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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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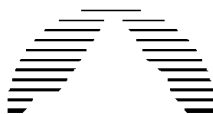
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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IDENTIFICATION OF THE GODLY

Our design in preparing a short article each year under this title is threefold. First, to test Christian professors, for it is highly probable that some of our readers have been deceived by that ill-balanced preaching which is so rife, wherein the whole emphasis is laid upon “believing”—and nothing is said of repentance and reformation, and scarcely anything on the imperative necessity of bringing forth the fruits of righteousness in order to authenticate our claim to being Christians. Second, to help doubting souls by describing some of the features of the regenerate, so that the better they may recognize whether or no they have been divinely renewed. Not a few, because of the defective teaching they sit under, are needlessly kept languishing in “doubting Castle”; and we long to be used in delivering them from its dismal dungeons, and bringing them out into the sunshine of the Gospel. Third, to deepen the assurance of the saints, that they may be more firmly rooted and established in the truth, and *know* they have “passed from death unto life” (1Jo 3:14), so that their “joy may be full” (1Jo 1:4).

We turn now to point out another mark which distinguishes the regenerate from the unregenerate, basing our argument on those words, “not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Rom 2:4). It should be pointed out that that verse is not speaking from the viewpoint of God’s eternal purpose, nor is its design to teach us (by implication) how repentance is effectually wrought in the elect. Quite otherwise. Since it occurs in a passage which is little understood, we will take this opportunity to offer a few remarks upon its general scope. Romans 2, particularly verses 1-16, is an expansion of the solemn truth made known in Rom 1:18. It sets forth those principles which at once commend themselves unto every quickened conscience. The first is, he who condemns in others what he does himself, thereby condemns himself (Rom 2:1). Second, God’s judgment will be according to the real state of the case, everything being taken into impartial consideration (Rom 2:2). Third, the special goodness of God—whether exercised toward a particular individual of a nation—forms no ground of exemption from merited punishment, but when unimproved, will only serve to aggravate their condemnation (Rom 2:3-5).

It was the expectation of the Jews that their descent from Abraham (Mat 3:9; Joh 8:33), and the special favours they enjoyed from Jehovah, would secure them from the doom that would overtake the Gentiles. In that, they erred fatally. Nor are they by any means alone in cherishing such a vain delusion. It is a very common assumption on the part of the children of disobedience that the showering of heaven’s providential bounties upon them is a sure sign there is nothing for them to fear. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecc 8:11). They make the very kindness of God a license to continue in sin and regard His longsuffering as indifference to their wickedness. Because their lives are spared and prolonged when many of their careless companions are cut off, or because they are given a larger portion than others of their fellows of what this world provides, they conclude that God will never deal severely with them. They err greatly, for after their hardness and impenitent heart, they are but treasuring up unto themselves wrath “against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom 2:5).

“Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Rom 2:4). The “goodness of God” is a general term for His benignity and munificence. The “riches” thereof import the high value and great abundance of them, and are thus termed to excite our wonderment. The principal reference is to God’s providential blessings and bounties unto the children of men, and which are “despised” by them when their hearts are unaffected by the same. The “riches of his goodness and forbearance” tells of the restraint which God exercises in not immediately executing His vengeance upon such base ingrates. The “riches of his...longsuffering” describes the amazing extent of His forbearance in delaying to punish those who so greatly abuse His mercies—a degree not yet completely exhausted. He still grants them “space to repent” (Rev 2:21). Present immunity from punishment by no means signifies that the sinner may continue to defy God with impunity. Far from it. Rather is the prolongation of his day of opportunity and the continuation of God’s mercies designed to lead him to repentance.

“Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” The apostle, then, is not speaking here of men’s ignorance of that gracious influence, which, in the day of God’s power, makes His people willing to throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him (2Co 10:4-5), but rather of their failure to perceive *the design* of His moral government. It is not the divine decree which is in view, but the moral

tendency of God's providential dispensations. It is what theologians rightly term the "external call," addressed unto the responsibility of all, by the privileges they enjoy, and the advantages which are theirs (compare Pro 1:24; Isa 5:4!). Though the divine bounties bestowed upon the unregenerate do not soften their hearts, and though the wondrous patience of God with them does not move them to forsake their sins, yet such is the design or moral tendency of both the one and the other. That they do not so eventuate is solely the fault of their base recipients. They *ought* to produce repentance in all: if they do not, the impenitent are left "without excuse" (Rom 1:20), and their case is aggravated in proportion to the mercies they have abused.

"Not knowing": such is the carnal stupidity and moral insensibility of the natural man. He fails to understand the gracious design of the One who is his daily Benefactor. He neither discerns the trend of God's kindness, nor comprehends his own duty with reference thereto. He is either so filled with self-righteousness as to consider temporal blessings are his due, or so besotted as to draw an entirely false inference from them. The great majority insanely regard God's goodness as a mark of indulgence, or as His indifference to their deplorable conduct. God's very patience hardens their hearts and causes them to continue in sin, supposing that He will ever be tolerant with them, even though they go on defying Him unto the end of their days. "Not knowing" means in a *practical way*, not duly improving the same. Because divine justice lingers in its execution, the wicked assume it has no real existence and consists only of empty threats. Instead, God holds back the hand of His wrath to prolong man's opportunity for repentance: "Let it alone this year...if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down" (Luk 13:7-9).

God is good and doeth good. It is true that "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7), yet he is the recipient of much which relieves his misery, for the mercy of God is over all the works of His hands. He daily loadeth men with His benefits (Psa 68:19), but those benefits meet with a very varied reception. Many receive them with callous unconcern: the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but multitudes of men and women refuse to recognize the hand that ministers so tenderly to them. The patience of God not only affords time and opportunity for repentance, but it furnishes motives and encouragement thereto—revealing our duty unto One so benevolent and affording ground to hope for His acceptance of us if we respond to His gracious overtures in the Gospel; only man's depravity and perversity prevents the improvement of His forbearance. But, instead, the majority harden their hearts, as they did during the terrible air raids, closing their ears to God's voice in them. A few appear thankful for His mercies, and verbally acknowledge God's goodness; but there they stop—there is no repentance, no reformation of life.

But how different is it with the regenerate! God's goodness does lead *them* "to repentance"! Even His temporal blessings affect their hearts, so that they are made to sincerely exclaim: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant" (Gen 32:10). The divine blessings they receive, so far from hardening and causing them presumptuously to proceed with high-handed rebellion, melt them, and cause them gratefully to ask: "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?" (Psa 116:12). The more tokens of God's goodness they receive, the more are they convicted of their undeservingness. Instead of abusing His forbearance, they are amazed at His patience with them.

It is no proof that you are a child of God because He has borne long with your waywardness, for God endures "with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom 9:22). Nor is it any proof that you are a Christian because God has ministered freely unto you in temporal mercies, for "he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mat 5:45). But it *is* an evidence that you are one of God's children if His forbearance has touched your heart and moved you to marvel at His patience toward you. It *is* an evidence you are a quickened soul if the realization of God's goodness has filled you with godly sorrow and led you to amend your life. Here, then, is one of the distinguishing marks between the regenerate and the unregenerate: the *effects* which God's goodness has upon their hearts and the *response* which they make unto the same.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

42. Colossians 1:9-12, Part 6

“Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col 1:11). Since we hope to return to the subject of patience, when (D.V.) we read 2 Thessalonians 3:5, we will say nothing further upon it here. Nor is there any need to descant upon “longsuffering,” since the term defines itself—signifying a prolongation of patience unto the end of the trial. Yet in view of the *connections* in which those terms are found, we may distinguish between them thus: “patience” looks more to the attitude of the heart godward while we are being tried; “longsuffering” respects our attitude toward the instruments which He makes use of in the trial. Thus, “longsuffering” includes the ideas of being slow to anger with those who persecute or afflict us, meekly bearing for Christ’s sake those injuries which His enemies inflict upon us, refusing to retaliate when we are oppressed, following the example our Master has left us, “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again” (1Pe 2:23). “Charity suffereth long, and is kind” (1Co 13:4). But “patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col 1:11) calls for a fuller consideration.

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [or ‘trials’]” (Jam 1:2). Many will be ready to say, That is asking of me an impossibility: I cannot conjure up joy by any effort of will; only the Lord can produce rapture in my heart. But joy, my reader, is not a thing apart, unrelated to the faculties of the soul, unconnected with the state of our minds. I cannot indeed command the sun to appear, but when it *is* shining, I can retire into the shade, and there, sulk in my chilliness. So, too, the heart may turn away from the Sun of righteousness, and, instead of dwelling upon His love and loveliness, occupy the mind with gloomy objects and subjects. The Christian is just as responsible to be joyous, as he is to be holy. It is his duty to be joyous in adversity, as well as in prosperity, when the devil rages against us, as when he leaves us in peace for a season—and we shall do so, if our minds be properly employed and our hearts delight themselves in the Lord.

None of the empty pleasures of this world afford any solid happiness. As the natural man passes from childhood to old age, he does but change his toys, only to discover that no gratification of his senses yields any real satisfaction. Neither sorrow nor joy are caused by environment or circumstances; nor is joy to be found in any creature. “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines...the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls”: what then? I will deplore the situation, and make myself wretched by contemplating a death of starvation? No indeed: rather, “Yet I will *rejoice* in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab 3:17-18). Note well that “I will” of personal resolution. As the king may be miserable in his palace (1Ki 21:5-6; Ecc 2:1-11), so the manacled and bleeding occupants of the dungeon may sing praises (Act 16:25); yea, while sorrowing over things around us, we may continually rejoice (2Co 6:10).

James 1:2 does not exhort us to rejoice in the trials as such, but by an act of spiritual judgment, to regard them as joyous, giving three reasons why Christians should do so. “Knowing this [being fully persuaded of it] that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (Jam 1:3). Two things are there included which should mightily further our joy. First, that all our sufferings and afflictions are for the trial of faith, and that is a great privilege. If we were possessed of more spiritual discernment, we should readily perceive that as the *communication* of saving grace to a soul is the greatest blessing which can be bestowed in this world, so to have that grace *tested*, exercised, and drawn forth to the glory of God is the next greatest mercy. For that grace to approve itself unto God, in a manner that is well pleasing to Him, is a matter of vast moment. So for the genuineness of my faith to be made manifest by overcoming the world—“esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb 11:26); by valuing the smile of God more than fearing the frowns of men; by firmly enduring persecution when others fall away (Mat 13:21)—should bring much comfort to the soul.

Second, this trying of faith “worketh patience.” Trials are not only designed for the approving of faith, but for the improving—i.e. that it may yield its “peaceable fruits” (Heb 12:11). The more faith enables us to truly rest in the Lord and stand our ground under afflictions, the more we become inured to and patient under them. As faith draws out the heart unto and stays the mind upon God, the soul is brought into a more sober frame and more cordially acquiesces in the divine will. Faith brings home to the heart the dominion which God has over a man’s person and life, and this quietens evil uprisings against Him. Faith assures the

heart of the love of God and its interests in Him, and that strengthens him in the greatest distresses. When Ziklag was burned, David's goods plundered, and his wives carried away by the Philistines, he "encouraged himself in the LORD his God" (1Sa 30:6). The more a Christian bears meekly but perseveringly, the more he is enabled *to bear*—the muscles of his graces become stronger by use. If trials produce such fruits, ought we not to rejoice in them!

Third, "Blessed [or 'happy'] is the man that endureth temptation" Why? "For when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life" (Jam 1:12). That is the reward given to the victor in the day to come, in the happy expectation of which the soul may count it all joy that he is now being afflicted and persecuted. The object of his rejoicing is not his sufferings, for they are considered in themselves grievous; but rather the issue thereof. Paul reminded the Hebrews, "For ye...took joyfully the spoiling of your goods"—why so?—"knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance" (Heb 10:34). Thus it was with the Saviour Himself: "Who for *the joy* that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb 12:2). And thus has He assured His followers, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. *Rejoice*, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Mat 5:11-12). When we "glory in tribulations" (Rom 5:3)—because we realize the advantages which will accrue both here and hereafter—we are "more than conquerors" (Rom 8:37).

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col 1:12). This is the closing section of our prayer; and we may notice that in it, the apostle exemplifies his exhortation: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known unto God" (Phi 4:6). When we come to the Throne of Grace, petitions and praise should ever accompany each other. There should be the thanksgiving of grateful love for mercies already received; of confident faith in God's promises, that He will certainly bestow the things for which we now ask—so far as to do so will be for His glory and our highest good; of joyous expectation of the things which He hath prepared and are awaiting us on high. The general relation of this verse to those preceding is apparent: the being "filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col 1:9) is to find expression in a worthy walk (Col 1:10), in the exercise of patient endurance (Col 1:11), in grateful thanksgiving (Col 1:12).

The *order* of those things is not only according to the analogy of faith, but it is verified in the experience of the saints in the several stages of their growth in grace. Conscious of his ignorance, it is a knowledge of God's will (as made known in the Word) which most engages the attention of the babe in Christ. As the Spirit graciously opens the Scriptures to his understanding and applies them to his heart, he becomes more concerned with honouring the Lord in his daily walk and "being fruitful in every good work" (Col 1:10). As he grows still older and meets with more trials and tribulations, he has an increasing realization of his need for being divinely strengthened, so that he may not faint beneath the burdens of life and the difficulties of the way (Eph 3:13); that he may not become weary in well doing (Gal 6:9; 2Th 3:13), but run the race set before him (Heb 12:1; 1Co 9:24); and meekly submit to all the dispensations of God's providence (Col 1:11). Finally, as he approaches the end of his journey, he is more and more occupied with the glorious inheritance awaiting him, wherein he will have done for ever with sin and suffering. The more joyful he is (Col 1:11), the more will he be filled with the spirit of thanksgiving.

The order of these things here also inculcates, in a most searching manner, an important practical lesson. This giving of thanks unto the Father does not occur at the beginning of the prayer, but at its *close*. Thereby, it is intimated that none of us is warranted in concluding that *he* is among the number whom He "hath made...meet to be partakers of the inheritance" (Col 1:12), unless the things previously mentioned are in some measure really found in him. It would be highly presumptuous for me to complacently assume that I am fit for heaven, *unless* I be sincerely endeavouring to "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work" (Col 1:10), and unless I possess my soul with patience, longsuffering (Col 1:11), and rejoice when I am persecuted for Christ's sake (Mat 5:11-12). Not that these things are qualifications for heaven, but rather the *evidences* that divine grace has suitably fashioned my soul thereunto. It is not that these things are the procuring cause by which I shall enter the glory, but the marks that God has already "wrought me for" it.

On the other hand, it is equally necessary that we note carefully the tense of the verb here. It is not a promise that God "*will* make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance," nor is the reference unto a present process that He is now "*making* us meet." That is one of the serious errors of Romanists, who teach that

Christians must undergo a refining season of discipline in this life to fit them for the courts above, which discipline is only completed by the purifying fires of purgatory ridding them of their remaining corruptions. Nor has the teaching of many Protestants been much better. Some of them, in their presentation of what is termed “progressive sanctification,” have handled it in a very legal manner and brought many of God’s people into cruel bondage thereby. How widespread is this confusion, which appears in such expressions as being “meetened for glory” and “ripened for heaven.” Few indeed make use of this prayer in giving thanks unto the Father, because He *has already* made them meet for the inheritance.

Our present verse, then, brings before us a subject of vital moment and great practical importance, albeit one of which most of God’s children today are sadly defective in their apprehensions. Many of them who ought to be rejoicing in the liberty of the Gospel are enthralled in some form of legal bondage. Comparatively, few of them are exulting in the self-abasing and soul-satisfying consciousness that they are “*complete* in him” who is their Head (Col 2:10). If the only consequences of this were the disturbing of their peace and overcasting of their joy, such evils would call for an earnest effort to correct them. How much more so when, in addition, the absence of such assurance (which is their legitimate portion) dishonours the Lord, cramps their energies, obscures their graces, and renders their spiritual state uncertain both to themselves and to others.

One form of this evil is found even in many who have a clear knowledge of the ground on which God justifies the ungodly—that after a person has tasted of the blessedness of the man “whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Psa 32:1), there remains much to be done before the soul is ready to enter his eternal rest. They hold that after justification, the believer must undergo a process of sanctification; and for this reason, he is left for a time amid the trials and conflicts of a hostile world. The prevalency of this notion appears in much preaching, many hymns, and especially in prayers—for while many Christians may be frequently heard pleading to be made meet, rarely indeed do we hear one giving thanks to the Father because He *hath* made us meet for the inheritance of the saints. Those labouring under such an impression can never know when the process is completed, nor can they say with any confidence to a dying man, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Act 16:31) here and now, for it would flatly contradict their own ideas.

One would suppose that those toiling under this view must be staggered by their own experience and observation. They see those whom they confidently regard as Christians cut off in apparently very different stages of this process; and if the completion of it be what is styled “perfect sanctification,” then in how few cases, so far as we can perceive, is any such preparation for glory actually attained! On their death-beds, the most eminent saints confess themselves thoroughly dissatisfied with their attainments! Yet many who deem themselves the most orthodox insist that while justification is an act completed at once, “sanctification is a progressive work.” If by that expression they intend our growth in grace and the manifestation of it in this life, there can be no objection; but if it import a preparation for heaven, and that such preparation is to be the grand object of the believer’s life, it is to be rejected as a God-dishonouring and soul-enslaving error—a flat contradiction of the text before us.

These three things (none others or any more) are indispensable to qualify any sinner for heaven. First, he must be predestinated thereto by the Father, which was effected “on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore [by His eternal decree] prepared unto glory” (Rom 9:23). Second, he must have a valid legal right and the title unto the inheritance: this the believing sinner has in the merits of Christ, who, by His one offering, “*hath perfected for ever* them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14). Third, he must be experimentally fitted for the kingdom of God—and this, he is, by the regenerating act of the Holy Spirit. As the natural babe is born complete in parts (though not in their development), so that no new member or faculty can be added—though they are susceptible of expansion, with a fuller expression and clearer manifestation—so it is with the spiritual babe in Christ. “He that *hath wrought us* for the selfsame thing [i.e. the glory to come—see context] is God,” and proof thereof is, “who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit” (2Co 5:5).

“The work of God the Spirit in regeneration is *eternally complete*. It admits of no increase or decrease. It is one and the same in all believers. There will not be the least addition to it in heaven: not one grace, holy affection, or disposition *there*, which is not in it *now*. The whole of the Spirit’s work, therefore, from the moment of regeneration to our glorification, is to draw out those graces into actual exercise, which He hath wrought in us. And though one believer may abound in the fruits of righteousness more than another, yet there is not one of them more regenerate than another. This work of the Spirit, in which our meetness

for the eternal fruition of God consists, is alike in all, in each, in every one that is born of the Spirit. The babe in Christ, dying as such, is as capable of high communion with God as Paul in the state of glory. The regenerate soul cannot have any addition to the holiness of that new principle imparted from the Spirit to them. He cannot be a partaker of every grace of the Holy Spirit more completely than he is already" (Samuel E. Pierce, b. 1827).

Our "meetness" for heaven is evidenced by the very terms here used. First, it is called an "inheritance"; and that is not something we purchase by good works, nor procure by self-denial and mortification (as the Papists insist): rather is it that to which we lawfully succeed by our relationship to another. Primarily, it is that to which a child succeeds because of his relation to his father, or as the son of an earthly king inherits the crown. In this case, the inheritance is ours by virtue of our being the *sons* of God—which we become actually at the new birth. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:16-17). If we inquire more distinctly what this "inheritance" is, the next verse (Col 1:13) tells us: it is "the kingdom of his [God's] dear Son" into which we are already translated. Joint-heirs with Christ must share His kingdom. He has *now* made us "kings and priests unto God" (Rev 1:6).

Second, it is "the inheritance of *the saints*" (Col 1:12); and this Christians are from the first moment they savingly believe in Christ, for they are then sanctified or sainted by the very blood which procured their forgiveness (Heb 13:12). Every Christian was sanctified essentially when he was anointed by the Spirit: whether we regard it as separation from those dead in sin, consecration unto God, or made holy by renewal in His image. Third, it is "the inheritance of the saints *in light*"; and we are "made meet" for it when, by the new birth, we became "the children of light" (1Th 5:5). It was then we were "delivered...from the power of darkness" and "called...out of darkness into his [God's] marvellous light" (1Pe 2:9). By nature, we were totally unfit for the inheritance, but by the gracious operation of the Spirit, we are now meet for it, for He has made us sons, heirs, "light in the Lord" (Eph 5:8).

"They were made meet because brought out from a state of alienation from the knowledge of God, the life of God, the love of God, and the glory of God, to know God, to express the life of God, to taste the love of God, and to be willingly and cheerfully devoted to the service and glory of God. Are we come to the enjoyment of all these inestimable privileges: to be 'fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God' (Eph 2:19), brought nigh to God, have free access to Him—with boldness; sprinkled by the blood of Christ? Are these the common privileges which all believers are made the partakers of; and after this, can any gainsay that any believer in Christ is not made meet to partake of the heavenly inheritance? Surely, they who do so can swallow the greatest absurdity. Thou canst thus give thanks" (William Mason, 1719-1791, *The Gospel Magazine*, November 1773).

It is indeed a monstrous absurdity to deny their meetness for the heavenly inheritance of whom God declares, "but ye are washed, but ye *are sanctified*, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1Co 6:11); whom "now hath he reconciled" (Col 1:21), "made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:13), indwelt by His Spirit, delighted in as His sons, and to whom He says, "all things are yours" (1Co 3:21). Rightly did Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) affirm, "The true believer is fit for heaven now, at this very moment. That does not mean he is sinless, but that he has been accepted in the Beloved, adopted into the Family, and fitted by divine approbation to dwell with the saints in light." That no refining process of discipline, no preparation on our part, no progressive sanctification or growth in grace is necessary, in order to meeten a babe in Christ for Paradise, is conclusively shown by the case of the dying thief—who, in the *first day* of his saving faith, was immediately translated from the convict's gibbet to the inheritance of the saints in light.

The question, Why does God leave the Christian in this world for a season if he be already fit for heaven? admits of a simple, but sufficient answer—for His own glory. As a monument of His mercy, an example of his distinguishing love, a witness of His sufficient grace, a proof of His faithfulness in bearing with his infirmities and supplying all his need. To give him an opportunity to honour Him in the place where he had so dishonoured Him. To serve as salt in a corrupt community.

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance." That is not the language of solicitude, but of gratitude. Let it be duly noted that the apostle was not here himself giving thanks on behalf of these saints, but rather, he requests God that *they* might do so! Then let every Christian reader join the writer in fervently thanking the Father for *having* fitted him for eternal glory. The sloughing off of "the flesh" at death is not a qualification for heaven, but the removal of a disqualification.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

22. *Its Lessons*

Before mentioning some of the different aspects of truth which are illustrated in Joshua 3, let us look at the miracle there recorded. "And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,)" (Jos 3:14-15). First, observe well the *time* when this wonder was wrought. It was in the spring of the year, when the river was in spate. At that season, the snows on Mount Lebanon (near which Jordan had its rise) melted, when there was an annual inundation of the valley. God selected a month when conditions were such as to form the most suitable background for an illustrious display of His power. He did not defer the crossing of the river until the end of summer, when it had been at its lowest, but chose the month when it was at its broadest and deepest, that His hand might be the more plainly seen. 1 Chronicles 12:15 tells us Jordan continued to overflow in the days of David.

Next, we would take note of a little detail here which brings out the minute accuracy of Scripture and attests its historical verity, and that, in a most artless manner. Joshua 3:15 tells us it was "the time of harvest." Now the "barley harvest" came first (Ru 1:22); and after an interval of a month or so, the "wheat harvest" (Ru 2:21, 23). Now the Jordan was crossed on the tenth day of the fourth month (Jos 4:19), or four days before the Passover, which fell in with the barley harvest. From Exodus 9:31, we learn that the barley ripened at that season, for the plague of hail was only a day or two before the Passover. From that verse, we learn that the "flax" crop ripened at the same time; and, since the climate of Palestine differed little from that of Egypt, this, no doubt, was the case in Canaan too. Thus, by a comparison of Joshua 3:13 and 4:19, with Exodus 9:31, we see that Israel crossed the Jordan when both the barley and the *flax* were ripe. What a silent, but convincing, confirmation does that furnish of the incidental statement that Rahab hid the spies "with the stalks of *flax*" (Jos 2:6)! This is one out of scores of similar instances adduced by John J. Blunt (1745-1855) in his remarkable book (out of print), *Undesigned Coincidences*, to manifest the veracity of the Word.

"That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho" (Jos 3:16). First, the waters were cleft asunder so that those which came down from above—i.e. from the mountains—were invincibly dammed, so that the down-flowing torrent was supernaturally stayed. It was as though an enormous, but invisible, sluice had suddenly shut off the stream at its source. Second, the huge volume which had already descended was made to turn backward and stand on a heap in a congealed mass—which in our judgment was more remarkable than what occurred at the Red Sea. That solid wall of water must have appeared like some mammoth buttress, yet without any apparent support. Third, the waters which were already in the Jordan valley rapidly drained away into the Dead Sea, leaving the whole of the river's bed dry—"as far downward, it is likely, as it swelled upward" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). Most vividly did R. Gosse depict this prodigy:

"At any time the passage of the river by such a multitude, with their wives and children, their flocks and herds, and all their baggage, would have presented formidable difficulties; but now the channel was filled with a deep and impetuous torrent, which overflowed its banks and spread widely on either side, probably extending nearly a mile in width; while in the very sight of the scene were the Canaanitish hosts, who might be expected to pour out from their fortress and exterminate the invading multitude before they could reach the shore. Yet these difficulties were nothing to Almighty power, and only serve to heighten the effect of the stupendous miracle about to be wrought. No sooner had the feet of the priests touched the brim of the overflowing river than the swollen waters receded from them; and not only the broad lower valley, but the deep bed of the stream was presently emptied of water, and its pebbly bottom became dry. The waters which had been in the channel speedily ran off, while those which would naturally have replaced them from above were miraculously suspended, and accumulated in a glassy heap, far above the city Adam...nearly the whole channel of the Lower Jordan from a little below the Lake of Tiberias to the Dead Sea was dry."

“And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan” (Jos 3:17). What a test of the priests’ faith and obedience was that!—a much more severe one than that required of them in verse 8. There, they were only bidden to step into the brink of the water, which, at most, occasioned but a temporary inconvenience; though since they had to do so *before* any miracle was wrought, it called for unquestioning submission to the divine will. But here they were required to remain stationary in the centre of the river bed, which, to sight, was a most perilous situation—with the great mass of the higher waters liable to suddenly rush down and engulf them. But there they patiently abode, for it must have taken many hours for such a huge multitude to pass over on foot. God’s servants are not only called upon to set His people an example of implicit confidence in and full obedience to Him, but to take the lead when dangers threaten and acquit themselves courageously and perseveringly. The Lord fully vindicated the priests’ obedience, holding back the mighty torrent, until after they too crossed to the farther side—thereby denoting that the same power which divided the waters kept them suspended.

Consider now some of the lessons taught us here:

(1) We are shown the fundamental things which God requires from His people. First, they must “sanctify” themselves (Jos 3:5), the essential elements of which are separation from sin and the world, and entire consecration of ourselves unto God. Thereby, we evince that He has won our hearts. Second, they must obediently follow the ark of the covenant, ordering their actions by it. In the ark was the divine Law—the articles of the covenant. They must, in resolve and earnest endeavour, be regulated by the will of God in all things, doing whatsoever He commanded them. Third, they must steadily and thankfully view the propitiatory which formed the lid of the ark. Here we behold the blessed balance. The ark spoke of the righteous demands of God upon us, the mercy-seat of His gracious provisions for us. Humbly confess your sins to God, and thankfully plead the cleansing blood of Christ. If we conduct ourselves by those three basic rules, all will be well.

(2) What a glorious God do we serve! He is possessed of all-mighty power and infinite wisdom. All the powers and elements of nature are subject to Him and make way for His presence. When He so pleases, He can alter all the properties of those elements and change the course of nature. Nothing is too hard for that One who has turned liquid floods into solid walls, who has caused the sun to stand still (yea, to go backward: 2Ki 20:11), who has made flinty rocks to pour out fountains of water, ravens to feed Elijah, iron to swim, fire not to burn. “He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground;...He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings. And there he maketh the hungry to dwell” (Psa 107:33-36). And if such a “God be *for us*, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31).

(3) Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity. The Lord waits to be gracious. Often He suffers our circumstances to become critical, yea, desperate, before He appears on our behalf. Here was Israel ready to enter Canaan, and there was the Jordan that “overfloweth all his banks” (Jos 3:15)—a season which, to carnal reason, seemed the most unfavourable of all. Ah, but it afforded the Lord a most fitting occasion to display His sufficiency. “Though that opposition made to the salvation of God’s people have all imaginable advantage, yet God can and will conquer it. Let the banks of Jordan be filled to the brim, filled till they rush over it; it is as easy to Omnipotence to divide them and dry them up, as if they were never so narrow, never so shallow: it is all one unto the Lord” (M. Henry). Then let not the Christian reader give way to despair, because the conditions in which he finds himself are altogether beyond his power to overcome. Your troubles may have already reached the high-water mark, but when they “overfloweth” and all appears to be lost, then you may expect the Lord to show Himself strong in your behalf.

(4) We have here an illustration of the grand truth expressed in Romans 8:28: “And we know that *all* things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Alas, there are times when many a Christian have unbelievably said with Jacob, “all these things are against me” (Gen 42:36); and even though some may not have gone that far, yet few could plead guiltless to having feared that *some* things were against them. Did not the flooded valley appear to be directly against Israel, working for their ill? Yet, in reality, the very overflowing of the Jordan was among the all things contributing to their good: for it furnished an occasion for their God to the more manifestly display His power for them, so that instead of hindering, that inundation actually promoted their good—strengthening their faith in the Lord. How that should reassure the hard-pressed saint today! The very thing or things which are inclining you to give way to despair will yet prove a blessing in disguise, and you will have reason to acknowledge with David, “It is *good* for me that I have been afflicted” (Psa

119:71). The dark dispensations of divine providence, the tribulations you experience, are for the trying and development of your graces.

(5) We have here an exemplification of that is stated in Genesis 1:6-9, where we are told that on the second day, "God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament." By the latter "waters," we understand the reference to be unto something other than the ordinary moisture suspended in the atmosphere—namely, to those "floods" of Genesis 7:11-12. "By the dividing of the waters from the waters [at the Jordan] and the making of the dry land [there] to appear, God would remind them of that which Moses, by divine revelation, had instructed them in concerning the work of creation. That, by what they now saw, their belief of that which they there read might be assisted; and they might know that the God whom they worshipped was the same God that made the world; and that it was the same power which was engaged and employed for them" (M. Henry). Thus, this miracle of Joshua 3 serves to illustrate the verity of Genesis 1:6-9.

(6) We also behold a striking, but solemn, type of Christ effecting the work of our redemption. The ark adumbrated Him as the Covenant-head of His people: borne by the priests, signifying that His work was wrought in His official character. The divine appointment that the ark must go so far in advance of the people (Jos 3:4) foreshadowed the blessed, but awe-inspiring, fact that Christ was *alone* in performing the work of redemption: "for there is none to help" (Psa 22:11) was His plaintive cry. Peter declared that he was ready to accompany his Master unto death, but He answered, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now" (Joh 13:36). And why? Because Christ was about to endure the wrath of God and experience the awful curse of the Law in the stead of His people. The "Jordan" was not only an emblem of death, but of *judgment*—"dan" meaning "judging" (Gen 30:6). Observe well that in Joshua 3:15, we are most significantly told that the river fled back to the place of Adam, to intimate that Christ bore the judgment of all our sins, even "original sin"—the condemnation which the first man's transgression brought upon us, as well as the additional guilt of all our own iniquities.

(7) How to act when confronted by difficulty or danger. Though we dwelt upon this at some length in a previous article, yet because we deem it the most important practical lesson inculcated, we make further reference to it now. Perplexing problems, baffling situations, and being faced with formidable obstacles, are, from time to time, the experience of each Christian: how then is he to conduct himself? Without again enlarging upon the necessity of his taking full stock of the obstacle and of his own inability to remove it, of his refusing to lean unto his own understanding or resort to any carnal expediency, of his being regulated only by the Word of God and walking "in newness of life" (Rom 6:4), we will stress but one feature, the central one: his looking trustfully, expectantly, and perseveringly unto the Lord to make a passage for him through his "Jordan." In a word, to keep the eye of faith steadfastly fixed on the Anti-typical Ark, to grasp firmly His promise, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee...For I am the LORD *thy* God: the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour"—or "Deliverer" (Isa 43:2-3).

(8) For the Christian, there is nothing whatever to fear in death is another truth writ large across Joshua 3. Yet the fact remains that, excepting sin, there is nothing so much dreaded by not a few of God's children: with them a horror of sin proceeds from a spiritual principle, of death from their natural constitution. But death can no more harm a saint than the Jordan did any of the children of Israel, and that for the very same reasons. Christ has vanquished death, as in a figure when the ark of the covenant vanquished the Jordan. It was as that sacred vessel entered the brim that its waters fled before it; and in consequence, all who followed it passed through dry shod. So it was Christ's going before His people into death, which has rendered it impotent to hurt them; and therefore, they exultantly cry, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Co 15:55-57)—for He endured the Law's penalty upon our behalf and extracted the fatal sting from death. For the believer, death is the portal into the heavenly Canaan.

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

6. *The Existence of God, Part 6*

Third, *as seen in human history*. Since God be the Creator of all things, it logically follows that He is their perpetual Preserver and Regulator; and since man be the chief of His earthly creatures, it is unthinkable that God has left him entirely to himself. The same all-mighty Being, who created every part of it, directs the vast machinery of the universe and controls equally all the hearts and actions of men. But the same unbelief, which seeks to banish God from the realm of creation, denies that He has any real place or part in the moral government of the world. The one, it is said, is regulated by the (impersonal) “laws of Nature”; while man, endowed with “free will,” must not be interfered with, but left to work out his own destiny, both individually and collectively considered. We have shown how utterly irrational is such a view as it pertains to the material sphere; and it is no more difficult to demonstrate how thoroughly untenable it is as applied to the moral realm. The palpable facts of observation refute it. The affairs of every individual, the history of each nation, the general course of human events—each alike bear evidence of a higher Power superintending the same.

In reading history, most people are contented with a bare knowledge of its salient facts, without attempting to trace their causes or ascertain the connection of events. For the most part, they look no farther than the motives, designs, and tendencies of human nature. They perceive not that there is a *philosophy* of history. They rise not to the realization that the living God has absolute sway over this scene, that amid all the confusion of human wills and interests, all the malice and wickedness of Satan and his agents, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth—not only in heaven, but over this earth—shaping all its affairs, directing all things to the outworking of His eternal purpose. Because the reading of human history is done so superficially, and few have more than a general acquaintance with its character, our present line of argument may not be so patient or so potent unto some of those who peruse this article. Nevertheless, it should be more or less obvious unto any person of ordinary intelligence that in the course of the centuries, there are clear marks of an over-ruling and presiding Power above the human.

Since there can be no effect without a previous cause, no law without a law-giver, neither do events come to pass fortuitously. Any thoughtful student of history is obliged to conclude that its records are something more than a series of disconnected and purposeless incidents: rather do they evince the working out of a plan. True, its wheels often appear to move slowly, and not infrequently at cross-purposes; nevertheless, the sequel shows they work surely. It is in the *combination* of events leading up to some grand end that the workings of divine providence most clearly appear. As we perceive the wisdom of the Creator in so admirably fitting each member of the human body to perform its designed functions, so we may discern the hand of the moral Ruler of this world in the adapting of appropriate means to the accomplishment of His ends, in the suitability of the instruments He has selected thereunto, in making each separate human actor play his part, each individual contribute his quota in producing the desired effect. As in the mechanism of a watch, each pivot is in place, each wheel in motion, so that the main-spring guides its index, so in the complicated machinery of history, every single circumstance pays its mite toward the furthering of some grand object.

Proofs of a presiding Providence are to be found in the life of each individual. Where is the man who has not passed through experiences which made him feel in his heart there must be a God who watches over him. In the unexpected and remarkable turns in the course of his affairs, in the sudden thoughts and unaccountable decisions which lead to most important results, in his narrow escapes from grave danger, he has evidence of a higher power at work. Even the most giddy and thoughtless are, at times, forced to take notice of this. That we *are* under a Moral Government which dispenses rewards and punishments in a natural way is also plain to our senses and proved by personal experience. Vicious actions speedily meet with retribution, by involving their perpetrator in disgrace, by often reducing him to poverty, subjecting him to bodily disease and mental suffering, and bringing about an untimely death. On the other hand, we find that virtuous actions not only result in inward peace and satisfaction, but lead to respect, health, and happiness.

If there be no living God presiding over this scene, how can we possibly account for the almost exact ratio between the two sexes? Each year, there are born into this world millions of males and of females, yet the balance between them is perfectly preserved. Their parents had no say in the matter, nor did medical science regulate it! The only rational explanation is that the sex of each child is determined by the Creator.

Again, if there be no personal Creator fashioning human countenances, how are we to explain their unvarying variation? The features of the human countenance are but few in number, yet so much does their appearance differ, both singly and in their combination, that out of countless millions, no two people look exactly alike! Suppose the opposite. If a likeness were common, what incalculable inconvenience and confusion would ensue. If only one hundred men in a single large city had the same build and countenance, impersonation would be practised without fear of detection, and criminals could not be identified. Such endless dissimilarities among those descended from common parents must have the Almighty for their Author.

That the One from above regulates all human affairs is demonstrated on every side of us, look where we may. In the instances alluded to above, the individual is entirely passive, for it is by no decision of his that he is born male or female, black or white, a giant or a dwarf. But consider something yet more striking, namely, that even our *voluntary actions* are secretly directed from on high. Each year, hundreds of thousands of both young men and women choose their ordinary vocations or careers: what is it which moves them to make a proportionate selection from such a variety of alternatives? Is it nothing but blind chance that each generation is supplied with sufficient physicians and dentists, lawyers and school teachers, mechanics and manual labourers? Many of our youth emigrate: what hinders *all* from so doing? Some prefer a life on the land, others on the sea—why? Take something still more commonplace: today the composer of this article has written and mailed seven letters—suppose every adult in Great Britain did the same! The complicated machinery of modern life would speedily break down and utter chaos would obtain, were not an omniscient and omnipresent Being regulating it.

It may be objected that the machinery of our complex social life does not always run smoothly: that there are strikes and lock-outs which result in much inconvenience, that at times, the railroads are blocked with traffic, that hotels are overcrowded, and so on. Granted, yet such occurrences are the exception rather than the rule. But we may draw an argument of divine providence from the very commotions and confusions which *do* obtain in the world. Seeing it does occasionally pass through disturbances, is it not evident that there must be a mighty Power balancing these commotions, yea curbing them, so that they do not speedily issue in the total ruin of the world? The same One who has put the fear of man into wild beasts and a natural instinct for them to avoid human habitations—preferring to resort unto the jungles and deserts, to prowl for their prey in the night, and in the morning, return to their caves and dens—sufficiently places His restraining hand upon the baser passions of men, as to ensure that degree of law and order which makes life possible amid fallen and depraved creatures. Were that restraining hand altogether removed, any guarantee of safety and security would be *non est*.

God is no idle Spectator of the affairs of this earth, but is the immediate Regulator of all its events—and that, not only in a general way, but in all particulars, from the least to the greatest. If, on the one hand, not a sparrow falls to the ground without the divine will (Mat 10:29), certain it is that on the other, no throne can be overturned without His ordering. “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36). God is not only “King of saints” (Rev 15:3), but He is “King of nations” (Jer 10:7) as well. God reigns as truly over His foes as He does over his friends, and works through Satan and his demons as truly as by His holy angels. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Pro 21:1). God presides over the deliberations of parliaments and influences the decisions of cabinets. Human governments act only as they are moved by a secret power from heaven. Jehovah rules in the councils of the ungodly equally as in the prayerful counsels of a church assembly. The designs, decisions, and actions of all men are directed by Him unto those ends which He has appointed; yet this nowise annuls their moral agency, or lessens their own guilt in sinning.

The government of this world is as much a work of God as was the creation of it; and while there be some things as inscrutable about the one as the other, yet each alike bears unmistakably upon it the divine impress. There are riddles in each which the wisest cannot solve, but there are also wonders in each before which all should be awed. Broadly speaking, the moral government of God consists in two things: in directing the creatures’ actions, and in apportioning rewards and punishments according to the actions of rational creatures. No evil comes to pass without His permission, no good without His concurrence; no good or evil without His over-ruling—ordering it to His own ends. “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov 15:3); and in His balances, everything is weighed. The distributions of divine mercy and of vengeance are, to some extent, apportioned in this life, but more particularly and fully

will they be made manifest in the day to come. God rules in such a way that His hand should be neither too evident, nor too secret; and by adopting this middle course, room is left for the exercise of faith, while the unbelief of infidels is rendered without excuse.

Nothing happens simply because it must, that is, of inexorable necessity. Fate is blind, but Providence has eyes—all is directed by wisdom and according to design. The history of each nation is the outworking of the divine plan and purpose concerning it. Yet it is equally true that the history of each nation is determined by its own attitude toward God and His Law. In the experience of each one, it is made to appear that “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Pro 14:34). Thus the Word of God and the providence of God are complementary: the former sheds light on the latter, while the latter illustrates and exemplifies the former. Therefore, in His government of this world, God displays His manifold perfections: His wisdom and goodness, His mercy and justice, His faithfulness and patience. The rise, progress, and triumphs of each nation—as also its decline, fall, and ignominy—are according to both the sovereign will and the perfect righteousness of the Lord. He rules “in the midst of” His enemies (Psa 110:2); yet His rule is neither capricious nor arbitrary, but a wise and just one. The prosperity of nations generally tends to the increase of vice through affording fuller opportunity to indulge its lusts; and in such cases, sore calamities are necessary for the checking of their wickedness; or, when it has come to the full, to destroy them as the Egyptian and Babylonian empires were.

The history of Israel affords the most striking example of what has been pointed out above. So long as they honoured God and walked in obedience to His law, so long they prospered and flourished—witness their history in the days of Joshua and David—but when they worshipped the idols of the heathen and became unrighteous in their conduct man with man, sore chastisements and heavy judgments were their portion, as in the times of the Judges and of the Babylonian captivity. Observe, too, the futile attempts made by the most powerful of their enemies to secure their extirpation: the efforts of Pharaoh, of Haman, of Sennacherib to overthrow the purpose of Jehovah concerning His people resulted only in their own destruction. Note how an exact retribution—“poetic justice” worldlings would call it—overtook Jezebel: “In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth” (1Ki 21:19), who was murdered at the orders of that wicked queen, *there* was her corpse consumed by dogs (2Ki 9:36). On the other hand, behold how God blessed those who showed kindness to His people: as Rahab and the whole of her family being delivered when Jericho was destroyed, because she had sheltered the two Israelitish spies; and the Shunnamite woman supernaturally provided for throughout the sore famine, for her befriending of the prophet Elijah. What incredulity regards as “coincidences,” right reason views as wondrous providences.

The book of Esther furnishes a most vivid illustration and demonstration of the invisible, yet palpable, working of God in human affairs. In it, we are shown the Jews brought to the very brink of ruin, and then delivered without any miracle being wrought on their behalf. The very means employed by their enemies for their destruction were, by the secret operations of God, made the means of their deliverance and glory. Writing thereon, Carson rightly said: “The hand of God in His ordinary Providence linked together a course of events as simple and as natural as the mind can conceive, yet as surprising as the boldest fictions of romance.” The series of events opens with the king of Persia giving a banquet. Heated with wine, that monarch gave orders for his royal consort to appear before the assembled revellers. Though such a request was indecorous and distasteful to the queen, yet it is remarkable she dared to disobey her despotic husband. Whether a sense of decency or personal pride actuated her, we know not, but in voluntarily acting according to her own feelings, she ignorantly fulfilled the will of Him whom she knew not. That the king should subject her to a temporary disgrace for her refusal to heed his behest might be expected, but that he should give up for ever one whom he so much admired is surprising.

How extraordinary it was that the deposing of Vashti made way for the elevating of a poor Jewess to the rank of queen of the Persian empire! Was it nothing but a “happy coincidence” that she should be more beautiful than all the virgins of over a hundred provinces? Was it only a piece of “good luck” that the king’s chamberlain was pleased with her from the first moment of her arrival, and that he did all in his power to advance her interests? Was it simple “fortunate” for her that she instantly met with favour when the king set eyes upon her? Was it only by blind chance that the conspiracy of two of the king’s servants was thwarted, and that Mordecai and all his people were saved from disaster? Haman was sure of victory, having obtained the king’s decree to execute his bloody designs. Why was it, then, that the king was sleepless one night, and why should he arise and, to pass the time away, scan the court records? Why did his eye happen to alight on the reported discovery of the plot on his own life? Why had Mordecai been the one to

uncover the scheme, and his name entered into the report? Why was the king now—at this critical juncture in Israel’s affairs—so anxious to ascertain whether Mordecai had been suitably rewarded? Cold logic is not sufficiently credulous to regard these things, and the grand sequel to them all, as so many fortuitous events.

The book of Esther plainly evinces that the most trifling affairs are ordered by the Lord to subserve His own glory, and effect the good of His own people. Though He works behind the scenes, He works none the less really. He does indeed govern the inanimate world by general laws of His own appointing, yet He *directs* their operations—or suspends them when He pleases—so as to accomplish what He has decreed. He has also established general moral laws in the government of mankind, yet He is not tied by them: sometimes He uses means; at others, He uses none. As the sun and rain minister to the nourishment and comfort of the righteous and wicked alike—not from the necessity of general laws, but from the immediate providence of Him who has ordained all things—so the free determinations of men are so controlled from on high that they effect the eternal designs of God. So, too, that book reveals that it is in the *combination* of incidents the working of Providence most plainly appears. There is a wonderful concatenation of events which leads to the accomplishment of God’s glorious purpose: the actions of each person are links in the chain to bring about some appointed result—if one link were removed, the whole chain would be broken. All lines converge on and meet in one centre: all things concur to bring about the decreed event.

If the record of any Gentile nation were fully chronicled, and had we sufficient discernment and perspicuity, we should perceive as definite a connection between one event—which now appears to us isolated—and another, and the hand of God controlling *them* as in the history of Israel. But even a fragmentary knowledge of general history should be sufficient to reveal to any man the directing hand of God in it, and the testimony it bears to the truth of the Bible. It abounds in illustrations that “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong” (Ecc 9:11). The most numerous and powerful armies are no guaranty of success, as has frequently been demonstrated. Providence disposes the event: without any miraculous interference, the best trained and equipped forces have been defeated by much weaker ones. The discovery of America by Columbus, in time for that land to afford an asylum for persecuted Protestants, the invention of printing just before the Reformation, the destruction of the “Invincible Armada” of Spain, are more than “coincidences.” Why has England always had a man of outstanding proportions—genius, valour, dynamism, dogged determination—at each critical juncture of her history? Cromwell, Drake, Nelson, Wellington, Churchill, were the special gifts of God to a people under His peculiar favour.

A real, if mysterious, Providence is obviously at work, controlling the gradual growth of each empire and of the combination of nations: as in the federation of the ten kings of Revelation 17:16-17—the divine plan is brought to fruition by those whose intention it is to accomplish their *own* purpose. “For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil *his* will,” though that in nowise lessens their sin: none but the hand of the Almighty can bring good out of evil and make the wrath of His enemies to praise Him. The more their chronicles be studied, the stronger should be our conviction that only the action and interposition of God can account for many of the outstanding events in human history. The rise and careers of individual tyrants also illustrates the same principle. How often have the workings of providence verified the Word that “the triumphing of the wicked is *short*” (Job 20:5). At longest, it is but brief because limited by the span of this life, whereas their sufferings will be eternal. But often, God blows upon the plans of ambitious oppressors, crosses their imperious wills, and brings them to a speedy ruin in this world: He did so with Napoleon, the Kaiser, Mussolini, and Hitler! He raised them on high that He might cast them down by a more terrible fall.

THE GREAT CHANGE

Part 6

Let none conclude from the last few paragraphs that we do not believe in the “total depravity” of man, or that we do so in such a manner as practically to evacuate that expression of any real meaning. Most probably, the writer believes more firmly in the utter ruin of fallen human nature than do some of his readers, and views the plight of the natural man as being more desperate than they do. We hold that the state of every unregenerate soul is such that he *cannot* turn his face Godward or originate a single spiritual thought, and that he has not even so much as the wish or will to do so. Nor let it be inferred from our preceding remarks that we deny the evil principle or “the flesh” as being existent and dominant in the natural man: we most emphatically believe—both on the testimony of the Word of truth, and from personal experience of its awful potency and horrible workings—that it is. But we also hold that great care should be taken when seeking to visualize or define in our minds what “the flesh” consists of. It is a principle of evil and not a concrete or tangible entity. The moment we regard it as something material, we confuse ourselves.

It is because all of us are so accustomed to thinking in the terms of matter that we find it difficult to form a definite concept of something, which, though immaterial, is *real*. Nor is it by any means a simple task for one to express himself thereon, so that he will be coherent unto others. Man lost no part of his tripartite nature when he fell, nor was a fourth part then communicated to him. Instead, sin—which is not a material entity—entered into him, and vitiated and corrupted his entire being. He was stricken with a loathsome disease which defiled all his faculties and members, so that his entire spirit and soul became precisely like one whose body is thus described: “From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores” (Isa 1:6). A potato is still a potato even when frozen, though it is no longer edible. An apple remains an apple when decayed within. And man still retained his human nature when he apostatized from God, died spiritually, and became totally depraved. He remained all that he was previously, minus only his *holiness*.

When man fell, he died spiritually; and as we have shown, death is not annihilation, but separation. Yet that word “separation” does not express the full meaning of what is signified by “spiritual death.” Scripture employs another term—“*alienation*”; and that, too, we must take fully into account. “Alienation” includes the thought of severance, but it also imports an *opposition*. A dear friend may be separated from me physically, but a cruel enemy is bitterly antagonistic to me. Thus it is with fallen man: he is not only cut off from all communion with the Holy One, but he is innately and inveterately hostile to Him—“alienated” in his affections. We are not here striving about mere “words,” but calling attention to a most solemn truth and fact. It is thus that the Scripture depicts the condition of fallen mankind: “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18); yea, it solemnly declares that “the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7), and “enmity” is not a negative and passive thing, but a positive and active one.

“Dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1) is the fearful diagnosis made of fallen man by the divine Physician. Yet though that language be true to fact and is no exaggeration, still it is a *figure*; and unless we interpret it in strict accord with Scripture, we shall falsify its meaning. It is often said that the spiritual state of the natural man is analogous to that of a corpse buried in the cemetery. From one standpoint, that is correct; from another, it is utterly erroneous. The natural man is a putrefying creature, a stench in the nostrils of the Holy One; and he can no more perform a spiritual act godwards than a corpse can perform a physical act manwards. But there the analogy ends! There is a contrast between the two cases, as well as a resemblance. A corpse has no responsibility, but the natural man *has*! A corpse can perform *no* actions; far different is the case of the sinner. He *is* active—active against *God*! Though he does not love Him (and he ought!), yet he is filled with enmity and hatred against Him. Thus, spiritual death is not a state of passivity and inactivity, but one of aggressive hostility against God.

Here then, as everywhere, there is a balance to be preserved; yet it is rarely maintained. Far too many Calvinists, in their zeal to repudiate the free-willism of Arminians, have at the same time repudiated man’s moral agency; anxious to enforce the utter helplessness of fallen men in spiritual matters, they have virtually reduced him to an irresponsible machine. It has not been sufficiently noted that in the very next verse after the statement, “who were dead in trespasses and sins,” the apostle added, “Wherein [i.e. that state of spiritual death] in time past ye *walked* [which a corpse in the grave could not!] according to the course of

this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation [‘conduct’] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Eph 2:1-3). So that in one sense, they were dead (i.e. Godward) while they lived (i.e. in sin); and in another sense, they *lived* (a life of self-seeking and of enmity against God), while *dead* to all spiritual things.

By the Fall, man both lost something and acquired something. Term that something a “nature” if you will, so long as you do not conceive of it as something material. That which man lost was holiness, and that which he acquired was sin; and neither the one nor the other is a substance, but rather a moral quality. A “nature” is not a concrete entity, but instead, that which characterizes and impels an entity or creature. It is the “nature” of gravitation to attract; it is the nature of fire to burn. A “nature” is not a tangible thing, but a power impelling to action, a dominating influence—an “instinct” for want of a better term. Strictly speaking, a “nature” is that which we have by our *origin*, as our partaking of *human nature* distinguishes us from the celestial creatures who are partakers of angelic nature. Thus we speak of a lion’s “nature” (ferocity), a vulture’s nature (to feed on carrion), a lamb’s nature (gentleness). A “nature,” then, describes more what a creature is by birth and disposition; and therefore, we prefer to speak of holiness or imparted grace as a “*principle of good*,” and indwelling sin or “the flesh” as a principle of evil—a prevalent disposition which moves its subjects to ever act in accord with its distinguishing quality.

If it be kept in mind that, strictly speaking, a “nature” is that which we have *by our origin*, as partaking of human nature—which distinguishes us from the celestial creatures on the one hand, and from the beasts of the field (with their animal nature) on the other—much confusion of thought will be avoided. Furthermore, if we distinguish carefully between what our nature intrinsically consists of and what it “accidentally” (non-essentially) became and becomes by virtue of the changes passing upon it at the Fall and at regeneration, then we should have less difficulty in understanding what is signified by the Lord’s assuming *our nature*. When the Son of God became incarnate, He took unto Himself human nature. He was, in every respect, true Man, possessed of spirit (Luk 23:46), soul (Joh 12:27), and body (Joh 19:40): “in *all* things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren” (Heb 2:17)—otherwise, He could not be their Surety and Mediator. This does not explain the miracle and mystery of the divine incarnation, for that is incomprehensible, but it states the fundamental fact of it. Christ did not inherit our corruption, for *that* was no essential part of manhood! He was born and ever remained immaculately pure and holy; nevertheless, He took upon Him our nature intrinsically considered, but *not* as it had been defiled by sin; and therefore is denominated “the son of *Adam*” (Luk 3:38).

When, then, we say that by the Fall, man became possessed of a “sinful nature,” it must not be understood that something comparable to his spirit or soul was *added* to his being; but instead, that a principle of evil entered into him which defiled every part of his being, as frost entering into fruit ruins it. Instead of his faculties now being influenced and regulated by holiness, they became defiled and dominated by sin. Instead of spiritual propensities and properties actuating his conduct, a carnal disposition became the law of his being. The objects and things man formerly loved, he now hated; and those which he was fitted to hate, he now desires. Therein lies both his depravity and his criminality. God holds fallen man responsible to mortify every inclination unto evil, to resist and reject every solicitation unto sin, and will justly punish him because he fails to do so. Nay more, God requires him and holds him accountable to love him with all his heart, and to employ each of his faculties in serving and glorifying Him: his failure so to do consists solely in a voluntary refusal—and for that, He will righteously judge him.

Now the miracle of grace is *God’s answer* to man’s ruination of himself, His begun reversal of what happened to him at the Fall. Let us now establish that fact from the Scriptures and show this concept is no invention of ours. The very fact that Christ is denominated, “the last Adam,” implies that He came to right the wrong wrought by the first Adam—though only so far as God’s elect are concerned. Hence, we find Him saying by the Spirit of prophecy, “I *restored* that which I took not away” (Psa 69:4). A lengthy article might well be written on those comprehensive words: suffice it now to say that He recovered both unto God and His people what had been lost by Adam’s defection—to the One, His manifestative honour and glory; to the other, the Holy Spirit and holiness in their hearts. What Christ did for His people is the meritorious ground of what the Spirit works in them; and at regeneration, they begin to be restored to their pristine purity, or brought back to their original state. Therefore, it is that the great change is spoken of as the “*renewing* of the Holy Ghost” (Ti 3:5)—that is, a renovating and restoring of spiritual life to the soul.

“Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col 3:9-10). Those to whom the apostle was writing had, by their profession and practice, “put off” or renounced “the old man,” and by lip and life, had avowed and exhibited the new. That new man is here said to be “renewed in knowledge,” which cannot be the obtaining of a knowledge which man never had previously, but rather, the recovery and restoration of that spiritual knowledge of God which he had originally. That is confirmed by what follows: “after the image of him that created him”—i.e. at the beginning. Man was originally made “in the image of God” (Gen 1:27), which imported at least three things: First, he was constituted a tripartite being by the Triune God; and this, he continued to be after the Fall. Second, he was created in His *natural* image, being made a moral agent, endowed with rationality and freedom of will; and this, too, he retained. Third, he was created in God’s *moral* image, being “made upright,” endued “with righteousness and true holiness”; and this, which was lost when man became a sinner, is restored to him by the miracle of grace.

That which takes place in the elect at regeneration is the *reversing* of the effects of the Fall. The one born again is, through Christ and by the Spirit’s operations, restored to union and communion with God (1Pe 3:18). The one who previously was spiritually dead, alienated from God, is now spiritually alive, reconciled to God. Just as spiritual death was brought about by the entrance into man’s being of a principle of evil, which darkened his understanding and hardened his heart (Eph 4:18), so spiritual life is the introduction of a principle of holiness into man’s soul, which enlightens his understanding and softens his heart. God communicates a *new principle*—one which is as real and potent unto good as indwelling sin is unto evil. Grace is now imparted, a holy disposition is wrought in the soul, a new temper of spirit is bestowed upon the inner man. But no new faculties are communicated unto him: rather are his original faculties (in measure) purified, enriched, elevated, empowered. Just as man did not become less than a threefold being when he fell, neither does he become more than a threefold being when he is renewed. Nor will he in heaven itself: his spirit and soul and body will then be *glorified*—completely purged from every taint of sin, and perfectly conformed unto the image of God’s Son.

But is not a “new nature” received by us when we are born again? If that term (in preference to “another principle”) be admitted and used, we must be careful lest we carnalize our conception of what is connoted by that expression. Much confusion has been caused at this point through failure to recognize that it is a *person*—and not merely a “nature”—who is born of the Spirit: “he is born of God” (1Jo 3:9). The selfsame person who was spiritually dead Godwards (separated and alienated from Him) is now spiritually alive Godwards—reconciled and brought back into union and communion with Him. The same person whose entire being (and not merely some part of him!) was “dead in trespasses and sins,” wherein he “walked according to the course of this world,” according to the evil spirit who “now worketh in the children of disobedience,” fulfilling the lusts of the flesh (Eph 2:1-3); his entire being is now alive in holiness and righteousness, and he walks according to the course of God’s Word, according to the power and promptings of the Holy Spirit, who worketh in the children of obedience, moving them to fulfil the dispositions and develop the graces of the spirit or “new nature.”

This must be so, or otherwise, there would be no preservation of the *identity* of the individual: we repeat, it is the individual himself who is born again, and not merely something *in* him. The person of the regenerate is constitutionally the same as the person of the unregenerate, each having a spirit and soul and body. But just as in fallen man, there is *also* a principle of evil which has corrupted each part of his threefold being—which principle may be styled his “sinful nature” (if by that, be meant his evil disposition and character), as it is the “nature” of swine to be filthy; so when a person is born again, another and new principle is introduced into his being, which may be styled a “new nature,” if by it be meant a disposition which propels him in a new direction—Godwards. Thus, in both cases, “nature” is a moral principle rather than a tangible entity. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Joh 3:6)—spiritual and not material, and must not be regarded as something substantial, distinct from the soul of the regenerate, like one part of matter added to another; rather is it that which *spiritualizes* his inward faculties as the “flesh” had carnalized them.

When treating of regeneration under the figure of the new birth, some writers (ourselves included in earlier days) have introduced analogies from natural birth, which Scripture by no means warrants; and which, by its employment of *other* figures, it disallows. Physical birth is the bringing forth into this world of a creature, a complete personality, which, before conception, had no existence whatever. But the one regenerated by God *had* a complete personality before he was born again! To that statement, it may be objected, Not a *spiritual* personality. True, but keep steadily in mind that spirit and matter are opposites; and

we only confuse ourselves if we think or speak of that which is “spiritual” as being something concrete. Regeneration is not the creating of a person who hitherto had no existence, but the spiritualizing of one who had—the renewing and renovating of one whom sin had unfitted for communion with God; and this, by the imparting to him of a principle, or “nature,” or *life*, which gives a new and different bias to all his faculties. Ever beware of regarding the Christian as made up of two distinct personalities.

A century ago, a booklet was published in England purporting to prove that “a child of God cannot backslide,” and many in a reputedly orthodox circle were evilly affected by it. Its author argued, “a regenerated man possesses two natures: an old man of sin, and a new man of grace; that the old man of sin never made any progress in the divine life nor ever can; consequently, he can never go back from that in which he had never made any advances. The new man of grace never sinned, nor ever can sin, so that he likewise can never go back or imbibe the least taint or particle of sin. How then can the child of God backslide?” A reviewer exposed this sophistry by mentioning a Papist in Germany who was a royal bishop that was very fond of hunting, and who was friendly admonished of the inconsistency of the chase with the mitre. His reply was, “I do not hunt as bishop, but as prince”; to which it was answered, “If the prince should break his neck while a-hunting and went to hell, what would become of the bishop?” That was answering a fool according to his folly!

The “old man” and the “new man” indwell and belong to the same individual, and can no more be divorced from *his person*, than the bishop could be separated from the prince. It is not merely something *in* the Christian, but the Christian *himself* who backslides. What we have called attention to above is but the corollary—a carrying out to its logical conclusion of another error (equally mischievous and reprehensible, though not so fully developed): namely, wherein the “two natures” in the believer are made so prominent and dominant that the person possessing them is largely lost sight of, and his responsibility repudiated. Thus, it is just as much an idle quibble to reason that neither “the flesh” or old nature, nor “the spirit” or new nature, is capable of backsliding. It is the person possessing those two natures (or principles) who backslides; and for that, God holds him accountable and chastens him accordingly. Unless believers are much on their guard, they will eagerly snatch at any line of teaching which undermines their accountability and causes them to slur over the exceeding sinfulness of *their* sins, by finding a pretext for supposing they are more to be pitied than blamed.

The youth differs much from the infant, and the adult from the immature youth; nevertheless, it is *the same individual*, the same human person, who passes through those stages. Human beings we are; moral agents, responsible creatures we shall ever remain. No matter what be the precise nature of the internal change we experienced at regeneration (nor how the character of that experience be defined or expressed), or whatever change awaits the body at resurrection: we shall never lose our essential personality or *identity* as God created us at the first. Let that be clearly understood and firmly grasped: we remain *the same persons* all through our history. Neither the deprivation of spiritual life at the Fall, nor the communication of spiritual life at the new birth, affects the reality of our being in possession of *human nature*. By the Fall, we did not become less than men; by regeneration, we do not become more than men—though our relation to God is altered. That which essentially constitutes our manhood was not lost, and no matter what be imparted to us at regeneration, our individuality and personal identity as a responsible being remains unchanged.

