



# Bitter & Sweet Things New & Old Things

**A. W. Pink**



# **Bitter and Sweet Things, New and Old Things**

**A. W. Pink**

## **Bitter Things**

“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil...that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20). Deplorable indeed is the case of those who are incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, who confound objects so radically dissimilar. Yet such by nature is the sad case with all of us. Our understanding is darkened, so that we are unable to perceive the real nature of things. Our wicked hearts deceive us into imagining that profitable exercises are a waste of time, and that pursuits which end in misery are pleasant. Instead of calling the Sabbath a delight (Isa. 58:13), it is a weariness to the ungodly (Amos 8:5). They spend their strength for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfies not (Isa. 55:2). They mistake licentiousness for liberty, and the light yoke of Christ for a heavy burden. True wisdom is regarded as folly, and her ways (which are peaceful) as paths to be shunned. Thus do they befool and cheat their own souls. Instead of making God their chief good, He is abhorred, and Satan, their worst enemy, is served.

“And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage” (Exod. 1:13, 14). The curse which the fall has called down upon man is a multiple one. It has not only alienated him from God, slain his spiritual life, and polluted his entire being, but it has also brought him into abject subjection to sin and Satan. Solemnly and graphically is this aspect of his misery depicted in Exodus 1. Pharaoh, who adumbrated the devil, was a most cruel tyrant over those who were in his power. He loaded them with intolerable burdens and treated them in a barbarous manner. He heaped one job upon another, and set over them taskmasters, who beat them mercilessly when they relaxed. Thus, the Hebrews had no ease of body and no comfort of mind. And such, my reader, is how Satan treats *his* captives, forcing them to employ their strength and

talents in his hard service. For the most part, they realize it not, for sin so completely infatuates its victims as to make them in love with their bonds and unconscious of their burdens. Nevertheless, they have been taken captive by the devil at his will (2 Tim. 2:26) and are “serving divers lusts” (Tit. 3:3).

“With better herbs shall they eat it” (Exod. 12:8). The reference is to the paschal lamb, the blood of which provided shelter from the angel of death and issued in their deliverance from their serfdom under Pharaoh. Thus, that lamb was a notable type of Christ and His glorious redemption. It is not sufficiently realized that “redemption” presupposes *bondage*, that it is the freeing of sin’s captives, the delivering of the devil’s bound prisoners (Isa. 61:1; Zech. 9:11). “If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). Redemption, then, is the emancipating of Satan’s serfs, by the mighty power of God, on the ground of atoning blood. Ever after, the children of Israel were annually to celebrate that deliverance from Egyptian slavery by eating a lamb with bitter herbs—the bitter herbs being designed to be a perpetual reminder of their former bitter bondage. In their spiritual application unto Christians, those bitter herbs are an emblem of that godly sorrow and mortification of the flesh which are ever to accompany the exercise of a living faith in the Lord Jesus. We cannot have real fellowship with the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 3:10) except as we bring to mind what it was that made those sufferings necessary, and the recollection of our past wickedness will produce a broken heart and contrite spirit. “This will give an admirable relish to the paschal lamb: Christ will be as sweet to us as sin be bitter” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

“When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry” (Esth. 4:1). This was because the king had issued an edict that on a certain day all the Jews in his provinces were to be slain. “Public calamities, especially those which oppress the Church of God, should more affect our hearts than any private

afflictions” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821). If we be concerned for the glory of God, we cannot behold with stoical indifference the dishonour now being done to His name throughout Christendom. Moses refused to eat and drink for forty days and nights because Israel had sinned so grievously against the Lord (Deut. 19:18, 19). Samuel, in anticipation of the divine judgments on Saul, grieved himself, and “cried unto the LORD all night” (1 Sam. 15:11). On a similar occasion, Ezra was prostrated in the deepest sorrow (9:3, 4). David declared, “Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law” (Psa. 119:136). Christ wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), and in this feature, too, we are to be conformed unto Him. When rebuking wayward saints, Paul could only write to them “out of much affliction and anguish of heart” (2 Cor. 2:4), and in speaking of others, he said, “of whom I...tell you even weeping” (Phil. 3:18).

“Even to day is my complaint [not “complaining”] bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning” (Job 23:2). We do not at all agree with those expositors who regard Job as here referring to what they term a “divine desertion,” that the Lord had so withdrawn the light of His countenance from the patriarch that he was unable to obtain conscious access to Him. Rather do we think that Job’s distress was occasioned by his inability to understand the Lord’s dealings with him. His afflictions were so severe, so long-protracted, so inexplicably mysterious to him, that his case was well-nigh unendurable. He was at a complete loss to understand the divine providence. As he sought to forecast the future, no light was shed on his path. As he reviewed the past (verse 8), he was unable to put his finger on any sin which had provoked God to deal so severely with him. No matter from which angle he sought to view his case (verse 9), the divine dispensations appeared to proceed neither from justice nor from grace. Such a bewildering situation is indeed bitter. If such be yours, comfort yourself with the assurance, “But he knoweth [if I do not] the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (verse 10).

“Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words” (Psa. 64:3). There are some sensitive dispositions which find this experience harder to endure than bodily pains or temporal losses. While it be true that “hard words never broke any bones,” yet some are cut to the very quick when sharp words are spoken against or even to them. Sly insinuations and false accusations are like arrows shot from a bow. Spiteful reproaches and evil slanders are grievous trials to many. As the viper fastened on the hand of Paul, so the venomous tongues of the wicked make the godly their mark, seeking to ruin their reputations and distress their minds. They unscrupulously invent falsehoods which are calculated to cause anguish. If such be the reader’s case, let him remember the Lord Jesus—they laid grievous things to His charge which they could not prove. Vile indeed were their words against Him. They charged Him with being a glutton and a winebibber, said He was a Samaritan, imputed His miracles to diabolical influence, branded His teaching as blasphemous. But “when he was reviled, he reviled not again.”

“Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God” (Jer. 2:19). Backsliding implies a relationship to Him, whether it be in profession or reality. Every sin committed by a Christian is not a backsliding, any more than every spot is leprosy. He may sin through ignorance, be overtaken in a fault, or find sin cleaving to him when it is loathed and resisted. Backsliding imports a wilful step, though it ever begins in the heart ere it is manifested in the outward life. God no longer has His rightful place in the soul, and the creature is preferred before Him. Bitter indeed are the consequences, for he is made to reap the sour fruits of his evil sowings. “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways” (Prov. 14:14). He no longer delights in the Lord or seeks His glory, but is occupied with his own wretchedness. The joy of the Lord is no longer his strength, nor does His peace rule in his

heart. A coldness in prayer seizes upon him, relish of the Word is lost, a burdened conscience is now his portion. “The way of the transgressor is. hard” (Prov. 13:15), whether it be trod by the converted or by the unconverted—double so to the former.

“But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth” (Jam. 3:14). Sad indeed is it that the Lord’s own people require such an exhortation as this; yet both the history of the past and the conditions now obtaining in the churches evince the need for it. In it, we are shown the acrid fruit which issues from that extreme austerity which is contrary to “the meekness of wisdom” of the preceding verse, namely, an unreadiness to forgive one another and live at peace with all men. There may be envy without contention, yet it is usually contention which makes the envying bitter; and, as John Calvin (1509-1564) pointed out, “That prevails not except when minds are so infatuated with the poison of malignity that they turn all things into bitterness.” Where there be such pride and animosity against any differing from you, boast not of it as though you were endowed with greater wisdom, wiser discernment or more zeal for the truth than others. Glory not in your shame. “Holy zeal and bitter envyings are as different as the flames of seraphim and the fire of hell” (Matthew Henry). That which produces breaches between Christians rarely proceeds from love to God, but is generally the overflow of gall and anger.

### **Sweet Things**

One of the accompaniments of the new birth is a spiritual palate, which enables one to savour the things that be of God. At regeneration, its favoured subjects receive not only eyes which are capable of seeing objects imperceptible to the natural man, and ears which hear the voice of God as He speaks to the soul, but also a new sense of taste, whereby things which were formerly insipid are now relished, and what before was agreeable is now loathed. An illustration of this is found in connection with the manna. The bread from heaven which God so graciously

provided for His people during their wilderness journeying was unto the children of Israel “like wafers made with honey” (Exod. 16:31), but unto the “mixed multitude” which accompanied them from Egypt, it was very different (Num. 11:4-6). It is because the unregenerate *lack* a spiritual palate that they enjoy not that which is so desirable unto the children of God. Hence, it is not surprising that they regard the testimonies borne by Christians unto the sweetness of God’s Word as a species of fanaticism. “The full soul loatheth an honeycomb” (Prov. 27:7): they who are full of self and the world find the honeycomb of the Gospel nauseating unto them.

“And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a sweet savour” (Gen. 8:20, 21). This is the first time the word “sweet” occurs in the Bible, and as might well be expected, it speaks loudly to us of Christ, for that which Noah had offered unto God upon the altar was a prefiguration of Him. As Thomas Scott (1747-1821) pointed out, “The smell of burning flesh could in itself be no more pleasing to God than the blood of bulls or of calves; but as it typified the sacrifice of Christ and expressed Noah’s faith and grateful love, the Lord accepted it.” As a figure of His Son’s death, Noah’s offering was a fragrant odour and perfume unto God. Proof of that is found in “Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour” (Eph. 5:2). As fragrant scents regale and refresh our senses, so did the sacrifice of Christ content God and give Him infinite pleasure. He was well pleased with Christ’s sacrifice because of the dignity of the Offerer, because of the spotless purity of His offering, because of the graces exercised by Him therein—His obedience to God (Phil. 2:8), faith in God (Heb. 2:13), love to God (John 14:31); and because it brought more glory unto Him than sin has dishonoured Him.

“And the LORD showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet” (Exod. 15:25).

Shortly after crossing the Red Sea, Israel met with a very disappointing and painful experience. They went for three days “and found no water”—adumbrating the fact that this scene affords nothing which can refresh the souls of God’s children. Like the Psalmist, he says, “my soul thirsteth for thee...in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is” (63:1). Presently the Israelites reached a place where there *was* a stream, but only to discover that they “could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter” (verse 23). A sore trial, a real test, was that! Three days’ journeying in the hot and sandy desert without finding water, and now that water was reached, it was undrinkable. How that shadows forth the inexperienced believer seeking some satisfaction from the things of this life, only to find them “bitter!” Alas, like we so often do when our carnal hopes are dashed, Israel murmured. Whereupon Moses cried unto the Lord, and He graciously “showed him a tree” which when cut down and cast into the bitter waters made them sweet. It was an emblem of the Tree of Life—the person (Psa. 1:3; Song 2:3) and work (1 Pet. 2:24) of Christ. Just in proportion as the saint regards his bitter trials and afflictions as so many opportunities for him to enter into “the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10) will they be made sweet to him.

“My meditation of him shall be sweet” (Psa. 104:34). Holy meditation is a most important means for promoting growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. God has so constituted us that, in the ordinary way of operation, the heart is affected as objects are set before the mind and subjects pondered: as thought is set in motion, the affections are stimulated—“While I was musing the fire burned!” The more the believer thinks upon the love of God, the more is the holy spark within him fanned into a flame. Some of our readers are unable, through ill health and age, to attend the preaching of the Word, and others have no access to any place where they could hear the unsearchable riches of Christ extolled; but they may in private have the most blessed communion, by engaging their hearts with Him. He is the One in



whom all our joys centre, and if we would become better acquainted with “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord,” then we must be more frequent in devout contemplations of Him. Ponder the perfections of His person, the glory of His mediatorial office, His finished work, His intercession, and your heart will be warmed, gratitude deepened, assurance increased, closer conformity to Him desired; and *He* will be honoured.

“How sweet are thy words unto my taste” (Psa. 119:103): not only pleasant to the ear, but delicious to the palate. Note how comprehensive is this eulogy: “David loved them each one individually, and the whole of them as a whole...he makes no distinction between promises and precepts, doctrines and threatenings: they are all included in God’s words, and all are precious in his esteem” (Charles H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892) None but a child of God could use such language, because none but he has a spiritual taste. But we may be yet more discriminating: only the Christian when in communion with God can truthfully make such an assertion. Thus that testimony supplies a criterion by which the believer may ascertain his spiritual condition. If this be our case, it indicates that the soul is in a healthy state. When it be otherwise with us, it is because our palate has been vitiated by the world and the flesh; and when such be the case, though the Word be read, it will be done formally and indolently, without mixing faith with it, with no personal appropriation, and therefore without joy. Where the Word be truly precious unto the heart, there is an inward experience, a spiritual relishing of it, which cannot be conveyed unto others by words.

“I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste” (Song 2:3). That is the testimony borne to Christ by the Church collectively, and by each saint individually who is enjoying communion with Him. In comparison with the lofty palm and the majestic cedar, the apple tree is of small dimensions and mean appearance. As such, it is a figure of Him who laid aside His glory and assumed a lowly place in this world.

But the fruits of His abasement and sufferings are inexpressibly precious to the believer. As the sin-burdened soul comes to Christ for rest, he finds Him to be the Man that is “as the shadow of a rock in a weary land,” and declares: “Thou hast been...a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat” (Isa. 32:2; 25:4), for He interposed between him and the fiery wrath of God. Christ has not only shadow to shelter, but also fruit to refresh. The fruit of His work: reconciliation to God, the gift of His Spirit, etc. The fruit of His lips: words of counsel, intimate communications. The fruit of His personal perfections. These are highly prized by the believer, and as he feeds and feasts thereon, he finds them most delectable. They are sweet to him because a miracle of grace has prepared his appetite to receive and welcome them.

“Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely” (Song 2:14). That is Christ’s commendation of and invitation to His spouse. Most blessed is it to observe not only that this is a term of endearment, but that the form assumed by the Spirit when He came on Christ (Matt. 3:16) is the emblem here chosen by Christ to represent those whom the Spirit indwells—“My dove.” First, He says, “Let me see thy countenance:” whether it be wet with the tears of godly sorrow or shining with joy. Second, “Let me hear thy voice,” in confession, prayer and praise. Third, He declares that her voice is sweet and her countenance comely unto Him. Christ takes great delight in His blood-bought people and will have them make very free with Him. What marvellous condescension on His part! What encouragement for us to lift up our heads, come boldly to His throne, pour out our hearts before Him. Christian reader, your voice is not only pleasing to Him when you are singing His praises, but it is also music as you pour out the grief of a contrite heart. Fear not to tell Him your secrets. Let Him also hear you commending Him to others.

“Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are *unto God* a sweet savour of Christ, in

them that are saved, *and* in them that perish” (2 Cor. 2:14, 15). Those words ought to be of great cheer unto many a despondent servant of His who is cast down because his preaching appears to be fruitless. Whether men listen or not, the proclamation of that name which is above every name is a continual incense before God! However unacceptable his ministry be unto a dead church, if the minister faithfully preach the person and work of Christ, it is “a sweet savour unto God.” Let the realization of this comfort and nerve afresh. If you be setting forth the glories of His Son, it is sweet to the Father. If the Christian reader is spared, and spends more time than previously in feeding on God’s Word, meditating on Christ, feasting on His perfections, then 1952 will be a *sweeter* year unto him.

## **New Things**

In writing upon things new and old, the question arises, What is the order in which they should be dealt with? Either is permissible according to taste, or for the purpose of emphasis, for no scriptural principle would be contravened whichever were given the preference. In our Bibles, the Old Testament comes before the New, and in the experience of a Christian, he is born naturally before he is born spiritually. Nevertheless, since our Lord said, “Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Matt. 13:52). We cannot err if we follow that classification. In view of the popular delusion of this generation, with its craze for what is novel and modern, and its contempt of that which is stable and ancient, it is perhaps necessary to point out that all new things are not good and desirable, nor all old things to be despised. For on the one hand, we read of “new gods,” which Israel wickedly followed (Judg. 5:8), and on the other, of “old paths” which we are bidden to ask for (Jer. 6:16). In our remarks, we shall dwell the longest on those which are least understood, seeking to furnish help where it is most needed.

1. *The new heart.* “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:25, 26). Whatever fulfilment that prediction may or may not have in connection with the Jews at some future day, it is made good in the experience of the regenerate in all ages. The language is, of course, highly figurative, nevertheless, it expresses simple but grand realities. It describes the essential features of that miracle of grace which is wrought within the people of God. First, there is an effectual application of the pure Word of God unto their souls, whereby they are cleansed from the love of sin and conformed unto His holiness. “The fear of the LORD is to depart from evil,” yea, “to hate evil” (Prov. 16:6; 8:13). When the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, its affections are drawn unto things above, and it finds its satisfaction in them.

Second, a new heart and spirit are assured. The heart is the cause of all motions and actions. By nature, it is a heart of stone—insensible, inflexible, impenitent, impervious to spiritual things, unmoved by mercies or judgments, invitations or warnings, dead and dry—fit emblem of the vile and inveterate *enmity* of fallen man against God. But when He quickens us, then does He make good that word, “I will give them an heart *to know me*” (Jer. 24:7). That is not a mere head knowledge of God, but an experiential one, which is accompanied by an approbation of Him, communion with Him, acknowledgment of Him; or, as Deuteronomy 30:6 says, “*To love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.*” That new heart is tender, warm, pliable. The “new spirit” signifies an enlightened understanding, a sensitive conscience, a submissive will. There is then an inward and universal change, producing a transforming and permanent effect. A change which brings its subject to serve God sincerely and cheerfully. Those gifts are the bestowments of

God's sovereign favour and are communicated by divine power. Nothing whatever is here attributed to man. God appropriates the whole work unto Himself. The imparting of a vital principle requires a supernatural Agent. To remove the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh is an act of omnipotence.

**2. *The new covenant.*** This was inaugurated and established by the Lord Jesus, being founded on the blood of atonement. Its contents are described in Hebrews 8:8-12, where Jeremiah 31:3-34 is quoted. At the time God gave that assurance through the prophet, the fleshly descendants of Abraham were divided into two hostile groups, with separate kings and centres of worship. They were antagonistic to each other, and as such strikingly adumbrated the great division between God's elect among the Jews and the Gentiles in their natural state and status (Eph. 2:14, 16). But just as God announced that the separate houses of Judah and Israel should "become one" (Ezek. 36:16), so His elect among Jews and Gentiles are made one by Christ (Eph. 2:14-18), and therefore are all born-again believers designated the "children and seed" of Abraham (Gal. 3:7, 29), and are "blessed with faithful Abraham" (Gal. 3:9). Thus, the house of Israel in Hebrews 8:10 is to be understood mystically and spiritually (compare with Rom. 2:28, 29; Gal. 6:16). That this new covenant is in force today is clear from, "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he *is* the mediator of a better covenant" (Heb. 8:6), from "This cup is the new testament in my blood" (Luke 22:20, compared with 1 Cor. 11:24, 25), and from "Wherefore the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us" (Heb. 10:15).

The question has been raised, both by Calvinists and Arminians, as to whether the promises of Hebrews 8:10-12 are absolute or conditional, and rarely has one answered to the satisfaction of the other. The former dwelling upon 2 Samuel 23:5, and the latter upon Isaiah 55:3, neither giving due weight to *both* of those passages. Personally, we would say that those promises are absolute as they were made by God to Christ—

conditional as they are made by Christ to us—to a full interest in them, faith and obedience are indispensable. To the sinner Christ says, “Incline your ear” (cease your rebellion and submit to My lordship), “and come unto me” (throw down the weapons of your warfare and cast yourself upon My mercy): “hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you” (Isa. 55:3). Human responsibility is there addressed and enforced. Our compliance with those terms is conversion. Christ will not disgrace His grace by entering into a covenant with those who are still defiant and impenitent. “The honour of God would fall to the ground if we should be pardoned without submission, without confession of past sins, or resolution of future obedience” (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677).

**3. *The new name.*** “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (Rev. 2:17). The “hidden manna” speaks of Christ’s feasting him with spiritual and inward refreshments—those enjoyments of Himself which the world knows nothing about. The giving of “a white stone” is a figure taken from a custom of the ancients, that being handed to those acquitted after trial, as a black one was to those condemned. Thus, it signified absolution from guilt. The “new name” tells of acceptance, as adopted ones take the name of the family into which they are adopted. The giving of a new name not only betokened a new beginning, but carried with it a high honour, as is clear from the cases of Abram (Gen. 17:5), Jacob (Gen. 32:5), Simon (John 1:42), and Saul when commended to a new work (Acts 13:9). The new name is an expression of the Lord’s personal delight in the individual overcomer. No one else knows it because the ground of this knowledge is hid in his own consciousness and experience. In this world, his name is of no account, but then he will be owned by the Lord of glory, and be advanced to a new dignity.

**4. *The new song.*** The fundamental passage on this is Psalm

40:3, where the speaker is the Lord Jesus. In the preceding verse, He owns the Father's action in bringing Him up out of a horrible pit and miry clay, setting His feet upon a rock, and establishing His goings. Thus, it is the resurrected Christ who is in view. On the eve of His death, at the Passover supper, He had sung one of the old Psalms (Matt. 26:30), but upon His triumph over the grave a new song was put into His mouth, "even praise unto [not simply "His," but] *our* God." Thus, the members are conformed to their Head in this too, and exhorted, "O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things" (Psa. 98:1). This is a call to the renewed soul to celebrate the honour of the Lamb, who fulfilled the law on his behalf, put away all his sins by the sacrifice of Himself, and brought in an everlasting righteousness for him. Then has He not given him abundant cause to rejoice and to laud his wonderful Saviour? The Son of God took upon Him the form of a servant, became the poorest of the poor, suffered, and died in his stead. Then let him raise unto Him a song of loving gratitude and praise. Let him make melody in his heart unto the Lord, let him give vent to his joy (and not stifle it), let hosannahs resound unto the Conqueror of his foes. The angels celebrated the wondrous work of God in creation, "The morning stars sang together" (Job 38:7), but the Church has a far grander cause to hymn His praise, even redemption. The new song will be sung in heaven (Rev. 5:9), but the saints are learning to lisp it even now.

**5. *The new life.*** "That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4)—abstaining from the things which displease, practicing what honours Him. Thanksgiving is to be translated into thanksgiving, *showing forth* the virtues of "Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

**6. *New mercies.*** "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed....They are new every morning" (Lam. 3:22, 23). Each

fresh day brings fresh proofs of His unfailing compassions, chief of which is His renewing us in the inner man day by day (2 Cor. 4:16).

**7. *The new earth.*** “We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). The question is often asked, “When will the prayer be answered and God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10)? When the new earth replaces the old one, for *there*, “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9).

## **Old Things**

**1. *The old man.*** “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom. 6:6). Alas, how few of God’s people today *do* “know this” and enjoy the settled peace which accompanies a scriptural apprehension thereof. It is one of those profound doctrinal statements in which this epistle abounds. It has to do with the objective side of things and not the subjective, having reference to a past judicial transaction and not to a present experiential process or future attainment. In the preceding verses, the apostle had affirmed the identification of believers with Christ, their being legally one with Him in His death and resurrection. Here he states a threefold consequence thereof. First, their old man was crucified with Christ—the aorist tense is used, denoting a completed act in the past. According to the righteous judgment of God, when Christ was crucified, all His people were associated with and included in His penal sufferings and death. It is important to note that the verb is in the passive voice, for this crucifixion was accomplished wholly outside of themselves in the person of their Head. Nowhere in Scripture are Christians exhorted to crucify themselves, for it is a form of death which cannot be self-inflicted. What is required from them is that they reckon or account themselves to be dead indeed unto sin (Rom. 6:11), and act accordingly—denying self, mortifying



their lusts, taking up their cross, and following the holy example which Christ has left them.

Most of the commentators regard the “old man” as synonymous with our corruptions, but against this there are weighty objections. It fails to discriminate between the person himself and his depraved nature—a difference which Paul was most careful to preserve throughout (Rom. 7:15-25). Moreover, the “old man” is distinguished from the “body of sin” in the next clause; so too in “the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph. 4:22). No, “our old man” is what we were from the very beginning of our existence, before divine grace found us, namely *our Adam standing*, our natural selves; and *that* was, in the reckoning of God, executed upon the cross. It was so in order that “the body of sin might be destroyed.” The body of sin is our evil nature, the “flesh” of John 3:6, that which defiled our natural selves. It is called “the body of this death” in Romans 7:24, where the reference is not to the physical body, but to that which corrupts it. Sin is here personified, called a “body” because it is an organized entity, comprising a complete system of unholy dispositions, diffusing its pernicious influence through all the faculties of our being. Again, sin is here designated a “body” in keeping with the previous clause, where “crucifixion” is in view: in Colossians 3:5, some of its hideous “members” are described. But what is meant by “that the body of sin might be *destroyed*?” Not annihilated, but annulled.

Because of the believer’s federal union with Christ, he was “co-crucified,” for such is the literal meaning of the Greek. God’s *design* in that arrangement was that his sin, root and branch, should be made an end of in His sight; that is, as He is considered in His official character as the Judge. The object of this was that his sin should be done away with entirely. In the original, it is the strongest possible word: the same as in “the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26). That body of sin and death, which is such a grief unto the Christian, is, by virtue of his co-crucifixion with Christ, as much destroyed in the eyes of the

divine law as death will be destroyed when it is swallowed up in victory. In 1 Corinthians 1:28, the same Greek word is rendered “bring to nought,” in Galatians 3:17, “make...of none effect,” in 2 Timothy 1:10, “abolished,” in 2 Corinthians 3:14, “done away.” The *effect* of this is “that henceforth we should not serve sin,” or more literally “be slaves to sin.” The full wages of sin have been paid, and therefore the believer is freed from his old master. The body of sin can no longer be the ruler of those who died in and with Christ, for in that death the sceptre of the tyrant was taken away. Sin still puts in its claims, but it has no authority to enforce them. Christ alone has the right to govern us. Having been made free from sin, we have become servants to God (Rom. 6:22). To Him alone we are to yield ourselves, refusing sin’s solicitations.

Now concerning *our apprehension thereof*, “Knowing this,” says the apostle. The only way we can do so is by divine revelation. We know nothing about our co-crucifixion with Christ by actual experience. There is not a saint on earth whose own history informs him that his whole body of sin has been brought to naught, made of none effect, abolished, done away. And from his daily inward conflicts, it appears very much to the contrary that he has been liberated from sin. Nevertheless, these things are so, though not as matters of perception but of reception—by believing them to be so because God affirms them, setting to our seal that He is true (John 3:33). Thus “*knowing* that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more” (Rom. 6:9), we know that not by our feelings or through our senses, but by the sure testimony of God. So it is with the three things stated in Rom. 6:6. It is in no wise a matter of practical acquaintance, for neither the work of Christ for us nor the work of the Spirit in us has effected any improvement or change in our sinful nature. Every believer died (legally) with Christ on the cross, for he was federally in Him as represented by Him. The condemning sentence of the Law was executed upon him. Again, “We *know* that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have [so infallibly certain is it]...an house not made with hands,

eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). And again, “*Know ye not that ye shall judge angels?*” (1 Cor. 6:3). Those are certainties of faith!

“Lie not one to another, seeing that *ye have* put off the “old man” with his deeds” (Col. 3:9). This presents quite another aspect of our subject, though one that is closely related to the former, growing out of it. As the result of Christ’s work for His people, the Holy Spirit is sent to them, and one of the effects of His regenerating them is that they are brought to loathe themselves and their former manner of life. At conversion, they put off the old man by renouncing the world, the flesh and the devil, and by resolving to live a new life unto the glory of their new Master. Their language then is, “O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but [henceforth] by thee only will we make mention of thy name” (Isa. 26:13). They are thoroughly ashamed of themselves for having served such evil tyrants, and now determine, by grace, to render submission unto God alone. Now, says the apostle, lie not one to another, and eschew whatever is inconsistent with and contradictory to the profession you have made. Refuse to yield obedience to any of the dictates of your old self.

“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph. 4:22). That is the final reference to the “old man,” and it gives completeness to the others. The first is a doctrinal statement treating of the legal aspect. The second is a factual reference to what we did at our conversion. This is a practical exhortation bidding us to shun everything incompatible with the resolutions we made when we first gave ourselves unto the Lord. We are to abandon our previous ways as a worn-out filthy garment that is thrown away. That outward conduct which issues from our old self must be eschewed, and inward desires after forbidden things sternly denied. All behaviour that conflicts with a Christian profession is to be studiously avoided, all carnal affections unsparingly mortified.

**2. *Old leaven.*** “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye *are* unleavened” (1 Cor. 5:7). Taken by itself, that verse appears to present a paradox, for what occasion is there to purge out leaven if they already be “unleavened?”—if unleavened, what old leaven could be purged out? Yet in the light of the distinctions the Scriptures themselves draw regarding the “old man,” there should be no difficulty in understanding this passage, and though it be couched in typical language, its meaning is easily interpreted. Allusion is made to the Passover feast, when every Israelite was required to seek out all leaven and put it away from his house (Exod. 12:15, 19; 13:7). Leaven is the symbol of sin, and the apostle applies the type to the local assembly, calling upon it to cast out everything offensive to God and contrary to His holiness, thus observing a strict discipline (verse 13) and maintaining Gospel purity. The Corinthians had been sadly remiss in this, allowing both moral (verses 1-5) and doctrinal evil (15:12).

The apostle enforced his exhortation for the local church to put matters right by a number of weighty considerations. First, he reminded that that “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (verse 6)—if evil be tolerated, it leads to more ungodliness. The presence of a worldling in their midst would corrupt the believers by his evil example. Second, by their fidelity thus, they would be “a new lump” (verse 7) and not a heterogeneous mixture of regenerate and unregenerate souls. Third, they were “unleavened” (verse 7) in Christ, in their standing before God, and they were obligated to make that good practically in their behaviour. Fourth, the sacrifice of Christ their Passover (verse 7) demanded this (see Titus 2:14). Fifth, neither our “feast” of communion with God nor the Lord’s supper can be observed with leavened bread (verse 8).

**3. *Old sins.*** “But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Pet. 1:9). Those words occur in a passage of deep importance practically. Verses 5-7 contain an exhortation for the

Christian to give all diligence to the cultivation of his graces, and verses 8 and 9 describe the results of a compliance or non-compliance therewith. There is no remaining stationary in the spiritual life. If we do not advance, we backslide. The “these things” in verses 8 and 9 are the seven graces enumerated in 5-7. To “lack” them is not necessarily to be totally devoid of the same, but to be careless and remiss concerning them—as *not to use* the grace already bestowed is, in the language of Scripture, not having it (Luke 8:18; Matt. 25:29). I only possess as much truth as really possesses me—influences and regulates me. Regeneration imposes an obligation to cultivate our spiritual life to the utmost possible extent, to exercise the greatest diligence in striving after holiness and fruitfulness. If we fail to do so, then our growth will quickly be arrested. As yet, there may be nothing wrong in the outward life, but there is an inward torpor and non-enjoyment of God and the things of God, and sad will be the consequences.

“He that lacketh these things is blind.” Not absolutely so, as is the case with the unregenerate, but relatively, as is indicated in the clause immediately following. Clearness or dimness of spiritual vision is inseparably connected with a holy or unholy life. As our Lord declared, “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). To follow Christ is to commit ourselves unreservedly unto His guidance, both in doctrine and in practice, to be regulated by the example He has left us, to yield to His authority and be governed by His precepts. By so doing, we have “the light of life”—not only an illuminated path, perception of our duty, but joy of soul. Or, keeping more closely to the language of the context, clearness or dimness of spiritual vision is determined by the extent to which we heed or ignore the exhortation of verses 5-7. There is a mist over divine and eternal things when faith is not in exercise, and we become near-sighted. This is clear from the contrast presented between “cannot see afar off,” and “These all died in faith, not having received the

[fulfilment of the] promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them and embraced them” (Heb. 11:13). Just as our Lord said of believing and obedient Abraham, he “rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it [thousands of years beforehand], and was glad” (John 8:56). He enjoyed “the light of life” (John 8:12).

“And hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” That statement clearly implies that the Lord’s people ought not to forget such a favour, that there is a danger of their so doing, yea, that if a certain course be followed such will be the outcome. If they yield to, instead of mortify, their lusts, the understanding will be darkened, the conscience will become calloused, the affections cold. The “forgotten” here, like the “blindness” of the first clause, is not to be understood absolutely, but relatively, for the divine forgiveness of sins is a blissful experience which is never totally erased from consciousness while memory is retained. What then is signified? This—There is a *practical* “forgetting.” Neglect of the means of grace and carelessness of our conduct are utterly incompatible with a heart realization of the awful costliness of that sacrifice by which alone sin can be purged. Hence, the closeness of the connection between the two things. If I turn again to folly (Psa. 85:8) and fashion my ways according to the former lusts (1 Pet. 1:14), I shall be purblind, deficient in discernment, dim of vision, with no clear sight of heaven and things to come, in the sense that they have any power to move and mould me. Likewise, Calvary and its pardoning mercy will no longer engage my thoughts. Such a one needs to repent, return to Christ, and beg Him to anoint his eyes with eye-salve that he may see clearly again (Rev. 3:18).

But, alas, our lot is cast in a day when sin is regarded lightly, and even many professing Christians refer to their early lives with little or no apparent sense of shame and self-abhorrence. Yet this is scarcely to be wondered at, for there are preachers (styling themselves “Bible teachers”) who tell the Lord’s people that God remembers their sins and iniquities no more, and that *they* should not do so. But that by no means follows. Though God has

forgiven me, I can never forgive myself for my past wickedness. Yea, if I grow in grace, I shall have a deeper realization of its enormity. Sins *are to be* called to mind, for my humbling, my watchfulness against a repetition thereof, my gratitude for the amazing grace that cleansed one so foul. “Thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed” (Ezek. 36:31). So too the New Testament calls upon us to remember what we were “in time past” (Eph. 2:11, 12), that repentance may be deepened by a renewed sense of the same. If we do not, God is likely to suffer the devil to terrify the conscience by reviving the burden of old sins. “Remember not the sins of my youth,” prayed David (Psa. 25:7), which was not only an acknowledgment of the same, but a suitable petition when the chastening rod of God be upon us. Poor Job was made to possess the iniquities of his youth (Job 13:26).

**4. *Old bottles.*** “And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish” (Luke 5:37). The container must be suited to the contents. The bottles here alluded to were of skin—bladders—and when new wine fermented, they would burst. It was an emblematical representation of the impossibility of a conjunction between the new covenant and the old one, which was ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13). Christ had come to inaugurate a better economy than the Mosaic, and Judaism was quite unable to contain the blessings and privileges of Christianity. The untenability of such a fusion of them is shown in Galatians. But our Lord’s figure has also an *individual* application and illustrates the necessity of regeneration. The heart must be renewed before it is fitted to receive spiritual things. Grace cannot be acceptable to a self-righteous person, nor the humbling principles of the Gospel to pride. The pure milk of the Word (1 Pet. 2:2) is repulsive to those who crave the things of this world. Love has no room in a heart filled with enmity. Comfort is for those who mourn. Holiness is not suited to the carnal man, nor can spiritual duties be performed by those who

are unspiritual.

**5. *Old things.*** “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Probably there is not a verse in the New Testament less understood than that, nor one which has occasioned the saints so much anguish, through their misapprehension of it. It is commonly applied to regeneration, but Christian experience uniformly refutes such a view, for it finds to its sorrow that those words describe neither all things without nor all things within them, the godliest having to lament, “When I would do good, evil is present with me” (Rom. 7:21). The believer discovers that evil thoughts and imaginations *still* beset him, that old inclinations and temptations are still present, that sinful lusts and desires constantly harass, and, though he prays against and resists them, he still yields to old habits. But 2 Corinthians 5:17 describes not an inward change, but a *dispensational one*—the old covenant giving way to the new, Judaism being displaced by Christianity. The “middle wall of partition” (Eph. 2:14) between Jew and Gentile has passed away. So too have circumcision, the paschal feast, the Levitical priesthood, the seventh-day Sabbath. “All things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17), baptism, the Lord’s supper, Christ’s priesthood and the Lord’s day taking their places.

**6. *Olden times.*** “Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? For thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this” (Eccl. 7:10)—the Hebrew word for “former” is rendered “old time” in 2 Samuel 20:18. In view of those plain words, how many of our readers can plead guiltless? We wonder what percentage of them definitely realized there was such a prohibition in God’s Word. Anyone who has read extensively knows that in every century and each generation men have spoken of “the good old days,” and referred to their own as “hard” or “evil” times. In most instances, it was owing to ignorance of the past and a spirit of peevishness in the present. Human nature has been the same all through history. In every age, the mercies of God have far outnumbered His judgments. It



is an undervaluing of our blessings, proneness to murmur against divine providence, which make us draw odious comparisons. Here too let us forget the things which are behind and press forward unto those before (Phil. 3:12-14).

**7. *Old age.*** This is something which is contemplated with dismay by the majority of human beings, for they realize it will put a period to indulging in carnal pleasures. But such should be far from the case with the believer, for each year that passes brings him that much nearer an entrance into heaven. Yes, but it also means increasing infirmities, and perhaps total helplessness. By no means always so, for many retain their faculties to the end. Yet even so, has not God promised, “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)? Say with the Psalmist, “My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever” (73:26). And remember 2 Corinthians 4:16.

