

The Master's Bounty, and the Servant's Obedience

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"Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live and keep thy word." Psalm 119:17

What a fund of true and vital experience is contained in the 119th Psalm! What simplicity and godly sincerity shine through it! What breathings after God's presence and manifested favour! What desires to live to the glory of God! What fervent pourings out of the Psalmist's heart, that he might be enabled to keep God's precepts!

Three features especially seem to my mind stamped upon this blessed portion of God's word. *One is, a deep sense of the Psalmist's sinfulness and helplessness.* "My soul," he cries, "cleaveth to the dust; quicken thou me according to thy word." (ver. 25.) "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments." (ver. 176.) And indeed, what I may call the *substratum* of the whole Psalm is, creature weakness and helplessness. This feeling lies under well-nigh every petition; and springing out of it, and built upon it, is David's earnest cry that the Lord would supply his wants. The *second* feature that strikes my mind as stamped upon this Psalm is, *the desire of David's soul to experience the quickening and reviving teachings and testimonies of God the Spirit in his heart.* Being completely weaned from creature strength, and having felt from time to time the blessed teachings, guidings, and leadings of the Lord the Comforter, he here pours out his soul after those reviving influences and quickening manifestations. The Psalm is full of them: "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness." (ver. 88.) "I opened my mouth, and panted." (ver. 131.) "I have

longed for thy salvation." (ver. 174.) "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." (ver. 135.) "Mine eyes fail for thy salvation." (ver. 123.) And the *third* striking feature, which in fact shines through nearly every verse of the Psalm, is, the *desire of David's heart to understand and keep God's word*. The tender affection that he displays to the word of God; his fervent desires to have that word brought into his soul; and the breathings he pours forth, that he may speak, and act, and live in perfect conformity to its precepts—is a feature peculiarly stamped upon the whole Psalm.

In the text, we find, *first, a petition, "Deal bountifully with thy servant;" secondly, what David knew and felt would be the fruit and effect, if that petition were granted, "That I may live and keep thy word."*

I.—What is man in a state of nature? We are never to forget our base original; we are continually to look to the rock whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we were digged. Israel was ever to say, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father." (Deut. 26:5.) We are, therefore, continually to look to the fall of man; for only so far as we are acquainted with the fall, can we experimentally know the remedy that God has provided for this desperate malady.

1. What, then, is man in a state of nature? He is, as the Apostle so emphatically describes, Romans 6:17, "*the servant of sin.*" Before, therefore, he can become the servant of God, as David in the text declares himself to be, a mighty revolution must take place in his soul. By nature we are bond-slaves to sin; as the Apostle says, "We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures." (Titus 3:3.) We served them eagerly, we served them greedily; they were our willing masters, and we were their willing slaves. During the time

that we are thus wearing the chains of servitude to the basest lusts, to the vilest sins, we are ignorant of our state as sinners before God. We know not that "the wages of sin is death." We are hurrying on to the chambers of destruction; yet we know not, we care not, whither we are tending.

2. But we are also, *the servants of Satan*. "When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." This mighty conqueror has with him a numerous train of captives; this haughty master, the god of this world, has in his princely retinue a whole array of servants who gladly do his behests: him they cheerfully obey, though he is leading them down to the bottomless pit; for though he amuses them here awhile with a few toys and baubles, he will not pay them their wages until he has inveigled them into that awful gulf of destruction in which he himself has been for ages weltering.

3. Again. In our natural state, we are *the servants of the world*. What the world presents, we love; what the world offers, we delight in. To please the world; to get as large a portion as we can of its goods; to provide in it amply for ourselves and our children; to obtain and to maintain a respectable station in it,—this is the grand bent of man's carnal heart.

And lastly, we are *the servants of self*. Self in its various forms, proud self, lustful self, covetous self, righteous self—self in some shape or other, is the idol before whom all carnal knees bow, the master whom all carnal hearts serve.

See, then, the state into which every child of Adam is fallen and sunk—the servant of sin, the servant of Satan, the servant of the world, and the servant of self. He loves his master, hugs his chain, and delights in his servitude, little thinking what awful wages are to follow.

But if we look at the expression in the text, David calls himself *God's servant*, "Deal bountifully with *thy servant*." If, therefore, we are to be brought off from being servants of sin and self, it must be by some change taking place in the soul; for the Lord says, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other; ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matt 6:24.) We cannot serve sin and righteousness; we cannot serve the world and God; we cannot serve Satan and the Lord; we cannot serve self and Jesus. A mighty revolution must, therefore, take place in the soul, in order to bring us into that state and posture where David was, when he said, "Deal bountifully with *thy servant*."

In what way, then, are we made *God's servants*? It is true, that so far as the Lord has adopted us into his family, we are *God's sons*; "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." But we are not only sons of God, so far as the Lord has begotten us unto eternal life, we are *servants* also. The one relationship does not destroy the other. It is often so naturally; the son will often be to the father as a servant. He shall assist him in his labours; he shall take a share of his daily toils. Jacob was Laban's servant, though his son by marriage. "I *served* thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle" was the complaint of the aggrieved patriarch. (Gen. 31:41.) Jacob's own sons afterwards kept their father's flock. And does not the Lord call himself Master as well as Father? "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is my fear?" (Mal. 1:6)—one relationship not annulling the other. Nay, the very angels who are called in Scripture "sons of God," (Job 1:6, 38:7), are yet called "servants of God;" as the angel said to John, "See thou do it not; I am *thy fellow servant*, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep

the sayings of this book." (Rev. 22: 9.) And thus we find the Apostles, when writing to the churches, call themselves "servants." For instance, "Paul and Timotheus, servants of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:1.) "James, a servant of God." (James 1:1.) "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:1.) As if their highest title, and their most blessed employment, was to be servants of the living Jehovah.

But how are we brought into this relationship? for the Lord finds us in the chains of slavery; the servants of sin, self, and Satan. Must, then, not some mighty change take place before we can be made the servants of the living God? There must. The change takes place in this way.

1. First, the Lord, by casting divine light into the mind, and bringing his holy word with quickening power into the conscience, alarms, terrifies, deeply convinces the soul of its state by nature, as "serving divers lusts and pleasures." This is the first stroke that God usually makes to loosen the chains of slavery off the hands, and the fetters off the limbs. By piercing and penetrating the conscience through the communication of light and life, sin is felt to be sin, and its wages are known to be death.

2. But this is not sufficient. This does not strike the fetters off the captive's limbs. He may still clank his chains, though he clanks them in misery. Other processes are necessary before the manacles can be stricken off. One is, *to make him fairly sick of sin*; not merely to arouse the soul, to awake the conscience, to alarm the mind by the convictions of the Spirit from the application of God's law, but also to make him fairly sick of sin, sick of the world, sick of Satan, and sick of self; to make him feel such bondage, such darkness, such wretchedness, and such miserable sensations, as to loathe those lusts in which he has been so cruelly entangled, to

loathe the world which he has so gladly served, to loathe Satan who has so perpetually drawn him aside, and loathe himself as the vilest and worst monster of all.

3 But even this is not sufficient. By these means we are brought to hate our servitude; by these means our chains and fetters are somewhat unloosened, and the links are partially struck off the limbs. But still, we want something more before we can be servants of the Lord. "Thy people," we read, "shall be willing in the day of thy power." *We want some manifestation of the Lord's mercy, grace, and favour to our hearts; and when this is felt, we gladly leave the old servitude, and enlist ourselves, so to speak, under a better master, and yield our hearts, our affections, our bodies, our souls, our spirits, our all—we yield them all up into his hands who has made himself dear, near, and precious to our souls. This is to obey the counsel which the blessed Spirit gives the Bride, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly delight in thy beauty; for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him."* (Psa. 14:10, 11.)

4. But a *fourth* thing is necessary to complete it—to *be crucified with Christ*, entering by living faith into a knowledge of the sufferings of Jesus, his blood, and his righteousness; and thus being crucified and dying with him, to be killed to sin by virtue of his death. This is the point so beautifully set forth, Rom. 6:2-6, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of

sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." And this was Paul's own blessed experience. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20.)

Thus, by these powerful operations of the Spirit of God upon the heart; *first*, awakening and alarming the conscience; *secondly*, sickening and surfeiting us completely of our fetters; *thirdly*, making Jesus dear, near, and precious by some discovery of his beauty and glory; *fourthly*, leading us into some fellowship with him in his sufferings, some knowledge of his death and resurrection—by these distinct operations of the Spirit of God upon the soul, are we brought to be his willing servants, to delight in serving him, to feel it to be our highest privilege and our chiefest pleasure to yield ourselves up unto the Lord that we may be eternally his, that he may mould us into his image here and take us to be with him in a glorious immortality hereafter.

David, then, was in this posture and state of soul, when he breathed forth the words, "Deal bountifully with *thy servant*." He had been enlisted into the service of this blessed Master. He had been delivered from serving sin, the world, Satan, and self. He had been brought to yield up his heart's affections into the hands of Jesus, to be his in life and in death, for time and for eternity. But, like all other children of God, he felt, deeply felt, his own sinfulness, helplessness, and inability to bring forth in his own heart that which he longed to realise there. He therefore makes use of this as a plea before the mercy-seat. As though he would say, 'I am thy servant; it is my desire to live to thy glory; I would serve thee with singleness of eye; I would renounce everything incompatible with my service to thee; I desire to be thine,

thine only; and that thou wouldest "work in me to will and to do of thy good pleasure." "Deal then bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word."

But what is it for the Lord to "*deal bountifully*" with the soul? All that the Lord does for his people, he does in a way of bounty. There is nothing to be gained by merit; there is nothing to be obtained by creature service. The servant of the Lord does not bring his services to the foot of his Master, and thereby lay a claim to God's goodness and favour. Whatever is communicated to him, is communicated as an act of mercy; whatever he receives, he receives as an act of grace. And yet feeling a desire after those bountiful mercies and favours which God has to bestow, he puts in his lowly plea. How earnestly and yet humbly he lays his petition at his Sovereign's footstool, "Deal bountifully with thy servant!"

But in what way does the Lord "deal bountifully?"

1. When he gives a sweet *manifestation of the pardon of sin*, he deals bountifully; for when the Lord pardons sin, he pardons completely; he makes no reserve; he pardons sins past, sins present, and sins to come; his forgiveness is extended to every thought of the heart, every look of the eyes, every word of the lip, every action of the hand: it is a complete, irrevocable amnesty. Therefore the Scriptures use such declarations as these, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." (Isa. 38:17.) "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19.) "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." (Isa. 44:22.) "In those days, and at that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." (Jer. 50:20.) When, then, a man's conscience has contracted guilt; when he feels

himself indeed to be one of the vilest wretches that crawls upon God's earth; when temptations press his soul down; when there is little else felt but the workings of inward depravity, filth, and iniquity—does not he then long for the Lord to deal bountifully with him—freely to pardon, graciously to accept, mercifully to forgive him? to reveal this full pardon to the heart, to seal this entire forgiveness upon the conscience, and to bless the soul with a clear testimony that the Lord has put away all his iniquities and blotted out all his transgressions?

2. The Lord deals also bountifully when he *opens up the treasures of mercy, grace, love, and salvation* that are stored up in the Saviour's fulness. "It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;" and therefore the Apostle John says, "Of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace." Now, the Lord unfolds, from time to time, the riches of Christ's grace to his waiting family. This is the covenant work of the blessed Spirit, "He shall take of mine, and shew it unto you." The blessed Spirit takes of the things of Jesus; and shows, at times, the glory of his justifying righteousness, and the balmy sweetness of his atoning blood and dying love; and as he unfolds these blessed things to the soul, he raises up in the heart earnest desires to experience them, to enjoy them, to realise them, and have them divinely shed abroad in the heart. We are not satisfied with eyeing these blessings at a distance; that is but a Balaam's view, "I shall see him, but not nigh." We are not contented with reading of them in the word; we are not contented with knowing that Jesus has this and that blessing to bestow; nor can we be satisfied with seeing, by the eye of faith, all the grace and all the glory stored up in his inexhaustible fulness. We want something more; we want a communication of these blessings to the heart. When the ground is parched and dry, it does not satisfy the farmer to see the clouds rolling over

his head filled with rain, unless they let fall their rich showers upon his fields. It does not satisfy a hungry man to see the table loaded with a noble banquet, unless some of that ample fare reach his mouth. Nay, the sight without the enjoyment raises up jealous feelings against the guests, if we see the table richly spread, and may not approach ourselves and feast. When, therefore, the Psalmist says, "Deal bountifully with thy servant," it is as though he had said, "Lord, I see such grace and glory in the blessed Jesus; I view such mercies and blessings stored up in him; I behold in him a Saviour so suited to my need; he so has and is everything that my poor lost soul can desire; O deal bountifully with thy servant by satisfying my need, by pouring into my heart some of those unspeakable riches, by bringing down into it a measure of those blessings, and communicating them with thy bounteous hand to my needy, naked soul." All this seems comprehended in the petition, "Deal bountifully with thy servant."

3. Again; *the superaboundings of God's grace over the aboundings of sin*, seems also implied in the petition put forth here. Sure I am, if we watch the movements of our heart; if we daily mark the various thoughts, desires, and workings that from time to time pass through our minds, we shall feel that sin indeed abounds in us. Pride, hypocrisy, covetousness, deadness in the things of God, selfishness, sensuality—a thousand evils are perpetually struggling and lifting up their heads in our souls. Who that knows himself does not feel, painfully feel, that sin is perpetually working and striving for the mastery in his heart? that evil in all its shapes, in all its subtle and various forms, is perpetually abounding in him? What then does one thus taught want? Is it not to feel the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of these sins? Is it not to feel the superabounding grace of God freely blotting out, freely

putting away, freely covering, freely justifying from, and freely spreading its divine glory over the aboundings of these inward and horrible iniquities? When, then, he says, "Deal bountifully with thy servant," it is as though he said, "Lord, I sin with every breath that I draw; my eye, my hand, my tongue, every member of my body is continually committing some evil; but, Lord, where sin has thus abounded, there let thy grace much more abound."

But there is something, also, to my mind, very sweet and very experimental in the expression, "*Deal* bountifully." It is as though the Psalmist longed to experience some special and sensible dealings of God upon his soul. He wanted to feel the fingers of the Almighty in his conscience. He was not satisfied with merely reading or hearing about grace; he wanted some manifestations and testimonies, some inward witness, some word applied with power, some smile from the Lord's countenance, some gracious promise from his lips to cheer and encourage him. And this is the feeling, more or less, of every living soul, and of none but a living soul; for by this the Lord's family are distinguished from all others—that they, and they only, have dealings with God, and God only has dealings with them; that to them only the Lord speaks, in them only the Lord works; that to them only the Lord appears, and upon them only the Lord smiles. They are the favoured of the Lord; he guides their steps, he directs their way, and guards them every moment; he keeps them as the apple of his eye. "In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." (Isaiah 27:2, 3.) The Lord's people are, as it were, in a blessed circle, on which alone the sun shines, and on which alone the rain falls. All but the Lord's garden is left a waste wilderness; all but the Lord's people are suffered to perish in their sins; all but the Lord's family are left unprovided for in the economy of

grace, unredeemed by the blood of the Son, unblessed by the work and witness of the Spirit. But when the Lord's people are dark and dead, when their souls are barren and dry, when they can only see their vileness, and feel as though they had little to distinguish them from those dead in sin, they cannot but pour out a simple and sincere desire Godward, "Deal bountifully with thy servant."

II.—But there were certain *fruits and effects* which David knew would follow, if the Lord would but "deal bountifully" with him; and it was these effects and these fruits which would be a proof to him of God's bounteous dealings. It is not with the child of God, that so long as the Lord appears for him he cares for no gracious fruits to follow. He wants certain effects and fruits to be brought forth; and knowing his own deadness, feeling his own hardness, and being thoroughly convinced of his own helplessness, he is looking up to the Lord, as he enables him, that he would work in him; for he knows that if the Lord will but work in him, these blessed fruits and effects must follow. Two of these fruits are mentioned in our text: "That I may *live*, and *keep thy word*."

1. "*That I may live*." David, no doubt, at times felt, as you and I so often and so painfully feel, great deadness of soul. Is not this one of the chief standing lamentations of God's family? Go amongst the Lord's family, the deepest taught, the most highly favoured, and those whom we could envy most for the leadings and teachings of God upon their heart; and you will hear them lamenting their great deadness of soul, their darkness and barrenness in the things of God. And go to others who are not so deeply taught; who are less highly favoured, and you will find them with the same language of complaint upon their lips—bemoaning their coldness, deadness, and barrenness Godward. The saints of old felt this. Paul says, "Death worketh in us, but life in you."

The Psalmist cries, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust." But can the child of God rest contentedly in these feelings of deadness and darkness? Are they not sources of continual lamentation? Can we take no notice of these feelings? Can we say, they shall not be a burden to us? Can we wholly set them aside, and say, so long as we are interested in Christ's love and blood, it matters not how dead, dark, cold, and barren we are? Such language may suit those who know nothing of the vital teachings of God the Spirit in the heart; but a living soul cannot, dare not, use such presumptuous language. It is his lamentation, his grief, his complaint, that he is, day by day, so dead, so cold, so stupid, and so hard-hearted in the things of God. But the very lamentation proves that there is a principle of life that feels deadness: the very mourning and sighing shew that there is a tender conscience which groans under it; the very desire to be delivered out of it proves there have been times and seasons when the light and life of God have been inwardly felt: and the very bondage and misery that these feelings create, manifest that there have been times when the Lord has been the light of our countenance, and liberty and love have been felt in the heart. It is the contrast, the painful contrast, between light and darkness, life and death, liberty and bondage, spirituality and carnality—it is this painful contrast that makes the soul so lament and mourn its darkness, deadness, and barrenness in the things of God. But can the creature help itself? Can the creature bring itself out of these wretched feelings of darkness, death, and bondage? No; it is utterly impossible for any child of Adam to quicken or keep alive his own soul. Therefore, the Lord, from time to time sends forth the blessed Spirit into the heart; and as he revives his work in the soul, the child of God pours out this simple petition: "Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live;" that I may not always be dead and cold; that I may not ever be dark and stupid; that I may not perpetually be in

bondage and carnality; but that there may be those sweet revivings, those blessed renewings, those divine inshinings, and those heavenly testimonies whereby the heart being enlarged runs in the way of God's commandments with perfect freedom; "Deal bountifully with me, *that I may live.*"

But in what way "*live?*" We can scarcely call it life when we are in that dead, cold, stupid, indifferent state where there is just enough life to feel our death, just enough light to see our darkness, just enough liberty to mourn over our chains. As to life, we cannot call it life, except there be some manifestations from the Lord, some revival of soul, some shining-in of the light of the Lord's countenance, some bountiful dealings of God himself with the heart. But no sooner does God begin to "deal bountifully," no sooner does he begin to work with his own blessed Spirit upon the heart; no sooner do light and life, liberty and love, flow out of the fulness of Christ into the soul—than it lives, it lives! it revives! New feelings are experienced; life flows in and life flows out; prayer comes in, and prayer flows forth; the Lord is endeared to the soul; what the Lord loves the soul loves, for he makes himself very precious; and this is living, living indeed! "Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I *may live.*"

But when we "*live,*" *we live by faith;* as the Apostle says, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." We live by faith when the Lord is pleased to communicate true faith, the precious gift of faith to the heart. Then indeed we *believe.* We then believe in Jesus, believe in his blood, believe in his righteousness, believe in his person, believe in his dying love; and as faith begins to lift up its drooping head in the soul, we begin to live a life of faith upon the Son of God. And as we begin to live, we also begin to *love.* When we are in darkness, coldness, and barrenness there is neither love to God nor man; the very

ways of God are a perfect misery to us; the Bible is neglected, and prayer is little attended to; under preaching we are cold, dead, and listless; the company of God's people is forsaken, and the things of eternity seem to fade from our view. But let the Lord revive his work upon the heart, let him bestow a gracious renewing, let him drop the unction of his Spirit, let the rain and dew of his grace fall, let him manifest himself with life and power; then the whole scene changes. It is like spring after a dreary winter; it is like the outpouring of the rain from heaven after a long season of drought, "Thou renewest the face of the earth." There is a blessed change when the Lord himself is pleased to appear in the soul. Then it begins to live. There is life in prayer, life in the reading of God's word, life in hearing the truth preached, life in conversing with God's people. Life must ever be experimentally felt in the soul when the Lord is pleased to deal bountifully with his servant.

And this life will manifest itself in various ways. Whilst we are dead, prayer is a burden; when we have life, prayer is our very breath. When we are dead, the very thoughts of God are grievous; when we are alive, the thoughts of God are sweet and pleasant. When we are dead, our affections cleave to the things of time and sense; when we are alive, our affections mount upward. When we are dead, the world is our home, though it is but a miserable one; when we are alive, we are looking upward to heaven as the home of the soul when time shall be no more.

But we are utterly unable to produce these feelings in our own soul. We feel our deadness, and mourn over it; we lament our barrenness, and cry unto the Lord, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But to revive our own souls, to bring life and feeling into our own hearts, to lift ourselves up out of the pit of

carnality, is beyond our power. We want sovereign grace to do this; we want almighty power put forth in our hearts to bring about this blessed change; we want a touch from the Lord's finger, a smile from the Lord's countenance, a manifestation of the Lord's mercy. But when he deals bountifully with the soul, then it lives; and when he does not deal bountifully with it, then it droops and dies.

How different is this experience of a living soul from those deceived and deceiving professors, who think they can do something to revive their own hearts! Poor deluded creatures! they have not yet felt the misery of slavery. Poor deluded wretches! they have not yet learnt this lesson, that in them, that is, "in their flesh, dwelleth no good thing." Poor blind creatures! they know not the depth of the fall into which man has sunk. Therefore, they may talk of doing this and doing that; of reviving their own souls, and of cultivating this or that grace. But the Lord's people, who have felt both sides of the question, and know what it is sometimes to sink and sometimes to rise, sometimes to be miserable, and sometimes happy, sometimes to be in bondage and sometimes in liberty, sometimes shut up and sometimes able to come forth, sometimes dead and sometimes alive—they know, painfully know, experimentally know, that no man ever quickened, and that no man ever kept alive his own soul; and if they are to live, if ever they are to have gracious revivals, if ever their soul is to enjoy the presence and favour of God, come it must as a gracious gift from him who deals bountifully with those whom he makes and manifests as his servants.

2. *"And keep thy word."* David earnestly desired to keep God's word. However men may slight and despise God's word, or however little they may think about obeying it, David was not so minded. Read the 119th Psalm, and see

what godly sincerity and simplicity run through it, what earnest desires, what fervent breathings, that he may keep God's word. But he could not do it himself. He could not obey God's precepts; he could not shape his life in conformity with God's will; he could not for a single half hour keep his thoughts upon God; nor could he obey God's revealed will except by the Lord's grace. But he was not therefore satisfied with neglecting God's word. He could not pack it off upon the "old man," or upon the devil, and say, 'If I am one of the Lord's people, it does not matter whether I keep God's word or not.' He well knew that without God's power he could not keep it; his inability and helplessness were too deeply wrought in his soul; he was too acutely sensible of the awful fall of man, and the carnality of his depraved nature to think of keeping God's word unless he enabled him. But he was looking up to a higher power to help him to obey God's precepts. Still there was that principle in his soul, that love of God, that holy fear, that tender conscience, that desire to please God and that dread to offend him, which made the real bent of his mind to desire to keep God's word. Seeing, therefore, what a blessed thing it was to keep God's word, but feeling his inability to do so, and yet desiring to have this obedience brought forth in his heart, in his lip, and in his life, he goes to the footstool of mercy, and pouring out his soul there in simplicity, he breathes forth this petition, "Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and *keep thy word.*"

But when do we *keep God's word*?

1. We keep it when we *feel any part of it to be very precious to our soul*. Is it not so in nature? We are very careful of that which we value; bank notes, gold, silver, jewels, precious stones—how carefully these are kept because a certain value belongs to them. So if the word of God is ever made precious

to our souls, we keep it. It is with us like the Virgin Mary, she "pondered these things in her heart." They were kept by her, pondered over, diligently treasured, carefully stored.

2. But again. *If the Lord has ever applied any word to the conscience*; if any portion of his blessed truth, has ever come home to our hearts, has ever enlightened our eyes, has ever been made sweet to our souls, has ever enlarged our captivity, has ever delivered us from temptations, has ever broken a snare, has ever made Jesus precious, has ever melted us at the footstool of mercy—*that word* is kept. It is God's word; it has been made life and spirit to the soul, and it is kept because a high value is put upon it. When the Lord deals bountifully with his servant, it is, for the most part, by dropping a word into his soul, by opening up some precious Scripture to his heart, by giving him some manifestation from the revealed word of his goodness and love; and then, as this word drops from the mouth of God, it is caught up by the hungry and thirsty soul, lodged in the heart, stored and locked up in the treasure-house of his conscience.

3. But we also keep God's word when *we obey it*, attend to it, act upon it, when it is our regulator and our guide; as the Psalmist says, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." If the Lord give a check, to attend to it; if he drop an admonition, not to despise it; if he send a reproof, to submit to it; if he bring a warning, to heed it;—in this way we keep God's word. The word is thus made life and spirit to the soul; it is brought with power into the heart; and the soul keeps it, because the Lord applies it with savour and unction to the conscience.

The Lord's family are, more or less, exercised in this way; and thus they can all, more or less, join with David in this petition at the footstool of mercy. Do not all the Lord's

family, for instance, feel at times their deadness and darkness? Do not they all sensibly mourn over their coldness and barrenness in the things of God? Is it not their daily complaint? Is it not sometimes their hourly burden? Is it not often a dark cloud that seems to depress and cast them down, and spread itself over every faculty of their soul? And when they feel this, they feel also that none but the Lord can remove it. How often they cry, sigh, beg, and groan, 'Lord, that thou wouldst remove this deadness! O revive my heart, strengthen my soul, shine upon me, lead me, guide me, hold me up, visit me, bring me out of this coldness, deadness, and darkness!'

And do not all the Lord's people earnestly desire to keep God's word? They have a holy fear of offending him; they have an earnest desire to please him; they know him to be a kind Father, a tender Parent; and the longing of their souls is, to live according to his word. But they cannot do it. Their wicked heart draws them aside in one direction, Satan drives them aside in the other direction. Sometimes lust entangles, sometimes pride inflates, sometimes hypocrisy seizes, sometimes presumption swells, sometimes one corruption, sometimes another so lays hold upon them, that they cannot obey God's word. Then conviction comes, and guilt follows; their hearts are burdened, their souls are bowed down, and they desire again to keep God's word, "O that they could live to God's glory! O that they could obey him always! O that their hearts, lips, and lives were all directed according to God's revealed will and word!" But they cannot create these fruits in their own hearts, lips, and lives; and therefore, when the Lord brings them, as he does bring them, from time to time, to the footstool of mercy, they lift their hearts, if not in the very words, yet in the substance of this petition, "'Deal bountifully with thy servant;" Lord, appear for me; give me some smile, melt my heart with some discovery of thy

mercy, bring a sense of thy love into my soul, visit me with thy salvation and the light of thy countenance, and give me those sweet teachings and divine testimonies whereby I shall live and keep thy word.'

Thus the feeling sense of our own deadness becomes overruled to bring us more fervently to the footstool of mercy; and a feeling sense of our own sinfulness becomes divinely overruled to bring us more earnestly to the Lord that he would enable us to live to his glory. And thus the Lord takes occasion by our very complaints, our very mourning, our very lamentations, our very self-abhorrence and self-loathing—the Lord takes occasion by these things to manifest more of the riches of his sovereign grace, and to shew that "where sin hath abounded, grace doth much more abound."

But can the Lord deal any way but bountifully with his servants? Why has he made you his servants? Why did he strike the chains of former servitude off your hands? Why did he bring you out of the service of sin, the world, Satan, and self? Why did he ever make himself precious to your heart, win your affections, and enable you to give yourselves wholly unto him? That he might cast you off? that he might mock your calamity? that he might trample you one day into hell? that he might leave you to yourself? that he might suffer Satan to overcome you; permit your lusts to destroy you; or allow your sins to be tied one day, like a millstone round your neck, to sink you into hell? O, can our heart ever indulge thoughts so derogatory to sovereign grace? Was it not because the Lord had bounty in his heart towards you, that he first turned your heart towards himself? Was it not because the Lord had purposes of love towards you, that he first led your feet into his paths? Was it not because God first loved you, that he gave his Son to die for you? Now if he has taught you, led you, upheld you, kept you, all this time, is it

to cast you off *now*—to let you sink at last? He cannot do so, will not do so. Those whom he loves, he loves to the end; the good work which he has begun, he will accomplish, and bring to final perfection; and therefore, all the Lord's acts are acts of bounty.

But your soul may say—'Why, then, am I so straitened? Why am I so imprisoned? why so dark? why so dead? why so deserted? If the Lord "deal bountifully with his servants," and I am one of his, why does he leave me to all this carnality and wretchedness?' Why, the Lord has a purpose in so doing; he means to humble you more thereby; he means to lead you thereby more deeply into an acquaintance with the fall; he means, in the end, thereby to endear himself more to your soul; that you, sinking more and more deeply into nature's wretchedness and ruin, may more bless his precious name when he appears on your behalf. If you are his, he must deal bountifully with your soul. Let us never entertain such niggardly thoughts of God as to think that he can deal in any way but bountifully. He has a princely heart, he has a royal hand; and he therefore never has dealt, and never can deal in any way but bountifully with those that are his. Did not bounty move him to give up his only begotten Son? Did not bounty lead him first to deal with your conscience? Did not bounty induce him first to bless and deliver your soul? Did not bounty move him to keep you every step of the way? And will not bounty lead him to take you safely home? It is high treason against the Majesty of heaven to think he can deal niggardly, sparingly, scantily with his people. It is treason against his princely hand and his royal heart. He declares of himself, "I am God and not man;" and being God and not man, he therefore deals bountifully with all his servants. They live upon his bounty here, and they will live upon his bounty hereafter. He admits them to a seat at the table below, that they may sit at his board above; and thus

he gives to his people all the comfort, and gets to himself all the glory.