

GOD'S SUPERVISION OF HIS SAINTS.

"The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord, and he delighteth in his way. Though he stumble, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand." – Psalm 37:23,24.

CALVINISM has its good features as well as its bad ones. Its institution meant the reaction of noble Christian minds against a false doctrine. The fact that these reactionists went to an extreme should not condemn them utterly, nor nullify the good features of their teachings. It is customary for the pendulum of thought to swing from one extreme to another, passing the central point of absolute truth. Indeed, we have every reason to believe that this is a part of the Adversary's method in blinding the minds of those who are seeking truth. He would lead as far away from absolute truth as possible, either in one direction or the other in every reaction or reform; therefore, he seems to have taken an interest to the extent of helping the reformers to an opposite extreme.

During the "dark ages" the central thought of our text was lost sight of – the thought of God's care for each and for all of his consecrated people. The thought inculcated and generally held was to the contrary of this; viz., that the average man, even though a consecrated believer, is too insignificant for divine attention; that God had given over to the care of the Pope and the clergy the souls of his people. To so great an extent did this teaching prevail that the people subject thereto did not think of Jehovah as their shepherd; nor even of Jesus as his appointed representative shepherd; and did not think of approaching these in prayer, nor of having their divine oversight and direction in their affairs. On the contrary, if they had sins to be repented of, they were to go to the priest, make confession, and secure absolution. Had they requests to make, they were to ask the priest; or in prayer to approach some dead saint, requesting his mediation with some of the dead apostles or with Mary, the mother of Jesus, that they, in turn, might mediate with the Son Jesus, that he, in turn, might

mediate with the Father, and that thus they might be brought to the attention of Jehovah and possibly get some fragmentary blessing as a crumb from the table.

The reaction of Reformation times was against all this sort of thing, and the central teaching of Calvinism was that God has a direct interest in all those who, through the merit of Jesus, become his children through faith and consecration. It is difficult to estimate how great has been the blessing that has come to the Lord's people through the revival of this doctrine of the primitive Church. We must ever feel grateful to John Calvin and his coadjutors for the service they rendered to the household of faith in this particular, – even though we must, at the same time, thoroughly repudiate that feature of their teachings which passed to the extreme of declaring that as God had foreknown an elect Church, the special and happy object of his care during this Gospel age, and to be exalted ultimately to the heavenly state, he had, on the other hand, predetermined the torture of all the remainder of the race, and had made ample provision therefor. God permitted (we may even say, used) Calvin and his associates in the presentation of an important truth, while at the same time he permitted them to attach to it this awful, blasphemous, God-dishonoring teaching respecting the non-elect. We thank God that, in his providence, we live in the time when it is due that his gracious purposes toward the non-elect should be clearly seen, and his character freed from the evil aspersions of such a theory. **[R3155 : page 68]**

Papacy's conception of the insignificance of man, even though a good man in the Lord's sight, is much nearer to the view of the natural, worldly man, than is the thought that all the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord. The natural man finds it difficult to believe in a God at all; as he looks about the universe his first thought of its immensity and intricacies, and of the greatness of the one who created all these things is speedily offset by the suggestion that possibly there is no God; – possibly there are "laws of nature" which form themselves and which operate themselves, and under which all things are and shall

ever be. He is encouraged in this line of doubt by the views of some, known as Scientists, Evolutionists and Higher Critics. Though none of these have the temerity to declare point-blank that there is no God but nature, they, almost without exception, show that this is the leaning of their minds, the tendency of their thought. They have not yet discovered any form of life which has not in some sense or degree been transmitted from some other living thing. They are looking for this, however – earnestly looking for it and expecting it, and quite ready, if they can find it, to claim that all life, all being, is the result of a law of evolution, and needed no interference by a Creator, even at the beginning. From this standpoint, and especially backed up by the high authorities of our day, scientific and religious, the natural man feels skeptical about a God at all, and concludes that if there is a God he is so concerned and occupied in his own personal affairs and in the affairs of other beings in other worlds, that the hundreds of millions upon this planet are in his sight and estimation but as so many mites would be in man's estimation. These are little inclined to think that all the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord.

As Calvin's day was a time of reaction from a wrong thought toward a right one in this particular, so, today marks another crisis. We are living in the time of reaction against the right thought on this subject, and in favor of the wrong thought. In early times in all the theological seminaries, as well as in the great colleges and universities of Christendom, the teachings were distinctly adverse to the sentiment of our text, and at very most allow that mankind as a whole is possibly under some kind of divine supervision and care; though the sentiment seems to be that God knows and cares much less for the poor groaning creation than did its theologians, publicists and reformers.

There is a reason for all this, to be sure. The wheels in the divine plan are so large, and the hands on the divine clock move so slowly that the natural man perceives no movement – fails to realize that God is working all things according to the counsel of his own will. Lacking the instruction of the divine Word, worldly wisdom sees not the

purpose of the permission of "the present evil world;" nor how the lessons and experiences which it is giving to all mankind will eventually work out a great blessing, as part of man's needed instruction; to be followed by his instruction in righteousness in the Millennial age, soon to be ushered in. Worldly wisdom sees not the object for which the Church is now called out from amongst the world and shaped and fitted and polished, by trials and difficulties and contact with evil, for the glorious work of the future, – of blessing all the families of the earth. And not seeing these things, – not seeing the object of the permission of evil, not seeing why God has delayed the binding of Satan, the overthrow of his power and the release of the bonds of superstition and blindness with which he has enslaved the masses, it concludes that God is indifferent, and that all the provisions and arrangements for social uplift depend upon the wisdom and the benevolence of men.

How thankful should be our hearts, as we realize the divine favor which has rescued us from this blindness which is upon the world, and particularly upon the great and worldly-wise of Christendom! The knowledge granted us of the plan of the ages saves us, not only from the bondage of priestcraft and superstition of the "dark ages," but it saves us also from the evolutionary unbelief which is now sweeping over Christendom, and robbing all who have not the light of the present truth of their joy in the Lord, their peace, their confidence, their trust in him.

We thank God for the ability to grasp this blessed promise of our text (and scores of others of similar import) and to rejoice in them, strong in the Lord and in the power of his might; saying, "If God be for us who can be against us [to any avail]?" If God so loved us while we were yet sinners, much more does he love us now that we are his people. (Rom. 5:8,9.) He who has begun a good work in us is both able and willing to complete it unto the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:6.) Since we are the Lord's, and have these various assurances of his Word, "We know that all things work together for good to them that

love God; to them who are the called [ones] according to his purpose."
– Rom. 8:28.

Let us not, however, apply our text carelessly; let us note carefully that it does not apply to all mankind, but to the "good." The thought here is evidently in harmony with the statements elsewhere, to the effect that God's care is over the *righteous*, as when we read, "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish." (Psa. 1:6.) "The Lord knoweth them that are his." (2 Tim. 2:19.) **[R3155 : page 69]** Looking about us in the world we inquire: Who, then, are the righteous? who are so good as to be properly called God's people? Harkening for direction from the Word of the Lord we hear the answer, "There is none good, save one, that is God;" and, "There is none righteous, no, not one." These testimonies of the Word fully correspond to our own findings; for in ourselves, as well as in others, we find imperfection, – unrighteousness. But how can these testimonies of the Scripture be reconciled? – that there are none righteous, none good of all the Adamic race, and yet that God declares that all the steps of a good man, all the ways of the righteous, are under his supervision? We answer that the Scriptures explain how these statements are in full accord; that there is a class of people in the world who, at one time, **[R3156 : page 69]** were children of wrath even as others, but who have been reconciled to God through the death of his Son, their ransomer. These have come into accord with God in the spirit of their minds, in their hearts; – their wills are in accord with the divine will. Their deficiencies, which are still known to themselves, and some of them sadly apparent to their neighbors also, are not deficiencies of the will, of the heart, of the intention; and the terms of the New Covenant being applied to these in advance of the world, their blemishes are reckoned as covered in and by the merit of their Redeemer's sacrifice. Thus God declares that he can be just, and yet be the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus – of him who trusts in Jesus, and through Jesus, accepts forgiveness of sins and full reconciliation to God's will, so that he desires to sin no longer. These are the "righteous"; these are "his"; these are the "good" of our text.

Oh, blessed class! Oh, happy people! A peculiar people, prospectively a Royal Priesthood unto God – the "elect" Church.

If we call attention to the fact that none others than these righteous, good people are under the divine supervision, and guaranteed that all things shall work for their good, our object is not to discourage others; but to rightly inform them of their position, and to remove from their minds any false hopes and delusions they may have been entertaining – to the intent that by proper acceptance of God's favor in the ransom, and a full consecration to him, they may at once attain to this position of reconciliation, and relationship of sonship, and become heirs of this and all similar promises.

Who has not noticed that people who would not admit that they are God's children, who are not believers in the redemption, and not consecrated to the Lord, will in times of trouble go to the Lord in prayer, and take from his Word and apply to themselves such promises as this of our text? Yet this is all wrong if they are still "children of wrath." And if they have seen the open doorway by which they might approach God and attain to membership in his family, and if they have disdained these and neglected them, what effrontery it is on their part to approach the Lord in time of trouble! and how great is their credulity when they delude themselves into thinking that any of these promises would be applicable to them! We are not seeking to hinder any from coming to the Lord in a proper manner in their seasons of distress; but we are wishing to be understood that sorrow, even sorrow for sins, is not repentance; and that sorrow and trouble do not constitute doors of access to divine favor, and that then, as ever, no man cometh unto the Father but by the Son – "through faith in his blood." We would encourage any who, passing through trying experiences, and feeling the need of a Savior and a great one, come to God in faith and in consecration, and thus put themselves under his protecting care; but even then we would advise them that it had been better had they come to the Lord before the trouble; – better had they calmly, deliberately, dispassionately, thought over his goodness and greatness, and their

own insufficiency and need, and the reasonableness of their consecration and the privilege of accepting God's favor in Christ, and coming thus under his exceeding great and precious promises to them that love him.

Some may here inquire: What constitutes justifying faith? We answer: It is a faith in God, based upon and in harmony with all that he has revealed. Abraham believed God and was justified by his faith; yet his faith was far less comprehensive than the faith which justifies God's people today; because, in the meantime, God has unfolded and expanded his revelation. Abraham's faith took in all that God had promised; viz., the blessing of the whole world of mankind through his posterity; and his faith evidently grasped the thought that this implied a resurrection of the dead, not one which would concern his posterity only, but which would embrace also the families of the earth which had already passed into death. He could not do more than believe this, and in some respects it was a severer test of faith than is our larger faith of today. For he could not see how God could be just and yet be the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus; while we, standing on this side of the great ransom sacrifice, can see the *modus operandi*. Justifying faith today, however, must believe the record which God has given us of his Son. It is not sufficient that we recognize Jesus as one of the noble men of our race, nor even that we should recognize him as the chiefest member of it. God's revelation is more than this, and, hence, our faith must be more. We [R3156 : page 70] must grasp by faith that he was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate" from the sinner race; – that he left the glory which he had with the Father, and took the place and condition of the first perfect man, in order that he might redeem him and all of his race which had come under his condemnation to death. We must believe further, that our Lord Jesus gave himself a ransom for all. We must believe, further, that this was a satisfactory ransom, or purchase price for the world – that it sufficed as an offset for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world. We must believe that the Father evidenced or testified to this perfect obedience, in that he raised him from the dead; that he

ascended up on high, appearing in the presence of God on our behalf, making mediation for our iniquities, through the merit of his sacrifice; and that we are accepted in the Beloved, whom God has highly exalted, and given a name, authority and power above every name; and that he is Lord of all; we must accept him as our Lord, our Master, and must, to the extent of our ability, seek to walk in his ways – not after the flesh, but after the spirit.

But after we have attained this position, and after the promise of our text, and all like promises, are ours, it requires time and a continual application of faith, in order to rightly appreciate God's promises, and to appropriate them to ourselves; and this is Scripturally called "growing in grace and knowledge." We grow in knowledge as we take note of the promises of God, and by faith apply them to ourselves, and seek to discern in our lives the fulfilment of those promises; we grow in grace simultaneously, for unless each item of knowledge be received into a good and honest heart, and bring forth its measure of obedience and righteousness (grace) we will not be prepared for the next step of knowledge, and would be thus stopped, or possibly turned back. And as a loss of knowledge would mean a measurable loss of grace, so also a loss of grace would mean a corresponding loss of knowledge; – going into darkness, the promises of the Lord's Word becoming more and more dim and obscured, in proportion as our goodness or grace would be lost in worldliness or sin.

The Christian, as a disciple of the Lord, as a pupil in the school of Christ, is being fitted for a place in the Millennial Kingdom – for a share in its glory, honor and immortality. It is required of such pupils that they shall give diligence to learn to appropriate the instructions of their teacher, else they will not be prepared for the glorious things to which they are called – they will fail to make their calling and their election sure. Hence, we see the necessity for the frequent admonitions of the Scripture, that the Lord's people shall be awake; – not of those who slumber; not of those who are idle; not of those who are overcharged with the cares of this life; but that they be fervent in spirit,

serving the Lord. Their service toward the Lord is primarily the bringing of themselves into as close harmony with the Lord's will, and into as close likeness to the divine pattern as possible; and secondly, it is that by precept and example they may help others of the called ones in the same narrow way.

There is danger that some may misunderstand the meaning of our text, and suppose it to teach that every incident in the life of God's people is what and as he intended it to be; – that God arbitrarily interferes in the affairs of his people, sets aside their free agency, and forces them to take this step or the other as mere machines. This is a serious mistake. No such thought is contained in the words. God has shown us his good pleasure in such matters; for, although he could have made us like wagons or wheelbarrows, to be pulled or pushed regardless of any ambition of our own, he did not so make us, and seeketh not such to be his children – the recipients of his favors. On the contrary, he made man a free moral agent – in this respect a copy of his Creator, free to will as he may please. Although we are not always free to do as we may please, we are always free to will as we may please, and, as already seen, in the present time the Lord is dealing with his people according to their wills. And if God respects the will of the natural man, much more would he respect the will of the new creature in Christ Jesus, begotten of the holy spirit.

Our text presupposes that in the class described the human will has been transformed; – that the divine will has been accepted as instead of the human; and that the child of God is seeking to walk in the ways of righteousness, in which he has already started; and the proper thought to be gathered is that thus seeking to walk in the Lord's ways, God will not permit his imperfections of judgment to work him any injury, but will supervise his affairs; will overrule so that every step he may take, although it be taken of his own will, his own volition – his consecrated will, however – shall be overruled for his good; for his development as a new creature in Christ. If he shall err in judgment, and bring upon himself the consequences of his error, the Lord's

wisdom and power are such that he can fulfil all the provisions of this promise, and make even his blunders and weaknesses to so react as to strengthen his character and establish him in righteousness, developing in him by these and other experiences the fruits and graces of the spirit, which will eventually fit and prepare him for joint-heirship in the Kingdom.

Another Scripture gives us a suggestion respecting [R3157 : page 71] our part in the ordering of our steps. It represents the Lord's people as praying, in harmony with the Lord's provision, saying, "Order my steps in thy Word; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me." (Psa. 119:133.) This is the proper course for the Lord's people; to seek to walk carefully, circumspectly; to take heed to the instructions of the Lord's Word, so that thus their mistakes, their blunders, may be fewer and fewer, as they grow in grace and grow in knowledge of the Lord. But meantime, in connection with all of the weaknesses and imperfections incident to our imperfect bodies, we all have need of special comfort and consolation which the Lord has provided us in our text. It is the source of weakness in many of the Lord's people that they do not properly grasp by faith this and similar promises; for only in proportion as they have this faith and grasp these promises can they be buoyed up by this, and be encouraged to press along the line for the mark. This means faith toward God, and we readily admit that the "babes" in Christ cannot exercise as much faith in respect to these promises and experiences as can those who are further advanced; and yet we see continually that it is not years alone that tell in Christian development; that the growth of the Christian in grace and knowledge depends chiefly upon his faith, his love, his zeal.

"According to thy Word," – should not be misunderstood to mean that God orders the affairs of his people, only in the way of commands and advice given them in his Word. Ah! had this been true, how many now rejoicing in the light of the Lord's favor might have become outcasts long ago! How many have failed to take heed to the directions of the Word, whose steps, nevertheless, the Lord has ordered or

directed; – according to his Word; – according to his promise! When the wrong path was taken, and the Word neglected, and the privileges of Christian brotherhood neglected, and thus the way made ready for a complete separation from the Lord and the truth, – then, perhaps, the Lord ordered the way, according to his Word, in sending disappointments, financial or social, or sickness of body corresponding to the sickness of the heart; – and thus, perhaps, he brought back his wandering sheep, "according to his Word," making experiences and trials work out for his highest good.

Thus, in his Word the Lord promises the crown of life to the zealous soldiers of the cross, and assures us that the careless shall under divine providence have their steps so ordered that they shall receive "stripes," chastisements, to awaken and rescue them; – so that they may be "saved so as by fire," and come up through great tribulation, – even after they have failed to gain the "abundant entrance" of the Kingdom class. Let us rejoice in thus having our way committed to the Lord; but let us take earnest heed to our own steps also, that we may walk in the footsteps of our Master in the narrow way, and thus also inherit with him the glories promised.

Likewise we should expect the Lord's guidance of our temporal affairs and particularly in respect to our service of the truth. We should not only give heed to the Word and its spirit, but additionally we should keep watch for the leadings of divine grace; – opening or closing doors of opportunity, and thus leading us, if faithful and obedient, not only into all truth, but also into fuller liberties and opportunities for serving it to others.

We must not overlook the latter part of our text – the assurance that though the child of God may stumble at times in the way, these will never mean to him an utter fall, because his hand is still held by the Lord! What a comforting thought is here! How well calculated it is to deliver the Lord's people from utter despondency in respect to themselves and each other! The all-important thoughts to be kept in

mind are, Am I still the Lord's? Am I still trusting in the precious blood? Am I still consecrated to the Lord and his righteous way? If these can be answered in the affirmative we can still realize that we are God's children, and that our hands are still in his; that the spirit of begetting and adoption, which began in us the new life, has not perished; and that it is God's will that we should recover ourselves as quickly as possible from any stumbling, and looking well at the difficulties and trials which led us into it, we should fortify our characters against those difficulties as respects the future, and thus go on really stronger, because of our difficulties, and yet all the while realizing that our recovery from the difficulty was not of our own strength, but because of our trust in the arm of the Lord, to which we are still holding.

The Scriptures which speak of the natural branches of the olive tree, and also the ingrafted branches of the wild olive, continuing to be branches only so long as they continue in the relationship of faith (Rom. 11:17-21), are not to be ignored; neither should we forget our Lord's words, when likening his followers to the branches in a vine; saying, "I am the Vine; ye are the Branches;" he, nevertheless, pointed out that "every branch *in me*" that bears not fruit, the Father, the husbandman, taketh it away – it becomes refuse, never to be re-ingrafted but destroyed.

These and other Scriptures most emphatically teach the possibility, not of our stumbling as of accident, and being separated from the Lord, but of the **[R3157 : page 72]** possibility of our being separated from him through wilful disobedience and neglect of his Word and of the opportunities he has afforded us. He will not let us go so long as we are striving to walk in his way; but will order our steps so that they shall bring to us the best blessing possible, and will recover us and help us in our stumblings, because we are seeking and delighting to walk in his way. But if we lose this spirit, and become of a contrary one, if we fight against God, – if we resist the leadings and guidance which he has provided in his Word and by his spirit, and if

we seek to walk contrary to him, he will also walk contrary to us, and he will let go our hand; our stumbling then would mean our fall – we would be utterly cast down, and that beyond recovery, in the Second Death.

We do not, however, address those who are wilfully resisting the Lord and seeking to walk after the flesh and not after the spirit. We address those who are seeking the old paths; seeking to walk in the footsteps of Jesus; seeking to know and to do the Father's will, and whose discouragements are the result, not of wilful wrong, but of the weaknesses of the flesh against which they are continually striving. These the Lord would have us encourage, and draw to their attention the precious promises of his Word, and his assurances that "as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that reverence him."

