

# The Heavenly Birth and Its Earthly Counterfeits

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But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to  
become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His  
name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of  
the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”  
– John 1:11-13*

## **Introduction**

Hypocrisy and self-righteousness never probably rose to such a height as at the period when the Lord of life and glory was upon earth. The besetting sin of the Jewish nation before the Babylonish captivity was idolatry, as we find recorded in the pages of the Old Testament; but after their return from that captivity (more than five hundred years before Christ came into the world), they never relapsed into open idol-worship. The form of ungodliness in them was changed. The human heart, ever “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9), put on a new mask; and though they no longer bowed down to gods of wood and stone, nor went after the vain idols of their fathers, yet they prostituted the worship of the only true God into lip-service and “bodily exercise” (1Ti 4:8). And thus, though nominally worshippers of the only true God and though with their lips they drew nigh, yet they were as far from Him in their hearts as when their forefathers bowed down before stocks and stones.

It was at this period, then, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, and chose at this time to fulfil all those prophecies which He before had given concerning the Messiah. Of this period the apostle John speaks in the opening of this article: “That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Joh 1:9-13).

The text speaks of two entirely distinct classes of characters—those who received Christ, and those who received Him not; and it further tells us what was the happiness and blessed privilege of those who received Him into their hearts and affections as the Son of God.

### **Why Some Reject Christ**

Now, what was the reason of this difference? How came it to pass that of men born in the same nation, living in the same period of time, and placed in precisely similar circumstances, some received Christ and others received Him not? Must we not trace it up to God’s absolute sovereignty?—that the reason why some did not receive Him was because God willed it so? And why others did receive Him was equally because God willed it so? Can we admit any other *final* cause of this difference than the sovereign will of God, determining rejection by one and reception by the other.

But when we come down from looking at God's sovereignty to view the workings of the human heart, we see that there were certain *instrumental* causes which operated on the minds of the one, as there were certain *instrumental* causes which influenced the wills of the other. Those that "received Him not" were under the influence of certain workings. They knew nothing of divine sovereignty; they had no idea that what they said and did was according to God's "determinate counsel" (Act 2:23). In doing what they did, they followed the bent of their own minds; and thus they were seemingly left to the exercise of their own will, while God really ordered every action, that it might be to His own glory.

### *1. Blindness and Ignorance of Heart*

One cause, then, why those who "received Him not" scornfully rejected Him, was the blindness and ignorance of their hearts. And this is one cause why men still to this day reject the Lord of life and glory. As the apostle says, they were "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph 4:18). And to this the prophet alludes when he says, speaking in the name of the Jewish people, "He shall grow up...as a root out of a dry ground; He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isa 53:2). When the Jews looked upon the Man of sorrows, He was not what their fancy had figured out: a conquering Messiah, who should come to deliver them from the Roman yoke. And therefore, being spiritually ignorant of His Person and work, they rejected Him because their eyes were not opened to see the dignity of the Godhead under the veil of the suffering manhood.

## 2. *Self-righteousness*

Another reason was *their self-righteousness*. And this same cause operates in men's minds now. Until self-righteousness is in a measure broken down in a man's heart, he never can see any beauty nor comeliness in a bleeding Jesus. Being madly enamoured of his *own* righteousness, and not seeing it in the light of God's countenance as "filthy rags" (Isa 64:6), he has no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no heart to receive that glorious robe of righteousness which the Son of God wrought out, and which is imputed<sup>1</sup> to all that believe on His name.

## 3. *Worldliness of Mind*

Another cause was *the worldliness of their minds*. They were buried in the world, in the poor perishing things of time and sense. Being dead in sin, they had no spiritual faculty whereby eternal things were perceived; no spiritual appetite whereby heavenly food was relished; no spiritual birth whereby they could enter into the kingdom of heaven. When Nicodemus therefore came to Jesus by night, the very first truth that the Lord laid before him was the new birth: "Except a man be born again," he can neither "see," nor "enter into the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:3,5).

## 4. *Unbelief*

But the grand prevailing cause, after all, was unbelief. It was not the determinate purpose of God to give them faith; He left them therefore in their unbelief. Thus, having no spiritual faith to believe the testimony of God concerning His dear Son, and being left altogether to the power of unbelief, they first in-

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<sup>1</sup> *impute* – to ascribe or charge to the account of another.

wardly rejected and then openly crucified the Lord of life and glory. The same cause operates now. When we consider Christ's miracles, we may look with astonishment upon the unbelief of the Jews; but the same unbelief reigns by nature in the hearts of all. As long as men are blind, self-righteous, worldly, and unbelieving (and they are all these until God "works in them to will and to do of His good pleasure"), they will reject Jesus and say secretly, "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luk 19:14), just as their forefathers the Jews rejected Him openly when He stood at Pilate's tribunal.

### **God Sent His Son**

But God's will was not to be frustrated; the Almighty's purposes were not to be disappointed by the almost universal rejection of Jesus by the Jews. He had from eternity "a peculiar people" (Tit 2:14), who had an everlasting and indissoluble union with His dear Son. There was "a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom 11:5), who stood eternally in Christ: for whom He gave Himself, shed His precious blood, laid down His life, was entombed in the grave, rose on the third day, and now sits at God's right hand as their Intercessor and Mediator. And thus, however far a man may be from God, however desperate his wickedness, however thick his blindness, however powerful the unbelief of his heart, yet if he is a vessel of mercy, the light and life of God's Spirit will penetrate through all and bring him into a knowledge, first of his ruin, and then of those blessings which are stored up for him in his covenant Head. Though Christ "came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (Joh 1:11) (that is: not His own by election, redemption, and regeneration, but His own nation,

His own property as Lord of heaven and earth), yet there was a people who should receive Him by living faith as their Lord and their God.

### **Why Some Receive Christ**

But as we have looked at God's sovereignty in the way of rejection, and then endeavoured to trace out the various causes by which the great mass of the Jewish nation rejected the Lord of life and glory, so will we endeavour (having seen God's sovereignty in choosing a peculiar people), to trace out also the secret causes which led some to receive Him whom the others received not.

#### *1. The Quickening Life of God's Spirit*

The first cause, then, was the *quickenings life of God's Spirit* put into their souls; according to those words: "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). Until God by His Spirit quickens the soul into spiritual life, there must be a determined rejection of Christ. However a man may receive Him into his judgement, the inward bias of his heart and the secret speech of his soul is, "Not this Man, but Barabbas" (Luk 23:18). If, then, there be any who do believe in Him, receive Him, love Him, and have a blessed union with Him, it all springs from the quickening Spirit of God working with power in their souls.

Now this quickening work of God the Spirit upon the heart is manifested by certain fruits and evidences, which ever flow out of His blessed operations. For instance, wherever the quickening power of God's Spirit has passed upon a man's conscience, he is invariably brought to see and feel himself to be a sinner. This inward sight of self cuts him off sooner or later from all legal hopes, all Pharisaic

righteousness, all false refuges, and all vain evidences, wherewith he may seek to prop up his soul. In many cases the work may begin in a way scarcely perceptible, and in other instances may go on very gradually, for we cannot lay down any precise standard. But I am sure of this: that the Lord will “bring down the hearts” of all His people “with labour” (Psa 107:12), will convince them all of their lost state before Him, and cast them as ruined wretches into the dust of death—without hope, strength, wisdom, help, or righteousness, save that which is given to them as a free gift by distinguishing grace.

And when the soul is brought down by the hand of God upon it to know the exceedingly heavy burden of sin, the wretchedness of the malady with which we are infected, the holiness and justice of God who cannot clear the guilty; and feels itself not only implicated in Adam’s transgression, but also condemned by actual commission of sin, it then begins to find its need of such a Saviour as God has reveled in the Scriptures. And this work of grace in the conscience, pulling down all a man’s false refuges, stripping him of every lying hope, and thrusting him down into self-abasement and self-abhorrence, is indispensable to a true reception of Christ. Whatever a man may have learned in his head, or however far he may be informed in his judgment, he never will receive Christ spiritually into his heart and affections until he has been broken down by the hand of God in his soul to be a ruined wretch.

## 2. *How Long*

We cannot indeed tell *how long* a man may be in coming here; some may be weeks, others may be months, and some may be years. But when he is ef-

fectually brought here, the Lord is pleased, for the most part, to open up to his astonished view and to bring into his soul some saving knowledge of the Lord of life and glory. And this He does in various ways, for we cannot “limit the Holy One of Israel” (Psa 78:41): sometimes by a secret light cast into the mind, sometimes by the application of a passage of Scripture with power, sometimes alone in the secret chamber, sometimes under the preached Word. In various ways, as God is pleased Himself to choose, He casts into the mind a light and He brings into the heart a power, whereby the glorious Person of Christ, His atoning blood, dying love, finished work, and justifying righteousness, are looked upon by spiritual eyes, touched by spiritual hands, and received into a spiritual and believing heart.

### *3. Love Is Mixed with Faith*

But wherever faith is given to the soul thus “to receive” Christ, there will be mingled with this faith, and blessedly accompanying it, *love* to the Lord of life and glory. Sometimes we may know the existence of faith when we cannot see it, by discerning the secret workings and actings of love towards that Saviour in whom God has enabled us to believe. There will be from time to time, in living souls, a flowing forth of affection towards Jesus. From time to time He gives the soul a glimpse of His Person; He shows Himself, as the Scripture speaks, “through the lattice” (Song 2:9), perhaps passing hastily by, but giving such a transient glimpse of the beauty of His Person, the excellency of His finished work, dying love, and atoning blood, as ravishes the heart and secretly draws forth the affections of the soul, so that



there is a following hard after Him and a going out of the desires of the soul towards Him.

Thus sometimes, as we lie upon our bed, as we are engaged in our business, as we are occupied in our several pursuits of life, or at other times under the Word or reading the Scriptures, the Lord is pleased secretly to work in the heart, and there is a melting down at the feet of Jesus. It is a secret, soft, gentle going forth of love and affection towards Him, whereby the soul prefers Him before thousands of gold and silver, and desires nothing so much as the inward manifestations of His love, grace, and blood.

And thus a living soul “receives” Christ—not merely as driven by necessity, but also as drawn by affection. He does not receive Christ merely as a way of escape from “the wrath to come” (Luk 3:7), merely as something to save a soul from “the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched” (Mar 9:44), but mingled with necessity, sweetly and powerfully combined with it, and intimately and intricately working with it, there is the flowing forth of genuine affection and love that goes out to Him as the only object really worthy our heart’s affection, our spirit’s worship, and our soul’s desire. And we cannot say that less than this comes up to the meaning of the Scripture expression—“to receive Christ.” If we cannot then trace out in our hearts more or less of this work, which I have attempted feebly to describe, we cannot yet be said spiritually to have “received Christ.”

This is a very different thing from receiving Him into our judgment, or into our understanding in a doctrinal manner. To receive Him in the depths of a broken heart, as the only Saviour for our guilty soul, as our only hope for eternity, as the only Lord of our

heart's worship, and the only object of our pure affection; so that in secret, when no eye sees but the eye of God, and only the ear of Jehovah hears the pantings of our pleading heart, there is the breathing out of the spirit after the enjoyment of His love, grace, and blood—to know and feel this stamps a man to have “received” Christ into his heart by faith.

### **To Become a Son of God**

But in the words of the text we read of a peculiar privilege, a sacred blessing, which is connected with and attached to the receiving of Christ. And perhaps you have been struck sometimes with the words: “As many as received Him, to *them gave He power to become the sons of God*, even to them that believe on His name” (Joh 1:12). Did the word *become* never strike you as a singular word? Does it not intimate a further step? Does it not clearly imply that to “receive Christ” and to “become a son of God” are two distinct things, and that one precedes the other?

It is so. For it is only to those who “receive Christ” that the “power” (or “the privilege,” as we read in the margin) is given, “to become sons of God.”

What then is it to “become *a son of God?*” For it is evidently not the same thing as “receiving Christ,” but a step that follows on after receiving Christ—a privilege given to and reserved for those who do spiritually “receive Him.” To “become a son of God” is to become so experimentally: to receive the Spirit of adoption, whereby the soul cries, “Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6); to have that love which “casteth out all fear that hath torment” (1Jo 4:18); and not merely to receive Christ as our hope of salvation from eternal perdition, but to be enabled by the witness and work of the Spirit in the soul to enjoy that relationship.

## What “Sons of God” Are Not

But in speaking of these “sons of God,” the apostle describes them negatively as well as positively; he tells us what they are not, and he tells us what they are. And it is by contrasting what they are not with what they are, that we may arrive at some spiritual knowledge of their real character and position.

### *1. Of Blood*

Those then that have “received Christ,” and by receiving Christ have “become the sons of God” (Joh 1:13) manifestly, are said “not to have been born of *blood*.” The Jews, we know, laid great stress upon their lineal descent from Abraham. “We be Abraham’s seed,” they said to the Lord on one occasion, “and were never in bondage to any man; how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?” “Art thou greater,” asked they, “than our father Abraham?” (Joh 8:33, 53). Their lineal descent from Abraham was the ground of their hope; and they believed that, being his children, they were interested in all the promises which were made to him. They saw no distinction betwixt the children of Abraham literally and the children of Abraham spiritually; and those promises which were made to the spiritual seed of Abraham, as “the father of all them that believe” (Rom 4:11), they appropriated to themselves as his lineal and literal descendants. Now the apostle in the text demolishes that false idea, cuts from under their feet the ground on which their vain hopes rested, and declares that those who are so highly favoured as to “become the sons of God” had something more than being “born of *blood*.”

If you look at the word “born,” it implies some change. Birth is a transition from a state of almost

non-existence into existence—a coming from darkness to light. When the apostle then says of them, that they were “born not of blood,” he implies that a change of some kind might take place, analogous to the natural birth, and yet not be such a change as makes a man become a child of God. Is there not such a false birth frequently now? Are there not what are called “pious children of pious parents?” And could you trace their religion to the very source and run it up to its first origin, you would find that it had no better beginning than parental piety; that the religious father taught religion to his child, and by dint of admonition and instruction made him just as religious as himself. So that a change may have taken place; seriousness may have taken the place of trifling, religious books may have been taken up instead of novels, and hymns be sung instead of songs; but after all, the change is a mere birth “of blood.” There has been no *spiritual* change, no almighty work of the Holy Ghost in the soul; but the religion has been handed down from parent to child, and stands upon no better footing than a mother’s instruction or a father’s tuition. Those who were “born of God” had something better than this to stand upon.

## 2. *Of the Will of the Flesh*

But the apostle, in tracing out the character of those who were “the sons of God,” brings forward another imitation of a spiritual birth; he says they were not born “*of the will of the flesh.*” Has “the flesh,” then, a will to be religious? Aye, surely; we have a religious “old man,” as well as an irreligious “old man.” Nature is not confined to one garb; she wears many masks and can put on various appearances. Thus there is a will in man, at least in many

men, to be religious, and to save themselves if possible. But those who were “born of God” had “power given to them to become the sons of God,” and experienced a deeper, higher, spiritual, and supernatural work upon their consciences, than any such birth “after the will of the flesh.”

The flesh, however high it may rise, can never rise above itself. It begins in hypocrisy, it goes on in hypocrisy, and it never can end but in hypocrisy. Whatever various shapes it puts on (and it may wear the highest Calvinistic garb, as well as assume the lowest Arminian dress), a fleshly religion never can rise above itself. There is no brokenness of heart, no contrition of spirit, no godly sorrow, no genuine humility, no living faith, no spiritual hope, no heavenly love “shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost” (Rom 5:5), in those that are “born after the will of the flesh.” No abasing views of self, no tender feelings of reverence towards God, no filial fear of His great name, no melting of heart, no softening of spirit, no deadness to the world, no sweet communion with the Lord of life and glory, ever dwelt in their breasts. The flesh, with all its workings and all its subtle deceit and hypocrisy, never sank so low as self-abhorrence and godly sorrow, and never mounted so high as into communion with the Three-One God. The depth of the one is too deep, and the height of the other too high for any but those who are “born of God.”

### *3. Of the Will of Man*

We read in the text, however, of another birth still, which is “*of the will of man.*” Man, it appears, has a will to become religious; and as the birth according to “the will of the flesh” pointed out a relig-

ion taken up by ourselves, so the birth after “the will of man” shadows forth a religion put upon us by others. And to what does the great mass of the religion of the present day amount? If we gauge it by the scriptural standard, if we look at it with a spiritual eye, if we examine it in its bearings God-ward, what must we say of the vast bulk of religion current in this professing day? Must we not say that it is according to “the will of man?” Eloquent exhortations to “flee from the wrath to come,” thundering denunciations of God’s vengeance against the world, working upon the natural feelings, wooing men into a profession of religion, drawing into churches boys and girls just out of the Sunday school, and persuading all from infancy to grey-hairs to become religious—this is the way in which is brought about the birth after “the will of man.” And what is the end of it all? It leaves the soul under “the wrath to come.” There is in all this religion no deliverance from the law, no pardon of sin, no separation from the world, no salvation from death and hell. These various births, be they “of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man,” leave a man just where they found him—dead in sin, destitute of the fear of God, and utterly ignorant of that divine teaching, which alone can save his soul from eternal wrath.

### **Conclusion**

But those who were so highly privileged and so spiritually blessed as to “receive Christ,” and by receiving Christ to “become the sons of God,” were partakers of another birth than these false ones, and had received another teaching, another gospel, and another Jesus. And these, and these only, were “born of God.” The Lord Himself had quickened their souls, and brought

them out of nature's darkness into His own marvellous light. The Lord Himself, by His secret work upon their consciences, had cast them down and lifted them up, had brought them to the birth and had also brought them forth; and thus they were "born of God," and had received the kingdom of God with power into their hearts, so as to become "new creatures" (2Co 5:17) and to "pass from death unto life" (Joh 5:24).

We see then the steps that the Spirit of God has here been pleased to trace out. We see that He has drawn a separating line betwixt those who had nothing but nature, and those who had something more than nature—even the grace and Spirit of God; and we see that the Lord with decisive hand sets aside every profession but that which springs out of His own divine teaching; and will have no subjects of His sceptre and no inmates of His kingdom but those in whose hearts He Himself has begun, and is carrying on His own "work of faith with power."

Now I believe that for the most part, those who have nothing else but a birth "of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man," have no doubts nor fears, no strong exercises nor sharp temptations as to their eternal state before God. On the other hand, those whom the Lord is teaching by the blessed Spirit are often tried and exercised in their minds whether the feelings which they inwardly experience spring from a real work of God upon their souls, or whether they are mere counterfeits and imitations of a work of grace.

Thus, in God's mysterious providence, those who have every reason to fear, have for the most part no fear at all, and those who have no reason whatever to fear, but stand complete in Christ, the objects of God's eternal love, and the sheep for whom Jesus

died, are the only persons who are plagued and pestered with the fears that spring from their own unbelieving hearts and the temptations with which Satan is continually distressing their minds. It is the object of Satan to keep those secure who are safe in his hands; nor does God see fit to disturb their quiet. He has no purpose of mercy towards them; they are not subjects of His kingdom; they are not objects of His love. He therefore leaves them carnally secure; in a dream, from which they will not awake till God “despises their image” (Psa 73:20).

But on the other hand, where Satan perceives a work of grace going on; where he sees the eyes sometimes filled with tears, where he hears the sobs heaving from the contrite heart, where he observes the knees often bent in secret prayer, where his listening ear often hears the poor penitent confess his sins, weaknesses, and backslidings before God (for by these observations, we have reason to believe, Satan gains his intelligence), wherever he sees this secret work going on in the soul, mad with wrath and filled with malice, he vents his hellish spleen against the objects of God’s love. Sometimes he tries to ensnare them into sin, sometimes to harass them with temptation, sometimes to stir up their wicked heart into desperate rebellion, sometimes to work upon their natural infidelity, and sometimes to plague them with many groundless doubts and fears as to the reality of their sincerity before a heart-searching God.

So that whilst those who have no work of grace upon their hearts at all are left secure, and free from doubt and fear, those in whom God is at work are exercised and troubled in their minds, and often cannot really believe that they are the people in whom God takes delight. The depths of human hypocrisy, the



awful lengths to which profession may go, the deceit of the carnal heart, the snares spread for the unwary feet, the fearful danger of being deceived at the last—these traps and pitfalls are not objects of anxiety to those dead in sin. As long as they can pacify natural conscience, and do something to soothe any transient conviction, they are glad to be deceived.

But on the other hand, he that has a conscience tender in God's fear knows what an awful thing it is to be a hypocrite before God, to have "a lie in his right hand" (Isa 44:20), and be deluded by the prince of darkness; and therefore, until God Himself assures him with His own blessed lips, speaks with power to his conscience, and establishes him in a blessed assurance of his interest in Christ by "shedding abroad His love in his heart," he must be exercised and tried in his mind, he must have these various tossings to and fro, for this simple reason—because he cannot rest satisfied except in the personal manifestations of the mercy of God.

In this congregation, doubtless, there are living souls who are thus exercised. When you feel how carnal you have been (and how often are you carnal!), how your mind has been buried in the things of time and sense, how little prayer has been flowing out of your heart, how eternal things have been hid from your view—when you awake as out of a dream, and find all your evidences beclouded, and all your past experience covered with a thick veil of darkness, then these painful fears begin to rise in your mind—lest with all your profession you should be deceived at the last.

But what do you under such circumstances? Do you fly to man? No; for you are taught to see that "miserable comforters are ye all" (Job 16:2). Do you

fly back to past experiences? As you endeavour to pursue them, they more and more recede from your view. Do you endeavour to gather up your former comforts? They slip out of your fingers, and you have no solid grasp of them. Do you go to ministers, that they may speak a flattering word? If they do speak to you words of encouragement, you cannot receive it.

And thus, driven out of all creature hopes, your whole refuge and sole resource is the Lord Himself. To Him you go with a contrite heart, with a troubled mind, with an exercised soul; at His feet you bend with holy reverence, and cast yourself as a poor guilty wretch at His footstool. And when, in sweet and blessed answer to the cry of your soul, He drops in a word to raise up your drooping spirit, then you receive that which no human hand could minister; you have a balm which no human physician could give; and your soul for a time feels satisfied with a sense and testimony of the Lord's goodness.

Shall we quarrel, then, with these doubts and exercises, these temptations and trials, these assaults from Satan, these workings up of inward corruption, when they are, in God's mercy and in God's providence, such blessed helpers? If they drive us to a throne of grace to receive answers of mercy there; if by them we are brought out of lying refuges; if by them all false hopes are stripped off from us; if by them we are made honest and sincere before God; if by them we turn away from all human help, and come wholly and solely to the Lord that He alone may speak peace to us, and bless us; shall we quarrel with these things, which are—if I may use the expression—such friendly enemies, that are so outwitted, that are so—in God's di-

vine alembic<sup>2</sup>—changed from curses into blessings, that in God’s overruling providence are made so mysteriously to work for our good?

Shall we not rather bless God for every exercise that brings us to His footstool? For every temptation that has stripped away creature-righteousness; for every blow that has cut us off from the world; for every affliction that has embittered the things of time and sense; for everything, however painful to the flesh, which has brought us nearer to Himself, and made us feel more love towards Him, and more desire after Him? Sure I am, that when we sum up God’s mercies, we must include in the number things painful to the flesh, and which at one time we could only look upon as miseries; nay, in summing up the rich total, we must catalogue in the list every pang of guilt, every stroke of conviction, every agonizing doubt, every painful fear, every secret temptation, everything that has most disturbed us.

And could we among God’s mercies assign a more prominent place to one than to another, we should give the most distinguished to the deepest trial. We should say, “Of all mercies, next to manifested mercies (for we must put them at the head of the list), the greatest have been troubles, trials, exercises, and temptations; for we now see that their blessed effect has been to cut us clean out of fleshly religion, and out of those delusions which, had we continued in them, would have been our destruction, and thus eventually to bring us into nearer union, and to more sweet and special communion with God Himself.”

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<sup>2</sup> *alembic* – an apparatus used for distilling; anything which purifies.

God leads all His people “forth by the right way” (Psa 107:7); but the right way is to them, as God leads them, a mysterious one, for He “brings the blind by a way that they knew not” (Isa 42:16). Could you and I, by the eye of faith, retrace the whole path that God has been pleased to lead us in, from the time He was pleased to quicken our souls, or I might go further back than that—from the time that we came into existence; could we accurately and believingly trace out all the path, we should come to this sweet conclusion in our minds: It has all been a path of undeserved and unmingled mercy. His dealings with us, however painful they may have been, yet have all guided us “by the right way, that we might go to a city of habitation” (Psa 107:7).

And what is our present condition? Some of us perhaps are passing through severe trials, walking in “darkness which may be felt” (Exo 10:21), labouring under heavy burdens, and not seeing the sun behind the cloud. But may we not judge from the past, what is the use of the present, and what will be the issue of the future? Has the Lord ever disappointed your expectations? Has He ever been to you less than you have hoped, or other than you wished? Oh that the Lord would enable each of us to trust Him even now! However dark the path He may call us to walk in, may the Lord give us this blessed confidence, that He is still leading us, still guiding us, and will lead us and guide us, until He brings us to “see Him as He is” (1Jo 3:2), to enjoy His presence, and to sit down in His glorious and eternal kingdom. ❧

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