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STUDIES

IN THE

SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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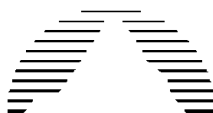
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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THE PRECEPTS AND UNDERSTANDING

“A man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels” (Pro 1:5). “Understanding shall keep thee” (Pro 2:11). “He that keepeth understanding shall find good” (Pro 19:8). “How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!... Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it” (Pro 16:16, 22). Do we *really* believe those statements? Re-read them slowly, and then answer our question. If we *did*, would we not more earnestly and diligently seek to respond to that injunction “with all thy getting get *understanding*” (Pro 4:7)? But what is meant by “understanding” in these passages? Not book learning or intellectual instruction, for there are many educated fools. Rather, holy prudence, spiritual knowledge, pious discernment and intuition, godly wisdom. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding” (Pro 9:10). “He that followeth vain persons is void of understanding” (Pro 12:11). “He that heareth reproof getteth understanding” (Pro 15:32). “They that seek the LORD understand all things” (Pro 28:5).

How many of the Lord’s people there are who feel that to a large extent, they are *lacking* such understanding. How often are they conscious of being wanting in spiritual discernment, that the eyes of their hearts are defective in vision. They deplore the foolish mistakes which they so frequently make and wish they had “good judgment.” Now the Word of God makes known how that lack *may be* supplied and that defect remedied—and in language so plain and simple that the unlettered can grasp it—and points to an antidote which is not beyond the reach of the poor and untalented. “The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psa 19:8). “For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light” (Pro 6:23). “A good understanding have all they that do his commandments” (Psa 111:10). “Through thy precepts I get understanding” (Psa 119:104). And again we ask, do we really believe those statements? It is by making the Divine precepts the regulators of our character and conduct, that clear vision, holy wisdom, and a good judgment become our portion.

By nature, our understanding is darkened (Eph 4:18), and just so far as the Christian is regulated by his fleshly inclinations is his judgment clouded. Sin blinds and deceives, and we are only delivered from its obscuring and deluding effects to the extent that we are governed by God’s precepts. It is not only wise to obey them, but we become wiser in so doing. It is only as we are in practical subjection to the Divine Law that the clouds produced by our lusts and passions are dispelled, and we are able to see clearly. “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20); and therefore, it is by its precepts we are prepared to understand and appreciate the Gospel, as it is by the precepts of the Gospel we learn our need of drawing upon the fulness there is in Christ for His people. There is not only pleasure for the soul to be found in walking in the Law of the Lord, but profit as well. Obedience to the Divine will begets wisdom of heart. The way to increase in spiritual understanding is to be studious of practical holiness, thereby we learn to distinguish between truth and falsehood, good and evil.

“Through thy precepts I get understanding” (Psa 119:104). 1. *Of the Divine character.* Those precepts are not only expressions of God’s will, but also of His wisdom. They are not only mandates of His authority, but manifestations of His moral perfections too. As we ponder the substance and nature of those precepts we the better perceive the spirituality, the goodness, the righteousness, the holiness of their Author. The perfections of God shine forth through His precepts. They reveal His benevolence and benignity, His solicitude for the welfare of His people, for the keeping of those precepts is not only for His glory, but our good. We do but forsake our own mercies when we ignore them. “The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12); and the more we meditate upon it and submit to its requirements, the more do we apprehend the excellency of Him who gave it to us.

“Through thy precepts I get understanding.” 2. *Of the Divine will.* It is to our shame if we find ourselves in darkness, for God has graciously provided a Lamp unto our feet and a Light unto our path (Psa 119:105). We should therefore reproach ourselves unsparingly if we are in doubt as to what God would have us do in any given situation. Professing Christians speak of being uncertain as to what is God’s “will” or “mind” for them, and ask how they may know when they are being “Divinely guided”? Why, He has already furnished us in His blessed Word with all the guidance we can ever need. His precepts are for the directing of our ways and ordering of all our actions. Those precepts are most comprehensive in their scope and cover every aspect of our varied life. Just so far as we “do his commandments” shall we have “good

understanding” (Psa 111:10) and sound judgment for dealing with every problem and decision confronting us.

“Through thy precepts I get understanding.” 3. *Of myself.* It is only as the Christian begins to apprehend the spirituality and strictness of the precepts and resolutely endeavours to be inwardly and outwardly conformed to their holy requirements, that he discovers how thoroughly depraved he is. As the performing of some laborious work reveals the unfitness for it of one not accustomed to use his muscles, so an honest attempt to please God in all things will show how much disinclination there is in one who has lived only to gratify lust. This will cause him to cry, “Teach me thy statutes” (Psa 119:12)—in their application to all the details of my life, and *how to render* full and joyous obedience to them.

4. Understanding of *Satan’s “devices”* (2Co 2:11). The more sincerely and closely we seek to walk with God, the more will our Enemy oppose and endeavour to hinder us, but with evil suggestions within and subtle temptations from without. Nor should we be surprised at this, for it is by treading the path of obedience that we avoid those snares which he has set for our souls. Hence, it is that he puts forth every effort to deter us *from* treading that path and tries his utmost to sidetrack us. The one who constantly and conscientiously seeks to keep God’s precepts will learn more of Satan’s devices in a practical and experimental way than he can from reading a dozen books on the subject—for he will now have a first-hand acquaintance with them.

5. Understanding of *what to pray for.* The one who is determined at all costs to order his life by the Divine precepts will need no manual on devotion or prayers made by men to help him—for his own felt needs will prompt his petitions. The difficulties he encounters both from within and without will drive him frequently to the Throne of Grace, that there he may obtain mercy for past failures and grace to help for present emergencies. Nor will he make the long-winded prayers so often heard in public; rather, will he find the breathings of this very Psalm exactly suited to his case and cry, “Make me to go in the path of thy commandments...Incline my heart unto thy testimonies...Teach me good judgment...quicken me, O LORD...Order my steps in thy word” (Psa 119:35, 36, 66, 107, 133).

6. Understanding of *our fellows.* If we be strict ourselves, we shall soon discover those who are lax. If we follow on to know the Lord, we shall quickly learn who are the ones that help and encourage us to walk in the way of holiness, and who are the ones that—by their vain conversation and conformity to this world—would hinder us. By the application of this one test, empty professors will stand exposed before our eyes, for by their fruits, we shall know them. In God’s light, we see light: we discern not only what we are, but what others are. If by grace we press forward along the Narrow Way, it will not be long before we perceive that there are but “few” who have really found it (Mat 7:14).

7. Understanding of *the true secret of happiness.* Though it may occasion real grief to break away from old acquaintances and “turn away” from empty professors (2Ti 3:5), we shall find right compensation in delighting ourselves in the Lord. In keeping God’s precepts, “there is great reward” (Psa 19:11): a peace the world cannot give, and a joy it cannot take away; a tranquil mind, a conscience which torments us not, the smile of God upon us, and His ear open to our petitions. Then it is that we prove for ourselves that Wisdom’s ways “are ways of pleasantness, all her paths are “peace” (Pro 3:17), and that “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh 8:10).

Sin and wretchedness are inseparable, for God will not suffer any who revolt against Him to have anything but misery for their portion. Contrariwise, obedience and happiness go together, for we are ever the gainers by submitting our wills to God.

From what has been set forth above, it should appear how greatly they are the losers who blindly follow a one-sided preaching which confines itself to either doctrinal discourses—or to what are termed “experimental” sermons—to the utter neglect of the *practical* side of the Truth. We beg those who have made far more of the Divine promises than they have of God’s *precepts* to thoughtfully re-read this article and turn it into prayer. “Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart” (Psa 119:2).

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

35. *Philippians 1:8-11, Part 3 (:10)*

Ere turning unto the next clause, we should look more definitely at the twofold meaning of “try things that differ” and “approve things that are excellent” (Phi 1:10). The attentive reader will observe how this twofoldness of thought meets us at every turn. First, the apostle had prayed that the love of these saints “may abound yet more and more in [1] knowledge and [2] in all judgment” (Phi 1:9). Next, we saw that the Greek word rendered “judgment” also carries in it the meaning of “sense”; and as it is “*all* sense,” therefore, “senses” as in Hebrews 5:14. Then we pointed out that the effect of that petition being answered would be their being enabled to “try” and “approve” things: that twofold significance of *dokimazo* corresponding to and being in perfect opposition with the two things prayed for in the previous verse—“knowledge” being needed in order to test and try, and spiritual “senses” to prove and approve. And now, we find that the objects of those actions may be translated “things that differ” or/and “things that are excellent”—the former linking with to “try”; and the latter, answering better to “approve.” *Diaphero* is rendered, “one star *differeth from* another star in glory” (1Co 15:41), and “ye are of *more value* than many sparrows” (Mat 10:31).

That for which the apostle prayed was their love might be so informed and their understanding so guided by spiritual judgment and sense that upon all occasions, they would be able to distinguish between truth and error in doctrine; that on controverted points wherein there is often aptness to mislead and deceive by means of a resemblance or likeness, yet when each side of the case has been presented, they may, after weighing both, be able to say, “*This* is the truth,” and to approve of it. And in all matters of practice, in cases of conscience or where courses of duty are concerned, amid all the vicissitudes and perplexities of life, they might be able to rightly discern and judge, and to see and say, “*This* is my path,” and that they might know this clearly so as not to be mistaken or deluded, but able to act in comfort and confidence, assured that they are doing the will of God. Thus it was predicted of Christ that “the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding” and that this should “make him of quick understanding [or “scent”—margin] in the fear of the LORD” (Isa 11:1-3)—that is, quick-sighted and keen-sensed to discern the difference of things. And in his measure, each Christian is endued with “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9).

But more: Paul desired their judgment would be so equipped that their hearts would approve or savour the goodness and relish the excellency of things spiritual, according to the several degrees of their worth as was best for them. Absolutely, that they might value Christ and all His perfections high above all things and persons worldly, so as to count them but dung in comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, as the apostle himself did (Phi 3:8). The children of disobedience despise and reject Christ, seeing in Him no beauty that they should desire Him; but unto those who believe, He is precious (1Pe 2:7), and should become increasingly so. So too the “saints”—rather than the famous, wealthy, and mighty—should be esteemed as “the excellent” of the earth, as they were by David (Psa 16:3) and Christ. Likewise, the things of God’s Law are excellent, and should be prized by us above silver and gold. Relatively, there should be a distinguishing and approving among things spiritual those that are *most* excellent, as “meat” surpasses “milk” (Heb 5:12-14). Thus, we should not only be able to distinguish between one Christian and another who is more spiritual and Christlike, and seek his fellowship, but between one company of professing Christians and another, cleaving unto those who keep nearest to the Word and walk closest to God.

We turn now to examine the second of the reasons why the apostle prayed that the love of the saints should abound yet more and more in knowledge and all judgment or sense, namely, “that ye may be *sincere*” (Phi 1:10). The Greek word used here occurs nowhere else in the New Testament except in 2 Peter 3:1, where it is rendered, “I stir up your *pure* minds by way of remembrance.” The noun is found in 1 Corinthians 5:8, 2 Corinthians 1:12 and 2:17, where in each instance, it is rendered “sincerity.” Sincerity is the opposite of counterfeit and dishonesty, of pretence and imposture. To be sincere is to be genuine, to be in reality what we are in appearance—frank, true, unfeigned, conscientious. It is one of the characteristic marks which distinguishes the regenerate from empty professors, who, though they may have much light in their heads, yet make no conscience of the integrity of their hearts, and are little exercised about the

uprightness of their daily walk. Yet, since sin still indwells the Christian, he needs to be constantly on his guard against dissembling, and judge unsparingly everything in and of himself which savours of unreality. Therefore did Christ warn His disciples (and us) “when thou prayest, thou shalt not be *as* the hypocrites” (Mat 6:5), whose religion is a pose—to obtain the high regard of men.

Albert Barnes (1798-1870) informs us that the Greek word for sincerity in our text properly means, “that which is *judged of in sunshine*, and then that which is clear and manifest. It is that over which there are no clouds, which is not doubtful and dark, and which is pure and bright.” As a rule, we attach little importance to the derivation of Hebrew and Greek words (many of which are most uncertain), greatly preferring to ascertain their significance from the manner and connections in which they are *used* in Holy Writ. But in this instance, the etymology of “eilikrines” is borne out by its force in 2 Corinthians 1:12: “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world,” for (see Revised Version and the Interlinear) “godly sincerity” is really “the sincerity of God.” The “sincerity of God” means not only the sincerity of which He is the Giver and Author, but whereof He is *Witness*, which may be brought to Him and held up before Him for His scrutiny. The idea expressed is that of John 3:21: “He that doeth truth *cometh to the light*, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”

Our English word “sincere” is derived from the Latin “sine cera,” which means “without wax”; and the origin of that Latin expression approximates very closely unto the etymology of the Greek word. The ancient Romans had a very delicate and valuable porcelain, exceedingly fragile, and only with much trouble could it be fired without being cracked. Dishonest dealers were in the habit of filling in the cracks that appeared with a specially white wax; but when their ware was held up to the light, the wax was evident, being darker in colour than the porcelain. Thus, it came about that honest dealers marked their ware *sine cera*—“without wax”—it having been sun tested. Hence, this grace of spiritual sincerity is not only the opposite of false pretence, but of unholy mixture. As the apostle said of himself and his companion ministers, “For we are not as many, which *corrupt* the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ” (2Co 2:17), where the words “which corrupt” literally mean “which huckster”—which deceitfully mingle false and worthless articles among the genuine.

Sincerity, then, is opposed to mixture, a mingling together of truth and error, of godliness and worldliness, of loveliness and sin. A sincere person has not assumed Christianity as a mask, but his motives are disinterested and pure, his conduct is free from double dealing and cunning, his words express the real sentiments of his heart. He is one who can bear to have the light turned upon him, the springs of his actions scrutinized by God Himself. He is of one piece through and through, and not a hypocrite who vainly attempts to serve two masters and “make the best of both worlds.” He is not afraid to be tested by the Word, for he is without guile (Psa 32:2) or sham—straightforward and honest in all his dealings. As we have seen, in 2 Corinthians 1:12, sincerity is joined with “simplicity,” which is expressed by, “if therefore thine eye be *single*” (Mat 6:22), where the same word is used. The one with a “single” eye refuses to mix fleshly craftiness with spirituality; he aims *solely* at the pleasing and glorifying of God. Hence, as Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) well pointed out: “A sincere heart is a ‘true heart’ (Heb 10:22), an heart genuinely holy, true to God, faithful in all things. A sincere heart is a ‘pure’ one (2Ti 2:22), which worketh out all humours and purgeth itself from all filthiness.”

Now the springs from which sincerity flows are the three things mentioned by Paul in his petition. First, it ariseth from a love to God—which consists not only of the understanding and the affections adoring His perfections, but also of the will’s esteeming *His will* as it is made known in His commandments; and therefore, the apostle prayed that their love might abound yet more and more. Second, it proceeds from knowledge, for the more the understanding be Divinely enlightened, and the heart awed by an apprehension of God’s ineffable majesty, the more do we make conscience of approaching Him with a “true heart,” and the more fearful we are of acting hypocritically before Him. It is spiritual ignorance of the true and living God which suffers the unregenerate to suppose they can impose upon Him with mere external performances and bodily postures, while their hearts be alienated from Him; hence, the apostle prayed that love might abound “in knowledge.” Third, it issues from that sense or taste which the believer has of the blessedness of walking with God and communing with Him, and from proving for himself the excellency and

sweetness of His Word, so that he declares, "O how love I thy law" (Psa 119:97). Thus, the apostle added that their love might abound in knowledge and in "all sense."

As 2 Corinthians 1:12 intimates, sincerity has special reference to the eyes of the heart being fixed upon God in all that we do. It is—to use again the language of T. Goodwin—"a sound constitution of spirit, both towards God and the commandments of God in walking with Him." It was unto such sincerity or soundness of spirit that David referred when he said, "Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine *integrity*" (Psa 26:1). It was unto the same the Lord referred when He said unto Solomon, "And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes...Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom" (1Ki 9:4-5)—if you genuinely aim at and earnestly please Me, and bend your will to My authority. "I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end" (Psa 119:112): It is in just such an inclining of the heart that is thus constant to the Divine precepts that sincerity lies. It was to this Job appealed in Job 27:5-6. That patriarch was not referring—as has been so commonly misunderstood—to his acceptance *with* God on the ground of his works, but unto the purity of his motives and the sincerity of his heart *before* God. He knew he was no hypocrite, and could appeal to the Searcher of hearts in proof.

Such sincerity as has been described above constitutes one of the radical differences existing between the truly regenerate and the formalist, for as John Newton (1725-1807) well pointed out in his piece on Simplicity and Sincerity, "It is an essential part of the Christian character." The natural religionist may be very diligent and regular in performing his devotions and very careful in making clean "the outside of the cup and of the platter" (Mat 23:25), but he takes no stock of what passes *within* himself. A slave may do just as much for his master as the child of that master does for his dear father; yea, because of his superior strength and skill, the former may do much more than the latter, yet there is a vast difference as to the affection with which and the *end* for which those two work—but that is inward and invisible! So too the service rendered by an unregenerate employee and another possessing godly sincerity: the latter will heed that injunction, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ [serving *Him* in it]; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph 6:5-6)—as appointed by Him and performed conscientiously unto Him.

Sincerity is found principally in *the will*: as it respects sin, in refusing evil; as it respects holiness, in choosing the good. Where the will be savingly sanctified, it gives God the pre-eminence—making ease, credit, pleasures, profits, honours, relations, and aspirations all stoop to Him. It is much, very much, when we can solemnly appeal to this grace before God Himself. That is what Hezekiah did when (in those little-understood words of his) he said, "I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth [reality, knowing Thine eye was ever upon me] and with a perfect [upright or sincere] heart" (2Ki 20:3)—men may misinterpret my motives and misjudge my intentions, but *Thou* knowest all the springs of my actions. When we are not afraid to come to the light (Isa 60:3) and have our innermost desires and designs examined by the Holy One, we may know that we have responded to His just call and claim, "Son, give me thine *heart*" (Pro 23:26). Thus, Peter—despite his terrible fall and after his sincere repentance—could unhesitatingly say to the Searcher of hearts, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" (Joh 21:17)—that was not a presumptuous boast, but a plain statement of fact.

Sincerity, then, eyes the *omniscience* of God, and knowing that He cannot be imposed upon, acts accordingly. It is exercised and manifested in such ways as these. By making conscience of *sinful thoughts* and imaginations, which—though hidden from the sight of our fellows—are "naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:13). Therefore, a sincere or upright soul prays and strives against them, mourns over and confesses the same; and if the reader be a stranger to such experiences, then his religion is worthless and his profession as empty as a drum. The sincere soul will not allow himself in *secret sins*, although the thickest curtains of night and darkness be drawn about him, He dare not—for he knows that "the eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Pro 15:3); and when his lusts gain a temporary mastery so far from excusing himself, he abhors himself, and with a broken heart, acknowledges his faults before God. The sincere soul will make conscience against the performing of holy duties *coldly* and mechanically, afraid to mock the Omniscient One with empty words and with the feigned reverence of outward postures.

It is in just such things as we have mentioned above that vital godliness chiefly consists: in the things of the *heart*. Alas, that the great majority of God's own people receive no instruction upon such matters today, either from the pulpit or the religious magazines. Alas, that there is now so little to search out and expose an empty profession. Instead, nominal Christians are bolstered up with the idea that so long as they are orthodox in their beliefs, attend to their church duties and lead respectable lives, all is well with them, no matter what may be the state of their hearts in the sight of God. A sincere soul is not occupied with how much time he spends in prayer, but *how real* and genuine his prayer is. He makes conscience of the *spirituality* of his worship. Thus Paul said, "God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit" (Rom 1:9)—not in mere external rites. To the hypocrites Christ said, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; *but their heart* is far from me"; and therefore, did He add, "in vain they do worship *me*" (Mat 15:8-9) Who looketh on the heart. Sincerity makes conscience of the *inward* part of our worship and service. Sincerity is the salt which alone savours any of our sacrifices; where that be lacking, they are an offence unto God, because of our play-acting therein.

We must pass on now to the third of the reasons by which the apostle supported his request: "That ye may be sincere, and *without offence* till the day of Christ" (Phi 1:10). The Greek word here rendered "offence" means to walk without stumbling. Thus, as "sincerity" has reference to the integrity of the heart, "offence" looks principally to the external conduct. As T. Goodwin defines the term, "It is put properly to signify the errings, mistreadings, stumblings, and bruising of the feet in walking." To which he added, "As afore in that of sincerity, the intention of the mind was compared to the eye ('if thine eye be single'), so this hath allusion to the steps." As we feel unable to improve upon T. Goodwin's outline, we will avail ourselves of the same, using our own language, more or less, in filling it in. First, to walk without offence is to carefully avoid those ways and works before believers as may induce them to sin, or such as we know would prove an occasion unto others of stumbling, or that would strengthen and confirm the wicked in their corruptions. It is in this manner the same word is used in 1 Corinthians 10:32: "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God"—that which occasioned scandal must be sedulously avoided. We must never by our example invite others to follow us in evil.

Second, to walk "without offence" is to abstain from every action which would be contrary to the light which the Christian has received from God and the principles which he professes before others. A case of failure in this particular respect is found in Galatians 2, where Peter "withdrew and separated himself" from the Gentile saints, "fearing them which were of the circumcision" (Gal 2:12). Such conduct was reprehensible, and Paul "withstood him to the face," for said he, "they walked not *uprightly*" (Gal 2:14). Literally, the Greek means, "they walked not with a right foot." It squared not with the Rule God had given, and therefore, he added, "not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel." Peter had been the first to receive a Divine revelation, by means of a vision from heaven (Act 10), that he must not regard the Gentile saints as unclean, and refuse to eat with them. But the fear of man brought a snare, and caused him to walk contrary to the light God had vouchsafed him, and thereby stumble the Gentile believers—which was the very reverse of being "without offence," as Philippians 1:10 speaks. Peter's failure here is recorded as a case for us to solemnly take unto heart.

Third, to walk "without offence" goes even further than the maintaining of a blameless conversation or conduct before men, including as it does a blameless conscience *before God*. This is clear from Acts 24:16 where the apostle again used the same term: "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience *void of offence* toward God, and toward men." T. Goodwin suggests that the "I exercise myself" is "a little too low and flat to reach the emphasis of the original," preferring "unto this do I give up myself" or "devote myself as the main study and design of my life and soul." He resolved that there should be nothing in his behaviour which could occasion accusation of conscience before God. Paul's conscience had received more light into it than any man's then living in the world; and therefore, he had the hardest task to walk up to that light, and needed to give the more thought and diligence in managing every action and the circumstances of it. He endeavoured to so conduct himself that there might not be a single dark spot in his conscience, that there might be no act of spirit converse to that light which shined in his soul, nothing that would cast any shadow upon it. That he succeeded therein is clear from 2 Corinthians 1:12, and that he prayed for the same experience in the saints is evident from our text; and therefore, with nothing short of that, should we be satisfied.

To live “without offence” does not mean to be sinless—for that would contradict James 3:2, 1 John 1:8; but it means to refrain from everything which occasions others to sin, to do no action contrary to the light we have received from God, and to avoid everything which would issue in a guilty conscience before Him. That is indeed a high standard of conduct, yet at nothing short of it must we aim. It is the highest realisable in this life, approximating closest to perfection outwardly. That it is, by the grace of God, attainable, appears from the case of the parents of John the Baptist, of whom we are told, “they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord *blameless*” (Luk 1:6)—though not “sinless.” So too the apostle Paul declared, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Act 23:1): I am not conscious of any action against the light. As T. Goodwin says, “If a holy man is often kept from such sins a week, a month, a year, then it is also possible, in this state of frailty, to be kept all his lifetime.”

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

15. The Jordan (3:1-2)

The long season of preparation had reached its close, and the arduous task confronting Israel must now be tackled. The forty years they had spent in the wilderness requires to be viewed from a twofold standpoint. First, it was a Divine judgment on the adult generation, which—after being so graciously brought out of Egypt and so gloriously delivered at the Red Sea—gave way to an evil heart of unbelief, baulking at the prospect of conquering Canaan (Num 13:28-33) and resolving to “return into Egypt” (Num 14:1-4), whose carcasses fell in the wilderness (1Co 10:5, 10; Heb 3:8-17). Second, it was a training for the younger generation who were to occupy the land of promise. This has not been sufficiently recognised. During that forty years, many sons and daughters had been born, and *they* were given to behold the wonders of the Lord in a manner and to an extent which no other generation ever has. Not only was there a visible display of Jehovah’s faithfulness and power before their eyes in sustaining such a vast number by a daily supply of food from Heaven, but at the close, Moses could say, “Your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot” (Deu 29:5).

And is not this ever the Lord’s way with His people? He does not bid them to trust in Him with all their hearts and lean not unto their own understandings, until He has given them clear proof that He is fully worthy of their confidence. He does not call upon them to overcome the world, mortify their lusts, and resist the devil, until He has strengthened them with might by His Spirit in the inner man. He does not exhort them to tread that path of “much tribulation” (Act 14:22) which alone conducts to Glory, without first weaning their hearts from this world, giving a death wound to their love of sin, and vouchsafing them a ravishing earnest of that glory. How gracious is the Lord and how tender are His ways! He does not quench the smoking flax (Isa 42:3; Mat 12:20), but feeds the spark of grace with the oil of His Spirit. He carries the lambs in His bosom (Isa 40:11) until they be able to walk. Only a personal and experimental knowledge of Him with whom they have to do will sustain the heart of a saint under the testings and trials to which he must be submitted.

In the same way, the Lord deals with and furnishes His servants. It was thus with Joshua’s predecessor. When Jehovah first appeared unto him and made known it was His purpose to employ him in leading the Hebrews out of Egypt, he was fearful; and though the Lord declared He would stretch forth His hand smiting Egypt with all His wonders and giving His people favour in the sight of their oppressors, poor Moses continued to raise objections that Israel would not believe him, nor hearken to his voice. Then the Lord bade him cast his rod on the ground, and it became a serpent; told him to take it by the tail, and it became a rod in his hand; ordered him to thrust his hand into his bosom, and he drew it forth leprous as snow; and when repeating the action, it was made whole (Exo 4:1-4). Thus assured, Moses went forth on his mission. So it was with the Eleven: Before they entered upon their life work and went forth to make disciples of all nations (Mat 28:19), they spent three years with Christ (Mar 3:14)—witnessing His miracles and being instructed by Him.

We have already seen how such was the case with Joshua. First, the Lord had spoken to him after the death of Moses, giving him the most definite and heartening promises for his faith to rest upon (Jos 1:1-6). Then his hands had been strengthened by the ready co-operation of the two and a half tribes whose portion lay on the eastern side of Jordan, vowing, “According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee” (Jos 1:12-18). Next, he had sent forth the two spies to reconnoiter the land, and they—having received a most unlooked-for welcome and assistance from Rahab—had returned and said unto Joshua, “Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us” (Jos 2:24). What more could Israel and their leader want! The Lord had gone before them preparing their ways, causing His “terror” to fall upon the inhabitants (Jos 2:9). With what confidence, then, might Joshua and all the people go forward into their inheritance! And should it not be the same with Christians now? “When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him” (Joh 10:4). If our eyes be fixed on Him and our ears respond to His voice, there is nothing to be afraid of.

But we must now turn to the sequel. And what does the reader suppose is the *nature* of it?—A severe testing of faith? Doubtless, that is what many would term it. Personally, we would prefer to say, “A glorious opportunity for exercising faith in the living God.” Do not, dear reader, look so much upon painful

circumstances and difficult situations as unpleasant trials of faith which have to be endured, but rather, thankfully regard them as golden occasions for you to prove afresh the sufficiency of Him who never fails those who fully trust Him. God gives His people grace not only for the comfort of their hearts, but to use for Him. He has placed His sure promises in the Word not merely for us to wonder at, but to turn unto good account. He grants encouragements along the way and strengthens us that we may press forward and do further exploits in His name. He imparts faith unto His people that they may employ it in a manner honouring to Him. Such it appears to us is, in part, the relation between Joshua 1 and 2 and what is now to be before us. Israel was faced with a most formidable obstacle, but in the view of what God had wrought for them, there was no ground for dismay.

Above, we have said, Such it appears to us is, *in part*, the relation between Joshua 1 and 2 and what is now to be before us. But there is something else, and if we deliberately disregarded it, we should be guilty of handling the Word of God deceitfully and seriously misleading His people. That ‘something else’ is either blankly repudiated today—by those who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness in failing to insist that grace reigns through righteousness (Rom 5:21), teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly (Titus 2:11-12); or is ignored by those who studiously omit everything which would be unpalatable to empty professors, well knowing that if they are to receive their support, such must be bolstered up in their worldliness and carnality. These hirelings harp continually on God’s grace, His promises, and naught but faith being required by Him; and woefully fail to lay stress upon God’s holiness, His precepts, and obedience being indispensably necessary. Joshua 1 and 2, my reader, contains something more than precious promises and gracious encouragements.

Joshua 1 and 2 also make prominent the *claims* of God and strongly enforces human *responsibility*. Let us refresh the reader’s memory. First, the Lord had bidden Joshua, “Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: . . . This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous . . .” (Jos 1:7-8). Thus was the leader himself required to render the most complete subjection unto the revealed will of the Lord, and informed, that success would hinge thereon. Joshua, in turn, “commanded the officers of the people” (Jos 1:10) what orders to give unto them. Then he pressed upon the two and a half tribes their obligations, bidding them, “Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD *commanded* you” (Jos 1:13). It was only in the behalf of a people whose hearts were right with Him and who walked in the way of His precepts that the Lord would show Himself strong. Faith in Him was to be evidenced by obedience unto His commands; no other faith would He own.

It is to be carefully noted that Joshua 3—like Joshua 2—opens with the word “And,” which not only shows the three chapters are closely connected, but also tells us we must carry in our minds what has previously engaged our attention. Joshua and the people, as they started forward on their new venture, must be regulated entirely by the instructions which they had already received. So must we be! And if we are to make a right application of this memorable incident unto ourselves, if we are to draw from it the spiritual lessons which it is designed to teach us, then we need to heed what was before us in the previous sections. A most formidable obstacle lay in Israel’s path: The river Jordan barred their entrance into Canaan, and we are now to behold how that obstacle was surmounted. If we are to make a personal and practical use of this portion of Scripture, that river which intercepted Israel’s progress should be regarded as illustrative of any problem or obstruction which confronts the minister of the Gospel or the ordinary Christian, and then ascertain from this passage what he must do if he is to overcome his difficulty and be enabled to go forward.

“And Joshua rose early in the morning” (Jos 3:1). Observe well that the Holy Spirit has taken due notice of this! Not only so, but He has recorded the same thing again in Joshua 6:12; 7:16; 8:10! In his early rising, as in so many other respects, he foreshadowed the antitypical Joshua, our Saviour—see Mark 1:35, Luke 4:42, etc. Joshua’s “early” rising shows that he was not slothful, or a lover of his own ease, but one whose heart was in his work and who diligently applied himself unto the same. Therein, he has left an example for each servant of Christ to follow. The minister of the Gospel is to be no slacker and shirker, but rather “a *workman* that needeth not to be ashamed” (2Ti 2:15). Whether he rises early or (as this writer) finds it more expedient to burn the midnight oil, he is in honour and duty bound to spend at least as many hours in his study each day as does the farmer in his field, the clerk in his office, or the labourer in the factory. He has no warrant to expect God to use him, unless he be industrious and denies himself.

“And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over” (Jos 3:1). Moses had conducted Israel as far as Shittim (Num 25:1); and after his death, it was from there that Joshua had sent out the two spies (Jos 2:1). They had returned to him with their favourable report, and now we behold the sequel. In his “rising early,” Joshua gave proof that he did not shirk the difficult task before him, but was anxious to come to grips with it. The Lord rewarded his diligence by inclining the people to co-operate with him. They might have demurred, saying, “What is the use of leaving this place where we have so long been encamped, and moving forward to Jordan itself, where there are neither bridges nor boats for us to cross over it?” Instead, they laid hold of the promise, “within three days *ye shall* pass over this Jordan (Jos 1:11), and went forward in faith and obedience. They knew not *how* the obstacle was to be overcome, and for the moment, that was none of their business. Their responsibility was to proceed along the path of duty so far as they were able, and count upon God’s continuing to keep that path open for them!

“And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host” (Jos 3:2). At first thought, it seems strange that such a multitude should be left encamped there for this length of time ere a further word was spoken to them, but a little reflection should indicate the Lord’s design therein, and then show us the important lesson *we* should learn therefrom. Ponder this incident; visualise the scene before your mind’s eye. It was not an army of men only, but a vast congregation of men, women, and children—to say nothing of their baggage and herds of animals, and further advance was blocked by the river. Whatever the breadth and depth of the Jordan in recent centuries or today, it is evident that it presented an impassable obstruction in Joshua’s time—moreover, it was *in flood* at that particular season (Jos 3:15); and yet, they were left to gaze upon it for three days, faced with the fact that they had no means of their own for crossing! Why? What was the Lord’s object in this? Was it not to impress Israel more deeply with a realisation of their own utter helplessness? Was it not to shut them up more completely unto Himself?

And is not that, very often, the chief design of God’s providential dealings with us? To bring us to the end of our own resources, to make us conscious of our own insufficiency, by bringing us into a situation from which we cannot extricate ourselves, confronting us with some obstacle which to human wit and might is insurmountable? By nature, we are proud and self-reliant, ignorant of the fact that the arm of flesh is frail. And even when faced with difficulties, we seek to solve them by our own wisdom, or get out of a tight corner by our own efforts. But the Lord is graciously resolved to humble us; and therefore, the difficulties are increased and the corner becomes tighter, and for a season, we are left to ourselves—as Israel was before the Jordan. It is not until we have duly weighed the difficulty and then discovered we have nothing of our own to place in the opposite scale that we are really brought to realise our impotency, and turn unto Him who alone can undertake for us and free us from our dilemma. But such dull scholars are we that the lesson must be taught us again and yet again before we actually put it into practice.

Those three days before that unfordable river was the necessary preparation for what followed—the background from which the following miracle might be the more evident to and the more appreciated by Israel. Man’s extremity furnishes the most suitable opportunity for God to display His power. And it is not until man is made painfully aware of his extremity that he turns unto the Lord and seeks His intervention. That truth is writ large across the 107th Psalm, which forcibly illustrates and exemplifies what we have been seeking to express. “Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. *Then* they cried unto the LORD in their trouble” (Psa 107:5-6). “And there was none to help. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses” (Psa 107:12-13). “They draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the LORD” (Psa 107:18-19). “They...are at their wits’ end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble” (Psa 107:27-28). They are brought into a desperate situation to the end of their own resources, and then it is that they—not merely utter a few cold and formal petitions, but—“*cry unto* the LORD”; and such a cry is ever responded to by His deliverance.

Ah, my reader, do not close your eyes to the Jordan—the problem, the difficulty, the obstacle—that confronts you, but face it. Do not attempt to minimise it, but take its full measure. Continue contemplating it until you plainly realise your own helplessness to cope with the same, and then trustfully turn unto Him who is capable of dealing with it. Suppose you be a minister of the Gospel, and you yearn for your hearers to be saved: Is there not an insuperable obstacle standing in the way of the realisation of your desire? Indeed, there is: The stolid indifference and unresponsiveness of your hearers. *That* is the “Jordan” which confronts you: The spiritual insensibility of your congregation—and “Jordan” is the symbol of *death*! Do you fully realise that?—that your hearers have no more spiritual life in them than the waters of that river

had? That you can no more open their hearts to the reception of the Gospel than Israel could open a path through the Jordan? Are you acting accordingly? Few ministers, few churches today are! When they would have a "revival," they hire an outside evangelist and count on special singing, instead of crying unto the Lord.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

12b. Its Responsibilities

It might be thought that we had pretty well covered this aspect of our subject in the preceding section. Not so; there is another important phase of it which needs to be considered. Sin has not only alienated man from God, but man from man as well. Where there is no love to God, there is no genuine love to our fellow-men. By nature, we are totally depraved; and as such, possessed of a radically selfish, evil, malicious disposition. "The poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways" (Rom 3:13-16). The record of human history consists largely of a solemn demonstration of that fact. Envy and enmities have marked the relationships of one nation to another, one party against another, one individual against another. Frictions and feuds have been the inevitable outcome of a covetous and ferocious spirit among men—were they black or white, red or yellow.

It is only the restraining hand of God which holds men within bounds and prevents the social sphere from becoming worse than the jungle. Every once in a while that restraining Hand is largely withdrawn; and then, despite all our vaunted progress, human nature is seen in its naked savagery. The truth is that men today are neither better nor worse than they were at the beginning of this Christian era. Speaking of God's own people during their unregeneracy, the apostle described them as "serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and *hating one another*" (Titus 3:3). Such are men the world over, though they will not own up to it, nor can they be expected to. Since the natural man is ignorant of his inherent and inveterate enmity against God, it is not to be supposed that he is aware of harbouring such a spirit against his neighbours. But if all the police were removed from this so-called civilised country, how long would it be before "hateful and hating one another" was plainly and generally manifested!

Fallen man not only requires to be reconciled to God, but to his fellows; and where the one takes place, the other necessarily follows. Reconciliation, as was shown, is one of the fruits of regeneration, for at the new birth, a new principle is imparted to its subject, so that his enmity is displaced by amity: "Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him" (1Jo 5:1). The reconciliation of a soul to God entails his reconciliation to all saints. Since God has been reconciled to the entire Church (considered as fallen), and its two main constituents (believing Jews and Gentiles) are made one, it follows that each Christian is, fundamentally, harmoniously united to all others. We say "fundamentally," for the work of Christ has federally and legally united them. But that is not all: He procured the Spirit for His Church and He—by the work of regeneration—makes them vitally one in a new creation. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1Co 12:13).

As the Christian's reconciliation to God entails certain clearly-marked responsibilities, so also does his reconciliation to all fellow-believers, and these are what we shall now be occupied with. Let us begin with that basic and comprehensive duty, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). Concerning that simple precept, there has been much confusion—both as to its meaning and requirement—with almost endless controversy about church-union and divisions. Man, with his usual perversity, has changed that exhortation to "zealously attempt to make and enforce a human unity," anathematizing all who will not subscribe and conform unto the same. Romanists have made the greatest outcry about church unity, vehemently contending that it is indispensably necessary that all Christians should submit to the papal authority, and that there is no salvation for anyone dying outside their communion. Thus, a visible and carnal union with an Italian pontiff is preferred to an invisible, spiritual, and saving union with the Christ of God.

We do not propose to canvass now the various efforts and devices of men since the Reformation to bring into existence organizations for unity and uniformity among professing Christians, but in creed and form of worship, such as State Churches "by law established," denominations which have laid claim to being the "true Church" or "churches of Christ"; nor the high pretensions of those who rather more than a century ago denounced all sects and systems and alleged that they alone met on "the ground of Christ's Body" and "expressed" the unity of the Spirit—only to split up in a very short time into numerous factions and conflicting "fellowships." No, our object here is not to be controversial, but constructive; to give a brief exposition of Ephesians 4:1-6; and then point out the practical application and bearing of the same. We

cannot intelligently “keep the unity of the Spirit” (Eph 4:3) until we rightly understand what that “unity” is. May He graciously be our Guide.

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,...Endeavouring to keep,” etc. (Eph 4:1-3). That exhortation holds the same place in this epistle as does Romans 12:1, being placed at the forefront of the hortatory section; and we at once observe the verbal resemblances between them in the “therefore” by which it is supported, and the “I beseech you”—the earnestness with which the call is made. Standing as it does at the beginning of the practical division of the epistle, taking precedence of all its other precepts, we have emphasized its deep importance. It was written by the apostle during his incarceration at Rome, but it is blessed to mark that he looked above Caesar, regarding himself as “the prisoner of *the Lord*” (Eph 4:1). Hence, we find his heart was occupied not with his own danger or discomfort, but with the glory of Christ and the interests of His redeemed. He asked not the saints to “get up a petition” for his release, nor even to pray for it, but was concerned that they should conduct themselves in a way which would bring glory to his Master.

The “I therefore,...beseech you that ye walk worthy...Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:1-4) requires that we carefully consult what precedes, for it is the contents of Ephesians 1-3 which explains the force of Ephesians 4:1, 3. First, it should be pointed out that the Greek word rendered “bond” is not the simple “desmos,” but rather the compound “sun-desmos”—*joining*—bond. This at once links up with and is based upon the “fellow-citizens” of Ephesians 2:19, the being “fitly framed *together*” and “builded together” (Eph 2:21-22), and the “fellow-heirs, and a *joint*-body, and *joint*-partakers of His promise” (Eph 3:6—Greek)—where, in each case, the reference is to the union of believing Jews and Gentiles in the mystical Body of Christ. It is therefore an affectionate plea that those—who in their unregenerate days, had been bitterly hostile against each other—should now walk together in love and harmony. The same Greek word occurs in the parallel passage in Colossians 3:14: “And above all these things put on *charity*, which is the [*joint*] bond of perfectness,” which throws clear light on the verse we are now considering.

“I therefore...beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Eph 4:1), which is *unto sonship*—holiness and glory, conformity to the image of Christ. The inestimable privileges conferred upon those who are effectually called by God out of darkness into His marvellous light, obligates its favoured recipients to order their lives accordingly. It requires from them a distinctive spirit, a particular disposition and temper, which is to be exercised and manifested in their dealings with fellow-saints. They are to conduct themselves with humility and gentleness, not with self-assertiveness and self-exaltation. They are required to seek the good and promote the interests of their brethren and sisters in Christ, and continually endeavour to preserve amity and concord among them: “To bear with one another in love as to those light occasions of offence or displeasure which could not be wholly avoided even among believers in this present imperfect state” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

For the Christian to walk worthily of his vocation is for him to live and act congruously, suitably thereto. Here, it has particular reference to the spirit and manner in which he is to *practically* conduct himself toward his fellow-saints—namely, by endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That word, “endeavouring” means far more than a half-hearted effort which ceases as soon as opposition be encountered. It signifies “give diligence”—labouring earnestly, doing our utmost in performing this task. The nature of this duty is intimated with considerable definiteness by the particular graces which are here specified as needing to be exercised. Had that “unity” consisted of uniformity of belief, as many have supposed, then the saints had been exhorted unto the acquirement of “knowledge” and the exercise of “faith.” Or had that unity been an ecclesiastical one, which is to be framed or “expressed” on earth, then the call would be to the exercise of “faithfulness” and “firmness” in uncompromisingly resisting all innovations. But instead, it is “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another [*individually*] in love” (Eph 4:2-3).

Thus, whatever be our angle of approach in seeking to define this controversial expression—whether it be from the contents of the previous chapters, the parallel passage in Colossians 3:14, or the congruity of the preceding verse—it should be clear that the “unity of the Spirit,” which we are to diligently assay to keep “in the bond of peace,” has no reference to the formation of an external and visible unification of all professing Christians, wherein all differences in judgment and belief are to be dropped and where all worship is to conform to a common standard. The union of Christendom—which so many enthusiasts have advocated—would, in reality, consist of a unity in which principle gave way to policy; contending earnestly

for the Faith once delivered to the saints would be displaced by the uttering of mere generalities and moral platitudes; and the masculine virtues degenerating into an effeminate affection of universal charity. Sheep and goats will never make amicable companions; still less so, sheep and wolves. Variety, and not uniformity, marks all the works of God—whether it be in creation, providence, or grace.

The unity of the Spirit is not an ecclesiastical one here on earth, nor is it one which God will make in Heaven by and by. Nor is it the unity of the mystical body—for *that* can no more be broken than could a bone in the literal body of Christ (Joh 18:36). The very fact that it is “the unity of the *Spirit*” precludes any visible ecclesiastical unity. It is a fact subsisting to faith, without any evidence of it to sight. It is therefore a Divine, spiritual, and present unity which is quite imperceptible to the senses; it is that unity of which the Spirit is the Author; it is the new creation of which He makes God’s elect members by regeneration. Every soul indwelt by the Spirit is a part of that unity, and none others are. By being made members of the new creation, we are brought into “the joint-bond of peace.” Each soul indwelt by the Spirit is inducted into a company where enmity has been slain, in which the members are united as the fruit of Christ’s sacrifice; and they are here enjoined to act in full harmony with this new relationship.

By virtue of his having the Spirit, each Christian is in spirit united with all other regenerated souls; and he is to give diligence in practically observing that fact in all his converse and dealings with them. He is to earnestly avoid falling out with a brother or sister in Christ, being most careful to eschew everything having a tendency to cause a breach between them. He is to love all in whom he can discern any of the features of Christ, whether or not they belong to his own “church” or “assembly.” He is to exercise good will unto all who are members of the Household of Faith. He should be slow to take offence, and having himself received mercy, should ever be merciful unto others. God’s reconciliation should be our rule in dealing with our brethren: “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another (1Jo 4:11); and since His heart embraces the whole of His family, ours should do no less. If He be longsuffering to usward, we should be longsuffering to themward. “Be ye therefore followers [imitators] of God, as dear children” (Eph 5:1).

Now the only possible way in which the reconciled soul can discharge this essential and blessed part of his responsibility is by exercising those graces enjoined in Ephesians 4:2. After beseeching the saints to walk worthy of their vocation, Paul at once described the necessary qualifications for so doing, namely, “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (Eph 4:2). Lowliness of mind or humility is to have a mean estimate of myself, based upon the consciousness of my sinfulness and weakness. Let it be most attentively noted that the exercise of *this* grace comes first; and that it is not only “with lowliness,” but “with *all* lowliness”—nothing so hinders our keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace as personal pride. Next comes “meekness,” which signifies tractability, gentleness, mildness; an unresisting and uncomplaining temper. It is that lamb-like disposition which enables one to bear injury from others without bitterness and retaliating in a spirit of revenge. “Forbearing one another in love”: Suppressing anger and ill feeling, patiently enduring the failings, foibles, and faults of my brethren, as they do (or should) mine.

Those graces of humility, meekness, and longsuffering are to be manifested in *keeping*—recognising and cherishing—that spiritual and invisible unity which there is between the children of God, loving all in whom they perceive His image, doing everything in their power to further one another’s interests, and to promote harmony and concord. For the glory of God, the honour of Christ, and the good of His people, each believer is under bonds to exercise and manifest a spirit of good will unto his brethren: That is to override all natural peculiarities, all selfish interests, all party concerns. That does not mean a peace at any price, wherein we connive at error or condone the sins of an erring saint, making no effort to recover him. No, indeed, the wisdom which is from above is “first pure, then peaceable” (Jam 3:17). If we perceive a professing Christian walking contrary to the Truth, we are to have no intimate fellowship with him, “Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2Th 3:15); if he be suddenly overtaken in a fault, we should—in the spirit of meekness—seek to restore him (Gal 6:1).

Rightly did Matthew Henry (1662-1714) point out that, “The seat of Christian unity is the heart or spirit; it does not lie in one set of thoughts and form or mode of worship, but in one heart or soul.” In other words, it lies in the exercise of a gracious and peaceable disposition. As that writer so aptly pointed out, “*Love* is the law of Christ’s kingdom, the lesson of His school, and the livery of His family.” If Christ be the Prince of Peace, then surely His disciples ought to be the children of peace, ever striving to maintain amity and harmony. The root cause of strife and dissension lies not in anything external, but within ourselves: “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that

war in your members?" (Jam 4:1). We should not rudely obtrude our ideas upon others, but rather wait until we are asked to state our views, and then do so with meekness and reverence (1Pe 3:15). The cultivation of an amiable disposition and peaceable temper is the best cement for binding saints together.

In Ephesians 4:4-6, the apostle mentions several motives to prompt unto a compliance with the duty expressed in Ephesians 4:1, 3: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (Eph 4:4). What better grounds could believers have to love and act peaceably toward each other! They are fellow-members of the mystical body of Christ, they are indwelt by the same blessed Spirit, they are begotten unto the same glorious and eternal inheritance. Do they look forward to the time when they shall join "the spirits of just men made perfect"?—then let them anticipate that time and act now agreeably thereto toward those they hope to dwell together with forever. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5): There may be different apprehensions of that Faith, different degrees of conformity to that Lord, different understandings of "baptism," but that must not alienate the heart of one Christian from another. "One God and Father of all" (Eph 4:6), whose family all the reconciled belong to; and should not the members of that family cherish one another! Let that sevenfold consideration animate each of us to live in peace and brotherly affection with our fellow-saints.

The unity of the Spirit differs from the oneness of the Body, in that while we may either keep or break the former, we can do neither the one nor the other with the latter. The responsibility of those reconciled to each other is, negatively, to avoid anything which would mar that unity; and positively, to engage in everything that would further it. Pride, self-will, envy, bigotry, fleshly zeal about comparative trifles, are the causes of most of the frictions and fractions among believers. "Only *by pride* cometh contention" (Pro 13:10): That is the most fertile root of all—offence is taken because I do not receive that notice to which I deem myself entitled; or I am hurt because I cannot have my own way in everything. "A whisperer separateth chief friends" (Pro 16:28)—but he can only do so by one *giving ear* to his malicious tales! An acquaintance of ours used to say unto those who came to her with evil reports of others, "Please take your garbage elsewhere: I decline to receive it."

"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Mat 5:23-24). How emphatically that makes manifest the importance which God attaches to our keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace! When that unity has been broken, He desires not our gifts: If you have done a brother an injury, and he has just cause of complaint, peace has been disrupted, and the Holy One requires you to right that wrong *before* He will receive your worship. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psa 66:18). God is as much the Father of the offended one as He is of you; and He will receive naught at your hand, until you remove that stumblingstone from before your brother. No worship or service can possibly be acceptable to God while I cherish a malicious spirit toward any of His children.

When a minister of the Church of England gives notice of an approaching "Holy Communion," he is required to read unto those expecting to participate from an exhortation containing these words: "And if ye shall perceive your offences to be such as are not only against God, but also against your neighbours, then ye shall reconcile yourself unto them; being ready to make restitution and satisfaction, according to the uttermost of your power, for all injuries and wrongs done by you to any other; and being likewise ready to forgive others that have offended you, as ye would have forgiveness of your offence at God's hand: for otherwise, the receiving of the Holy Communion doth naught else than increase your damnation." Alas, that there is so little of such plain and faithful warning in most sections of Christendom today; and that Christ is so often insulted by His "Supper" being celebrated in places where bitter feelings are cherished and breaches exist between the celebrants.

The following precepts are so many illustrations of Ephesians 4:3, and so many branches of the responsibility saintwards of each reconciled soul. "Have peace *one with another*" (Mar 9:50). "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet...love one another" (Joh 13:14, 34). "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom 12:10). "Admonish one another" (Rom 15:14). "By love serve one another...Bear ye one another's burdens" (Gal 5:13; 6:2). "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph 4:32). "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phi 2:3). "Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another" (1Th 5:11). "Exhort one another... consider one another to provoke unto love and to

good works” (Heb 3:13; 10:24). “Speak not evil one of another” (Jam 4:11). “Use hospitality one to another...all of you be subject one to another” (1Pe 4:9; 5:5).

THE GREAT CHANGE

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2Co 5:17). Familiar as are those words to most of our readers, simple and plain as their meaning appears to be; yet like almost every verse in the Epistles, this one can only be rightly understood by ascertaining its connection with the context. Nay, we go further: Unless this verse be interpreted in strict accord with its setting, we are certain to err in our apprehension of it. The very fact that it is introduced with “therefore” shows it is inseparably connected with what goes before, that it introduces an inference, or draws a conclusion therefrom; and if we ignore it, we reject the key which alone will open its contents. In our last, we took up the preceding verses, though we by no means attempted to give a full exposition of the same. Our design was simply to supply a sufficient explanation of their terms, as would enable the reader to perceive the apostle’s drift. That required us to point out the general conditions prevailing in the Corinthian assembly (so that it might appear *why* Paul wrote to them as he did), and then to indicate the trend of what he said in chapters 3 and 4.

In 2 Corinthians 5:12, the apostle tells them, “For we commend not ourselves again unto you [see 2Co 3:1-2], but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.” Those who gloried in appearance were the Judaizers, who boasted of their lineage from Abraham and of belonging to the Circumcision. In what follows, Paul furnishes his converts with arguments which the false teachers could not answer, employing language which set aside the exclusivism of Judaism. First, he pointed out that “if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all” (2Co 5:14-15). That thrice repeated “all” emphasized the international scope of Christ’s federal work: He died as truly on the behalf and in the stead of God’s elect among the Gentiles as for the elect Jews, and as verse 15 goes on to show, the one benefits therefrom as much as do the other. The cross of Christ effected and introduced a great change in the kingdom of God. Whatever peculiar position of honour the Jews had previously occupied, whatever special privileges had been theirs under the Mosaic economy, they obtained no longer. The glorious inheritance which Christ purchased was to be the portion of all for whom He endured the curse, and of all for whom He earned the reward of the Law.

Next, the apostle showed the logical inferences which must be drawn forth from what he had established in verses 14-15. First, “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). Notice first the words which we have placed in italics: They are time marks defining the revolutionary transition, calling attention to the great dispensational change, which the redemptive work of Christ had produced. That change consisted of the complete setting aside of the old order of things, which had held sway during the fifteen centuries preceding, under which a fleshly relation had predominated. Christ had ushered in an order of things, wherein such distinctions, as Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, had no virtue and conferred no special privilege. For one who had been redeemed, it mattered nothing whether his brethren and sisters in Christ were formerly members of the Jewish nation or aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. He knew or esteemed no man according to his natural descent. The true Circumcision are they “which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”—or their genealogy (Phi 3:3).

Not only had the death and resurrection of Christ resulted in the setting aside of Judaism—which was based upon a fleshly descent from Abraham, and whose privileges could only be enjoyed by those bearing in their bodies the covenant sign of circumcision (Judaism being displaced by Christianity, which is based upon a spiritual relation to Christ, the privileges of which are enjoyed by those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the sign and seal of the new covenant)—but Christ Himself is now known or esteemed after a different and higher manner. It was as their promised Messiah He had appeared unto the Jews, and it was as such His disciples had believed on Him (Luk 24:21; Joh 1:41, 45). Accordingly, He had bidden His apostles, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mat 10:5-6)—contrast Matthew 28:19 after His resurrection! So far from knowing Christ as the Jewish Messiah, they worship Him as exalted above all principality and power. “Jesus Christ *was* a minister of the circumcision” (Rom 15:8), but He is *now* seated “on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the [heavenly] sanctuary” (Heb 8:1-2).

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, the apostle draws a further conclusion from what he had stated in verse 15: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature"—yes, "any man," be he a Jew or Gentile. Before we can ascertain the force of "a new creature," we have to carefully weigh the opening word, for its absence or presence entirely changes the character of the sentence: "If any man be in Christ, he *is* a new creature" is a simple statement of fact, but "therefore if" is a conclusion drawn from something preceding. That one consideration should be sufficient to show our verse is not treating of regeneration, for if it signified "any person who is vitally united to Christ has been born again," the "therefore" would be entirely superfluous—he either is or he is not a spiritually-quicken soul, and no reasoning, no inference can alter the fact. Or is there anything in the context from which regeneration can be deduced, for the apostle is not treating of the gift and operations of the Spirit, but of the judicial consequences of Christ's federal work. Instead of describing Christian experience in this 17th verse, Paul is stating one of the *legal effects* which necessarily results from what Christ did for His people.

In 2 Corinthians 5:13 and 14, Christ is set forth as the federal Head of His Church, first in death, then in resurrection. From that doctrinal statement of fact, a twofold inference is pointed. First and negatively (2Co 5:16), those whom Christ represented *died in Him* to their old status or natural standing, so that henceforth, they are no longer influenced by fleshly relationships. Second and positively (2Co 5:17), those whom Christ represented *rose in Him* and were inducted into a new status or spiritual standing. Christ was transacting as the Covenant Head of His people, and He rose as the Head of the new creation (as Adam was the head of the old); and therefore, if I be federally in a risen Christ, I must legally be "a new creature" (2Co 5:17; Gal 6:15), having *judicially* "passed from death unto life" (Joh 5:24; 1Jo 3:14). As Romans 8:1 declares, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus"—and why? Because being legally one with Him, they died in Him. In like manner, they are therefore new creatures in Christ—and why? Because being legally one with Him, they rose in Him: "Who is the beginning [i.e. of the new creation—compare Rev 3:14], the firstborn from the dead" (Col 1:18). Judicially, they are "risen *with* Christ" (Col 3:1).

Not only does the context and its opening, "therefore" preclude us from regarding 2 Corinthians 5:17 as describing what takes place in a soul at regeneration, but the contents of the verse itself forbid such an interpretation. It is indeed true that such a miracle of grace effects a most blessed transformation in the one who is the subject of it, yet *not* such as comes up to the terms here used. What is the principal thing which affects the character and conduct of a person *before* he is born again? Is it not "the flesh"? Beyond dispute it is. Equally indubitable is it that the old nature does *not* "pass away" when God quickens a spiritually-dead soul. It is also true that regeneration is an entrance upon a new life, yet it certainly is not the case that "*all* things are become new," for he receives neither a new memory nor a new body. If verse 17 be describing some aspect of Christian experience, then it is glorification, for most assuredly its language does not suit regeneration.

"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us [the ministers of the new covenant—2 Corinthians 3:6] the ministry of reconciliation" (2Co 5:18). This also is quite against the popular interpretation of the foregoing. Let it be duly noted that verse 18 opens with "And," which indicates it continues the same line of thought. "All [the—Greek] things" which are of God refer not to the universe as proceeding from Him, nor to His providential agency by which all events are controlled, but rather to those particular things spoken of from verse 13 onwards: All that Christ accomplished—the great dispensational change which has resulted from His death and resurrection, the preaching of the ministers of the new covenant—have God for their Author. The outcome of what Christ did is that those for whom He transacted are "reconciled to God" (2Co 5:20); and reconciliation, be it particularly noted, is like justification—entirely *objective*, and not subjective as is regeneration! Reconciliation is—as we have fully demonstrated in our articles on that doctrine—wholly a matter of *relationship*: God's laying aside His wrath and being at peace with us.

"And hath given to us [His ambassadors] the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world [‘a world’—Greek] unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2Co 5:18-19). From there to the end of 2 Corinthians 6:10, the apostle informs us what this "ministry" consisted of. First, it was that God "was in Christ, reconciling" not merely an apostate Judaism, but an alienated "world"—that is, the whole election of grace, the "all" of 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 15. Then he states the negative side of "reconciliation"—namely, "not imputing their trespasses unto them," which again brings in the *legal* side of things. The positive side of reconciliation is given in verse 21: "That we might be made the

righteousness of God in him," which is entirely objective and judicial, and in no sense subjective and experimental. How vastly different is that than if he had said, "reconciling a world unto Himself, imparting unto them a new nature" or "subduing their iniquities"! It is not what God works *in* His people, but what by Christ He has done *for* them, that the whole passage treats of.

Turning back again to verse 17, "Therefore": In view of what has been established in the preceding verses, it necessarily follows that—"if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature"—he has a new standing before God; being representatively one with Christ, he has been brought onto resurrection ground, he is a member of that new creation of which Christ is the federal Head; and consequently, he is under an entirely *new Covenant*. This is the grand and incontrovertible conclusion which must be drawn: The "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." The natural and national distinctions which obtained under the old covenant find no place on resurrection ground: *They* were connected with the flesh; whereas, the relationship which obtains, and the privileges which are enjoyed under the new covenant are entirely spiritual. Once that was clearly apprehended and laid hold of by faith, it rendered nugatory the contentions of the Judaizers.

It is by no means easy for us at this late date to conceive of what that revolutionary transaction from Judaism to Christianity involved, to Jew and Gentile alike. It was the greatest change this world has ever witnessed. For fifteen centuries, God's kingdom on earth had been confined unto one favoured nation, during which time all others had been left to walk in their own ways. The gulf which divided Judaism from Paganism was far more real and very much wider than that which exists between Romanism and orthodox Christianity. The divisive spirit between Jew and Gentile was more intense than that which obtains between the several castes in India. But at the Cross, the Mosaic economy "passed away," the middle wall of partition was broken down; and upon Christ's resurrection, the "Go not into the way of the Gentiles" (Mat 10:5) gave place to "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mar 16:15). Fleshly relationships which had so markedly characterised Judaism, now gave place to spiritual ones; yet it was only with the greatest difficulty that converted Jews could be brought to realise that fact; and much in the New Testament is devoted unto a proving of the same.

The principal design of the entire epistle to the Hebrews was to demonstrate that "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2Co 5:17)! In it, the apostle makes it manifest that the "old covenant" which Jehovah had entered into with Israel, at Sinai, with all its ordinances of worship and the peculiar privileges connected therewith, was disannulled, that it was superceded by a new and better economy. Therein, it is declared that Christ hath "obtained a more excellent ministry" in proportion to His being "the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (Heb 8:6); and after quoting from Jeremiah 31, where the new covenant was announced, pointed out that the former one "which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away" (Heb 8:13). The transcendent superiority of the new above the old is brought out in many details: The former was but temporary, the latter is eternal; the one contained only the shadow of good things to come, the latter the substance. The Aaronic priesthood has been displaced by Christ's—an earthly inheritance by an heavenly. The blessed contrast between them is set forth most fully in Hebrews 12:18-24.

Not only did the converted Jews find it difficult to adjust themselves to the great change produced by the new covenant displacing the old, but unconverted Jews caused much trouble in the Christian assemblies, insisting that their descent from Abraham conferred special privileges upon them, and that Gentiles could only participate in them by being circumcised and becoming subject to the ceremonial law. Not a little in Paul's epistles is devoted to a refutation of such errors. That the Corinthians were being harassed by such Judaizers, we have already shown—further evidence is supplied by 2 Corinthians 11:18, where the apostle refers to "many glory after the flesh"—i.e. their natural lineage. But all ground had been cut from under their feet by what he had declared in 2 Corinthians 3 and his unanswerable argument in 2 Corinthians 5:13-18. Christ's death and resurrection had caused "old things" to pass away: The old covenant, the Mosaic economy, Judaism, was no more. "All things are become new": A new covenant, Christianity—with better relationships and privileges, a superior standing before God, different ordinances of worship—had been introduced.

The same is true of the epistle to the Galatians, wherein there are many parallels to what has been before us in Corinthians. The churches of Galatia were also troubled by teachers of error, who were seeking to Judaize them, and Paul uses much the same method in exposing their sophistries. "There is neither Jew nor Greek...bond nor free...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28) is an echo of "henceforth know

we no man after the flesh" (2Co 5:16). In several respects, the contents of Galatians 4:21-31 are similar to what is found in 2 Corinthians 3—for in both, the two covenants are contrasted; and in Galatians 4, under the allegory of Hagar and Sarah and their sons, the superiority of the latter is shown. "Ye that desire to be under the law" (Gal 4:21) means under the old covenant. "Born after the flesh" in verse 23 signifies according to nature, "by promise" equals supernaturally. "These are" means that "*represent* the two covenants" (Gal 4:24). "Cast out the bondwoman and her son" of verse 30 has the force of act, in accordance with the fact that the old things are "passed away"; while the "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (the only other place in the New Testament that expression occurs!!) of Galatians 6:15 is enforcing the same truth as 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Once the meaning of 2 Corinthians 5:16 be perceived, there is no place for any dispute as to the signification of what immediately follows. In the light of 2 Corinthians 5:12; 10:7; 11:18, it is unmistakably clear that the apostle was dissuading the Corinthian saints from a carnal and sinful partiality, namely, of regarding men according to "outward appearance," or fleshly descent; bidding them to esteem their brethren by their relation *to Christ* and not to Abraham, and to view Christ Himself not as "a minister of the circumcision" (Rom 15:8), but as "the mediator of a better covenant" (Heb 8:6) who has made "all things...become new" (2Co 5:17). The old covenant was made with one nation only; the new covenant, with believers of all nations. Its sacrifices made nothing perfect; our Sacrifice has perfected us forever (Heb 10:1, 14). Circumcision was for the natural seed of Jacob; baptism is for the spiritual children of Christ. Only the Levites were permitted to enter the holy place, all the children of God have the right of immediate access to Him. The seventh day was the Sabbath under the Siniatic constitution; the first day celebrates the order of things introduced by a risen Christ. "Old things are passed away; behold, *all* things are become new"!

N.B.¹ The "great change" which the grand miracle of grace effects in God's elect will be examined in considerable detail (D.V.) in next year's issues.



¹ N.B.—*Nota Bene*, Latin, meaning: a note of importance.