

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

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

What a fund of true and vital experience is contained in Psalm 119! What simplicity and godly sincerity shine through it! What breathings after God's presence and manifested favor! 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. The first is—a deep sense of the Psalmist's sinfulness and helplessness. "My soul," he cries, "cleaves to the dust; quicken me according to your word." (verse 25.) "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant; for I do not forget your commandments." (verse 176.) And indeed, what I may call the substratum of the whole Psalm is, "creature weakness and helplessness". This feeling lies under well-near every petition; and springing out of it, and built upon it, is David's earnest cry that the Lord would supply his needs.

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 your loving-kindness." (verse 88.) "I opened my mouth, and panted." (verse 131.) "I have longed for your salvation." (verse 174.) "Make your face to shine upon your servant." (verse 135.) "My eyes fail for your salvation." (verse 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 your servant;" secondly, what David knew and felt would be the fruit and effect, if that petition were granted, "That I may live and keep your word."

I. The PETITION—"Deal bountifully with your servant."

A. 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 dug. Israel

was ever to say, "my father was a wandering Syrian, ready to perish." (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. What, then, is man in a state of nature?

1. He is, as the Apostle so emphatically describes in Romans 6:17, "the slave 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 slaves to sin; as the Apostle says, "We ourselves also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse 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 did not know that "the wages of sin is death." We were hurrying on to the chambers of destruction; yet we know not, we care not, where we are rushing to.

2. But we are also, the slaves of SATAN. "When the strong man armed keeps 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 fiendish retinue, a whole array of slaves who gladly do his behests—him they cheerfully obey, though he is leading them down to the bottomless pit; for though he amuses them while here in this world with a few toys and baubles, he will not pay them their wages until he has enticed and flattered them into that ghastly gulf of destruction, in which he himself has been weltering for ages.

3. Again. In our natural state, we are the slaves 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.

4. And lastly, we are the slaves 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 slave of sin, the slave of Satan, the slave of the world, and the slave of self. He loves his master, hugs his chain, and delights in his servitude, little thinking what awful wages are to follow.

B. But if we look at the expression in the text, David calls himself God's servant, "Deal bountifully with your servant." If, therefore, we are to be brought off from being slaves 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; you 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 your 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 labors; he shall take a share of his daily toils. Jacob was Laban's servant, though his son by marriage. "I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your 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 honors his father, and a servant his master—if then I be a Father, where is my honor? and if I be a Master, where is my fear?" (Mal. 1:6)—one relationship not annulling the other.

No, 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, "No, don't worship me. I am a servant of God, just like you and your brothers the prophets, as well as all who obey what is written in this scroll. Worship God!" (Rev. 22:9.) And thus we find the Apostles, when writing to the churches, call themselves "servants." For instance, "Paul and Timothy, 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 slaves 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 diverse 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 sincerely 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 genuinely 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 need something more before we can be servants of the Lord. "Your people," we read, "shall be willing in the day of your power." We need some manifestation of the Lord's

mercy, grace, and favor 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, "Listen to me, O royal daughter; take to heart what I say. Forget your people and your homeland far away. For your royal husband delights in your beauty; honor him, for he is your Lord." (Psalm 45:10, 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, Romans 6:2-6, "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." And this was Paul's own blessed experience. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in 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 glutting us completely with 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 chief pleasure to yield ourselves up unto the Lord that we may be eternally his, that he may mold 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 your 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 realize there. He therefore makes use of this as a plea before the mercy-seat. As though he would say, "I am your servant; it is my desire to live to your glory; I would serve you with singleness of eye; I would renounce everything incompatible with my service to you; I desire to be yours, yours only; and that you would "work in me to will and to do of your good pleasure." "Deal then bountifully with your servant, that I may live, and keep your 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 own services to the foot of his Master, and thereby lay a claim to God's goodness and favor. 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 favors 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 your 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 pardon. Therefore the Scriptures use such declarations as these, "You have cast all my sins behind your back." (Isa. 38:17.) "You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19.) "I have blotted out as a thick cloud your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins." (Isa. 44:22.) "In those days, and at that time, says 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 the remnant whom I preserve." (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 Savior's fullness. "It has pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell;" and therefore the Apostle John says, "Of his fullness 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, "the Spirit will reveal to you whatever he receives from me." 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 realize them, and have them divinely shed abroad in the heart.

We are not satisfied with merely eyeing these blessings at a distance; that is but a Balaam's view, "I shall see him, but not near." 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 fullness. We want something more; we desire 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 plentiful food reaches his mouth.

No, 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 your 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 Savior so suited to my need; he so has and is everything that my poor lost soul can desire—O deal bountifully with your servant by satisfying my desires—by pouring into my heart some of those unspeakable riches, by bringing down into it a measure of those blessings, and communicating them with your bounteous hand to my needy, naked soul." All this seems comprehended in the petition, "Deal bountifully with your servant."

3. Again; the super-aboundings of God's grace over the aboundings of sin, seems also implied in the petition put forth here. I am sure, if we watch the movements of our hearts—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 super-aboundings 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 your 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 your 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 desired 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 alone, have dealings with God, and God only has dealings with them—that to them alone 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 favored 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 we will sing of the pleasant vineyard. I, the Lord, will watch over it and tend its fruitful vines. Each day I will water them; day and night I will watch to keep enemies away." (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 barren 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 Godwards—"Deal bountifully with your 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 your word."

A. "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 among the Lord's family, the deepest taught, the most highly favored, 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 favored, and you will find them with the same language of complaint upon their lips—bemoaning their coldness, deadness, and barrenness towards God. The saints of old felt this. Paul says, "Death works in us." The Psalmist cries, "My soul cleaves 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 savingly 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 which feels the deadness—the very mourning and sighing show 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 fallen 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 your 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 in-shinings, 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 do we "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 fullness 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 your 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 faith in 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 total misery to us—the Bible is neglected—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, "You renew 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. While 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 need sovereign grace to do this! We need almighty power put forth in our hearts, to bring about this blessed change! We need—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 learned this lesson, that in them, that is, "in their flesh, dwells 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 his own soul, 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 favor of God, it must come as a gracious gift from him who deals bountifully with those whom he makes and manifests as his servants.

B. "And keep your 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 dreadful 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 your servant, that I may live, and keep your 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 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, "How shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to your word." If the Lord gives a check—to attend to it; if he drops an admonition—not to despise it; if he sends a reproof—to submit to it; if he brings 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 savor and unction to the conscience.

The Lord's family are, more or less, all 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, O that you would 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—and 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 your servant! Lord, appear for me—give me some smile—melt my heart with some discovery of your mercy—bring a sense of your love into my soul—visit me with your salvation and the light of your countenance—and give me those sweet teachings and divine testimonies whereby I shall live and keep your 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 mournings—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 show us that where sin has abounded, grace does 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 slavery 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 allow Satan to overcome you? That he might 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! He 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 deals bountifully with his servants, and I am one of his, why does he leave me in 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—so 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 table above! And thus he gives to his people all the comfort—and gets to himself all the glory!