Psalms - Commentaries by William Kelly

Christian Truth: Volume 2, First-Born of All Creation

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Here (Col. 1:15), as elsewhere (Psalm 89:27), the title of first-born is taken in the sense of dignity rather than that of mere priority of time. Adam was the first man, but was not nor could be the firstborn. How could Christ, so late in His birth here below, be said to be the first-born? The truth is, if Christ became a man and entered the ranks of creation, He could not be anything else. He is the Son and Heir. Just so we are now by grace said to be the Church "of the first-born," although there were saints before the Church. It is a question of rank, not of date. Christ is truly first-born of all creation.

The Christian Shepherd: 2004, Truth and Power

“Thou desirest truth in the inward parts” (Psa. 51:6).

When souls are brought out of hindrances, when they are brought out of a false position, there is many a confession made which shows that the truth had pierced their consciences long before: only will, the world, the difficulties of family connection, a thousand snares, hinder fidelity to the Lord. But in truth, we are entirely dependent on God Himself to give force to His own truth.

Power is not in the truth simply. It is still less in a position, true as it may be. The grace of God alone gives the truth power. It is this that really works so as to deliver from hindrances, and therefore it is of such importance to our souls that the affections should be strong and rightly set.

If the affections are kept, set vigorous and pure on the object of God, then the truth is seen in its real beauty and brightness; whereas if the affections are weak or wandering after false objects, we may have all the truth in the Bible before us, but it makes little or no impression. This we see in the unconverted man fully, but the very same thing that ends in the ruin of the unconverted operates, if allowed, and in the degree it is allowed, to the hindrance and injury of those born of God.

W. Kelly (Gems From My Reading)

Christian Truth: Volume 35, Safety

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." Psalm 23:1.

Any pious Jew having a renewed nature, in old time, might know and use this psalm, saying, "Jehovah, my Shepherd." The holiness of God was not fully revealed; therefore, the conscience was not disquieted, nor the distance felt. They knew the favor of God, and counted on His goodness then; but now we are brought into the light, and see what judgment is. The veil is rent, and God's holiness is manifested, for we are in the light as He is in the light, through Jesus. "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth" (1 John 2:8).

Now that sin has been fully shown out-the death of Christ proving what the enmity of the heart is-this matter must be settled. I cannot say, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever," if I have not the knowledge of sins forgiven. I cannot talk of confidence if I have a fear of judgment and I see the desert of sin in the light of His holiness. I cannot consistently speak of One who may be my Judge, that He is my Shepherd, and I shall dwell with Him. To know Him as our Shepherd, we must not have the matter of sins being forgiven left unsettled. God cannot let sin into His presence. There must be a conscience purged. Christ has been accepted, and He puts us into His place, having made peace through the blood of His cross. He has "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26). "By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). He has "entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:12).

The starting point of Christian experience is God is for us; and "If God be for us, who can be against us?" I am the object of His favor which is better than life. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters." I shall find good everywhere. I shall lie down, no one making me afraid. Though the wolf may prowl in the way, I lie down in green pastures. It is "He leadeth me," and that must be in perfect peace and enjoyment, "beside the still waters." This is the natural Christian state. We realize all things as ours, for God is for us; therefore we may lie down.

We shall have conflict, etc., but amidst it all is enjoyment. If the sorrow gets between our souls and God, so as to produce distrust, it is sin. Even if sin comes in, sad as it is, He can restore the soul. Whether from trouble or from offending, He can restore. See what thoughts are here given about God! The psalmist does not say, I must get my soul restored and then go to God, but "He restoreth my soul." So "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father" (1 John 2:1). Who can restore but He? There may be something to correct in us, even if we have not actually fallen. There may be hardness in my heart, which trouble shows me, and the like. But if He restores, it is "for His name's sake." Whatever / am, God is for me, and not only in this way, but also against enemies. For, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Man had reason to quail at death before Christ came, but now, in the fullest sense, we need "fear no evil." Death is "ours" now. "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead." 2 Cor. 1:9. If they took my life, they could not hurt me, for I was trusting to One who could raise me. Paul as good as says, If they take this life, I have lost nothing; no, it is positive gain, for it hastens me on the road. Death is not terrible now. Why? "Thou art with me." It is terrible without this.

"Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." It is not a rod, but Thine, so I shall fear no evil. No one can compete with God. Death is the very thing by which Christ has saved me, and it is that by which He may take me into His presence-"Absent from the body... present with the Lord." It may come as a trial to exercise my soul. Well, I have to remember, "Thou art with me."

There is not only death to face and failure in life, but there are other mighty enemies (verse 5). Nevertheless, I can sit down among them, and find everything given me for food. In the presence of all, I can sit down and say, I have done with them all, for "Thou art with me." I have found that power by which they are made nothing to me. Then we arrive at still further security, joy, and blessedness: "Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." Now that Christ has ascended, and the Holy Spirit has been given, there is triumphant peace and abounding joy through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I now find God Himself as the source of all, and not only is this a present thing, but seeing what God is, I can say, "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." For us, it is the Father's house. There are not only blessings conferred, but there is a place to dwell with the Father forever. Whatever it is we meet with by the way, we know it is all for good, and we shall dwell forever with Him. Wonderful grace!

The Psalms, Psalms, Book 5, Psalm 119:86-176

Lamed. “Forever, Jehovah, thy word is settled in the heavens. To generation and generation [is] thy faithfulness. Thou hast established earth, and it hath stood. For thy judgments, they stand to day, for the whole (or universe) [is] thy servants. Unless thy law [had been] my delights, then should I have perished in mine affliction. Never will I forget thy precepts, for by them thou hast quickened me. I [am] thine: save me, for thy precepts I have sought. For me have waited wicked men to destroy me: thy testimonies I attend to. To all perfection I have seen an end: exceeding broad [is] thy commandment” (vers. 89-96).

The stability of Jehovah is seen on high; His purpose emanates thence infallibly, but establishes earth too, the universe being His servant. Then its moral power is owned, and by it the conviction that the soul is His, attending in the midst of malice to His testimonies, and in the sense of total failure feeling the all-embracing value of what expresses His mind.

Mem. “How I love thy law! all the day have I meditated on it. Thy commandments make me wiser than mine enemies, for it [is] ever mine. More than all my teachers I have understanding: for thy testimonies [are] my meditation. More than aged men I understand, for thy precepts I have observed. From every evil path I withheld my feet, that I might keep thy word. From thy judgments I have not departed, for thou hast taught me. How sweet to my palate are thy sayings! more than honey to my mouth. From thy precepts I understand; therefore I hate every path of falsehood” (vers. 97-104).

Here it is love of Jehovah's law, leading to meditation, and with blessed results in wisdom and morally.

Nan. “As a lamp to my feet [is] thy word, and a light to my path. I have sworn, and will perform, to keep thy righteous judgments. I was afflicted exceedingly: Jehovah, quicken me according to thy word. Accept, I pray, Jehovah, the free-will offerings of my mouth, and teach me thy judgments. My soul [is] in thy hand continually, yet (and) I do not forget thy law. Wicked men laid a snare for me, yet (and) from thy precepts I strayed not. I inherit thy testimonies forever, for they [are] my heart's rejoicing. I incline my heart to do thy statutes forever [to] the end” (vers. 105-112).

In this stanza the light of the word for himself is acknowledged, and its judgments for wickedness.

Samech. “Double-minded men I hate, and thy law I love. My hiding-place and my shield [art] thou: in thy word I hope. Depart from me, evildoers; and I will observe the commandments of my God. Uphold me according to thy saying, and I shall live, and let me not be ashamed of my waiting. Uphold me, and I shall be saved, and I will lock in thy statutes continually. Thou settest at naught all wanderers from thy statutes; for a lie [is] their deceit. [As] dross thou causest to cease all earth's wicked ones: therefore I love thy testimonies. My flesh shuddereth for fear, of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments” (vers. 113-120).

Wavering and evil-doing are deprecated as heartily as Jehovah's law is loved. But the need of being sustained is expressed, as on the other hand Jehovah's summary dealings with the deceitful and wicked; for indeed He is to be feared.

“I have done judgment and righteousness: leave me net to mine oppressors. Be surety for thy servant for good: let not proud men oppress me. Mine eyes fail for thy salvation and for thy righteous saying. Do with thy servant according to thy mercy, and thy statutes teach me. Thy servant [am] I; give me understanding, and I shall know thy testimonies. [It is] time for Jehovah to act: they make void thy law. Therefore I love thy commandments above gold and above fine gold. Therefore all precepts [as to] all I count right; every path of falsehood I hate” (vers. 121-128).

Hence he looks for Jehovah to act, not only on His servant's behalf but in vindication of His law.

Pe. “Wonderful [are] thy testimonies: therefore doth my soul observe them. The opening of thy words enlighteneth, giving understanding to simple ones. I opened my mouth, and panted, for I longed for thy commandments. Turn unto me and be gracious to me, as [thou art] wont to lovers of thy name. Establish my steps in thy saying, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. Redeem me from man's oppression: and I shall keep thy precepts. Let thy face shine on thy servant and teach me thy statutes. Streams of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law” (vers. 129-136).

The intrinsic and real efficacy of Jehovah's revelation is here expressed, with the spiritual desire created by it.

Tzade. “Righteous [art] thou, Jehovah, and upright thy judgments. Thou hast commanded thy testimonies [in] righteousness and exceeding faithfulness. My zeal destroyeth me, because my adversaries have forgotten thy words. Thy word [is] exceedingly pure; and thy servant loveth it. Little [am] I, and despised; thy precepts I do not forget. Thy righteousness [is] an everlasting righteousness, and thy law truth. Distress and anguish seized me; thy commandments fare] my delights. Righteousness [are] thy testimonies forever: give me understanding,

and I shall live" (vers. 137-144).

Here the righteousness of Jehovah's judgments and testimonies predominates, which he forgot not, if others did.

Koph. "I have called with a whole heart: answer me, Jehovah; thy statutes I will observe. I have called on thee: save me; and I will keep thy testimonies. I anticipated the twilight [of dawn] and cried; for thy words do I wait. Mine eyes anticipate the watches to meditate in thy saying. Hear my voice according to thy mercy; Jehovah, according to thy judgment quicken me. Pursuers of mischief are nigh; from thy law they are far off. Near [art] thou, Jehovah, and all thy commandments [are] truth. Of old have I known from thy testimonies that thou hast founded them forever" (vers. 145-152).

Dependence is the great resource in the evil day, and indeed always, with confidence in Jehovah, but according to His word.

Rash. "See mine affliction and deliver me; for thy law I do not forget. Plead my cause and deliver me: with thy saying quicken me. Far from wicked men [is] salvation, for thy statutes they seek not. Thy tender mercies [are] many. Jehovah; according to thy judgments quicken me! Many [are] my persecutors and mine oppressors; from thy testimonies I decline not. I have seen treacherous dealers and was disgusted, who kept not thy saying. See how I love thy precepts; Jehovah, according to thy mercy quicken me. The sum (head) of thy word [is] truth; and every judgment of thy righteousness [is] forever" (vers. 153-160).

If persecutors are more felt, so are Jehovah's judgments on behalf of faithfulness as well as life in power.

Schin. "Princes persecuted me without cause, but (and) at thy word my heart is in awe. For me, I [am] joyful over thy saying as a finder of great spoil. Falsehood I, hate and abhor; thy law I love. Seven [times] in the day I praise thee for the judgments of thy righteousness. Great peace have the lovers of thy law, and they have no stumbling-block. I hope for thy salvation, Jehovah, and thy commandments I do. My soul keepeth thy testimonies, and I love them exceedingly. I keep thy precepts and thy testimonies, for all my ways [are] before thee" (vers. 161-168).

This stanza goes farther: awe at Jehovah's word, yet joy in what he says. Fruit of loving the expression of divine authority, praise rises fully, and peace without stumbling. Obedience is deepened by having all our ways out before Him.

Tau. "Let my cry come near before thee, Jehovah; according to thy word give me understanding. Let my supplication come before thee; according to thy saying deliver me. My lips shall utter praise, for thou wilt teach me thy statutes. Let my tongue answer thy saying, for all thy commandments [are] righteousness. Let thy hand be for my help, for I have chosen thy precepts. I have longed for thy salvation, Jehovah; and thy law [is] my delights. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me, I have wandered like a lost sheep: seek thy servant, for thy commandments I do not forget" (vers. 169-176).

It is the worthy end of a psalm most instructive in experience for the individual and the nation.

The Psalms, Psalms, Book 5, Psalm 119:1-85

This psalm is not more remarkable in its structure than in its moral beauty—the expression of the law written on Israel's heart, after God's intervention to restore them to the land, yet before their complete deliverance. Each section consists of eight verses marked successively by each letter of the Hebrew alphabet in due order, all dwelling on the virtues of divine revelation as made known to the chosen people: law, testimonies, ways, precepts, statutes, commandments, and word generally.

Aleph. "Blessed [are] the perfect in the way, that walk in Jehovah's law. Blessed [are] they that observe his testimonies, that seek him with a whole heart. Yea, they practice no wrong, in his ways they walk. Thou hast commanded thy precepts, to keep (them) diligently. Oh, that my ways were established to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed in my looking to all thy commandments. I will give thee thanks with uprightness of heart, in my learning the judgments of thy righteousness. Thy statutes I will keep: forsake me not utterly" (vers. 1-8).

All here is introductory and general: the return after wandering and sorrowful experience; Jehovah's laws written within under the new covenant.

Beth. "By what shall a youth cleanse his path? By taking heed (to keep it) according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee; let me not wander from thy commandments. In my heart have I laid up thy saying, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed [art] thou, Jehovah: teach me thy statutes. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. In the way of thy testimonies have I rejoiced as over all wealth. In thy precepts I will meditate and regard thy paths. In thy statutes I will delight myself; I will not forget thy word" (vers. 9-16).

Here is the washing of water by the word, God purifying the heart by faith even where natural energy might be strongest.

Gomel. "Grant unto thy servant I shall live, and I will keep thy word. Open mine eyes, and I shall behold wondrous things out of thy law. For me I [am] a sojourner in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me. My soul breaketh with longing for thy judgments at every time. Thou hast rebuked proud men, accursed, that wander from thy commandments. Roll from me reproach and contempt, for thy testimonies I have observed. Princes also sat and at me talked; thy servant doth meditate in thy statutes. Thy testimonies also fare] my delights, my counselors (lit. men of my counsel)" (vers. 17-24).

Jehovah's goodness is asked according to and in His word, the delight and guide of the Israel of God, whosoever might despise.

Daleth. "My soul cleaveth unto dust: quicken me according to thy word. My ways I declared, and thou answeredst me: teach me thy statutes. The way of thy precepts make me understand, and I will meditate in thy wonders. My soul droppeth for sorrow: raise me up according to thy word. Way of falsehood remove from me, and thy law grant me graciously. Way of faithfulness I have chosen; thy judgments have I held (or set [before me]). I have cleaved unto thy testimonies: Jehovah, put me not to shame. The way of thy commandments I will run, for (or when) thou wilt enlarge my heart" (vers. 25-32).

The heart prefers abasement from and with God to ease without Him, but looks for enlargement to do His will with alacrity.

He. “Teach me, Jehovah, the way of thy statutes, and I shall observe it [unto the] end. Make me understand, and I will observe thy law and will keep [it] with a whole heart. Make me go in the path of thy commandments; for therein I delight. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to gain. Turn away mine eyes from seeing vanity; in thy way quicken me. Set up thy saying for thy servant, who [is devoted] to thy fear. Turn away my reproach of which I am afraid, for thy judgments [are] good. Behold, I have longed for thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness” (vers. 33-40).

The need of Jehovah's teaching in order to obey and be kept is here spread before Him.

Vau. “And let thy mercy, Jehovah, come to me, thy salvation according to thy mind. And I will answer my reviler a word; for I confide in thy word. And take not out of my mouth the word of truth utterly, for I have hoped in thy judgments. And I will observe thy law continually forever and ever. And I will walk at large; for thy precepts have I sought. And I will speak of thy testimonies before kings, and will not he ashamed. And I will delight myself in thy commandments which I have loved, and I will lift up thy commandments which I have loved, and I will meditate in thy statutes” (vers. 41-48).

The taste of the grace of Jehovah, of His salvation as he expresses it, is next craved for courage and fidelity.

Zaire. “Remember for thy servant the word on which thou hast made me hope. This [is] my comfort in mine afflictions, for thy saying hath quickened me. Proud men deride me exceedingly: from thy law I swerve not. I remembered thy judgments of old, Jehovah, and have comforted myself. Indignation seizeth me because of wicked men forsaking thy laws. Thy statutes were songs in the house of my sojournings. I remember in the night thy name, Jehovah, and observe thy law. This hath been to me, because thy precepts I observed” (vers. 49-56).

“The word” is owned as hope and comfort in the midst of pride and ungodliness; His name gives motive to obey.

Cheth. “Jehovah [is] my portion, and I have tried to keep thy words. I have sought thy: face with a whole heart: be gracious to me according to thy saying. I have thought on my ways, and; turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I hasted and delayed not to keep thy commandments. Cords of wicked men surrounded me: thy laws I have not forgotten. At midnight I rise to give thanks unto thee because of the judgments of thy righteousness. A companion am I to all who fear thee, and to those who keep thy precepts. Of thy mercy, Jehovah, the earth is full; thy statutes teach me” (vers. 57-64).

Here the heart rises to Jehovah Himself; so that wicked men's bands were powerless to make the law forgotten, and he saw His mercy everywhere.

Teth. “Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, Jehovah, according to thy word. Goodness of judgment and knowledge teach me, for in thy commandments I believe. Before I was afflicted I went astray, and now thy saying I keep. Good [art] thou and doing good: teach me thy statutes. Proud men have forged falsehood; with a whole heart I will observe thy precepts. Fat as the grease is their heart: I delight myself in thy law. [It is] good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes. The law of thy mouth [is] better to me than thousands of gold and silver” (vers. 65-72).

It is a soul profiting by affliction, and confiding all the more in Jehovah, to learn His statutes, better than thousands of gold and silver.

Yod. “Thy hands made me and fashioned me: make me understand, and I will learn thy commandments. Thy fearers will see me and be glad; for I have hoped in thy word. I know, Jehovah, that thy judgments [are] righteousness, and [in] faithfulness thou hast afflicted me. Let, I pray, thy mercy be for my comfort according to thy word to thy servant. Let thy compassions come to me, and I shall live; for thy law [is] my delights. Let proud men be ashamed; for [with] falsehood they perverted me: I will meditate in thy precepts. Let them turn unto me that fear thee and know thy testimonies. Let my heart be perfect in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed” (vers. 73-80).

Jehovah is looked to as a faithful Creator, and those that fear Him counted on. As He afflicted for good, so would He show lovingkindness.

Caph. “My soul fainteth for thy salvation; in thy word do I hope. Mine eyes fail for thy saying, so that I say (saying), When wilt thou comfort me? For I am become like a wine-skin in smoke; thy statutes I forget not. How many (lit. like what) [are] thy servant's days? When wilt thou execute judgment on my persecutors? Proud [men] dig for me pits, which (or who) are not according to thy law. All thy commandments [are] faithfulness: [with] falsehood do they persecute me. Help me. They had almost consumed me in the earth (or land); but I did not forsake thy precepts. According to thy mercy quicken me. I will keep the testimony of thy mouth” (vers. 80-88).

Here the prayer is instant, as the iniquity grows apace, and weakness is realized in the severest trial. It is not the hope of the Christian, who like Christ will go on high; but deliverance, as Israel expect and will have, by judgments executed manifestly on the enemy.

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