

# The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity

Alvah Hovey D.D., President Of Newton Theological Institution, Mass.  
From the book, *Baptist Doctrines*, 1880. Charles A. Jenkens, Ed.

## ***In This Issue:***

### ***The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity***

Page 1

### ***The Divinity of Christ***

Page 8

### ***The Personality of the Holy Spirit***

Page 14

### ***The Undiscernible God***

Page 18

### ***Private Offences, Part 3 of 3***

Page 22

*Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Matt. 28:19.*

**T**his text has been chosen, not because it speaks of Christian baptism, but because it speaks of a Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For my article will attempt to state the Biblical doctrine of a Trinity—a doctrine which is often denominated a mystery - though not always in the Scriptural sense of this term.

For the word "mystery" is used by the sacred writers to denote a fact or truth which could not have been discovered by the unassisted mind of man, but which has been revealed by the Saviour or by the Holy Spirit. In this sense it was employed by Christ when he told his disciples why he was teaching them plainly, and the people in parables. "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given." (Matt. 13:11) And in the same sense it was used by Paul when he informed the Colossians that he had been made a minister "to fulfill the word of God, even the mystery which hath been hid

from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints." (Col. 1:25-26) A mystery, then, in its proper, biblical sense, is simply a fact or truth made known by revelation. It may, therefore, be plain or obscure, comprehensible or incomprehensible.

But many of the facts revealed by Christ, or by holy men who were enlightened by the Spirit of God, are "hard to be understood." They do not fall within the range of our earthly experience. They belong to the world that is unseen and spiritual. They refer to modes of existence and of intercourse that puzzle the understanding. And so we have gradually come to apply the word to any fact or truth which is incomprehensible. In this sense the word is commonly used when we speak of the Divine Trinity. We call the doctrine of the Triune God a mystery, not so much because it is a revealed truth as because it is an obscure truth. Doubtless it is both; for all our knowledge of it is derived from the Bible, and all that the Bible says fails to explain the amazing fact. It "half reveals and half conceals" a mode of the divine existence which differs greatly from anything in our own. Obviously, then, we ought to listen with deep reverence to the testimony of Christ and of his Apostles while they utter "wondrous things" concerning "him whom no man hath seen or can see."

The word "Trinity" is not applied by any sacred writer to the Supreme Being, but it has been used a long time by Christians to express what they suppose to be a doctrine of the New Testament in respect to God. Trinity, abbreviated from tri-unity,

is formed of two words, which signify, respectively, "three" and "one," and is affirmed of God because he is believed to be three in one—that is, in a certain respect three, and in another respect one. Thus Trinity and Unity are affirmed of the Godhead, but they are not both affirmed of the same thing in the Godhead.

In harmony with the great body of Christian teachers in the past, we believe that the Unity of God is essential, and the distinctions in God personal. But by the latter expression we do not mean that the Father is as separate and secluded in consciousness from the Son as a human father is from his son; we only mean to say that whatever distinction there is between the Father and the Son is of a personal nature. For it seems to us very evident that the Scriptures teach three things, namely, that there is but one true God; that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are, each of them, truly Divine or God; and that these three are in a personal respect distinguishable from one another. Let us look at some of the evidence for each of these propositions.

### **I. The Scriptures teach that there is but one living and true God.**

This statement is rarely called in question by any person familiar with the sacred record; for it represents the prevailing tone and spirit of that record. It is the deep underlying assumption which supports every message of every prophet; and it is often expressed. With all the emphasis possible Moses cried: "Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God is one Jehovah." (Deut. 6:4) With no less assurance Malachi asks: "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" (Mal. 2:10) And the Most High declares by the pen of Isaiah: "I am Jehovah, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another." (Isa. 42:8) "Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am Jehovah, and besides me there is no Saviour." (Isa. 42:10, 11) "I am the first and the last, and besides me there is no God." (Isa. 44:6) If further evidence is needed, a large part of the fortieth chapter of Isaiah may be read; for it is a passage of wonderful majesty, asserting that Jehovah, in contrast with idols, is the only God, the Creator, the Preserver, and the Ruler of all things.

And this doctrine of one God, so clearly announced by the prophets, became at last the settled creed of the Jews, and was made by them an excuse for rejecting Jesus Christ as a blasphemer, instead of receiving him as the Son of God. Yet the Saviour himself taught that there is but one true God, (e.g. Mark 10:18); and while he claimed to be strictly divine, he so identified himself with the Father that the unity of God was maintained.

As to the nature of the divine unity, we hold that it is essential, or in other words, that the proper essence or substance of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is forever one and the same—a simple, indivisible, self-existent, everlasting principle of life, intelligence, wisdom, love and power. This language describes what is implied in the words of the sacred writers; it offers a key that will fit into all the statements of Scripture and lay open to us their treasures of wisdom.

Do the sacred writers lay great stress on the Unity of God as if it were a fundamental characteristic of His being? This view accounts for their so doing, for by a law of our reason we attach even greater importance to being than to manifestation, even though that manifestation be personal. Do they represent the distinctions of the Godhead as personal? This view is consistent with the representation, for it has never been proved that unity of essence carries with it unity of person. Do they ascribe equal knowledge, goodness, wisdom, and right to the divine Father, Son and Spirit? This view explains their doctrine, for the same attributes ought naturally to inhere in personal beings whose underlying and essential nature is one and the same. Does the Saviour say, "I and my Father are one," (John 10:30); that is, one in guarding the flock, one in power, one thing, using a neuter form of the word one? This view accounts for the saying better than any other with which we are acquainted; for power, in the last analysis, belongs to essence, and if the essence of the Father and the Son is one and the same, their power may well be one. In the light of these facts it seems to us that the Unity of God is essential.

### **II. The Scriptures plainly teach that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are, each of them, truly divine, or God.**

We are not now concerned about the agreement of this teaching with the doctrine that God is one, but are seeking to show that this teaching is to be found in the New Testament. If found there, we may be sure that it agrees with the Unity of God, even though we should be unable to comprehend the mystery of the divine nature, and demonstrate this agreement. Taking one step at a time, let us search for the testimony of the inspired Word as to the Deity of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Christians of every name freely admit that the Father is often called God, and is always represented by the sacred writers as truly divine. That Christians are right in doing this may be proved by a single text; for in his Epistle to the Ephesians Paul declares there is "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in you all." (Eph. 4:6) If we add to this the fact that, while there are several passages of the New Testament in which the term God may signify the Supreme Being, without any special reference to the Father, and a few in which it is applied to the Son or to the Holy Spirit, there are very many in which this term is applied to the Father—no further proof will be necessary. The proper Deity of the Father will be accepted as a certain truth of Scripture.

In regard to the Deity of the Son, we appeal, first, to the language of Thomas when Jesus appeared to him in the evening of the eighth day after his resurrection. For seeing Jesus before him, he said unto him: "My Lord and my God." (John 20:28) If this was not a definite acknowledgment of the Deity of Christ, I am at a loss to conceive how such an acknowledgment could have been made. And the Saviour did not protest against it. He who had recently come from Paradise with the awe of the unseen and holy Father upon him, did not rebuke the words of his disciples, though, if he was less than God, they were false and blasphemous.

We appeal secondly to the words of Paul, exhorting the Philippians: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation," etc. (Phil. 2:5) These words teach that equality with God was freely relinquished by Jesus Christ when He left His heavenly state or condition to become man. But no being can relinquish or forego that which is beyond his reach; no one can relinquish his equality with God whose nature does not qualify him to be on a level with God, to share his condition and glory. With this passage may be compared another in the Epistle to the Colossians, written about the same time, in which, speaking of Christ, he says that "all things have been created by him and for him," and that "in him all things consist," (Col. 1:16, 17); while a little further on he declares that "in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (Col 1:8.) Or we may turn to one of his earlier epistles, namely, that sent to the Romans, and hear him say of the Israelites: "Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is God over all, blessed forever." (Rom. 9:5)

We appeal thirdly to the language of John in his prologue to the Fourth Gospel, who says that "the Word was God," that "all things were made by Him," that "in Him was life," and that "the life was the light of men." (John 1:1-4) With these words of the disciple whom Jesus loved we may compare the sayings of Christ himself: "The Son can do nothing of himself" or from himself; that is, so close is the union between the Father and Son that any action of the Son, separate from that of the Father, is impossible. Hence the full expression is this: "The Son can do nothing from himself but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he (the Father) doeth, these in like manner doeth the Son also. For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." (John 5:19-21) "I am the light of the world." (John 7:12) "Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:5-8.) "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." (John 14:9) "I and my Father are one." (John 10:30; 17:22) This last expression was twice used by the Lord—once to affirm the inseparable unity of his own action and his Father's, and once to affirm his moral unity with the Father.

We have here given but a small part of the biblical evidence that Christ is truly God, but enough to establish this proposition as a doctrine of the Christian religion. Our Saviour is divine as well as human, and we are constrained to take account of His divinity in forming our conception of the Godhead.

But if the Son is truly God, so likewise is the Spirit. This might be inferred with some degree of probability from the designation itself; for as the spirit of man is that part of his being which is highest, freest, most intelligent, it is surely improbable that inspired men would apply such a name as Spirit of God, or Holy Spirit, to anything less high and holy than God himself. The same might be inferred with still greater confidence from the fact that divers acts, such as inspiration, regeneration, sanctification and the like are ascribed sometimes to God, sometimes to Christ, sometimes to the Spirit of God, sometimes to the Spirit of Christ, and sometimes to the Holy Spirit; while a careful examination and comparison of all these representations lead to the belief that it is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes, by direct agency, the divine will in human souls.

Moreover, the proper deity of the Holy Spirit appears to be assumed by Peter in his address to Ananias: "Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?", and "Why hast thou conceived this thing in thy heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." (Acts 5:3, 4) The same assumption is also made by Paul in

these words: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16) That is, God dwells in his temple, and ye are God's temple, because the Spirit of God dwells in you, for the Spirit is God. But we need not multiply citations, for there seems to be in fact no biblical ground for doubt as to the divinity of the Holy Spirit. It may be necessary to collect with some care the evidence that he is personal, but it is needless to prove that he is Divine.

### III. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinguishable in a personal respect from one another.

Personality is selfhood, and by a personal being we mean a being that is intelligent, self-conscious, voluntary—a being that knows, feels, wills. Let us observe what the Scriptures teach in respect to a personal distinction between the Father and the Son:

(1) They make use of these terms as divine names, and these terms, Father and Son, point to distinctions of a personal nature. They are applicable to beings that know, love, plan and choose. Any other use of them is intensely figurative. Yet they are used very often by the Saviour, when his language is otherwise plain, sober, didactic. And they are often accompanied by other expressions which rest on the idea of a personal distinction between the Father and the Son.

(2) The pronouns, I, thou, he and we, are often employed by Jesus in speaking of himself, of the Father, or of both, and they imply the personality of himself and of His Father, as well as some distinction between the two. Thus: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth." (Matt. 11:25) "Glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." (John 17:5) "Even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us." (John 17:21) If this use of the pronouns does not prove that there is some distinction of a personal nature between the Father and the Son, it is not easy to imagine any kind of evidence which would be accepted as proof of such a distinction.

(3) Christ distinguishes between His own knowledge and the Father's. Thus: "No one knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any one the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him." (Matt. 11:27) "The Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that himself doeth." (John 5:20) Both these testimonies—one preserved in the Gospel of Matthew, and the other in the Gospel of John—imply that the intellect of the Son is, properly speaking, distinguishable from that of the Father. And the same may be said of nearly every passage in the New Testament which refers to the knowledge of either.

(4) Christ distinguishes between his own affection and his Father's; not indeed as to the moral character of that affection, but as to the heart that exercises it. "The Father loveth the Son," (John 5:20), is a declaration of Jesus himself, and it accords with the voice from Heaven: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:17) As to the Son's love of the Father, we find it expressed in such terms as these: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." (John 4:34) "I honor my Father." (John 8:49) "I know him and keep his word." (John 8:55) "I do always those things which please him." (John 8:29) It is then certain that the Father loves the Son, and the Son the Father; and it is no less certain that mutual affection implies distinctions of a personal nature.

(5) Christ distinguishes between his own will and his Father's will. "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father that glorifieth me." (John 8:54) "I seek not mine own glory; there is one that seeketh and judgeth." (John 8:50) "Not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42) There is, of course, a sense in which the Father's will is the same as the Son's; for they agree in willing the same holy ends; but if the passages quoted by us are to have any natural interpretation, the faculty of will in the Father is in some way and measure distinct from the faculty of will in the Son, and this distinction is clearly personal.

Finally, it must be observed that every particle of evidence to be found in the New Testament for any kind of Trinity in the Godhead, goes to prove that the distinctions marked by the words Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are of a personal nature. All the Scriptural evidence, we say, looks towards this kind of a distinction, and not as some would have us believe, to something else which is utterly, and it may be forever, hidden from us in the depths of the Divine nature.

But, if we admit the personality of the Son to be distinguishable from that of the Father, is it necessary to take a similar view of the Holy Spirit? May we not think of the latter as being only a certain divine influence or operation by which the Father and the Son move upon the hearts of men? In answer to these questions, it may be said:

1. That our appeal must still be made to biblical evidence. Where that leads, it is necessary for us to follow; for on this subject there is no other valid evidence within our reach.
2. That all the logical difficulties involved in the doctrine of a *tripersonal* God are encountered in the doctrine of a *bipersonal* God, the Father and the Son, and as we must accept the latter, there is no reason why we should not accept the former, if it is supported by preponderating evidence.
3. That the biblical evidence for the personality of the Holy Spirit is amply sufficient to justify belief in the same. Recall the words of my text, "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Is it easy to suppose that the Lord Jesus here associates an influence or operation with himself and the Father, binding them together by the word "name"? Can we believe that he intended to say, "Baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy influence which is exercised by the Father and the Son?"

Read the Apostle's benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14), and ask yourselves whether there is not in this ease also strong reason to infer the personality of the Spirit from the personality of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Father? Recall, at the same time, the Apostle's account of the extraordinary gifts which were bestowed on certain members of the early church, concluding with the words, "But all these worketh the one and self-same Spirit, distributing to every one severally as he willeth" (1 Cor. 12:11), and his word of exhortation, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, by whom ye were called unto the day of redemption." (Eph. 4:30)

In these expressions, feeling, willing and doing are ascribed to the Spirit as unequivocally as they are ever ascribed to the Father or to the Son. Recall, too, the language of Christ when he promised the Comforter to his disciples: "He will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak of (or from) himself, but whatsoever he shall hear that will he speak; and he will show you things to come. He will glorify me, for he will receive of mine and will show it unto you." (John 16:13, 14) Do not the words, "he will not speak from himself," imply that he could speak from himself? Is it necessary to say that an influence or operation will not speak from itself? Or does an influence or mode of action "hear" and "receive." It is enough to read the last discourse of Jesus before he was betrayed, in order to be convinced that the Holy Spirit is as truly personal as the Father or the Son.

Thus the elements of the doctrine of the Trinity are found in the New Testament; the unity of God, the deity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and the personal distinction between these three. And these elements readily unite in the received doctrine of the Trinity, which is, that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one and the same in essence, but distinguishable in a personal respect. This doctrine, I repeat, is not to be fully comprehended by us in the present life. It may be a mystery forever. For who can find out the deep things of God? (Job 11:17) No one can tell just how far unity of spiritual essence modifies and reduces the distinction involved in separate personalities as we know them.

All we affirm is this: that, according to Scripture, the divine unity is essential, and the difference between the eternal Father, Son, and Spirit personal, or of a personal nature. There is a vast mystery here. But it is not the only mystery that confronts us. There is no power or object in nature that does not rest in mystery, in the very bosom and sea of impenetrable obscurity. Who of us ever expects to learn on the shores of time the secret of the union of body and soul, of matter and spirit, acting and reacting upon each other, and so related by vital forces as to be a single being, a complex unity, as proved by the witness of self-consciousness? Most truly did the Apostle say, "For now we know in part, and we prophesy in part."

But if we cannot comprehend the Trinity, why is anything said of it in the Bible? Would not the Scriptures have been more useful, because less obscure and perplexing, if they had contained no references to this mysterious truth? We think not. Be

the subject what it may, our knowledge of it is only partial; yet this partial knowledge is found to produce wonder, curiosity, desire, effort and progress; yea, partial knowledge has often proved sufficient to smother vanity, beget reverence, warn of danger, and point out the way of life. Men knew how to use the compass, and, by its direction, how to cross the pathless deep in safety, long before they had any conception (if they have this now) of the power which held it with unseen hand, and made its trembling point a steady guide in cloud and storm.

Men have known by the Word of God of a future life and a heavenly state, and have been animated to holy action by that knowledge, though quite unable to imagine the peculiarities of that life, and always baffled in their attempts to comprehend its glory. In like manner our knowledge of the Trinity, though partial, is sufficient to awaken awe, reverence, gratitude and praise in our hearts. It is all we need for religious direction and improvement. It is all we need to prevent as from relapsing into the coldness of deism or the distraction of polytheism.

If the unity of the Godhead were not plainly taught, we should be liable, in the interest of clear thought, to regard the Father and the Son and the Spirit as three separate beings, like ourselves. If the deity of the Son and the Spirit were not plainly taught, we should be liable, under the influence of gratitude, to pay religious homage to our Saviour and our Sanctifier, even though they were not known to be truly divine. And if the personal distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were not plainly taught, we should be in danger of rejecting the whole doctrine of grace through atonement, and of going back to Judaism or over to Islamism, where legal righteousness and despair are the sole alternatives.

In two particulars, especially, may a reverent belief of the Trinity prove helpful to our religious life:

1. In the first place, it may help us to see how God can be forever both self-sufficient and benevolent. By saying that God is self-sufficient, we mean to say that his being and blessedness are complete in themselves, and therefore independent of any other being; and by saying that he is benevolent, we mean to say that he is love, that good will to others is natural to him. For when we read, "Every one that loveth is born of God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8), we feel that an affection really akin to Christian love, though infinite and eternal, must pervade and animate the life of the Godhead. And this is actually conceivable, if we can say with the Apostle John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) For the term "with" denotes fellowship, intimate communion; in this case, the fellowship of the divine Word with the divine Father.

And it is easy to see that if there are different selves in the infinite Being,—however interpenetrant, transparent and perfectly known to one another they may be,—there must be mutual and perfect love; for in every one of them must be constantly revealed, in personal form and beauty, the infinite virtues of their common nature. But, with any other view, we must believe, either that love is not an affection eternally active in God, or that he has had from eternity created objects on which to bestow his affection. By the former supposition, the innermost and highest activity of the Godhead is temporal instead of eternal, and mutable instead of permanent; and by the latter, the highest affection and blessedness of Jehovah depend upon the existence of created objects. But such a dependence of God upon creation is inconsistent with any proper idea of his self-sufficiency or perfection. I am, therefore, convinced that the doctrine of the Trinity is very helpful to us in forming a conception of God as both self-sufficing and loving.

2. In the second place, this doctrine is a help to us in thinking of the Atonement. As a matter of history, we know that a rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity has almost always led to a rejection of the Atonement, while a cordial belief in the Trinity has been almost always accompanied with a belief in the Atonement. From this fact alone it would be safe to conclude that the two doctrines belong to the same system of truth. But this is not all that should be said. The Scriptures link them together in many places, and the method of interpretation which finds or fails to find one of them will find or fail to find the other. He to whom the Scriptures represent Jesus Christ as the Son of God—strictly divine and strictly human—will see in him a fit Mediator between God and men, and will receive the testimony of the Apostles to his atoning death.



The mystery of a triune God accepted, a hundred passages of the New Testament, otherwise obscure, are made plain. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:23) "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." (1 John 2:1, 2) "For he made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor. 5:21) "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7) "Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by him, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. 7:23) "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." (Rev. 5:12)

Though my principal object in this essay has been to set forth, as clearly as possible, what seems to me to be the plain teaching of the Scriptures concerning a triune God, I am fully aware of the objections which are sometimes made to it, and might attempt, if it was necessary, to point out their inconclusiveness. But I will only remark:

1. That the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, as believed by evangelical Christians, is not self-contradictory. This will be evident, if you recall the fact that it does not affirm God to be in all respects one, and in all respects three, but in a certain respect one and in another respect three. To illustrate my thought: there is no contradiction in saying that every man is three in essence, and one in person or consciousness. His being may comprise three distinct elements — a material body, a principle of life which pervades and animates that body, and a spirit which is united with both, but higher than either, rational, immortal, and fitted to glorify God and enjoy him forever. I do not say that man has this triple nature; I only say that there is no contradiction in supposing that he has it.

So, on the other hand, there is no contradiction in supposing that the personality of God is triple, and his essence single. In either case, our only duty is to ask for the evidence and follow where it leads. In the one case, as well as in the other, we are brought face to face with a mystery which no man ever yet comprehended or explained. Let us not stumble at mysteries. The universe is full of them, and from youth to age we are encompassed by them as by an atmosphere. Let us not imagine that we can comprehend the Almighty, "He is higher than heaven, what canst thou know?" My brethren, this is not a theme for philosophy, but for revelation. On this subject, above most others, we need to be as little children, accepting the facts as they are declared to us by "holy men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

2. That the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, as understood by evangelical Christians, is not inconsistent with some kind of subordination on the part of the Son to the Father. We may be unable to point out the kind or degree of that subordination, but two remarks will show the direction in which it is possible to look for light:

First. The second person of the Godhead is generally set before us by the sacred writers in his state of incarnation or humiliation. Both prophecy and history are chiefly occupied with him as the Mediator, and in this office he took upon himself the form, place and work of a servant of God, though he was Head over all things to the church. A certain subordination to the Father is therefore involved in his mediatorial work. But the relation of sonship and official subordination among men is consistent with that of equality in every natural and moral excellence; may we not believe that it is equally so in the Godhead, whose personal distinctions are rooted in a common nature?

Second. To say that the distinction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is of a personal nature, is to prepare the way for us to believe that some personal quality of the eternal Word rendered it divinely suitable that he should be the revealer of God and the Redeemer of mankind, and that some personal quality of the Holy Spirit rendered it divinely

suitable that he should be the Sanctifier of men. Beyond this we need not attempt to go. We may be certain that there is an eternal fitness or decorum in all the acts of the triune God, but it is too much for us to expect to see and comprehend it in the present life.

3. That in prayer we should think of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as truly divine. We need not hesitate to address either of them in praise or petition. We need not, and we should not, fear to sing, "Come Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove." Though this is prayer and praise to the Spirit, the author of the new life is certainly God, since "every one that loveth is born of God" (1 John 4:17), and those who "believe in the name" of Christ "have been born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13); that is to say, of God the Spirit; for "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," and "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou Nearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whether it goeth, so is (it with) every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)

We need not hesitate to offer praise or petition to Christ; for that is what the first Christians did, when they called on the name of the Lord; that is what Stephen did, when he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59), and that is what the hosts of heaven were seen and heard doing by the Apostle John when banished to the Isle of Patmos. And, finally, we need not puzzle ourselves with any attempt to hold in our minds the unity and *tripersonality* of God at the same time.

It is enough for us to come to God as sinners saved by grace, recognizing the work of Christ in our behalf, and ready to ascribe the glory of our salvation to the infinite God. It is enough if we honor God is the unseen Father, behold him in the face of Jesus Christ, and gratefully welcome his presence in the working of the Holy Spirit.



## The Divinity of Christ

---

W. T. Brantly, D. D., Baltimore, MD.

From the book, *Baptist Doctrines*, 1880. Charles A. Jenkins, Ed

1 Tim. 3:16 - *God was manifest in the flesh.*

As to some facts respecting Jesus Christ, people of all parties and shades of opinion concur —that he lived on earth at the period mentioned by the evangelists, that he was a man of upright life, that he delivered sundry discourses, some of which are extant in our day, that he was the founder of a religion which now numbers its adherents by millions, and that he was put to death by Pontius Pilate, at the instigation of the Jewish Rulers. Whether he wrought the miracles ascribed to him, indeed whether he performed any miracles at all, whether he rose from the dead after his crucifixion, whether he was a teacher sent from God,—these and other inquiries involving superhuman intervention have been constantly agitated; and different conclusions have been reached. This should not be surprising. For even among those who were brought into personal contact with him, who listened to his discourses, saw his miracles and observed his daily life, very diverse opinions prevailed respecting him. "Whom do men say that I am?" he asked his disciples on one occasion. "Some say John the Baptist; some Elias, others Jeremias or one of the prophets," was the reply. They might have added, some call you "a gluttonous man; a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners; others say you have a devil and are mad; others still, that you are in league with Beelzebub and through your connection with the King of devils you are able to cast out inferior demons." The addition would have been true, for the sacred historians tell us that these opinions were expressed at different times in regard to his character.

As clashing views were held in reference to the person of Christ prior to the completion of his early work and his ascension to heaven, it might be supposed that after he had left the world great diversity of opinions would continue to prevail



respecting himself and the work he had performed. Such accordingly we find to be the case. He had scarcely disappeared from the earth before controversies sprang up respecting his character and his teachings. In our day it is generally the divinity of Jesus which is denied. His true humanity is now universally conceded. But in the first century, we find a considerable number of persons, known as Docetae, who asserted that Christ was a human being only in appearance. They taught that the being who sojourned among men, who ate and drank, and slept and wept, and experienced pleasure and pain, and finally was crucified, was only the phantom of a man. Absurd as such an opinion appears to us, it would seem that the Apostle John regarded it as sufficiently serious to demand a refutation. The existence of this heresy explains the apparent repetition and tautology with which he emphasizes the humanity of our Lord when he speaks of "what he has heard, what he has seen with his eyes, what he has looked upon, what his hands have handled of the Word of life."

Three hundred years later comes Arius denying the proper divinity of Christ. In his view, Jesus was superior to man, above angels, more exalted in rank and dignity than any intelligence in heaven, but nevertheless a creature—there having been a time when he did not exist. This doctrine for a time enlisted many adherents. Indeed for several centuries all the leading nations of Europe appear to have been largely under its influence. Coming down to more recent periods we reach the days of Faustus Socinus, who in the fifteenth century declared that no religious doctrine should be received which could not be explained by rational methods, and as he could not understand how Christ the Son could be equal with God the Father, he rejected the doctrine of three persons in the Godhead. He believed that Christ was a good man, that his teaching was invested with divine authority, and that he suffered death as a martyr to the truth of his teachings. Socinus died in 1604. But his views are still held by many persons in our own country and in Europe. Unitarians (though we do not admit their exclusive right to the appellation) is the name by which they elect to be called. But their views are essentially the same as those of Lelius and Faustus Socinus, who uttered them in the latter part of the fifteenth century.

But during all the years in which these discordant opinions have prevailed, respecting the character of our Lord, there have always been those who have been in full agreement with Simon Barjona, when he said, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." And were the Saviour now to ask, as he did at the coast of Caesarea Philippi, "Whom do men say that I am?"—whilst the answer might be, "Some say that thou art a human being and no more," it would also be, "Millions believe in thee as the being 'who was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God. They believe that thou wast 'God manifest in the flesh'; and they are looking for salvation through thy name because they believe that thou art 'able to save to the uttermost, all that come to God through thee.'"

But why do we hold these views of Jesus Christ? Those who believe him to be God should be ready to give a reason for the faith that is in them. For whilst it is true that if he be divine, and we refuse him the homage to which he is entitled, we are guilty of a robbery which imperils our salvation, it is also true that if he be only a creature, we are obnoxious to the charge of idolatry if we render him the homage due to God only.

When we claim Deity for Jesus Christ, we must rely on divine revelation to substantiate the claim. We have no other source of proof. Some persons have said that natural religion suggests the necessity for a mediator between God and man. Granted the necessity, reason teaches farther: it has been said that he should possess a dual nature; that is, he must be God and man at the same time. But we need better evidence than natural religion can supply, in support of a truth so momentous. As respects reason, it is enough for us to know that there is nothing contrary to her dictates in the declaration that there may be God the Father and God the Son also. For though she may not comprehend how this can be—since "great is the mystery of Godliness"—she must admit that it is more reasonable to believe what Revelation teaches to be true, than to trust her own uncertain light. It is not contended that the Scriptures teach with irresistible clearness, (to every class of inquirers), the divinity of Jesus. They do not, indeed, present any important doctrine so strongly as to defy resistance. The Scriptures—any of them—may be wrested. Our conduct in the pursuit and reception of truth, it has been well said, "is a part of our probation." Whilst the meek and honest inquirer may be able to discover the truth, the self-sufficient seeker, filled with prepossessions for which he is mainly seeking confirmation from the Scriptures, will be left to wander in ignorance and error. If we appeal to the sacred oracles, with teachable and devout minds in quest of the truth on this vital question, I think we shall find the following propositions to be true:

**I. The Scriptures declare that Jesus Christ claimed for himself a divine nature.** It is natural to suppose that if Jesus had been truly God, he would have asserted this prerogative for himself, whenever it was proper to set forth his divinity. Had he made no such claim on any occasion, though the evidence for his Deity from other sources would still be conclusive,

objectors would be ready to say that a superiority should not be awarded to Christ, which, by his silence, he virtually disclaimed. But the words of our Lord, on such occasions, as well as the construction placed on his language by those best qualified to judge, constrain us to believe that he declared his own true divinity.

1. See what occurred after the healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. The miracle was performed on the Sabbath day. The enemies of our Lord, always in quest of some vulnerable point at which they might strike the object of their hate, assail him as a profaner of the Sabbath. By his violation of the law he is guilty of death, and they determined to take his life. Aware of their designs, Jesus excused himself, saying "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." But this language, we are told, only awakened their fiercest displeasure. They sought the more to kill him, because he had not only dishonored the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Should it be said that the Jews misapprehended the Saviour when they charged him with claiming equality with God, it may be replied that our Lord would not have permitted such a construction of his answer to pass in silence, had it been incorrect. His non-repudiation, his acceptance of their interpretation, attests its correctness; and in his case it is equivalent to the assertion of the claim for himself. The truth is, his language can have no other meaning; and it is plain, in our view, that he intended it to convey just the meaning which they accepted. It is as if he had said, "My Father worketh hitherto on the Sabbath day in his Providence; he heals the sick on this day; he makes his sun to rise and set; he sends the rain on this day; he makes the grass to grow and the flowers to bloom on this day; and I, who am his Son, work also in the same manner, and with the same authority, being Lord of the Sabbath as he is." Thus the language involves equality with the Father, and if equal to him, he must be Divine.

Accepting the character ascribed to him by his enemies, our Lord proceeds to assert his equality in an extended discourse. He tells them that "as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." Surely he who can call back to life, from the repositories of the dead, any person whom he wills thus to summon, may "without robbery think himself equal with God." Being thus equal, he declares that the Father hath commanded that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. Is it the will of the Father that all men should believe in him as God? Then it is his will that they reverence the Son likewise. Is it the will of the Father that all men should worship him? Then it is his will that they worship the Son also. Is it the will of the Father that all men should obey him? Then it is his will that they obey the Son likewise. Such is the union between them that no man can truly honor the Son, without at the same time honoring the Father. The more we exalt Jesus, the more do we honor him who says of his Son, "This is my beloved Son, hear him." This is the teaching of our Lord respecting himself. It is apparent that throughout the discourse he is vindicating himself from the charge of arrogant blasphemies, and asserting his Divine nature. The language fairly and obviously understood, represents him as claiming true Deity.

2. A similar claim is made in that striking declaration, "I and my Father are one." I am aware that Socinians teach that in this Scripture our Lord is setting forth that between himself and Father there is a unity of sentiment and action. They deny that it teaches any essential unity of nature. But if the Socinians are right in their interpretation of the expression, would the Jews, on hearing it, immediately have taken up stones to stone him? They surely understood him to affirm that he was one with God. For when he interrogated them as to the reason of the assault,—inquiring for which of the good works he had shown them their anger was excited—they promptly replied, "For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy, and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." Now, if the declaration of our Lord had been misapprehended by his hearers, he would not have permitted them to be misled on a point so important. Common honesty, to say nothing of true benevolence, would have quickly corrected the mistake. But so far from disclaiming the construction placed on his words, he accepted their interpretation of his meaning, and then, as on a previous occasion, he continued his discourse, exhibiting at length the intimate relation between the Father and himself.

3. In the memorable prayer offered on the eve of his crucifixion, our Lord claims divinity for himself, when, addressing the Father, he says, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." What is the glory to which reference is here made? It can be nothing less than the homage which is paid to Divine beings. God was the object of angelic worship long before the foundations of the earth were laid. This it seems was shared by the Son before he became "God manifest in the flesh;" and can we suppose that God, who "never gives his glory to another," would have been glorified with anyone who did not, like himself, possess a divine nature, who was not God equal to himself? The prayer manifestly implies the claim of Divinity on the part of Christ.

And so, when Philip asked that he might see the Father, "Show us the Father and it sufficeth us." The reply from Jesus implies a like claim, "Have I been so long time with you and yet halt thou not known me, Philip? After all that you have heard from me, after having learned from me that I and my Father are one, are you still in doubt as to who I am? Let me tell you again, whoever has seen me has seen all that it is possible for mortal man to see of the Father."

Such was the claim of Jesus. That he was a good man none have denied who believe in his existence at all. The Docetae who ignored his person, and the Arians who called him a preexistent creature, and the Socinians who deny his divinity, all admit that he was a good man. And if this be his character then he will certainly speak the truth; and we must receive his testimony respecting his own Deity as absolutely true.

**II. Whilst Jesus Christ asserted his own proper Divinity, he sustained his assertion by performing works which could only be wrought by the power of God.** It might be said that the mere claim of anyone to a character proves nothing. An impostor may claim to be king of the realm. Even a good man, through the imperfections of his judgment, may claim for himself prerogatives to which he has no just title. It is admitted that one claiming a divine nature should be prepared to furnish the world with sufficient reasons for such a claim. If Jesus, like Mohammed, had produced no miracles in attestation of his high claims, we should be as unwilling to believe in his Deity as to recognize the assumptions of the great Arabian impostor to be the prophet of God.

But his Deity was demonstrated by an impressive exhibition of the most unquestionable miracles. When the disciples exclaimed, on the Sea of Tiberias, "What manner of man is this?" they felt most profoundly that the Being who could tranquilize the angry elements with a word, was something more than man. He who could take a few small loaves and fishes, which a lad had brought with him, probably a lunch for his own use, and so multiply them as to satisfy the appetites of ten thousand people, (for if we include the women and the children, there were probably so many), and then gather up a larger amount of fragments than the original supply, showed himself equal to a work which is one of the most indisputable proofs of divine power—we mean creation. The young man who rose from the bier on which the attendants were bearing him to the tomb, and Lazarus, who returned to life after decomposition had proceeded to such an extent as to be offensive, proclaim a present Deity as manifestly as did the water at the marriage of Cana in Galilee, which at its Lord's bidding, "blushed into wine."

I know it may be said that this argument for the Divinity of Jesus proves too much, since it would prove Moses, who wrought stupendous miracles in Egypt; and Elijah, at whose word the widow's son came back to life, and whose meal and oil were multiplied; and Peter and Paul who healed the sick and raised the dead, to have been divine also. Not so. These men never wrought miracles as Jesus did. They acted with a delegated authority which they never failed to recognize. Moses and others of the Old Testament saints worked miracles only as they were acting under Divine command. When Paul requires the spirit of divination to come out of the damsel, he asserts his order "in the name of Jesus Christ," thus attesting his own weakness, and the power of the Lord Jesus. "Aeneas," says Peter, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." Here Peter in like manner attests at once the Divinity of Jesus and his own subordination. But Jesus acted in his own name and on his own authority. He had but to say, "I will, be thou clean," and immediately the cleansing followed. With authority and power he commanded the unclean spirits and they obeyed him. The seventy came back to him saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name." Well then has it been said that "although miracles may be performed by mere men, that is, through their instrumentality, and so cannot by themselves be proofs of the Deity of those who, in this instrumental sense, performed them; yet as the miracles of Christ were performed in his own name, by his undisputed word, according to his will and for his glory, they plainly prove him to be Divine."

**III. The Deity of Christ is further manifest in the declarations made of the fact expressly, or by fair implication, by God the Father.** If God should send his Son into the world, it is quite reasonable to suppose (if his Son were a divine being) that the attention of men would in some way be drawn to the fact. This is just what we find to be true. At the commencement of his ministry, we hear the Father introducing him to the multitude, assembled at his baptism, with the announcement, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." It is true that good men are often called sons of God in the Scriptures; but it is always with such qualifications, or under such circumstances as to indicate the limited sense in which he intended the expression to be understood. But when, on the banks of the Jordan, we hear the voice of the Father miraculously proclaiming the august character of the candidate who had just received baptism at the hands of John, and mark the spirit descending in the form of a dove, such facts indicate unmistakably that the object of such honor could be none other than

the equal Son—even "God manifest in the flesh." And as at the beginning, so as he was entering on the last scenes of his ministerial life, the voice of the Father is heard in the Holy Mount reaffirming the utterance at Jordan, saying, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." Is it possible, if the Son had not been Divine, he could have been the recipient of such renewed commendation of the Father, after he had asserted his equality with God, had repeatedly allowed Divine homage to be paid him, and had, in fact, declared that he and his Father were one?

But we have something stronger than implication on this important point. The Father bears witness to the Divinity of the Son, when he commands both angels and men to worship him. Speaking of Jesus in his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle tells us "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name;" that at the name of Jesus "every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Now says our Lord, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Is not then the fact that God commands rational beings on earth and in heaven—beings everywhere—to worship him, a testimony of God the Father to the Divinity of the Son? In like manner when the Apostle, in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, citing the language of the Psalmist in the forty-fifth Psalm, "Thy throne O God is forever and ever," as the very language addressed by God the Father to God the Son, what room can there be to question the Father's recognition of the equality of the Son?

**IV. The Deity of Christ is directly affirmed in repeated instances by the sacred writers.** The testimony of these writers to the Deity of Christ derives all its value from the fact that they were divinely directed in their testimony. If you suppose that they were ordinary witnesses, liable to the frailties and errors of fallible men, their testimony upon the point would be of little value. But guided as they were by an unerring hand, we may depend on what they have said. Do they distinctly declare the Deity of the blessed Lord? Let the prophet Isaiah answer, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Hear the beloved disciple, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Who was this Word? The same that afterwards was "made flesh and dwelt among us." "Of whom," says the Apostle Paul, "as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever."

Can language be more explicit than this in regard to the Divinity of Jesus? "He was in the form of God," says the same Apostle, "and thought it no robbery to be equal with God." And if he, wise and good as he was, thought it no robbery, there was none, and he was equal with God. Again says the same Apostle, "In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." And yet again, "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven." "Hereby," says the inspired John, "perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us"—thus fulfilling his own words—"I lay down my life for the sheep." But we need not multiply this testimony. It is more than complete; it is abundant. The sacred writers, it would seem, seek to establish this vital truth by irresistible proof.

**V. The worship paid to Jesus Christ, on earth and in heaven is another evidence of his Deity.** We know that Christ was often addressed as Lord when he was on earth. We know that he was often worshipped and that prayers were constantly offered to him. Here comes the leper worshipping him and saying, "Lord if thou wilt thou canst make me clean." Peter says to him, "Depart from me O Lord, for I am a sinful man." Thomas cries out, "My Lord and my God." The dying thief prays, "Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." After his resurrection, the disciples come calling him Lord, saying, "Lord wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" After his ascension, these same disciples "worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem."

Now, what would you think of any one, not divine, who would allow himself, through the ignorance of others, to be worshipped as God? You remember on one occasion, Cornelius fell down at the feet of Peter and worshipped him, but Peter disclaimed the homage. He would not for a moment suffer Cornelius to remain under the delusion that he was entitled to any such honor. "Stand up, I myself also am a man." So when John fell down to worship one improperly he was immediately corrected. "See thou do it not, I am thy fellow servant, worship God." Can anyone suppose for a moment that the Lord Jesus would have received worship which was not his due?

Perhaps someone may say just here, the fact that these men worshipped Jesus proves nothing, since it shows rather their opinion of his person than his true character. This would be true, but for what we have just seen—that our Lord allowed himself to be so worshipped. But more than this, he not only received this worship, but actually commended it. "Ye call me

Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am." "I am your Master;" it is as if he had said, "I have a right to lay my commands upon you. More than that, I am your Lord. I give you rest, I forgive your sins, and when you die I am he that will raise you up at the last day." Then, too, the Scriptures teach us that he who permitted himself to be worshipped on earth is receiving homage in heaven.

The dying Stephen called upon him after he had ascended on high, crying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." "I beheld," says John in Revelation, "and heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living creatures and the elders, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor and glory and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing and honor and glory and power be to him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb forever and ever. And the four living creatures said Amen."

May we not call him God who accepted worship from men on earth, and who now receives the homage of saints and angels in heaven?

Need I multiply proofs from the sacred oracles in support of this cardinal article of our Christianity? It would be easy to do it. I could show you that attributes properly predicable of Deity only, are constantly affirmed of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. I could show you that works which God alone could perform were wrought by Jesus Christ. It could be shown that the names applied to God are also applied to Jesus—that the Deity of Christ is recognized in the prayers which were constantly addressed to him by Paul and the other Apostles—that when Christ commanded his Apostles to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, his equality with the other persons of the Godhead was asserted—that the benediction pronounced on Christian congregations is an act of worship rendered to Christ in connection with the Father and the Holy Spirit. But enough.

The discussion of the subject is closed. We have proved, we think, most conclusively, from the only authorized source, that the man who was born in Bethlehem of Judea, was indeed, "God manifest in the flesh"—"very God of very God." Who can think even superficially that the God of Glory should thus humble himself for sinners; should for the guilty and lost consent not only to this act of humiliation, but to a whole life of suffering, shame and sorrow, and finally to an ignominious death upon the cross, without having his soul stirred to its lowest depths? What shall we say to such love? What words of gratitude can express the obligation we owe to such a benefactor? What devotion can adequately characterize the obedience which is his due? We can only summon our poor souls to stand still, and praise and wonder and adore. We say with the Apostle, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." But how cold and unworthy is that word "thanks," viewed in connection with the gift? Still let us rejoice that, poor as it is, we can speak it. Let us love to speak it every day. Let the earliest consciousness of every morning hour find our hearts swelling with grateful emotions to the God-Saviour. Let the last thoughts of the evening hour be of Him who, God though he was, gave himself for us. Let our whole lives attest by appropriate deeds, the sincerity of our thanks. And let us look forward to the skies as the place in which we may repeat and continue evermore the praises begun on earth. For, after we have dwelt for ages on the theme, we cannot express all that ransomed sinners owe to such a Divine Deliverer.

"O for this love, let rocks and hills  
Their lasting silence break,  
And all harmonious human tongues,  
The Saviour's promise speak.  
Angels! assist our mighty joys,  
Strike all your harps of gold—  
But when you raise your highest notes  
My love can ne'er be told."



# The Personality of the Holy Spirit

---

A. J. Gordon, D.D., Boston, Mass.

From the book, *Baptist Doctrines*, 1880, Charles A. Jenkens, Ed.

*"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever."*—John 14:16.

**W**e have in these words a comparison and a contrast. The comparison is between Christ and the Holy Spirit. For the words "another Comforter" carry the thought, that Jesus is one comforter, and the Spirit who should come is another. Thus, by a single word, our Lord puts the Holy Spirit on the same plane with himself. There is no comparison between a person and an influence. If I say, "I am a man and you are another," I mean, of course, that you are another man. Thus it seems to me, we have our Lord's estimate of the Spirit established in a single word.

Mechanics have an instrument, you know, which they call a "spirit level," which being placed across two objects, indicates when they are upon exactly the same plane. Such is the word "another" as here employed. By it Christ fixes forever the divine level between himself and the Holy Ghost. And whatever claim of divinity and personality he made for himself as the advocate with God—for that is what the word here translated "Comforter" means—he now makes for the Spirit who was to come, since he puts that Spirit upon the same level with himself by calling him "another advocate."

And there is also a contrast between Christ and the Spirit. "I go away," the Lord had three times said in the previous part of his discourse. Of the Spirit he says, "that he may abide with you forever." It is the contrast between Christ's brief visit to earth, and the Spirit's perpetual and abiding presence on earth. And this comparison and contrast suggest two thoughts—the personality and the perpetual presence of the Holy Spirit:

1. It seems to me that the text teaches quite distinctly the personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit. For the word comforter or advocate could hardly be applied to other than a person. An advocate is one who stands for another, as a lawyer for his client. "If any man sin," says John, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." It is a word which strongly and especially carries in it the idea of personality. No concentration of spiritual influences, no combination of divine impressions could ever be intense enough to constitute an advocate. The sun's rays condensed to a focus will kindle a fire, but they cannot make a sun, since they are only an emanation of the sun. And no spiritual influences, however powerful, can make a spirit or constitute an advocate, pleading, speaking and standing for us before God. A person can produce influences, but no amount of influences can ever constitute a person.

Indeed, the more we study the word *paraclete* or "advocate," the more fertile do we find it to be in suggestions in regard to the personality of the Holy Spirit. It is that which takes the place of Jesus in his separation from his Church. "If I depart I will send the Comforter unto you." Here the thought is clearly that of a substitute for Christ in his absence. And when he says that it is expedient for him to go away in order that this substitute may come, a most powerful impression is at once made upon the mind, of the greatness and dignity of a being that shall be deemed worthy to take the place in the world which is about to be made vacant by the Son of God. If the Lord himself is a person, surely his vicegerent must also be a person.

But then we hear Christ, in the same discourse, identify himself with this person: "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you." So closely and mysteriously related is the Lord to this coming advocate that he thus speaks of him as another self. And if the Lord is divine, surely this advocate must be divine. And not only this. There is a constant identification of ministry and offices between Christ and the Spirit in convicting of sin, in revealing the truth, in intercession with God. As Christ testifies of the Father, so the Spirit testifies of Christ. Christ comes in the Father's name; the Spirit comes in Christ's name. Christ makes known to men the things of the Father; the Spirit makes known the things of Christ. Christ reveals himself as one with the Father; and he reveals the Holy Spirit as one with himself. Christ is "an advocate with the Father;" the Holy Spirit is "another advocate."



Thus, in all our Lord's predictions concerning the Spirit who should come, he seems to be not only installing a divine successor in his place, but to be bequeathing to that successor all the offices and dignities and attributes which he himself had claimed. And this testimony of Jesus to the Spirit is more decisive than any word of that Spirit himself could be. For did not Christ teach us that even a divine being is not to base his claims upon his own testimony? "If I bear witness of myself," said Jesus, "my witness is not true." And so he appealed constantly to the testimony of his Father. So does the Holy Ghost appeal to the testimony of Christ. From the silent heavens God speaks concerning Jesus, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him." And just before Christ enters into those silent heavens that must contain him until the times of restitution of all things, he spoke concerning the Spirit, "Howbeit, when he the Spirit of Truth shall come he will guide you into all truth."

What a being that must be to whom the Lord committed the trust of leading his disciples into all truth after his own departure! The Spirit, who was to be a more advanced teacher than Christ, surely could not be a less exalted person; the one who was to enlarge and intensify the work which Jesus had begun could not belong to a lower rank of being than Jesus. In God's school men do not graduate downward any more than in man's school. And if the Holy Spirit were anything less than a divine person, I cannot conceive of Christ's dismissing his disciples to his tuition with the saying, "I have taught much, but this instructor will teach you more. I have led you as far as is yet possible in your present weakness, but he shall lead you farther. I have guided you into some truth, but he will, guide you into all truth." And this is what he says in the words, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now. Howbeit, when he the Spirit of Truth is come he will guide you into all truth."

Many regard the Holy Spirit as simply the moral influence of Jesus which remains in the world after his departure. But how feeble is the posthumous influence of even the greatest man compared with his personal presence! The echo can add no single syllable to the voice that creates it; the influence can, by no possibility, be greater than the man who exerted it. But we hear Jesus saying to his disciples, "When I am gone and the Spirit is come, greater works than I have done shall ye do; and further into the truth than I have brought you shall ye be led." Can it be that this augmented power is but the momentum of his influence increasing after his departure? Can it be that this larger teaching is but the multiplying echo of his voice after he has ceased to speak on earth?

Napoleon is said to have uttered this prediction before his death, "When I am gone, my spirit shall come back to France to throb with ceaseless life in new revolutions." His spirit did come back in the sense of his personal influence, and its inspiration was more or less felt in European politics in subsequent years. But how very small is the posthumous influence compared with the living man who shook all Europe by his giant tread. And how inevitably has that influence waned from year to year.

But Christ said, "When I am gone, the Spirit of Truth shall come, whom I will send unto you." That Spirit came. The church became filled and energized with his presence, and instead of being feebler than before, now commences her mightiest conquests; now dim apprehensions of truth give way to clear and vivid knowledge; doubts succumb to doctrine, and fears to faith. The disciples are utterly transformed. John, who in carnal blindness would call down fire from heaven on his enemies, now glows like a seraph with the fire of love, writing, "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him." And Peter, who before seemed so amazed and bewildered at every mention of his Master's death, now makes that strongest of all statements of the doctrine of atonement, "Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree."

When I read Christ's predictions in regard to the Spirit that should come, and when I read in the Acts of the Apostles what happened after he had come, the impression is inevitable in my mind that there is an invisible divine presence tilling the church and making it no less than a second incarnation of God through the Spirit. Looking at Jesus Christ, Paul exclaims, "Great is the mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh." And looking at Paul and his companions casting out devils, healing the sick, and preaching the Word, who has not exclaimed to himself, "Great is the mystery of Christliness; Jesus manifested in the person of his disciples." "In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit."

I have referred to the words "another advocate" as used in the text. Christ, in using this phrase, not only puts the Spirit on a level with himself, and in the place of himself, but makes him a co-partner with himself in the work of regeneration and salvation. As in a law partnership there is often a counsellor and an advocate—the one to advise in the office, the other to plead in court; so in the divine co-partnership between Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the earthly advocate,

counselling in the heart of man. Christ is the heavenly advocate, pleading in the court of heaven. There must be a good case on earth in order that there may be a successful issue in heaven. And so we are told of the indwelling Spirit that "he helpeth our infirmities since we know not what we should pray for as we ought, and maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Then the prayer which has been wrought within us according to the divine will, Christ takes up and pleads before the throne for us, "seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us."

Does the heart need comforting and enlightening, that "other advocate" searches its depths and voices its unutterable longings, and then the heavenly advocate prolongs and presses its suit before the Judge in heaven? Oh, blessed and unfailing advocacy! How can our case with such defendants be lost? "It is Satan's highest art," says John Bunyan, "to get us to take our cases into some lower court, knowing that he can never non-suit us in the court of heaven with such counsellors." God grant that in all the convictions of an accusing conscience we may have the wisdom to appeal to that court where the Lord Jesus has gone to appear for us.

Now what a testimony to the Divine personality of the Spirit is found in the very fact of such a partnership as this: Think you that in those sublime doxologies which are found in almost every epistle "to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," it is a mere impersonal influence which is thus linked up into co-equal fellowship with God and Christ. And in that passage in the Ephesians where the whole Trinity is mentioned in a single sweep of thought, "Through him we all have access by one Spirit unto the Father," think you that it is only some mysterious breath or impression that is thus made partner with God and the Son of God? Oh, Holy Spirit, since our fellowship also is with the Father and with the Son, so lift us into the lofty plane of thy communion with God that we may never be so irreverent as to drag thee down to the plane of our earthly and finite fellowship! So near to Christ is the Holy Ghost, and yet so near, blessed be God, to us.

Nothing in the New Testament so impresses me at once with the infallible deity of the Spirit, and with his familiar and tender fellowship with man, as that single phrase in the Acts of the Apostles, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and us." The first serious controversy and dissension had arisen in the church. Had Christ been present, how quickly they would have sought him out for his advice and counsel. But he had gone into heaven to be their advocate. Yet that other advocate whom he had promised had come. And so real and personal was his presence to the disciples, so plain and decisive was his counsel to them, that they could say with all the positiveness of a client returning from a Conference with his lawyer, "It seemed good to my counsellor and myself to do thus." Oh, that we knew such communion with the Spirit, and had such sensible manifestations of his mind, that instead of saying so often, "It seemed good to us," we might say, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us."

2. The text teaches also the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. "That he may abide with you forever" or, "for the age", as it is in the original. Christ went away after a few brief years on earth, and sent the Spirit to fill up the interregnum between his departure and his coming again in his kingdom. The earth is now the abode of the Spirit, just as truly as it was the abode of Christ during his personal ministry. We have not now to pray for the Holy Spirit to descend, any more than the disciples had need to pray for Christ to descend while he was already with them. For these eighteen hundred years the Holy Ghost has been among men, convincing the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; witnessing and interceding in the hearts of Christians; often sorely grieved by their sins, as the Master was; his admonitions often quenched, his testimony often rejected, his counsel often refused; yet always having somewhere a body of true believers where he could make his home.

This coming and abiding of the Holy Spirit in the world seems to me the most powerful testimony to God's loving and persistent determination to dwell with men, however rejected and driven away by their sins. Each of the three persons of the Trinity has in turn dwelt upon the earth. God walked with man in the garden, talked familiarly with patriarchs and prophets, and dwelt at last in the cloud of glory over the mercy-seat in the Temple. But he was driven away by man's sin. There was no cloud of glory in the latter days of the Temple. Jewish tradition has the strange story that that *Sheckina*-cloud moved slowly away from the Temple in the days of Jewish apostasy, and for three years and a half hung over the brow of Olivet, waiting in vain for the nation to repent, and then disappeared. It is probably but a legend, but it is a striking prophecy, at least.

Now Christ, the second person of the Godhead, comes. "The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us," says John. For three and a half years of his public ministry he pleaded with the people, only to be despised and rejected of men, till at

last, turning to the Temple, he said, "Behold! Your house is left unto you desolate;" and through the path of the cross, the resurrection and the ascension, he also went away. Then came the Holy Spirit—not to inhabit the temple on Mount Zion, but to dwell in a redeemed and regenerated church of living men. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Do you wish to know where Christ is now? Without the slightest question I answer you that he is in the temple of God in heaven, in the presence of the Father. Do you wish to know where the Holy Spirit is? With equal assurance I answer that he is in "the temple of God" on earth. "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost that is in you?" Be terribly afraid, then, of the lusts that tarnish and defile this temple; drive out with the scourge of self-denial the avarice that would turn this temple into a house of merchandise, "for the temple of God is holy, which temple are ye."

This fact of the present, personal abiding of the Holy Spirit upon the earth cannot be too strongly emphasized. There is danger that we grieve this present Spirit by the unbelief that counts him absent. To forget an absent friend is a serious slight; but to forget a present friend, and be so little sensible of his nearness that we put him afar off in our thoughts, is a most grievous affront. The sin of the Jews was that they "knew not the day of their visitation," and looked and prayed for a Messiah yet to come, instead of believing on the Messiah that had come. With a telescopic faith they gazed on for the star of Balaam, saying: "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh. There shall come forth a star out of Jacob," and only a humble few had the simple faith to behold the Star of Bethlehem, already risen, and to follow where it led. Oh, the sin which puts God afar off, and cries, "Who shall ascend up into heaven to bring Christ down?" when the Word is nigh us, even in our mouth! So many pray for the Spirit now, calling to him beyond the stars to come down to us—as though we knew not that he had been here for eighteen hundred years.

I sometimes think that if Christ were to speak to us from the heavens, it would be to repeat to us concerning the Spirit what he once said concerning himself, "There standeth one among you that ye know not." The Spirit is here, and it is for us to open our hearts to give him entrance. Air only needs a vacuum to secure its swift and rushing presence. And the most prevailing prayer for the Spirit is a heart vacant of selfish idols. We need not and cannot repeat the day of Pentecost; for on that day the Spirit came down, never to return till this dispensation shall end. But the waiting and praying of Pentecost we have need constantly to repeat. And if we might but open to him a heart utterly empty of sin, the Spirit would come into us like "a rushing, mighty wind," and we should know the meaning of these words, "being filled with the Holy Ghost."

I have said that the Holy Ghost is given to abide on earth during the present dispensation, or till the return of Christ to the world. And how striking it is that all the ordinances and instruments through which the Spirit works are limited to precisely the same era. The Word of God is the instrument through which the Spirit regenerates and sanctifies. And how long does the office of the Word continue? "We have also a more sure word of prophecy whereunto ye do well that ye take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place until the day dawn and the day-star arise." The ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are the agencies, in connection with the Word, for confession and sanctification. And how long do they continue their ministry in the church. "Even unto the end of the age" are the solemn words with which our baptismal commission ends. "Until he come, is the refrain with which the commandment to observe the Supper closes. Thus ordinances that point to the absent Christ testify of the present Spirit. They tell of Christ's return by the limit which is put to their continuance. The Spirit, the Word and the ordinances are the moon and stars that are to light our midnight journey till Christ, the Star of Day, shall once more arise upon the earth. God grant that in memory of that Sun now set, and in hope of that Star to arise again, we never forget the lesser lights that rule the night.

Oh, Holy Spirit, help us to receive thee in the fullness of thine indwelling; to pray ever under the power of thy prevailing intercession; to walk according to thy holy guidance; to live in the power of thine endless life. Oh Holy Spirit, open hearts that are yet closed to thy presence; convince of sin those who are saying to themselves "we have no sin;" convince of righteousness those who are trusting in their vain self-righteousness; and convince of judgment those who know not that by Christ's death the prince of this world is cast out, and "there is now therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."



# The Undiscernible God

---

J. L. Burrows, D.D.

From the book, *What Baptists Believe and Other Discourses*, 1887

*Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.*—Isa. 45:15

Many and profound have been the studyings and speculations of learned and wise men to find out something about God. What is his nature, his character? What is he doing in this universe? Upon what sort of plan, by what kind of methods is Jehovah working? Is he working at all? After all, is there any God? These are questions upon which the philosophers of earth have been working from India to Germany, from Egypt to England; from Confucius to Spinoza, from Buddha to Stuart Mill, from Plato to Herbert Spencer. And from every such starting-point *logic* seems to force the conclusion,—there is no God. We have searched for him everywhere, and he cannot be found. Every series of philosophical systems since men began to construct world-building theories has begun in Materialism and ended in Atheism. So effectually has God seemed to hide himself from scientific theorists.

When Christianity came as a disturbing element into contact with the ancient philosophies, these gave shape to the conceptions of many early Christian thinkers. Various sects arose whose basis principle was some wild, metaphysical notion of the nature of God and of creation. The Gnostics, the schoolmen, even the recognized orthodox Fathers of the Church puzzled themselves and perplexed their followers by strangest speculations and most incomprehensible expositions concerning the character and essence of the Supreme Power and of creative processes. God was removed, in their conceptions, to an infinite distance from his creation, and revealed himself only in emanations or incarnations of himself, in Secondary Beings to whom was delegated the work of creation and government.

Sometimes this secondary Divinity was called the *Demiurge*, sometimes the *Archon* and later the *Logos*, in a very different than the Christian sense. In all these theories this Secondary Being was the world-builder and Ruler, the only God whom men could comprehend. This intermediate Divinity was conceived of as sometimes good, sometimes evil, sometimes as a mixture of both. In the concepts of some he imagined himself to be truly the only God, not knowing he was himself influenced by a supreme power above him, like Jupiter limited and controlled by Fate. There are libraries of volumes filled with theories of this sort, showing how bewildering to human reason, even when partially illumined by revelation, but defective in simple faith, is the idea of the Supreme God. This is a theme upon which those who study most, laboring to understand, are most perplexed and become most conscious of their own ignorance. It was not peculiar to Isaiah to exclaim, "Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself; O God of Israel, the Saviour."

## FIRST NOTICE THE FACT ASSERTED, "GOD HIDETH HIMSELF."

I do not suppose it is intended to be asserted that Jehovah *of purpose* conceals himself from his creatures, but rather that, owing to his inherent greatness and glory in contrast with the narrowness and imperfections of our finite capabilities, a clear conception of what God is, is for us impossible. As by his spiritual nature he is invisible to mortal eyes, so, by the infinite grandeur and majesty of his Being, he is beyond the possibilities of comprehension by such limited, shallow minds as ours.

Our eyes cannot pierce ocean depths, nor scan the interior of the sun. Hence in his revealed word he is represented as "dwelling in thick darkness," making "darkness his dwelling-place," "His pavilion is darkness and thick clouds of the sky," "Clouds and darkness are round about him." But all this darkness to us is as the effect of blinding light. For in the same word God is spoken of as "light," "everlasting light," "in whom is no darkness at all," himself the source and centre of all light.

If you stand under the clear midday beams of the sun and lift your eyes to examine its splendors, you are dazzled and blinded, you cannot see the sun, but only a vague glare. Its ineffable lustre renders itself obscure. Blackness settles upon your eyeballs, and you cannot trace its form nor examine its rays in their source. So St. Paul speaks of God as "dwelling in light which no man can approach unto, which no man hath seen nor can see." As there is more light in the sun than we can

take into our eye, so there is infinitely more light in God than we can take into our mind. And hence he is to us as though surrounded by darkness. Under the bewildering effulgence of his light we are blinded.

#### **GOD IS HIDDEN FROM US AS TO HIS NATURE.**

What is God? In what consists the essence of his being? We say he is immaterial, pure Spirit. But what idea does this convey? What is spirit? How from pure spirit can flow out the solid material of creation? If Jehovah existed—a pure Spirit—in the past solitudes of Eternity, then how came substance matter into being? We are asking more than we can answer.

#### **GOD IS DESCRIBED TO US BY HIS ATTRIBUTES.**

That is, we conceive of certain characteristics of our own nature and we enlarge them into what we call the unlimited, the infinite. We find in ourselves power and we say God has *all* power—he is *Omnipotent*. We gain a limited degree of knowledge and we say God has all knowledge—he is Omniscient. We can see and observe. We enlarge the faculty and say God sees everything—he is Omnipresent. And so through the whole catalogue of attributes. But when we have collated and catalogued all, do we now know what God is—in himself? We are as far from it as when we started.

And then within these attributes "he hideth himself." WHAT IS OMNIPOTENCE? Are the methods, the workings of Almightyness observable? We see the *results* of might. We say the Universe must have been produced by Infinite Power. But who ever saw Omnipotence in direct action? What Archangel ever saw God making a world? Or giving it the first cast, spinning through the spaces to continue its three-fold whirlings with unvarying regularity during the ages. Can you imagine that any Angel understood how God did it, when "he spake and it was done, when he commanded and it stood fast?" Who can answer God's challenge, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare if thou hast understanding!" He hideth his Omnipotence and reveals it not at all in its operations, but only in its results. We see what he produces. But where he found or how he formed the materials, in what secret laboratory he wrought, what implements he used, what methods he pursued, where he began, how he progressed, when he finished—if he has yet finished—his creative work, all this is hidden. All processes, all methods are concealed. He works in impenetrable secrecy, hiding himself from all creatures' gaze.

#### **JEHOVAH HIDETH HIMSELF IN HIS OMNISCIENCE.**

His all-seeing eye is everywhere, and yet no creature ever saw it. He watches every motion, yet none can ever watch him. He observes every thought, yet in no thought is there consciousness of being noticed. Observing every creature, every thing, every thought, he is never himself the object of observation.

#### **HE HIDETH HIMSELF IN HIS OMNIPRESENCE.**

In his own personality he is in every place in the whole broad universe at the same instant and in every instant; yet his presence displaces nothing, disturbs nothing, is noticed by no eye, perceived by no mind. Shrouded in invisibility, he takes distinct cognizance of every movement and every thought, yet keeps his Omnipresence so concealed that men are not at all conscious of it, and think of the fact as only a doctrine, an abstraction, not as a reality.

#### **GOD HIDETH HIMSELF AS TO HIS WISDOM.**

We think we can trace evidences of marvelous wisdom in the order, harmonies and adaptations of all the parts of creation in their isolations and in their combinations. In all organic structures, in the relations of part to part and of each part to the whole; in the movements of *masses* and of molecules, in the organization of worlds and worms, we discover indications of profoundest wisdom. But by what methods, for what reasons, to what ends he displayeth this wonderful wisdom he often concealeth. So hidden is his wisdom that men often question whether the Maker was wise, and ask such questions as why were thorns and briars and weeds created with such marvelous designing skill and in such prolific spontaneous abundance? Why are storms, hurricanes, earthquakes disturbing forces among the harmonies of earth? Why are snakes and gnats and poisonous insects and reptiles; why wolves and tigers, vultures and hawks and sharks a part of the living creation? Why such vast deserts and rugged ranges of sterile hills and broad salt seas, deforming the beauty and detracting from the

productive fertility of earth? In relation to these and a thousand like questions we are forced to confess that his wisdom is hidden.

#### **HE HIDETH HIMSELF AS TO HIS GOODNESS.**

"He openeth his hand and supplieth the wants of every living creature." "From him proceedeth every good and perfect gift."

Yet men discover no direct connection between his active beneficence and their supplies and comforts. Their food they themselves sow and plant, and cultivate and gather, and prepare. Their clothing they shear from the beasts, pluck from the plants, and spin and weave and sew. And behind and within all these operations, concealing himself, moves the Lord, giving life to the beast, growth to the plant and cunning and skill to the laborer, keeping in ceaseless activity all these operations, and men discern him not. "They bless themselves and forget the Lord," because he hideth his goodness.

#### **THE LORD HIDETH HIMSELF AS TO HIS JUSTICE.**

That Jehovah must be inflexibly just is a clear doctrine of revelation and a deduction of sound reason. Sometimes we do see retribution visited upon the guilty, a sudden and terrible blow smiting a transgressor. But it seems to us like an accident, or like a natural consequence of some violated law. We see no direct evidence of God's interference. And yet behind all these second causes God, unseen, is operating, shaping the laws and pushing forward the penalties. And we say these are casualties, chances, not at all seeing that he is controlling and governing all. So effectually does he hide himself in the administration of justice. In the seeming immunity with which crime is often perpetrated, men adding sin to sin, undiscovered, blackening their own souls with daily accumulating guilt, and yet all the while God hides himself as to his justice, so that we sometimes almost doubt whether he notices.

*In the sufferings of the upright and pious, in the seeming long delay of vindicating their integrity and compensating their wrongs and oppressions, the Lord hideth himself, while even his own saints cry out, "How long, O Lord, how long!"*

Yet we are assured and convinced that behind this impervious veil that conceals the invisible, there is an eye that traces down into its sources, in the inner heart of man, every transgression; that keeps an accurate account of all sins, with all their varying degrees of guilt; himself unobserved, yet observing all; of whose notice we are not conscious, and yet whose notice is for no instant abstracted or confused. Oh, it is a startling, solemn thought that a hidden God, who has determined that the wicked shall not go unpunished, in secret sees and in secret "whets his glittering sword" that is yet to smite.

#### **THE LORD HIDETH HIMSELF IN THE WORK OF REDEMPTION.**

When he sent his Son into our world, to reveal and make efficacious his purposes and authority, he concealed him in garments of humanity, hid him in a human form so "that his own received him not." The world did not know that God himself, incarnated in the person of his own Son, was moving and working among men, originating and perfecting the grandest scheme for the good, purity, happiness of mankind, which a heart of infinite benevolence could devise or the hand of infinite power execute.

The kingdom of the incarnate God "cometh without observation." He is moulding the entire history of the world for the triumph of this kingdom. But he is, himself, behind the veil, and his plans and purposes are revealed only in their results. We cannot discover how unfolding events are all gradually and consecutively bearing upon the grand anal end, the redemption of the world.

*In the application of these remedial measures to individuals, under the ministration of the Holy Spirit, the Lord hideth himself. An influence, unseen, untraceable as "the wind that bloweth where it listeth," moves the hearts of men, breaking up in their souls the ice of selfish indifference, thawing out the frozen sensibilities, awaking the wicked to a sense of guilt, the careless to a consciousness of danger, inciting yearnings after deliverance and holiness, awaking and directing right purposes, renewing, regenerating the whole man, working within the soul to will and to do according to his good pleasure, while all the while the man seems to be working out his own salvation. In all God works and in all he hideth himself. While it*



is true that he reveals enough for all practical direction and guidance, it is at the same time true that in all departments of his administration he conceals more than he reveals.

#### **GOD HIDETH HIMSELF WITHIN WHAT ARE COMMONLY CALLED NATURAL LAWS OR LAWS OF NATURE.**

That Jehovah has established uniform laws for the government of the Physical Universe is obvious enough, even to a superficial observer. Worlds move in their several spheres in beautiful harmony and regularity. Their relations to each other are never disturbed. Day and night, summer and winter succeed each other in regular order. Even comets in their eccentric orbits we are sure are following settled laws. The most reasonable logic is that uniform laws indicate an Intelligent Law-Maker. Laws cannot originate themselves and work themselves into regular operation. They must be indications and proofs of intelligence, purpose, mind. They are only methods by which foreseeing and controlling intelligence works.

And yet so entirely does God hide himself behind and within these laws, that some studious scientists, absorbed in their chosen specialties, can discover nothing but the laws and cannot find God within or among them. And because they cannot see his hand working or managing the laws some deny that there is any God.

I see a brilliant electric lamp five miles distant. I never saw one before and I do not know how it is lighted or kept blazing; but a man would think me a fool if I argued that it was a chance concentration of electricity, without any interference of purpose or intelligence; that it was not intended at all, but only happened. It is an hour before day when I first discover it, and I watch till the day dawns and the glorious sun, upspringing from the Eastern horizon, shines down the new light into obscurity. And a philosopher standing at my elbow says:

"You were right in concluding that that bright light thirty feet above the ground was designed and made by some intelligent-minded man, but that magnificent orb blazing millions of miles higher, a thousand million times brighter, itself the source of the electricity that mind and hand concentrated into that lamp, that *Sun* itself was never designed or made at all, was never intended to shine as it does, but just happened through the blind operation of blind laws to form itself into that shape and splendor. There is mind in constructing the electric lamps, but mind had nothing to do with the construction of the Sun."

My reason and common sense revolt at the preposterous proposition that intelligence was necessary to the construction of the little light, and not at all necessary to the construction of the infinitely greater light.

Some men seem to be unable to get down beneath the facts—the phenomena—that are developed, into the prime causes, the intelligent working power out of which they all spring. We discourse learnedly about gravitation and how it binds systems of worlds together and keeps all in place. And what is gravitation, but a big word to conceal ignorance? To say a body falls by gravitation is only saying that it falls because it is heavy, or that it falls because it does fall. There is no such fluid or ether or mechanical force as gravitation. The word itself is nothing but a name to describe the fact that bodies have a tendency to approach one another in proportion to bulk and distance. But the underlying question is, why have they this tendency? The only answer, *nescience*, often nick-named science, can give is, because they do. The answer that a truer philosophy gives is, because an intelligent mind ordained that these relations should subsist between bodies. That mind we prefer to call God. There we have a cause. Gravitation is not a cause; it is only a fact for which there must be some cause outside itself. Science coins a good many terms that only describe facts or phenomena and calls them causes.

In all departments of physical nature we can trace operations and relations to a limited distance and there we become lost. We are sure that there must be something further on, but what it is and how it works no science can find out. We can trace up links in the chain of causes a certain distance, but the end of the chain eludes our most eager and patient researches and loses itself within the sphere of the invisible and indiscernible. And there is God within that sphere, sending out influences along those links that are controlling all that is visible, creating causes, himself the perpetually operating first cause of all, yet keeping himself and the activities of his agency concealed from the apprehension of finite minds. We see, examine, admire the workmanship, but we cannot see the worker. We can only very dimly comprehend his methods or his reasons. He dwells within the darkness of the dazzling light, and we are blinded when we attempt to gaze into its interior insufferable splendors. Within all his works God hideth himself.

Now is it any more wonderful or inexplicable that the Lord should hide himself AS TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF HIS PROVIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT?

Men do not lose faith in God nor complain of injustice or partiality, when he conceals himself as to his nature, his attributes or his works; but when they fail to discover his hand, his benevolence, his righteousness in his providential management of human affairs, they doubt and murmur and complain. Through the operation of what they call natural laws men see storms, earthquakes and sweeping cyclones, and yet they are convinced that after all there are good ends subserved by these seeming evils and outbreaks, and that upon the whole the ordering of nature is wise and benevolent. We cannot always immediately trace the beneficence under the hurtling ruins of a city and amid the festering corpses of the dead, when the earth has heaved up its foundations; but still we believe that the system of laws which govern the physical universe are as a whole good and wise.

Why should we not carry the *like conclusions into our views of God's Providence?* But when we see virtue humble and vice proud, the pious depressed and suffering, and the wicked prosperous and exultant, the right cause languishing and the wrong cause flourishing; God seemingly rejecting the prayers of the righteous and favoring the curses of the wicked; when we see many who have faithfully tried to obey him prostrated by poverty and affliction, while many who have openly denied and defied him walk along the serener heights of enjoyment and peace; when we observe the great inequalities in the lives of men, conditioned upon no noticeable distinctions of moral character, we sometimes become amazed and dazed and impatiently ask: Is there a God after all, who ruleth righteously and wisely among men? When we see victories of injustice, fraud and violence, over meekness, honesty and piety, we wring our hands in perplexity and agony and cry out,— "Doth God know? Is there knowledge with the most High?" "Surely, thou art a God that hidest thyself."

We have heard men groaning under the pressure of adversities, the reason or the justice of which they could not discover, call in question the reign or the righteousness of Jehovah and suggest skeptical doubts of his benevolence or of his Being, and conclude that there is no profit in praying to him or in serving him.

Poor, weak, short-sighted mortal! What are you going to do about it? Whither do you propose turning when you give up faith in Jehovah? Is there any other God for you to worship? Is there any other Being to whom you can commit the control of your happiness or destinies? Will you dictate to the All-Wise, and threaten him with the withdrawal of your confidence and obedience, if he does not meet your views of what is right and best? Do you dare nurse displeasure toward God because he thwarts your plans and disappoints your hopes? Will you patronize Jehovah by your approval, or revenge yourself upon him by your disapproval? "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall hold you in derision!"

What *can* you do better for yourself than submit to his will, whether you comprehend the reasons of his dealings with you or not? Can you secure your own interests, insure your own happiness, save your own soul, make your eternal life a blessing, without God? Oh, repent of these rebellious complainings and let faith strengthen itself against all these infidel misgivings! It is true that the Lord does hide himself in the administration of his Providence, as he does as to his Nature, his Attributes and his Works. We cannot understand from what we see what he purposes to accomplish. But faith believes that he overrules all for good. He leadeth nations as he does individuals, "by a way they know not."

Thus, though God hideth himself in his providential management, we may be sure that he never swerves from the line of highest wisdom and purest goodness, and that he will develop in kindness and love his purposes so that "What we know not now we shall know hereafter."

From what we have said concerning the obscurity in which Jehovah veils himself, it may be presumptuous to say anything about the *reasons* which may govern him in thus concealing his plans and workings. But though we may not discover all he means, and in many cases nothing at all of his purposes, yet there are certain revealed principles—general truths—which may furnish a clue to what otherwise would be utterly inexplicable, and so furnish a foundation for faith, when sight fails.

*Jehovah is in himself absolutely independent and self-sufficient.* He has no need of consulting or informing any of his creatures concerning his plans and purposes. Kings may need counselors. The Lord needs none; for he is himself the fountain of all wisdom, and all the wisdom man possesses comes into him only as tide ripples from the great ocean. Sages may need instruction, sometimes from even the humblest sources, but "who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being

his counselor bath taught him" or can teach him?

*Why*, then, should the Lord make known to men or to angels his purposes? They cannot help him. Nor can they change or modify them. He knows his own ends and all the means for securing them, and all possible contingencies that may arise.

It is true that there are men who seem to fancy that they could instruct God if he would only consult them; who do not hesitate to criticize and find fault with his plans and methods. He has not created the world, nor does he govern it, so as precisely to suit them. They imagine that they could show him a better way. But the great Creator evidently does not so think, and in the calmness and majesty of his own self-sufficiency carries forward his own designs in absolute independence of creaturely interference.

Were the Lord to make known his plans and purposes, the depraved hostility of devils and devil-governed men might prompt them to oppose his designs and interfere with his methods of accomplishing them. Indeed we see this, when the Lord does make known in a general way his will. They array themselves against it. They will not permit him to rule his world, or to bring themselves and others into submission and harmony with his plans if they can hinder. They throw themselves, all their influence and example, against his gracious purposes and the means of their fulfillment so far as he has revealed them for the regeneration of the world. True, they can effect nothing beyond what he permits and overrules, and their opposition is only so much the worse for themselves. But many of his plans he does not choose to bring at all into conflict with human or infernal hostility and therefore he so hideth himself that ungodly hate cannot discover the ends which he intends to secure nor the means by which be purposes to accomplish them. He spares them the guilt and punishment of such a weak and wicked attempt.

Again: The Lord would have men act freely, in view of motives and of right, and not compulsorily, in view of what they know to be inevitable. He has mysteriously connected human freedom of action with his fixed purposes. But if he clearly made known just what and how he determined to do, men would conclude that they had no freedom, choice or responsibility. They would sink into the lethargy or despair of fatalism. God does not mean that his foreknowledge or decrees shall interfere with the free agency of man. Indeed, he carries out his decrees through the foreseen actings of this free agency and thus connects and harmonizes as none but a God of infinite wisdom could do His own predeterminations with man's agencies. There is here room left for the disciplinary development of all human activities and energies. Men are encouraged to vigilance, consecration and prayer. They do not know what is before them, therefore they must watch and labor and pray. They cannot tell how far the Lord may interweave their own agency into his plans, therefore they may keep themselves in constant readiness for him to use. His purposes are fixed indeed, but they are not fixed in matters pertaining to their personal interests, without reference to their own faculties, relations and obligations. God would not have his revealings induce in men's souls indifference, despondency or despair, and therefore it may well be that he conceals the ends he determines, that they may act freely in view of right principles and motives.

Again: In hiding himself the Lord tests our faith in him and our submission to him. He reveals to us enough to assure us of the perfect wisdom and goodness of his government. He conceals himself enough to educate and test our confidence and faith in that government. What he does, we know not now? What then? Shall we indulge doubts and suspicions that matters are going wrong, or shall we not rather summon our faith to assure our souls that, beyond the clouds, all things are moving rightly so as to secure the most beneficent ends? The foundation' grace of the soul is faith, and God often hides himself that we may exercise faith where we cannot see nor understand, that we may cherish unwavering confidence in him. There would be no room or place for such faith and trust if we could understand all. It is when he covers himself with clouds and directs our pathway amid storms and through deep waters, that we feel that we have nothing to sustain us or comfort us but undoubting faith in his perfect wisdom, righteousness and love.

Within the folds of the veil, which Jehovah gathers around his throne, we find the place for believing confidence and submission, certain in our faith that he is controlling all things wisely and well. He has given sufficient assurances of his love and power by his general favoring providences and especially by the gift of Jesus, his only and well-beloved Son, to warrant perfect faith and confiding submission to his orderings; even when he withdraws his light and leaves us for a season in darkness, we are still assured that even amid the gloom "all things are working together for good."

Still another reason, which covers all the rest and which perhaps more than all the rest is fitted to inspire and strengthen

our faith and humility and submission, is this: That *God is infinite and cannot bring the infinite within the compass and grasp of finite capabilities*. Robert Hall beautifully says:

"A child cannot be made to comprehend the reasons of his father in imposing those restraints and privations which are a necessary part of parental discipline. It is only by degrees that its feeble capacity can be made to penetrate the secret of its education. If this be the case with respect to two finite minds, one of which has only arrived at greater maturity than the other, how much more disproportionate must be the plans of infinite wisdom to our narrow faculties, and what force does such a consideration give to that appeal of the Apostle, 'We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?' Surely we owe as much deference to the wisdom and as much reliance upon the kindness of the Eternal Father as we give to our earthly father."

We may be the more believing and confiding when we call to mind that the PURPOSE AND END OF GOD'S CONCEALMENTS, AS WELL AS OF HIS REVEALINGS, IS THE SALVATION OF MAN. Notice particularly the closing sentence of this text, showing the connection of thought,—"*The Saviour*." Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the *Saviour*. He hideth himself that he may be "THE SAVIOUR."

They are not black storm-clouds which he gathers about his throne, within which to concentrate lightnings of wrath and thunderbolts of vengeance to hurl on the heads of the guilty. But he withdraws into his pavilion of resplendent darkness, that he may there work out the plans and thence project the forces for saving men. Is he ever hid from your vision, my brother? Do you, like Job, search for him on every side, without discovering his presence? Oh, comfort your soul with the assurance that within the veil, like the High Priest within the Holy of Holies, he is still employed in what pertains to your salvation—"Behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face." In the obscurity, as well as in the light, he is still Saviour.

Finally, let us gratefully remember that all that it *is needful for us to know, our Father has very clearly revealed*. When we earnestly inquire, "How can my sins be pardoned? How can my soul be justified? How can my condemnation be canceled? How can I gain God's favor in life, his support in death, his smile in heaven?"—all this is made plain enough for the understanding, even of the illiterate man and of the inquiring child. Along the path of practical duty and piety instructions plain enough are given for even "babes and sucklings," and "the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein."



## Private Offences:

### Three Steps in the Settlement of Private Difficulties

---

A. W. Chambliss

From the book, *The Baptist Preacher*, 1846. Part 3 of 3

**Part III. The second and last duty of the offended remains to be considered. "If he repent, forgive him."**

**A**nd what shall we say? Where shall we begin to press this duty? Can any argument be necessary to induce the forgiveness of a repenting brother? One who has deeply felt and deplored his offence? One who has humbly acknowledged his fault? Who has offered every satisfaction in the power of his hands? From this moment, the onus of responsibility is removed from his shoulders to thine own, and devolves upon thee with all its fearful weight. Every principle sacred to Christianity demands his release and absolution—every principle of religion forbids us to longer regard him as an alien. It is not optionary with us, whether we will or will not receive him as a brother. Our own forgiveness and

acceptance with God, the fellowship of the Spirit, and the consolation of religion, the hope of heaven, and the bliss of immortality, all hang suspended on this point. Withhold the one, and we forfeit the rest.

The spirit of forgiveness enters into all the essential elements of Christianity, and forms an indispensable part of it. That is a false notion of religion, which fancies one's self forgiven, irrespective of the sentiments and principles which he may still cherish in his heart. Behold, how the apostle sums up the virtues of the Christian character, and in the bonds of indissoluble union connects them together: "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing and forgiving one another; if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." (Col. 3:12, 13) Remark the entire chain, and the absolute dependence of link upon link. How beautiful the cluster! And how inseparably close the connection!

Every ornament to religion—every principle vital to godliness, is here interarticulated, like the joints and members of the human frame, from which no one can be taken away without defacing and deforming the whole symmetry. Who would suppose a beautiful mansion proportioned and completed, with only one of its walls erected? With no less impropriety do we regard our Christianity perfect, while malice and rancor are indulged in the soul. An implacable Christian! It is a contradiction in terms. Bigots there may be, and have been, in all denominations: but an implacable, irreconcilable, unforgiving Christian, is of the same figure of speech, as a godly adulterer, a religious drunkard, or a devout murderer. Who can possess "bowels of mercies," with an inexorable hatred burning in his heart? Who can perform acts of Christian kindness, while malevolence and rankle in his bosom? Who can indulge "humbleness of mind," when his indomitable haughtiness and pride will not so much as pardon a fault? Can he be clothed upon with meekness, whose spirit heaves with anger, like the sides of a burning volcano? Where is the long buffeting of that man whom the most paltry offence kindles into an inextinguishable rage and madness? Where are his forbearance and pity—his tender heartedness and compassion, whom no tears of repentance—no ingenuousness of sorrow—no frankness of confession—no reparation of damage, can appease or excite to deeds of forgiveness? "If he repent, thou shalt forgive him."

The exercise of forgiveness is an indispensable prerequisite and qualification for acceptable prayer—the first Christian duty. No Christian, we dare say, can live satisfied without prayer. It is his native element—"it is vital breath." Prayer is the soul's best channel of intercommunication with heaven. The benefits of the atonement—the constant supplies of grace, both for trials and duties—the felicitous superintendence of the divine providence—these are sought and vouchsafed through this channel: and sufficiently endear the heaven-appointed exercise to every pious heart. Nevertheless, prayer to meet the divine favor must needs be offered in the spirit of universal love. No petition that ascends from the burning elements of strife and bitterness, can reach the ear of divine grace and goodness. "If I regard iniquity in my heart," said the Psalmist, "thou wilt not hear me." (Ps. 66:18) Why went the Pharisee down from the place of prayer unjustified and unblessed? The answer is given in this short phrase, "he thought he was righteous, but despised others." (Luke 18:9) A malignant and contentious spirit awoke the displeasure of God against the most solemn and sacred assemblages of the Jewish nation. "Ye fast for strife and debate, and to fight with the fist of wickedness." (Isa. 55:4) If men are commanded to pray everywhere, they are also to "lift up holy hands, without wrath," first, and then "without doubting." (1 Tim. 2:8)

In that beautiful formulary of prayer, given by our blessed Redeemer, we are taught to say, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors;" (Matt. 6:12) or, as it is expressed by another evangelist, "Forgive us our sins, FOR we also forgive every one that is indebted to us." (Luke 11:4) In the latter of these forms, the Christian is required to say, when he prays in the presence of the heart-searching God, that he has forgiven everyone who hath trespassed against him; and in the former, to ask the divine mercy, only in the measure that he shows mercy to his fellow man. Perhaps we have frequently uttered this petition: but have we duly pondered its import? Dare we assert to God that we have forgiven those who have wronged us, while we still cherish a latent malice towards them? Or dare we ask the mercy of God, as we show mercy to another, to whom, in reality, we show no mercy? What is the import of such a petition? It is that all the bowels of the divine compassion may be forever closet against us—that instead of smiles, his frowns may rest upon us—instead of blessing, he may consume us with interminable sorrows and wretchedness. Dare we make this prayer in the presence of the Most High? "He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath showed no mercy." "Therefore, when ye stand praying, forgive, that your Father also, which is in heaven, may forgive your trespasses; but if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is heaven forgive your trespasses." (James 2:13; Mark 11:25, 26)

The duty of forgiveness is farther enforced in the scriptures, from the consideration of that mercy which we have already received. This is our Lord's argument, in a parable representing the kingdom of heaven, "I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" (Math. 18:32, 33) Who can think of his own sins, and of the wrath to which they exposed him—who can think of the condescension and mercy of God in their forgiveness, and not feel the kindlings of holy pity move towards an erring brother? How multitudinous were they! HOW they rose over our head, as dark and portentous clouds, whose aggregated particles are without number!

Every breath was polluted with guilt, and every word was contaminated with crime. Through the eye and through the ear its deadly venom was imparted to the soul. We turned not away the eye from seeing, nor the ear from bearing, vanity and lies. Their image was drawn upon the spirit in dark and fearful outlines. Depravity entered into the essential elements of our nature. It beat in the pulse and flowed in the veins. It burnt in lurid glimmerings on the brain, and in flames of consuming wrath upon the heart. "The whole head was sick, and the whole heart was faint." Every imagination of the thoughts of the heart was only evil, and that continually. What is the sin of a brother, compared with the innumerable transgressions which we have committed against God? And has the divine mercy abounded to their pardon? "He forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst him: shouldst not thou also have compassion on thy fellow man, even as the Lord had pity on thee?"

Further, if our sins were actually without number, they were also heinous to the last degree. Their enormity rose with the law of which they were a violation—with the obligations of which they were a contempt—with the person of whom they were an abhorrence—and with the motives which they despised. Beheld, in the light of these reflections, bow do the most aggravated offences of a brother sink into the mere frailties and sinless infirmities of helpless human nature! What principles subsisting between man and man can be compared with the authoritative law of which our sins were an infraction? What obligations can be imposed by the relations of earth, so solemnly imperative as those devolved upon us as the creatures and beneficiaries of God? What human virtue can claim such inalienable fidelity and love, as that which we have despised in the ineffable purity and beneficence of the deity? Have we trampled all these beneath our feet? And has the boundless compassion of the Father of mercies extended to us a divine pardon? Tell me, thou pardoned spirit—raised to a princely station from the demerited flames of the hottest hell—tell me whether thou canst refuse forgiveness to a brother, whose sins scarce deserve mention beside thine own? If God forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst him, shouldst not thou also have compassion on thy fellow man, even as the Lord had pity on thee? "Therefore, be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Eph. 4:32)

"As God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you!" Here is the rule and measure—the spirit of acceptable forgiveness. It must be real and entire. Forgiveness is not a form of words alone. It is not a mere reprieve—a suspension of the feud—a temporary abatement of the animosity. It is more. It is an act—an important act—the act of absolution and release. It is the relinquishment of present claims—the abolishment of present liabilities—a "blotting out of the handwriting" of charges against the offender. Nor is this a partial act. It extends to the whole debt—both the principal and the interest. The last letter of the offence must be erased. Not an iota can remain. "I forgave thee all that debt," said the Son of God: and thus must we say. However heinous may have been the crime—however aggravated the circumstances of its commission—however possible that it may be repeated, the moment it is forgiven, that moment it is buried, and completely buried. Nothing short of this is pardon. He that pretends to forgiveness, while a private rancor—a secret jealousy—a latent coldness and reserve, are cherished in his heart, more than was wont before the offence was committed—needs to farther investigate his character, and perform his work anew. It is not thus that God for Christ's sake forgives sin, nor is it thus that we must forgive. "If ye, from your hearts, forgive not every one his brother his trespasses, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." (Math. 18:35)

Forgiveness must be final. Thus, "God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." They are cast into the deep sea; nor will they ever be called up to remembrance to our detriment. Like the moment, which is past to return no more; so, the sins which are blotted out, are never to be recalled. No subsequent offence can revive those which were once pardoned. With equal propriety may the liquidated debts of past years come into the settlement of present accounts, as that crimes once forgiven should be brought into the adjustment of future difficulties. Grant that his repentance was insincere and that it was only a pretext to another and more nefarious offence—grant that his subsequent conduct may require his expulsion from the church of God, and from



the society of the faithful. That is his own fault, and let him bear the responsibility. His repentance—real or pretended—was accepted, and in consideration thereof, we forgave, and must forgive. This forever puts a terminus to that difficulty; nor may we ever revive it. We may not mention the past to his detriment, nor permit it to influence any part of our conduct towards him. It may not so much as give credibility to reports that may thereafter circulate to his prejudice. His character, as a good or bad man, must stand or fall alone upon the subsequent acts of his life. What else is that forgiveness which consists in "restoring" the transgressor to that place from which by transgression he fell? What else is that forgiveness which "God for Christ's sake bath extended to us?" Nor yet is this all.

Forgiveness must be cheerful. Thus, "God for Christ's sake bath forgiven you." God does nothing with hesitancy and reluctance: and least of all, does he extend pardon with grudging hands. The smiles which accompany the divine mercy, give to it a principal sweetness. The virtue of condescension and pity is heightened by the pleasure which is manifested in the deed. Compassion is a priceless jewel, in willing and delighted hands: but a fulsome and obnoxious thing, when accompanied with complaints and apparent pain. "Show mercy with cheerfulness," is a divine requisition, (Rom. 12:8) and without cheerfulness, there is no beauty in it, that one should desire it. To forgive an offence is magnanimous; and the magnanimity of the deed is increased by the greatness of the crime, and the sovereign readiness and pleasure with which we pass it by. It is Godlike to meet a "prodigal son"—a reckless adversary—a malignant enemy—a foul asperser—a wily chicaner—with open arms, and extend to him a prompt and hearty forgiveness. Thus we "return good for evil,"—thus we "suffer long and are kind."—thus we "heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord shall reward thee." (Rom. 12:22) "If he repent, thou shalt forgive him."

"As God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you!" Here is the rule and spirit of acceptable conduct towards a repenting brother. We oppose it to those who profess to forgive, but are nevertheless unwilling, for the present, to fellowship the offender. He must be restored to our fellowship. "Let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican,"—when? After he shall have turned, saying, "I repent?" After he shall have deplored his offence—confessed his fault—and rendered every satisfaction in the power of his hands? No, verily. Had he refused to hear thee—and refused to hear them whom thou broughtest with thee—and refused to hear the church—then he should have been to thee as "an heathen man and a publican." But what now remains in the power of his hand, whereby to regain thy favor? What beside his offence intercepted thy fellowship? That was the only bar to thy communion—the middle wall of partition between thee. Hast thou forgiven it? That act was the extinguishment of the debt—the removal of the impediment. If it was anything less than this, it was nothing—then forgiveness is no more forgiveness. What if the church of God were to act upon this principle, and still refuse to fellowship those whom she might forgive the violation of any of her rules and measures? What if the divine mercy were to refuse fellowship with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ, to those whom it nevertheless pardoned? Where were the advantages of mercy, that one should desire it? Say not that thou hast forgiven him whom thou wilt not restore to thy fellowship.

"As God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you!" Here is the rule and spirit of acceptable conduct towards a repenting brother. We oppose it, again, to those who profess to forgive, but are nevertheless unwilling, for the present, to confide in the offender. He must be restored to our confidence. "Him that is weak receive ye, but not to doubtful disputation," is a maxim that applies with peculiar emphasis to the present case. His offence was the only bar to thy confidence—the middle wall of partition between thee? Hast thou forgiven it? That act was the obliteration of the difficulty—the annihilation of the obstacle. If it was anything less than this, it was nothing—then forgiveness is no more forgiveness. What if thy brethren—the church of the living God—were to pardon thy offences, but still regard thee with jealousy and dread? What if the divine mercy were to pardon thy sins, but still hold thee in suspicion and doubt? Where were the desirableness of mercy, that one should seek it? Say not thou hast forgiven him whom still thou beholdest with distrust and jealousy.

"As God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you!" Here is the rule and spirit of acceptable conduct towards a repenting brother. We oppose it, finally, to those who profess to forgive, but are nevertheless unwilling to replace their love upon the offender. He must be restored to our love. "I beseech you," said St. Paul, in the case of a notorious offence lamented and forgiven, "I beseech you, that ye would confirm your love toward him." (2 Cor. 2:8) What remains to prevent it? His crime was the only bar to thy love—the middle wall of partition between thee. Hast thou forgiven it? That act was the extinction of the barrier—the everlasting destruction of the hindrance. If it was anything less than this, it was nothing—then forgiveness is no more forgiveness. What if thy brethren—the church of the living God—were to pardon thy faults, but still withhold their affections from thee? What if the divine mercy were to forgive thy trespasses, and yet shut up the fountains

of his love and goodness from thee? Where were the great excellencies of mercy, that one should desire it? Say not thou hast forgiven him whom thou dost not and wilt not love. These two, forgiveness and love, stand inseparable in the argument of the apostle. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also bath loved us, and bath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savor." "Brethren, if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness: considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (Eph. 4:31, 32; 5:1, 2; Gal. 6:1)

My brethren, "be at peace among yourselves." By the consolations of Christianity—by the unity of the faith—by the valedictory prayer of the Son of God, that "you should be one, even as he and his Father are one,"—we pray you, "be at peace among yourselves." What is there in the turbid waters of strife and confusion—of bickering and animosity—of babblings and contention—that we should prefer to the placid streams of harmony and love? "I protest before God, my conscience also bearing me witness that I stand in jeopardy of you every hour." "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and division, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Cor. 3:3) What worse than this could be anticipated of men of the world, who have never heard of Jesus?—men of the world, who make no pretensions to the peaceful religion of Christ?—men of the world, who are led captive in the chains of Satan, and yield a willing and submissive servitude to the lusts that war in their members? What worse than this could be anticipated from those who have nothing in common, save a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked? But all ye are brethren, called unto peace—ye are brethren, redeemed with the blood of peace—ye are brethren, quickened and renewed by the spirit of peace—ye are brethren, the servants of the prince of peace—all ye are brethren, journeying to the abode of everlasting peace. By all these considerations, we pray you "be at peace among yourselves." "If there be any consolation in Christ—if any comfort of love—if any fellowship of the spirit—if any bowels and mercies—fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." (Phil. 2:1-3)

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen!



# Behave Thyself!



The above cartoon, drawn by a student of the Grand Rapids Baptist Theological Seminary, depicts the growing spirit of irreverence which blights the spiritual progress of our churches in these perilous times. Even Scripture reading, prayer and decision time are often sabotaged. Is this your besetting sin?

Do you realize that God Almighty is concerned about your conduct in church? It's true! You may actually be angering God more than pleasing Him with your attendance, singing, offerings, etc., because of your whispering, giggling, poking, note-passing, etc. during the services. Scripture warns: "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to HEAR, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil." Eccles. 5:1.

It's clear that your first duty is to LISTEN attentively! If you do, God can speak to you and to others. You should come to church to worship (John 4:23- 24), and to pray (Matthew 21:13), but not to play.

You realize now that you have sinned by your frivolity, do you not? Perhaps souls have not been saved and revival hindered by your conduct. Therefore, you should pray for forgiveness and promise the Lord that from now on you will "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (Heb. 12:28).

This tract calls your attention to these Bible truths so that, as Scripture says, "...thou mayest know how to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Tim. 3:15). You are the key that will open the door of Heaven's blessings on your church if you will so "behave thyself."