

God is Our Refuge and Our Strength Part 2

By George Gipps (n.d.)

Psalm 46:1

I. The Text Opened

A. Psalm 46:1

1. I remind you of our text, when we string all the words of our text together, it reads “we shall find God our refuge, strength and very present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. DOCTRINE: It is the wisdom of God’s church and children to make God their hope, refuge, and shelter in all their troubles.

1. I pass to the second proposition, namely, that it is the wisdom of God’s church and children to make God their hope, refuge, and shelter in all their troubles.
 - a) To the proof of Scripture I gave you in the general discussion of all three doctrines, we shall now add the demonstrative grounds of reason, which are these two.
 - b) First, because in God is full, certain, and sufficient help in all troubles.
 - c) Secondly, because apart from God, in no creature, no not in all the creatures, is there full, certain, and sufficient help.
 - (1) *If these two are as strongly confirmed as they are easily affirmed, I am sure you cannot question their validity.*
 - (2) *Instinct of nature teaches every creature to fly for shelter when it needs help (Psa. 104:18, Proverbs 30:26), as both David and Solomon tell us how the conies fly to the holes of the rocks and the goats to the steep craggy tops of it.*
 - (3) *Our only work, therefore, is to make good these two reasons.*
 2. Outside of God, among all the creatures in the universe not one can offer full, certain, and sufficient help, for these three reasons.
 - a) Reason 1: First, all creatures are instrumental subservient helps under God, in and for God, how, and how far he pleases.
 - (1) *He stops, turns, re-routes, and overturns them all at his pleasure.*
 - (2) *Therefore, in them and outside of him no safe repose for help exists.*
 - (3) *Lions, fire, water, winds, seas, and even devils and all the hosts of creatures are wholly at his beck and call.*
 - (4) *He instructs one to go, and he goes, another to stay and he stays.*
 - (5) *As the centurion said to Christ, “say the word only, and my servant will be whole.”*
 - (6) *We have plenty of Scripture to show this in particular, and we shall mention some of them.*
 - b) Reason 2: The second reason is because these instrumental helps are only partial and particular, some in one kind, some in another, but none in all.
 - (1) *They cannot all join in one sufficient help in all troubles, though God blesses and enables them to act and work.*
 - (2) *In the first creation, as well as in Noah’s flood, the waters covered the surface of the whole earth and would perpetually do so if God did not design it for the good of man.*
 - (3) *For without the atmosphere we would all smother without air to breathe.*

- (a) *Fire heats and dries, but it also burns and consumes.*
- (b) *Water moistens and cools, but it also sinks and drowns as God determines.*
- (c) *God made all the elements in his creation fruitful and serviceable for the use of man.*

(4) *But some may object that if God blesses and enables each creature to do his part, can they not all jointly supply sufficient help in all our wants and needs?*

- (a) *Answer. First, it is more wise, safe, generous, and comfortable to go immediately and directly to God, than secondarily to the creatures for help, for this is both a short cut and the more secure way, especially since God has so graciously invited us, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."*
- (b) *Who begs the keeper for a piece of venison if he has free access to ask for all the meat he wants from the Master of the game?*
- (c) *A second answer is because God reserves for himself his royal power to underwrite all the workings of all his creatures.*
- (d) *God presently withdraws his blessing from the creature when man ignores the Creator and begins to depend on the creature.*
- (e) *As it was with the prodigal son in the gospel, who on receiving his portion from his father, went into a far country and spent all he had.*
- (i) ***He only returned to the father when he was hungry and had no food.***

c) *Necessity moves us to seek the resources we need from God and to delight in him daily.*

(1) *This is why Christ's exemplary prayer teaches us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," not to inform him of our needs, because he knows them better than we do.*

- (a) *Nor is it to urge him to supply our needs, who is more ready to give than we are to ask.*
- (b) *He is not advantaged by our service, to whom the whole creation can add nothing, neither does he lack anything.*
- (c) *But merely and purely in mercy and grace he will have us see him as the source of our supply, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer," (1 Tim. 4:4-5).*
- (d) *He also wants to initiate in us his saints and servants a delight to converse with him as he did with Adam in paradise, to establish us in our new creation.*

(i) ***How much greater is one's sin who neglects such great grace offered them!***

(2) *Take the third and last answer to the objection, namely again that it is not so; because God reserves some choicest blessings for himself immediately to bestow on his children without the help of any creature and beyond the course of nature.*

- (a) *These are namely, election, redemption, justification, sanctification and glorification, with all spiritual gifts.*
- (b) *So if we choose to run to any creature for aid, whether glorified saint or angel, or even to our own merits, we make void the grace of God.*
- (c) *Psalm 73:25-26 says, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none in earth that I desire besides thee... God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."*

(3) *And if any shall here further object, God uses his ministry and ordinances as means on his behalf.*

(a) *To be sure, these means are not natural within the compass of creation, but supernatural, directly from God and from heaven specifically for those ends.*

(b) *These means work supernaturally and arbitrarily, not naturally and necessarily.*

(c) *In other words, they only work when, where, and how God pleases.*

(d) *And when they do, it is not a result of any infused inherent quality in them, but rather from God, by the concurrence of his grace and our obedience of faith in him.*

(e) *Fire burns and water wets by virtue of inherent qualities given them from God.*

(f) *Therefore, they all burn and wet all alike. But by one man's ministry a creature is converted, when not by others, because of the gracious pleasure of our good God.*

(g) *As it is said in 1 Corinthians 2:3, "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling."*

(h) *And, "my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and power," (verse 4).*

(i) *"That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God," (verse 5).*

(j) *"You see your calling, that not many wise, mighty, noble," etc. (verse 27).*

(k) *But God uses the foolish and weak things of the world to confound the wise and mighty (verse 31) that he that glories should glory (verse 29) only in the Lord.*

(l) *Rom. 9:15 states, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy."*

(m) *Verse 16 says that it is not in him that wills, nor in him that runs, but in God that shows mercy (see also verse 18).*

(n) *And whom he will, he hardens. And in Acts 16, about the woman to whom the apostles preached (among many who heard them), Scripture says that "the Lord opened her heart," (Acts 16:14).*

d) Finally, God often infuses grace without using any means, as in those he sanctifies in and from the womb like John the Baptist, those above and contrary to means, as in the thief converted on the cross, and in those like Saul, who in the heat of pursuit of the saints in order to persecute them was himself made a chief one, a choice one.

(1) *Indeed, God has brought about many miracles, even in natural and civil affairs of men that are contrary to natural principles, to demonstrate his sovereignty and to show us that we may go to and rest wholly on him, and not on the creature.*

3. The third and final reason for the clearing of this doctrine follows.

a) As the creature is only God's instrument (the first reason), and no more than a partial and particular help (the second reason), so at best it is a creature full of vanity, emptiness, and deceit, and will fail us most when we most rely on it.

(1) *This is why the Scripture frequently reminds us that it is a lie, and feeds lies to those who fly to it.*

(a) *"We have made lies our refuge, and have hid ourselves under falsehood," (Isa. 28:15).*

(b) *"The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies," (verse 17).*

(c) *“O Lord my strength, my fortress, my refuge in the day of affliction, surely our fathers have inherited lies,” (Jer. 16:19).*

(d) *The antithesis is between God and all things, between vanity and things in which there is no profit.*

(e) *So either the creature is a mere natural agent, without free choice, and God curses the creature which proves to be a lie to us because we trusted in it (i.e., he makes the earth as iron and heaven as brass to us).*

(f) *On the other hand, if the creature is a voluntary agent (as men and angels) then it often proves to be a lie to us maliciously, as wicked men and devils act as servants to the god of this world.*

(2) *Another option is that if they are good men, they prove a lie to us through weakness, (forgetfulness or other weakness), attempting to undertake something that is above their strength and in so doing frustrate their good intentions.*

b) And this, beloved, is the most candid interpretation that we attribute to a very many of our present state affairs.

(1) *We trust their failings are from human frailty and not from devilish malice and treachery.*

(2) *Of course, there are those that offend out of malicious wickedness.*

(a) *But God will find those out and call them into account.*

4. Lastly, even good angels prove a lie to us, not by any malice or weakness in them, but because we place and force our hopes on them, promising ourselves more from them than they are capable of doing, more than they dare or can promise to do for us.

a) Though truly in this case we prove to be a lie unto ourselves, by placing our trust in the creatures, which they would not have us do.

b) The papists here again are miserably hindered because of their emphasis on the adoration and invocation of the glorified saints and angels.

c) Observe the example of John who, when falling at the angel's feet to worship him, the angel said, “See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God...” (Rev. 19:10, 22:9).

d) The Scripture abundantly charges us not to trust our own wits, wisdom, wills, wealth, strength, favor of princes, multitude of people, or whatever other being in creation.

e) We are not to trust even our Christian goodness, for this is also an aspect of creation.

(1) *And in this you have the demonstration of our second doctrine: that the whole creature is vanity and a lie to trust in.*

(2) *Therefore, it is the wise saint who flies to and relies on God alone in all their troubles.*

(3) *Though we should never fix our trust elsewhere, yet even this consideration alone questions (or rather denies) God's all wise, just, good, and powerful providence.*

(4) *For if we did truly believe he is all these and more to us, we would certainly trust in him.*

(5) *“O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me,” (Psalm 25:2).*

(a) *And yet the common curse of these times is that we trust God no further than we see him.*

(b) *And in so doing we forsake our first love and the cause of Christ which we were converted to.*

III. The Text Applied

A. USE 1

1. But then much more are those to be reprov'd who look to anything or anyone else to trust instead of God.
 - a) Why is it so hard for us to simply trust God?
 - b) I answer that, first, we are all so swayed by our physical senses that we live totally in and for the present, counting one bird in the hand of more value than two in the bush – though it is that bush of Moses which burned and was not consumed (Exod. 3:2-3; Deut. 33:16), and though we have God's assurance that for all our thorny perplexities we have his wise and gracious providence to, at length, remove us out of them and set us at liberty so that they do not consume us; and still, we fail to call on him.
2. A second way we distrust God and trust in the creature instead is by not seeking repose in him, which esteems and honors him.
 - a) On the contrary, we think, talk, and dote wholly in the worth of our counselors.
 - b) "You say 'today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain.' Whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. For that you ought to say, 'If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that,'" (James 4:13-16).
 - c) Therefore, God will remove our idols from us, if he intends good to us, as he has already removed some of our prime counselors in order to teach us to trust in him, the living Lord, who never fails those that trust in him.
3. A third and last application is to hope in and fly wholly to God in all our troubles.
 - a) As Lamentations 3:24-26 states, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good to them that wait for him, that seek him. It is good that we should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."
4. I shall drive home this exhortation by offering four rules which may serve both as the means directing us and as marks determining whether we do or not.
 - a) Rule 1: (which is both directive and detective), 1. Seek to gain a right knowledge and esteem of God in all his attributes of power, wisdom, truth, goodness, mercy and providence, first from his word, and then from your own observation.
 - (1) *And if you have not yet attained the latter, then choose to trust him on his bare word, which so honors God that he will make it good to you sooner or later in your experience.*
 - (2) *"They that know thy name," (that is to say, "thy attributes") "will put their trust in thee, for thou Lord hast not forsaken them that seek thee," (Psa. 9:10).*
 - b) Rule 2. Learn to trust God freely and fully.
 - (1) *Trust in nothing else without or above, nothing but him (Psa. 44:6-8).*
 - (2) *"Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not to thine own understanding," (Proverbs 3:5).*
 - c) Rule 3. Trust in God constantly, always, in all difficulties and improbabilities, in your greatest extremities, in your greatest securities.
 - (1) *In all conditions.*
 - (2) *When you possess all those things that the world trusts in, still do not look to those things but to God.*

(3) *And when you have nothing that those of the world trust in, yet even then rest in him securely.*

(4) *Happy is that man who trusts in God in all occurrences whatsoever.*

(5) *For I am certain that a true hope and trust in God would bear us up against the most mountainous troubles that can befall us (Psa. 62:5-8).*

d) Rule 4. Trust in God perpetually, to death and even in death itself.

(1) *This is proper to the believer, who has hope in death, in contrast to all the world's hopes which perish at death.*

(2) *This made the blood of the martyrs a true seed to the church because those who did not obey the word were won without the word when they beheld the martyrs' resolution coupled with the fear of God.*

(3) *And so, devoid of the fear of death, they were convinced of a more glorious estate after death which positioned them to hear instruction, and so often led to their saving conversion.*

(4) *And in the interim, they rest in perfect bliss, free from sin and sorrow, expecting a glorious resurrection.*

(5) *In this regard, they are likened in Scripture to seed (1 Cor. 15).*

(a) *"Trust in the Lord Jehovah forever, for in him is everlasting strength," (Isa. 26:4).*

(b) *"Though he slays me, yet will I trust in him," (Job 13:15).*