

The Power of the Gospel

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The Word of the Gospel

It is the sincere desire of my heart that every seeker of truth comes to a real, heart-changing experience of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is with that purpose in mind, that I share the following considerations on what the gospel is, what it does in the submissive heart, and more particularly, why many in our day do not experience it to be what it was to Paul, namely, the very “power of God.”¹

I am aware that just as soon as I mention the word gospel, nearly everyone in the church assumes that we have already heard it and are quite familiar with it. But that is precisely what I would like you to consider: What do you *really* know of the gospel? Because we only really know the gospel to the extent that it is changing our hearts. It matters very little how familiar we are with the words of the gospel, or how many times we have

¹ Romans 1:16

heard, or even preached, the good news of the gospel. There is only one way to truly *know* the gospel, and that is to know the living power, the effective working of the gospel, putting to death the root and nature of sin in man, and creating all things new in the heart.

The gospel is not words. It can be *described* by words, and *declared* through words. But the substance of the gospel is not words. Multitudes have listened to the words of the gospel, believed the words, and yet known little or nothing of that power which crucifies the flesh with its passions and desires, circumcises the heart, purifies the conscience, and changes the soul into a temple of God. These are still strangers to the gospel, no matter how long they have agreed with the words.

In his first letter to the church, Peter makes the following statement:

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of

the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the Word of the Lord endures forever.” Now this is the Word which, by the gospel, was preached to you.²

There is much here worth noting, but I will highlight only a few important things by way of introducing this subject.

First, we read that those who had “been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,” had accordingly purified their souls by obeying the truth, and were thus enabled to love one another fervently with a pure heart.

Second: We see that that which has caused this birth in them, and this purification of them, and which has allowed heavenly love to flow unrestricted, is an incorruptible *Seed* or *Word*. It is an imperishable thing, a living Word, which is not like the grass or the flowers of the field that fade away, but is rather an immortal power that endures forever.

Third: We then read in very plain and direct words, that the preaching of the gospel was meant

2 1 Peter 1:22-25

to bring about an encounter with this living Word: “This is the Word which, *by the gospel*, was preached to you.” That is to say, it was through the preaching of words, that an eternal Word of life and power—of which man must be born, and through which he must be purified unto unfeigned love—was announced or declared to men.

It appears evident from this Scripture (as from many others as well), that it is possible to hear an announcement of gospel words, without hearing or experiencing the Word of the gospel; or in Peter’s language, without hearing the living Word that is preached “by the gospel.” In fact, if somebody among the original recipients of this letter from Peter were to read these statements and know in their hearts that they were *not* among those who were being purified by obeying the Word of truth, and were therefore *not* able to love one another fervently with a pure heart, they would then most likely (and wisely!) assume that they were not yet sufficiently familiar with the eternal Word of life and power that does these things. They as yet knew little of the gospel.

The message or declaration of the gospel can be described in words, believed as words, and repeated with words; but the thing described by these words is an experience of power, an incorruptible

Seed or Word, that purifies the obedient heart so that it can become a conduit of divine love. And if we know something of this Seed, Word, or Power, then we know that much of the gospel. But if all we know is the bare declaration, or believe the words without abiding in the living Word, then we have found only the shell or husk of the gospel, and have come short of the kernel. This very thing was declared by Christ to those who had already begun to believe in Him: “Then Jesus said to those Jews *who believed Him*, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’”³

It is for this very reason that Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.” And also in chapter 2 verse 13 of the same letter he says, “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also *effectively works* in you who believe.”

It is this “effective working” that I want you to consider. And again, I ask you to give some

3 John 8:31-32

thought to the following question with humility and sincerity: How far can we claim to possess a knowledge of the gospel if we are yet strangers to its effective working? In his letter to the Romans, Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God.”⁴ Do we know and experience the gospel to be a power that comes from God? Let us be honest with ourselves in answering these questions. Nothing is gained by assuming ourselves to be somewhere other than where we really are. Is our faith in the gospel a faith in the power of God? Paul said, “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, *that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*”⁵

Let us then consider what this power is, what it does in man, and why we so desperately need it. And let us never be content with mere words and definitions, but rather follow the words towards the experiential knowledge of that “implanted Word which is able to save your souls.”⁶ Because the gospel of Jesus Christ is a solution, a powerful

4 Romans 1:16

5 1 Corinthians 2:4-5

6 James 1:21

cure, a heavenly medicine for a universal disease, and it must be experienced as such. But no one takes a medicine that they do not think they need. So if we are going to really know the medicine, and desire its effects, we must begin by diagnosing the disease.

The Problem

Man was created in the image and likeness of God. God said, “Let Us make man in our own image and likeness,” and then He breathed into him *His own* breath of life. What was this image and likeness? Some mistakenly assume that this likeness had something to do with man’s form or shape, or with the fact that man walks on two feet and can grow a long white beard. But God is a Spirit, and there is no form, shape or beard that bears His image and likeness.

In all of creation, only mankind is said to have borne the image and likeness of God, and this is because only mankind was created to bear the life, light and Spirit of God, to live as a branch on God’s vine, to walk in His love, be a partaker of His nature, and bear His heavenly fruit. Man’s ability to bear the image and likeness of God was owing to the fact that he was created to be a temple of God’s Spirit, a partaker of His life, love,

righteousness, truth, and wisdom. Man bore the image of God because God Himself was at work in him both to will and to do according to His good pleasure.

The image and likeness of God was no external thing. Nor did it reside in man's intellectual abilities or faculty of reason. In fact, intelligence and rational thought have no intrinsic goodness or godliness. Many of the greatest minds in history have held atheistic opinions, and lived notoriously unrighteous lives. Every day, millions of humans use their faculty of reason for no better purpose than the pursuit of power, praise, and sinful pleasures. We must conclude, therefore, that the true image of God is not found in the strength of man's brain. Instead, prior to his fall, Adam bore the image and likeness of God because the Spirit of God was the spirit of his soul. The life, light, love, righteousness, purity, power, and wisdom of his Creator were the very *nature* that governed him; and all that he thought, desired, and did were only so many manifestations of the goodness, love, and glory that were hidden in the invisible God.

In a similar sense, one could say that a diamond bears the image and likeness of the beauty and color that are concealed in the rays of the sun. We know that there is a rainbow of colors hidden

in the light that continually streams forth from the sun. Color and beauty are there, even when our eyes are unable to see them. But when the rays of the sun pass through a diamond, the eye suddenly beholds sparkles and colors that were there all along. The diamond, we understand, does not *produce* any of this light and beauty. In fact, if you put the diamond in a dark room for a hundred years it would do nothing at all, manifest nothing at all, and would be indistinguishable from the darkness. But when the diamond is filled with the light of the sun, it becomes a beautiful showcase, a clear revelation and manifestation of all that is normally invisible to the eye of man. *In this sense, the diamond can truly be said to bear the image and likeness of the sun.* It receives, holds, and displays before all seeing eyes the beauties and colors that are hidden in light.

But now, if you spoke to a man who was born blind, and told him that a diamond bears the image and likeness of the sun, he would have no frame of reference to understand your meaning. Having never seen the sun, he could only *imagine* what it meant to bear its image. And so, holding a diamond in his hands, he may tell you that the sun must be hard and cold, because this is what he finds to be true of the diamond. And if you

tell him he is mistaken, he might then say, “Then clearly the sun has sharp edges and hard points that can easily break rocks or carve images on a piece of wood.” But all seeing eyes know that this has nothing to do with the sun’s image and likeness.

Here is the point: The image and likeness of the sun has nothing to do with what the diamond is *in itself, without the sun*, but rather with what the sun manifests of itself in and through the diamond. And in just the same way, the image and likeness of God has nothing to do with what man can be *without the life of God*, that is, with what man is *in the flesh*. Like a diamond in a dark room, you will never find God’s image and likeness in anything man can be or produce of his own. The only way that man ever did, or ever will, bear the image and likeness of God is if, like the diamond, he receives, holds, and displays the beauties and wonders of life and light that are hidden in Christ.

Now the fall or death of the first man was not a death of the outward, fleshly vessel. God said, “In the day that you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall surely die.”¹ We know

¹ Genesis 2:17

that they *did* eat the fruit, and therefore they most surely *did die* as well. But what was this death that they died?

Let us approach the answer to this question by starting with another question: what is natural death? How should we define it? In a few words, natural death is when the eternal soul of man ceases to experience the outward life of this physical realm. The soul continues on as an immortal creation, but natural death brings an end of its relationship with the things of this world—with the light, life, food, creatures, and pleasures of a physical creation.

What then is spiritual death, or the death that Adam died? Spiritual death is when the soul of man ceases to experience the inward life of a heavenly realm. Again, the soul continues on, but spiritual death brings an end of the soul's relationship with the light, life, food, creatures, and pleasures of a heavenly creation. This second kind of death is therefore far more severe than the first. It is the loss of something far greater than flesh and blood, or outward, temporal things. It is a loss, a separation, an end of a relationship with the light and life of God. It is a real death to God's nature, a total departure from His goodness, a complete loss of His image and likeness.

It is not uncommon to hear in the church today that man still bears the image and likeness of God. But this cannot be true, unless a man has regained what he has lost. Man was indeed *created* in God's image and likeness, but this image was lost when he died to the reign or kingdom of God's life in his soul. He did not retain God's image and likeness after the fall simply because he retained the same shape, or because he walked on two feet, grew white hair, and kept his intellectual faculties. No; the sad truth is that, having died to the life of God, man began to use his mind, his body, and all other natural gifts and abilities to manifest the image and likeness of another father, with another nature.

Adam *lost* the image and likeness of God, and in Genesis chapter 5 we are told that after "Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he begot a son *in his own likeness, after his image*, and named him Seth." Here was a new image and likeness—something like a hard and cold diamond without the light of the sun.

Now it deserves to be said that man, even after the fall, retained the same *purpose*. That is to say, it is true that he is still born into this world *in order to* bear God's image and likeness. But he does not naturally possess this image as he comes

into this world born of a woman. The image and likeness that he bears in his fallen condition is that of his fallen father; and this is something that the Scriptures bear witness to in the clearest and strongest terms that language can convey. The following are just a few examples:

Genesis 6:5 “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Genesis 8:21 “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”

Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is more deceitful than all else, and is desperately sick; who can understand it?”

John 8:44 “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.”

Romans 3:10 “As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.’”

Ephesians 2:1-3 “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

Will anyone say that these verses describe the image and likeness of God? These, and multitudes of similar Scriptures, clearly represent an enormous change from our original condition, a great fall and loss by which man has become something entirely different than he was. From a branch of God's goodness, righteousness, purity, love, and life, man became an independent, selfish, proud, and covetous creature that quickly filled the earth with violence and with every form of corruption. “So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.”² Or in the language of Jeremiah, “I planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?”³

2 Genesis 6:12

Yet, even though God has declared our fallen condition to us over and over again in Scripture, there is no real need of inspired texts, outward proofs, or prophets sent by the Spirit to make man aware of this truth. The clearest and most undeniable evidence for the fall of man is daily found within our own hearts and minds. If we have but the willingness to consider it, and the honesty to admit it, I am convinced that nobody can deny these two basic realities: *First*, that every man somehow knows what is good; and *second*, that every man naturally—and often irrationally—inclines toward evil. Evil is natural for man, and must be resisted; good is contrary to his nature, and must be deliberately sought.

Here then is the problem, man's universal disease. This is not an idea or doctrine that must only be taught and believed with the mind. It is a change of nature, a self-evident condition that shows itself in all that man desires and does. Something terrible happened to the heart of man. It *died* to the light and Spirit of God and become something that it was not before. And in this condition, we are continually faced with the truth that the only thing we need to do to further corrupt ourselves, to live a life of regret, and to bring pain

3 Jeremiah 2:21

upon family and friends, is to simply to follow the inclinations of our own thoughts and desires! This is an oft-repeated assertion of Scripture. In Numbers 15:39, Israel was commanded not to “follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot.”⁴

Consider also these verses from Jeremiah:

11:7-8 “For I earnestly exhorted your fathers in the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, until this day, rising early and exhorting, saying, ‘Obey My voice.’ Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart.”

18:11-12 “Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.” And they said, “That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart.”

3:17 “At that time Jerusalem shall be called the Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts.”

⁴ NASB

6:19 *“Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people—the fruit of their thoughts.”*

Following his own thoughts makes man increasingly evil. What does this tell us about ourselves? It tells us that we have a problem. It tells us that we have no greater enemy than *self*.

The heart of fallen man stands up in pride, looks out into the world, and uses whatever is in his reach—words, money, deceit, force—to pull things towards himself. When he succeeds, self-love grows. When he fails, self-love turns to anger. When another has more, self-love becomes envy. When he is threatened, self-love becomes fear. Having lost his greatest treasure—the life of God—he is driven to every expression of selfishness by the distressing sense of emptiness and the anxious discontentment that he cannot help but feel. And yet, all the while he lives this way, he knows deep in his heart that something is terribly wrong, and that this cannot be the condition in which man came into this world.

Every man knows what is good, and yet every man knows that he is naturally evil. If he did not know that he was evil, he would not pretend to be good. If he did not recognize that there is a right, and that he naturally stands in the wrong, he

would not disguise his true motives and hide his real designs. But even when a man recognizes the evil of his own actions and desires, still he puts the best construction on them that words will allow. Though he chooses to do the very same things that he will not tolerate in others, still he hopes to be regarded as different from them. And though he lives a life that is contrary to his own convictions, being judged in his own conscience, still he cannot bear the thought of being judged by another.

I ask again, what does all of this mean about ourselves? It means something has changed! Man is not the same creature that he was before. He no longer bears the image and likeness of his benevolent Creator. He has fallen into a condition that is worse than what he is willing to see, and there he hides from the light because his deeds are evil.

These strong words do not describe *other* people; they describe *all* people who have not been set free from this nature by the “effective working” of the gospel. And this is why I asked you to consider how well you knew the *power* of the gospel. The *words* of the gospel cannot save from this problem or heal this disease. But the power of the gospel can “put to death the deeds of the body”⁵ and bring forth a new creation. The

5 Romans 8:13

gospel of Jesus Christ does not just call you a new name; it gives you a new nature. It does not merely forgive sins; it saves from the power of sin. The gospel is the power of God that works in man to restore all that was lost, to create man anew in Christ Jesus, to regenerate, restore, and renew the nature and image that man lost in the fall.

But just as in the days of the first church, there are other gospels that have become popular in our day, gospels that do not strike at the root of man's problem, or heal his mortal wound. There are gospels that call man a new name without making him a new creation, that call him a saint though he still lives like a sinner. Some say the glory of the gospel is that God no longer sees sin in man. Or that though man lives in sin, he is nevertheless accounted righteous. But Christ said He came to make free from sin, to cleanse the inside of the cup, to make the tree good so that its fruit would be good. The Son said we can be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect; we can walk in the light, love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, love our enemies, and "go and sin no more."⁶ John wrote that the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil in man, to give us a seed which cannot sin,⁷ and which can

6 John 8:11

purify us even as He is pure.⁸ Paul said we can be transformed “into the same image from glory to glory,”⁹ “conformed to the image of His Son,”¹⁰ “cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”¹¹

Such a change requires power, not words. Not a power to call us something that we are not, but a power to restore all that man once was. “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God.” Again I ask, how well do you know the effective working of this gospel power? Has the gospel created in you a clean heart? Has it cleansed your thoughts, bowed your will, and filled you with new desires? Is it crucifying you to the world, making you dead to sin, fixing your mind on things above, and causing your heart to grow in love? If your honest answer is “yes,” then praise God!—you indeed know the gospel of Jesus Christ! But if your answer is “no,” or “very little,” then it may be helpful for you to read on, in order to better understand why this might be the case.

7 1 John 3:8-9

8 1 John 3:3

9 2 Corinthians 3:18

10 Romans 8:29

11 2 Corinthians 7:1

Have You Gone Out?

Imagine that someone came to visit a prisoner who had been confined for years in a dark and miserable underground dungeon, and said to him, “I have good news, the king has set you free. You no longer have to remain here. Come with me now, and I will show you the way out of this filthy place.” This is obviously very good news! These are exciting words! The prisoner has been set free, and so begins to rejoice and celebrate his liberty. But after receiving and believing these exciting words, what if he never actually followed the man out of the dungeon? What if he remained in the same place, lived in the same condition, and the only thing that changed was that, from that day forward, he daily proclaimed his freedom and sang songs about the goodness of the king?

Let us change the analogy. A generation of Israelites was born in Egypt where they lived in a hopeless state of slavery and oppression, governed

by an evil Pharaoh who had no intention of letting them go. But in an incredible display of His love and goodwill, the Lord visited this people in their bondage and, through Moses and Aaron, made a way for all who were willing to follow Him out of captivity and into a land flowing with milk and honey. Through mighty manifestations of both judgment and mercy, God overcame Pharaoh's dominion, provided a Passover Lamb as the price for Israel's redemption, parted the Red Sea, and invited all who would follow to leave the land of their nativity, pass through the wilderness, and inherit a land of promise.

This was good news preached to a people in bondage! But what if a large group of Israelites who had lived their entire lives in Egypt—who had heard the words of Moses, experienced something of the power, and plagues, and miracles of God—*instead of actually leaving Egypt*, simply began to form churches and small study groups that talked and sang about the power of God and the glories of the Promised Land? They gathered together on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings, appointed leaders, performed ceremonies and memorials, and shared with each other what they had seen and felt during God's merciful visitation. They taught and memorized the words

of Moses, interpreted and expounded his teachings, frequently recounted the story of the ten plagues, and gave thanks to God for His judgments against Pharaoh—and yet, never took a single step out of the land of Egypt.

Such an idea sounds ridiculous to our ears, and it is difficult to believe that anyone could be so blind or deceived. However, I believe there are many today who are doing precisely this, and I confess myself to have been one of them. The Lord has allowed me to see this very thing in my own heart. He has shown me that years of my life were spent reading, studying, singing, celebrating, and even seeing from a distance the realities of the Promised Land, though I had taken very few steps out of Egypt—the “land” of my first birth.

In the exodus story, it is certainly true that Moses came to Egypt and proclaimed the good news of the gospel. Speaking of that generation, the author of Hebrews writes: “For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them.”¹ All of Israel witnessed how God overcame the power of Pharaoh, how He “rendered powerless him who had the power of death,”² brought judgment

¹ Hebrews 4:2

² Hebrews 2:14 NASB

on the powers of darkness, and gave a Passover Lamb as a price for their redemption. The Lord opened the Red Sea, made a covenant with Israel, and placed a continual light over the tabernacle to lead them in the way. What incredible news! What wonderful words and mighty works! But this is a true story, and those who know how it ends also know how few in that generation entered into rest and experienced the kingdom of God.

What is Egypt? What does it represent? Egypt does not represent a place, either physical or spiritual. Nor is Egypt bad habits, wrong doctrines, or unbelief. Egypt is the *condition* of the natural man, the fleshly man; it is humanity as it exists in the fall. Egypt is not *where* man lives, but *what* man has become. It is the first birth, the man of sin: a man who has lost the image and likeness of God and fallen into slavery to self-love and earthly pleasure. Egypt is the human condition apart from the power of the gospel—dead to the life of God, yet alive to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—living under the dominion of a spiritual Pharaoh.

Now, the good news is that there is a *way* (a “new and living way”³) to come *out* of this condition, to experience true liberty from this state, to

3 Hebrews 10:20

actually *change* our condition and become something different. The good news is that God has provided a *power* (the resurrected life of Christ) that can work in fallen man like a mustard seed, spreading and filling the wild garden of his heart; or like leaven, filling and changing all three measures of meal. The gospel is that power which has been given to us as our guide out of Egypt, a power that can change from one nature to another, bring us out of one man and into Another, crucify us to sin, to the flesh, and to the world, and fill the heart with the Spirit of love. But to simply *call* us something different, having only believed the *words* of the gospel, this is falling very short of the work of the gospel!

Some may ask, “But are we not saved by faith?” I answer: Indeed we are, as faith accesses and experiences grace.⁴ But true faith is not believing words and applying them to ourselves contrary to our experience. Gospel faith is a living thing, a gift from above that works in the heart by laying hold of God’s power. Even the demons believe the truth and tremble. But true faith “purifies the heart,”⁵ “sees Him who is invisible,”⁶ “walks in

4 Romans 5:2,4:16, Ephesians 2:18

5 Acts 15:9

6 Hebrews 11:27

the footsteps”⁷ of faithful Abraham, and is “held in a pure conscience.”⁸ Those who know real faith live by it, walk in it, are changed by it, and thus “receive the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls.”⁹

Much more could be said about living faith, but my desire is only to call your attention to a common misunderstanding: the gospel is not the power of God to *call* us what we are not; it is the power of God to *make* us what we are not.

When people consider what it means to receive the gospel, what often comes to mind is a mental agreement that brings about an instantaneous change in position or status. It is not uncommon for new believers to hear statements like: “Congratulations! A few minutes ago you did not believe the gospel, but now you believe and are saved!” But, before we conclude that all is finished right after it has begun, we should ask ourselves: *what have we been saved from?* Have we been saved from our pride? Have we been saved from our lusts? Have we been saved from our old man, our bondage to sin, our love of the world, our oppressive insecurities? What about

7 Romans 4:12

8 1 Timothy 3:9

9 1 Peter 1:9

our lack of real love, our carnal mind, our plaguing doubts, foolish jesting, manipulative words, spiritual blindness, inward emptiness and discontent, anger and irritation? Have we been saved from self-love, self-will, and self-seeking? From living in this world as a creature of this world? Have we been saved from earthly passions, earthly desires, earthly treasures, an earthly image and likeness?

Multitudes have felt the love of God and heard His call out of Egypt's darkness. The immense love of God visits man in Egypt, Sodom, Jericho, and Babylon. His grace reaches to all and invites all. "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men."¹⁰ He appears to men in every condition, and sets before them the door that He Himself has opened through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. But He does not appear in Egypt or Sodom in order to *remain* there, or to establish His kingdom there. He comes with an invitation to leave.

What does this mean in our own experience? It means that the Lord appears to us in the land of our first birth, our fallen condition. There He finds us, touches us, and calls us. There He lets us feel something of His mercy mingled with judgments, and sets before us the way of life. He

¹⁰ Titus 2:11

sends two witnesses (so to speak) into our lives—one inward and one outward—with the purpose of calling us out of the nature and life we have called our “country, kindred, and father’s house.” He says to us what He said to the father of faith: “Abram, get out of your country, from your family, and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.”¹¹

It means God has something far greater in mind than an invisible, unfelt change of legal status or position, by which we can call ourselves free and yet continue in slavery. The gospel is a living way out of a dead man. It is the exodus out of Adam and his fall, and the way back into the paradise of God. It is a gift of power that can change the heart, purify the conscience, regenerate the soul, and “do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”¹²

Many believers today have had real and impacting experiences of the mercy of God. They have felt convictions for sin with real desires to change. Scriptures have touched their hearts and sermons have convinced their minds. They have

¹¹ Genesis 12:1

¹² Ephesians 3:20

heard the good news of the gospel and have no doubt that Christ has come as the Savior of the world. But in many cases, they change their beliefs without changing their course. Doctrines have changed, but nature has not. The door is thrown open by Christ, and a shout of joy is heard in the camp. But there has been very little experiential exodus out from the Egyptian nature—from the ways, thoughts, appetites, and treasures of the first birth. The old man has not been put off, nor the new man put on. There is no death to sin and no life in righteousness. Just as in the days of Moses, there has been a true visitation, with real convictions and loving invitations, but many who profess His name still meet together in the wrong nature, in the wrong land, talking, learning, and even debating about a Promised Land that they have never experienced.

I therefore repeat my question, hoping that it is now better understood: What has the effective working of the gospel done in you? Have you left the land of your first birth? Is your heart at least set upon leaving the kingdom of self? I meddle not with whether you will be saved from the *consequences* of sin when your body dies. But all of Scripture declares with one clear voice that *the gospel saves from the power of sin today.*

Salvation is not a future event that follows a life of Egyptian slavery. Salvation is a present and active power that destroys the works of the devil, perfects holiness in the fear of God, sanctifies completely in spirit, soul, and body, conforms to the image of the Son, and transforms into the same image from glory to glory.

And bear with me if I ask this question: Why should we assume that God will save us in the next life, if we will not let Him save us in this one? Why would He save us from the future *consequences* of sin, if we desire no salvation from the *power* of sin in this present life? Because the truth over and over declared in Scripture is that this *present salvation from the power of sin is the very reason why we have been given time and place in a body of flesh*.

Man is not a body that possesses a soul, but rather a soul—an immortal and spiritual being—that for a very short time inhabits an earthly body of flesh and blood. We are told very plainly that the days of our pilgrimage here are “like a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away,”¹³ that “Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.”¹⁴ Yet in this body of flesh

¹³ James 4:14

¹⁴ Ps. 144:4

God has afforded us *time and place* to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”¹⁵

Therefore, the greatest and the wisest thing that anyone can do with time is to “redeem the time, because the days are evil,”¹⁶—to use time to gain what time cannot take away. Time was not given to be wasted on the passing pleasures of the outward man. What an awful waste of a precious gift! What a tragedy to squander our lives like the foolish virgins who slept without oil in their lamps, or like the man with one talent who said:

“Lord, I went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.” But his lord answered and said to him, “You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.”¹⁷

15 Philippians 2:12-13

16 Ephesians 5:16

17 Matthew 25:24-28

Here Paul tells us plainly why we were given time and place:

*And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being.*¹⁸

Our pre-appointed times and the boundaries of our dwellings are opportunities to seek and grope and find the Lord. This is what time is for. This is why we are here. And if we do this, if we sincerely and humbly live in this way, we will begin to find—not just true words; *not* an unfelt position or status; *not* just a new collection of doctrines and beliefs—but *a light that reveals what we are, and a power that saves us from it.*

¹⁸ Acts 17:26-28

Loving His Appearing

Why are there so many Christians whose lives do not evince the light, life, and love of Jesus Christ that the New Testament describes on nearly every page? Why have their hearts not been changed? Why have some believed in Jesus for ten, twenty, or forty years, and yet complain of ongoing slavery to pride, selfishness, lust, anger, fear, and worldly desires? In other words, why have many believed the words of the gospel for so long but experienced so little of its power?

I believe there is a very specific reason for this: It is because *they do not receive power in the way that it comes*. Paul says, “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.”¹ What does this mean? What is this power? How does it come, and what does it do? These are extremely important questions, and rather than assume that

¹ 1 Thessalonians 1:5

we could never overlook or undervalue the coming of God's power in our own lives, it would be wise to consider these things in great humility before the Lord.

The way that man begins to experience the power of the gospel is through an inward experience of spiritual light. The works of God begin with the light of God. We know that His work in the outward world began when He said "Let there be light," and from there He began to divide contrary things, bring growth and increase, and cause glory to spring up in the outward creation. But the *new* creation, with all of its inward growth and glory, begins in much the same way. Power comes first as light. Paul says:

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.²

The Scriptures are full of expressions that describe God or Christ as the light of men, the light of the world, a light that shines in the heart, a daystar that rises in the heart, the Lamb who is a light to the city of God, etc. Of course we know that these verses do not speak of outward, natural light. And yet, spiritual light has something in common with natural light: it “makes manifest.”³ That is, it allows spiritual senses to perceive what is spiritually real. John chapter 1 says:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and without Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”⁴

Christians understand that these verses are talking about Jesus Christ—the eternal, living Word, that was *with* God in the beginning, and *was* God in the beginning. John tells us that the

2 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

3 Ephesians 5:13

4 John 1:1-4

living Word was the creator of all things, and that through Him all things came into being. He then tells us that in the Word was life, and that this life was *the light* of men. I recognize that these are familiar verses, but I ask my reader to stop for a minute and consider anew what is being said here: John is telling us that the *life* of the eternal Word is a *light* that shines in men, though most men do not comprehend it. Or, said slightly differently, that the *light* that shines in men is the *life* of the Word that was with God and was God in the beginning.

In the next verses John mentions the coming of John the Baptist, and tells us that he was not the light, but was sent to bear witness of the true light. And then in verse 9, speaking of the Word, he says:

He was the true Light, which enlightens every man that comes into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, He gave to them power to become the sons of God.

It is very important to feel the weight of these truths. In the Word that made all things was a

life, and that life was the true light of men. This light shines in some measure, or to some degree, in every man that comes into the world. But though the world was made by Him, and though He shines in all, still the world can easily remain in a state where they do not know Him or receive Him. But, to as many as do receive His light, He gives them *power to become* sons of God.

I know that many have seen these verses relating exclusively to Christ's outward coming to the Jews of the first century, and it is certainly true that the majority of the Jewish people did not receive Christ's outward coming. But because John is speaking here of the eternal Word as the creator of *all men*, and as a light that shines in "*every man* that comes into the world;" and since this light is said to shine with the purpose that "*all men* though Him might believe," and not only the Jews of the first century, I think it is safe to conclude that these Scriptures are speaking more broadly. In other words, it would seem that John has in view *every* sort of "appearing" or "coming" of the Son of God, and not only His physical appearance for three and a half years, in one specific place and time in the world. This is further confirmed by the fact that John does not introduce the incarnation

until verse 14, where he says, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”

Now, it is extremely important to note that, though this light (which, again, is the life of the eternal Word) shines in the darkness of man, yet it is only to those who receive Him that power is given to become sons of God.⁵ Right here is the answer to our question, if we only understand what it means to “receive Him.” This is precisely the reason why so few experience the effective working of gospel power. It is because only those who receive this light, who love its appearing, who accept, follow, and obey its shining, will experience power to become sons of God—that is, receive power to be changed back into His image and likeness.

Have you ever thoughtfully considered the verses in the New Testament that speak of the “coming” of the Lord? There are several of them that cannot possibly be referring to a physical, future event. For instance, Paul says: “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden

5 Some translations have *authority* or *right* instead of *power* here, which are also valid translations of the Greek word *ἐξουσία*. However there are sixty-nine places in the KJV New Testament where the word is translated power, and it seems the most fitting translation in this context.

things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.”⁶ Can this Scripture be forbidding all forms of judgment (in our lives, doctrines, families, the church, etc.) until there has been a future, outward coming of Christ? Such an interpretation would contradict Paul’s own words in the following chapter of the same letter: 1 Corinthians 5:3, “For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed.” Or 1 Corinthians 5:13, “For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?”

In chapter 5 of his epistle, James compares the “coming of the Lord” to precious fruit that springs out of the earth for those who patiently wait for Him. (See James 5:7-8) Revelation 3:20 speaks of Christ “coming in and dining” with those who hear His voice and open to Him. Neither of these Scriptures refer to a future event, or a physical move from one place to another. But I would like to draw your attention specifically to 2 Timothy 4:8, where Paul says: “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved

6 1 Corinthians 4:5

His appearing.” Some Bible translations read “all who have loved His *coming*,” instead of “appearing,” but in either case, readers often assume that Paul is speaking exclusively of a future event.

To be very clear, I unequivocally believe that Christ *has* come in the flesh, that He lived thirty-three years as a man, was crucified, buried, raised from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of God. I also believe that one day He *will* manifest himself openly to all the world, put an end to time, corruption, and the curse, and judge the living and the dead. But in 2 Timothy 4:8, it seems beyond any doubt that this coming or appearing cannot possibly refer either to a past or a future event. Consider for a moment: What would it mean for a person to love a *future, physical* coming of Christ? Paul obviously cannot intend for Christians to look continually into the sky in hopes of seeing an outward appearing. But it seems similarly doubtful that he intends believers only to comfort themselves with thoughts and imaginations of a future event. Because, how would this be the way to attain a crown of righteousness?

However, what *does* make sense—a great deal of sense—and what is understandably of the greatest importance for every Christian, in every age, and is indeed the way to attain a crown of

righteousness, is the necessity to love, receive, and obey the Son of God in the way that He “comes” or “appears” every day! And how does He come to us every day? He comes to us as light, shining in our darkness. Nevertheless, many do not love *this* appearing.

This is precisely what Jesus is describing in John chapter 3, in his conversation with Nicodemus.

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.⁷

Here we read that light *comes* into the world, but rather than loving its appearing, men love darkness rather than light. And why do they love darkness? Because their deeds are evil, and they can feel how the light exposes their works and contradicts their will. But I ask you: when does this light come? And how does it come? Should

7 John 3:19-21

we limit this verse to the outward coming of the Son of God in one part of the world, for a brief moment in history? Was it possible for men to see their evil deeds and come to the light *only* when Christ walked as a man two thousand years ago? Or is Christ *still* a light that appears in darkness and teaches men to do the truth?

With regard to Christ's coming or appearing, the following three points sum up what I am trying to communicate:

First, that though Christ indeed *did come* as the Son of Man and Son of God in a body that God "prepared for Him,"⁸ and though He *shall come* as "a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,"⁹ yet He also *comes now*, in varying measures or degrees, in every man that comes into the world,¹⁰ as the "light of the [entire] world,"¹¹ and not just a light for first-century Israel.

8 Hebrews 10:5

9 2 Peter 3:10

10 John 1:9

11 John 8:12

Second, that this coming of Christ's light in man makes manifest, or exposes that which is evil, or contrary to God's nature and will. Ephesians 5:13, "But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever makes manifest is light."

And third, that man has the ability, or rather the tendency, to "not receive," to "hate" and to "resist" this coming of light, and therefore to not receive its power or experience the purpose for its appearing.

So who is it that experiences the "effective working" of gospel power? Only those who love, embrace, and obey His appearing—who bow their neck and unite their will to all that the light makes manifest. All who will meekly receive His strokes, and practice His truth, instead of hiding in the darkness of human opinions and desires, will surely be crowned with the righteousness of their Savior.

The Day of Little Things

There are great misunderstandings about the coming of Christ's light, and many imaginations about both *how* it comes and *what* it does. In fact, I believe there are just as many misunderstandings about the inward appearing of Christ's light in the heart, as there were about the outward appearance of Christ in the days of His flesh.

When Christ came outwardly, it was not at all in the way that the Jews expected. The Jews were waiting for something unmistakable and undeniable, something that solved their perceived problems, and aligned with their own interpretations of Scripture. But the long-awaited Messiah came as a baby in a manger, and worked for years as a carpenter in Nazareth. He began His ministry declaring that the time had been fulfilled, and the hour had come for God to set up a kingdom in man—an inward kingdom where the King would conquer an inward enemy. He passed through the

streets of Israel testifying, not against outward enemies and social injustices, but against every form of sin, evil, and impurity that had turned the heart of man (the temple of God) into a den of thieves. Though He came in the boundless love of God to seek and save what was lost, yet He “struck the earth with the rod of His mouth,”¹ calling many hypocrites, sons of the devil, white-washed tombs, dishes and plates that were dirty on the inside, and trees with bad roots that could not produce good fruit. He said to his brothers, “The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil.”² He taught them that uncleanness came from within, not from touching food with unwashed hands. He said they were children of flesh that must be born of the Spirit, and were in need of a righteousness that surpassed that of the scribes and Pharisees. And all of this was said to men and women who possessed the laws of God and believed themselves to be His only true worshippers.

This is how Jesus Christ came in the flesh, and it was not at all what they were expecting. Many of them loved the miracles that healed their bodies and filled their stomachs, but they did not like His

¹ Isaiah 11:4

² John 7:7

words, and were offended at His mission. “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free’? Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”³ Thus, very far from “receiving” His coming, and from “loving His appearing,” they hated it, denied it, and sought ways to kill Him, even while they continued to read their Bibles, attend their synagogues, and wait for a Messiah that better fit their expectations.

What would you say if I told you that this very thing continues happening today? Israel overlooked, rejected, and then crucified their Savior because they did not like the way that He appeared to them. But time has not changed the heart of man. In his natural condition, he is still the very same blind, prejudiced, and proud creature that rejects the light that testifies against him.

The coming of Christ’s light in the heart today is no different than His coming in Israel. Of course it is an *inward* rather than an *outward* manifestation, but it is *the very same Jesus Christ*, with the very same nature, power, and mission. The same Messiah who came outwardly now comes

³ John 8:33-34

inwardly, and the fallen nature of man gives Him exactly the same reception.

Now be very careful that you do not hastily excuse yourself from this charge. Just because you love the historical Jesus of the Bible, does not necessarily mean that you love the light and power of Jesus that appears in your heart. The Jews of the first century loved Moses and all the prophets. They quoted the prophet's words, adorned their tombs, and firmly believed that they lived according to their doctrines. Multitudes in Israel praised, memorized and taught the prophets' words, even when their hearts were entirely contrary to the Spirit that spoke through them. What is more, the Jews of the first century actually found ways to use the words of Moses and the prophets to convict and to crucify their Savior—the very One of whom Moses and the prophets had written!

Christians today think it is incredible that the Jews of the past could be so blind and hard-hearted. But, please do not be offended if I tell you we often do the very same thing with the words of Jesus Christ. Two thousand years have passed, and people have become very familiar and comfortable with the red words in the Bible. And yet it is extremely easy to love His sayings, even while we hate His *nature* when it appears in our heart.

It is easy to enjoy stories and songs about Jesus, to marvel at His wisdom and miracles, and even to believe all of His words, but when the *light of His life* shines in our hearts, manifesting selfishness, pride, vain words and evil desires, we then do not “love His appearing,” but rather “love the darkness rather than light.” We are convinced that we would never have been among those who crucified the Lord of glory, and yet in the unseen city of our heart, we often “crucify again to ourselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”⁴

Again, please do not assume that this is an impossibility for you. It is no strange thing to have zeal for God and for a form of righteousness, and yet refuse to submit to the righteousness that comes from God. Speaking of his countrymen according to the flesh, Paul says:

*For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.*⁵

4 Hebrews 6:6

5 Romans 10:2-3

I freely confess to you that I was one of these, even when I worked as a leader in the church. Again, there is a great difference between loving Christ's righteousness outside of us, and submitting to Christ's righteousness within us. There is a great difference between loving Christ's words, and loving Christ's light. When a man reads Christ's words in the darkness of the natural mind, they can be made to mean anything at all. But when the light of His life appears in the heart, there is a sight and sense of Truth that needs no interpretation. In my own experience, I have found how easy it is to read, sing, and even preach Christ's words, and yet hate His appearance every bit as much as the hard-hearted Pharisees. And why did I hate it? For the same reason the Pharisees did—because it threatened something that loved. I could accommodate the *words* of the gospel to my own opinions and preferences, but the *light* of the gospel was a threat to self.

No one openly professes to hate the coming or appearing of Christ. The Pharisees of the first century would never have acknowledged despising the coming of their Messiah, and Christians today are perhaps even more averse to such an idea. But to hate the light of Christ, one need only disagree with, resist, or ignore what it reveals. To “love

darkness more than light” is simply to withhold acceptance and submission to *whatever* it makes manifest, and this is rarely done with words. It is the heart that denies the light of Christ. It is our choices that refuse Him, our thoughts, pursuits, and desires that contradict Him all day long, even without a word being spoken. And it is in precisely *this way*, to varying degrees and in hundreds of little decisions, that all of us have rejected the light of Christ, and thus stunted our own growth in the power of the gospel.

Now when I say Christ appears by His light in the heart, you must not imagine that I am referring to visions, dreams, or even spoken words. Christ is the living Word of God, the perfect communication and manifestation of God’s nature and essence. Hebrews states He is the “brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.”⁶ Christ is the living substance of goodness, the essence of selfless love and perfect holiness. His very nature is humility, righteousness, meekness, kindness, and purity. And when this nature makes its presence known in the heart, it is very rarely with words that a man must perceive or interpret. The coming or appearing of Christ is an inward seeing of who and what He is, and in His light

6 Hebrews 1:3

there often comes an uncomfortable perception of who and what we are.

For example, a glimpse of His light brings a sense of true goodness and righteousness, and along with this comes an unpleasant conviction of our own selfishness or unrighteousness—perhaps in something we did, thought, said, or desired. Something within makes us see that our actions or motivations are contrary to truth, or inconsistent with God’s nature. Perhaps there is a sting in our conscience for acting from pride, vanity, selfishness, or anger, for using words to call attention to ourselves, or using clothes to show off our bodies or wealth. Or maybe we feel a nagging awareness (though we try to suppress it) that we are wasting precious time with YouTube, Netflix, or social media, or with unedifying conversations and unprofitable books.

These are what many Christians call “little things,” and we generally believe they have little to do with our spiritual growth and our experience of God’s power. We typically pay very little attention to these checks and reproofs, and often both parents and pastors teach us (by word and example) that Christians should not allow themselves to feel guilty or ashamed. In many ways we are encouraged to follow the current of our societies,

our friends, our culture, what we see on the internet or on TV, rather than pay attention to the still small voice, the disquieting feeling that pricks our hearts when our lives, choices, desires, and attitudes contradict the nature of God. But the truth is (and all who have ever obeyed the light will testify of it) that these little convictions and corrections *are the beginnings of God's power, the first and lowest appearances of the "light of life."*

Can anyone say that these "little things" have nothing to do with our spiritual lives, when it is plain that they have everything to do with our hearts? Is not God the God of the heart? Has there ever been anything *more* important to Him in his dealings with mankind than what the heart is doing, seeking, and loving? Can we say that little things like clothes, jokes, entertainment, and phones do not matter to God when they clearly matter so much to us? And if such things already have so much of our heart, our time, and our tongue, should we expect God's first communications with us to be related to something else?

Where do you think these feelings of discomfort and reproof come from? Do they spring from the fallen and perverse nature of flesh? Is your flesh reproving itself? Or did something inherently good remain in man after he died to the life

of God—contrary to God’s declaration that “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth,”⁷ and that “every intent of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually.”⁸ Or will you say these convictions for evil, and drawings to righteousness, come from the accuser of the brethren, the enemy of man’s soul? Is Satan’s kingdom divided against itself?

Sometimes people argue: “These feelings of reproof or condemnation for sin cannot be from God, because God loves me!” But it is precisely *because* God loves us that He lets us feel what is both contrary to His nature and opposed to our own good. Light brings judgment and conviction for sin not so that we live under condemnation, but so that we turn from the desires of the flesh, learn to walk in the Spirit, and thereby *come out* from under condemnation.

This is precisely what Paul tells us in Romans chapter 8: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” There is no condemnation for those who walk according to the Spirit. But *of course* there is a sense of condemnation or disapproval

7 Genesis 8:21

8 Genesis 6:5

when those who have received a gift of the Spirit continue to walk according to the flesh! Of course God will allow us to feel His discord and disagreement with a nature that is contrary to Him in every way—a nature that we are told “sets its desires against the Spirit,”⁹ and is “enmity against God.”¹⁰ Feelings of rejection aimed at the believer instead of the sin, with accusations of being a hopeless case, a failure, or a disappointment, are often the work of the “accuser of the brethren.”¹¹ But consciousness of sin, convictions for evil, with drawings toward righteousness, are the gifts of a merciful God who wants to live with man in His own pure Spirit.

Some allege that these convictions and reproofs are the operations of man’s “natural conscience.” But Paul tells us plainly, “All things that are reproofed are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever makes manifest is light.”¹² Christ says, “This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than

9 Galatians 5:17

10 Romans 8:7

11 Revelation 12:10

12 Ephesians 5:13 The word ἐλέγχω in his verse means to rebuke, reprove, or convict, as it is translated in the KJV. Other translations use the word expose, which seems to soften the intended meaning.

light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”¹³ Elsewhere He tells us, “When He [the Spirit of Truth] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”¹⁴ Paul writes to Titus, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.”¹⁵ The author of Hebrews speaks of a “living and active Word,” that “judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”¹⁶ Here are several Scriptures (among many others that could be cited) that plainly indicate that it is the light, Spirit, or grace of Jesus Christ that reproves and convicts in the secret of the heart. Where are the Scriptures that teach that these convictions arise from the natural conscience of fallen man?

It is not the conscience itself, *but the Light of Christ that shines in the conscience*, that causes a person to see and feel what is contrary to his Creator. The conscience is a real and wonderful gift

¹³ John 3:19-21

¹⁴ John 16:8

¹⁵ Titus 2:11

¹⁶ Hebrews 4:12

of God. But without Christ's light shining within it, it is like a lantern without a flame, or a lamp without a bulb.

In all that has been said, the principal point I am desiring to communicate is just this: it is because we do not turn at His reproofs, do not love and embrace Christ's inward appearing, do not submit our hearts to His light and take it as our guide and teacher; it is because we make excuses for evil, and for following our own will; it is because we justify ourselves against our own felt convictions in so many "little" ways that quench and grieve and resist the Spirit of holiness, that we experience so little growth in the power of the gospel.

These are *not* "little things," and our attempts to surrender them will show us just how big a place they have in our hearts. The truth is, there is no such thing as a "little thing." There are only things from above, and things from below. There are things that are in, for, and from the Spirit of God, and there are things that are in, for, and from the flesh. And when a man clings to that which is below, when he loves his own life more than the truth, his own will more than the "reproofs of instruction that are the way of life,"¹⁷ he shuts the

¹⁷ Proverbs 6:23

door on the beginnings of God's power. He steps on the mustard seed just as it starts to grow. It is easy to crush an oak tree when it is only two inches tall. And it very often happens, that while we wait for something big and unmistakable, something impressive and more according to our own expectations, we "despise the day of small things,"¹⁸ and miss the coming of gospel power.

The greatest reason why so many remain strangers to the transforming power of God is because our hearts do not *humbly* and *continually* submit to its first and lowest appearances—the Light of Jesus Christ that shines in the conscience. We do not faithfully turn away from the evil, nor yield our will to the good that we are *already* able to see. And because we are not "faithful in very little,"¹⁹ we do not grow to experience more. In multitudes of little ways—in little thoughts we entertain, decisions we make, words we say, and desires we pursue throughout every normal day—we grieve, quench, and resist the buddings of gospel power in our hearts. We grow familiar with gospel doctrine, yet remain strangers to its power, because the "effective working" of God's power begins in the heart with a still, small voice that

¹⁸ Zechariah 4:10

¹⁹ Luke 19:17

says, “Turn at My reproof, surely I will pour out
My Spirit upon you!”²⁰

²⁰ Proverbs 1:23