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STUDIES

IN THE

SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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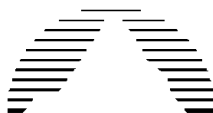
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow in their influence upon God's people around the world, through their clarity, careful exposition, and Christ-centeredness.

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INQUIRY REWARDED

Since we are creatures prone to extremes, we need to be constantly on our guard against permitting the pendulum of life swinging too far over to the right hand or to the left. Even a virtue will degenerate into a vice if it be not duly controlled—as justice untempered by mercy, or mercy ignoring the requirements of righteousness. It is only as our character is formed and our conduct is regulated by the Word of God that a due balance will be preserved. If on the one hand miserliness be condemned—“there is that withholdeth more than is meet” (Pro 11:24)—so prodigality and wastefulness is equally reprehensible: “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost” (Joh 6:12). If callousness and hard-heartedness, being “without natural affection” (2Ti 3:3), is a mark of moral degeneracy, so to be carried away by his emotions is unbecoming to a saint: We are bidden to mortify “inordinate [excessive] affection,” as well as “evil concupiscence” (Col 3:5).

In view of what has just been alluded to, it is meet we should point out that if on the one side we find the Scriptures reprehending curiosity, yet on the other, they contain many examples wherein a spirit of inquiry was Divinely rewarded. It is the idle, carnal, profitless curiosity which is disallowed; while it is the reverent and practical inquiry—which issues from a holy ambition—that is encouraged. There is a wide difference between a vain inquisitiveness and a sincere desire to obtain fuller knowledge of what is pleasing to God and will prove to be profitable unto the soul. The query of Zacharias unto the angel, “Whereby shall I know this?” (Luk 1:18), proceeded from unbelief, but when the mother of our Lord inquired, “How shall this be?” (Luk 1:34), she voiced a becoming perplexity. Pilate’s “What is truth?” (Joh 18:38) issued not from a heart that desired to be taught, but “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” (Psa 119:9) expresses a genuine longing to learn how to overcome evil.

When Abraham said, “Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?” (Gen 15:2), that was neither the language of unbelief nor the query of impertinent curiosity, but the breathing of honest perplexity and reverent inquiry. Consequently, the Lord did not rebuke him for his impudence, but favoured him with a gracious revelation. When the angel of the Lord appeared unto Moses in a flame of fire out of the bush and he said, “I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt” (Exo 3:3), he spoke “as one inquisitive and bold in his inquiry” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714), as is clear from the Lord’s response. But when, on a later occasion, he made request, “Shew me thy glory” (Exo 33:18), he was very far from asking for the gratification of any natural desire; rather, he was anxious for a better and clearer revelation of Jehovah, and the same was granted unto him.

“Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?” (Mat 9:14). The occasion was when Matthew, recently called by Christ, had made a feast of thanksgiving, of which our Lord and the apostles partook (Mat 9:9-11, and compare Luke 5:29). Unlike the questions of the scribes and lawyers—the Pharisees and Sadducees who sought only to ensnare the Saviour—this inquiry was a desire to resolve their perplexity. It is clear from John 4:1-2 and Matthew 11:2-14 that the followers of John the Baptist continued during our Lord’s ministry to form a separate body. They followed the rules which John had laid down for them, so that they had their own days of fasting and their own forms of prayer (Luk 11:1). It was because Christ’s disciples fasted not—so different from the conduct of the master they revered—they asked this question. It was answered not with sternness, but with gentleness.

“Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” (Mat 11:3). Poor John was languishing in prison—not singing praises as the two apostles in the Philippian dungeon (Act 16), but dejected, disappointed at the non-appearance of the Messianic kingdom. Apparently, his disciples had free access to him (Luk 7:18) and brought word to him of the ministry of Christ. Though His preaching attracted great multitudes, and though He performed startling miracles, yet all things continued as before—there was neither deliverance for himself, nor for the Nation. Under this perplexity, his heart was sick from hope deferred (Pro 13:12), he took the only wise course and sent to Christ, asking—almost in despair—“Art thou he that should come...?” (Mat 11:3): If so, why tarry the wheels of Thy chariot? In His answer, Christ declared that the promised One *had* come: His miraculous works evidenced it. But above the signs and wonders, “to the poor the gospel is preached” (Luk 7:22), His kingdom was to be one of pardon of sin and peace of con-

science! “And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me” (Mat 11:6) was a warning for John to find no stumbling-block in the humiliation of Christ and the spiritual nature of His kingdom.

“Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?” (Mat 17:10). The scribes believed in and taught a literal fulfilment of Malachi 4:5, so the apostles were puzzled over the brief appearing and then the disappearing of Elijah when Christ was transfigured. If Elijah was to come and prepare the way, why had he appeared on the mount for a moment only? Wisely did they spread their problem before Christ, for He never discouraged any one who sought Him in honest perplexity. His answer (Mat 17:12) was a repetition of what He had said in Matthew 11:13-14. Men were expecting the re-appearing of the great Tishbite as the forerunner of Christ, hence the question asked of John (Joh 1:21)—a vacant chair is still placed for him at all the great Jewish solemnities. But the true meaning of Malachi 4:5 had been intimated by the angel in Luke 1:17, confirmed in Matthew 11:14—if they really accepted John’s message, they need look for no further fulfilment of Malachi 4:5, for the Baptist’s message continues unto the end: Acts 17:31; 2 Peter 3:9. “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Mat 11:15) was always used by Christ where something more than natural perspicuity was required, namely, spiritual discernment—without *that*, prophecy is a sealed book.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

34. *Philippians 1:8-11, Part 2 (:9)*

How different are the prayers of Scripture from those which we are accustomed to hear in religious gatherings! Who ever heard this petition offered in public: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phi 1:9) or "sense"! How many now in the "churches" would understand its purport if they should hear it? True spirituality, vital godliness, and personal piety have almost become an unknown quantity in Christendom today. Even if we turn to that much smaller circle which prides itself in being sound in the Faith and upholding the banner of Truth, how very different is this bold and comprehensive request, [that love] "may abound yet more and more" (Phi 1:9) from the halting and half-hearted, "If it can please Thee to favour us with a sip" or "a few crumbs," of those who seem utterly afraid to ask for anything worthy of such a God as ours! How little can such souls be acquainted with "the God of all grace" (1Pe 5:10). We entreat them to seriously ponder the petitions of Paul and observe that *he* was not straitened, and therefore, he asked for no half measures or scanty portion. Above all, realise that these prayers are recorded for our instruction, for our encouragement, for our emulation.

As pointed out in our last, the substance of this petition was that there might be a better balance in these saints, that their love and knowledge might keep pace with each other, that their affections should be intelligently exercised. Paul longed that their warm-heartedness should be accompanied and directed by a well-instructed understanding; that they might have a spiritual judgment which would cause them to weigh things and enable them to discriminate between the true and the false; that they might perceive what to love and what to hate, what to seek and what to shun; that they should be able at all times to distinguish between duty and sin, and know what *was* their duty, no matter how dark the times or how difficult their circumstances and case. In order thereto, the apostle requested first that they be granted a better and fuller "knowledge"—that they be more thoroughly instructed from the Word. Second, that their love be regulated by "judgment" or wisdom, or spiritual instinct—an enlightened perception of the fitness of things. Third, that they might possess something more than a mere theoretical knowledge, namely, that which is obtained by and through "sense"—the soul has faculties which correspond to the five senses of the body.

First, "judgment" [or "sense"] here has the force of *faith*—for it is through faith we perceive, know, and understand spiritual things. Second, by "judgment" is meant *experience*—something distinct from and following faith. Thus in Romans 5, after declaring we are "justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1), the apostle went on to show how faith is educated and added unto through God's dealings with us: "Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience" (Rom 5:3-4). By means of the trials which faith encounters and the discipline of daily life, we are taught humble submission to God, and, notwithstanding obstacles and failures, to persevere in the path of duty. As we do so, God graciously supports the soul and communicates His consolations; and faith is strengthened to meet the next trial. Thereby, we obtain a personal experience of God's goodness and faithfulness, as well as of our frailty and sinfulness. We acquire a first-hand acquaintance with the reality of the snares against which His Word warns us and of the veracity of His promises by which He cheers us. This "experience" breeds "hope" (Rom 5:1-4), or a steady confidence and growing expectation that God will not suffer us to abandon our profession and make shipwreck of the faith, but will continue ministering to us, delivering us from our foes, and finally bringing us safely through to Glory.

This "experience" is an acquired knowledge in spiritual matters, founded on sense. It is a personal realisation of the mercy, power, longsufferance, and grace of God. The Christian starts out with a bare faith in the veracity of God or certainty of His promises. He doubts not that, in due course, God will make them good unto him. But later, as God performs one promise after another, there is a sense of experience added to his faith, which deepens his assurance and enables him to face the future with still greater confidence in God: "By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me" (Psa 41:11). The young Christian—believing that his Father is a prayer-hearing God from the declarations of His Word—has no doubt about it. But in the process of time, he has occasion to say, "I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications" (Psa 116:1), for he now has sensible proof, a visible demonstration thereof. Six years ago, when Hitler and Mussolini were at the height of their success, we assured our friends on the authority of Scripture that their success would be a short-lived one: By now, we have actually *seen* that "the triumphing of the wicked is short" (Job 20:5).

The things of God are first cognized and apprehended by faith, and then by experience—by personal contact and more intimate acquaintance with them. By God's effectual working in them that believe (1Th 2:13), the saints find that to be true which the Word affirms of them. This experimental knowledge of the Lord is spoken of as a "tasting" of Him (1Pe 2:3)—which is something even more convincing and satisfying than sight, as food and water are to a famished man. To taste His goodness, to feel His power, to experience His tender compassion is to have a real proof within ourselves. "When Christ doth heal our diseases, remove our anguish, sanctify our natures, give us the promised help in temptations, relieve us in our distresses, and bridles our corruptions, then we know that He is ours" (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677). The human side of this is presented in Hebrews 5:14: "Those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." As it is by eating and drinking that we discover what foods agree or disagree with us, so by the exercise of our graces we learn what things and persons are helpful or harmful to us. As by our exercises at school we become proficient scholars, so by experimental knowledge—gained by exercising the faculties of our souls—do we become proficient believers.

By "sense" is also meant, "Deep and glorious *impressions on the soul*, over and above the light of faith or knowledge by ordinary experiences, and such impressions are truly sense than knowledge, as all find that enjoy them; and they are therefore, said to 'passeth knowledge' (Eph 3:19) and are entitled 'the peace of God, which passeth all understanding' (Phi 4:7), and to be rejoicing 'with joy unspeakable and full of glory' (1Pe 1:8). This high and heavenly sense and enjoyment, the apostles used to pray for on behalf of those they wrote to. Thus Paul for the Romans, 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost' (Rom 15:13). And Peter exhorted those Christians to maintain and not to lose the unspeakable joy they had at conversion by exhorting them to keep up that sense and taste, even as new-born babes (1 Pe 2:2-3). He would have them, though men in understanding, yet always to be as babes in their affections and tastings of the love and goodness of God; and if they wanted it, to cry for it" (Thomas Goodwin, 1600-1680). Have you received fulfilment of this promise, "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures" (Psa 36:8)?

Third, *its reasons*. Were we making an analysis of any strictly doctrinal portion of Scripture, we should style the things mentioned in Philippians 1:10-11 "the *effects* of an ardent love as it is regulated by knowledge and all sense"; and such indeed *are* the four things specified. But since the contents of these verses are a part of the apostle's prayer, it seems to us that they should be regarded as so many supporting pleas of the request which he had just made. He longed to see the affections of these Philippian saints intelligently directed, in order that they might first "approve things that are excellent"; second, that they might "be sincere"; third, that they should be "without offence till the day of Christ"; and fourth, that they should be "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Phi 1:10-11). Those were the reasons *why* he asked for them that particular blessing. How they serve to emphasise the great importance and value of love being enlightened! How much depends upon having our affections educated by spiritual knowledge and controlled by spiritual sensibility! How the walk of a well-balanced Christian will honour his Lord! What blessed consequences follow when heavenly wisdom and mature experience guide the actions of a heart that is warm toward Christ and His redeemed! Then let us strive diligently after such.

"That ye may approve things that are excellent" (Phi 1:10). Here again, there is a fulness in the Greek terms, which is difficult to translate adequately by any single equivalents in English, the margin giving us the alternative, "that ye may try things that differ." However, in this instance, the two renderings come to much the same thing. Following our usual custom, we will put the reader in possession of the main facts, so that he can check our exposition and draw his own conclusions. The Greek word here—rendered "try" in the margin—denotes that kind of trial to which metals are subjected when their nature and genuineness is being tested. Thus, when the apostle says, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1Pe 1:7), the resemblance is that of the goldsmith submitting the ore to a process of proof in his crucible. All is not gold that glistens! The uninstructed eye is not able to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit—the metal must be properly examined, tested by the "touchstone" and by fire to ascertain beyond doubt whether it be precious, or worthless.

Elsewhere, the apostle Paul frequently made use of this same metaphor: "*To prove* the sincerity of your love" (2Co 8:8), which denotes, to give opportunity to attest the genuineness of your love. "Examine your-

selves, whether ye be in the faith; *prove* your own selves" (2Co 13:5)—take nothing for granted, but honestly and diligently examine your hearts and lives, and ascertain whether or not your profession be a valid one. "*Prove* all things; hold fast that which is good" (1Th 5:21). In the preceding verse, he had said, "Despise not prophesyings," which, though they proceeded from gifted men, were not infallible, and therefore, needed to be carefully pondered and weighed in "the balances of the Sanctuary." In each passage (as also Galatians 6:4, 1Ti 3:10, etc.), the same Greek word ("dokimazo") is used as the one rendered "try" and "approve" in our text. Now that which the reader needs to realise is that before he is capable of attesting the genuineness of his love, verifying the validity of his profession, or proving the worth or worthlessness of the preaching he hears or reads—whether that teaching relates to doctrine or practice—his love must needs be warm and enlightened by knowledge and directed by good judgment; otherwise, he is likely to be deceived by what is erroneous.

But the Greek word also signifies "an *approving* or judgment of what is good, a savouring, a relishing, closing with and cleaving unto the goodness of it *as* good and best for him." A love which is directed by an enlightened mind and a holy heart not only has the capacity to detect counterfeits and contraries, but sweetly realises the excellence of Divine things and delights therein. Thus, in Romans 12:2, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may *prove* what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"—where the Greek word for "prove" is the same as that in our text rendered "approve." In the preceding verse, Christian duty, as a whole, is viewed in reference to God Himself; but in verse 2, it is contemplated in connection with that system of things seen and temporal, amid which we live our lives day by day. Both of the imperatives are in the present tense, denoting a *process*; there is to be an ever-widening gulf between the character and conduct of the world and that of the saint, and an ever-growing conformity unto Christ not only outwardly, but inwardly, his thoughts and affections being more and more set upon things above—the "mind" here being the equivalent of the *whole soul*.

Regeneration of the communication of spiritual life is a Divine act, in which we are wholly passive, being done once for all. But "renewing," as the tense denotes, is *continuous*. This too is a Divine work, as Titus 3:5 and 2 Corinthians 4:16 inform us; yet it is also one in which *we* are called upon to be active, in which we are required to co-operate, as Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 4:23 clearly show. This "be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2) is the human-responsibility correlative of "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment [senses]" (Phi 1:9). This "be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" is accompanied by our responding to or making use of the light which God has given us—which is the necessary condition of our obtaining further light from Him. That light has a considerable extent already dispelled from our understandings and hearts the mists of self-love, and has revealed to us infinity, and worthier objects and pursuits. And if those objects have the supreme place in our affections, and those pursuits become the dominant quest of our energies, those mists will be still further cleared away, and we shall perceive yet more clearly the excellency and desirability of Divine and spiritual things, and we shall become more absorbed in and satisfied with them.

As the "be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2) is the counterpart of "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment [senses]" (Phi 1:9); so the "that ye may *prove* what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" in Romans 12:2 is parallel with that "ye may *approve* things that are excellent" (Phi 1:10) of our prayer. Just in proportion, as we disdain and reject the principles, policies, and practices of the world (which may be summed up in self-love and self-pleasing), and earnestly endeavour to be governed by the precepts and promises of God—seeking to please and glorify Him, delighting ourselves in Him and being more assimilated to His holy image—do we acquire the capacity to *prove* for ourselves the excellency of His will. As by a spiritual touchstone, we perceive and realise the immeasurable superiority of the Divine will to self-will, and joyfully surrender ourselves unto it. In other words, as our spiritual love to God and to His people is regulated by the knowledge of His Word and is confirmed by our spiritual sensibilities, we discover for ourselves that Wisdom's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Pro 3:17). We learn by experience what peace and joy there is in being conformed to God's will.

There is a vast difference between a theoretical conviction that God's will is "good, and acceptable, and perfect," and actually proving it to be so for ourselves; yet that is what we *do*, just so far as we heed the injunctions, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2). Just so far as we render a willing and more constant obedience to those exhortations, we not only prove for ourselves that God's commandments "are not grievous" (1Jo 5:3), but we discover that "in keep-

ing of them there is great reward" (Psa 19:11)—that is, in this life. Then it is that we "*sing* in the ways of the LORD" (Psa 138:5). Then it is that we obtain a personal acquaintance, an experimental realisation of the goodness, the acceptableness, and perfection of the Divine will. We determine for ourselves both by an inward relish and an outward practice the excellency of His will. We both prove and approve that it is designed for *our* "good," for our being "acceptable" or pleasing to God, for our being "perfect"—that it contains in it everything necessary to make us spiritually complete and to be all that we ought to be. How much we lose dear reader, when we suffer ourselves to follow the dictates of self-will and be in any degree conformed to this evil world—the ways of the ungodly!

How far, and to what extent have you, my reader; and how far have I, the writer, proved for himself by actual experience, by rendering obedience to God the goodness, acceptableness, and perfection of His will? That is the question which each one of us should seriously put to himself. How far have I perceived the will of God in all the latitude and excellency of it, and how far has my heart and actions approved the same? There is great variety and vast number of sins forbidden and duties commanded. To what extent have we discerned the *spiritual part* of them, to what degree do we really relish the same? Do we cherish His precepts? Do we hold fast to them amid a perverse generation which universally despises and flouts them? Are all of my ways ordered by them? Can I truly say with the Psalmist, "Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem *all* thy precepts concerning *all* things to be right; and I hate every false way" (Psa 119:127-128)? For it is in God's commandments and precepts that His *will* is made known. Only so are we *really* approving things that are excellent (Phi 1:10), as Paul requested in our prayer.

The connection between the clause we have been considering and the one preceding it is therefore clear and simple. Where there be an increasing love which is directed by spiritual knowledge and holy sensibility, there is an enlarged capacity in the understanding to judge and discriminate—both to discern and detest what is injurious, and to recognise and cherish what is beneficial. Or, to invert the order of thought, the apostle longs that these saints should "approve things that are excellent" (Phi 1:10)—that they choose them, cleave unto them, delight in them, and be regulated by the same. But in order thereto, their love must both abound and be educated, so that they might have a true judgment and sense of the real worth of the different objects which competed for their hearts, and be suitably affected by the same; and that could only be obtained by *making trial* of them. Love is not to be exercised indiscriminately, but objects must be esteemed only according to their nature and worth, and that worth is experimentally ascertained by an actual acquaintance with them. As the sweetness of honey is best known by the eating of it, so the preciousness of Divine and spiritual things is realised in proportion as the soul is actually and actively engaged with them.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

14. *Rahab (2:14-21)*

Rahab's request of the two spies that they should enter into a solemn covenant with her—guaranteeing the preservation of her family from the impending destruction of Jericho (Jos 2:12-13)—placed them in a very awkward predicament; or it is more accurate to say that it presented an acute problem, which we fear some of our moderns would fail to solve aright. Only a short time before, Israel had received the following commandment concerning their treatment of the Canaanites: "When the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them" (Deu 7:2). In the light of that express prohibition, what ought the spies to do? The correct answer to that question turns upon the proper application of a real and necessary distinction between the Divine commands—a distinction which has been drawn by well-instructed scribes in all ages—namely, between moral and positive laws: the one being grounded in essential rectitude; the other, in sovereignty. The moral nature with which God has endowed us teaches that parents should cherish and care for their children, and that children should revere and obey their parents; but it would not prompt Christians to practice baptism or observe the Lord's Supper—those are positive institutions, *ad extra*.

The things enjoined by God's positive laws depend solely on His sovereign pleasure, there being no other reason for them. But the things enjoined by His moral precepts are required not only by the authority of His will, but also by that nature and order of things which He has placed in the creation. The former are alterable at His pleasure, being appointed by mere prerogative; the other are perpetual, enforcing as they do the necessary distinctions of good and evil. All the ceremonial laws given unto Israel were of the former order: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and thy neighbour as thyself—the sum of the Ten Words—belonging unto the latter. The former are only of local application unto those who receive them by Divine revelation; the latter are universally binding on all who are possessed of moral accountability. Whenever obedience to a positive law would involve a plain violation of the principles of the moral law, then the inferior must necessarily yield to the superior—though God requires us to believe and do many things which are contrary to our depraved inclinations, yet He never demands from us that which is opposed to the moral nature He has given us.

An illustration of the distinction pointed out above is supplied by the case of David and his men when they were a hungered, and he requested five loaves of the showbread. Ahimelech the priest pointed out that that bread was not for common use, but had been sanctified unto the LORD (1Sa 21:3-6); yet after being assured the men were free from defilement, he gave the loaves unto David. None other than our Lord tells us that though it "was not lawful" for them to eat the sacred bread, yet they were "blameless" (Mat 12:3-6). Thus the positive law which prohibited the priest from giving the hallowed bread for food unto David and his men yielded to the pressing need of the situation. "The Son of David approves of it, and shows from it that mercy is to be preferred to sacrifice, that ritual observances must give way to moral duties, and that that may be done in a case of urgent providential necessity which may not otherwise be done" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

The law laid down in Deuteronomy 7:2 was, then, a positive one, and neither absolute in its force, nor binding in all cases—for justice itself requires that we must ever show mercy unto the merciful and never return evil for good. Now Rahab *had* shown mercy unto the two spies, and at great risk to herself. The instincts of humanity would fill them with kindly feeling toward their benefactress. Gratitude is a law of nature, and the law of nature takes precedence over positive precepts. Thus, those two godly Israelites had sufficient moral sensibility and spiritual discernment to perceive that Deuteronomy 7:2 could not debar them from acting justly and kindly toward her who had ensured their safety. Yet, though their duty was quite clear, that did not warrant them acting hurriedly and rashly. No arrangement should be entered into thoughtlessly, on the impulse of the moment. No definite promise should be made, until we have carefully weighed what we are committing ourselves unto, for our word must be our bond. Still less should we enter into any solemn compact without first prayerfully and thoroughly pondering all that is involved in it.

"And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye [better "thou," as in verse 20] utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee" (Jos 2:14). Let it be noted that the fulfilment of Rahab's request was suspended upon an "if"! Necessarily so, for those men were entering into a covenant with her—as her "swear unto me by the LORD" (Jos

2:12) intimated (compare 1 Samuel 20:16-17; Psalm 89:3)—and a covenant is a mutual compact in which each party agrees to do or grant certain things in return for the other fulfilling certain conditions. That which they agreed upon was qualified by three provisos, the first of which was that she must continue loyal to their interests. Thus, we see their circumspection in binding Rahab to this condition. “They that will be conscientious in keeping their promises will be cautious in making them, and perhaps may insert certain conditions which may otherwise seem frivolous” (M. Henry). The Christian should always qualify his promises with “the Lord willing” or “the Lord enabling me.”

They solemnly bound themselves for her preservation in the common destruction of Jericho. Their “our life instead of you to die” (margin) not only affirmed that they would be as much concerned about her safety as their own, but signified a definite imprecation of God’s judgment on them if they failed in their part of the agreement. “We will *deal* kindly and truly with thee” (Jos 2:14) was an assurance that their words would prove no empty ones, but that there should be an actual performance of what was promised. Observe, too, how they employed the language of faith: “It shall be when the Lord hath given us the land.” There was no doubt in their minds about the issue. Instead, they were fully convinced that Canaan was going to be conquered—yet “by the Lord” and as His “gift”! We too should wage the fight of faith with full assurance of the outcome, that the Lord will grant ultimate success so that each exclaims, “I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Psa 23:6). In their “we will deal kindly,” they gave proof they were imbued with no ferocious spirit, and were far from being the blood-thirsty creatures which infidels charge the conquerors of Canaan with being.

“Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall” (Jos 2:15). As soon as she received promise from the spies, Rahab set about assisting them in their escape. It was most convenient for them that her house was so situated, for had it been in the centre of the town, there was much more likelihood of their being recognised and arrested; but being on the outer wall, they could be let down by night unseen by unfriendly eyes. Yet let it be pointed out that the convenience was no mere happy co-incidence, but *ordered* by the Lord, for of all men, He hath appointed “the bounds of their habitation” (Act 17:26)—a sovereign God ordained where each of us should be born and reside. But not only was the particular location of Rahab’s house of assistance to the spies, it also served to display more evidently the power of God, for it was the wall of the city which “fell down flat” (Jos 6:20), and the preservation of her lone house amid the universal devastation stood forth as a monument—both of His might and of His mercy.

“And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way” (Jos 2:16). It is striking to behold the blending together of Divine power and human precaution all through this incident. The grand truth of Divine preservation is typically illustrated, yet that preservation was accomplished *by* the use of means at every point: Rahab’s by obeying the orders she received, her house because of the cord in her window, and the spies by concealing themselves in the mountain. Let those who teach the “eternal security of the saints” see to it that they present it *with* the safeguards by which God has hedged it about. True, the accomplishment of His eternal purpose of grace is not left contingent upon the acts of the creature; nevertheless, He who has ordained the end has also appointed the means by which that end is reached. God has not promised to conduct any one to Heaven without the exercise of his faculties and the discharge of his responsibility. He deals with us throughout as moral agents, and requires us to heed His warnings and *avoid* that which would destroy us (1Co 9:27).

Committing my soul and its eternal interests into the hand of the Lord by no means releases me of obligation. “He who has fixed the limits of our life, has also entrusted us with the care of it; has furnished us with means and supports for its preservation, has also made us provident of dangers, and that they may not oppress us unawares has furnished us with cautions and remedies. Thus, it is evident what is our duty.” That, my reader, is a quotation not from the Arminian John Wesley, but from the Reformer, John Calvin!—alas that so many who claim to be Calvinists lack his wisdom and balance of doctrine. The truth of Divine preservation is not designed as a shelter for either laziness or licentiousness. God’s promises are made to those who honestly strive against sin and mourn when tripped up by it, and not to those who take their fill thereof and delight therein—for He undertakes to keep His saints *in holiness* and not in wickedness. If God has turned our feet into that way which leadeth unto life, we must continue therein. Otherwise, we shall never reach our desired destination. Only those who press forward to that which is before reach the goal (Phi 3:14).

Saving faith is far more than an isolated act. It is a spiritual principle which continues to operate in those to whom it is communicated. Divine preservation works through Christian perseverance, for grace is given us not to render our efforts needless, but to make them effectual. God does not carry His children to glory in a state of passivity, but works in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phi 2:13)—to hate and fear sin, to desire and strive after holiness, to heed His warnings, to shun the things which would destroy, to *keep* His commandments. The Christian must continue as he began, for Christian perseverance is the maintaining of godly affections and practices. We are indeed “kept by the power of God,” yet “through faith” (1Pe 1:5); and therefore, so long as the flesh is left in us, and we in the world, we are required to attend unto that exhortation, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12)—for the verses which follow solemnly remind us that many of those who came out of Egypt never entered Canaan! “They could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19).

“And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way” (Jos 2:16). Observe how this illustrates and enforces what we have just said above. The spies were under the immediate care of God, they had trustfully committed themselves into His hands, and He would certainly bring them safely back unto Joshua. Nevertheless, they were required to exercise care and caution; and they did so, for Joshua 2:22 shows they acted in exact accordance with Rahab’s counsels. They might have argued, We cannot afford to waste three days in the mountain, rather does it behoove us to make all possible speed to Joshua and make our report unto him. But that had been only the feverish energy of the flesh: “He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16)—alas that that wise old proverb, “Slow but sure, is sure to do well” is now despised. Nor did those spies, under the plea of trusting God, recklessly disregard the peril of being captured by the pursuers—that would have been tempting Him, acting presumptuously, rather than believingly. God requires us to conduct ourselves circumspectly, to exercise good judgment.

“And the men said unto her, We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear. Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread [or “rope”] in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father’s household, home unto thee” (Jos 2:17-18). If the spies must need take due precautions for their personal safety, equally indispensable was it that Rahab should act in obedience with their orders; otherwise, they would be released from their promise, and the oath would no longer be binding upon them. Their oath, as pointed out above, was for the confirmation of the covenant they had entered into with Rahab—and a covenant is a mutual compact between two parties, which is rendered null and void if either of them fails to keep his part of the agreement. Now the Gospel itself is a covenant, for in it, God offers and promises certain blessings upon our acceptance of His offer and compliance with His terms (Psa 50:5, Jer 50:5), and we are required to be “*mindful* always of his covenant” (1Ch 16:15) and to “*keep* his covenant” (Psa 25:10)—for a fuller discussion of this, see the March and April articles on “Reconciliation.”

The binding of the scarlet cord in her window was for the purpose of *identification*, so that when Israel made their attack upon Jericho, they might know which was her house, and spare it. It must be borne in mind that when the spies gave her those instructions, they knew not that the Lord was going to work a miracle, and cause the walls of the city to fall down without any assault upon them by Israel. That was not revealed unto Joshua until later (Jos 6:5), illustrating the fact that God’s will is made known unto us only a step at a time—He sees the end from the beginning (Act 15:18), but He does not permit us to do so (Joh 13:7). That cord was the “token” for which she had asked (Jos 2:12), and it enabled the army of Israel to ascertain which was her house—just as the sprinkled blood on the door-posts of the Hebrews in Egypt caused the angel of death to recognise their houses and pass over them when He went forth to slay the firstborn (Exo 12:13); and just as the 144,000 who are exempted from judgment are “sealed...in their foreheads” (Rev 7:3), their identifying mark being that of *obedience* to the Lord (Rev 14:1-5)—for it is obedience which manifestatively distinguishes the children of God from the children of the devil.

“And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on *our* head, if any hand be upon him” (Jos 2:19). Thus, the terms of the covenant or agreement were precisely stated and carefully explained to her before they parted. Those of Rahab’s family who were to be preserved from the common destruction must be inside her house, *separated from the wicked*. If they forsook that shelter and mingled with the heathen inhabitants of Jericho, they would perish with them—as Noah and his

family had in the flood—unless they had separated from the ungodly and taken refuge in the ark. Typically, this teaches the imperative necessity of separation from the world if we would escape from its impending doom. The case of Rahab's family remaining secluded in her house as the condition of their preservation is parallel with Acts 27, where we find that though the angel of God assured Paul, "There shall be no loss of any man's life" (Act 27:22), yet when the sailors were about to abandon it, he cried, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved" (Act 27:31)—and except Christians maintain separation from this evil world, they cannot escape destruction with it.

"And *if* thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear" (Jos 2:20). Let those who proclaim the grand truth of "the eternal security of the saints" fail not to give due place unto that "if"—the "if" not of uncertainty from the Divine side, but of enforcing responsibility from the human. Let them carefully ponder the "if" in Romans 8:13 and 11:22; 1 Corinthians 15:2; Colossians 1:23; and Hebrews 3:6, 14. Scripture does not teach a mechanical security, but one which is obtained through our use of means and avoidance of dangers. The preservation of Rahab from destruction was conditioned upon her obedience to the instructions of God's messengers, and her use of the means they specified. First, she must mention not their business or betray them to their enemies. She must be loyal to them and promote their interests—a figure of love for the brethren. Second, she must place the scarlet cord in the window so that her house might be recognised—we must bear the identifying mark of God's children. Third, she must abide in her house—we must maintain separation from the world.

"And she said, According unto your words, so be it" (Jos 2:21). There was no resentment, no offering of objections. "And she bound the scarlet line in the window" (Jos 2:21), manifesting by her obedience that she was an elect and regenerate soul. Unless you, my reader, are walking in obedience to God, you have no scriptural warrant to conclude you are "eternally secure." The *reward* of her faith and obedience is revealed in other passages. First, she "perished not with them that believed not" (Heb 11:31). Second, she "dwelleth in Israel" (Jos 6:25): from being a citizen of heathen Jericho, she was given a place in the congregation of the Lord. Third, she became the honoured wife of a prince in Judah, the mother of Boaz, and one of the grandmothers of David (Mat 1:5). Fourth, she was one of the favoured ancestresses of the Saviour (Mat 1). Thus did God do for her exceeding abundantly above all that she asked or thought: delivered from awful depths of sin and shame, elevated to heights of honour and dignity.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

12a. Its Responsibilities

This is an aspect of our subject which will by no means appeal to the empty professor, nor, we may add, to the backslider. The Antimonian is all for hearing about the free grace of God and His unforfeitable gifts, and if the preacher should point out that favours and privileges entail obligations, he is condemned by them for his legality; but if he is to receive his Master's, "Well done" (Mat 25:21-23), he will not have the united approbation of a large congregation. It betrays a most unhealthy state of soul when we wish to hear only of what Christ did and procured *for* sinners, and little or nothing of what He requires *from* the beneficiaries of the same. God has inseparably joined together privilege and duty, relationship and obligation; and we are lacking an honest heart if we eagerly seize His promises and despise His precepts. It betrays a sad condition of soul if we are not anxious to ascertain, "What doth the LORD require of thee" (Mic 6:8).

It is our firm conviction that one of the main causes for such a vast number of empty professors and backslidden believers in Christendom today was the disproportionate and unfaithful preaching of most of the prominent 'orthodox' pulpits during the past century. Instead of giving a conspicuous place to that which *tested* profession—both doctrinally and practically—nominal saints were lulled into a false sense of security. Instead of insisting that conversion is but the beginning of the Christian life, an enlisting under the banner of Christ to "fight the good fight of faith" (1Ti 6:12)—in which the devil is to be steadfastly resisted and a ceaseless warfare waged against indwelling sin—the siren song of, "Once saved, always saved" was dinned into the ears of those whose walk was thoroughly carnal and worldly. Instead of a searching and probing ministry, the pulpit cried, "Peace, peace" unto those still at enmity with God.

Those who were flattered as being "the stalwarts of the Faith" were often most partial in which aspects of the Faith they concentrated upon. Those whose proud boast it was that they had "not shunned to declare unto you *all* the counsel of God" (Act 20:27), were, for the most part, men who repudiated human responsibility and detested the word "duty." It is handling the Word of God deceitfully to emphasise the expression, "ordained to eternal life" (Act 13:48) and to ignore "good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10). It is withholding that which is profitable unto souls (Act 20:20) to leave them in ignorance that Christ is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey him*" (Heb 5:9). It is highly dishonouring to God when we pretend to magnify "the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7) if we fail to insist that His grace effectually teaches its recipients to be "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, [that] we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:12).

Having dwelt upon the privilege-side of our theme in previous articles of this series, we should be woefully lacking in proportion and completeness if we now failed to consider the duty-side of it. It behoves us to point out God's full rights and just claims upon us, as well as His rich favours and unmerited mercies unto us. It becomes the reader to whole-heartedly welcome our efforts to execute this part of our task. The language of a reconciled soul is, and must be, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?" (Psa 116:12). How shall I express my gratitude unto that blessed One who has shown me such unspeakable mercy? If the wrath of God be removed from me, and I am now taken into His unclouded and everlasting favour, how shall I now most fitly comport myself? Since such measureless love has been so freely lavished upon me, how can I best show forth my gratitude? That is the question we shall now endeavour to answer.

1. *By fervent praise unto God.* O what thanksgiving is due unto Him for His matchless grace! As it was the supreme demonstration of His love in sending forth His Son to make peace, that should be the principal spring of our thanksgiving. When God bids His people, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isa 42:1), whom He gave "for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house" (Isa 42:6-7); the use which He enjoins them to make of the same is, "Sing unto the LORD a new song" (Isa 42:10). As the initial response of one who realises that his trespasses are no longer imputed to him—but instead that the perfect righteousness of Christ is reckoned to his account—must be "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Psa 103:1), so too it should be his daily—as it will be his eternal—response.

“God might have destroyed us with less cost than He hath reconciled us: for our destruction there was no need of His counsel, nor fitting out and sending His Son, nor opening His treasures; a word would have done it, whereas our reconciliation stood Him at much charge. It was performed at the expense of His grace and Spirit to furnish His Son to be a sacrifice for our atonement. An inexpressible wonder that the Father should prepare His Son a mortal body that our souls might be prepared for immortal glory” (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680). The apostle could not consider the will of our Father in this work without interrupting his discourse with a doxology: “To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Gal 1:4-5); and such should be our response. As the angels rejoiced in the manifestation of the wisdom and power of God in the incarnation of His dear Son, much more should we rejoice at the triumphant outcome of His mission and of our personal interest in the same, joining with them in their “Glory to God in the highest” (Luk 2:14).

Who is it, my reader, who maketh thee to differ from others? Is it not God? Then ascribe glory to Him. If He has made thee to differ from others in the exercise of His sovereign mercy, do thou differ from them in the sounding forth of His praises? When David considered the works of God’s hand in the stellar heavens, he exclaimed, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” (Psa 8:4)! And if we consider what sovereign favour hath wrought for and in the regenerate, well may we be overwhelmed with wonder. Pardon of but one sin would make us forever debtors to God, for every sin is a hatred of Him and renders us obnoxious to eternal torments. What then is due unto Him from those whom He had pardoned sins more in number than the hairs of their heads! O the marvel of it that one who is by nature a child of wrath should be made an heir of Heaven; that one so vile should be taken into the bosom of the Father! Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.

2. *By care to please God.* Since He went to so much trouble and cost in restoring us, how our thoughts and affections should unitedly engage in earnestly endeavouring to please Him. The Decalogue is prefaced with “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exo 20:2), as an incentive and inducement for Israel to render cheerful obedience unto Him. “I am the LORD thy God who in Christ hath delivered thee from eternal death and brought thee into My everlasting favour” is the tenour of the Gospel—a far weightier motive for the Christian to place himself unreservedly at God’s disposal. This it is which will demonstrate the worth and genuineness of our praise: Whether it be merely an emotional spasm, or the overflowing gratitude of a heart which has been won by Him. If our expressions of thanksgiving and worship be sincere, then the homage of our lips will be borne out by the honouring of God in our daily lives. Whenever I am tempted to gratify the flesh, my reply should be, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9); or “Is this thy kindness to thy friend?” (2Sa 16:17)—shall I so evilly requite the One who has been so gracious unto me.

The service which God requires from us is that of love, and not of compulsion. We must indeed keep our eyes on the Rule, so that our actions may be conformed to its requirements; otherwise, God will ask, “Who hath required this at your hand?” (Isa 1:12). But there must be something more: The Lord looketh on the heart, as well as the outward performances. Duties are not distinguished by their external garb, but by the spirit prompting them. A box of ointment with an affectionate regard for the Lord, nay a cup of cold water, is valued and registered. The smallest act of service unto God which issues from gratitude is prized by Him more highly than all the imposing works of men without it. It is at this very point that the saint differs radically from all others: Whatever be the religious performances of the legalist, the formalist, or the hypocrite, they proceed from some form of self-esteem; but that of the believer is wrought by gratitude. It is the love of Christ which constrains him, which moves him to take His yoke upon him, which so motivates him that his chief concern is to keep His commandments and show forth His praises.

If there be good will in the heart toward God, it will be evidenced by choosing and doing the things which are pleasing unto Him. There will be a readiness of heart unto obedience, for love prepares and pre-disposes the heart unto what He requires from us. Good will in the heart toward God expresses itself in the actual performing of what He has enjoined, for the language of gratitude is “his commandments are not grievous” (1Jo 5:3). When love to Rachel set Jacob a work, it was not unpleasant to him; and though it took him seven years, he deemed it not long. So far from a reconciled soul, feeling that God is a hard Master imposing a severe task upon him, he is thankful to have the opportunity to manifest his appreciation. When David made such costly preparations for the house of God, he asked, “But who am I?” (1Ch 29:14), considering it a marvel of condescension that the great God should accept aught at his hands. So far from begrudging any self-sacrifice, love will mourn that what has been done is so little and so imperfect, realis-

ing that nothing can be too much or too good for the Lord—and not only too small to answer God's love, but to adequately express his own.

3. *By trusting in God.* Since He be reconciled to me and I to Him, then it is both my privilege and duty to look to Him for the supply of every need and confidently expect the same. The Christian should habitually view Him as "the God of peace" (Heb 13:20); and under that title and relationship, implore Him for daily supplies of grace—for it is as such that He works in us "that which is wellpleasing in his sight" (Heb 13:21). God has promised to be "as the dew" unto His people under the Gospel (Hos 14:5); and as the dew descends from a clear sky, so does grace from the One who has blotted out our iniquities. We should look then continually for spiritual strength from God in Christ. All our approaches to Him should be begun and attended with a sense that we have been taken into His favour. In all His communications to His people, God acts as reconciled to them, and so should we eye Him whenever we come to the Throne of Grace. As there is not one mercy God shows us but springs from this relationship, so every duty we offer to Him and petition we make of Him should rise from a sense of the same. This should cause us to believe with a holy boldness.

Here is a cordial for us in our sorest problems and trials. What can the greatest difficulty or acutest strait signify when God remains reconciled to the soul in Christ! Providence is ordered by your best Friend. This is the grand stay which Christ has furnished His disciples: "That in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation" (Joh 16:33). Is not that a sufficient defence against all the roaring of men and the rage of Satan? Though the world frown, God in Christ smiles upon thee. It was a sense of their reconciliation to God which turned prisons into palaces and dungeons into chambers of praise for those who were persecuted by the ungodly. Here is a shield against fear, security against danger, a treasure against poverty. Under the sharpest affliction, the believer may distinguish between God as a loving Father and avenging Judge. Carnal reason and sense will indeed dispute against faith, and while they be listened unto, faith will stagger; but if the heart turns to and be engaged with a reconciled God, it will discern under the severest chastisement the rod of mercy, wielded by a love maintaining our best interests.

There should be an expecting of temporal mercies. If God were in Christ reconciling us to Himself, then most assuredly He will be in Christ giving forth all suited benefits. It is entirely inconsistent with His amity to withhold anything really needed by us, for in that case, as one pointed out, it would not then be a "much more" as Christ argued, but a *much less*: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Mat 7:11). Yet it is to be borne in mind that it is *only* "good things" which He has promised to give, and that He alone is the proper judge as to what *is* "good." If God feeds the ravens, certainly He will not permit His friends to starve. If He spared not His only Son, He will not begrudge mere food and raiment. Our covenant God will deny His children nothing which is for their welfare. If we lived in the realisation of that, how contented we should be in every situation!

4. *By cherishing God's peace.* "The remission of sins past gives not a permission for sins to come, but should be a bridle and a restraint" (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677). "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psa 130:4). The end of Christ's death cannot be separated: He is no Atoner for those He is not a Refiner, for He gave Himself to "purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). As there was a double enmity in us—one rooted in our nature and another declared by wicked works—so there must be a change both in our state and an alteration of our actions. God and sin are irreconcilable enemies, so that where there is peace with one, there must be war with another. Fire and water would sooner agree than a peace with God and a peace with sin. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa 57:21). We should be very tender of God's peace, that no breach fall out between us: "If I have done iniquity, I will do no more" (Job 34:32) must be our sincere desire and resolution; otherwise, we are but hypocrites.

Peace was broken by the sin of the first Adam; and though it was restored by the last Adam, yet our obedience is necessary if we are to enjoy the fruits of it: "Great peace have they which love thy law" (Psa 119:165). Then let us beware of relaxing in our watchfulness or of becoming self-confident in our ability to face temptations: "He will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly" (Psa 85:8). "When we sought for pardon, sin was the great burden which lay upon our conscience; the wound which pained us at heart, the disease our souls were sick of; and shall that which we complained of as a burden become our delight? Shall we tear open our wounds which are in a fair way of being healed, and run into bonds and chains again after we are freed of them?" (T. Manton). That were indeed crass, fol-

ly, madness. Backsliders forsake their peace, as it is said of them: "They have forgotten their restingplace" (Jer 50:6). Peace can only be recovered as we repent of our sins and renew our covenant with God.

5. *By using our access to God.* The most blessed result or consequence of reconciliation is that believers have the right of approach unto God, and therefore, it is their privilege to freely avail themselves of the same. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus... Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb 10:19, 22)—that is, with a firm belief in the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice and a firm reliance upon the same. As God was in Christ reconciling, so He is in Him receiving our praises and petitions. As Christ made satisfaction for us by His death, so He provides the acceptance of our sacrifices and services by His merits. Though justification be a transcendent mercy, yet it would not complete our happiness unless we could commune with God. Peace was not the thing God ultimately aimed at—it was but the medium: He would be our Friend, that there might be sweet intercourse between Him and His people. This is an inestimable privilege of which we should make constant use.

But those who would enjoy communion with the Lord must needs be careful to avoid everything which would separate from Him. He is a jealous God and will brook no rivals. If our fellowship with the Holy One is to be intimate and constant, then we must keep a close guard against grieving the Spirit. We must beware of cooling affections, slackening in the use of means and fighting against sin, slipping back into our old ways. If we neglect those duties, there can be no real, acceptable, or satisfying drawing nigh unto God. Christ has indeed opened a new and living way for His people in God's presence, and has provided them with both the right and title so to do; nevertheless, there are certain moral qualifications required of them if they are to really draw nigh unto the Holy One—certainly those who simply offer cold and formal prayers do not do so.

There are many of God's own children who are cut off from conscious access to Him, for their sins have caused a breach (Isa 59:1-2): "With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward" (Psa 18:26). Loose walking severs our communion with God, and then He acts distantly toward us: "How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" (Psa 13:1) has been the sorrowful lament of many a wayward saint. Our folly must be repented of and humbly confessed before there can be restoration unto fellowship with God. If we would draw near unto Him, it must be with "our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb 10:22)—i.e., our internal and external man cleansed from defilement, our members kept from evil and used for God. "Universal sanctification upon our whole persons and the mortification in an especial manner of outward sins are required of us in our drawing nigh to God" (John Owen, 1616-1683).

6. *By rejoicing in God.* How great should and may be the joy of believing souls! To be instated in the favour of God, to have the Almighty for our Friend, to have the light of His countenance shining upon us—the knowledge of that in the understanding is tidings of great joy, the sense of it in our hearts is "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1Pe 1:8). Reconciliation and the realisation of it are two distinct things. The one may be a fact, yet through unbelief or carelessness, I may lack the assurance of it. But what comfort and happiness is his who has the assurance that he is at peace with God, and the testimony that his conscience is sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb! Then, even though the fig tree blossom not, the fields yield no meat, and there be no herds in the stalls, "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab 3:18). "As sorrowful"—over our sins—yet "alway rejoicing" in the Lord (2Co 6:10) is our bounden duty.

7. *By devotedness to God.* "What? know ye not... ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1Co 6:19-20). That summarises the responsibilities of the reconciled—to conduct themselves as those who are not only the creatures, the children, but the purchased property of God, in whom He has the sole right. Since He spared not His own Son for us, we should withhold nothing from Him, but present ourselves unreservedly to Him as "a living sacrifice" which is indeed our "reasonable service" (Rom 12:1). We must spare no lust, nor indulge anything which is hateful to Christ, but denying self, take up our cross, and follow Him. Let us earnestly seek grace for the discharge of these duties.

THE GREAT CHANGE

To say that the “old things” which are “passed away” (2Co 5:17) when a person becomes a new creature in Christ refer to “old desires, principles, and appetites” is flatly contradicted by Romans 7:14-25. The old nature, the “flesh”—or evil principle—most certainly does not pass away, either wholly or in part, neither at the new birth, nor at any subsequent stage of his life while the Christian is left here on earth. Instead, the “flesh” remains in the saint, and “lusteth against the Spirit” (Gal 5:17), producing a continual conflict as he seeks to walk with and please the Lord. That a real and radical change takes place in the soul when a miracle of grace is wrought within him is indeed blessedly true, but to describe that miraculous change as consisting of, or being accompanied by, the removal of the old sinful nature or indwelling corruption is totally unwarranted and utterly unscriptural. And it is just because so many have been confused by this error and sufficiently affected by it as to have their assurance undermined and their peace disturbed, that we are now writing upon the subject.

It should be carefully noted that 2 Corinthians 5:17 is not describing some exceptional experience which is attained unto only by a favoured few from among the children of God, but rather it is postulating that which is common to the whole family: “Therefore if *any man* be in Christ, he is a new creature.” The “if any man” shows that we have here a proposition which is general, one which is of universal application unto the regenerate—as much so as though it said, “if any man be in Christ, his sins are pardoned.” This at once assures the Christian that it is not through any fault of *his* that he comes short of such a standard as some would appear to measure unto. Nor is our verse giving an account of that which is gained as he reaches Christian maturity, still less that which will characterise him only when he reaches Heaven; instead, it predicates a present fact the moment one is vitally united to Christ. It is true that the substantive “he is” (or “there is”—Revised Version) is supplied by the translators, yet the legitimacy, or rather the necessity, of it is evident from what follows: “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

The opening “Therefore” bids us ponder the context. Upon turning to the verse immediately preceding, here is what we read: “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him [so] no more” (2Co 5:16). We wonder how many of our readers understand that verse, or have even formulated any idea of what it is speaking about. If they consult the commentators, instead of finding help, they are likely to be the more perplexed—for no two of them are agreed as to its meaning, and some of them would have been more honest if they frankly owned they did not understand it, instead of darkening counsel by a multitude of meaningless words. Now it is not obvious that in order to a right perception of its significance, we must seek answers to the following questions: Whom was the apostle here instructing? Upon what particular subject was he writing? What required his taking up *this* subject? Or, in other words, What was his special *design* on this occasion? This alone will afford us the true perspective.

As we have pointed out before in these pages, it is necessary to know something of the circumstances *which occasioned* the writing of the Corinthian epistles, if we are to obtain an insight of many of their details. Soon after Paul departed from Corinth (Act 18), false teachers assailed the saints there, seeking to undermine the apostle’s influence and discredit his ministry. The result was that the believers became divided into opposing classes, engaged in disputes and being guilty of carnal walking (1Co 1:11-12). Those who said, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos” were in all probability the Gentile converts; whereas those who boasted, “I of Cephas; and I of Christ” (glorying in a fleshly relation to Him which the Gentiles could not lay claim unto) were undoubtedly the converted Jews. Thus, the enemies of the Gospel had succeeded in sowing the seeds of discord in the Corinthian assembly, creating jealousies and animosities by an appeal to *racial* prejudices, seeking to perpetuate the ancient enmities of Semitism and anti-Semitism.

Those false teachers had come to Corinth with “letters of commendation” (2Co 3:1), issued most likely by the temple authorities. They were “Hebrews” (2Co 11:22), professing to be “ministers of Christ”—i.e., of the Messiah (2Co 11:23); yet, in fact, they were “false apostles, deceitful workers,” the ministers of Satan (2Co 11:13-15). They had attempted to *Judaize* the Gentile saints, insisting that such could not participate in the covenant blessings and privileges of God’s people, unless they be circumcised and become the proselytes of the Mosaic religion. It was because of this the apostle had written to them, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1Co 7:19). *That* was indeed a startling thing to affirm, for it was *God* who had instituted circumcision

(Gen 17:10), and for many centuries, it had entailed peculiar privileges (Exo 12:48). The Lord Jesus Himself had been circumcised (Luk 2:21). But now it was “nothing”—useless, worthless. Why so? Because of the *great change* which had taken place *dispensationally* in the kingdom or economy of God upon earth. Judaism had become effete, a thing of the past. Something new and better had displaced it.

Those false teachers had evidently denied that Paul was a true apostle of Christ, arguing (on the basis of what is recorded in Acts 1:21-22) that he could not be such, since he had not (as the Eleven) accompanied Him during the days of His flesh. This had obliged him to write unto the saints vindicating the Divine authority of his apostleship (1Co 9:1-3). That his first epistle had produced a salutary effect upon them is clear from 2 Corinthians 1 and 2, yet it had neither silenced the “false apostles,” nor completely established those whose faith they had shaken; hence, the need for his second epistle to them. On the one hand, the major part of the assembly had expressed the warmest affection for him (2Co 1:14; 7:7); but on the other, the boldness and influence of his adversaries had increased, and their false charges and determined efforts to repudiate his apostolic authority (2Co 10:2; 11:2-7, 12:15) moved him to indignation. Those two adverse elements at Corinth is what serve to explain the sudden change from one subject to another, and the noticeable variations of language in this second epistle.

In the third chapter of 2 Corinthians (to which we devoted an article in the November 1938 issue), the apostle vindicated his apostleship in a manner which demonstrated the irrelevancy and worthlessness of the objections of his detractors, and which placed the faith of his converts on an unshakeable foundation by affirming that God had made him and his companions “able [or “sufficient”] ministers of the *new testament*” (2Co 3:6)—or as it should be rendered, “of the new covenant.” Therein, he struck the keynote to all that follows, for unto the end of the chapter, he proceeded to draw a series of contrasts between the old and new covenants, and exhibited the immeasurable superiority of the latter over the former. By so doing, he entirely cut away all ground from under the feet of those who were troubling the Corinthian saints—for what mattered it whether or no Paul had companied with Christ during the three and a half years of His public ministry, or whether his converts were circumcised or not, seeing that the old order of things, Judaism, had been “done away” (2Co 3:7)! Who would complain at the absence of the stars, when the sun was shining in its meridian splendour?

With unmistakable wisdom from on High, Paul wove into the texture of his personal vindication a lovely picture of the various respects in which Christianity excelled Judaism. The one was founded upon what was written on “the tables of stone” (Deu 9:9) and the ceremonial law which accompanied the same; the other is rendered valid and vital by “the Spirit of the living God” writing in “fleshy tables of the heart” (2Co 3:3). The one was “of the letter” which “killeth”; the other “of the spirit” which “giveth life” (2Co 3:6), those expressions denoting the leading characteristics of the two covenants or economies—compare Romans 7:6. Judaism is likened unto “the letter,” because it was something external and objective, for it presented a rule of Divine duty, though it conveyed neither disposition nor power to obey; Christianity has to do with the soul and is made effectual—Romans 1:16. “The one was external, the other spiritual; the one was an outward precept, the other an inward power. In the one case, the law was written on stone; in the other, on the heart. The one was therefore letter, the other spirit” (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878).

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, the apostle contrasts the *ministrations* of the two dispensations or economies. It is *not*—as the Dispensationalists erroneously teach—that he here opposes Grace (a word never occurring in this chapter!) to the Moral Law, but that Christianity is set over against Judaism. It is a great mistake to suppose that Paul was here speaking of the Ten Commandments as such. Rather, it is the whole Mosaic system which he has in view—“when Moses is *read*” (2Co 3:15), the reference is primarily to the *ceremonial* law, wherein there was much that pointed forward to Christ and typified His work of redemption, but which, because of their carnality, the Jews discerned not. Judaism was a “ministration of death” (2Co 3:7)—the Moral Law is designed to slay all self-righteousness, for it condemns, and brings in the whole world guilty before God, thereby revealing the sinner’s dire need of salvation. The ceremonial law with its priesthood and ritual likewise exhibited both the guilt and pollution of man, as well as the ineffable holiness and inexorable justice of God, so that without shedding of blood is no remission. The brazen altar in the outer court, where the sacrificial victims were slain, testified loudly to this fact that Judaism is “a ministration of *death*.”

Though the ministration of the old covenant was one of “death,” nevertheless, it was “*glorious*” (2Co 3:7). Judaism was not of human invention, but of Divine institution. In it there was a solemn and yet glorious revelation of the moral perfections of God. In it there was a wondrous and blessed foreshadowing of

the person, office, and work of the Redeemer. In it there was a wise and necessary paving of the way for the introduction and establishment of Christianity. That “glory” was adumbrated on the countenance of the mediator of that covenant (Deu 5:4-5, Gal 3:19) when he returned to the people after speaking with Jehovah in the mount, for the “skin of his face shone” (Exo 34:29-30). That radiance of his features was emblematic of the glory pertaining to the old covenant—and that, in two noticeable respects. First, it was only an *external* one; whereas a glorious work of grace is wrought *within* the beneficiaries of the new covenant. Second, it was but a *transcient* glory, as the quickly-fading brightness of Moses’ face symbolized; whereas that connected with the new covenant is one that “fadeth not away” (1Pe 1:4). Christians, beholding the glory of the Lord, “are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Co 3:18).

Any one who gives an attentive reading to 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 should have no difficulty at all in understanding what the apostle was referring to when he said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “old things are passed away.” First, he tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:7 that the glory connected with the old covenant “was *to be* done away.” But he went further, saying, second, “For if that which *is done away* was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious” (2Co 3:11)—the old economy and its ministry were but temporary and had even then been set aside. The sacrificing of bulls and goats was no longer valid now the Antitype had appeared. Third, in verse 13, he uses still stronger language: “That which is abolished” (2Co 3:13) or “destroyed.” In the former epistle (1Co 13:10), Paul had laid down the maxim that “when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away”; so here, he declares the new covenant annulled the old, for that was never designed to have anything more than a transcient existence. The “old things” which are “passed away” (2Co 5:17) are circumcision, the temple ritual, the Levitical priesthood, the whole of the ceremonial law; in a word, Judaism and all that marked it as a system.

In 2 Corinthians 4, the apostle continues the same subject. The “this ministry” of verse 1 is that of “the new testament” [or “covenant”] spoken of in 2 Corinthians 3:6 and termed, “the ministration of the spirit” and “of righteousness” (2Co 3:8-9). In 2 Corinthians 3:14, speaking of the great body of the Jewish nation, he said, “but their minds were blinded”; and in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, he declares, “but if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world [i.e. Satan, as the director of its religions] hath *blinded* the minds of them which believe not.” In 2 Corinthians 3:9-10, he affirmed that while indeed there was a “glory” connected with the old covenant, yet that of the new “excelled” it. Amplification of that is made in 2 Corinthians 4:6. The pillar of the cloud and of fire which guided Israel during their journeyings was but external and temporary, but Jehovah has now “shined in *our hearts*, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” That inward illumination abides in the believer forever—immeasurably superior are the “new things” which have displaced the old! In 2 Corinthians 4:8-18, the apostle mentioned some of the trials which a faithful discharge of his commission had entailed.

After a characteristic digression in which the apostle described the rich compensations God has provided for His servants—and His people in general (2Co 5:1-10)—he returns to the subject of his ministerial labours, making known the springs from which they issued (2Co 5:11-14). As in chapter 3, when vindicating his apostleship, he had interwoven important doctrinal instruction, so here. First, it should be carefully noted that Paul was still engaged in closing the mouths of his detractors, yea, furnishing his converts with material to silence them (*see* 2Co 5:12), speaking of his adversaries as those who “glory in appearance, and not in heart.” In what follows, he adduces that which could not be gainsaid. “Because we thus judge [or “reason”] that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2Co 5:14)—a most misleading translation, which is corrected in the Revised Version: “One died for all, therefore all died.” It is quite true that those for whom Christ died were spiritually dead, but that is not what is here referred to—their being unregenerate was a fact *without* Christ dying for them! Rather was Paul showing the legal *effect*, or what follows as the consequence of Christ’s having died for them.

“Having judged this, that if one died for all, then the all died” (Bagster’s Interlinear). The apostle there enunciates a theological axiom: it expresses the principle of federal representation. The act of one is, in the sight of the law, the act of all those on whose behalf he transacts. The whole election of grace “died” *judicially* in the death of their Surety. Christ’s death—so far as the claims of the Divine Law or the end of the Divine government were concerned—is the same as though they had all personally died. “Died” *unto what?* The consequences of their sins, the curse of the Law? Yes, though that is *not* the main thing which is here in view. What then? This, rather that they had “died” to their old standing in the flesh: they no longer had

any status in that realm where such distinctions as Jew and Gentile obtained. They had not only died unto sin, but unto all *natural relations*. Death levels all distinctions!

But that is only negative; the apostle goes further and brings in the positive side: "And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2Co 5:15). "That they which live" does not *here* signify those quickened into newness of life by the Spirit, but those who lived *legally* when their Representative came forth from the tomb. It is premier "life" which is in view—that life which the Law awards unto those who have fulfilled all its requirements. It is the legal oneness of Christ and His Church on resurrection-ground. Having borne the curse, they are dead in law; living now through Christ's resurrection, they cannot but "live unto him" (Luk 20:38), because judicially, they are one with Him. His resurrection was as vicarious as His death, and the same individuals were the objects of both. The pertinency of this reasoning, this blessed truth and fact to the apostle's case should at once be apparent. Christ's own relation to Judaism terminated at His death, and when He came forth from the grave, it was onto resurrection—entirely *new*—ground; and thus it is with all those He legally represented.

What has just been pointed out above is made yet clearer in 2 Corinthians 5:16, where the apostle shows the conclusion which must be drawn from what he had just proved: "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him [so] no more." To know a man after the flesh is to own him according to his *natural state*, his racial distinction. To know Christ "after the flesh" was to approve Him as the "seed of David" (Rom 1:3), the Jewish Messiah. But the death of Christ annulled such relations: His resurrection brought Him a new and higher relationship. Therefore, in the exercise of his ministry, Paul showed no respect to a man merely because he was a Jew, nor did he esteem Christ on account of His being the Son of David—rather did he adore Him as being the Saviour of Jew and Gentile alike. Thus, the sinful partiality of those who were seeking to Judaize the Corinthian saints was conclusively exposed. 2 Corinthians 5:17 states the grand conclusion to be drawn from what has been established in the context. (*D.V., continued in the November issue*).

A friend has kindly sent us his Gill's Commentaries.

CONFESSION OF SIN

The holiest man on earth hath cause to confess that he hath sinned. Confession is the duty of the best Christians. While the ship leaks, the pump must not stand still. Confession is a soul-humbling duty, and the best have need of that, for they are in most danger of being lifted up above measure. To preserve us from self-exaltations, the Lord sometimes sends the messenger of Satan to buffet us by temptations, and commands us to buffet ourselves by confessions. Confession affects the heart with sin, and engages the heart against it. Every confession of the evil we do is a new obligation not to do it any more. Confession of sin shows us more clearly our need of mercy, and endears it more to us. How good and sweet is mercy to a soul that hath tasted how evil and bitter a thing it is to sin against the Lord. Confession of sin advances Christ in our hearts. How doth it declare the riches of Christ when we are not afraid to tell Him what infinite sums of debt we are in, which He only, and He easily, can discharge! How it doth commend the healing virtue of His blood when we open to Him such mortal wounds and sicknesses which He only, and He easily, can cure! Woe to be those who commit sin aboundingly that grace may abound, but it is our duty to confess sin aboundingly that grace may abound.

Sincere confession of sin makes the soul very active about the remedies of sin. "I have sinned" said Job; his next word is, "What shall I do unto thee?" (Job 7:20). Many make confession of sin who are never troubled about the cure of it; nay, it may be their next action is to sin over the same sin they have confessed. When the Jews heard of the foulness of their sin in crucifying Christ and the sadness of their condition, they also asked, "What shall we do?" (Act 2:37). A soul truly sensible of sin is ready to submit to any terms which God shall put upon him: "What shall I do?"—I am ready to accept them. That was the sense of the Jews' question in Acts 2:37: Show us the way, let it be what it will; we will not pick and chose. So too when the Jailor found himself in the bonds of iniquity, he was ready to enter into any bonds of duty.

God is to be consulted and inquired after in all doubtful cases, especially in our sin-cases. "I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?" (Job 7:20). He calls upon God to know what course he should take. Though when we have opportunity to speak unto men, that is good and a duty; yet we must not rest in the counsels of men what to do in sin-cases—God must be consulted.—*Joseph Caryl (1602-1673), 1645.*

