
"Cum studiō est scientia et sapientia"

THE BAPTIST FORUM

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Coweta Particular Baptist Church

*Holding forth the Gospel
of Jesus Christ and
maintaining the doctrinal
standards of the Baptist
Confession of 1689*

**Remove not the ancient
landmark which thy
fathers have set.**

Proverbs 22:8

Mission Statement

The primary mission of this Church in the issuance of this journal is to glorify Christ Jesus our Lord by encouraging the understanding of the Scriptures within the framework of our Baptist Heritage by promoting inquiry, study, and discussion.

The Baptist Forum, created to edify and encourage all Christians, is a quarterly journal of articles highlighting the Baptist Heritage.

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends,

Each time we come again to the time for publication of the *Baptist Forum*, I am reminded how quickly the times of our lives fly by. It is with divine accuracy that Job said in Job 7:6 that, “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle...” and in Job 7:7, “Oh, remember that my life is wind...” No wonder the Psalmist declared of our lives, “...for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” (9:10)

Our lives are variously described in Scripture as “the flower of the field,” “the grass that withereth,” “a vapor that appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away.” It seems to me sometimes that the Holy Spirit of our God nearly exhausts human language attempting to construct an adequate picture whereby we may understand life’s brevity. No sooner does the babe start suckling, then he begins to grow teeth and start to eat. No sooner does he begin to eat well, then he loses all those teeth and grows a whole new set. No sooner does he grow to maturity in his chewing before his teeth begin to decay and fall out. No sooner have they fallen out, then he returns to the point from which he started and seeks his nourishment in liquids again! And all of this—from liquids to liquids—seems to transpire so suddenly, like a dream in the night; and then he “shall not be found” at last! (Job 20:8)

It seems I looked up in a mirror one morning and, to my shock and dismay, some weary, old man was looking back at me. Who could this specter be? Only yesterday, I was skinning my tiny knees and riding my bicycle down an old dirt road beside my house in the country. “What happened?” I ask myself. “Where did my life go? Well, the Bible tells us plainly, does it not? It went “swifter than a weaver’s shuttle.”

Someone wisely said, “Should the conqueror, or the orator, reflect when the laurel crown is placed on his brow, how soon it will be followed by the cypress wreath, it would lower the delirium of ambition, it would cool the intoxication of carnal infatuation.” How soon indeed.

Knowing, as we do, the brevity of our lives, let us labor with haste and with diligence. To that end, we send forth again this little journal with the prayer that our God will use it to the further equipping of His saints to “work while it is yet day, for the night cometh when no man can work.”

It is said that in London there is a tomb of an ancient bishop whose epitaph simply reads:

Here rests a man...

Who never rested here.

May the same be said of me when “I draw this fleeting breath, when mine eyes shall close in death.”

Dr. John Suttles

*How short and hasty is our life!
How vast our soul’s affairs!
Yet foolish mortals vainly strive
To lavish out their years.*

*Our days run thoughtlessly along,
Without a moment’s stay;
Just like a story, or a song,
We pass our lives away.*

*God from on high invites us home;
But we march heedless on,
And, ever hastening to the tomb,
Stoop downward as we run.*

*Draw us, O God, with sovereign grace,
And lift our thoughts on high,
That we may end this mortal race,
And see salvation nigh.*

Isaac Watts

Gentlemen! May I Have Your Attention, Please?

Editor's Note: *This article is the printed version of a sermon preached in January 2019 for the New Year.*

Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.

For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land.

And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.

Jeremiah 1:17-19

In preparation for the New Year 2019, I addressed the ladies of our congregation and asked them to examine themselves in light of Proverbs 31.¹ But now here, I want to address myself in like manner to our men.

It goes without saying, that when I speak to the men of this church, I am speaking first and foremost to myself. It was just recently in our study together of Bunyan's *The Holy War*, that we examined that powerful sermon by Mr. Conscience to the carnal and wayward

town of Mansoul. "There was such power and authority in that sermon," says Bunyan, "...that the like has seldom been heard." But then Bunyan tells us that as he did "show to Mansoul **their** sin...he did tremble before them, under the sense of **his own** guilt...crying out of himself as he preached to them, 'Unhappy man that I am! That I should do so wicked a thing! That I, a preacher! Should live so senseless and sottishly here and be one of the first found in transgression! I should have cried out against the wickedness, but I let Mansoul lie wallowing in it...'"

Oh! How painfully I feel that condemnation myself; but like him, I must preach the truth. If I were intending now to address you here as *husbands*, I could, no doubt, turn to Ephesians 5 and find there great volumes of instruction for our admonition as husbands in the proper treatment of these "weaker vessels"—loving them "as your own bodies," as well as many others. Gentlemen, if we were to address ourselves at this time to our work as *fathers*, we would, no doubt, find volumes of instructions all through the Bible—a proverbial "Parenting Manual" of divine origin. Not the least of all, we could search

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¹ This message *Ladies! May I Have Your Attention, Please?* is available in the January 2019 issue of *The Baptist Forum*.

Ephesians 6 for instructions “not to provoke our children to wrath, but to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”; and all else which that admonition entails.

If I were to address you as *brethren*—brothers in Christ—we would find much to instruct us from Hebrews 13:1: *Let brotherly love continue*, or from 2 Peter 1:7 to add to our other virtues *brotherly kindness* and mutual care.

But it is not only as husbands that I admonish you here. It is not only as fathers or as brothers or any other specific relation that I would admonish our hearts here in this message—but as MEN!

In this vile generation of “gender neutrality,” this God-denying generation of gender ambiguity, I boldly proclaim to you this day that God created Adam and Eve—*so God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them.* (Genesis 1:27) And from that very day, He set them in His Garden to glorify His name and do His work and prescribed for them both their own individual roles—roles which were not the fruit of social evolution to be modified with time; nor were they the development of cultural mores to be reassigned in every succeeding generation; but roles appointed by God—set by none other than the hand of Almighty Wisdom and Authority.

It is as men, then, thus created and thus appointed, that I address you here; and I would address you, my brothers, to take to yourselves a lesson today, a lesson from Jeremiah the prophet, before whom our Lord set this admonition by inspiration so long ago. *Thou therefore, gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee; be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.*

My brethren, I lay **this** charge at your feet this day!

In order to make ourselves knowledgeable in the understanding of this

charge, I must remind you of the nature of Jeremiah’s ministry. Jeremiah labored for more than forty years (some say fifty) in a time when Judah was completely overrun by idolatry and iniquity. He prophesied of their captivity in Babylon and fought hard to turn them from their sins. Delitzsch commented: “The nation had come to utter ruin by its apostacy from God and on account of its calf-worship.” It is at this time and under these conditions that along comes this son of a priest, raised up of the Lord from a very young age, to thunder out God’s law and His damnation on all law-breaking in Judah! He was called by one commentator: “The evening star in a declining day”; and by another, “The herald of the dissolution of the commonwealth.” Most historians say he was eventually stoned to death in exile in Egypt; but whatever his end, Calvin surely got it right when he characterized Jeremiah’s life succinctly as “hard and arduous”!

While he thundered out the fire and threatenings of God on Judah, he struggled himself with despair and melancholy like Job, cursing even the day he was born. (Jeremiah 20:14) Oh! How human was this man! There were plots for his murder, and trouble on every hand—**this** is the man to whom our Lord said: *Thou therefore, gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee; be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.* Notice with me the contents of this admonition to this “man.”

First, He instructs Jeremiah to *gird up thy loins*. In preparation for work, the man was to tightly secure the looseness of his tunic in his waist-girdle or belt to prevent any hindrance or impediment while he worked or engaged in battle. This was instruction given specifically for a **man** to express his need to prepare himself for strenuous—even violent—engagement. This was God’s instruction for Jeremiah as a man. We, too, in 2019, must engage in manly preparation

for the service of our God in these days of over-whelming hostility. Peter admonished the Church: *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end...* (I Peter 1:13). This hour is not the season for whimperish indecisiveness and weak unresolve!

Secondly, the Lord admonished Jeremiah, to *speak unto them*. Simply put, silence will not do! This hour of compromise in which we live is not the season for retreat into the sanctuary of silence, but for open and clear testimony! This testimony must be manfully borne before all—our co-workers on our jobs, among our friends, and especially within the household of our own families!

Thirdly, in Jeremiah's speaking to Judah, he is instructed to tell them *all that I command you*. It is the responsibility of a man to summon up his manly courage, put on a brave face, square off with the enemy, and spare nothing in the declaration of the Truth of God. This hour is not the season for selective testimony, cowering from unpopular and unsavory truths or wincing at the condemnation of godless practices. There must be no blushing on the face of a man when declaring God's unconditional Law.

Finally, the Lord admonished Jeremiah *be not dismayed*. The Hebrew word here translated *dismayed* literally translates "to fall prostrate or break down." Simply put, it is the responsibility of a man not to quit. This hour is not the time for unmanly defeatism or faltering retreat! Having put his hands to the plow, he must **never** look back!

Finally, in conclusion, his strength and resolve is bolstered in the powerful words of this consolation:

For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land.

And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.

A "defenced city." An "iron pillar." A "brassen wall."

This is a man!

Shunning the Cross

As Christians, we talk a great deal about the grace of patience—its perfect work—its useful discipline, and that our strength is to sit still; but as soon as the trial arrives, how often the distrustful question comes with it, "How shall I get out of this trouble?" Thus in attempting to step out of one difficulty, where no way is opened, and leaving the appointed path, we often get into a more trying one, and in avoiding the stones which cut our feet, fall into the quagmire, from which they cannot get loose. "But as for me my feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped," may the believer say as he reviews the shunning of the cross, and the by-ways into which his impatient feet have often led him, from the one narrow path where alone he was safe.

Jonah, when he rose up from Tarshish to flee from the presence of the Lord, paid dearly for his flight; cast into the sea, and then swallowed by the fish...the son of Amittai has stood for ages and will stand to the last, a beacon to the church to warn her of the danger of shunning the cross. Like Jonah, it is actually from the presence of God we fly, when trying to escape the arrow which His own loving hand is aiming at us; for the Lord never sends a trouble upon His people unaccompanied by the promise of His presence through it. Yet marvelously and graciously does Jehovah overrule for **His** glory and **their** profit, the backslidings and false steps, the slips and falls, the waywardness and unfaithfulness of His people. Jonah's disobedience was the cause of all his misery, yet how sweet a song grace taught him to sing when the depths closed round about him—salvation is of the Lord; no apostle ever preached the Gospel more fully than did Jonah when he said that. Oh for wisdom to avoid every path but the one of God's appointment! "Guided by the skillfulness of His hands," and kept by His mighty power, we shall safely reach at last the city of God.

The Gospel Magazine 1853

Self-Delusion

Or

“A Way to Hell, Even from the Gate of Heaven”

“A Way to Hell, Even from the Gate of Heaven.”¹

*Mistaken souls, that dream of Heav'n,
And make their empty boast
Of inward joys, and sins forgiv'n,
While they are slaves to lust.*

Isaac Watts

*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord,
have we not prophesied in thy name? and in
thy name have cast out devils? and in thy
name done many wonderful works?
And then will I profess unto them, I never
knew you: depart from me, ye that work
iniquity. Matthew 7: 22-23*

“Sincerity affords no conclusive proof of piety.”² Reader, pause and ponder deeply the foregoing sentence. Does it raise any alarm in your soul? Does it heave your breast with a sigh of anguish at its possibilities? Do you grasp in the slightest measure the vastness of its implications? Does it give you the least concern? If not, then it is a serious question whether you may have embraced a self-induced delusion that will carry you to and over the precipice of death and judgment with

a lie in your right hand. Smooth words are high treason when the destiny of your never-dying soul is in the balance; and the example of countless multitudes, from the hour of our first parents' defection, proves to an everlasting certainty that, be we ever so *sincere* it is no preservative against a species of deception all the more monstrous because perpetrated upon us by our own heart.

Hypocrisy, in its accepted definition, is not that of which we now speak. The knowing hypocrite, feigning a godliness he yet recognizes himself to be a stranger to, is a repugnant creature to God and every true Christian, though far too well represented throughout professed Christendom. But if hypocrisy has slain his thousands then self-delusion has slain his ten thousands since men began to multiply on the earth. As troubling as the rising specters of atheism and paganism are in our own day, it may be questioned whether they pale in comparison to the wholesale destruction of souls wrought in the professing church by Giant Self-Delusion, to speak in the mode of Mr. Bunyan's allegory.

In fact, Bunyan himself gives us frequent portraits of the self-deceived right through

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¹ A phrase from the penultimate sentence of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* describing the fate of Ignorance who came to the Celestial City without a certificate.

² Jacob Helfenstein, *Self-Deception, Its Nature, Evils, and Remedy*, (New York: American Tract Society, n.d.), 1-2.

his *Pilgrim's Progress*. Think of Formalist, By-Ends, and especially one Ignorance. Mr. Bunyan describes him as “a very brisk lad” who came out of the “country of Conceit” by way of a “little crooked lane.” This Ignorance, says Alexander Whyte, “is a new kind of pilgrim...A few more young gentlemen like this, and the pilgrimage way would positively soon become fashionable and popular, and be the thing to do.” (Who knew Mr. Whyte could have spoken so prophetically of our own day!) Fair was this lad for the Celestial City. By his own testimony he knew the Lord’s will, endeavored to obey it, paid every man his due, prayed, fasted, tithed, relieved the poor, and far beyond even these, had “left my country,” indeed, he was certain he had “left all,” to seek entrance at the City. Little wonder then he had such confidence that his “heart and life agree together”—his own heart told him so! What numbers would esteem this “lad” just in the way to the shining gate and sure to find welcome in the King’s palace. But, oh, Mr. Bunyan exposes his dreadful condition in those momentous words from Christian’s lips—“thou camest not in at the wicket-gate...THOU ART A THIEF AND A ROBBER...” Here was one more *sincere* than most, yet notwithstanding *utterly lost* as you surely know, dear reader, from the closing paragraphs of the *Progress*. One writer, and that in 1849, sadly observed of this spectacle: “No real Christian has gone among such as profess and call themselves Christians and *conversed with them as to the ground of their hope*, without finding how *awfully common* are such characters as the one here described.”³

But, says an objector, make out your proof of this, not from the allegories of men, but from the sacred page. Then look no farther than that most *sincere* of all men, Saul

of Tarsus, who testified concerning his sincerity: *touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless* (Philippians 3:6). Yet even our esteemed translators have not given us the full weight of Paul’s words, for he actually wrote—“*having become blameless.*” Saul the Pharisee *sincerely* believed he had achieved a state of sinless perfection in his keeping of the law. (And who among his peers or his victims could question for a moment his zeal!) Here was a man fully convinced he was doing God service by his *threatenings and slaughter* until the very moment he was apprehended and undeceived by Christ Himself. True, says another, but his is an obvious case, for he did *many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth* (Acts 26:9). But if sincerity is the rule by which we must measure a profession, then this Saul was surely among the most godly of men to tread the earth.

If Saul’s own testimony is insufficient proof then the words of our Lord, quoted at the beginning of this article, must forever silence all doubt as to the terrible reality of this soul-destroying self-delusion. Read them again now with that seriousness befitting them: *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.* The Son of God here describes a horrific self-deception and its eternally fatal result. Dare we think ourselves or anyone else safely beyond the reach of its arrows or sheltered from its wasting destruction?

We have no interest in unsettling those *weak in faith*. As Christ will not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax; so we have no desire to be a hindrance but every way a help to those yet laboring to come to

³ Alfred Patton, *Cottage Lectures on the Pilgrim's Progress*, (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1849), 369.

that *full assurance of faith*. To these the words of that blessed Puritan John Collinges are offered for encouragement. “Be of good comfort, weak faith *is* faith; little ones are true children of the Father, who casts none away that comes (though creeping) to Him.”⁴ Yet we think the danger in our day to be infinitely greater on the left side of the path where dwell deluded goats than on the right hand where may be found discouraged sheep; that countless more are in peril of shipwreck upon the Scylla of self-deception than are likely to be caught in the Charybdis of a swirling despair over unclear evidence of their interest in Christ.

Consider the Master’s description of the *dimensions* of that self-delusion of which He so strikingly warns His hearers. View its *width*. The second Person of the triune God said it would be *many*. MANY! How many is many when Sovereign Omniscience says it will be *many*? It will not be an isolated one here or two there or even some few among all the hosts of mankind gathered to judgment, startling as even one alone should seem at *that day*. No, the Lord of glory, the Judge has declared it unequivocally and given abundant forewarning that MANY who assured themselves of a blessed reception into the *joy of the Lord* will, in the devastating words of Daniel Dyke, instead “find how fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of God, which shall pluck thy mask from thy face, and thy head from thy body, both at once.”⁵ These *Many* undoubtedly must include persons of the highest rank, most pleasing character, excellent talents, and bold profession. How can it be otherwise; for of these are made up a multitude on earth who take it for granted that they, if anyone, shall be received into everlasting habitations. Seeing that so *many* with a fine profession will be exposed as lacking a real possession will we, will you, then neglect for even a moment the apostolic

admonition, *be not highminded, but fear?* Hopeful’s lament of the pilgrims’ interview with Ignorance is just a true report of the sad state of Christendom: “Alas! there are *abundance* in our town in this condition, *whole families, yea, whole streets*, and that of *pilgrims* too; and if there be *so many in our parts*, how many, think you, must there be in the place where Ignorance was born.” Our Lord sums Hopeful’s speech in a brief compass—*Many shall say...*

Consider also its *length*. How far did these deluded ones go in time and in service to their professed *Lord*. They held out a good confession to the end, yea, *past* the end. They preached, exorcised, and did miracles; and they did it all, according to their own testimony, for Him! These gave astonishing, and, to the eye, incontrovertible evidence of both sincerity and piety. These were no secret disciples but ones who gave *phenomenal* confirmation of being valiant and prodigious witnesses and doers for the kingdom. Here were gathered a host of gospel proclaimers and, verily, miracle-workers for the cause of Christ. And not for an hour, nor for a day, nor only a season, but these spent and were spent in a lifetime of such activity, then having departed this life were lauded as the King’s own and choice servants in very deed by their descendants. BUT IT WAS ALL A LIE! A lie with which they deceived, certainly themselves and perhaps others, but to their horror at last they discovered *man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart*. “Men may be endowed with talents by which they may be highly useful to others, while they become ‘castaways’ themselves. They may preach the Gospel with discrimination, and even with *success*, while that Gospel exerts no sanctifying influence upon their own hearts. They may guide others to heaven, and in the end be excluded

⁴ John Collinges, *A Cordial for a Fainting Soul*, (London, 1649), 8-9.

⁵ Daniel Dyke, *The Mystery of Self-Deceiving*, (London, 1614), 30.

themselves.”⁶ To what *lengths* will many go in words and acts that earn them the name “Christian” in the regard of men during and after their lives but who will learn too late *that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God* (Luke 16:15).

Then too, contemplate its *height* and *depth*. This is a self-delusion that will carry its devotees up to the very throne of God in a confidence that even the intervening period from their death to the *great day* will be unable to shake. Their bodies shall be called forth by the trump of God from the graves in which they have lain for days, years, centuries, or perhaps millennia. Their souls shall be called from the torments they have suffered with the *rich man* from the hour of their death; and they shall inhabit again their former tabernacle of flesh, now made capable by that *resurrection at the last day* of receiving in them the everlasting reward of their works. In these bodies, they shall ascend the steps to the throne where He, to whom all judgment has been committed by the Father, sits in the glory which He had before the world began, on a great white throne from which the very earth and heaven flee in dread. It is up to this throne that their self-delusion will carry them; and it is before the all- and infinitely-glorious King on that throne they shall stand in unshaken self-confidence. And it will be while the Son in the full glory of His inexpressible holiness pierces their souls with the eye of absolute omniscience that they will yet make their profession of a sincere heart and service, and plead that their torments until now must surely be a grand *mistake*, for “*Lord, Lord, did we not...?*” If you think this description but an unwarranted flight of fancy or at least impossible given the infinite magnitude of the persons and transactions of that hour then, dear friend, we are afraid that you are not yet fully acquainted with the height and depth of

your own depravity! Further, these are not our own declarations but the express statements of the King Himself concerning that day. Do you doubt His testimony?! Perhaps with far greater solemnity we hear again the inspired witness, *the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked...* Oh, how surpassing great may be this self-delusion!

Having established the awful reality of such a condition from the inspired record, especially from the Lord’s own description of it, it remains to point out some of the character of its operations and effects as well as to inquire whether there is any remedy to this grievous and nearly pandemic affliction. This self-delusion works by counterfeit and conceit, making those under its sway misapprehend the false for the true, then, Jael-like, bidding them refresh themselves and take rest while it disguises their mortal danger.

Many are, and will be, deluded by mistaking knowledge for grace. Hosts there have been who possess “great knowledge of Gospel mysteries,” as Talkative boasted to Faithful, who professed an orthodox creed, or at least some notion of the “fundamentals of the faith,” and who may have it in such profusion that it exceeds even that of not a few true, humble saints. For such, theology is a science with its axioms, postulates, theorems, and laws to be mastered by the intellect. Christianity is a sum of religious intelligence to be acquired. And lest we be tempted to impute this mistake only to the “learned,” bear in mind that many professors small and great have fixed upon some narrow discipline within the university of doctrine and made it their life’s labor to become its leading proponent. Further, all this may be united to a life of blameless morality and fastidious adherence to the forms of religion. Where then is the mistake? Not in the doctrine, surely, but in the *heart*. Truth may

⁶ Helfenstein, 20.

be clearly seen and fill the mind while the heart and soul experience nothing of its power. Knowledge may overflow where yet Christ is not loved. Sin may be acknowledged as an infinite evil and yet not be hated, that is, hated not simply outwardly, for many can make a great outcry against sin in others, but in a spiritual opposition made against the corruptions of their own hearts to crucify *the flesh with the affections and lusts*. There may be the appearance of surpassing light where there is no reality of gracious obedience. The Savior made this clear to a demonstration from the beginning of His ministry, *whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them...to His final hours before the cross, if ye love me, keep my commandments*.

And it is just here that self-delusion steps forward once more to reassure its followers that, whatever others may be, *thou art now the blessed of the Lord*. It makes its adherents to say, *all these have I kept from my youth up*, but simultaneously stops the ears when the Master returns answer, *one thing thou lackest*.

Then again, how many are deceived by natural excitements they take to be holy emotions. Whole religious movements are now founded upon the affective, with their followers assured that the animations they experience, alone or especially among the throngs, are certain evidence of the genuineness of their first “experience” of religion. Thus, the current experience is used to prove the previous experience and self-delusion craves for the repetition of the experience as the latest proof that it is all real. Rarely do those under its spell stop to consider that there have been throughout history and are now numberless masses who have never so much as heard of the Lord’s Christ but who can and do manifest the same emotional agitations, “evinced indeed a high degree of mental excitement without

determining whether that excitement be produced by the agency of the Spirit, or whether it be a fire of their own kindling.”⁷ Nor tears, nor groans, nor trembling, nor joy—of themselves—go to prove one’s union to Christ, however sincere the expressions may be. “Never tell me that thou burnest in holy feelings, as long as thou burnest no otherwise than the bush that burned but was not consumed: as long as the inward corruption of thy heart remains unconsumed, for all these ‘burnings,’ thou mayest burn in hell forever.”⁸

Consider further that self-delusion’s forgery of repentance is remorse. Guilt often awakens anguish and mental pain for sin. Conviction, especially real spiritual conviction, can and does produce sorrow inwardly and often outwardly for sin and its consequences. It may abide in the soul for a great while, causing the heart to bemoan its state, drawing it from the world’s trifles, provoking trembling for transgressions. Yet, conviction, as necessary to the work of conversion as it is, is not conversion. The apostle warns us that *the sorrow of the world worketh death* and that there is, therefore, an infinite distinction between that and *godly sorrow that worketh repentance*. If a protracted period of conviction and remorse is dispelled by a sudden experience of or delight in “spiritualities” then is the delusion strengthened by the self-assurance that all is now well with the soul. We say again, conviction is *not* conversion. Cain, Pharaoh, King Saul, Belshazzar, and Judas to name a few are wretched confirmation of this truth. The day of judgment will produce overwhelming conviction, guilt, and remorse; hell itself will be the scene and source of deep and eternal remorse, *weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth*, but there will be *no* repentance. A sinner may come to feel he is lost, but that is still an infinite distance from his being saved.

⁷ Helfenstein, 12.

⁸ Dyke, 104.

Moreover, this delusion confounds gifts with graces. In a day when every sort of natural talent, skill, or inclination is pronounced by religious assemblies to be a “spiritual gift” and its exercise viewed as a divine mandate, the ensuing chaos has further blurred the eternal distinction between the two. The Angelic Doctor Sibbes cautions, “Gifts may come from a more common work of the Spirit; *they are common to castaways*”; and as William Bridge rightly observed, “gifts are a dead grace.” They cannot and do not advance us in sanctification, while they give the appearance of being the fruit of sanctification and thereby deceive many. Bridge notes further: “While we are living, graces and gifts are mingled together; some men have gifts and some men have graces, and *they look very like*...though a man have never such great parts and gifts, yet if he have not grace, he may perish to all eternity, *for by his gifts he is not united unto Jesus Christ.*” A professed Christian may possess much of ability, expertise, fluency, eloquence, earnestness, persuasiveness, generosity, and a thousand more besides, and be as really destitute of grace as that description of those in I Corinthians 13 who, for all their gifts, all their efforts, and all their sincerity, having not love are but clanging bankrupts. King Saul prophesied and Judas performed miracles; both were reprobates at last. Gifts, no matter how pleasing to self and others, no matter how friendly to religion, are a shadow that carries no weight at the bar of judgment.

We might add a virtually countless train of others to these already mentioned. Common philanthropy may easily be confounded with Christian benevolence. There is abundant evidence around us that sympathy, even empathy, with the sufferings of the body, mind, or circumstances are often in evidence when it is just as evident that the sympathizers have *no fear of God before their eyes*. How many since the dawn of our

race have confused reformation with regeneration? Who rest content in having abandoned, or never taken up, a course of open warfare against the King’s laws and yet have their residence, though no longer within the City of Destruction, are still well short of being inside the gate; for they dwell in the town of Morality? Are there not multitudes who mistake natural zeal for real devotion to Christ? Paul testifies of his kinsman who had *a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*. Not less in our day do many make wonderful demonstrations of their fervor but in whose wake is rather desolation than the savor of Christ, who, like Jehu, boast of zeal for Jehovah but set about to establish their kingdom, or who, like Herod, having heard the Baptist, *did many things* but in the end made the prophet a sacrifice to Herodias’ zeal for his head. All these and legions more demonstrate absolutely that there may be an *appearance* of piety where the reality of it is entirely absent. “Thus, it appears that every Christian grace has its counterfeits. The question, then, is not simply whether we have love to God, sorrow for sin, faith in Christ, submission, fear, hope, and joy—but what is the *nature* of these exercises? Are they such as *God requires*—such as are *peculiar* to the saints—such as will be *approved* in the great day of final retribution?”⁹

Scripture is filled with warnings to professors of religion that they take heed, that not only *may* they be deceived, but that many *are* deceived. *I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart* (Deuteronomy 29:19). *There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness* (Proverbs 30:12). Nor is the New Testament silent on this subject, but rather the more urgent to those that *have a name that they live but are dead* (Revelation 3:1). *Let no man deceive himself* (1 Corinthians 3:18). *For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden*

⁹ Helfenstein, 26-27.

destruction cometh upon them (1 Thessalonians 5:3). *Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked* (Revelation 3:17). To whom are these last addressed but to those who had professedly been *made partakers of the divine nature*. No marvel then that the inspired record admonishes every professing Christian repeatedly in words of like import, *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!* How tragic the thought that MANY shall go from the sacred precincts of the church on earth, appear before Him whom they professed to honor and serve, and hear the dreadful sentence, *Depart!* and to have discovered to themselves and the assembled universe that in all their religious labors they were but *workers of iniquity!* “To sink into hell from the very table of the Lord! O, what a terrible fall! They that perished from Sodom and Gomorrah, though their punishment will be intolerable, will be but slightly punished in comparison with *you*. A lost *communicant!*—one who went to hell with the bread and wine, the memorials of a dying Savior, as it were in his mouth! O, methinks such a one must be the most shocking sight in the infernal regions. How will lost angels and lost heathens wonder and stare at you as a horrible phenomenon, a dreadful curiosity!”¹⁰

Has the church no small portion of blame to bear for such as perish in self-delusion? She has embraced multiplied thousands within her pale upon the scantest of evidence, or none at all, other than a sincerity, and that often momentary, that produces the self-confident exclamation, *The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are we*. Thus, the Lord’s house is made a *refuge of lies*; and the self-deceived *strengthens himself in the iniquity of his life*.

Awful as the disease is, and in so many

cases incurable, there is a remedy. It is a hard physic and seldom prescribed in our generation. None of it may be omitted, the whole must be applied, and we may not spare for the tenderness of the wounds or the sting of the medicine. It is no less than *self-examination*. *Examine yourselves*, said the apostle by inspiration, *whether ye be in the faith*. Use the proper instrument—the Bible. *He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool* (Proverbs 28:26); and to attempt to search our own hearts without the light of truth is infinitely more foolish than to hope to find our way in the palpable darkness of a bottomless cavern. Repentance, conversion, sanctification, love to Christ, and every other cardinal truth is alone described and illustrated in God’s word and from thence we must fetch a proper understanding; or we are hopelessly thwarted in any attempt to rightly discern our true state.

Use the proper rule—Christ. Not friend, fellow Christian, fond family member, nor favorite church leader is the pattern for the saint. It is Christ, Christ alone. And not the superficial, sentimental Jesus so sadly and so often portrayed by both the world and by religion, but the Son as presented to us in His own word, His portrait drawn by the inspired pen. We are to *walk even as he walked* and judge our interest in Him by our conformity to His image.

Labor diligently to ascertain the true evidences of conversion and sanctification. They are, in a word, that *fruit of the Spirit* described for us in Galatians 5, and not as we wish to define them but as the Scripture itself characterizes them and their outworkings in the true disciple of Christ. “There are some who place great dependence upon the pungency of their convictions, the ecstasy of their joys, remarkable dreams, sudden impulses, the unexpected application of some Scripture promise, or the fact that they can refer to the particular moment and place of

¹⁰ Helfenstein, 41.

their supposed conversion. *None of these things*, however, constitute the distinguishing marks of grace.”¹¹

Having traced out all the Scripture features of these graces, look to yourselves carefully, diligently. Deal honestly with your heart whether you have such as these to *be in you and abound*, not in external acts but in the motions of your heart. In the quietness of your soul, for this will not be the work of a moment, nor an hour, nor even a day, lay these Biblical portraits of a saint side by side with your own experience and say, God being witness, if you bear some likeness to them...now, at present, in this moment. Put no trust in your actions and feelings in the day of your supposed conversion. Union with Christ as evidenced by these living graces must be a present reality, they must be alive and at work in the soul now, or they are no evidence at all. They may not be at the height of their strength just now, but they will exist presently, or we have no sure ground of hope.

Use the proper means—a daily dying to self. The Master has given one rule for all His disciples: *death*. It is the inescapable obligation of all who come unto Him, *...and hate not...yea, his own life also, he cannot be my disciple*. The cross that the disciple is to bear is not simply a burden—it is the instrument of death for him. The Lord made it unmistakably clear; and the apostle echoed his Master’s instruction, *I am crucified with Christ*, and again, *...the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world*, and once more, *They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts*. If there be nothing of a daily dying, of a mortification of sin, of a perpetual warfare against all that is not Christ in your soul, then consider seriously whether you have ever been espoused to Christ; for He means to present His bride to Himself *not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should*

be holy and without blemish. “Enter therefore into those dark closets of thy heart, take the *light of the word* in one hand, and the *sword of the Spirit* in the other: and whosoever Agagite or Amalekite that light shall discover, kill, spare none, make havoc of all an universal destruction; save but one and thou destroyest thyself.”¹²

Reader, you have the terrifying condition laid out before you. Self-delusion may pacify the mind for a time; but *At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder*. What will it be to take this companion with you up to the very throne of judgment only to have it forsake you in that moment when the King undeceives you and pronounces your doom, *Depart!* Depart from *me!* Depart from me, ye *cursed!* Whatever the width, and length, and height of your sincerity, it may be just equal to the dimensions of your self-delusion. But you have the remedy to hand: *Examine yourselves. Give diligence. Make sure*. And if, after all, you find that you have indeed *walked in the light of your own fire*, make no delay and go at once to Christ. Seek Him while He may be found a Savior, before He becomes at the last your Judge.

“Then I saw that there was a way to hell even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction.”

*Why will ye waste on trifling cares
That life which God’s compassion spares,
While, in the various range of thought,
The one thing needful is forgot!*

*Not so your eyes will always view
Those objects which you now pursue;
Not so will heaven and hell appear,
When death’s decisive hour is near.*

*Almighty God Thy grace impart;
Fix deep conviction on each heart;
Nor let us waste on trifling cares
That life which Thy compassion spares.*

¹¹ Helfenstein, 57.

¹² Dyke, 105.

The Virtue of Quitting

Lay thine hand upon him, remember the battle, do no more.

Job 41:8

There are few things more tedious to a principled and resolute man than a quitter. Nothing excites his anger like seeing a person simply stop when the task is tiresome or complicated, dangerous or protracted. Hardly anything smells so foul to a person of high character than that breed of cowardice or sloth that despises dedication more than the shame of failure. Can any sense be made of such behavior, I wonder?

Being a quitter is a sin, if this kind of quitter you are. But as I consider the Church and the wisdom required for faithfulness going forward, I want to suggest that there is a species of quitting that we need to practice—virtue in leaving off some things.

There is a species of stubborn dedication to a cause that is not born of reason or wisdom. While it may be very truly well-intentioned, it is still the child of pride and the neighbor to ignorance. It insists on sticking to the cause in hand, at all costs. And it very soon loses perspective in the fight and, either convinced by self-righteousness or energized by fear, it insists that quitting is losing, plain and simple.

Job apparently imagined that, by insisting, he could at last carry his point, as well. But comes the Lord to him in a lengthy, glorious, and kingly argument that might be reduced to these words: Job, stop it!

But of course, Job must, because the question of verse 1 demands that answer: Job, can you? Brethren, when I consider our

individual experiences and their impact on the Church corporate, I believe the Lord may ask us the same question. Is this thing you are wrestling over something you can do?

Look the monster in the face

I believe there are struggles of personal salvation, struggles of family relations, of failing health, of church relations, struggles of career or finance, of community interaction and gospel outreach where we may need to learn the virtue of quitting. The greater Church in our land might learn it. So might we. It's not defeatism I propose. Job's wife offered defeat. God offered reason. And it begins with revisiting the limits of our ability—with a fair assessment of our weakness. It rests in the fact of God's omnipotence!

Come not to Job 41 to be tangled in the mystery of prehistoric animals. Come not to Job 41 to learn only of Leviathan! Come to Job 41 to see Job's weakness exposed, and the Lord's power expressed. Oh, what a creature is this Leviathan! Nothing for the Lord! Too much for Job. And to move forward in such a conflict as this, Job must quit. But to arrive at that sanctified conclusion, I want you to notice there is a ...

Contact Assumed

Job, lay thine hand upon him! To discover your limitations and to find your confidence in the power of God, you are first going to have to have a real sense of the

*W. Luke Suttles is the author of several Gospel tracts and the book **The Year's Most Worthy**. Both the tracts and book are available from www.cowetaparticularbaptist.org.*

matter at hand. In all its ugliness, in all its terror, in all its bitterness, the way forward assumes a personal experience with the enemy. You will have to clear your eyes and look the monster in the face.

It seems to be the case with us as it was with Job, that the dust and bluster of general engagement clouds our senses. But if we are to move forward, we will need to lay on our hands to get a right sense of the matter. This is calculated and circumspect behavior. This is often frightful or bewildering. And here is where we usually cease to think circumspectly. But this is only what goes before the ...

Consideration Required.

Job, remember the battle! Do you see? What is required here is an honest estimation of the result of foolish behavior. Job, nothing will come of this but conflict. Nothing will come of this but destruction. Nothing will come of this but loss—loss to you! Job, consider the outcome! Oh, dear Lord, if only we would have the wisdom to consider the battle! You have your hand upon the problem, Job. Now, what do you suppose will come of your efforts at tackling this?

Remember the battle!

Would that we would not so often press on in our dogged and deluded determination to master every monster in our lives, with our bare hands. Would that we would count the costs. Would that we would not accept self-annihilation as a cost of doing battle. Would that we would not accept fractures of the church or fissures of the home as necessary products of our conceited wrangling. Would that, in the wake of so many doleful conflicts fought and lost, we could remember the battle first!

Will the church in our land not remember what happened when we undertook to battle liberalism with rationalism? Will she not remember when she undertook to wrestle the political machine with her pulpits? Or, what happened when she sought to subdue culture with relativism? What a frightful spiritual slaughter followed her vain attempt to master Arminianism with pragmatism! Why did she not consider the battle first? She thought to do what was never given to her to do! If she is going to move forward, she is going to have to lay her hand on the beast and remember the battle!

Oh, in the life of our own fledgling church, already we have forgotten to consider the battle at times before setting ourselves to the fight. What did we think would come of engaging that member of the Christian community, so called? Did we remember the outcome for attempting to make reform in a pugnacious and near-sighted way with bushels full of angst and teaspoons of the fruit of the Spirit?

In the tumult of relations with the lost ones that we love, what convinced us that meeting them on their terms would make headway for grace or breaking violent opposition over their heads would tame the devil? Why did we imagine that sharp word in our midst would gain the victory and give room to godly unity? Was it zeal or good intention that fooled us? With that child or spouse or parent, did we really forget what comes of doing battle with the weapons of bitterness or fear instead of the weapons our Captain has styled “the weapons of our warfare”? Why didn’t we stop to consider the conflict?

But, oh in our hearts, we have failed to remember the battle! Leviathans of guilt stand up before us, and we take to the field with our most polished deeds to subdue them. Monsters of doubt parade about the walls, and we sally out to level them with our most chiseled religious habits. Fears of being lost

swell around us, and we strap on our best intentions to beat them back. Wounds! Wounds are all we get for our best efforts! Because we fail to consider the outcome!

There is a Leviathan in every corner, be it in the relations of our church to the community or in the relations of those within the church to each other, or the relations of those within the homes collected in the church—be it in our hearts or our minds. Dear Church, going forward, lay your hand upon it and remember the battle! Going forward, we need to count the dreadful costs of foolish conflict. We must consider the battle! And hear then the...

*You will have to quit the
battle*

Concession Recommended.

In a word, Do no more! Sure, it's a strange recommendation to be found in the Bible. We are ordinarily called to fight, fight, fight—do, labor, press on, engage, cease not. But now we are told to quit? Indeed!

And there is virtue in this quitting. But never would our Lord approve of doing nothing. We are instead admonished to leave off the battles we were never called to fight because they are battles we were never made able to win!

But blessed be the Lord and Captain of our deliverance; there is no fatalism here! It's not a sad acknowledgement by the Lord that there are adversaries we simply cannot overcome—that leave us no alternative but to sit down defeated. There is only an adjustment here for our deviated compass, tuning for our discordant strings. It's a fixing of our drooping sails and a bracing of our crumbling walls!

It's the child frantically thrashing about in the murky waters crying, "Oh help; I can't do this! Help, Daddy. Daddy, I'm trying to

swim but only sinking now!" But comes the Father's voice, "You need not even try, my child. I hold you now, and it is I that will carry you through the waters. Do no more, but trust me and rest in my arms."

And here, you see, is the lesson. As we cannot fight against our God, so we ought not try to fight on behalf of our God. It is not that there is nothing for us to do. It is that there are battles to which we lay our hands, that are not our battles to fight! We despair that we lose, but we were never able to win! And we ought to stop trying! We ought to exercise faith in the appointed way and in the boundless power of our God...and do no more!

Church in America, it doesn't fall to you to save the world. It doesn't fall to you to be relevant to every culture or fashion. It doesn't fall to you to feed every hungry mouth or heal every sickly child. To win that war, you will have to quit that battle! It falls to you to be like Christ and tell the world exactly what He said! Do no more.

Church local, it doesn't fall to you to heal every sickness of the modern church or right every wrongheaded Baptist in the land. It doesn't fall to you alone to carry the torch of pure religion through to the next epoch in time or to build the Church of Christ for Him. To win that war, you will have to quit that battle! It falls to you to cultivate the fruits of the Spirit in your length of this great trench, until the Prince arrives. It falls to you to compel the dying around you, by your doctrine and example, to be reconciled to their God. And do no more.

Christian, it doesn't fall to you to sort out for Christ who is wheat and who is tare. It doesn't fall to you to ensure that every professing Christian abides by every word of Christ's commands. To win that war, you will have to quit that battle. It falls to you to take the yoke of Christ and learn from Him. It falls to you to labor in the vineyard until the Husbandman returns and to recommend the

vineyard to the world by your peaceful and loving service. And do no more.

*The victory of submissive
faith*

Dear struggling saint, it doesn't fall to you to overcome your adversity. It doesn't fall to you to right your broken health or ensure your future provision. To win that war, you will have quit that battle! It falls to you to keep digging ditches (2 Kings 3:16) and remember that your Father knows. Do no more.

And oh, dear burdened saint, it doesn't fall to you to save your soul! It doesn't fall to you to lift even one corner of that heavy load of guilt. It doesn't fall to you to make peace in your troubled mind or silence the devil in your ear. It doesn't fall to you to be good enough or serve painfully enough to win the Father's admiration. It doesn't even fall to you to blow away the low, black clouds of desperate doubt! It doesn't fall to you to supply preserving grace until the end. And it doesn't fall to you to overcome the grave! You only wreck your peace to try it. I'm telling you, to win that war, you will have to quit that battle!

Look rather at the victory of submissive faith: "I know thou canst do everything!" said Job. (42:2) "Wherefore I repent." (42:6) So...The Lord accepted Job! (42:9) Put your hand upon these things, consider the outcome of undertaking what you cannot do, and do no more. Oh, rather lay your hand by faith upon the head of Christ, remember the battle He fought, and do no more but rest in Him. It will work. Let us believe it. Sometimes, Church, to win the war, you will have to quit the battle.

Charles Spurgeon commenting on Psalm 20:3 *Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice. Selah:*

"Still does His burnt sacrifice perfume the courts of heaven, and through Him the offerings of His people are received as *His* sacrifices and oblations. We ought in our spiritual conflicts to have an eye to the sacrifice of Jesus, and never venture to war until first the Lord has given us a token for good at the altar of the cross, where faith beholds her bleeding Lord. It is well to pause at the cross before we march onward to battle, and with the Psalmist cry "Selah." We are too much in a hurry to make good haste. A little pausing might greatly help our speed. Stay, good man, there is a haste which hinders; rest awhile, meditate on the burnt sacrifice, and put thy heart right for the stern work which lieth before thee."

*And will the great, eternal God
On earth establish His abode?
And will He, from His heavenly throne,
Avow our temples for His own?*

*We bring the tribute of our praise,
And sing that condescending grace
Which to our notes will lend an ear,
And call us, sinful mortals, near.*

*These walls we to Thy honor raise;
Long may they echo with Thy praise,
And Thou, descending, fill the place
With choicest tokens of Thy grace.*

*Here let the great Redeemer reign,
With all the graces of His train;
While power divine His words attends,
To conquer foes and cheer His friends.*

*And in the great, decisive day,
When God the nations shall survey,
May it before the world appear
That crowds were born to glory here.*

Philip Doddridge

Precious Jewels

Philip Doddridge

Editor’s Note: To assist in the maintenance of hymnody in our local congregations, brief biographies of sacred hymn-writers will be included—less renowned sprinkled among the renowned—with our prayer for your richest blessings in this year.

Departing the familiar scenes of his native land, Philip Doddridge sailed southward, nurturing the hope for some physical renewal from the warmer climate in Lisbon. Forty-nine years seems such a brief span of time for a man to mark his earthly existence with any lasting accomplishment. Yet men of Doddridge’s stature often achieved more in the glorious kingdom work of Christ in such a brief span than others who have lingered much longer on this earth with far less affliction credited to their accounts.

Home Hearth

Charles Spurgeon commented on Psalm 22:10:

God begins His care over us from the earliest hour. We are dandled upon the knee of mercy and cherished in the lap of goodness; our cradle is canopied by divine love, and our first totterings are guided by His care.

Surely this sovereign attendance was witnessed at the birth of Philip Doddridge on that 26th day of June 1702. One biographer

wrote: “At his birth he showed so little sign of life that he was laid aside as dead. But one of the attendants, thinking she perceived some motion, or breath, took that necessary care of him, on which, in those tender circumstances, the feeble frame of life depended, which was so near expiring as soon as it was kindled.”¹ His great-grandson John Doddridge Humphreys wrote of his great-grandfather’s birth:

[He] was so destitute of any appearance of vitality that the attendants felt convinced that it was actually dead and put it aside accordingly; one of them, however, soon afterwards, chancing to cast a glance upon the infant, fancied that she perceived a feeble heaving of its chest; and moved with pity, took upon herself the apparently futile task of its resuscitation. The pious care was providentially rewarded, for while she continued to cherish it, a faint moaning became audible, evincing that the babe was indeed alive...²

Mr. Humphreys noted the results of this extraordinary care: “...and thus, apparently by an accident, was that voice called into action, on whose eloquent accents thousands afterwards hung in hushed delight, while their hearts grew warm with the holy love of God!”

The life of this twentieth child of Daniel and Elizabeth Doddridge did not expire on that June day; but young Philip would live to

¹ Edwin M. Long, Rev., *Illustrated History of Hymns and their Authors*, (Philadelphia: P. W. Ziegler, 1876), 128.

² John Doddridge Humphreys, *The Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge, D. D., Vol. I*, (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1829), 18.

share the ministerial calling of his two godly grandfathers and perpetuate their faithful testimony in Christian labor. Reverend John Bauman, his maternal grandfather, had been an exiled Bohemian clergyman. It was said that Doddridge's mother had "imbibed the devoted spirit of her father," who had forsaken a large estate in Prague in 1626 for Christ's sake, "carrying with him nothing but a hundred broad pieces of gold plaited in a leathern girdle, and a Bible of Luther's translation." His paternal grandfather, John Doddridge, had been ejected from his pulpit and his living by the Act of Uniformity, 1662 and had become a Nonconformist minister.

Of the twenty children born to Daniel and Elizabeth Doddridge, only Philip and an elder sister survived. The tender care of this godly mother had been such a remarkable influence in his youth that he often recommended her example to parents as worthy of imitation. She had used the Dutch tiles framing her fireplace to teach her young son the history of the Old and New Testaments. Philip Doddridge recollected his early home training in a letter to Mr. Wilbraham:

I was brought up in the early knowledge of religion by my pious parents, who were in their character very worthy of their birth and education; and I well remember that my mother taught me the history of the Old and New Testament before I could read, by the assistance of some blue Dutch tiles in the chimney-place of the room where we commonly sat; and the wise and pious reflections she made upon these stories were the means of enforcing such good impressions on my heart, as never afterwards wore out.³

Academics and Heartache

In 1712, his tenth year, he was enrolled in the grammar school at Kingston-upon-Thames where his grandfather John Bauman had been the schoolmaster and the place

where his grandfather John Doddridge had been ejected from his pulpit. His mother's pious teaching had laid the foundation that afforded him such preparation for his attendance at grammar school and earned him the reputation of being "remarkable for his piety and diligent application to learning."

In his thirteenth year, he endured the severest of afflictions for a child, with the death of his father. This child's piety and "resignation to the divine will" was revealed in his written reflection of his loss:

God is an immortal Father; my soul rejoiceth in Him; He has hitherto helped me and provided for me; may it be my study to approve myself a more affectionate, grateful and dutiful child.⁴

The date of his mother's death is unknown, but it is likely that it was during that same period. Always an advocate for orphans, he wrote in his sermon entitled "The Orphan's Hope": "I am under some peculiar obligations to desire and attempt the relief of orphans; as I know the heart of an orphan, having been deprived of both of my parents at an age in which it might reasonably be supposed I would be most sensible of such a loss."

Following the death of his parents, the young Doddridge was moved to a school in St. Albans, under the direction of the Reverend Nathaniel Wood. The young Doddridge began to keep account of the use of his time that he might improve this expenditure in more private meditation and study. He was known to assist his fellow students who had not the same advantages as he had. Often, he would read to those who dwelled in the cottages near his school or to supply them with small sums of money as his pocket money allowed.

Reverend Wood introduced his young pupil to the Reverend Samuel Clark, pastor of a Nonconformist congregation in St. Albans. Doddridge was admitted into the fellowship

³ Ibid., 18-19.

⁴ Ibid., 20.

of this congregation in 1718 at the age of sixteen. This was the time that he began to consider the ministry and, in consequence, more diligently committed himself to the study of the languages and the recording of his reflections on portions of Scriptures.

But a dark cloud drifted over this sublime preparation. It was said that Mr. Downs, the guardian of his property, had lost all his own property and all that of Doddridge's. The imprisonment of Mr. Downs resulted in no outcome to remedy the loss of Doddridge. As a young student in the midst of his studies, he was left destitute. He visited his sister and esteemed brother-in-law the Reverend John Nettleton at Hampstead. Here, he no doubt, received consolation and blessed counsel.

The lack of funds would prevent the continuation of his schooling and preparation for the ministry. The Duchess of Bedford, a friend of his late parents, heard of his distress, and generously offered herself as his benefactress to attend one of the esteemed universities, if he would prepare himself for the Church of England. The distress of his situation could not overcome his inability to ascribe to the Church's Thirty-nine Articles. With profound gratitude, the young man declined her generous offer.

With the refusal of the Duchess's provision, Doddridge had a single alternative remaining for educational support. He turned to the Dissenters and acquired an interview with the esteemed Dr. Edmund Calamy to request advice and assistance to continue preparation for the ministry. But Dr. Calamy gave no encouragement to the young scholar. In fact, he counseled Doddridge to turn his thoughts to some other pursuit. Doddridge wrote: "It was with great concern that I received such advice; but I desire to follow Providence, and not to force it. The Lord give me grace to glorify Him in whatever

station He sets me: then, here am I; let Him do with me what seemeth good in His sight."

The young Doddridge must have been extremely perplexed and disheartened with such counsel. Mr. Humphreys wrote of his revered grandfather:

That the young suppliant, who doubtless pleaded his cause with all the fervency of ardent piety, and the persuasive energy of conscious though humble desert, should meet with so decided a negative, must appear strange; and the more so, when we remember that Dr. Calamy, a man of learning and benevolent spirit, well knew the pious stock from whence he sprung, and the advantages he had already enjoyed.⁵

Why this esteemed Presbyterian minister issued such counsel remained a mystery, but it was surmised that Dr. Calamy considered the delicate health of Doddridge; and although Doddridge had exhibited superior mental strength, he was persuaded that the rigors of the ministry would have been overpowering to his physical strength.

The counsel of the godly Dr. Calamy that historically proved to be contrary to the ordering of Doddridge's steps in no way substantiates the annulment of godly counsel nor lack of submission to it. On the contrary, the life of Doddridge proves that the Lord does lead His seeking child in the way he should go and verifies it with His kind providences and peace. And as the humble submission of the young Doddridge proved, it is always important that the seeking one patiently wait for the Lord's response.

Following Dr. Calamy's discouragement to pursue the ministry, Doddridge turned his attention to the law and his family friend Mr. Horseman, whose own talents in the field of law, provided a contact for Doddridge in that pursuit. Consequently, the contact, a Mr. Eyre, made Doddridge what was deemed "a handsome proposal." Mr. Humphreys

⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

commented on this expeditious option for Doddridge:

There is something in the fact of success that tends to surprise the mind; and the moment of the consummation of hope must always be one of anxiety: so it was with Mr. Doddridge; he had pursued this new object with that ardour which was characteristic of his mind; but now that it seemed within his grasp, hesitation and doubt came upon him, for he felt that it would be a divorce from all that the early yearnings of his heart had anticipated, and that a lingering feeling of chagrin would remain.⁶

Motivated by this lingering doubt, Doddridge delayed his acceptance of Eyre's proposal. Later he wrote about that time of hesitation:

Before I returned my final answer, I took one morning solemnly to seek of God for direction; and so it was, that even while I was thus engaged, the postman called at the door with a letter from Mr. Clark, in which he told me that he had heard of my difficulty, and offered to take me under his care, if I chose the ministry upon Christian principles (and there were no other that in those circumstances could invite me to such a choice). This I looked upon almost as an answer from Heaven; and while I live, I shall ever adore so seasonable an interposition of Divine Providence.⁷

Ministry

With the receipt of this letter from his former pastor Reverend Samuel Clark, Doddridge returned to St. Albans to make preparations for the ministry. In October 1719, Doddridge, yet seventeen years old, entered the Academy at Kibworth in Leicestershire, the esteemed school of the Dissenters conducted by Reverend John Jennings.

Philip Doddridge received a letter dated 1723 from Reverend Clark, his esteemed

benefactor: "I had heard of your beginning to preach before I received your former letter, and was informed at the same time that it was with a good acceptance..." After the confirmation of his trust in Doddridge's tutor to encourage his endeavors and improve his talents, Reverend Clark shared the most timely advice for any young man assuming the weight of a pulpit ministry:

One thing that young ministers have particular reason to study is humility. Many are their temptations to vanity, especially if they have the advantages of superior ability and acceptance. Indulgence in this weakness will be a bar to the divine influence, for God resisteth the proud, but gives more and more grace to the humble; it also lessens a man very much in the eyes of judicious persons, who, whatever artful methods are taken, will still be able to discover and despise it.

It ordinarily also takes off from the vigour of a man's endeavours to make further advances to improve himself. It is good therefore to have our eyes very much upon our own defects, and to think how much we fall short of those excellent patterns, which we should be always proposing to our imitation. Let us not value ourselves upon, nor be much concerned about the opinions of men; but labour above all things after the divine approbation.

It is also of great importance in all our ministerial performances to have continually in view our great end, which is the advancement of the interests of religion, and the salvation of souls; and not only in general, but in every particular ministration to awaken in our minds a very sensible concern about these matters...that in every sermon these ends be pursued with the greatest ardour.⁸

Doddridge remarked in a letter to his sister in that same year of 1723, that he had "become a sort of itinerant preacher." In

⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁷ Ibid., 25-26.

⁸ Ibid. 200-202.

March 1724, the twenty-one year old Doddridge again received wise counsel from Reverend Clark regarding a possible invitation to preach in London: "Prudence and wisdom, indeed as to your conduct will be necessary in London; but this will not be wanting to those who, in a deep sense of their own insufficiency, humbly cast themselves upon God for His guidance." The dear, revered brother included also counsel as a response to Doddridge's evident inquiry:

As to the young lady you speak of, from the account I received of her from Mr. Jennings, I should think you very happy in the enjoyment of one so worthy. As to what measures are proper to be taken, in order to realize your hopes, you are best able to judge. There is no affair in the world requires more that you keep the utmost guard upon yourself, that your affections lead you into no steps contrary to the rules of prudence, or inconsistent with the character of a Christian and a minister, and therefore, a divine assistance is in a particular manner to be implored; this I heartily wish you, and answerable success; but, before you engage yourself, be sure that you act an open and honorable part with relation to the parents.

The remarkable success with which Providence has crowned my having acted in that manner, notwithstanding the opposition I at first met with, may be an encouragement to others.⁹

Upon the death of his eminent tutor Mr. Jennings in 1723, Doddridge assumed the oversight of that academy for a time. Later, a group of Nonconformist ministers chose Doddridge to conduct a new academy formed in Northampton. Doddridge also became the pastor of an Independent congregation in that town; and here, he spent the remainder of his life. The universities in Aberdeen conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. His marriage, there in Northampton, to

Mercy Maris blessed them with nine children.

Expending himself in the kingdom work, Doddridge pastored, lectured to a multitude of students, and wrote prolifically, including more than 400 hymns. His work *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* was labeled as "that holy book" by Charles Spurgeon.

Departure

But the unflagging work brought with it a toll on the delicate constitution of this pious minister. By the age of forty-nine, Doddridge was suffering in the throes of consumption (tuberculosis) and was being urged to seek a warmer climate. He resisted this earnest persuasion; but, at times, his feebleness interfered with his speaking. His dear friend Lady Huntingdon once entered his sick room to find him in tears with his Bible lying over him. "What, in tears again, my dear doctor?"

He replied, "I am weeping, madam, but they are tears of joy and comfort. I can give up my country, my friends, my relatives, into the hands of God; and as to myself, I can as well go to heaven from Lisbon, as from my own study at Northampton."¹⁰

That resignation is revealed in the words of his hymn:

*While on the verge of life I stand,
And view the scene on either hand,
My spirit struggles with its clay,
And longs to wing its flight away.*

*Where Jesus dwells my soul would be;
It faints my much-loved Lord to see;
Earth! Twine no more about my heart,
For 'tis far better to depart.*

The ailing Doddridge, accompanied by his wife, sailed for Lisbon on September 30, 1751. Sailing within sight of the groves and spires of sunny Lisbon, Doddridge wrote his hymn:

⁹ Ibid., 356-357.

¹⁰ *Illustrated History of Hymns and their Authors*, 136.

*Now let our voices join,
To form a sacred song;
Ye pilgrims in Jehovah's ways,
With music pass along.*

*See Salem's golden spires
In beauteous prospect rise;
And brighter crowns than mortals wear,
Which sparkle through the skies.*

*All honor to his name
Who marks the shining way:
To him who leads the wanderers on
To realms of endless day.*

But the beauty of that place, he was only able to enjoy for two short weeks; for Doddridge exchanged this world of suffering for those “realms of endless day.” Writing to her children, his grieving widow penned the description of her solace: “Oh, my dear children, help me to praise Him. Such supports, such consolations, such comforts has He granted, that my mind at times is astonished and is ready to burst into songs of praise under its most exquisite distress.”¹¹

Realms of endless day

Entering into his eternal Sabbath, Doddridge could sing the words of his hymn:

*Thine earthly Sabbaths, Lord, we love,
But there's a nobler rest above;
To that our laboring souls aspire
With ardent hope and strong desire.*

In the briefest of forty-nine years, a life that barely flickered, burst into flame that lighted the way and warmed the hearts of countless saints along their pilgrim way to “a nobler rest above.”

*O happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Savior and my God!
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad.*

*'Tis done; the great transaction's done;
I am my Lord's, and he is mine:
He drew me, and I followed on,
Rejoiced to own the call divine.*

*Now rest, my long-divided heart;
Fixed on this blissful center, rest:
Here have I found a nobler part;
Here heavenly pleasures fill my breast.*

*High Heaven, that hears the solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear,
Till in life's latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear.*

*Eternal God, our wondering souls
Admire Thy matchless grace—
That Thou wilt walk, that Thou wilt
dwell,
With such a sinful race.*

*Cheered with Thy presence, I can trace
The desert with delight:
Through all the gloom, one smile of
Thine
Can dissipate the night.*

*Nor shall I through eternal days
A restless pilgrim roam;
Thy hand, that now directs my course,
Will soon convey me home.*

*With joy my spirit will consent
To drop its mortal load,
And hail the messenger of death,
That bids it rise to God.*

Philip Doddridge (1702-1751)

¹¹ Ibid., 137.

The Virtuous Woman

Editor's Note: This article was adapted from a presentation in a ladies' class.

The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him. Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. **Proverbs 31:1, 10**

Many of the ancients, such as Ambrose, Augustine, and the Venerable Bede, consider this description of a virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 to be an allegory of the Church. Dr. John Gill, the esteemed Baptist theologian and commentator, was inclined to believe that as well. The verses are written as a Hebrew acrostic by beginning each of the twenty-two verses with each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet in their order. Most commentators also agree that Lemuel is Solomon; but while some believe that Bathsheba may have given the counsel, it was Solomon who framed it into the acrostic following the same form as a Psalm.

It has also been proposed that Solomon wrote it himself, describing his own mother. But others believe that this is Solomon's own thoughts in verse describing the Church as the Bride of Christ because he used the same type of analogy as he used in the Song of Solomon. Dr. Gill confirmed his conclusion that this is indeed an allegory: "The description is drawn up to such a pitch, and written in such strong lines, as cannot agree with any of the daughters of fallen Adam, literally understood; nor with Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon; nor with the Virgin Mary...nor indeed with any other; for though

some parts of the description may meet in some, and others in others, yet not all in one; wherefore the mystical and spiritual sense of the whole must be sought."

Yet, considering that both men and women are saved by grace alone, attaining glory through the purifying fires of sanctification, can not this beautiful portrait of a virtuous woman be descriptive of a Christian woman who finds daily the truth in the words of Paul: *And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me* (II Corinthians 12:9)? This may be the portrait of the woman hung foremost in the gallery of godly women who walked in Christ, *the hope of glory*, striving to be perfect even as the *Father which is in heaven is perfect*. This description in poetry is, perhaps, what Matthew Henry described as "a looking glass for ladies."

Perhaps, Matthew Henry was again correct to perceive this acrostic as a learning tool that was employed for teaching or memorization. The importance of this teaching is repeated in the New Testament instruction of Paul to Timothy and again in Peter. (I Timothy 2:9-10; I Peter 3:1-6) Supporting his persuasion, Mr. Henry commented: "...the duty prescribed to wives agrees with this description of a good wife; and with good reason is so much stress laid upon it, since it contributes as much as any one thing to the keeping up of religion in families, and the entail of it upon posterity,

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that the mothers be wise and good; and of what consequences it is to the wealth and outward prosperity of a house every one is sensible.” In agreement with Mr. Henry, Matthew Poole commented: “...the good or bad education even of private families, which depends much upon the mother’s qualifications, hath a mighty influence upon the welfare or misery of commonwealths.” The commentator Franz Delitzsch believed that this is an invaluable part of Biblical moral instruction: “Such a woman’s mirror is nowhere else found. The housewife is depicted here as she ought to be; the poet shows how she governs and increases the wealth of the house, and thereby also advances the position of her husband in the common estimation, and he refers all these, her virtues and her prudence, to the fear of God as their root.”

Solomon acknowledged the teaching of his father David: *He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments and live* (Proverbs 4:4). But he remembered also the admonition of his father to *keep thy father’s commandment and forsake not the law of thy mother* (Proverbs 6:20-21). Matthew Henry commented that it is the duty of mothers as well as fathers to teach their children what is good; but the children “when they are young and tender they are most under the mother’s eye, and she has then an opportunity of molding and fashioning their minds well which she ought not to let slip.”

Solomon’s mother addressed her son as “the son of her womb” and cautioned him to seek a wife who, as Charles Simeon framed it, “was not ashamed to occupy herself in domestic duties.” In Solomon’s day and in Simeon’s day, this may not have been an unnatural quality to seek for in a Christian woman. Alas, post-modernity has removed the beauty and satisfaction of domestic solicitude and replaced it with a smoking, iron-bellied Moloch belching the remains of

posterity, slyly hidden behind the glitzy curtains of all things modern. Freedom has become the quest, with achievement as the target, and remuneration as the proof. Strength is no longer a spiritual fruit but has attained the status of a conqueror. This is the day when the question grows more pressing: *Who can find a virtuous woman?*

This virtuous woman is a woman of strength—the strength that defined the character of the judges in Exodus 18:21, who were to be able men, men of truth, fearing God. So it is to be with the virtuous wife—the wife of strength Mr. Henry instructs that is to be the choice of a godly man. This is the woman “of spirit, who has the command of her own spirit and knows how to manage other people’s, one that is pious and industrious, and a help meet for man.” This is a woman of resolution, a woman of good principles, firm and steady, who will not be frightened from any part of her duty by winds or storms of distress or affliction.

“Who can find one?” Solomon asked in his day. Even then, his query intimates, was such a woman difficult to find. His search was predicated solely upon virtue. This requisite qualified the choice and rendered the field of search to be the Church, the only residence of pious candidates; and fixed her price as “far above rubies,” demonstrating the responsibility of the husband who finds such a wife. “The unspeakable worth of such a one,” admonished Mr. Henry, “and the value which he that has such a wife ought to put upon her, showing it by his thankfulness to God and his kindness and respect to her, whom he must never think he can do too much for.”

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her. The husband who finds such a wife will commit his heart to the safety of her care, knowing that she cares *how she may please her husband* (I Corinthians 7:34). The husband entertains no qualms in the diligent maintenance of the virtuous wife’s domain

and her perception of the good for her household. It was by the invitation of the great woman of Shunem that Elisha was refreshed as often as he passed that way and by her design that her husband's household was honored with the regular presence of the prophet of God. *And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall...and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither* (II Kings 4:9-10).

This is the wife who will do her husband good and not evil all the days of her life. Note that the length of her service is all the days of **her** life, not all the days of his. If she outlives him, she will continue to honor him in the care of his children and the good management of his affairs and property. Consider the recognition of Boaz for Ruth's care of her mother-in-law, not only in her own affection for Naomi, but in honor to the God of her deceased husband. How can a godly woman do evil to her husband? It is the woman of wise godliness who *buildeth her house*; but it is the woman of foolishness who *plucketh it down with her hands* (Proverbs 14:1).

This is the virtuous woman who *is a crown to her husband. He is known in the gates* by the quietness and order of his household. Even his appearance and demeanor bespeak the domestic rule of this "agreeable wife."

No household is without its multitude of domestic duties. This rendering by Solomon incorporates the enterprise of the wife who *worketh willingly with her hands*. Even a princess would have been required to oversee the wise use of her servants' time that it was spent in profitability and not waste. Great ladies of the more recent past have been truly educated and refined only when they could perform the delicate skills of weaving, sewing, spinning, and embroidery. The

queen of Romania and her ladies provided fine linens, many tatted with gold thread, for the church altars. Ladies of antiquity, attended by their maidens, were employed with spindles and distaffs and other implements of handiwork. Minerva was the goddess of spinning; Helen of Troy wove an exquisite tapestry of the Battle of Troy; Penelope held her suitors at bay by her weaving. Dr. Gill noted that by the order of Caesar Augustus, his wife, daughters, and granddaughters were employed in the manufacture of woollens and that Caesar wore only garments made by his wife.

The details of beauty adorning the home are tokens of the pleasure of the heart of a godly wife. This work is not forced upon her, nor does she wait for her husband to procure the materials for her work, for Solomon says *she seeketh wool and flax and worketh willingly with her hands*. The beauty is not confined to the work itself but finds its description in the loveliness of a willing heart.

She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. Delitzsch called this verse a proverb; for the woman, he explained, is like the merchant ship fitted out and commanded by an enterprising spirit to sail away and return with merchandise. The woman, likewise, is focused on the care and management of her household, even when that means going out beyond the home to take advantage of opportunities. He uses the old English word which means "to find out, to discover, to make known." This is a dedicated labor and industry that precludes time frivolously spent.

The very next verse underscores her diligent commitment; for she is found to rise *while it is yet night* that she can provide food for her household. Within the hours of her day, she is praised for extending the wealth of her household in considering a field and buying it and working in her vineyard. This verse, according to Delitzsch, is using the

common expression for business in general, the mention of a field and a vineyard that illustrated a personal business or industry that would augment the income of the household.

This type of work would certainly have required the physical strength described in verse seventeen: *she girdeth her loins with strength and strengtheneth her arms*. Matthew Henry commented on this text: “She does not employ herself in sitting work only or in that which is only the nice performance of the fingers; but, if there be occasion, she will go through with work that requires all the strength she has, which she will use as one that knows it is the way to have more.”

She will view the profit of her labor, which will stimulate her continued industry and labor. Delitzsch calls her the “unwearied woman.” The grammatical construction of verse eighteen, he said, is relational, showing that the industry is the antecedent with the profit as the consequent, spurring her to continued industry so that *her candle goeth not out by night*. Matthew Henry commented on handwork done by lamplight: “We say of an elaborate piece, it smells of the lamp.”

She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. Solomon once again returned to the labor of her hands. The spindle and the distaff were the common tools of manufacture for the industrious woman who must clothe her household. Mr. Henry commented that this diligent woman did not reckon these common tools to be “either an abridgment of her liberty or a disparagement of her dignity or at all inconsistent with her repose.” He noted that the distaff and spindle were her honor while the ornaments that bedecked the daughters of Zion were reckoned as their reproach. (Isaiah 2:18) “That which impels the housewife to this labour,” wrote Delitzsch, “is not selfishness, not a narrow-hearted limitation of her care to the circle of what is her own, but love, which reaches out far beyond this

circle.” Even though Dr. Gill considered this text to be referencing the Church, his note on this verse is worth contemplating: “...not only wool and flax were sought by her, but she spins them, and works them up into garments; her web is not like the spider’s, spun out of its own bowels, on which it hangs; to which the hope and trust of a hypocrite are compared, and whose webs do not become garments to cover them; but the church’s web is both for ornament, to the adorning of her profession, and for defense and protection from the calumnies of the world; for by these are meant good works...”

Her endeavors were not limited to the realm of her own household; for she was found to *stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy*. This one verse, according to Delitzsch, was descriptive of her character; since, without this sympathy with misery and poverty, this woman, who was so industrious and trustworthy, “might indeed be pleasing to her husband, but not to God.” The plenty of her own household, accumulated by her industry, provided the means to distribute in times of need, procuring God’s blessing on her husband and family and bringing honor to her household.

The amplex of her provision is highlighted with the assurance that her household would not dread the changing seasons; for they would be covered with the richness of scarlet and linen and fine tapestries; and her husband would be esteemed in the gates of the city—one whose appearance and ordered home brought respect from his peers.

But the emphasis of the Preacher shifts from this woman’s ability and production to an inward description of strength and honor that undergirds her with the confidence that will not shatter with the changes that can influence and affect the daily care of her household. This strength and honor is the clothing, Matthew Henry said, “in which she

wraps herself and in which she appears to the world, and so recommends herself. She enjoys a firmness and constancy of mind, has spirit to bear up under the many crosses and disappointments which even the wise and virtuous must expect to meet with in this world...this is her defense.” In this, *she shall rejoice in time to come*. Those who are not idle when they are in their prime will have the pleasure and joy of their work when they are old, both in reflecting upon it and in reaping the benefit as Henry continued: “...that she was not idle or useless when she was young.” Dorcas, whose life was spent in giving to others, illustrates the rejoicing that these godly women may anticipate *in time to come*.

Her life will have given her a fullness of wisdom and prudence that filled her *mouth with wisdom and the law of kindness*; and her duties had prevented her from being the idle busybodies about whom Paul warned Timothy. “Idleness is the source of talkativeness,” wrote a commentator, “so industry is its antidote.” When she speaks, it is “wisdom pressing itself from her heart outward.” This woman is thoughtful and sensible in her instruction and filled with mercy and grace, understanding the law of God “which she delights of to talk among her children.” So said Mr. Henry, who went on to describe her demeanor: “In her tongue is the law of grace or mercy...which shows how full her heart is of another world even when her hands are most busy about this world.” Mr. Poole commented: “she is neither sullenly silent nor full of vain and impertinent talk...but speaks directly and piously, as occasion offereth.” “Godly women,” another commentator wrote, “should speak not merely of household matters, but also of the grace of God to all within their sphere of influence.”

Those who have been most aware of “her misdemeanors” are those of her household who have also been constant eyewitnesses of her virtues. They will *arise up and call her*

blessed. They will go out into public and give her praise. It would be foolish to assume that an all-inclusive group of women has lived in any age that experienced the same treatment in their homes and society. But no society of women must confuse their rights afforded or denied by their society as that which affects the protection and elevation provided to them by obedience to the Scriptures. It is true that not every husband establishes and maintains his home according to God’s Word or honors his wife as his helpmeet; and not every woman enters into marriage intent upon honoring the Lord by serving Him in the establishment and maintenance of her home. But the woman who does, makes it clear that her love is not selfish and self-centered; it is the servant-love of Christ. This is the love her husband is praising when he says of her: *Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all*. The true value of his wife is not the deceitful, fleeting beauty of the body, but the inward grace of the fear of the Lord—this beauty in her—a beauty that excels them all, flourishing with age. It is her comfort that *she shall be praised*. Her greatest praise is her works! These will be the praises in the gates, and she has left it to her works to be the fountain of her praise, not seeking the applause of men. The widows, encircling her bed, commended Dorcas with the very coats she had sewn for them. Like this woman of Proverbs, this was the gates of Dorcas’s praise.

But perhaps the commentary on these verses has worked consternation in the hearts of those who have sought comfort in the mistaken idea that these verses are no longer applicable. Perhaps others agree with the comfortable assessment that this text is an allegorical portrait of the Bride of Christ, since, as Gill noted, no woman could achieve so much. The more unifying consensus among many women is the obvious—this was written by a man—albeit a king—and commentated by men.

Where is the representative voice of the woman? Ah, could it not be the woman of Proverbs herself? She, perhaps, cannot speak for all women; but can she not speak for those women who seek to serve Christ wholly? Is she not representative of the prudent wife who is a gift from the Lord (Proverbs 19:14) and whose heart was willingly purposed, in serving Christ, to do her husband *good and not evil all the days of her life*?

Spindles and distaffs may not be necessities of household commerce in contemporary Christian homes. It is certain that the activities of the Christian woman in any given age may differ from other times; but the model she has been given in Proverbs 31 is timeless; and the principles taught in the life of Solomon's portrait should be in every Christian home.

The revelation of Christian graces of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance are all predicated on the one gem—service. All the domestic descriptions of the godly wife employed by Solomon could be reduced to one description—a woman of service. Must this be so unsavory to any Christian, and most particularly to the Christian wife, to be noted as one who serves? Their service drew our dear Lord aside to the hospitable table of Martha and Mary. Service commended Dorcas to Peter to be drawn back from the dead. Service recorded the exemplary act of the woman who perfumed our Lord and wiped His feet with her hair. Service, according to James, reveals the Christian; service is the requirement to follow Christ. *For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another* (Galatians 5:13).

All Christians, not just wives, are admonished to *present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service* (Romans 12:1). If this is the *reasonable service* to serve Christ

completely; then how reasonable is it that the Christian woman will endeavor to be the *wise woman who buildeth her house* (Proverbs 14:1) to rear godly seed for the Lord?

This is the Proverbs woman. She works for her household. Her energy is not expended and consumed upon herself; rather, she is the benefactress of her household. All her gifts and talents are culminated in the provision and education of her household. Her remuneration is the joy of her children rising up and calling her blessed. Her blessing is the wisdom that fills her mind and animates her tongue in the law of kindness. Her strength and honor are manifested in her understanding of what must be done and her ability to teach those who work with her. Her beauty is reflected in the heart of her husband who rests in her judgment. Her faithful testimony, though woven quietly among her domestic duties, is broadcast in the gates. She is the living embodiment of Christ's sermon: *But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted* (Matthew 23:11-12). She is the living proof of His promise: *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again* (Luke 6:38).

Matthew Henry concluded his own commentary on the Proverbs 31 woman:

Thus is shut up this looking glass for ladies, which they are desired to open and dress themselves by: and, if they do so, their adorning will be found to praise, and honor and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Who can find a virtuous woman? Strength—honor—praise—she is found in Christ. *Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.* Matthew 26:1

A "Devine" Jewel

Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies.

Proverbs 31:10

Perhaps some have heard about the influential Baptist hymn writer John Leland. Indeed, he impacted the Baptists of this country greatly in fighting for their religious freedom and equality, traveling the colonies during the late eighteenth century to preach to great crowds of people.

Although he was a great character in Baptist history, this record is not focused on John Leland himself, but his wife.

This wonderful lady's name was Sally Devine of Hopkinton, Massachusetts, later becoming Sally Devine Leland. Her devotion to her husband was one that lasted for sixty-one years, filled with service to Christ and faithful motherhood to her children.

Childhood

Though the date of Sally Leland's birth is not recorded, an estimation can be made that the year was 1755, only a year after her husband's birth. Mrs. Leland's early years were rather sad and harsh. When only two years old, Mrs. Leland lost her first father, a rather wealthy man, only to find that the fairytale stories of step-parents are true.

Her cruel step-father turned her out of the house when she was nearly four years old; and she was exposed to the cold weather and attacked by a sickness called the canker, which ate away her palate so much so that only those her knew her well could understand easily what she said.

Once she recovered from her sickness, the young girl found that her first father's property had been taken; and she was left to a life of service.

We are not given a record of the time of her conversion, but she was said to have known Christ. One may assume that she came to know Him when she was older, especially by the time she married John Leland. Her path in life would be long and sometimes difficult; but the Lord would lead His dear saint through this path, guiding each of her steps.

Marriage

It is not recorded where or when John Leland met Sally Devine of Hopkinton; but their marriage took place in 1776, when Mrs. Leland would have been about twenty-two years of age. By that time, Leland was ready to enter the ministry and travel about the colonies, proclaiming the Good News. Miss Sally Devine became Mrs. Sally D. Leland; thus preparing herself, not for a life of ease and luxury from the hand of a rich husband as some of her peers might have done, but for a humble pilgrimage by her husband's side.

Shortly after their marriage, Leland took his new wife from his native state of Massachusetts down to Virginia where they lived for over twenty years of Leland's ministry. While in Virginia, during which time Leland and his wife moved from place to place, Mrs. Leland endured a period of religious unrest and revolutionary actions in that colony.

Mrs. Leland played a role not only in raising a family but helping her husband in an unexpected way. Around the year 1788, John

Alaina Suttles is a classically homeschooled eighth-grader who found this "Devine" nugget while researching the life of the Baptist preacher and statesman Reverend John Leland.

Leland was invited by a lady to hold a meeting in her house. Her son, who was at the house at that time, was a captain, possibly in the American Revolution. He warned Leland not to preach in his mother's house, for he disliked it greatly.

But, of course, Leland did begin the meeting. Immediately, the enraged captain charged in, drew his sword, and attempted to stab Leland; but he was hindered.

Mrs. Leland, fearing for her husband's life, quickly pinned the soldier's arm to his side, thus inhibiting him until some men could take away his sword. Needless to say, Leland and those at the meeting went out into the road to conduct their gathering.

Motherhood

During this time too, Mrs. Leland began what would become a family of eight children.

When her first children were still young, being often left alone at home while her husband was gone on preaching tours, she kept provisions for her family. Even strangers or soldiers and runaway slaves could find food from her hands or shelter when they were in time of need.

It was written of her that she would sew her young children's clothes by moonlight so that the light of a lamp would not beckon any unsavory characters to the house where she would be found alone and without protection. Even when housing soldiers for the night and feeding them until she had no more food to give, Mrs. Leland would remain awake at night, praying that the mighty Jehovah would protect her and her children if the soldier should mean to murder them.

A biography of John Leland, which included a short sketch of Mrs. Leland's life, gave the following account of the mother's faithfulness to her children:

An example of that habitual presence of mind as well as courage, which never failed her in any emergency, is found in the instance in which, like a guardian angel, she saved her husband from the murderer's sword. A similar illustration of these, and other strongly marked traits, is presented in the fact, that when one of her children, a little girl of four years old, had her head crushed under the wheels of a loaded cart which passed directly over it, she sat through the long hours of night with the child in her arms, pressing with her fingers a divided artery, to prevent the effusion of blood which would have caused immediate death. The child, almost miraculously saved, "rose up to call her blessed," and still lives to receive the same tribute of gratitude from a numerous posterity.¹

Faithfulness to her children

Another instance of her endurance occurred after the family had moved to Connecticut in 1790. The following year brought about a strange visit of a sound in the walls of the family's house. This sound continued for many months, exhibiting itself as groans as though of one in pain. Mrs. Leland was left alone with another set of little children and could hear this terrifying noise often. It was rather disturbing to hear in the night, most likely frightening her as much as it did her children each time it occurred.

Finally, at one time that John Leland was at home and in bed with his wife, the sound began again. Leland began to pray that if it was a messenger from God that it might deliver its message and leave; and if it was an evil spirit, that it might be expelled from their presence. By the end of the prayer, the

¹ John Leland and Miss L. F. Greene, *The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland, Including Some Events in His Life*, (New York: G. W. Wood, 1845), 42.

dreadful sound had reached a crescendo and left without a trace, never returning again. If this story is true, then such were the things that Mrs. Leland was left to endure alone when her husband was away from home.

When the family moved from Connecticut to Massachusetts in 1791, they embarked on a ship. A great storm arose which threatened to overturn the vessel. After she had prayed for many hours for deliverance, Mrs. Leland told her husband that she had seen a heavenly body who told her that he would not let the ship sink. This proclamation did come true. If this story is also true, it was quite an amazing occurrence.

Death

Throughout the rest of John Leland's ministry, little is said of his wife until the couple had grown old together in the county of Cheshire, Massachusetts, where the last half of Leland's ministry was spent.

Filled with service to Christ

On October 5, 1837, Mrs. Leland departed to be with her Lord, leaving behind a grieving husband who missed a sorely needed wife. The disease which afflicted Mrs. Leland and caused her death was very strange. In the biography of John Leland, an account was included of this sickness:

The afflictive stroke which at length deprived him [Leland] of the companion who had trodden with him so great a share of the rough path of life, was rendered doubly painful by the nature of the disease, which left to her friends not even the sad consolation of alleviating the distress they could not remove. A difficulty in her throat, which had been a long time increasing, at length reached such a height, that some months before her death, she could swallow nothing

*but liquids. The ability to do even this, continued to decrease from day to day, her strength wasting for want of nourishment, till life could no longer retain its feeble hold, and she literally starved to death.*²

A further account of her death from the same biography says:

*In her last illness, she exhibited the utmost patience and resignation under all her sufferings. She spoke with great warmth and animation of the Divine goodness to her, and especially found cause of thankfulness in the circumstance, that for many weeks before her death, she did not feel the sensation of hunger. She had very humiliating views of herself; and desires proportionably great to exalt and magnify the riches of that grace which had proved sufficient in every scene of trial hitherto, and which she trusted would not fail her in the last; and truly it did not; for when the hour of release arrived, so gently did the hand of death loosen the bonds of her captivity, that not a groan was heard by those who stood around her bed, and a long life of eminent usefulness was crowned by a death of "perfect peace."*³

All through her life, Mrs. Leland had served her Lord, her husband, and children faithfully as any godly wife should. Though meant for another, the words "always busy, and always quiet,"⁴ could certainly be used to describe her.

Her biographer described her as the epitome of Proverbs 31:10-31; for that chapter in the Scriptures describes a godly woman, which in turn describes Mrs. Leland fully. Every attribute of hers fulfilled this text's description.

We may pray that the Lord would give us more wives and mothers who follow their husbands and Christ as faithfully as Mrs. Sally Devine Leland once did. Her example is a "devine" jewel in God's treasure trove of saints.

² Ibid., 41-42.

³ Ibid., 45.

⁴ Ibid., 43.

Our Heavenly Father Calls

Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son.

I John 1:3

*Our heavenly Father calls
And Christ invites us near;
With both our friendship shall be sweet
And our communion dear.*

*God pities all our griefs,
He pardons every day,
Almighty to protect our souls
And wise to guide our way.*

*How large His bounties are!
What various stores of good,
Diffused from our Redeemer's hand
And purchased with His blood!*

*Jesus, our living Head,
We bless Thy faithful care,
Our Advocate before the throne
And our Forerunner there.*

*Here fix, my roving heart,
Here, wait, my warmest love,
Till the communion be complete
In nobler scenes above.*

Philip Doddridge