

The Divine Hand.

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THE DIVINE HAND.

 BRIEF word on this may be helpful at a time, and in a day, when human means and man's ability are so generally regarded as answering all things.

We may consider the Divine Hand in three aspects—I., The Hand of God as exercised in Providences; II., The Hand of the Lord Jesus as exercised by the Spirit's operation in believers; and, III., The Hand of the Father and the Son as exercised in the affections of Divine Persons towards those who are the children of God. The Scriptures bearing on these three aspects are Acts xvii., 24-31; Acts xi., 20-24; and John x., 27-30. A due consideration of this subject will, we think, also promote ability to rightly divide the word of truth.

I.—THE HAND OF GOD IN PROVIDENCES.

The chapter before us (Acts xvii.) amply demonstrates that this is neither peculiar to Christianity nor to Christians, but so general as to be universal. God is here presented as that God who has made the earth and everything and everybody upon it. He dwells not in anything He has made, nor needs anything from those He has made. All nations are of one blood before Him, and just live where He has put them. Each one receives his life and breath and all things from God, and all live and

move and have their being in Him. Idolatry is rebuked by the wonderful fact that God's creature man is God's offspring, and, therefore, such divine workmanship should not think of its source as comparable to the work of man's hand or material things. Moreover, this same God has at the last done His most glorious work in raising Jesus our Lord from the dead, after the poor deluded creature had put Him to death. Such then is the God who has everything and everyone in His creatorial and preserving hand, above and beyond all means of every kind that are at the creature's disposal.

We have said that the hand of God is not peculiar to Christianity. Indeed the Old Testament gives more instances of its exercise than the New. We have associated it with what are called Providences, because God is pleased to work and act by instrumental means. On this account sight and sense quite lose Him and see not His hand. For discernment of this, faith is necessary. Indeed He is spoken of in the prophets as a God that hideth Himself. He is usually pleased to hide Himself behind the means He uses, consequently, fallen man, under Satan's influence, very easily and naturally attributes everything to the visible instrumentality and leaves God out. Seldom does our God work a miracle; He could do so of course at any time, but as all is in view of faith, He keeps Himself out of sight, and thus faith only can seek Him out and find where He is in any of our cir-

cumstantial exercises. We have records of miracles, but only to promote faith in Him who did them. We have striking interventions even now, yet we believe only to encourage faith in God, and not in anywise to make heroes or heroines of those so favoured.

God is able to overrule the most trivial circumstance, and give a turn by an unseen influence at the greatest extremity, without interfering with the ordinary course of either nature, or things, or circumstances. Therefore, to rely on means, to the extent of leaving God out of our thoughts and confidence, is as foolish on the one hand as to assume independency of means on the other. There is ever the Divine and the human side of things. When Saul was on his way to Samuel to be made a King, according to God's ordering and His previous instructions to Samuel the day before, Saul was simply seeking his father's asses. No miracle was wrought, nor any extraordinary circumstance brought about. On Saul's side he went on seeking the asses, and when at the end of his resources, consulted a seer as the usual way in an extremity. This brought him to Samuel. On God's side Saul was brought there, for God had told Samuel He would send Him on the morrow.

So it is ever. We might multiply instances from Scripture, and indeed each man's career abounds with such things; only, alas! we fail to hold the connection between God and His hand in these

outward occurrences, and so take things so little and so seldom as His hand.

How often we find this to be the subject of God's special pleading with His beloved people Israel in the prophets. They suffered in severe and most painful ways, and only considered how to get through and out of these things. In this sense we read "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?" and again, "I make peace and create evil." Certainly these statements could only apply to outward circumstances. Just the same on the side of what is pleasant, for God balances matters as we can bear things. Surely all things are ever in His hand, and how wise and how blessed to take things as His hand, whether pleasant or painful, trusting in Him as the preserver of all men, specially of them that believe, and as the God who gives us all things richly to enjoy.

II.—THE HAND OF THE LORD JESUS, BY HIS SPIRIT IN TRUE BELIEVERS.

What we have before said, as to the hand of God in His providential ways, should be regarded as preliminary, and necessary, and helpful to this second aspect of the Divine hand. The immense and most extensive instruction in God's ways given to us in the Old Testament, wrought out in such wonderful ways, and most interesting

detail through so many vessels chosen for the purpose, was doubtless in view of that work of the Lord, which is now carried on in souls, under the spiritual administration of the Lord Jesus, whilst He is hidden at the right hand of God in heaven. We read that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope;" and again, "All these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come."

So that God's ways in outward circumstances then, and indeed now, are clearly in view of, and in strict harmony with the ways of the Lord Jesus, secretly and mysteriously carried on in our souls' spiritual exercises and experiences. It is of all importance for the believer to view the hand of God in circumstances as a means to discipline us, so that we may thereby be helped to subjection to the hand of the Lord Jesus, in His hidden handling of our souls by His Spirit and His own implanting of the Word. God has made Jesus Lord, and given to Him the Holy Ghost, which is shed abundantly on those who believe, in an inward way, that such may be as to their souls, inwardly, as really under the saving control of the Lord Jesus, as the whole universe will be outwardly in the world to come, when the Spirit is poured out *upon* all flesh.

We read in the passage before us—*viz.*: Acts xi. 20-24—that simple disciples on coming to Antioch announced the glad tidings that Jesus was now Lord on God's throne in heaven. "The *hand* of the *Lord* was with them." Now mark, it does not here say the hand of God as so often mentioned in the Old Testament, nor is this statement in connection with any outward circumstance save the simple announcement of the glorified Lord in heaven.

It is necessary to call attention to this, for many true Christians even may still be heard to speak of God as Lord, as though the name Lord now applied to natural circumstances and outward occurrences in a natural order of things. When Peter exhorts us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of *God*, it is in view of future exaltation, and present cares, which are to be cast upon Him as the One who cares for us. On the other hand, when James exhorts us to "humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord," it is that we may *now* be lifted up in our souls spiritually. This is clearly inward and spiritual by the hand of the Lord, whilst the other is outward, and necessarily future, as those who share the present sufferings and the future glories of our great Fore-runner.

The hand of the Lord then, was clearly in the case before us an inward unseen power, exercised in souls who had received the Spirit, and felt by the hearers of the glad tidings, spoken in the power

of the Lord by those who were moved by the hand of the Lord. We read elsewhere, "they so spake that a great multitude believed." In this sense we may say, "How shall they preach except they be sent?" for unless the hand of the Lord be with the speaker, what spiritual power can there be with his word?

"The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord." So that we conclude the hand of the Lord Jesus to be *inside*, and only in believers, as those who have received the Spirit. Thus the Lord Jesus has every true believer's spirit and soul entirely in His hand, and can as He pleases—by the Spirit in us, who never acts or moves apart from the Lord Jesus—lift us up or let us down in our souls, or handle us inwardly, according to His sovereign grace, so that all our spiritual ups and downs, so to speak, should exercise us in the fear of the Lord, even as our outward circumstances should exercise us in the fear of God.

The Word announced, the Word believed, the turning to a Person in heaven, the cleaving to Him there, yea, and the being added to Him there, all speak of what pertains to the soul inwardly, and therefore of what is spiritual. In this sense we might term the Book of the Acts of the Apostles the Acts of the Lord Jesus, as the record of that which the Lord Jesus spoke and wrought, by the Spirit, through the Apostles on

earth, and written to encourage our faith in Jesus as our Lord; but all in regard to soul matters, and His saving power from Satan's influence over our souls.

It is indeed a comfort to know that our Lord Jesus has His hand in all who have believed, and this too in such a way, that they cannot possibly either get His hand out of them or get out of His hand.

Well may we all be uncomfortable within, when not subdued and subject to Him, that is to His Spirit within. This explains much. May we frankly own it to Him. Faith in God, as God, is little enough in this day, we fear; but is not faith in Jesus as our Lord even at a lower point still? May we awake to this, for surely all God's people are as to their souls in the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ.

III.—THE HAND OF THE FATHER AND THE SON.

Now we believe, that as the hand of God in Providences is in view of subjection of soul to the hand of the Lord Jesus, the Spirit in us; even so, the hand of the Lord is in view of our obedient response to the voice of Divine Persons speaking to our hearts of the unflinching, unalterable hold that their affections have upon us.

The hand of God subdues us outwardly and bodily, bringing down pride and self-sufficiency in a natural sense. The hand of the Lord subdues

inwardly along with the hand of God, so that the inward working of an insubordinate spirit may be brought down by soul exercise, lest the spiritual advantages of our Christian portion should result in self-exultation and self-occupation. Yet both these aspects of the Divine hand are only a means to an end, and not the end itself.

Love is the great end in view. Love, Divine love, is the great lesson we have all to learn. Divine love can only be learned in Divine Persons, and no one less than the Son could make love known. Father and Son! What wonderful heart-affecting names of Divine beings, speaking straight to our hearts of Divine love towards us in the Son who gave Himself for us! Doubtless, being such as we are, we need the subduing effect of humbling circumstances, for we are men and women still, and when we have received the Spirit we need the subduing, controlling, saving power of the Kingdom in the hand of the Lord; yet, if this were all, there would be no satisfaction for our hearts, nor what we might term the quiet repose of safety and security. This the hand of Divine love alone can give, for it has a hold upon us that is the spring of all other things and will outlive them all.

There are many aspects of Divine love in John's Gospel, and many unfoldings of this most precious and blessed theme so affecting to our hearts; yet there is one peculiar to John x., and it is this—that the Son, as the Good Shepherd, *will* have His sheep,

notwithstanding everything; and in this He and His Father were perfectly One. We here get at what is behind all the Providences, and the Kingdom power, too. The strength of Divine love was such that it was irresistible and unquenchable in its determination at all cost to have those who were the subjects of the Father's sovereign will, and given to the Son out of the world which rejected Him and His Father. By this mighty hand of Divine love the Son has turned death by His own death into a way out of all that, which before shut us up in darkness and ignorance away from God. By the voice of this Good Shepherd, who gave His life for us, our hearts are called out of everything here after Himself, as the One who loved and gave Himself for us.

This mighty hand of love has done more than subdue, necessary as that may be for this; it has removed out of the way of our hearts that selfish self which shut out God, and made self the centre of our thoughts, and it enables us to give Him the place which only belongs to Him. This place He has now won in the hearts of His own by His death, and saved us from our wretched selfishness by the love thus known. He holds the heart thus won so securely that no one, whoever he be, could induce any one of His sheep ever to give up the Shepherd, whose goodness has so captivated them. True, our faith in all this may be very feeble, and our realization

very little, as our stature in these affections may be very small, yet the Shepherd can and does describe all from His own standpoint, even that of His own heart towards them, and assures us that this is His Father's also, for in this He and His Father are One.

It is striking that no true sheep ever thinks of giving the Shepherd up, though many often think He has given them up. This is evidence enough that no one can pluck them out of the hand of the Father and the Son, for these Divine Persons have got such a hold of their hearts, and have them so tightly in the grasp of their love, that no influence in existence could induce the sheep to part with the Son and the Father. Such wondrous love has made itself indispensable to those who have but once truly tasted it, and we may be assured that the love of such Persons will never let go.

Yes, the Father and the Son have secured all the sheep beyond any one's ability—be he man or demon—to take them out of their hand—that is to become so estranged or alienated as to part with them. Many may be the distractions and doubtful exercises through which we pass in learning this love against all contradictory influences, but this love always conquers, and leaves us in the end humbled and ashamed that we should have ever doubted it. Peter could plead his love to Christ, and was deeply grieved when the Lord seemed to question it, even when he had scarcely any sense of the love of the Son and the Father to him.

However, the Son and the Father have secured our hearts and that for ever, little as we may know of their great heart towards us. This we all have to learn and grow in from babes to fathers. Yet, if real this love is ever there, deep down in our hearts, and thus they have us, and have us most securely beyond all that could take us from them. There are many desponding and gloomy-minded saints no doubt, who, if asked to part with the One who died for them, and refuse to own God as their Father any more, would at once most decidedly have to say, No; that I could never do.

Why this? They are in the hand of the Father and the Son, that supreme grasp of Divine Persons and Divine affections. What a wonderful being God is! What can there be against Him? What is He not equal to? Think, that He has won such a place in the heart of a ruined, rebellious, hating creature, that no power could induce that one ever to give Him up, and this, too, after the first of that kind of man had actually given God up for a bit of fruit.

Thank God Satan is overcome now, and we are all in the mighty hand of love. Then let us apply ourselves more to learn the love—towards us—of the One we love so much that we could never part with Him, and this, too, although we have never yet seen Him. How wonderful it all is!

Surely, then, it is not difficult to see that all God's hand in Providences, and all the Lord's

hand in our souls, is in view of teaching us that love which has so secured us, and will not fail to hold us, until He comes to receive us all to Himself.

Let us not then stumble at God's hand upon us in our circumstances, nor at the Lord's hand upon our spirits, knowing that we are so securely in the hand of Divine affections, that everything that happens to us is to teach us the love of the Son and Father towards us. The great end of all this education is that we may so know and enjoy Divine Persons, that their things and their sphere may be the home of our hearts until He come. Then all will be unmingled bliss, and eternal enjoyment of that love we have learned here. This will be the grand result of all our exercises, whether in circumstances, or in our souls, or in conflict with the selfish working of our poor hearts under influences of Satan. Yet, thank God, all gives way sooner or later to the all-conquering hand of the Father and the Son.

J.D.

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