

The Authority & Power of the Word upon the Heart

by J. C. Philpot



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Chapter 1

God is essentially invisible. "He dwells in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man has seen, nor can see." ([1Ti 6:16](#).) When, therefore, he would make himself known to the sons of men, it must be by his works or by his words. The first way of making his power and glory known is beautifully unfolded in Psalm 19—"The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies; yet their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to all the world." This is the testimony which God gave of himself to the Gentile world, but which, through the depravity of man's heart, has been universally misunderstood, perverted and abused, as the Apostle speaks—"since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." ([Rom 1:19-21](#).)

The secret spring whence this flows, and the eternal foundation on which this rests, is the incarnation of God's dear Son. He is "the Word"—the Word emphatically, originally, essentially; and so called not only because he is the express image of the Father, as the word is the image of the thought, but because he has declared or made him known, as our uttered word makes our thoughts known. John therefore bare witness of him—"No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." Had there, then, been no incarnate Word, there would have been no revealed word; and had there been no revealed word, there would have been no written word; for all that was revealed was not necessarily written, as John was bidden to seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. ([Rev 10:4](#).) And as without the incarnate Word there would have been no revealed or written word—so the power of the written word is derived from the power of the incarnate Word.

God's witness by his works, then, being insufficient, and failing, so to speak, through the depravity of man's heart, he has revealed himself by and in his word—in those precious Scriptures which we hold in our hands, and the power of which some of us have felt in our hearts. It is, then, of this power of the written word that we have now to speak. But when we speak of the power of the word of God we do not mean thereby to convey the idea that it possesses any power of its own, any actual, original, innate force, which acts of itself on the heart and conscience. The word of God is but the instrument of a higher and distinct power, even the power of that Holy and eternal Spirit, the revealer and testifier of Jesus, by whose express and immediate inspiration it was written.

The power of an instrument is the power of him who uses it. This is true literally. The strength of the sword is in the hand of him who wields it. A child may take up a warrior's sword, but can he use it as a warrior? If, then, the word of God is "quick (or living, as the word means) and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," it is because he wields it of whom it is said, "You are the most handsome of all. Gracious words stream from your lips. God himself has blessed you forever. Put on your sword, O mighty warrior! You are so glorious, so majestic!" ([Psa 45:2-3](#).) John, therefore, saw him in vision, as one "out of whose mouth went a sharp two-edged sword," ([Rev 1:16](#)), both to pierce the hearts of his people and to smite the nations. ([Rev 19:13](#).)

So with the word which he wields. "Where the word of a king is there is power." ([Ecc 8:4](#).) And why? Because it is the word of the king. Another may speak the word, but it has no power because he who speaks it has no power to execute it. When "the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as you have said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate; let nothing fail of all that you have spoken," ([Est 6:10](#)), it was done. The man whom the king delighted to honor was honored. ([Est 6:10-11](#).) When again the king said, "Hang him thereon," it was done—"So they

hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai." ([Est 7:9-10.](#)) Here were life and death in the power of the tongue. ([Pro 28:21.](#)) Thus we ascribe no power to the word itself, but to the power of him who speaks it. The Apostle therefore says of his speech and preaching that it was "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power;" ([1Co 2:4;](#)) and of his gospel, that is, the gospel which he knew, felt, and preached, that it came unto the Thessalonians "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance." ([1Th 1:5.](#)) Twice had David heard, that is on two solemn and special occasions, "that power belongs unto God." ([Psa 62:11.](#)) To understand and explain this power passes our comprehension. It may be and is felt, and its effects seen and known, but "the thunder of his power who can understand?" ([Job 26:14.](#)) When God said, "Let there be light," light burst forth at his creative fiat. But who can understand or explain how light came? Yet it could be seen when it filled the future creation with its bright effulgence.

But now let us consider **the exercise and display of this power in its first movements upon the heart.** Man being dead in sin, needs an almighty power to make him alive unto God; for what communion can there be between a dead soul and a living God? This, then, is the first display of the power of the word of God in the hands of the eternal Spirit. "You has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." ([Eph 2:1.](#)) And how? By the word. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." ([Jam 1:18.](#)) So testifies Peter—"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever." ([1Pe 1:23.](#)) What James calls "begetting" Peter terms "being born again;" and this corresponds with what the Lord himself declared to Nicodemus—"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." ([Joh 3:3.](#)) Almost similar is the language of John himself as taken, doubtless, from his divine Master—"Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man—but of God." ([Joh 1:13.](#)) So in his first epistle—"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and every one that loves him that begat loves him also that is begotten of him." ([1Jo 5:1.](#)) We need not therefore enter into the controversy about the difference between begetting and being born again, as if the new birth exactly corresponded with the old, and as if the analogy could be precisely carried out between natural and spiritual generation. Figures (and this is a figure) must not be pressed home to all their logical consequences, or made to fit and correspond in all their parts and particulars. It is sufficient for us to know that the mighty change whereby a sinner passes from death unto life, ([1Jo 3:14.](#)) is "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son," ([Col 1:13.](#)) is by the power of the word of God upon his soul.

Nor shall we, as we wish to avoid controversial topics, enter at any length into the question whether light or life first enters into the heart—"The entrance of your words gives light." ([Psa 119:130.](#)) There it would seem that light came first. And so the passage—"To open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light." ([Act 26:18.](#)) So Saul at Damascus' gate saw and was struck down by the light before the quickening words came—"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ([Act 9:4.](#)) In grace, if not in nature, it would seem evident that we see before we feel; and thus the disciples "beheld his glory, as of the only begotten of the Father," before they received the Son of God into their hearts and believed on his name. It will be seen from these hints that without entering into the controversy, or pronouncing any dogmatical opinion, our own view inclines to the point held by Mr. Huntington, that light precedes life. And yet, when we look back on our own experience, how difficult it is to determine whether we saw light before we felt life, or whether the same ray which brought light into the mind did not bring at the same moment life into the heart. At any rate we saw what we felt, and we felt what we saw. "In your light do we see light." To see this light is to be "enlightened with the light of the living." ([Job 33:30.](#)) And this our blessed Lord calls "the light of life." "Then spoke Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." ([Joh 8:12.](#))

So we will not put asunder what God has joined together—light and life. We know, however, the effect better than the cause; and need we wonder that we can neither understand nor explain the mystery of regeneration? Does not the Lord himself say—"The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound thereof, but can not tell whence it comes and where it goes; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." ([Joh 3:8.](#)) It is our mercy if we have seen light in God's light and felt the Spirit's quickening breath, if we cannot understand whence it came or where it goes, except to believe that it came from God and leads to God—it began in grace and will end in glory.

The beginning of this work upon the soul is in Scripture frequently termed "a calling," as in the well-known

passage—"But unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." (1Co 1:24-26.) And thus we find "calling" one of the links in that glorious chain which, reaching down to and stretching through time, is fastened at both ends to eternity—"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Rom 8:29-30.)

The very word "call" has a reference to something spoken or uttered, that is, a word addressed to the person called. If I call to a man, I speak to that man. My word to him is my call to him. Thus our Lord said to Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the receipt of custom, "Follow me." Power attended the word. It fell upon Matthew's heart. Light and life entered into his soul. His understanding was enlightened, his will renewed, his heart changed. What was the instantaneous effect? "And he arose and followed him." (Mar 2:14.) Similar in cause and effect was the calling of Peter and Andrew, of James and John. (Mat 4:18-22.) This calling is "by grace" or the pure favor of God; (Gal 1:15;) a "heavenly calling," as coming from heaven and leading to heaven; (Heb 3:1;) a "holy calling," (2Ti 1:9,) not only holy in itself, but leading to and productive of that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord;" (Heb 12:14;) and therefore a calling "to glory and virtue," or excellency, as the word means—excellency here, (Phi 1:10; Phi 4:8,) glory hereafter. It is also a calling out of the world, as Abraham was called to "leave his country, and his kindred, and his father's house;" and so we are bidden to "come out from among them and be separate, and not touch the unclean thing." (2Co 6:17.) It is "a high calling," and therefore free from everything low, groveling, and earthly; "into the grace of Christ;" (Gal 1:6;) a calling "to the fellowship of the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord;" (1Co 1:9;) a calling "to peace" with God and his dear people, and as far as lies in us with all men; (Col 3:15; 1Co 7:15; Rom 12:18;) "to liberty," (Gal 5:13,) to a "laying hold of eternal life," (1Ti 6:12,) and "to the obtaining of the eternal glory of the Lord Jesus Christ." (2Th 2:14; 1Pe 5:10; Joh 17:22-24.)

As, then, those who are thus called are called to the experimental enjoyment of these spiritual blessings, with all of which they were blessed in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, according as they were chosen in him before the foundation of the world, it is plain that they must have a knowledge of them communicated to their soul; and as we know nothing of divine truth but through the written word and cannot by any wisdom of our own, even with that word in our hands, attain to a saving knowledge of these divine realities—it is equally plain that **they must be revealed to us by a spiritual and supernatural power.**

This is clearly and beautifully unfolded by the Apostle in 1 Cor. 2. We cannot quote the whole chapter, which, to be clearly understood, should be read in its full connection, but we cannot forbear citing a few verses as being so appropriate to, and casting such a light on our subject—No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." (1Co 2:9-12.)

The things which "God has prepared for those who love him" are the things which his people are called to know and enjoy; and that not merely as regards the future state of glory but the present state of grace—the things to be known on earth as well as the things to be enjoyed in heaven. This is plain from the words, "But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit,"—not will hereafter reveal and make them known in heaven above, but has already revealed them on earth below. And where, but in the heart of his people? For it is there that they receive "the Spirit which is of God," and this "that they might know the things that are freely given to them of God."

Knowledge, then, is clearly and evidently the first effect of that divine light of which we have spoken; and this corresponds with what the gracious Lord said in his intercessory prayer—"And this is life eternal, that they might **know** you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (Joh 17:3.) The knowledge of the only true God must precede any fear of him, or any faith in him. While I am in nature's darkness and death, I do not know God, and, therefore, I neither can nor do fear him.

Some of our spiritual readers may feel surprised at our putting the knowledge of God as the first effect of the power of the word upon the heart; and some may tell us that we should put conviction of sin, and others might insist that we should place the fear of God first. But if they will bear with us for a few moments, we think we can show them that a true spiritual knowledge of the only true God must go before both right conviction of sin and before the right fear of the Lord.

1. First, then, what is conviction of sin but a conviction in our conscience of having sinned against and before a pure, holy, and just God? But where can be my conviction of having sinned against him, if I have no knowledge of him? In nature's darkness and death, I felt no conviction of sin, not only because my conscience was not awakened or divinely wrought upon, but because I knew nothing of him against whom I had sinned—nothing of his justice, nothing of his holiness, nothing of his power.

2. What is the fear of God but a trembling apprehension of his glorious majesty? But how can I have this apprehension of his glorious majesty if I am ignorant of his very existence, which I am—until he makes it known by a ray of light out of his own eternal fullness? Where do we see the fear of God more in exercise or more beautifully expressed than in Psalm 139? But how the whole of it is laid in the knowledge of the heart-searching presence of the Almighty—"O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me." ([Psa 139:1-5](#).)

We can sometimes read past experience best in the light of present experience, as a traveler emerging from a dark and tangled forest sees from the hill-top the way by which he came far more clearly and better than when he was struggling among the thickets.

When, then, now do we seem most to see and feel the evil of **sin**? When do we now seem most to fear that Lord in whose presence we stand? Is it not in proportion to our knowledge of him, to our present realization of his majesty, power, and presence, and to that spiritual experimental acquaintance which we have gained of his dread perfections by the teaching, as we trust, of the Holy Spirit through the written word? And take the converse. When are our views and feelings of the evil of sin comparatively dim and cold, so that we do not seem to see and realize what a dreadful thing it is? Is it not when there is no sensible view nor present apprehension of the majesty, holiness, and presence of God?

Similarly with respect to **godly fear**. When does this fountain of life to depart from the snares of death run shallow and low, so as to be diminished, as by a summer drought, almost to a thin thread? When our present vital, experimental sight and sense, knowledge and apprehension of the majesty of the Lord are become dim and feeble, when the old veil seems to flap back over the heart, and like a half-closed shutter shuts out the light of day. If we read the early chapters of the book of Proverbs, we shall see how much is spoken in them of wisdom, instruction, knowledge, understanding, and the like, and how closely there the fear of the Lord is connected with the knowledge of the Lord—"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; but fools despise wisdom and instruction." ([Pro 1:7](#).) And, again—"My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." ([Pro 2:1-6](#).)

And, again—"When wisdom enters into your heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto your soul; discretion shall preserve you, understanding shall keep you." ([Pro 2:10-11](#).) So those that perish, perish from lack of this knowledge and of this fear as its fruit—"For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." ([Pro 1:29-31](#).) And more plainly and emphatically—"Fools die for lack of wisdom." ([Pro 10:21](#).) Indeed, there is such a connection between true wisdom, which is "a knowledge of the holy," ([Pro 30:3](#).) and the fear of the Lord, and such a connection between ignorance of the Lord and sin, that saved saints are called "wise," and lost sinners are called "fools," not only in the Old Testament, as continually in the Proverbs, but in the New.

Many of the Lord's people look with suspicion upon knowledge, from not seeing clearly the vast distinction between the spiritual, experimental knowledge for which we are now contending, and what is called "head

knowledge." They see that a man may have a well-furnished head and a graceless heart, that he may understand "all mysteries" and all "knowledge" and yet be "nothing;" ([1Co 13:2](#).) And as some of these all-knowing professors are the basest characters that can infest the churches, those who really fear the Lord stand not only in doubt of them, but of all the knowledge possessed by them. But put it in a different form; ask the people of God whether there is not such a divine reality, such a heavenly blessing, as being "taught of God;" ([Joh 6:45](#);) having "an unction from above whereby we know all things;" ([1Jo 2:20](#);) knowing the truth for oneself and finding it makes free; ([Joh 8:32](#);) whether there is not a "counting of all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord," and a stretching forth of the desires of the soul to "know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings;" whether there is not "a knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins;" ([Luk 1:77](#);) "a knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" ([2Co 4:6](#);) a being "filled with the knowledge of his will," ([Col 1:9](#);) an "increasing in the knowledge of God;" ([Col 1:10](#);) "a growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," ([2Pe 3:18](#);)—ask the living family of God whether there be not such a knowledge as this, and if this knowledge is not the very pith and marrow, the very sum and substance of vital godliness? and they will with one voice say, "It is!"

By putting knowledge therefore, as the first effect of the word of truth upon the heart, we are not setting up, God forbid, that vain, empty, useless, deceptive thing, that delusion of the devil, "head knowledge"—but that divine, spiritual, gracious, and saving knowledge which is communicated to the soul and wrought into its very substance by the teaching and testimony of the Holy Spirit. This knowledge embraces every truth which we learn by divine teaching in living experience, from the first sigh to the last song, from the earliest conviction to the last consolation, from the cry of despair to the shout of triumph, from the agonies of hell to the joys of heaven. Need any one wonder, therefore, that we put first what stands first, that we lay down the first stone which is the foundation stone, and draw the first line where the Holy Spirit makes his first impression?

If, then, this knowledge is communicated by the Holy Spirit to the heart through the written word, two things follow, and we believe that the experience of every child of God will bear testimony to what we now advance concerning them—

1. That the word of God comes into the heart and conscience in and by regeneration, with a new and hitherto unfelt power. How carelessly, how ignorantly, how formally, if we read it at all, did we read the word of God in the days of our unregeneracy. What little heed we paid to the word preached, if we heard it at all. What thorough darkness and death wrapped us up, so that nothing of a spiritual, eternal nature touched, moved, or stirred us either with hope or fear. But at a certain, never-to-be-forgotten time, a power, we could not tell how or why, was put into the word and it fell upon our hearts, as a sound from heaven—as the very voice of God to our conscience. The word of God laid hold of us as the word of God; it was no longer the word of man, a dry, uninteresting, almost if not wholly hated book; but it got, we could not explain how, so into the very inside of us—armed with authority and power as a message from God.

But here let us guard ourselves. It is not always the exact words, or indeed any word of Scripture which lays hold of the conscience; but it is in every case the truth contained in the Scriptures. Eternity, judgment to come, the justice of God, his all-searching eye, his almighty hand, his universal presence, from which there is no escape—these, and other similar truths which fall with such weight upon the quickened sinner's conscience, are all revealed in and only known by the Scripture. The truth of God is, therefore, the word of God, as the word of God is the truth of God. If, then, no particular word or words are applied to the conscience by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, the truth, which is the word, is applied to the heart, and it is this entrance of the truth as the word of God, which gives light.

As a proof of this, no sooner do we receive the solemn truths of which we have spoken, into our conscience and feel their power, than we run to the Scriptures and find a light in and upon them hitherto unseen and unknown. The light, life, and power, which attended the truth as it fell upon the conscience gave the word a place in our hearts. And we shall always find that the place which the word has in the heart is in proportion to the light and power which attended its first entrance. Let us seek to explain this a little more fully and clearly.

The heart by nature is closed, shut, barred against the entrance of light. The light may, so to speak, play around the heart, but does not enter, for there is a thick veil over it. Thus our Lord said of himself, "While I am in the world I am the light of the world." ([Joh 9:5](#).) The light shone upon the world, but did not enter,

for the "light shines in darkness and the darkness comprehended (that is apprehended or embraced) it not." ([Joh 1:5.](#)) "My word," said the Lord, "has no place in you." ([Joh 8:37.](#)) But when the word comes with power, it seizes hold of the heart and conscience. They give way before it and leave a place for it, where it sets up its throne and becomes their Lord and Master.

Here, then, we shall for the present pause, leaving the word of truth in possession of the heart.

The Authority & Power of the Word upon the Heart

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Chapter 2

However vital godliness, either in its inward experience or in its outward fruits, may be imitated by the craft of Satan or the deceptiveness of man's heart, there is as much real and essential difference between the work of grace on the soul, as begun and carried on by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit—and any base counterfeit—as between light and darkness, life and death, Christ and Belial, heaven and hell. It may indeed be exceedingly difficult for any man or minister clearly, to discern the distinction, or accurately describe the difference between grace in its lowest degree and nature in its highest—between a saint in his worst state and a hypocrite in his best—for there is not a fruit of the Spirit which cannot be imitated, not a heavenly feeling, divine sensation, or gracious movement which cannot be counterfeited. Who, with all his real or fancied discernment, can at all times and under all circumstances discover all the delusions of Satan as an angel of light, or detect all the turnings and windings of a self-deceptive, hypocritical heart?

But of all the varied and intricate circumstances which puzzle the mind and perplex the judgment when we would try our own case or that of others, none seems to us more puzzling and perplexing than this—that every grace and fruit of the blessed Spirit has its corresponding counterpart in the natural mind. Thus is there an enlightening of the eyes of the understanding by the gift of the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ? ([Eph 1:17-18](#).) There is a corresponding enlightening of the natural mind to receive the knowledge of the truth. ([Rom 6:4](#); [Rom 10:26](#).) Is faith the gift of God and a fruit of the Spirit? ([Eph 2:8](#); [Gal 5:22](#);) and does it come by hearing, and hearing by the word of God? ([Rom 10:1.7](#).) There is a natural faith—a believing for a while, and in time of temptation falling away. ([Luk 8:13](#); [Joh 8:30](#); [Joh 12:42-43](#).) Is there a conscience made tender in the fear of God, as a choice new covenant blessing? ([Jer 32:40](#); [Act 23:1](#); [Act 24:16](#).) There is a natural conscience bearing witness in a heathen mind in its accusing or excusing thoughts, and convicting a graceless hypocrite with a stone in his hand ready to hurl it at the open sinner. ([Rom 2:15](#); [Joh 8:9](#).) Is there a receiving of the love of the truth, so as to be saved and sanctified thereby? ([2Th 2:10](#); [Joh 17:17](#).) There is a hearing of the word gladly by a Herod, ([Mar 6:20](#);) and a receiving of it with joy by a stony-ground hearer. ([Luk 8:13](#).) Is there "a good hope through grace," an "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil?" ([2Th 2:16](#); [Heb 6:19](#).) There is the hope of the hypocrite that perishes, and a trust which is but a spider's web. ([Job 8:13-14](#).) So might we run through the various fruits and graces of the Spirit, as repentance, and its natural counterpart in Ahab and Judas; ([1Ki 21:27](#); [Mat 27:3](#);) humility, and its imitation in Saul; ([1Sa 10:21-22](#); [1Sa 10:27](#);) zeal, and its fleshly mimicry in Jehu ([2Ki 10:16](#)), and in the false spirit of the sons of Zebedee; ([Luk 9:54-55](#);) love of holiness, and its sanctimonious counterfeit in the murderers of the Lord who, for fear of defilement, would not enter into Pilate's judgment hall. ([Joh 18:28](#).) But we need not enlarge on a point so evident, and of such every-day observation. Suffice it to remark that it is this counterpart of nature to grace, this correspondence of many if not most of the features of the old man to many if not most of the features of the new, which so greatly perplexes our mind when we sit in judgment on our own case or on that of others.

When, then, we attempt to trace out the operation and effects of the word of truth on the heart of the saints of God, and to show the authority and power which in the hands of the Spirit it exercises on their conscience, we are met at the very outset by the perplexing difficulty of which we have just spoken—the counterpart of flesh to spirit, the fruits and effects of the word on the natural conscience, as resembling the fruits and effects of the word on the spiritual conscience.

Still, as there is a vital and essential difference between them, we will, with God's help and blessing, make the attempt to trace out that peculiar work and those peculiar effects which seem especially to distinguish the authority and power of the word of God on the heart and conscience of his people—from all its imitations and all its counterfeits. And we more particularly dwell on this point as being well convinced that in nothing is the true work of grace more distinguished from all counterfeits, than by the power which attends the word in the hands of the Spirit to the heart of the elect family of God.

In our last paper we left the word in possession of the heart. At this point, therefore, we now resume our subject. In describing, however, this work, we drew rather a general sketch than worked out our subject in detail. We rather laid down the general truth, that light, life, and power attend the entrance of the word into the heart, than minutely described either the way in which they enter or the effects which they produce. To this more detailed description we now, therefore, come; for truth, it may be observed, is often lost, or if not altogether lost in, is much obscured by generalities. A map of a district to be of any real value must be minute. A child's map would be of little service to a bewildered traveler in a foreign land. Some friends of ours, many years ago, taking a walking tour in Switzerland lost their way on the mountains, and would probably have perished if one of the party had not had with him a most minute and accurate map of the country—by following which they soon arrived at a place of safety.

To a wanderer on the mountains of Israel, a map Zionwards must be not only accurate, but detailed, that he may know, not only that he is in the way, but whereabouts in the way. May wisdom and grace be given to us to line out the map not only plainly but accurately. To make it more clear and simple we should go back a few steps, and take **the vessel of mercy in his carnal, unregenerate state** before the mighty work begins whereby he is turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

To help our understanding on this point and establish our faith, the Scripture has given us a variety of figures, such as the quickening of the dead, ([Eph 2:1](#)), the breathing of life upon the dry bones, ([Ezek. 37](#)), the taking up and rearing of the outcast child, ([Ezek. 16](#)), besides the more ordinary emblems of begetting or being born again, of a new creation, of a resurrection, etc. But we shall, for the sake of clearness, adopt the Lord's own figure of the strong man armed keeping this palace. ([Luk 11:21-22](#).) View, then, the strong man, strong in his unregeneracy, in his palace and equipped is his armor. His palace is the heart; his armor his defense against the word of truth, the sword of the Spirit. How strong is his armor and how confident his trust in it. See him clothed from head to foot in his armor; and as every truth has its opposing error, and every grace and fruit of the Spirit its counterfeit, so the armor of the saint has its counterpart in the armor of the sinner. He stands, therefore, in the whole armor of sin and Satan. The belt of error, the breastplate of unrighteousness, the shoes of enmity, the shield of unbelief, the helmet of perdition, and the sword of the old man which is the word of carnal reason, equip him from head to foot as with armor of proof. And lest these be insufficient, he is firmly entrenched behind all such bulwarks of his palace as the prayerlessness, carelessness, watchlessness, and slothfulness of the carnal mind.

Who can overcome this strongman armed? None but the stronger than he, the mighty One, the strength of Israel. His goods are in peace. False peace and security wrap him in their folded arms, and he bids defiance to every fear and every foe. But Jesus comes upon him by the power of his word, assaults him in his castle, overcomes him, and takes from him all his armor wherein he trusted, stripping it off, piece by piece. While this armor was on, no arrow of conviction could reach the heart, for it was at once met and turned off by the shield or breastplate. But when the armor is stripped away, then there lies a naked, exposed, defenseless soul—for the sword of the Spirit to enter.

Did we not find, when eternal realities were first laid with weight on our mind, that something came over us which we could not describe, but which was sensibly felt? and that under this peculiar power there was a breaking up and a loosening of that ignorance, hardness, unbelief, prejudice, and carelessness which had hitherto held us locked up in carnal security? This was the coming upon us of the stronger than we, and this falling off of unbelief, hardness, ignorance, etc., was the stripping away of the armor in which we had stood encased, and to which we had trusted.

But now let us move a step onward. We have seen how the soul lies naked and bare, all its armor gone. Now comes the sword of the Spirit. Its operation and execution are clearly and beautifully described by the Apostle—"For the word of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." ([Heb 4:12](#).) Before this entrance of the sword of the Spirit, the word of God was not living—but dead, for it did not communicate life; nor "powerful," for it was weak through the flesh; ([Rom 8:3](#);) nor did it "pierce to any dividing asunder of soul and spirit, or of the joints and marrow," for it did not enter where soul and spirit, joints and marrow are; nor did it "discern the thoughts and intents of the heart," for all things were not yet made naked and opened before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

This sword has two edges, and therefore cuts as it goes, and cuts both ways at one and the same stroke. ([Rev 1:16](#); [Rev 2:12](#).) It is not sharp on one side and blunt on the other, like a table knife, which cuts but does not pierce, but it severs as it enters with both its edges at once, and thus effectually divides asunder soul and spirit, separating, as nothing else can, the natural religion, which is of the soul, from the spiritual religion which is of the Spirit.**

** If any consider this interpretation forced, let them consider the following points—Paul draws ([1Co 2:14-15](#)) a distinction between the "natural" man and the "spiritual" man. Now the word there translated, "natural," is literally, if we may coin an expression, "soulish;" that is, the man has a soul, but not a spirit, as not being born of the Spirit; for "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." His religion, therefore, in this state is natural, its seat being not the new man of grace, but the mere intellectual, mental part of man—the soul as distinct from the body. So James, describing a carnal, earthly religion, says, it is "sensual," ("natural," margin,) or "soulish." Similarly Jude speaks of certain ungodly characters, and says of them that they are "sensual," using precisely the same word as is rendered "natural," [1Co 2:14](#), and "sensual," [Jam 3:15](#).

The word thus also becomes "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart," laying the inmost movements of the mind, whether in imagination or intention, naked and bare before the eyes of the omniscient Majesty of heaven. Before this entrance of the sword of the Spirit, it was not known or felt that "the thought of foolishness is sin," ([Pro 24:9](#)), and that "every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is only evil continually." ([Gen 6:5](#).) Heart sins were not seen or regarded. As long as the outside of the cup and platter were made clean, the inward part might be full of ravening and wickedness. ([Luk 11:39](#).) As long as the whited sepulcher appeared beautiful outward, the dead men's bones and all uncleanness within were considered of little significance.

But God searches the heart. And how? By his word. ([Pro 20:27](#); [Psa 45:3-5](#); [Psa 139:1-2](#); [Psa 139:23-24](#); [1Co 14:24-25](#); [Rev 2:23](#).) This searching of the heart is effected by the entrance of the law into the conscience, for "by the law is the knowledge of sin." ([Rom 3:20](#).) This is the coming of the commandment in its spirituality and power, armed with all the authority of God, and discovering to the awakened conscience that to lust is to sin, because God has said, "You shall not covet." ([Rom 7:7-9](#).) The light which attends this entrance of the word ([Psa 119:130](#); [Eph 5:13](#)) reveals his character as a just and holy, righteous and inflexible Judge; the life which accompanies it makes the conscience bow and bend like a bruised reed, or a tender plant beneath the stroke; the power which clothes it awes and impresses the mind with solemn and ineffaceable convictions that it is the voice of the mighty God who speaks, for his voice is now upon the waters of a troubled heart, and as such is powerful and full of majesty; ([Isa. 29, 3, 4](#);) and the knowledge of the only true God which it communicates ([Joh 17:3](#)) fills the soul with godly fear before him. ([Hab 3:16](#).)

It is in this way that the authority and power of the word become established as the lord of conscience. This is the grand point of the Spirit's first work—to make the word master of the heart. Before, it was rather the servant than the master, a book like other books, which we could neglect or despise or criticize at will; air it, perhaps, on the Sunday, and lay it on the shelf or lock it up in a drawer for the rest of the week. But no more neglect, no more cold arrogant treatment, no more secret if not open contempt, no more Pharisaical reading of it now. If we neglect it, it will not neglect us; if we struggle against the convictions it produces, and seek to draw away soul and spirit from the word, there it is firmly fixed; and the more we plunge, the more deeply it penetrates and sharply it cuts.

Satan may muster against it all his arts and arms—unbelief, infidelity, love of sin, unwillingness to part with idol lusts, fear of man—gloomy prospects of temporal loss and ruin, family ties, religious connections, a whole lifetime of schemes and projects, education and prospects toppling to their very base—if these things be true—all these and a thousand other obstacles and objections which array themselves against the power of the word, plead against it, but plead in vain.

Where the word has no authority or power on the heart, or only what we may call common power, these, or similar hindrances, either prevent a profession, or induce the professor, after a longer or shorter time, to draw back unto perdition. We see this again and again in the gospels. Many felt the power and truth of the Lord's words with transient flashes of light in the understanding, and of conviction in the conscience, who became his persecutors and murderers.

It needs, therefore, a special, an uncommon, a spiritual, and a divine power to give the word that place in the heart and conscience which it is ever after to maintain as its lord and master. Until this power be felt, we do not really know that it is the word of the Lord. To establish, then, its authority and supremacy is the special work of the Holy Spirit. By this peculiar power it is effectually distinguished from the word of man. God himself gives this test—"The prophet that has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire? says the Lord; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" ([Jer 23:28-29](#).) The false prophets had their word; but it was the word of man, and therefore light as chaff, not heavy and weighty as wheat. It had no fire to burn, as shut up in the bones; ([Jer 20:9](#);) nor was it a hammer, to break to pieces a stony heart.

All the killing, ([1Sa 2:6](#);) slaughtering, ([Eze 21:9-10](#); [Zec 11:7](#);) hewing and slaying, ([Hos 6:5](#);) stripping, ([Hos 2:3](#);) emptying, ([Jer 48:11-12](#);) bringing down, ([Psa 18:27](#); [Psa 107:12](#);) and laying low ([Isa 26:5](#); [Jam 1:10](#);) of the soul before God are wrought by the power of the word. God speaks by and in it, as if by a voice from heaven; and what he speaks is listened to because he speaks it. We see this in the saints and prophets of old. The word of the Lord came to Noah, ([Gen 6:13](#);) to Abraham, ([Gen 12:1](#); [Gen 15:1](#);) to Isaac, ([Gen 26:2-5](#);) to Jacob, ([Gen 28:13](#); [Gen 35:1](#);) to Joseph, ([Psa 105:19](#);) to Moses, ([Exo 3:4](#);) to Joshua, ([Jos 1:1](#);) to Gideon, ([Jdg 6:12-14](#);) to Samuel, and to all the prophets—and was known by them to be the word of the Lord, by the power which attended it and the effects it produced upon their heart. Surely these men of God knew who it was that spoke unto them, and what he said.

Sometimes it was "the burden of the Lord," ([Jer 23:33](#); [Hab 1:1](#);) or "the burden of the word of the Lord," ([Zec 9:1](#);) implying the weight with which it pressed upon their minds; sometimes it was "the vision of the Lord;" ([2Sa 7:17](#); [Isa 1:1](#); [Oba 1:1](#);) the word coming to them when their bodily senses were locked up, but their spiritual eyes open; ([Num 24:4](#); [Act 10:10](#); [Act 22:17-18](#);) and sometimes God spoke to them in a dream in the hours of the night. ([Gen 31:10](#); [Job 33:14-16](#); [Mat 1:20](#).) But however the mode differed—the power and the effect were the same. It was still the word of the Lord, and known by them to be such.

In a similar manner the Scriptures are known by the people of God to be the word of the Lord now, by their power and their effects; for they are to us what the direct word of the Lord was to them; and though the same degree of power may not attend the word now as it attended it then, the power is the same and the effects are the same, though bearing each a proportion to the measure of influence put forth. Among these effects is trembling at the word; ([Isa 66:2](#); [Psa 119:120](#); [Hab 3:16](#);) standing in awe of it; ([Psa 119:161](#);) hiding it in the heart, that we may not sin against God; ([Psa 119:11](#);) refraining the feet from every evil way, to keep it; ([Psa 119:101](#);) being afraid of God's judgments; ([Psa 119:120](#);) receiving it as a lamp unto the feet and a light unto the path; ([Psa 119:105](#);) choosing the way of truth, and hating every false way. ([Psa 119:30](#); [Psa 119:104](#).)

By this power of the word experimentally realized and felt—the conscience is made tender, the heart humble, and the spirit broken and contrite; and thus, like wax to the seal and clay to the potter, the soul is rendered susceptible of divine teachings and heavenly impressions. Pride and self-righteousness are brought down; human traditions and old ceremonial forms of religion lose their power and influence, and drop off the liberated hands and heart like chains and fetters from a loosened prisoner; an empty profession and a name to live are dreaded as awful delusions, and as stamped with the hateful impress of hypocrisy; all known sins are forsaken and repented of, with many bitter tears and sorrow of spirit; convictions are hugged, lest the guilt of sin should go off the wrong way, and not be purged by the blood of sprinkling; the world is forsaken, never to be returned to; retirement and solitude are sought, that far from human eye and ear the almost bursting spirit may pour itself forth in groans and sighs, prayers and tears before the Lord of heaven and earth, the heart-searching, thought-trying God. The word is thus received into an honest and good heart, ([Luk 8:15](#);) made so by divine grace, where it takes root downward and bears fruit upward. Light attending the word in its first entrance, in that light the Scriptures are read; life accompanying the light, in that life the Scriptures are felt; knowledge being the fruit of light and life, of divine teaching and testimony, in that knowledge the Scriptures are understood; and power clothing the word, by that power faith is raised up to believe what the Scriptures reveal and declare.

By this power and influence the ear and heart are circumcised to discern truth from error; the veil of

unbelief and ignorance is rent off; ([2Co 3:16](#);) obedience to the word is produced; ([1Sa 3:10](#); [Act 9:6](#); [Rom 6:17](#); [Rom 16:26](#); [Heb 11:8](#);) the stony heart taken away and the heart of flesh given; ([Eze 36:26](#);) and the soul turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. ([Act 26:18](#).)

Until the authority and power of the word are thus established in the heart—nothing real, nothing effectual is done for the soul. Look at this point as exemplified in the case of the professors of the day, who, acknowledging the Bible as the word of God, and compassing perhaps sea and land to distribute it, yet have never felt its killing, subduing, renewing and regenerating power in their own soul. What a halting in them between two opinions; what a sheltering themselves under the rags of their own righteousness; what a cleaving to forms and ceremonies, self-imposed rules or traditional duties; what blind attachment to buildings, whether of church or chapel; what love to the world and conformity to its ways, fashions, and opinions; what dread of the cross, of being an object of contempt and derision, or a mark for persecution; what unwillingness to make any sacrifice of money, respectability, or comfort for Christ's sake or his people's; in many what indulgence in secret sin; what dislike to separating truth, to the bold and faithful servants of Christ, and to the poor despised family of God.

Why all this, but because they have never felt the keen edge of the sword of the Spirit letting out the life-blood of a carnal, sensual, earthly religion? We can look back and see that such was once our own case; for what they are we, more or less, were; and we can see that it was nothing but the power of the word felt in our heart and conscience that pulled us out of their ranks, and put the Redeemer's yoke upon our necks!

It is the power of God's word which men and devils oppose and hate, as being the only weapon which they really dread. To them the mere 'letter of the word' is as straw—and a mere 'form of godliness' as rotten wood. Such darts are counted as stubble, and they laugh at the shaking of such a spear. ([Job 41:27-28](#).) But they dread, though they hate, the 'power'—because it is the very voice of God. By the power of the word the dear Redeemer foiled and defeated the tempter in the wilderness. ([Mat 4:1-11](#).) By the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony the ancient martyrs overcame the accuser of the brethren; and the remnant of the seed of the woman with whom the dragon made war, were such as kept the commandments of God, and had the testimony of Jesus Christ. ([Rev 12:11](#); [Rev 12:17](#).)

It is against the authority and power of the word that all infidels, unbelievers, and erroneous men set themselves. What are such infidels aiming at—but to destroy the authority and power of God's word, by undermining its authenticity and inspiration? If not authentic, if not inspired, it has no power; and if it has no power, it can have no authority. The two are proportionate. What gives authority to a magistrate? The power to execute his decisions. Strip him of this power, and his sentences are not decisions, but opinions. So with the word of God. Take away its power by denying its authenticity and inspiration, and its authority to bind and loose, condemn and justify—is gone at once.

So again, what is Puseyism, or as it is now called, "Ritualism," but a setting up of traditions, forms and ceremonies, kneelings, bowings and intonings, vestments, buildings and decorations in the place of the word of truth? Can a new Gothic window, or a purple velvet altar-cloth, or a pair of huge wax candles lighted or unlighted, or a long procession of ornamented priests and choristers, or all the sounds of the pealing organ point out the way of salvation to a lost sinner, bind up a broken heart, or purge a guilty conscience?

What, again, is all error but the setting up of carnal reasonings and natural deductions in the place of, or against a "Thus says the Lord?" And what do so many preachers and writers really intend when they set their bow against what they call "frames and feelings," but to aim an envenomed shaft against the power of the word of God on a believing heart?

But does not all our daily and dear-bought experience convince us that in this power stands all our hope of eternal life? We have been hunted out of our false refuges by the power of the word, and brought to embrace the Son of God as revealed by the same divine power to our souls. We therefore know that "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power;" and that our faith "stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." ([1Co 2:5](#); [1Co 4:20](#).) The preaching of the cross was once to us foolishness; but it has been made to us the power of God; and Christ crucified has become to us both the power of God and the wisdom of God. ([1Co 1:18](#); [1Co 1:24](#).)

After this power we are seeking and feeling, we may say, every day in our lives, and sometimes often through the day and the lonely hours of the night. By this power we live, and in this power we hope and desire to die, as being well assured that nothing but this power can rob death of its sting and the grave of its victory, and land us on that happy shore where ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands will forever sing, "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto him who sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever!"

The Authority & Power of the Word upon the Heart

by J. C. Philpot

Chapter 3

The main point which we endeavored to establish in our last paper was the way in which the word of God became lord and master of a believer's conscience. Until this supremacy of the word of truth is established, nothing is really done. Long may be the struggle, for sense, nature, and reason die hard; and as in the case of the children of Israel becoming masters of the land of promise, these opposing nations may be driven out only "little by little," and even then the Canaanite will still dwell in the land. ([Exo 23:30](#); [Jos 17:12](#).) But as Jesus must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet, so will he by his Spirit and grace put down every enemy to the power and authority of his word upon the heart of his people. As by grace we are delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son; ([Col 1:13](#);) as this kingdom is within us; ([Luk 17:21](#);) and that not in word, but in power; ([1Co 9:20](#);) seeing that it "is not food and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit," ([Rom 14:17](#);) it necessarily embraces two distinct things—

1. The putting down of all other rule and all other authority and power. ([1Co 15:24](#))
2. The setting up and enthroning of the Lord Jesus in the conscience, heart, and affections.

This double work was beautifully symbolized in the vision of Nebuchadnezzar as interpreted by Daniel—"While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth." ([Dan 2:34-35](#).) The stone that fell upon the feet of the image represents the Lord Jesus, the stone laid in Zion for a foundation, ([Isa 27:16](#);) and its being "cut out, without hands" symbolizes his pure humanity as made of a woman without the help of man. ([Mar 14:58](#); [Heb 8:2](#).) The stone thus cut out without hands fell upon the toes of the image; for while the image stood upon its feet, the stone could not become a great mountain and fill the whole earth.

So in grace. (We do not offer this as an interpretation so much as a spiritual application of the prophecy.) Until the image of sin, Satan, and self is broken to pieces, and the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold become like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors, Christ in his grace and glory cannot fill the heart.

Hitherto, then, we have been considering the putting down of the rule, authority, and power of darkness, ignorance, and death—under the two figures of the stripping of the strong man of his armor—and the entrance of the two-edged sword of the word into the heart. By this effectual operation the word, as we have shown, becomes lord and master of conscience. This is the hardest part of the work, for until submission is produced, mercy is not manifested. "The arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies, whereby the people fall under you." ([Psa 45:5](#).) Where there is no falling under the power of the word, there is no real submission of heart to Jesus; no meek taking of his yoke upon the neck—for this is only for the laboring and heavy-laden; ([Mat 11:28-29](#);) no kissing the Son lest he be angry. ([Psa 2:12](#).)

But when the heart is "brought down with labor so as to fall down, and there is none to help;" ([Psa 107:12](#);) when the Lord sees of his servants that "their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left;" ([Deu 32:36](#);) when there is a putting of the mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope; ([Lam 3:29](#);) and there is no plea nor cry but, "Lord, save me," "God be merciful to me a sinner," then the scale turns; then it is found that "the Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him, and that it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." ([Lam 3:25-26](#).)

Being thus made "poor in spirit," a title is given to, an interest secured in the kingdom of heaven; ([Mat 5:3](#);) and as this poverty of spirit is attended with the docility and teachability of a little child there is an entrance into it; for "of such is the kingdom of God, and whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God

as a little child shall in nowise enter therein." ([Luk 18:16-17.](#))

If our readers have thus far, then, followed our train of thought, they will readily perceive that hitherto we have been directing our attention mainly to that first work of the law upon the conscience, whereby the soul is—slain, stripped, and emptied of all its self-strength, self-righteousness, and self-sufficiency—and brought into the dust of death. This is analogous to the falling of the stone upon the toes of the image, and corresponds to the first part of Jeremiah's commission—"See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down—to build and to plant." ([Jer 1:10.](#)) There we see that the prophet, as having the words of the Lord put into his mouth, was commissioned "to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down"—as well as "to build and to plant." And so the Lord speaks elsewhere—"And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to destroy, and to afflict—so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, says the Lord." ([Jer 31:28.](#)) Both are equally of God; and he as much watches over the soul to pluck and break down—as to build and plant.

But as we have endeavored to show the one and first part of the work, so shall we now attempt to trace out the other; for if the Lord kills—he makes alive, if he brings down to the grave—he brings up; and he who makes poor—also raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts up the beggar from the ash-heap, to set them among princes, and make them inherit the throne of glory. ([1Sa 2:6-8.](#)) Let us see, then, how this gracious work is accomplished, and the effects that follow.

1. Poverty of spirit springing out of the stripping hand of God, as we have described it, brings the soul within the reach of all the invitations of the gospel. "To the poor, the gospel is preached," ([Luk 7:22.](#)) and for the poor is the gospel supper provided; ([Luk 14:21.](#)) To them, therefore, emphatically do the invitations of the gospel belong. The full soul loaths a honeycomb. What are all the invitations of the gospel to one who is "rich and increased with goods and has need of nothing?" ([Rev 3:17.](#)) "Ho, every one who thirsts!" "Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth." "Call upon me in the day of trouble." "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." "Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden," etc.

These and similar invitations are all addressed to the poor and needy sinner. There is now a place in his heart for them, as emptied of self; and, as they come home with some degree of sweetness and savor, power attends them, whereby faith is raised up to believe that God speaks in them. This is more especially felt when in some season of distress the invitation is applied, and is thus embraced and acted upon. How many a poor sinner has hung upon the invitations, embraced them, pleaded them, and acted upon them. "Ask and you shall receive." What an encouragement to prayer.

"Look unto me." "Come unto me." How many a poor sensible sinner has, upon the strength of these words, looked unto Jesus and been lightened; ([Psa 34:5.](#)) come to him and met with a kind reception.

By the power which attends these invitations the heart is opened, as was the heart of Lydia, to attend unto the things spoken in the gospel. It is not put away as too holy for a poor polluted sinner to touch, nor is the Lord Jesus viewed as an angry Judge; but in these invitations—his clemency, tenderness, and compassion are seen and felt—and beams and rays of his mercy and grace both enlighten the understanding and soften and melt the heart. Thence spring confession of sin, self-loathing, renunciation of one's own righteousness, earnest desires and breathings after the Lord, and an embracing of the love of the truth so far as made known.

And as all these effects—so different from the old dead Pharisaic religion—are produced by the power of the word upon the heart, the Bible becomes a new book, and is read and studied with attention and delight. The ears too being unstopped, as well as the eyes opened, if there be the opportunity of hearing the preached gospel, with what eagerness is it embraced, and what a sweetness there is found in it. All who have passed through these things will agree with us that there are no such hearing days as what Job calls "the days of our youth, when the secret of God is upon our tabernacle." ([Job 29:4.](#))

2. This breaking up of the great image of sin and self by the falling of the stone cut without hands upon its feet prepares a way also for the entrance of the promises, as so many pledges and foretastes of that kingdom of God—which is peace, and righteousness, and joy in the Holy Spirit. It is upon the promises that the new covenant stands, as the Apostle says—"But now has he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon

better promises." ([Heb 8:6](#).) As, then, we are brought within the compass of the promises we are brought within the bonds of the covenant, according to the declaration—"And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant." ([Eze 20:37](#).) As, then, the soul is brought within the compass of the promises, and thus put within the manifested bond of the covenant, these promises become—as they are made sweet and precious—so many breasts of consolation, feeding the new-born babe with the sincere milk of the word, that it may grow thereby. ([Isa 66:11](#); [1Pe 2:2](#).)

Every promise that is made spirit and life to the soul, establishes the power of the word in the heart; for by the application of the promises (as Peter unfolds the mystery) "the divine nature," that is, the new man who, after the image of God, ([Col 3:10](#)), is created in righteousness and true holiness, is brought forth. ([Eph 4:24](#); [2Pe 1:4](#).) This is a partaking of the divine nature, that is, what is communicable of the divine nature, as being a conformity to the image of God's dear Son, Christ in the heart the hope of glory. ([Rom 8:29](#); [Col 1:27](#).) By being brought, then, within the compass of the promises we become children and heirs of them; ([Gal 4:28](#); [Heb 6:17](#);) and as they are applied with power, they are all found to be "in Christ yes, and in him amen, to the glory of God by us." ([2Co 1:20](#).)

It was by thus believing the promise that our father Abraham was justified, as the Apostle declares—"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness." ([Rom 4:20-22](#).) In his steps his children walk, and thus are blessed with him. ([Rom 4:11](#); [Gal 3:9](#).) The promise comes, faith believes, hope expects, patience waits; and so through faith and patience they inherit the promises. ([Rom 15:4](#); [Heb 6:12](#); [Heb 6:17-20](#).)

3. And as the promises are made sweet and precious, as pledges and foretastes of the gospel, and thus establish the power of the word upon the heart, so **when the gospel itself is made "the power of God unto salvation," it beyond everything seals and ratifies this power and authority of the word.** This is what the Apostle sets forth so clearly and blessedly in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit." ([1Th 1:4-6](#).) "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually works also in you that believe." ([1Th 2:13](#).)

It is the peculiar province of faith to believe the gospel; but this faith must "stand not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God," ([1Co 2:5](#)), that it may be a saving faith. When, then, the gospel comes "not in word only," as it does to thousands, "but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction"—as it only does to the elect of God, (1 Thess, 1:4,) by this power faith is raised up and drawn forth. By this faith the gospel is received, "not as the word of men," which might be weak and worthless, and is sure to be inoperative and inefficacious—but "as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually works in those who believe."

How evidently does this show, not only the power of the word, but that the gospel is that power, and that it is, if we may use the expression, a working power effectually molding the heart, giving grace to the lips, and producing all holy obedience in the life. But as the gospel is a message from God, a proclamation of mercy and grace—the best news that ever reached a poor sensible sinner's ears, for it proclaims pardon and peace, reconciliation and acceptance, through the blood and righteousness of Christ, so it is but the herald of advance to announce the nearer coming of the Son of God himself. It is, as it were, the chariot in which he rides "paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem." (Song [Son 3:10](#).)

We do not wish to separate, except for the sake of distinctness, the gospel—from him who is the sum and substance of it, nor the belief of the gospel from the revelation of Christ in and by the gospel, as these are often made manifest at one and the same moment. But for the sake of obtaining clearer views of the subject, we shall make a distinction between believing the gospel and the personal manifestation of Christ. Thus the disciples evidently believed the gospel and received Christ's words; ([Joh 15:3](#); [Joh 16:30](#); [Joh 17:8](#);) and still they were as yet unacquainted with the special manifestations of Christ, as is evident from the question of Judas, (not Iscariot), and the Lord's answer. ([Joh 14:22-23](#).) So in many cases now, and we may add it was much our own experience, there is a believing the gospel—prior

to the revelation of the Son of God with power to the soul.

4. When, then, the blessed Lord reveals himself to the soul in his glorious Person, finished work, atoning blood, and dying love—then it is with the willing heart almost as it was when the risen and ascended King of Zion entered the courts of heavenly bliss—"Lift up your heads, O gates; and be lifted up, you everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in!" ([Psa 24:7.](#)) Surely the posts of the doors of the heart are moved at his appearance as of the King in his beauty. ([Isa 6:4;](#) [Isa 33:17.](#)) His eternal Deity and Sonship on the one hand, and his pure spotless humanity on the other, uniting to form his one glorious Person as Immanuel, God with us—are presented to the eye of faith. As he thus appears in his glory—the understanding is divinely illuminated, the conscience purged, the heart melted and broken, and the affections drawn forth to embrace this glorious Lord as the chief among ten thousand and the altogether lovely one!

And as this revelation of Christ, though necessarily supernatural, has nothing in it visionary or enthusiastic, but is a most sober and substantial reality, so it is always attended with, or followed by the word of truth, either to communicate or confirm it. Sometimes it communicates it; that is, through the word applied and believed the Lord reveals himself to the soul, as very frequently, for instance, under the preached word—and often in private by the applied, without the medium of the preached word. Sometimes the word does not so much communicate it as it follows upon and confirms the inward revelation of the Son of God—"before I was aware, my soul became like the chariots of Amminadab," or "a willing people;" ([Son 6:12;](#)) that is, the soul is unexpectedly, as it were, ravished with the appearance of the King in his beauty, without any particular word from his lips. But passages flow almost immediately in to explain, confirm, and settle what has been thus transacted between the Lord and the soul without the immediate instrumentality of the word itself. This is like a second feast, a sitting under the shadow of the Beloved with great delight, and finding his fruit sweet to the taste. ([Son 2:3.](#))

We thus see how the word of God is established in its power and authority in the heart, not only by its strength to pull down, but by its strength to build up; by its mission to heal, as well as by its mission to kill. If we may say of it what the Apostle declares of an earthly magistrate, that it "bears not the sword in vain," we may also add, it "is the minister of God for good." ([Rom 13:4.](#)) The word of a king would be spoiled of half of its authority if life as well as death, were not in the power of his tongue; ([Pro 18:21;](#)) and if he could not, as supreme, ([1Pe 2:13,](#)) show mercy as well as judgment, pardon as well as punish.

And so, is there not one supreme Law-giver who is able to save and to destroy? ([Jam 4:12.](#)) When David measured Moab with two lines, the one to put to death and the other to keep alive, ([2Sa 8:2.](#)) the line of life was as much the king's line, and as much stretched by his authority as the line of death. The stretching of both these lines over the heart, of law and gospel, of the curse and the blessing, of the killing and the making alive, of the wrath of the king as the messenger of death and the light of his countenance as life and his favor as a cloud of the latter rain, ([Pro 16:14-15.](#)) makes the Lord at once both feared and loved. By the one the soul is preserved from presumption, and by the other from despair; and thus by the combined impressions of judgment and mercy, God is served acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ([Heb 12:28.](#))

But this manifestation of Christ to the soul is attended with peculiar blessings which not only are in themselves exceedingly precious, and prove the revelation to be genuine—not "the child of fancy richly dressed," but "the living child," but still more fully confirm the power and authority of the word of the Lord.

1. First, this manifestation of Christ to the soul makes the word itself exceeding sweet and precious. Jeremiah knew this experimentally when he said, "Your words were found and I did eat them, and your word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart;" ([Jer 15:16;](#)) and so felt the Psalmist—"How sweet are your words unto my taste! yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth." ([Psa 119:103.](#)) Nor was Job without an experience of the same sweetness of the word when he said, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." ([Job 23:12.](#)) Does not, then, this tasting of the sweetness of the word establish its power in the heart in the surest and most convincing way?

2. This manifestation of Christ to the soul sweeps away the unbelief and infidelity of the carnal reasoning mind. Perhaps few of his readers have been more tempted by unbelief and infidelity than the writer of these lines; but he knows from blessed experience how a revelation of the glorious Person of the Son of God to the soul sweeps away as with one stroke, at least for a time, all these armies of hell. Not a single

doubt of the Deity, Sonship, and pure humanity of the Son of God can stand before the revelation of the glorious King of Zion; and if the unworthy author of these Meditations has been enabled in former papers to trace out the Deity and Sonship, and the spotless humanity of the blessed Redeemer with any degree of light and life in his own soul, or with any measure of instruction and edification to his readers, he must thankfully ascribe it to what he has been favored to see of these divine realities by the eye of faith in the person of the God-man.

3. This manifestation of Christ to the soul therefore harmonizes the whole word of God from first to last. As the incarnate Word was "set for the fall" as well as "the rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which should be spoken against," so it is with the written word; it is made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling-block "to those to whom God has given the spirit of slumber—eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear." ([Luk 2:34](#); [Rom 11:9](#).) This is the reason why men infidels stumble at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed. ([1Pe 2:8](#).) Ever on the watch for difficulties and objections, they easily find or make what they seek; and as quarrelsome people readily pick a quarrel, so do they in a moment quarrel with a straw if it seem to lie awry across their reasoning, counting, calculating path. But by so doing they only fall into their own nets, while the godly escape. ([Psa 141:10](#).)

Truly does Wisdom speak—"All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse. To the discerning all of them are right; they are faultless to those who have knowledge." ([Pro 8:8-9](#).) But being destitute of a heavenly mind and of that divine anointing which teaches of all things, and is truth and no lie, ([1Jo 2:27](#).) such men "speak evil of those things which they know not; and even what they know naturally," as arithmetic and logic, "in these things they corrupt themselves," ([Jud 1:10](#).) abasing their very knowledge to attempt to prove God a liar.

4. This manifestation of Christ to the soul by faith, also produces submission to the will of God, a leaving of all things in his hand, and a laying at his feet a thousand difficult questions in providence and in grace, which at other times, the more they are thought of, the more do they rack and perplex the mind, both as regards ourselves and others. We cannot enlarge upon this point, but it is surprising to find what hard knots a believing view of Christ unties—what crooked things it makes straight—and what a complete answer it is to the sullen objections of our perverse spirit—bearing the soul, as it were, on a full wave into a harbor of peaceful rest—over those sunken rocks on which so many gallant ships sink.

5. Another effect which we must name as produced by the personal manifestation of Christ to the soul is the place which it gives the precept in the heart. All who study with any measure of divine light and life the pages of the New Testament, and pay any attention to such portions of it as the sermon on the mount and the preceptive parts of the Epistles must clearly see and feel what an important place the precept occupies in the inspired word. Take, for instance, the Epistles to the Ephesians, the Philippians, and the Colossians, and it will be found that at least half of each of these epistles is occupied with the precept, blended it is true with doctrine and experience, but enforcing, in the plainest manner, practical obedience.

But these holy, godly, practical precepts are in our day either wholly overlooked, or distorted into legal duties—the reason being that they have not that place in the heart which they have in the word of truth. And yet by this preceptive portion of the gospel are explained and enforced all that practical obedience, all that godliness of life, all that holiness of walk and conversation which mark the followers of the Lamb, and whereby their heavenly Father is glorified.

But as this obedience must be spiritual not carnal—evangelical and not legal—of the heart and not of the lip—to the glory of God and not to the exaltation of self—it can only be produced by the Holy Spirit. As, therefore, the Lord Jesus, under the power and unction of the Holy Spirit, reveals himself to the soul, and takes his place as Lord of the heart, obedience to the precept is produced by the same power and influence as the faith, hope, and love by and in which he is received. The precept, therefore, under these divine influences, comes into its right, its scriptural, and spiritual position—occupying that place in the heart which it occupies in the word of truth—and is seen and felt to harmonize in the most gracious and blessed manner with every holy doctrine, every precious promise, and every sweet manifestation.

We would willingly enlarge here, and show how productive this is of all practical obedience in attending to the ordinances of God's house—and how it embraces and extends itself to every relationship in life—and is as remote from all Antinomian carelessness and licentiousness as it is from legal service and Pharisaic

righteousness. But as it is in our mind, the Lord enabling us, on some future occasion to make this point the subject of our Meditations, as being in our view, though much disregarded, yet full of profitable instruction, we shall content ourselves with thus briefly touching on one of the most important and, we must say, least understood points of our most holy faith.

6. Our limits warn us to close, and yet we cannot bring our subject to a conclusion without naming another point closely connected with the power and authority of the word of God on the heart as established by a believing view of the Son of God. It is this—A firm support is needed amid all the storms of temptation, seas of affliction, and seasons of desertion and distress which are the appointed lot of the mystical members of Christ, and whereby they are conformed to his suffering image. We see how our gracious Lord was supported and upheld by the word of God from the moment when he said, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do your will, O my God; yes, your law is within my heart," ([Psa 40:7-8](#);) to his last expiring breath, when, with the word of truth in his mouth, he meekly said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." ([Psa 31:5](#); [Luk 23:46](#).) (To open and unfold this point is beyond our present scope, and to handle it properly would require much wisdom and grace; but that our blessed Lord was upheld by the power of the word is plain from the history of the temptation in the wilderness, from his words to Peter before his crucifixion, ([Mat 27:53-54](#);) to the disciples going to Emmaus, and to the rest of the disciples just before his ascension. ([Luk 24:25-27](#); [Luk 24:44-47](#).) That the Scriptures should be fulfilled, and the will of God revealed in them be fully accomplished, held him up in his path of suffering obedience.)

In a similar way the power of the word is needed to hold up the soul in seasons of trial and temptation. Abraham's case is full to the point. What but the promise that he should have a son by Sarah held him up for five-and-twenty years, in the very face of carnal reason and unbelief, against hope believing in hope, until after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise? ([Rom 4:18](#); [Heb 6:15](#).) And what but the word of the Lord strengthened him to offer up Isaac, when grown up, as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah? This hanging of the soul upon the word is beautifully unfolded in Psalm 119, in such expressions as, "Your word have I hid in my heart;" (ver. 11;) "I trust in your word;" (ver. 42;) "I have hoped, or I hope in your word;" (ver. 74, 81; 114, 147) "I rejoice at your word;" (ver. 162) "Your word is true from the beginning;" (ver. 160;) "Concerning your testimonies, I have known of old that you have founded them forever." (Ver. 152.)

All these and similar expressions with which the Psalm is filled show how the man of God hung upon the word as the prop of his soul in every trying hour. "When the enemy," we read, "shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." ([Isa 59:19](#).) But how? Not in a visionary way—but by the word applied with power, and thus believed, pleaded, hung upon, and its fulfillment patiently expected.

But we must draw our Meditations to a close—not that the subject is exhausted, but because our limits warn us to restrain our pen.

It is not our intention to pursue the subject, at least not under its present form, but to close it with the closing year. We have not been able, indeed, to carry out our expressed intention, to show the aspect which the word bears to the world as well as to the Church, and what it will be in the hands and in the mouth of the great Judge to all who have heard it, but disbelieved or disobeyed it. Let it be sufficient for the present to quote the Lord's own words—"There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day." ([Joh 12:48](#).)

And now what remains but for us to commend our Meditations on "The Authority and Power of the Word of God" to his most gracious disposal, in the prayerful hope that he who has magnified his word above all his name ([Psa 138:2](#)) will attend with the unction of his grace our feeble attempt to set it forth in the light of Scripture and experience. And should he kindly condescend to bless it to any of his dear family, to him writer and reader will gladly unite in ascribing all the praise.