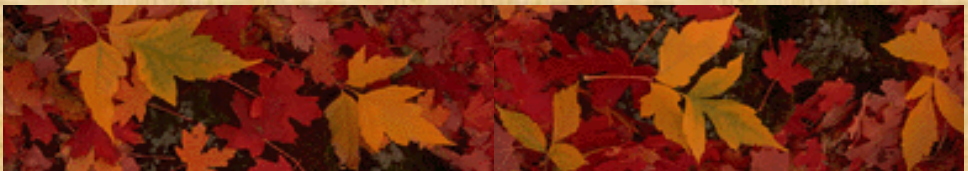


# **ENJOYING GOD'S BEST**

## **Part Two**



**A. W. Pink**



# Enjoying God's Best

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### Recovery of God's Best

We have considered various cases, both of individuals and corporate companies, who *missed* God's best, and saw how ill it fared with them. We pointed out how that if we judge ourselves for our sins we shall *escape* God's chastening rod. We now turn to the question, Is it possible for a Christian who has missed God's best to be *recovered* to full communion with Him and restored to His providential smile? Possible, yes; easy, no. Before we show how that possibility may be realized, let us solemnly ponder what brought that poor soul into such a sorry plight, a plight into which both writer and reader will certainly fall unless we are ever on our prayerful guard. The grand but simple secret of a healthy and prosperous spiritual life is to *continue* as we began (Col. 2:6): by daily trusting in the sufficiency of Christ's blood and yielding ourselves to His lordship, seeking to please and honour Him in all things. As the believer walks with Christ in the path of obedience, following the example which He has left him, peace will possess his soul and joy will fill his heart, and the smile of God will be upon him. But unless he, by grace, fulfil those conditions, such will not be his happy portion.

If the believer slackens in maintaining daily fellowship with Christ and drawing from His fullness, if he fails to feed regularly on the Word and becomes less frequent in his approaches to the throne of grace, then the pulse of his spiritual life will beat more feebly and irregularly. Unless he meditates oft on the love of God and keeps fresh before his heart the humiliation and sufferings of Christ on his behalf, his affections will soon cool, his relish for spiritual things will wane, and obedience will neither be so easy nor so pleasant. If such a spiritual decline be neglected or excused, it will not be long ere indwelling sin gains the upper hand over his graces, and his heart will more and more glide imperceptibly into carnality and worldliness. Worldly pleasures,

which previously repelled and were perceived to be vanities, will begin to attract. Worldly pursuits, which had been only a means, will become his end, absorbing more and more of his attention and having a higher value in his eyes. Or worldly cares, which he had cast upon the Lord, will now oppress and weigh him down. And unless there be a humbling of himself before God (and His providence hinder), he will soon be found in the ways of open transgression. Backsliding begins in the *heart!*

The case of a backslider is much more serious than that of one who has been “overtaken in a fault” (Gal. 6:1). For with him it is not a matter of a sudden surprisal and a single stumble, but rather of a steady deterioration and definite departure from the Lord. Nor is it, in its early stages, manifested openly, and hence his brethren may be quite unaware of it. A secret canker of unwatchfulness and coldness has infected him: he has yielded to a spirit of laxity and self-indulgence. When first aware of his decline, instead of being alarmed, he ignored it; instead of weeping over it before God, he went on in his carnality, until his graces became inoperative and all power to resist the devil was gone. With such the Holy Spirit is grieved and His quickening influences are withdrawn and His comforts are withheld. There are indeed degrees of backsliding: with some it is partial, with others total; yet while one remains in that case, it is impossible for the saint to determine which; nor is there anything in Scripture which gives a warrantable sense of security unto such a one, or which countenances any man to be easy in his sins; but very much the contrary.

Inexpressibly sad is the case of one who continues for a season in a backslidden state. He has displeased God, dishonoured Christ, in many instances has become a stumbling-block to fellow Christians, especially to younger ones. He has made himself miserable. He has sinned and repented not; departed from God, and confessed it not. Formerly he walked in happy fellowship with God, the light of His countenance shone upon him, and that peace which passeth all understanding possessed his soul. But now the joy of salvation is no more his portion. He has lost his relish for the Word, and prayer has become a burden. He is out of

touch with God, for his iniquities have separated him from Him (Isa. 59:2), and he can find no rest unto his soul. He has been spoilt for the world and cannot now find even that measure of satisfaction in carnal things which the ungodly do. Wretched indeed is his plight. "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his *own* ways" (Prov. 14:14): it cannot be otherwise, for he no longer has any delight in the ways of God. His own backslidings reprove him, so that he is made to know and see what "an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from the Lord his God" (Jer. 2:19), and thereby miss His best.

Yet, pitiful though his case be, it is not hopeless, for the call goes forth "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord" (Jer. 3:14). Nevertheless, response thereto is not the simple matter that lookers-on might suppose. It is very much easier to depart from God than to return unto Him. Not that His terms of recovery are rigorous, but because the soul is straitened. It is difficult for the backslider to perceive the nature and seriousness of his condition, for sin has a blinding and hardening effect, and the more he falls under the power of it, the less does he discern the state he is in. Even when his eyes begin to be opened again, there is an absence of real desire for recovery, for sin has a paralyzing influence, so that its victims are "at ease in Zion." Even David was insensible of his awful plight when Nathan first approached him, and it was not until the prophet pointedly declared "Thou art the man" that Satan's spell over him was broken. There is therefore much to be thankful for when such are awakened from their slumber and made to hear that word "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings" (Jer. 3:22).

But even then the soul is reluctant to meet God's terms. If nothing more were required than a lip acknowledgment of his offences and a return to outward duties, no great difficulty would be experienced; but to really fulfil the Divine conditions for restoration is a very different matter. As John Owen affirmed, "Recovery from backsliding is the hardest task in the Christian religion; one which few make either comfortable or honourable work of." There has to be an asking, a seeking, a knocking, if the door of deliverance is to be opened to him. As John Brine (whose

works were favourably reviewed in the *Gospel Standard*) wrote to God's people two hundred years ago, "Much labour and diligence are required unto this. It is not complaining of the sickly condition of our souls which will effect this cure: confession of our follies that have brought diseases upon us, though repeated ever so often, will avail nothing toward the removal of them. If we intend the recovery of our former health and vigour, we must *act* as well as complain and groan." Let us now endeavour to point out how God requires such a one *to* "act."

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13) epitomizes both sides of the case. Sin is a disease of the soul, and (like a bodily one) by concealing it, we make it increase and become desperate. As the Puritan, Joseph Caryl, pointed out, "Sin increases two ways in the concealment of it. First, in its *guilt*. The obligation to punishment takes stronger hold upon the soul, and every man is bound the faster with the chains of darkness by how much more he labours to keep his sins in the dark. The longer a sin remains on the conscience unpardoned, the more does the guilt of it increase. Second, in the filth and *contagion* of it, in the strength and power of it. It grows more master, and masterly, and at last raves and rages, commands and carries all before it." To "cover" our sins is a refusal to bring them out into the light by an honest confession of the same unto God; in the case of our fellows, refusing to acknowledge our offences unto those we have wronged. This reprehensible hiding of sin is an adding of sin unto sin, and is a certain preventative of prosperity, and if persisted in will cover the perpetrator with shame and confusion for ever.

To "cover" sin is to hide it within our own bosoms, instead of openly acknowledging it. Thus it was with Achan even when the tribes were solemnly arraigned before Joshua and Eleazar, the high priest: he solemnly maintained silence until his crime was publicly exposed. Some seek to conceal their sins by framing excuses and attempting a self-extenuation: they seek to throw the blame upon their circumstances, their fellows, or Satan—upon anything or anyone except *themselves!* Others proceed to a still worse device, and seek to cloak their sin by a lie, denying their

guilt. As did Cain, for when God made inquisition for blood and inquired of him “Where is Abel thy brother?” he answered “I know not.” So too Gehazi blankly denied his wrong when charged by Elisha (2 Kings 5:25). In like manner acted Ananias and Sapphira. Three things induce men to make coverings for their sins. First, *pride*. Man has such high thoughts of himself that when guilty of the basest things, he is too self-opinionated to own them. Second, *unbelief*. Those who have not faith to believe that *God* can and will cover confessed sins, vainly attempt to do so themselves. Third, *shame and fear* cause many to hide their sins. Sin is such a hideous monster they will not own it as *theirs*.

“But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” Confession of sin is an indispensable part of repentance, and without repentance there can be no remission (Acts 3:19). “I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Psa. 32:5)—the pardon was upon his confession. Those who are so convicted of their sins as to be humbled and sorrowed by a sight and sense of them, will not hide them out of sight. Nor will their confession be merely a formal one of the lips, but rather the sobbings of a contrite heart. And instead of generalizing, there will be a particularizing; instead of seeking to excuse or gloss over the offence, it will be painted in its true colours and its aggravations frankly owned. There will be an acknowledgment of the fact and of the fault: an unsparing self-condemnation. The language of David in the opening verses of Psalm 51 will be found most suited to his case. The sin or sins will be confessed sincerely, contritely, fully, with a self-abasement and self-loathing. The cry will be made “O Lord, pardon mine iniquity for it *is great*” (Psa. 25:11).

“And forsake them.” To “forsake” our sins is a voluntary and deliberate act. It signifies to hate and abandon them in our affections, to repudiate them by our wills, to refuse to dwell upon them in our minds and imaginations with any pleasure or satisfaction. It necessarily implies that we renounce them, and are resolved by God’s grace to make the utmost endeavour to avoid any repetition of them. “We must keep at a distance from those

persons and snares which have drawn us into instances of folly, which have occasioned that disorder which is the matter of our complaint. Without this we may multiply acknowledgments and expressions of concern for our past miscarriages to no purpose at all. It is very great folly to think of regaining our former strength so long as we embrace and dally with those objects through whose evil influence we have fallen into a spiritual decline. It is not our bewailing the pernicious effects of sin that will prevent its baleful influence upon us for time to come, except we are determined to *forsake* that to which is owing our melancholy disease” (John Brine). There must be a complete break from all that poisons the soul.

But suppose the saint *does not* promptly thus confess and forsake his sins, then what? Why, in such a case, he will “not prosper:” there will be no further growth in grace, nor will the providential smile of God be upon him. ‘The Holy Spirit is grieved, and will suspend His gracious operations within his soul, and henceforth his “way” will be made “hard” (Prov. 13:15). Such was the experience of David: “When I kept silence, my bones [a figure of the supports of the soul] waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture [or vigour or freshness] is turned into the drought of summer” (Psa. 32:3, 4). Sin is a pestilential thing which saps our spiritual vitality. Though David was silent as to confession, he was not so as to sorrow. God’s hand smote him so that he was made to groan under His chastening rod. Nor did he obtain any relief until he humbled himself before God by confessing and forsaking his sins. Not that there is anything meritorious in such acts which entitles their performer to mercy, but this is the holy order which God has established. He will not connive at our sins, but withholds His mercy until we take sides with Him in the hatred of them.

“If My people which are called by My name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:24). This passage shows us, first, that God sends temporal judgments upon His people

because of their sins. Second, it makes known what they are to do when His rod is upon them. Third, it contains a precious promise for faith to lay hold of. Let us carefully note what was required from them. First, “If My people shall humble themselves,” which is similar to the “judge ourselves” in 1 Corinthians 11:31, but here when chastisement is upon them. Leviticus 26:41 casts light upon it: “if . . . they *accept* the punishment of their iniquity,” which is the opposite of asking, what have I done to occasion this? “After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great trespass, seeing that Thou our God hast punished us *less* than our iniquities *deserve*” (Ezra 9:13) illustrates. David “humbled” himself when he owned, “I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me” (Psa. 119:75). He took sides with God against himself, and acknowledged his unrighteousness.

Until the stricken one has humbled himself it is vain to think of proceeding farther, for pride and impenitence bar any approaches unto the Holy One. But “if” we *have* duly “humbled” ourselves, second, “and pray.” Only as we take our place in the dust before Him can we truly do so. And for what will such a one make request? Surely for a deeper sense of God’s holiness and of his own vileness: for a broken and contrite heart. Accompanying his “humbling” and as an expression thereof, there will be the penitent confession, and that will be followed by a begging for faith in God’s mercy and a hope of cleansing and restoration. Third, “and seek my face,” which goes farther than “and pray:” expressing diligence, definiteness, and fervour. The omniscient One cannot be imposed upon by mere lip-service, but requires the heart. There has to be a face-to-face meeting with the One we have displeased: He will not gloss over our sins; nor must we. Hosea 14:2, 3, should be made use of, for the Lord has there made known the very words which we may appropriately use on such occasions. Fourth, “and turn from their wicked ways” (which had brought judgment upon them) has the same force as “forsake” our sins in Proverbs 28:13.

“Then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” Here is the gracious promise. But mark well



its opening “Then:” only when we have fully met its conditions. We have no warrant to look for its fulfilment until its qualifying terms are observed by us. Note, too, its blessed scope: a hearing from God is obtained, His forgiveness is assured, and His healing is available for faith to claim. Say, Lord I have by Thy grace, and to the best of my poor ability humbled myself, sought Thy face, and renounced my wicked ways; now do as Thou hast said: “*heal my land*”—whether it be my body, my loved one, or my estate. Remove Thy rod, and let Thy providential smile come upon me again. Make a believing use of and plead before God the promises of Hosea 14:4-8! “According unto your faith be it unto you” (Matt. 9:29) is most pertinent at this point. God is pledged to honour faith, and never does He fail those who trust Him fully; no, not when they count upon Him to work a miracle for them, as this writer can humbly but thankfully testify. How many Christians live below their privileges!

“Jehovah-rophi” (“the LORD that healeth thee:” Ex. 15:26) is as truly one of the Divine titles as “Jehovah-tsidkenu” (“THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS:” Jer. 23:6), yet how very few of His own people count upon Him as such; but instead, act like worldlings in such a crisis and put their confidence in human physicians. Is it possible for one who through long-continued self-indulgence has missed God’s best and brought down upon himself and family temporal adversity, to be fully recovered and restored to His favour? Who can doubt it in the light of this precious, but little-known promise, “I will restore to you the years the locusts hath eaten” (Joel 2:25)! Is not the One with whom we have to do “the God of *all* grace” (1 Peter 5:10); then who is justified in placing any limitation thereon! Yet, let it not be overlooked that Divine grace ever works “through righteousness” (Rom. 5:21) and never at the expense of it, as it would if God were to make light of sin and condone our transgressions. And let it also be carefully borne in mind that the Divine promises are addressed *to faith*, and must be personally appropriated by us in childlike confidence if we are to enjoy the good of them. “All things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23).

Let the reader turn to the prophet Joel and ponder the whole of

chapter 1 and the first eleven verses of 2. Israel had sinned grievously and repeatedly, and the Lord had smitten them severely. But at 2:12-13, we read, “Therefore [in view of these chastisements, particularly the plague of locusts] also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. And rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.” Then, because in this instance the whole nation was involved, the Lord gave orders for them to “Sanctify a fast” and to “call a solemn assembly,” bidding “the ministers of the Lord weep before the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach;” assuring them “*Then* will the Lord be jealous for His land, and pity His people,” promising “I will send you corn and wine and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith...I will *remove* the northern army [His scourge]...Fear not O land, be glad and rejoice for the Lord will do great things” (2:15-21).

Then follow those blessed words, “Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God...And I will *restore* to you the years that the locusts hath eaten.” Upon their compliance with those aforementioned requirements of God, that promise was left for faith to lay hold of and for hope to count upon. And think you, my reader, that the promise was placed on record only for the benefit of those who lived thousands of years ago? Surely, we have good reason to say, as the apostle did in another connection, “It was not written for his sake alone...but *for us also*” (Rom. 4:23-24). Yes, nevertheless, it avails us nothing unless faith lays hold of and makes it our own. Once more we quote that declaration “according to *your faith* be it unto you,” reverently reminding the Calvinistic reader that those are not the words of James Arminius, but of God the Son. If ever there is one time more than another when we have need to cry “Lord, increase our faith” (Luke 17:5), it is when we are pleading 1 John 1:9, and more especially when looking to God for a full restoration to His best and counting upon His fulfilling Joel 2:25, unto us.

## Objections

Many other passages might be quoted, both from Old and New Testaments, which illustrate the principle and fact which we have demonstrated, wherein we have shown that if we conduct ourselves contrary to the revealed will of God we shall certainly suffer for it both in soul and in body, that if we follow a course of self-pleasing we shall deprive ourselves of those spiritual and temporal blessings which the Word of God promises to those whose lives are ordered by its precepts. The teaching of Holy Writ is too clear to admit of any doubt that it makes a very real and marked difference whether a Christian's ways please or displease the righteous Ruler of this world: the difference of whether God be for him or against him—not in the absolute sense, but in His governmental and providential dealings. Sufficient should have been adduced to convince any candid mind that God acts towards His saints today on precisely the same basis as He did with them under the old economy, that His ways with them are regulated by the same principles now as then. This supplies a solution to many a problem and explains not a little in God's dealings with us—as it furnishes the key to Jacob's chequered life, and shows why the chastening rod of God fell so heavily upon David and his family.

Nevertheless much of what has been presented is no doubt new and strange to many, if not to most of our readers. Alas, that it should be so, for what can be of greater practical importance than for the Christian to be instructed in how to please God and have His providential smile upon his life? What is more needed today than to warn him against the contrary, specifying what will forfeit the same; and to make known the way of recovery to one who *has* missed God's best? How very much better for preachers to devote themselves unto *such* subjects, rather than culling sensational items from the newspapers or the radio to "illustrate" their vain speculations upon Prophecy. So too, how much more profitable than for them to deliver abstract disquisitions upon what are termed "the doctrines of grace," or uttering contentious declamations against those who repudiate the same. The *practical*

side of the truth is sadly neglected today, and in consequence not only are many of God's dear children living far below their privileges, but they have never been taught what those privileges are, nor what is required in order for them to enjoy the same in this life.

Since the ground we have been covering is so unfamiliar to many, we felt it would not be satisfactory for us to end here. Though what we have advanced is so clearly and fully based upon and confirmed by the teaching of God's Word, yet probably various questions have arisen in the minds of different readers to which they would welcome an answer, difficulties raised in their thoughts which they would like to have removed. It is only right that we should squarely face the principal objections which are likely to be made against what we have said. Yet, let it be pointed out, first, that no objection brought against anything which is clearly established from the Word can possibly invalidate it, for Scripture never contradicts itself. And second, that our inability to furnish a satisfactory solution is no proof that our teaching is erroneous—a child can ask questions which no adult can answer. In all the ways and works of God there is, to us, an element of *mystery*: necessarily so, for the finite cannot comprehend the infinite. The wisest among God's saints and servants now see through a glass darkly and know but "in part," (1 Corinthians 13:12) and therefore it is their wisdom to pray daily "that which I see not, teach Thou me" (Job 34:32).

Yet, while acknowledging that there *is* an element of mystery, profound and impenetrable, that is far from saying that God has left His people in darkness, or that they have neither the capacity nor the means of knowing scarcely anything about the principles which regulate the Most High in His dealings with the children of men. If, on the one hand, it be true that His judgments "are a great deep" (Psa. 36:6), that "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known" (Psa. 77:19) to carnal reason; on the other hand, we are told "He discovereth deep things out of darkness" (Job 12:22) and "He *revealeth* the deep and secret things" (Dan. 2:22). While it be true that God's judgments are unsearchable and His ways "past finding

out” (Rom. 11:33) by human wisdom; yet it is also true, blessedly true, that “in Thy light shall we see light” (Psa. 36:9), that “He *made known* His ways unto Moses” (Psa. 103:7). In His Word the Lord has been pleased to make known unto us not a little, and it is our privilege and duty to thankfully receive *all* the light which God has therein vouchsafed us; to attempt to go beyond it, to enter into speculation, is not only useless, but impious.

1. How is it possible for any person to “*miss* God’s best,” since He has foreordained everything that comes to pass (Rom. 11:36), and therefore has eternally appointed the precise lot and portion of each individual? That, we think, is a fair and frank way of stating the principal objection which Calvinists are likely to make. Our first reply is, such an objection is quite beside the point, for in these articles we are not discussing any aspect of God’s sovereignty, but rather are treating of that which concerns human responsibility. If the rejoinder be made, But human responsibility must not be allowed to crowd out the essential and basic fact of God’s sovereignty, that is readily granted; nor, on the other hand, must our adherence to God’s sovereignty be suffered to neutralize or render nugatory the important truth of man’s responsibility. One part of the Truth must never be used to nullify another part of it: both Romans 11:36, and Galatians 6:7, must be given their due places. When we attempt to *philosophize* about God’s sovereignty and human accountability we are out of our depth. They are to be received by faith, and not reasoned about. Each of them is plainly taught and enforced in the Scriptures, and both must be held fast by us, whether or no *we* perceive their “consistency.”

Nothing is easier than to raise difficulties and objections. If some of the “hypers” prefer reasoning to the actings of faith, let us meet them on their own ground for a moment and give them some questions to exercise their minds upon. “Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?” (1 Sam. 23:12). It is unmistakably evident from the sequel that God had ordained David should escape; yet He answered, “They *will* deliver thee up.” Query: How could they, since God had decreed otherwise! “Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times, *then* hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it;

whereas thou shalt smite Syria but thrice” (2 Kings 13:9,19). Query: what possible difference to the issue could be made by the number of times the king smote upon the ground? If God had predestinated that Syria should be “consumed,” could any failure in the faith of Joash prevent or even modify it? On the other hand, do not those words of Elisha plainly signify that the extent to which Israel would vanquish Syria turned upon the measure of the king’s appropriation of the promise “for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphec till thou hast consumed them?” (2 Kings 13:17) Which horn of the dilemma does the reasoner prefer?

Again, when the wicked Haman induced Ahasueras to seal the decree written in his name, that all the Jews scattered abroad throughout his kingdom should be slain on a certain day, Mordecai was grief-stricken by the terrible news. Esther sent one of the royal chamberlains to ascertain the cause of his sorrow. Whereupon her uncle handed the messenger a copy of the decree to show unto Esther, with the charge that “she should go in unto the king to make supplications unto him” (Esther 4:8). Esther sent back the messenger to Mordecai to say, “Whosoever, whether man or woman, shall go unto the king in the inner court who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days” (Esther 4:11). To which Mordecai replied, “If thou holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed” (verse 14). Query: if God had eternally purposed that the Jews should be delivered through the intervention of Esther, how could it possibly come “from *another* place” and she and her family be destroyed!

If our minds be dominated by our outlook upon life, narrowed down to a consideration of the inexorableness of the Divine determinations, then a spirit of irresponsibility will necessarily ensue. It is with the revealed and not with the secret will of God we need to be concerned. “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed [in His Word] belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may *do* all the

words of this Law” (Deut. 29:29). It is the Divine precepts and promises which are to engage our attention. “According unto your faith be it unto you” (Matt. 9:29) said Christ, *not* “according unto the Divine decrees.” Are we intimating that faith can set aside the Divine decrees or obtain something superior to them? Certainly not: instead, we are pointing out *where* the great Teacher placed *His* emphasis. We must not resolve all of God’s dealings with us into bare sovereignty: to do so is to lose sight of His righteousness. The unbalanced teaching of hyper-Calvinism has produced a most dangerous lethargy—unperceived by them, but apparent to “lookers on.” Those who dwell unduly upon the Divine decrees are in peril of lapsing into the paralysis of fatalism. There were times when even Mr. Philpot felt that, as the following quotations from his writings will show:

“However sovereign the dispensations of God are, no one who fears His great name should so shelter himself under Divine sovereignty as to remove all blame from himself. When the Lord asks “hast thou not procured this to thyself?” (Jer. 2:17) the soul must needs reply, Yea, Lord, I surely have. This is a narrow line, but one which everyone’s experience, where the conscience is tender, will surely ratify. Though we can do nothing to comfort our own souls, to speak peace to our own conscience, to bring the love of God into our hearts, to apply the balm of Gilead to bleeding wounds, and summon the great Physician to our bedside, we *may* do many things to *repel* this moment what we would seem to invite the next . . . We cannot make ourselves fruitful in every good word and work, but we may by disobedience and self-indulgence bring leanness into our souls, barrenness into our frames, deadness into our hearts, and in the end much guilt upon our consciences” (Sermon on Jer. 8:22). The same writer when exposing the error of nonchastisement said, “It nullifies the eternal distinction between good and evil, and makes it a matter of little real moment whether a believer walk in obedience or disobedience.” Then let those who have succeeded him devote more of their endeavours into pressing God’s precepts upon His people, and stressing the necessity, importance, and value of an obedient walk; and in faithfully showing the serious losses

incurred by disobedience.

2. To affirm that our having God's blessing upon us is the consequence of the Christian's pleasing of Him, may appear unto some as derogatory unto Christ, as militating against His merits. They will ask, Does not the believer owe every blessing to the *alone* worthiness of his Surety? Answer: that is to confound things which differ. We must distinguish between God's sovereign will as the originating cause, the work of Christ as the meritorious cause, the operation and application of the Spirit as the efficient cause, and the repentance, faith and obedience of the Christian as the instrumental cause. Keep each of those in its order and place and there will be no confusion. If that be too abstruse, let us put it this way. Is not Christ most glorified by them when His redeemed follow the example which He has left them and walk as He also walked (1 John 2:6)? If so, will not the governmental smile of God be upon such? Conversely, would God be honouring His beloved Son if His providences were favourable unto those who act in self-will, rather than in subjection to their Master? Further, if God's *present* rewarding of our obedience impugn the merits of Christ, then equally so will the *future* rewarding He has promised, for neither time nor place can make any difference in the essential nature of things.

It is so easy for us to mar the fair proportions of Truth and destroy its perfect symmetry. In our zeal, there is ever the tendency to take one aspect of Truth and press it so far as to cancel out another. Not only so in causing God's sovereignty to oust human responsibility, but to make the merits of Christ bar God from exercising His perfections in the present government of this world. Some have gone so far as to blankly deny that God ever uses the rod upon His children, arguing that Christ bore and took away all their sins, and therefore God could not chasten them for their transgressions without sullyng the sufficiency of His Son's atonement, thereby repudiating Psalm 89:30-32; Hebrews 12:5-11. Here too we must distinguish between things that differ. It is important for us to see that while the penal and eternal consequences of the believer's sins have been remitted by God, because atoned for by Christ, yet the disciplinary and temporal



effects thereof are not cancelled—otherwise he would never be sick or die. God never chastens His people penally or vindictively, but in love, in righteousness, in mercy, according to the principles of His government: rewarding them for their obedience, chastening for their disobedience, and thereby and therein Christ is honoured and not dishonoured.

3. Since all God's actings unto His people proceed from His uncaused, amazing, and super-abounding *grace*, how can it be maintained that He regulates His dealings with them according to *their conduct*? Easily, for there is nothing incompatible between the two things: they are complementary and not contradictory. As all the perfections of God are not to be swallowed up in His sovereignty, neither are they all to be merged into His grace. God is holy as well as benignant, and His favours are never bestowed in disregard of His purity. Divine grace never sets aside the requirements of Divine righteousness. When one has been truly saved by grace, he is taught to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and if he fails to do so, then the rod of God falls upon him. David was as truly saved by grace through faith, apart from any good works, as was the apostle Paul; but he was also required to be "holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Peter 1:15) as are the New Testament saints; and when he failed to be so, severe chastening was his portion. And it was *grace*, though holy and righteous grace, which dealt thus with him, that he "should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

The Christian needs to be viewed not only as one of God's elect—one of His high favourites, and not only as a member of the Father's family, and as such amenable to His paternal discipline, but also as a human being, a moral agent, a subject of God's government, and therefore is he dealt with accordingly by the Ruler of this world. As such, God has appointed an inseparable connection between conduct and the consequences it entails, and therefore is He pleased to manifest, by His providences, His approbation or His disapprobation of our conduct. It is not that the one who walks in the paths of righteousness thereby brings God into his debt, but that He condescends to act toward us according to the principle of

gracious reciprocity. No creature can possibly merit aught good at the hands of God, for if he rendered perfect and perpetual obedience, he has merely performed his duty, and hath profited God—essentially considered—nothing whatever. Moreover, the recompense itself is a free gift, an act of pure grace, for God is under no compulsion or obligation to bestow it.

4. When pointing out in connection with “He did not many mighty works there *because* of their unbelief” (Matt. 13:58) that “Unbelief is the great obstacle to Christ’s favours” (Matthew Henry), that *they* closed the door upon His deeds of mercy, it may be thought by some that we are approving the horrible impiety that the creature has the power to thwart the Creator. And when we emphatically deny any such idea, objectors are likely to ask, But how can you escape such a consequence? Easily: faith is God’s own prescribed ordinance, and therefore He is in no wise checkmated when He refuses to act contrary to His own appointed way. Obviously, He is by no means obliged to set a premium on unbelief or countenance contempt of His means. Mark 6 expresses it more strongly: “He *could* there do no mighty works,” etc. (verse 5). When it is said God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2) and “cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13), so far from signifying any limitation of His power, the perfection of His holiness is intimated. So with Christ. Among a people who were “offended in Him” because they regarded Him as “the carpenter,” (Matt 13:55,57), no *moral end* had been furthered by His dazzling their eyes with prodigies of His might, and therefore He cast not His pearls before swine.

5. Another class of readers, viz., those who have imbibed the poison of “dispensationalism” will complain that our teaching in these discourses is legalistic, confounding the old and new covenants, that God’s dealings with Jacob, David, and the nation of Israel furnish no parallel with His conduct toward us in this era. But that is a serious mistake. There is far more of essential oneness between the administration of those two economies than there was incidental divergencies, as Calvin long ago demonstrated in his *Institutes*—see his chapters upon “The Similarity of the Old and New Testaments” and “The Difference

of the two Testaments.” The principal difference between the Mosaic and Christian dispensations was neither in “the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17), the spiritual portion of God’s children, nor the principles of His government; but rather that spiritual things were presented to their view largely under types and shadows, whereas we have the substance itself openly set before us. Beneath all the trivial contrasts there is a fundamental unity between them, and it betrays a very superficial mind which delights in magnifying those contrasts, while ignoring or denying their basic oneness. But, as we have shown, the New Testament teaching on our present subject is identical with that of the Old, “Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he *receive* of the Lord” (Eph. 6:8) is both an echo and summary of the Law and the Prophets.

The underlying unity of the two Testaments is plainly intimated in that Divine declaration “whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our learning” (Rom. 15:4). But what could *we* “learn” from God’s dealings with His people of old if He be now acting according to radically different principles? Nothing at all. Nay, in such a case it would follow that the less we read the Old Testament the better for us, for we should only be confused. The fact is that the principles of God’s government are like Himself—immutable, the same in every age. “Righteousness and judgment” (Psa. 97:2) are just as truly the “habitation of His throne” today as when He cast out of heaven the apostate angels, and as when He destroyed the antediluvians—which was long before Moses! That God now deals with Christians on precisely the same basis as He did with the children of Israel, is unequivocally established by 1 Corinthians 10:6, where, after describing the privileges they had enjoyed and God’s overthrowing them in the wilderness because of their unbelief, we are told “Now these things were *our* examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted:” that is, they are real and solemn warnings for us to take to heart, specimens of those judgments which will befall *us* if we emulate their sinful conduct.

Nay, Scripture requires us to go yet farther. So far from the

higher blessings of this Christian era lessening our responsibility, they much increase them. The greater our privileges, the greater our obligations. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48), as the one who received five talents was required to yield more than those who received but one or two. “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much *sorer* punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God!” (Heb. 10:28, 29) The principle of that verse clearly signifies that the more light we have been favoured with the deeper are our obligations, and the greater the guilt incurred when those obligations are not met. “But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared” (Psa. 130:4). Yes, “feared” and not trifled with, by giving free rein to our lusts. A true apprehension of Divine mercy will not embolden unto sin, but will deepen our hatred of it, and make us more diligent in striving against it. Those who “know the grace of God in truth” (Col. 1:6)—in contrast with the ones who have merely a theoretical knowledge of it—so far from being careless of their ways and indifferent to the consequences, will be most diligent in endeavouring to please and glorify Him who has been so good to them.

6. Some are likely to complain that our teaching is too idealistic and impracticable, that we have presented an unattainable standard, arguing that in our present condition it is impossible to enjoy God’s best if that be dependent upon our daily life being well-pleasing unto Him. We shall be reminded that only one Perfect Man has trod this earth and that while the flesh indwells the Christian, failures and falls are inevitable. Nor should we be surprised at fault being found with that which rebukes the low level of Christian experience in this decadent age: those that are at ease in Zion do not welcome anything which searches the conscience and is calculated to arouse them from their deplorable apathy. But the One with whom each of us has to do declares, “Be ye holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16), and therefore does He bid us “Awake to righteousness, and sin not” (1 Cor. 15:34), “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh unto

the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:14), “He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked” (1 John 2:6).

But we have not said that our enjoyment of God’s smile is dependent upon our actually measuring up to that standard, though nothing short of it must be our constant aim and earnest endeavour. There is a great difference between a relative falling short of that standard and a life of defeat, between daily trespasses and being the slave of some dominant lust. Had we said that one must lead a *sinless* life in order to enter into God’s best, the above complaint had been pertinent. But we have not. If the heart be true to God, if it be our sincere desire and diligent effort to please the Lord in all things, then His approbation and blessing will certainly be upon us. And if such really be our intention and striving, then it will necessarily follow that we shall mourn over our conscious failures in missing that mark and will promptly and contritely confess the same—it is by *that* we may test and prove the genuineness of our sincerity. It is not the sins of a Christian, but his *unconfessed* sins, which choke the channel of blessing and cause so many to miss God’s best.

What has just been stated is clearly established by “he that covereth his sins shall not prosper” (Prov. 28:13). It is always an inexcusable and grievous thing for a saint to commit any sin, yet it is far worse to refuse to acknowledge the same: that is to “add sin to sin” (Isa. 30:1); yea, it evinces a spirit of defiance. So far from such a one prospering, he closes the door against God’s favours (Jer. 5:25). As the hiding of a disease prevents any cure, so to stifle convictions, seek to banish them from the mind, and then try and persuade ourselves that all is well, only makes bad matters worse. None but the penitent confessor can be pardoned (Psa. 32:5; 1 John 1:9). In the great majority of cases the chief reason why believers miss God’s best is because they fail to keep short accounts with Him. They do not make conscience of what the world regards as innocent blemishes and which empty professors excuse as “trifling faults.” And the result is that the conscience becomes comatose, laxity is encouraged, the Holy Spirit is grieved, Satan gains increasing power over him, and his unrepented sins hide God’s face from him (Isa. 59:2).

7. It may be inquired, How do you harmonize your teaching that God's frown is upon His people while they follow a course of self-will and self-gratification, when it is written "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Psa. 103:10)? Answer: there is nothing *to* harmonize, for the two things in no wise conflict. That Scripture is not speaking of God's present governmental dealings, but of what took place at conversion, when the penal consequences of all our sins were remitted. That is clear from what immediately follows, for after extolling the exalted character of God's mercy, the Psalmist declared "As far as the east is from the west, so far *hath* He removed our transgressions from us" (verses 11, 12). God hath not dealt with the one who savingly believes the Gospel "after his sins," because He laid them upon his Surety and dealt with Him accordingly; and being infinitely just, the Divine Judge will not exact payment twice. Therefore, instead of rewarding him according to his iniquities he recompenses him according to the merits of his Redeemer.

If that were *not* the meaning of Psalm 103:10, we should make the Scriptures contradict themselves—an evil against which we need ever to be upon our guard. Psalm 89:30-32, shows that God *does* deal with His disobedient children according to their sins—in a disciplinary way, in this life—expressly declaring that "then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." And yet there is a very real and blessed sense in which the principle of the former passage applies here too. For, first, God is not severe and rigorous in marking every offence: if our love be warm and the general course of our conduct pleases Him, He passes by our non-wilful sins. And, second, God does not chasten immediately when we offend Him, but graciously grants us space for repentance, that the rod may be withheld. Third, He does not chasten us fully, according to our deserts, but tempers His righteousness with mercy. Even when plying the rod upon us "His compassions fail not," and therefore "we are not consumed" (Lam. 3:22). God dealt so with His people under the *old* economy: Ezra 9:13; Psalm 130:3!

8. Notwithstanding what has just been pointed out, the

objection is likely to be made: Such teaching as yours is calculated to afford very “cold consolation” to some of God’s afflicted people; you are acting only as a “Job’s comforter” to them. Nor is such a demur to be wondered at in a day when the claimant cry of an apostate Christendom is “Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (Isa. 30:10). Though that be the language of the unregenerate, yet when Christians are in more or less of a backslidden condition, only too often that becomes the desire of their hearts also; and when the rod of God be upon them they crave pity and sympathy rather than love’s faithfulness. What such souls most need is *help*, real help and not maudlin sentimentality. To give soothing syrup to one needing a bitter purgative is not an act of kindness. The chastened one requires to be reminded that God “does not afflict willingly,” then urged to “search and try his ways and turn again to the Lord” (Lam. 3:33, 40), and assured that upon true confession he will be forgiven.

9. But it may be objected, did not David deeply repent of, contritely confess, and sincerely forsake his sins in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah, yet God’s rod was not removed from him and his family! That is, admittedly a more difficult question to answer. Nor should we look to the absolute sovereignty of God for its solution, for rather would that be cutting the knot instead of endeavouring to untie it. It should be evident to all that David’s was no ordinary case, and that his sins were such as the Mosaic Law called for capital punishment. Moreover, his iniquities were greatly aggravated by virtue of the position which he occupied: as a prophet, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, their king. Crimes committed by those in high civic or ministerial office are far more heinous and involve graver consequences than do those same crimes when committed by private persons. Therefore, though the Lord “forgave the iniquity of [his] sin” (Psa. 32:5), yet He declared “The sword shall never depart from thine house” (2 Sam. 12:10). The guilt and penal effects were remitted, but the governmental consequences remained.

“Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also born unto thee shall surely die” (2 Sam. 12:14). And though he “besought

God for the child, and fasted, and lay all night upon the earth,” it was in vain; the sin of the father was visited upon the son, to show that God was “no respecter of persons” even where a monarch, and one beloved by Himself, was involved. And “the sword” never did depart from his house, for one after another of his sons met with a violent end. Such transgressions of Israel’s king received no ordinary chastisements from God, to show that He would not countenance such actions, but vindicate His honour by manifesting His abhorrence of them. Thus, the governmental consequences of David’s sins not being remitted upon his repentant confession is to be accounted for on the ground of his *public* character. Another example or illustration of the same principle is found in the case of Moses and Aaron, who because of their unbelief at Meribah, being Israel’s leaders, were debarred from entering Canaan (Num. 20:12, 24).

10. As our readers have pondered the foregoing thoughts, it is probable that not a few have reverted in their minds to the experiences of *Job*, and wondered how it is possible to square with *them* the substance of what we have been writing. Obviously it is quite outside our present scope to enter upon anything like a full discussion of the book which describes the severe trials of that holy patriarch. Four brief statements must here suffice. First, that book presents to our notice something which is extraordinary and quite unique, as well as profoundly mysterious, namely, the position which Satan there occupies and his challenge of the Lord (Job 1:6-12). Second, it is therefore unwarrantable for us to appeal to the experiences of Job in *this* connection, for his case was entirely unprecedented. That which was there involved was not any controversy which God had with Job, but rather His contest with *Satan* in evidencing him to be a liar, disproving his charge that Job served God only for the benefit which he derived from Him for the same.

Satan’s attack was not upon the patriarch, but was aimed at the Lord Himself, being tantamount to saying, Thou art incapable of winning the confidence and love of man by what Thou art in Thyself: deal roughly and adversely with him, and Thou wilt find that so far from him delighting in Thee and remaining loyal to



Thee, he “will curse Thee to Thy face” (Job 1:11, 2:5). Thus the excellency of the Divine character was thereby impugned and His honour challenged. The Lord condescended to accept Satan’s challenge, and in the sequel demonstrate the emptiness of it by delivering His servant Job into His enemy’s hand and permitting him to afflict him severely in his estate, his family, and in his own person. The central theme and purpose of the book of Job is not only missed, but utterly perverted, if we regard its contents as a description of God’s chastening of Job for his sins (or “self-righteousness”), rather than a vindicating of His own honour and giving the lie to Satan’s accusation by the making of Job’s love and faith evident. So far from his cursing God, Job said, “Blessed be the name of the Lord,” and after Satan had done his worst, “though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him” (Job 1:21, 13:15).

Third, before Satan was allowed to lay a finger on Him, the Lord expressly declared of Job “There is none like him in the earth: a perfect [sincere] and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil” (Job 1:8). Thus, at the outset, all ground for uncertainty of Job’s moral condition is removed. The very fact that the first verse of the book contains such an affirmation renders it quite excuseless for anyone to conclude that in what follows we see the Lord dealing with Job on the ground that he had done something which displeased Him. Instead, no other saint in all the Scriptures is more highly commended by the Holy Spirit. Fourth, it should be carefully borne in mind that the book closes by informing us that “the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before,” that “The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning” (Job 42:10, 12, 16). Thus, so far from conflicting with or contradicting our thesis that the righteous prosper, that the providential smile of God rests upon those whose ways please Him, the case of Job is a striking proof of the same!

11. The sufferings of our blessed Lord prior to the cross may present a difficulty unto a few in this connection. *There* was One who “set the Lord always before Him” (Psa. 16:8) and who could aver “I do always those things that please Him” (John 8:29). How then are we to account for the fact that He was “The Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” that from the hour of His

birth into this world unto His death, trial and tribulation, suffering and adversity, was His portion? Surely that should not occasion a problem or call for much elucidation. *All* of Christ's sufferings were due *to sin*: not His own, but his Church's. God would not allow an innocent person to suffer, much less His beloved Son to be unrighteously afflicted at the hands of the wicked. We never view aright the ill-treatment and indignities Christ experienced, both before and throughout His ministerial life, until we recognize that from Bethlehem to Calvary He was the vicarious Victim of His people, bearing their sins and suffering the due reward of their iniquities. He was "made under the Law" (Gal. 4:4), and as the Surety of transgressors was therefore born under its curse. At the moment of His birth the sword of Divine justice was unsheathed and returned not to its scabbard.

12. Others may ask, what about the severe and protracted sufferings of the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 11:23-27). They were neither extraordinary, like Job's, nor vicarious like Christ's! True and that leads us to make this important observation: let none conclude from these articles that *all* suffering is to be regarded as *retributive*. That would be just as real a mistake as the one made by those who go to another extreme and suppose that all the suffering of saints is remedial, designed for purification and the development of their graces—which has provided a welcome sop for many an uneasy conscience! The subject of suffering is a much wider one than what has been dealt with in these articles, wherein but a single phase—the retributive—has been dealt with. It would take us too far afield to enter upon a systematic discussion of the whole problem of human sufferings, yet it is necessary for us to point out several important distinctions. Some suffering is to be attributed to the sovereignty of God (John 9:2, 3), yet we believe such cases are few in number.

Some suffering is due to heredity (Ex. 20:5): the whole of Achan's family were stoned to death for their father's sin (Josh. 7:24, 25), and the leprosy of Naaman was judicially inflicted upon Gehazi and his children (2 Kings 5:27). Much suffering is retributive, a personal reaping of what we have sown. Some is remedial or educative (2 Cor. 4:16, 17; James 1:2, 3), fitting for

closer communion with God, and increased fruitfulness. Other suffering is for righteousness' sake, for the Gospel's sake, and Christ's sake (Mat. 5:10, 11), which was what the apostle experienced, and which the whole "noble army of martyrs" endured at the hands of pagan Rome, when Christians were cast to the lions, and equally at the hands of Papal Rome, when countless thousands were vilely tortured and burned at the stake, and which would be repeated today if the pope and his cardinals had the power, for "*semper idem*" (always the same) is one of their proud boasts. We must distinguish sharply then between "tribulation" or persecution (John 16:33; 2 Tim. 3:12) for righteousness' sake, and Divine chastisement because of our sins.

There is no valid reason why the Christian should be confused in his mind by the above distinctions: nor will he be if he notes carefully the Scripture references given to them. Our purpose in drawing them was not only for the sake of giving completeness to these thoughts, and to supply preachers with a rough outline on the wider subject of "suffering," but chiefly in order to *point a warning*. It is entirely unwarrantable for us to conclude from the sight of an afflicted saint that he or she has missed God's best and is being chastised for his or her offences, though very often such is undoubtedly the case. But in our own personal experience, when God's providential smile be no longer upon us, and especially if the comforts of His Spirit be withdrawn from us, then it is always the wisest policy to assume that God is manifesting His displeasure at something in our lives, and therefore should we definitely, humbly and earnestly beg Him to convict us of wherein we have offended, and grant us grace to contritely confess and resolutely forsake the same.

The two forms of suffering most commonly experienced by the great majority of Christians are retributive—for their faults, and honorary—for the Truth's sake: though where there is much of the one there is rarely much of the other. Nor should there be any difficulty in identifying each of them, except that we must not mistake as the latter that coldness and estrangement of friends which is due to our own boorishness, for not a few pride themselves they are suffering for their faithfulness when in reality

they are being rebuked and ostracized for their uncharitableness, or “as a busybody in other men’s matters” (1 Pet. 4:15). A close and humble walking with God, an uncompromising cleaving to the path of His commandments is sure to stir up the enmity and evoke the opposition of the unregenerate, especially of empty professors, whose worldliness and carnality are condemned thereby. But whatever persecution and tribulation be encountered for *that* cause is a privilege and honour, for it is a having fellowship with Christ’s sufferings (1 Pet. 4:13), and such should “rejoice that they, are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41). It is the *absence* of this type of suffering which evinces we are hiding our colours in order to avoid being unpopular.

## Conclusion

Surely it is self-evident that the attitude of a holy God will be very different toward “a vessel wherein is no pleasure” (Hos. 8:8) and one who is “a vessel unto honour, sanctified and *meet* for the Master’s use, prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21). As we pointed out in an earlier article, an enjoyment of God’s best will *not* exempt from the common tricks and vicissitudes of life but *will* ensure having them sanctified and blest to him, as it will also deliver from those troubles and afflictions in which the follies of many Christians involve them. “Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be *well*, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings” (Isa. 3:10), on which the Puritan, Joseph Caryl, said, “They shall have good for the good they have done, or according to the good which they have done. If any object, but may it not be ill with men that do good and are good? Doth the Lord always reward to man according to his righteousness? I answer, first, It is well at present with most that do well. Look over the sons of men, and generally ye shall find that usually the better they are, the better they live. Second, I answer, it shall be well with all that do well in the issue, and for ever” (volume 10, page 439).

Finally, we again urge upon young Christians to form the habit of keeping short accounts with God, to promptly confess every known sin unto Him, even though it be the same sin over and over

again. There is no verse in all the Bible which this writer has made more use of and pleaded so frequently as 1 John 1:9. Failure at this point is a certain forerunner of trouble. Only too often Christians, particularly in seasons of temporal prosperity, will not take the time and trouble to search their hearts and lives for those things which displease the Holy One. Hence it is that God so often has occasion to take his refractory children apart from the world, laying them upon beds of sickness, or bringing them into situations where they *will* “consider [their] ways” (Hag. 1:5). If they then refuse to do so, they shall “suffer loss” (1 Cor. 3:15) eternally. It is greatly to be feared that not a few who will, by grace, enter the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ shall, through their own follies, fail to have “an *abundant* entrance” (2 Pet. 1:11) there into. O that neither writer nor reader may he among those saints who will be “*ashamed* before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28). We shall not, if we put everything right between our souls and Him in the present!

The second of two booklets.

