the exactions of law.

But grace works. It is something more than a good-natured smile, or a sentiment of pity. It redeems, conquers, saves. The New Testament interprets grace as power. By it redemption comes, for it was by "the grace of God" that Christ tasted death "for every one" of the sons (Heb. 2:9). Forgiveness of sins is proclaimed through His blood "according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). Grace not only makes salvation possible but also effectual. Grace is all-powerful. "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:9)—sufficient to overcome unbelief, the infirmities of the flesh, the oppositions of men, and the attacks of Satan.

This is the glory of the Gospel: it is the power of God unto salvation. In one of his books, Dr. J. H. Jowett says:

A little while ago I was speaking to a New York doctor, a man of long and varied experience with diseases that afflict both the body and mind. I asked him how many cases he had known of the slaves of drink having been delivered by medical treatment into health and freedom. How many he had been able to "doctor" into liberty and self-control. He immediately replied, "Not one." He further assured me that he believed his experience would be corroborated by the testimony of the faculty of medicine.

Doctors might afford a temporary escape, but the real bonds are not broken. At the end of the apparent but brief deliverance, it will be found that the chains remain. Medicine might address itself to effects, but the cause is as real and dominant as ever. The doctor has no cure for the drunkard. Medical skill cannot save him. But grace can! Without doctors, drugs, priests, penance, works, money or price, grace actually saves. Hallelujah! Yes, grace saves. It snaps the fetters of a lifetime, and makes a poor sinner a partaker of the divine nature and a rejoicing saint. It saves not only from the bondage of fleshly habits, but also from the curse of the fall, from the captivity of Satan, from the wrath to come.

What effect has this message on your heart? Does it fill you with praise to God? Are you thankful to know that salvation is by grace? Can you see and appreciate the infinite difference between all of man's schemes for self-betterment and the "Gospel of the Grace of God"?

## **6. The Fullness of Christ**

It is fitting that we should contemplate the excellencies of Christ the Mediator, for "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" is to be seen "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The fullest revelation that God is and what He is, is made in the person of Christ. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared" (1 John 1:18). But this knowledge of God is not a mere matter of intellectual apprehension, which one man can communicate to another. But it is a spiritual discernment, imparted by the Holy Spirit. God must shine in our hearts to give us that knowledge.

When the materialistic Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father," the Lord Jesus replied, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Yes, He was "the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person" (Heb. 1:3). In the eternal, incarnate Word "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). Amazing and glorious fact, it is in the perfection of manhood that the fullness of the Godhead is in Christ revealed to our faith. We could not ascend to God, so He descended to us. All that men can ever know of God is presented to them in the person of His incarnate Son. Hence, "That I may know him" (Phil. 3:10) is the constant longing of the most mature Christian.

It is our design to declare some part of that glory of our Lord Jesus Christ which is revealed in Scripture, and proposed as the object of our faith, love, delight, admiration and adoration. But after our utmost endeavors and most diligent inquiries we have to say, "How little a portion" (Job 26:14) of Him we understand. His glory is incomprehensible, His praises unutterable. Some things a divinely illuminated mind can conceive of, but what we express, in comparison to what the glory is in itself, is less than nothing. Nevertheless, that view which the Spirit grants from the Scriptures concerning Christ and His glory is to be preferred above all other knowledge or understanding. So it was declared, by him who was favored to know Him, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8).

John Owen has well said:

The revelation made of Christ in the blessed Gospel is far more excellent, more glorious, more filled with rays of Divine wisdom and goodness than the whole creation, and the just comprehension of it, if attainable, can contain or apprehend. Without the knowledge hereof, the mind of man, however priding itself in other inventions and discoveries, is wrapped up in darkness and confusion. This therefore deserves the severest of our thoughts, the best of our meditations, and our utmost diligence in them. For if our future blessedness shall consist in living where He is, and beholding of His glory; what better preparation can there be for it, than in a constant previous contemplation of that glory, in the revelation that is made in the Gospel unto this very end, that by a view of it we may be gradually transformed into the same glory.

The grandest of all privileges which believers are capable of, either in this world or the next, is to behold the glory (the personal and official excellencies) of Christ; now by faith, then by sight. Equally certain, no man will ever behold the glory of Christ by sight in heaven, who does not now behold it by faith. Where the soul has not been previously purified by grace and faith, it is incapable of glory and the open vision. Those who pretend to be greatly enamored by or to ardently desire that which they never saw or experienced, only dote on their imaginations. The pretended desires of many (especially on deathbeds) to behold the glory of Christ in heaven, but who had no vision of it by faith while they were in this world, are nothing but self-deceiving delusions.

There is no true rest for the mind nor satisfaction for the heart until we rest in Christ (Matthew 11:28-30). God has proposed to us the "mystery of godliness," that is, the person of His incarnate Son and His mediatorial work, as the supreme object of our faith and meditation. In this "mystery" we are called upon to behold the highest exhibition of the divine wisdom, goodness, and condescension. The Son of God assumed manhood by union with Himself, thereby constituting the same person in two natures, yet infinitely distinct as those of God and man. Thereby the Infinite became finite, the Eternal temporal, and the Immortal mortal, yet continued still infinite, eternal and immortal.

It cannot be expected that those who are drowned in the love of the world will have any true apprehension of Christ, or any real desire for it. But for those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet. 2:3), how foolish we would be if we gave all our time and strength to other things, to the neglect of diligent searching of Scripture to obtain a fuller knowledge of Him.

Man is "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," but the same Scriptures reveal a divinely appointed relief from all the evils to which fallen man is heir—so that we may not faint under them, but gain the victory over them.

Listen to the testimony of one who passed through a far deeper sea of trial than the great majority of men:

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed . . . For which cause we faint not: but though our outward man perish, yet the inward is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: while we look not at the things which are seen . . . but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:8; 4:16-18).

It is beholding by faith things which "are not seen" by the eye (which the spiritually poverty-stricken occupants of palaces and millionaire mansions know nothing of), the things that are spiritual and eternal, which alleviates the Christian's afflictions. Of these unseen, eternal things the supernal glories of Christ are the principal. He

who can contemplate Him who is "the Lord of glory," will, when "all around gives way," be lifted out of himself and delivered from the prevailing power of evil.

Not until the mind arrives at a fixed judgment that all things here are transitory and reach only to outward man—that everything under the sun is but "vanity and vexation of spirit," and there are other things incalculably better to comfort and satisfy the heart—not till then will we ever be delivered from spending our lives in fear, distress, and sorrow. Christ alone can satisfy the heart. And when He does truly satisfy, the language of the soul is, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Ps. 73:25).

How slight and shadowy, how petty and puerile are those things from which the trials of men arise! They all grow from the one root of the over-valuation of temporal things. Money cannot purchase joy of soul. Health does not insure happiness. A beautiful home will not satisfy the heart. Earthly friends, no matter how loyal and loving, cannot speak peace to a sin-burdened conscience, nor impart eternal life. Envy, covetousness, discontent, receive their death wound when Christ, in all His loveliness, is revealed as the "chiefest among ten thousand" (Song 5:10).