



*A*  
*Good*  
*Beginning,*  
*Continuing*  
*and*  
*Ending*



*A. W. Pink*

# **A Good Beginning, Continuing and Ending**

**A. W. Pink**

## **A Good Beginning**

What a mercy it is to enter this world with a healthy body and sound constitution; how severely handicapped for this life where the opposite be the case! What a blessing to be born into a Christian home, to receive our earliest impressions from pious parents, to be trained from infancy to walk in “the way of the LORD” (Gen. 18:19)! What a difference it makes in the marital life whether or not it opens with a consecration of the same to the Lord, and where the “family altar” is erected from the outset! It is sadly true that a good beginning will not of itself ensure a good ending; yet if the former obtains not, it is unlikely that the latter will be attained. If the foundation be faulty, the superstructure erected thereon is insecure. Though it be not everything, a good beginning is much to be desired. The indolent youth rarely amounts to much subsequently. Certain it is that as we sow in our earlier days, we are made to reap later on. The same law holds good in the Christian life: the formation of good spiritual habits at an early stage does much to mould future character and conduct.

It is customary in the early days of January for our friends to wish us a happy New Year, but what ground have we to expect that such a hope will be realized unless we *begin the year aright*? Certainly we are not justified in looking for the smile of God upon us if its dawn be celebrated with carnal gluttony and worldly jollification. *That* is to act as the heathen do. Nor may we count upon the providential blessing of the Lord if He be not duly honoured by us. This is not to inculcate the doctrine of human merits, as though by any good deeds of ours, the Lord can be brought into debt to us. No indeed: rather is it a pointing out of our duty and an enforcing of God’s rightful claims upon us. All of the Lord’s dealings with His people are in grace, yet grace ever works “through righteousness” (Rom. 5:21) and never at the expense of it. God has plainly declared, “them that honour me I will honour;” but on the other hand, “they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam. 2:30). Ponder well those words, my reader, at the opening of 1949,

and remember that “the hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him” (Ezra 8:22). Earnestly seek *His* glory, and you will enjoy His blessing.

Let us point out two or three things which are essential if the Christian reader is to make “a good beginning” in the new year. First, he must *start it with a clean slate*. Alas, says the reader, that is impossible. I cannot undo the past. Obligated am I to say, “What I have written, I have written,” and I cannot erase it. True, but God can! If your conversion was a genuine one, in the day of it, the Lord said, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions” (Isa. 44:22). And what made such a miracle of grace legally possible? The atoning sacrifice of the Redeemer: “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). And that precious blood is ever available for faith’s appropriation. Then spend part of the closing hour of 1948 in putting your sins under the blood of Christ. Make a general confession, and then a particular one of every known sin, and make use of God’s promise: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Plead the efficacy of Christ’s blood. Make full use of that Fountain which has been “opened to the house of David [i.e. ‘the beloved’] and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem [and every believer belongs to the ‘Jerusalem which is above’ (Gal. 4:26)] for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1).

By sincere and penitent confession, all sin may be purged from the conscience; and by a fresh application of the atoning blood of Christ, all sin will be cleansed before God. Thus, you may and should begin the new year with a clean slate. That is your holy privilege, Christian friend. Nor is that statement any invention of ours, for in substance, it is clearly taught in the Scriptures. See it illustrated in Exodus 12. When the Lord’s time had come for the children of Israel to leave the land of Egypt and enter upon a new stage of their history, what did God require them to do? Three things: First, “ye shall put away leaven out of your houses” (Exo. 12:15)—“leaven” is one of the Scriptural emblems of evil (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9); and the Christian puts it away when he abhors, mourns over, and confesses his sins before God, for it is then cast

out of his affections. Second, they placed themselves under the shed blood of the Lamb. Third, they fed upon it “with bitter herbs” (Exo. 12:8). Christ is only truly appropriated by a contrite soul, to whom sin is a bitter thing. Then the Lord gave orders: “This month shall be unto you the beginning of months” (Exo. 12:2). Was not *that* “a good beginning”—to start the year under the blood of the Lamb?

Second, *thankfulness for past mercies*. If we be not grateful for the blessings and bounties which God has already bestowed upon us, how can we look for a continuation of them? Is it likely that the Holy One will place a premium upon ingratitude? It becomes us to make hearty acknowledgement of the favours—both spiritual and temporal—which the Lord has lavished upon us. Alas that so many receive them as a matter of course and with hearts unaffected by the divine goodness. It is one of the foretold marks of graceless professors that in the “perilous times” they should be “unthankful,” to which is immediately added, “unholy” (2 Tim. 3:1-2). It behoves us, then, as we enter upon another period of life, to render praise to the Lord for past supplies and deliverances. See that illustrated in the case of Noah. As soon as he and his family emerged on to the new earth, which had been swept clean by the besom of destruction, he “builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar” (Gen. 8:20). Was not *that* “a good beginning:” to express thanks for their gracious preservation from the flood? And we are told: “And the LORD smelled a sweet savour” (Gen. 8:21): it was acceptable to Him. Then do *you* open 1949 by offering to Him a sacrifice of praise?

Third, *a renewal of his consecration to God*. The Christian life begins with a personal dedication to Him. They “first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us” (2 Cor. 8:5), which means that they made a complete surrender of themselves to Him, as the only suitable response to that great debt which can never be fully paid. There was an entire consecrating of themselves and all that they had to God in Christ, and a yielding of themselves to His accredited servants to be taught and directed by them—the latter being the evidence of the former. Nothing less than that would give proof

that they were genuinely devoted to His cause and interests here on earth. But alas, how treacherous are our hearts! How soon is the “love of [our] espousals” (Jer. 2:2) chilled! How quickly the things of this world draw us away from Christ, or the cares of this life unduly absorb us! How soon does the average Christian give the Lord cause to complain, “thou hast left thy first love”—the freshness and fervour which marked your conversion! And what is the remedy? “Repent [mourn over, confess, turn away from what has occasioned the sad failure], and do the first works” (Rev. 2:4-5)—that is, renew your dedication, make a fresh surrender of yourself to the Lord. Do so at the dawn of 1949, and that will indeed be “a good beginning.” Definitely acknowledge afresh the everlasting claims which the love of Christ has upon you, and determine to spend and be spent for Him.

Fourth, *a renewed resolve to live wholly for the honour of your Master*. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Make *that* your motto, your constant aim, your earnest endeavour during 1949. That is the principal mark which distinguishes the Christian from the non-Christian: that he serves not self but Christ, seeks not the praise of men but the approbation of God, aims not at his own advancement but at the magnifying of the Lord and the promoting of His interests. His opportunity for so doing in this scene of His rejection will soon be over. The night swiftly hastens on when writer and reader will no longer have this privilege. Then let us seek grace to redeem the time (Eph. 5:16) and enter the new year determined to do so. Our Master has left us an example so to do: “Christ pleased not himself” (Rom. 15:3). “I seek not mine own glory” (John 8:50), He declared. Completely and constantly devoted was He to the One whom He delighted to serve. How that was evinced in His *first* recorded utterance: “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?” (Luke 2:49). Was not *that* “a good beginning?” Then cry to Him for enablement to “follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21) more closely during 1949 than ever before.

### **A Good Continuing**

Our “New Year's” message (which appeared in the December

issue) was entitled “A Good Beginning.” This and the one in February are designed as sequels thereto. While a good beginning is much to be desired, it is not everything, but rather a means to an end. If the ending is to be satisfactory, then we must continue well. Alas, how very few really do so! How rare it is to find a child of God who has preserved his early freshness and fervour! Of how many does it have to be said, “Thou hast left thy first love” (Rev. 2:4)? Mark closely the verb employed there: it is not “thou has *lost* thy first love,” as so frequently misquoted, but something much more serious being referred to. One may lose a thing involuntarily, but to *leave* “the love of thine espousals” (Jer. 2:2) implies deliberation, and is therefore more culpable. Hence, the one guilty thereof is bidden to “remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent” (Rev. 2:5), which serves to explain what is there involved. To “leave” our first love is to depart from that elevation of heart (the affections set upon things above) which formerly characterized us, to forsake the “mountain of myrrh” and “the hill of frankincense” (Song 4:6) previously trodden in fellowship with the eternal Lover of our souls.

Many solemn examples are given in Scripture of those who made a promising start, but later, belied the same. Such was the case with Samson, of whom we read first, “The LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him” (Judges 13:24-25), but subsequently Delilah “began to afflict him, and his strength went from him...And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him” (Judges 16:19-20). How fair was the commencement of King Saul’s public life, but how terrible its termination! “The Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied” (1 Sam. 10:10); “But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him” (1 Sam. 16:14). How frequently do we see exemplified our Lord’s description of the stony-ground hearer, who “heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while” (Matt. 13:20-21). It was so under His own ministry: “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66)—little wonder if such prove the case with those converted under our preaching. How soon after Pentecost were the ranks of the early

church thinned by the defection and death of Ananias and Sapphira!

Not only are many such individual cases recorded in the Scripture for our warning, but a whole generation of Israel is set before us to tremblingly heed. Behold upwards of half a million of them issuing forth from the house of bondage under the leadership of Moses. Hear them fervently singing the LORD's praises for His deliverance at the Red Sea. See them journeying unto, yea nearing, the promised inheritance. Alas, how tragic was the sequel! Only two of that vast host ever entered Canaan: of all the others God swore "that they should not enter into his rest" (Heb. 3:18), and their carcasses fell in the wilderness. Does the reader object, But they were not *regenerate* souls and therefore point no warning to Christians? We answer, Such a point does not have to be determined by us; sufficient to know that they were the people of God, in covenant relation with Him, and that the Holy Spirit declares they were "*our* examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted," and bids us, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest *he* fall" (1 Cor. 10:6, 12). And again, "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after *the same* example of unbelief" (Heb. 4:11). Woe be unto those who presumptuously disregard such a danger-signal.

Holy Scripture knows nothing of a "Once saved, always saved" *irrespective* of the subsequent life. The saving of the soul is a miracle of divine grace which produces supernatural effects. The one who has hitherto played the fool with the things of God and the eternal interests of his own soul, is given "the spirit...of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7), and the same is manifested by his now conducting himself sanely. There is placed within him a principle of holiness, in consequence of which he hates evil and is moved to strive against sin. The love of God is shed abroad in his heart, and that constrains unto an earnest endeavour to please Him in all things, and to glorify His great name. Hence, no one who returns to his wallowing in the mire has any divine warrant to regard himself *as saved*. The saved are "his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Therefore, none is to be regarded as *His* "workmanship" who walk not in good works, but who instead lead

carnal and worldly lives. Regeneration is but the commencement of the saving operations of the Holy Spirit, and those who are the favoured subjects of them are assured, “he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [‘finish’] it” (Phil. 1:6), causing them to grow in grace and become fruitful branches of the Vine.

Yet the divine work of grace in a soul is not carried forward mechanically without any concurrence on the part of its subjects. It is a fatal error to conclude that because the work of salvation and sanctification is a divine one, *we* have no responsibility in connection therewith. Scripture teaches the very opposite: we are exhorted to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling *because* it is God which worketh in us (Phil. 2:12-13). Grace is bestowed not to encourage idleness, but to energize unto holy activity. The Spirit of God does not produce apathy, but stirs those He indwells unto a diligent use of means. The one who was loudest in owning, “But by the grace of God I am what I am,” hesitated not to add, “but I laboured more abundantly than they all (1 Cor. 15:10). God treats with His people, throughout, as rational and accountable creatures. Unto those who believed on Him, the Lord Jesus said, “If ye *continue* in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31), and not merely by lip profession. The apostles returned to their converts, “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them *to continue* in the faith,” warning them that they “must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Walking that “narrow” way, which is the *only one* “which leadeth unto life” (Matt. 7:14), is not the easy matter which so many vainly imagine. Rather does it call for self-denial, godly fear, circumspection, and persevering effort.

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk ye in him” (Col. 2:6) must be heeded by us if we are to make a good continuance. *How* did we “receive Christ Jesus the Lord?” By ceasing to fight against Him, and throwing down the weapons of our rebellion. By determining to end a life of self-will, giving ourselves up to Him freely and wholly, consenting to be His forever. By penitently confessing our sins and trusting in His redeeming blood. By coming empty-handed to draw upon His fullness. How did we “receive” Him? As He is freely offered in the



Gospel: “able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb. 7:25). As a whole Christ: a Prophet to teach, a Priest to atone, a King to reign over us. As a *complete* Saviour: to deliver from the penalty of sin, cleanse from its pollution, free from its power; to sanctify as well as justify, purify, and ultimately glorify. “So walk ye in him:” continue as you began—in subjection to, in dependence upon Him. A Gospel faith must issue in Gospel practice. “Walking in Christ means living *out of self*, in conformity to Him. Only thus do we obtain evidence of having *savingly* “received” Him. The genuineness of faith is always seen in what it produces. Alas, the walk of most professing Christians gives the lie to their talk.

A good continuance is only made possible by our regular *use* of those means of grace which God has appointed for His people. If the Word be neglected, the soul will be starved. If meditation be not practised, the heavenly manna will not be digested. If prayer be omitted, or performed formally and mechanically, fresh supplies of grace will not be obtained. Unless the love of God be kept constantly before the heart, the affections will soon cool. Unless we draw daily upon Christ’s mediatorial fullness, we shall be feeble and incapable of wrestling with our foes. Unless we tread the path of obedience, Satan will quickly overcome us. There must also be a *right* use of the means, or they will profit us nothing. The Word itself does not nourish unless faith be mixed with it (Heb. 4:2). They must be used in a spirit of humble dependence on God, for they avail not apart from His *blessing* upon them. Put them not in the stead of Christ. Trust not in the mere use of them as though your diligence therein ensured success. Yet they must be used patiently and perseveringly: “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9).

### **A Good Ending**

In order to a good ending, it is required that we heed the injunction, “Let us not be weary in well doing” (Gal. 6:9). There has ever been a pressing need for God’s people to pay attention to that word, for they meet with so many discouraging setbacks in their best efforts to mortify their lusts and develop their graces, that

they are very apt to become thoroughly discouraged, which produces a readiness to give ear unto that seductive whisper of Satan's "What's the use?" But there is a special timeliness in this exhortation for our degenerate generation, when the vast majority of professing Christians are walking arm-in-arm with the world, and the believer himself is tempted to follow their evil example. If he is not to share their doom, then he must not tread their path, for all who walk the broad road—no matter how orthodox their beliefs, or what their church connections—will most certainly find it terminates in destruction—eternal and unbearable. "Welldoing" consists of a sincere determination and endeavour to perform God's revealed will and an earnest effort to glorify Him. Unto those who continue so doing, the promise is given "for in due season we shall reap, *if we faint not.*"

The "if" is not to be ignored, explained away, nor glossed over, but taken just as it stands. To continue well is not only desirable, but imperative and indispensable. There are many who appear to make an excellent start in the Christian life whose efforts are not sustained, and it has to be said of them, as of the Galatians in like case, "Who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth...?" (Gal. 3:1). And observe well that the apostle did not say, "peace," "peace," and assure them that God would certainly recover them out of the snare of the devil. Instead, he told them plainly and faithfully, "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal. 4:11). So far was Paul from subscribing to the dangerous delusion which now prevails so widely—that if a person has once "accepted Christ as his personal Saviour," all is well with him for ever, no matter to what extent he conforms to this world and indulges the lusts of the flesh—he declared, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). Alas, that such a solemn warning should now be robbed of all points where it is not criminally disregarded.

That verse has been woefully wrested by the "Dispensationalists," who make such a pretence of "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). They affirm that it

merely relates to a being disqualified for and rejected from Christian “service.” But the Greek word for “castaway” (“*adokimos*”) is never used of anyone’s being set aside from the ministry, but in every instance refers to “something” much more serious and fatal—namely to a being *abandoned by God*. It is translated “rejected” of the ground which bears “thorns and briars” (Heb. 6:8), and “reprobate” in the other six passages, among which are Romans 1:28; 2 Timothy 3:8; Titus 1:16! In the context of 1 Corinthians 9:27, the apostle likens the Christian life and conflict unto the running of a race and the engaging in a wrestling contest (verses 24 and 25), both of which call for strenuous effort, strict self-discipline and self-denial (verse 25). In verse 26, he changes the figure from running to boxing, and then applies the same to himself, making his body the antagonist (verse 27). By a synecdoche (in which a part is made to comprehend the whole—the “body” represents his entire sinful nature: compare the “body of sin” (Rom. 6:6), “the body of this death” (Rom. 7:24), “mortify therefore your *members* which are upon the earth [namely, the lusts of]; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5), where in each case the allusion is to the totality of our inward corruptions.

Even so strong a Calvinist as Charles Hodge (1797-1878), in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, said upon 9:27, “It was not merely his sensual nature that Paul endeavoured to bring into subjection, but all the propensities and passions of his heart...He made these strenuous exertions, lest, having preached the Gospel to others, he himself should become a reprobate, one rejected. What an argument and what a reproof is this! The reckless and listless Corinthians thought they could safely indulge themselves to the very verge of sin, while this devoted apostle considered himself as engaged in a lifelong *struggle for his salvation*. This same apostle, however, who evidently acted on the principle that the righteous scarcely are saved and that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, at other times breaks out in the most joyful assurance of salvation, and says that he was persuaded that nothing in heaven, earth, or hell, could ever separate him from the love of God (Rom.

8:38-39). The one state of mind is the necessary condition of the other.” It is only those who heed God’s solemn warnings, that recognize the perils which beset their souls, that assiduously employ the means of grace which He has provided for their preservation, who are entitled to appropriate the comfort found in the divine promises concerning the eternal security of the saints.

It was *not* that Paul *expected* to become a “castaway,” but that he tells us in 1 Corinthians 9:27, what he did (and what we must do) in order to *prevent* such a catastrophe. He was not one who fondly dreamed of being “carried to heaven on flowery beds of ease,” but rather was engaged in fighting the good fight of faith, seeking to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil—knowing full well that unless he did so, he would be fatally overcome by them. But it will be asked, Is not every regenerate soul “kept by the power of God” (1 Peter 1:5)? Certainly he is. But how, and where? Not by preserving him in the ways of utter worldliness, self-will, and self-pleasing, but rather by leading him into the paths of righteousness, and when he wanders, restoring him thereto; by moving him to resist temptation, avoid the perils which menace, and conduct himself sanely and circumspectly. God’s power does not keep us mechanically, without any concurrence on *our* part; but as 1 Peter 1:5 goes on to say, “through faith:” that is, through working in us a spirit of dependence upon God and obedience to Him. Believers are kept by divine power moving them to deny self, take heed to their ways, flee temptation, and by causing them to seek grace from above and to draw strength from Christ.

But does not Scripture expressly teach the final perseverance of all saints? Of *saints* yes, but not of graceless professors or white-washed worldlings. Of thousands of them it is written, “This man *began* to build, and was not able to finish” (Luke 14:30); and again, “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the *latter end* is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Peter 2:20). The final perseverance of the saints taught in God’s Word is not their preservation in a course of self-gratification and sin, but a perseverance in faith, obedience, and holiness. “He that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matt.

10:22), and none others will be. Thus, it is imperative to heed that word, “For we are made partakers of Christ, *if* we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end” (Heb. 3:14), which is very far from signifying a “presumptuous persuasion” that heaven is sure no matter what road I tread. “Our confidence,” as the context shows, is our “profession” (Heb. 3:1); and to hold it “unto the end” is to continue supplying evidence of the genuineness of our profession, to “continue in the faith grounded and settled” (Col. 1:23), to heed the exhortations in Hebrews 3:12 and 13, and the warnings in Hebrews 4:1, 11.

“Conversion is a turning into the right road; the next thing is to walk in it. The daily going on in the road is as essential as the first starting, if we would reach the desired end. To strike the first blow is not all the battle; to him that overcometh is the crown promised. To start in the race is nothing; many have done that who have failed; but to hold out until you reach the winning-post is the great point of the matter. Perseverance is as essential to man’s salvation as conversion”—Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892). We must not only begin well but continue well, if we are to *end well*. Unless we can truly say, “*For to me to live is Christ,*” we are but deceiving ourselves if we imagine that “to die is *gain*” (Phil. 1:21). Alas, if the vast majority of professing Christians were honest, they would be obliged to aver, “For to me to live is—pleasure—money-making—or social prestige;” and for *them* to die is eternal loss, for they must not only leave behind their idols, but enter a hopeless eternity. Face the issue squarely, my reader: is it “For me to live is to gratify *self*?” or “For me to live is *Christ*”—to seek to please and honour Him? Only if the latter be the case, will you end well.

[What has been said up to now] under this title was designed chiefly for those who have come under the baneful influence of a popular type of “Eternal Security” teaching, wherein the responsibility of the saints is utterly ignored. We therefore emphasized the Scriptural fact that to begin well and to continue well are absolutely indispensable if the believer is to end well. We [now] propose to define more closely what is signified by a good ending, and then point out some of the duties which must be attended to by the Christian in order for him to experience the

same. There is a sense in which everyone who continues to tread that narrow way which leadeth unto Life has a good ending; for whatever falls he had therein, he rose up again (Prov. 24:16) and held on his way (Job 17:9), neither making shipwreck of the faith (1 Tim. 1:19) nor turning the grace of God into lasciviousness (Jude verse 4). Upon their removal from the world, such have ceased from all sin and sorrow, and that is indeed a good ending. But there is another sense in which many real Christians *do not* have a good ending to their earthly career: their growth in grace is arrested, their testimony for the Lord does not honour Him as it once did, they can no longer be described as burning and shining lights; rather are they more or less under a cloud ere they pass away from this scene—rusting, instead of wearing out.

It is often said that the young Christian is the one who most of all needs to tread warily in order to escape the snares of Satan, that it is the babes in Christ who are in the greatest danger of bringing reproach upon His holy name. But neither Scripture nor observation confirms this view. Was it in their earlier years or their later that Noah, Isaac, Moses, and David conducted themselves so carnally? On the other hand, how signally was the LORD honoured by Joseph, Samuel, Josiah, and Daniel in the days of their youth! The fact is that each stage of the spiritual life has its own peculiar temptations and perils; and there is just as urgent a need for the most mature saint to walk cautiously, as there is for the one who has only just commenced his spiritual pilgrimage. While it be true that the longer a believer follows on to know the Lord, the stronger he should become in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:1), yet the more on his guard must he be against becoming puffed up with his attainments. It is also true that old age is accompanied by infirmities of both mind and body; yet for the Christian, it should also be marked by an increasing dependence upon the Lord and a proving of the sufficiency of His grace.

There is abundant reason for the Christian to go “from strength to strength” (Psa. 84:7) and “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). He has the infallible Word of God in his hands, so that he may be “perfect [complete], thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:17). He has access to the Throne of Grace where he may

ever “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). He is divinely assured, “They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31). He has the mediatorial fullness of Christ to draw upon (John 1:16). He has the comforting promises of the living God to rest in: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isa. 41:10). “And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isa. 46:4). “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). Then ought we not to exclaim, “I will trust, and not be afraid” (Isa. 12:2) and “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil” (Psa. 23:4).

While it be the case that the Holy Spirit has recorded—for our warning—the sad follies and falls committed by some saints in their old age, He has also described—for our encouragement and emulation—the good ending of others. “For before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Heb. 11:5). Joshua’s career finished as brightly as it commenced. “So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning” (Job 42:12). To the close of his long life, Daniel glorified the LORD: he “prospered in the reign of Darius [as well as Nebuchadnezzar’s], *and* in the reign of Cyrus the Persian” (Dan. 6:28). How many a spiritual Gaddite has proved by experience, “a troop [of lusts and temptations] shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last” (Gen. 49:19). “Mark the perfect [sincere] man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace” (Psa. 37:37): probably most of us have personally witnessed such cases. Then why should not the writer and the reader receive fulfilment of that promise, “It shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light” (Zech. 14:7). But in order thereto we must maintain fellowship with Him who is “light” (1 John 1:5). “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

“But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind,

and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14). Those words were penned by Paul as he neared the end of his course, and they should be translated into prayer by all elderly saints. As we advance in years, there is a strong tendency to live too much in the past. As there is a sinful forgetfulness, so there is a hindering remembrance. It is indeed incumbent upon us to take notice, with thankfulness, of those portions of the wilderness through which the Lord has already led us, and to raise our Ebenezers for the same (1 Sam. 7:12). It is equally our duty to “[leave] the principles of the doctrine of Christ” and “go on unto perfection” (Heb. 6:1). We should assuredly cherish in our hearts the previous deliverances and mercies which God has vouchsafed us; and yet there is a sense in which we should forget them. Keep them in mind in order to promote thanksgiving and deepen confidence in God; but do not suffer the recollection of them to produce slackness in diligently seeking further blessings from Him. Be not content with the measure of grace, knowledge, and growth already granted, but continue to “covet earnestly the best gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31).

So far as remembrance of the past humbles and makes us walk more softly, such an exercise of the mind is helpful; but if it dispirits and enervates, it is harmful. Like all of our faculties, the memory can be cultivated or neglected, put to both a good and a bad use. We should frequently review the past in order to learn the lessons it may teach us, and to profit from our mistakes; but we must not become so cast down over the failures of yesterday that we are disqualified for the discharge of today’s duties. It is far from honouring the Lord if we suffer the sins of our youth to fill us with dejection and despair: if they have been repented of and confessed, we should leave them under the blood of Christ. Nor is it at all a healthy sign for the soul to be always harping upon and resting in the blissful experience of conversion; rather should he see to it that he is *now* in a right attitude toward the Lord, and rejoicing in Him. Losses and bereavements must not be dwelt upon by us so as to produce perpetual gloominess; seek to cheer other distressed souls with the comfort wherewith you have been comforted of God (2



Cor. 1:4). The racer retards his progress by glancing back at the ground already covered: his task is to keep his eyes steadily on the winning post.

In John 15, when speaking of the branches of the true vine, Christ made mention of “fruit,” “more fruit” (verse 2), and “much fruit” (verses 5, 8): such proportions ought to characterize, respectively, the babes, young men, and fathers in Christ. A lengthy acquaintance with the Lord, and deepening experience in His goodness and mercy, should issue in increasing fruitfulness. That fruit is described, in part, in Galatians 5:22-23. As we grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, will there not be increasing love for, joy in, and peace from Him? Has not God promised, “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age” (Psa. 92:14)? But, says the aged pilgrim, I feel so helpless and useless. Ah, patient submission to God’s will, contentment with His appointments, and gratitude for His provisions, are also a part of spiritual “fruit.” Nor need you be inactive though confined to your bed. You now have leisure, denied to those earning their bread, and mothers of young families, to engage in the holy work of *intercession*—for God’s servants and people. Seek to be an example of cheerfulness. Remember, “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (Prov. 16:31), otherwise, it is a disgrace to Christ and a stumbling-block to the young.

