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PART I

1

STRIVINGS AFTER ASSURANCE

IN A MINISTRY of almost half a century, I have had the joy of leading many to rest in Christ. And I have found that the questions that perplex and the hindrances to full assurance are all more or less basically alike, though expressed differently by different people. So I have sought in this little volume to set forth, as clearly as I know how, the truths that I have proved basic in meeting the needs of thousands of souls.

I have been told that in days gone by young doctors were in the habit of using a great number of medicines in their endeavors to help their various patients, but that with increasing practice and larger experience, they discarded many remedies which they found were of little use and thereafter concentrated on a few that they had proven to be really worthwhile.

The physician of souls is likely to have much the same experience, and while this may give a somewhat uninteresting sameness to his later ministrations, as compared or contrasted with his earlier ones, it puts him after all in the immediate succession of the

apostles of our Lord, whose viewpoint may be summed up in words written by the greatest of them all: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Here is the sovereign remedy for all spiritual ills. Here is the one supreme message that is needed, whether they realize it or not, by all men everywhere. And this I have tried to proclaim in these unpretending pages.

As an Itinerant Preacher

For the most of my life I have been an itinerant preacher of the gospel, traveling often as much as thirty to forty thousand miles a year to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. In all these years I only recall two occasions on which I have missed my trains. One was by becoming confused between what is known as daylight saving and standard time. The other was through the passive assurance of a farmer-host, who was to drive me from his country home into the town of Lowry, Minnesota, in time for me to take an afternoon train for Winnipeg, on which I had a Pullman reservation. I can remember yet how I urged my friend to get on the way, but he puttered about with all kinds of inconsequential chores, insistent that there was plenty of time. I fumed and fretted to no purpose. He was calmly adamant.

Finally, he hitched up his team and we started across the prairie. About a mile from town we saw the train steam into the station, pause a few moments, and depart for the north. There was nothing to do but wait some five or six hours for the night express, on which I had no reservation, and found when it arrived

I could not get a berth, so was obliged to sit in a crowded day coach all the way to the Canadian border, after which there was more room. While annoyed, I comforted myself with the words, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." I prayed earnestly that if He had some purpose in permitting me to miss my train and comfortable accommodations, I might not fail to find it out.

When I boarded the crowded, foul-smelling coach, I found there was only one vacancy left and that was half of a seat midway down the car, a sleeping young man occupying the other half. As I sat down by him and stowed away my baggage, he awoke, straightened up, and gave me a rather sleepy greeting. Soon we were in an agreeable, low-toned conversation, while other passengers slept and snored all about us. A suitable opportunity presenting itself, I inquired, "Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ?" He sat up as though shot. "How strange that you should ask me that! I went to sleep thinking of Him and wishing I did know Him, but I do not understand, though I want to! Can you help me?"

Further conversation elicited the fact that he had been working in a town in southern Minnesota, where he had been persuaded to attend some revival meetings. Evidently, the preaching was in power and he became deeply concerned about his soul. He had even gone forward to the mourners' bench, but though he wept and prayed over his sins, he came away without finding peace. I knew then why I had missed my train. This was my Gaza, and though unworthy I was sent

of God to be His Philip. So I opened to the same scripture that the Ethiopian treasurer had been reading when Philip met him—Isaiah 53.

Drawing my newly found friend's attention to its wonderful depiction of the crucified Saviour, though written so long before the event, I put before him verses 4, 5 and 6: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

As the young man read them, they seemed to burn their way into his very soul. He saw himself as the lost sheep that had taken its own way. He saw Christ as the One on whom Jehovah laid all his iniquity, and he bowed his head and told Him he would trust Him as his own Saviour. For perhaps two hours we had hallowed fellowship on the way, as we turned from one scripture to another. Then he reached his destination and left, thanking me most profusely for showing him the way of life. I have never seen him since, but I know I shall greet him again at the judgment seat of Christ.

Help for the Needy Soul

Into whose hands this book will fall I cannot tell, but I send it forth with the prayer that it may prove

as timely a message to many a needy soul as the talk on the train that night in Minnesota with the young man who felt his need and had really turned to God, but did not understand the way of peace and so had no assurance, until he found it through the written Word, borne home to his soul in the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you are just as troubled as that young man, and should by divine providence use this treatise at any time, I trust that you will see that it is the Lord's own way of seeking to draw you to Himself, and that you will read it carefully, thoughtfully, and prayerfully, looking up each passage referred to in your own Bible, if you have one, and that thus you, too, may obtain full assurance.

Be certain of this: God is deeply concerned about you. He longs to give you the knowledge of His salvation. It is no mere accident that these pages have come to your attention. He put it on my heart to write them. He would have you read them. They may prove to be His own message to your troubled soul. God's ways are varied. "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

The Barber Was Much Concerned

Another personal experience will perhaps accentuate and fittingly close this chapter. One afternoon I was walking the busy streets of Indianapolis, looking for a barber shop. Entering the first one I saw (my attention being attracted by the red and white striped pole), I was soon seated in the chair, and the tonsorial artist began operations. He was chatty but subdued, I thought,

not carelessly voluble. Praying for an opening, it soon seemed a fitting time to ask as in the other case, "Are you acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ?" To my astonishment, the barber's reaction was remarkable. He stopped his work, burst into uncontrollable weeping, and when the first paroxysm had passed, exclaimed, "How strange that you should ask me about Him! In all my life I never had a man ask me that before. And I have been thinking of Him nearly all the time for the last three days. What can you tell me about Him?"

It was my turn to be amazed. I asked him what had led up to this. He explained that he had gone to see a picture of a passion play, and that it had made an indelible impression on his mind. He kept asking, "Why did that good Man have to suffer so? Why did God let Him die like that?" He had never heard the gospel in his life, so I spent an hour with him opening up the story of the cross. We prayed together and he declared that all was now plain, and he trusted the Saviour for himself. I had the joy of knowing, as I left his shop, that the gospel was indeed the dynamic of God unto salvation to him, an uninstructed Greek barber, who had learned for the first time that Christ loved him and gave Himself for him.

To me it was a singular instance of divine sovereignty. The very idea of a passion play—sinful men endeavoring to portray the life, death and resurrection of Jesus—was abhorrent to me. But God, who delights not in the death of the sinner, but desires that all should turn to Him and live, used that very picture to arouse this man and so make him ready to hear the gospel. And I could not doubt that He had directed my

steps to that particular shop, that I might have the joy of pointing the anxious barber to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

That in many similar instances He may be pleased to own and use these written messages is my earnest desire.

Sovereign grace o'er sin abounding,
Ransomed souls the tidings tell;
'Tis a deep that knows no sounding,
Who its length and breadth can tell?
On its glories, let my soul forever dwell.

2

ASSURANCE FOREVER

THERE IS a very remarkable statement found in Isaiah 32:17: "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever."

Assurance forever! Is it not a wonderfully pleasing expression? Assurance not for a few days, or weeks, or months—nor yet for a few years, or even a lifetime—but forever! It is this blessed assurance that God delights to impart to all who come to Him as needy sinners seeking the way of life.

Two words are employed in this verse that are intimately related—peace and assurance. Yet how many deeply religious people there are in the world who scarcely know the meaning of either term. They are honestly seeking after God. They are punctilious about their religious duties, such as reading the Scriptures, saying their prayers, attending church, partaking of the sacrament, and supporting the cause of Christ. They are scrupulously honest and upright in all their dealings with their fellowmen, endeavoring to fulfill every civic and national responsibility, and to obey the golden rule. Yet they have no lasting peace, nor any definite assurance of salvation. I am persuaded that in practically every such instance the reason for

their unquiet and unsettled state is due to a lack of apprehension of God's way of salvation.

Though living seven centuries before Calvary, it was given to Isaiah to set forth in a very blessed manner the righteousness of God as later revealed in the gospel. This is not to be wondered at for he spoke as he was moved by the Holy Spirit.

The key word of his great book, often called the fifth gospel, is the same as in the epistle to the Romans—the word, "righteousness." And I would urge the reader to meditate on this word for a little and see how it is used in the Holy Scriptures.

The Dying Lawyer

A lawyer lay dying. He had attended church all his life but was not saved. He was known to be a man of unimpeachable integrity. Yet as he lay there facing eternity, he was troubled and distressed. He knew that upright as he had been before men, he was a sinner before God. His awakened conscience brought to his memory sins and transgressions that had never seemed so heinous as then, when he knew that shortly he must meet his Maker.

A friend put the direct question, "Are you saved?" He replied in the negative, shaking his head sadly. The other asked, "Would you not like to be saved?" "I would indeed," was his reply, "if it is not already too late. But," he added almost fiercely, "I do not want God to do anything wrong in saving me!"

His remark showed how deeply he had learned to value the importance of righteousness. The visitor turned to his Bible and there read how God had

Himself devised a righteous way to save unrighteous sinners. The fact is that He has no other possible way of saving anybody. If sin must be glossed over, in order that the sinner may be saved, he will be forever lost. God refuses to compromise His own character for the sake of anyone, much as He yearns to have all men to be saved.

It was this that stirred the soul of Luther, and brought new light and help after long, weary months of groping in the darkness, trying in vain to save himself in conformity to the demands of blind leaders of the blind. As he was reading the Latin Psalter, he came across David's prayer, "Save me in thy righteousness." Luther exclaimed, "What does this mean? I can understand how God can damn me in His righteousness, but if He would save me it must surely be in His mercy!" The more he meditated on it, the more the wonder grew. But little by little the truth dawned upon his troubled soul that God Himself had devised a righteous method whereby He could justify unrighteous sinners who came to Him in repentance and received His Word in faith.

Isaiah stresses this great and glorious truth throughout his marvelous Old Testament unfolding of the gospel plan. In unsparing severity, the prophet portrays man's utterly lost and absolutely hopeless condition, apart from divine grace. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (Isa. 1:5-6). It is surely a revolting picture,

but nevertheless it is true of the unsaved man as God sees him. Sin is a vile disease that has fastened upon the very vitals of its victim. None can free himself from its pollution, or deliver himself from its power.

A Sure Remedy

But God has a remedy. He says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (v. 18). It is God Himself who can thus purge the leper from all his uncleanness, and justify the ungodly from all his guilt. And He does it, not at the expense of righteousness, but in a perfectly righteous way.

'Tis in the Cross of Christ we see
How God can save, yet righteous be;
'Tis in the Cross of Christ we trace
His righteousness and wondrous grace.
The sinner who believes is free,
Can say, the Saviour died for me;
Can point to the atoning blood
And say, that made my peace with God.

So it is Isaiah who, above all other prophetic writers, sets forth the work of the cross. He looks on by the eye of faith to Calvary, and there he sees the holy Sufferer dying for sins not His own. He exclaims, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD [Jehovah] hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:5-6).

Have you ever thoughtfully considered these remarkable statements? If not, I beg you to ponder over them now. It was Jesus that the Spirit of God brought before the mind of Isaiah. He would have you gaze upon Him, too. Take each clause separately and weigh its wondrous meaning.

"He was wounded for our transgressions." Make it personal! Put yourself and your own sins in there. Read it as though it said, "He was wounded for *my* transgressions." Do not get lost in the crowd. If there had never been another sinner in the world, Jesus would have gone to the cross for you! Oh, believe it and enter into peace!

"He was bruised for our iniquities." Make it personal! Think what your ungodliness and your self-will cost Him. He took the blows that should have fallen upon you. He stepped in between you and God, as the rod of justice was about to fall. It bruised Him in your stead. Again, I plead, make it personal! Cry out in faith, "He was bruised for *my* iniquities."

Now go further. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him." All that was necessary to make peace with God, He endured. "He made peace through the blood of his cross." Change the "our" to "my." "He made *my* peace."

He bore on the tree
The sentence for me,
And now both the surety
And sinner are free.

Now note the last clause of this glorious verse, "With his stripes we are healed." Do you see it? Can you set

to your seal that God is true, and cry exultingly, "Yes, I a poor sinner, I a lost, ruined soul, I who so richly deserved judgment, I am healed by His stripes"?

We are healed by His stripes,
Wouldst thou add to the Word?
He Himself is our righteousness made.
The best robe of heaven He bids thee put on,
Oh, couldst thou be better arrayed?

The Old Account Settled

It is not that God ignores our sins, or indulgently overlooks them; but on the cross all have been settled for. In Isaiah 53:6, He has balanced the books of the world. There were two debit entries:

All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned every one to his own way.

But there is one credit item that squares the account:

Jehovah hath laid on him [that is, on Jesus at the cross] the iniquity of us all.

The first debit entry takes into account our participation in the fall of the race. Sheep follow the leader. One goes through a hole in the fence and all follow after. So Adam sinned and we are all implicated in his guilt. "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

But the second entry takes into account our individual willfulness. Each one has chosen to sin in his own way, so we are not only sinners by nature, but we are also transgressors by practice. In other words, we are lost—utterly lost. But "the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

By His sacrificial death on the cross, He has paid to outraged justice that which meets every charge against the sinner. Now in perfect righteousness God can offer a complete pardon and justification to all who trust His risen Son.

Thus "the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever." The troubled conscience can now be at rest. God is satisfied with what His Son has done. On that basis He can freely forgive the vilest sinner who turns in repentance to the Christ of the cross.

The trembling sinner feareth
That God can ne'er forget;
But one full payment cleareth
His mem'ry of all debt;
Returning sons He kisses,
And with His robe invests;
His perfect love dismisses
All terror from our breasts.

He says to every believing soul, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isa. 44:22). And again, "I, even I, am he that blot-teth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isa. 43:25). You may never be able to forget the years of wandering, the many sins of which you have been guilty. But that which gives peace is the knowledge that God will never recall them again. He has blotted them from the book of His remembrance, and He has done it in righteousness, for the account is completely settled. The debt is paid!

Christ's Resurrection Gives Assurance

Christ's bodily resurrection is the divine token that all has been dealt with to God's satisfaction. Jesus bore our sins on the cross. He made Himself responsible for them. He died to put them away forever. But God raised Him from the dead, thereby attesting His good pleasure in the work of His Son. Now the blessed Lord sits exalted at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. He could not be there if our sins were still upon Him. The fact that He is there proves that they are completely put away. God is satisfied!

Payment He will not twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

It is this that gives quietness and assurance forever. When I know that my sins have been dealt with in such a way that God's righteousness remains untarnished, even as He folds me to His bosom, a justified believer, I have perfect peace. I know Him now as "a just God and a Saviour" (Isa. 45:21). He says, "I will bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry" (Isa. 46:13). What cheering words are these! He has provided a righteousness, *His very own*, for men who have *none of their own*! Gladly, therefore, do I spurn all attempts at self-righteousness, to be found in Him perfect and complete, clothed with His righteousness.

Every believer can say with the prophet, "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of

righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels" (Isa. 61:10).

Clad in this robe, how bright I shine;
Angels have not a robe like mine.

It is given only to redeemed sinners to wear this garment of glory. Christ Himself is the robe of righteousness. We who trust him are "in Christ"; we are "made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:21). He is "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (I Cor. 1:30). If my acceptance depended on my growth in grace I could never have settled peace. It would be egotism of the worst kind to consider myself so holy that I could be satisfactory to God on the ground of my personal experience. But when I see that "he hath made us accepted in the beloved," every doubt is banished. My soul is at peace. I have quietness and assurance forever. I know now that only

That which can shake the Cross,
Can shake the peace it gave;
Which tells me Christ has never died,
Nor ever left the grave.

As long as these great unchanging verities remain, my peace is unshaken, my confidence is secure. I have "assurance forever."

Dear, anxious, burdened soul, do you not see it? Can you not rest, where God rests, in the finished work of His blessed Son? If He is satisfied to save you by faith in Jesus, surely you should be satisfied to trust Him.