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STUDIES

IN THE

SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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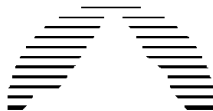
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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IDENTIFICATION OF THE GODLY

"I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Isa 57:15). Here we have a distinct, though brief, description of those whom the high and lofty One inhabits. Contrition and humility are the identifying marks of the particular characters in whom the Holy One tabernacles. That description applies to and is common to *all* the regenerate. "Him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit" is not a delineation of a few exceptionally eminent saints who constitute a special class all to themselves, but depicts all who are truly saved. So far from those marks belonging only to certain highly favoured souls that have far out-stripped their fellows in spiritual attainments, they are found in every one who has been born again. That is clear from Romans 8:9-11: God indwells all the regenerate, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his"; and compare Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:22.

Now if the reader will carefully and honestly examine himself in the mirror of the Word, he should have no difficulty in discovering whether or not those two features be stamped upon *him*. The Hebrew word for "contrite" means "bruised" or "beaten," as an object that comes under the pestle or hammer. That at once reminds us of Jeremiah 23:29: "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"—fire in the conscience (Deu 32:22), and a hammer on the heart. When God's Word is applied in power, it convicts the sinner of his awful sinfulness; and when a crucified Christ is revealed to him, he mourns for his sins as one mourneth for his only son (Zec 12:10). Contrition then is a feeling sense of the heinousness and loathsomeness of sin. It causes us to grieve over it with godly sorrow. If sin be hateful to you, if the plague of your heart be your sorest grief, if you mourn over your corruptions, then you *have* a "contrite" spirit.

But it is rather upon the second of those marks we wish to dwell, for many of God's little ones deprive themselves of legitimate assurance because of ignorance on this subject. An humble spirit or heart is an infallible sign of regeneration, for the unregenerate are proud, self-complacent, self-righteous. Yet the very mention of the word "humility" seems to cut off many Christians. As they examine themselves, they discover so much pride at work within that they are quite unable to persuade themselves that *they* have an *humble* heart. It seems to them that it is one thing they most evidently lack. Now it will no doubt be a startling statement, but we unhesitatingly affirm that the great majority of God's people are—not less—but far more humble than they suppose. That is a fact, and we propose to now furnish clear and full proof of the same, and in language which we trust the simplest will be able to grasp. Attend closely then to what follows.

First, that the Christian reader possesses an humble heart is plain from the fact that he confesses himself to be a *Hell-deserving sinner*. We do not have in mind what you think or say of yourself when in the company of your fellows, but rather what you feel and say of yourself when *alone with God*. Whatever pretences you are guilty of before men—and none of us can plead guiltless there, for we naturally want people to think well of us and are hurt if they do not—when in the presence of the Omniscient One, you are real, sincere, and genuine. Now, dear reader, be honest with yourself: When on your knees before the Throne of Grace, do you freely and frankly acknowledge that if you received your lawful due, you would—even now—be suffering the awful fires of Hell? If so, a miracle of grace must have been wrought within you. No unregenerate person will or can honestly make such a confession to God, for he does not feel he has done anything deserving of eternal punishment!

Second, if you own that all your righteousness are *as filthy rags*, that is proof you possess an humble heart. Of course, we mean much more than your merely uttering those words as a parrot might, or even singing then during some religious service. We mean that when you are in the presence of *the Lord*—which is always the surest test—you personally realise that you have nothing whatever of your own to commend you to His favourable regard, that there is not a single meritorious deed standing to your credit *before Him*. We mean that, when bowed in His presence, in the calmness and quietness of your closet, you own without any qualification that your best performances are *defiled by sin* and that in yourself, you are a filthy pauper. If that be indeed your language before God, it most certainly issues from an humble heart. The heart of the natural man thinks and feels the very opposite, and can no more loathe himself than transform himself into a holy angel.

Third, if you receive everything in the Scriptures *as a little child*, that is another proof that a miracle of grace has been wrought within you and that you now possess an humble heart. By nature, we are "wise and

prudent” in our own esteem. Whatever may have been our early training, however, we may have been taught to revere God’s Word, yet there was that in us which rose up in opposition to some of its teachings. Proud reason rebelled at the mysteries of creation, the virgin birth, the Trinity. The enmity of the carnal mind rose up against the sovereignty of God, making one vessel to honour and another to dishonour; against the spirituality and strictness of the Divine Law, which curses all who deviate the slightest from its holy demands; against the endless punishment of all dying out of Christ. But the regenerate, while there is much they do not understand, accept without murmur or question *all* that is revealed in the Word. *If you do*, that is proof that your pride has been abased before God.

Fourth, if you *mourn over the wretched returns* you make unto God, that is further evidence of an humble heart. Nor is that a point in any site difficult to determine. There is no need for you to make a mystery out of it. You know whether you do or do not sorrow over the response you make unto God for all His goodness unto you. You know whether or not you feel you have ill requited Him for the multitude of His favours and mercies. You know whether you do or do not grieve over the coldness of your heart in answer to His lovingkindness, the weakness of your faith in view of His promises, the feebleness—and perhaps the absence—of your praise and thanksgiving for His long-sufferance and faithfulness. If you *do* make conscience of these things, mourn over them, confess them—though not as feelingly as you ought—that is another proof of an humble heart. As it is faith, and not the strength of it, which saves; so it is such mourning, and not the depth of it, which evidences its spirituality.

Fifth, if you frankly *ascribe to God all the good* that is in you, then you have an humble heart. If you freely own that all your springs are in Him, that He has wrought all your works in you (Isa 26:12), if you honestly *disclaim* any credit to yourself for any good thing, then your pride has been slain *before God*—and that is what most matters! If the language of your heart really be “by the grace of God I am what I am” (1Co 15:10), my “sufficiency is of God” (2Co 3:5), that He has worked in me both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phi 2:13), then most assuredly, your pride has been subdued. In such case, you will gladly unite in declaring, “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory” (Psalm 115:1). You will take no credit for—nor should you deny the existence of—an humble heart, but will unhesitatingly give *God* all the honour and praise for it.

How thankful we should be that Scripture does not say, God dwells only in those who have complete victory over sin, or those who enjoy unbroken and unclouded communion with Him. Had those been the distinguishing features named, then every one of us might well despair—most certainly, they had excluded or “cut off” this writer. But we say again, a contrite and humble spirit takes in *every* regenerate soul. And if you, my reader, measuring yourself by what has been pointed out above, can discern such fruits and evidences of contrition and humility, then so far from its being presumptuous for you to look upon yourself as one saved and indwelt by God, it would be most wicked presumption for you to do otherwise.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

31. *Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 7 (3:19)*

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). We devoted quite a little space to this fourth petition in our last, but not too much we hope, for we feel that several other things need to be said upon it. Probably it is this particular request in the prayer which has occasioned the most difficulty to our readers, and therefore, is the one on which they would most welcome help—and there is very little indeed to be obtained from the commentators. Before giving a more detailed exposition of what we conceive to be its meaning, let us outline its contents. It is a prayer that by viewing God objectively, believers may—through a contemplation of His manifold perfections—take into their renewed minds a full-orbed concept of His excellency. It also included such a contemplation of the Deity as would fill the mind with a satisfying view of all the Three Persons. In each of these instances, it would be more like unto the filling of a room with light as the sun shone through its windows. It was a request that God would communicate into us abundantly of His grace and comforts that we might be filled with His light and love—which would more resemble a vessel being fully supplied. It was also a request that we would be constrained to yield ourselves wholly unto God that He might fill and possess our entire being—like a king occupying the whole of the royal suite in his palace.

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” Regard the expression relatively and comparatively. Paul longed that the saints might not rest content with a contracted and inadequate concept and apprehension of the Divine character, but aspire after a well-balanced, full, and symmetrical view and experience of God. How many believers entertain a most limited idea of the Divine perfections? Some almost restrict their thoughts to His majesty and sovereignty, some to His power and holiness, some to His love and grace; while others also take in His goodness, His faithfulness, His immutability, His righteousness, His longsuffering. We should not dwell on one or two of His glorious attributes only, to the exclusion of others; but should pray for and strive after a spiritual knowledge, and experimental acquaintance with each alike, that our minds and hearts may be filled with *all* His excellencies. We should pant after such views of His manifold glory as produce peace in the conscience, love in the heart, and satisfaction in the soul; occupied with the riches of His grace, the wonders of His wisdom, the miracles of His might, with *all* His blessed attributes, as engaged for His people and made over to them in the everlasting covenant.

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” is not to be restricted unto the perfections of Deity abstractly considered, but is to be regarded as pertaining to all the Three Persons of the adorable Trinity. So we also understand it as signifying “filled with all the fulness of *the Triune God*”—and not of one Person only to the exclusion of the Others. There are some denominations which make the most of the Father, some which make most of the Son, some which make most of the Spirit. Each is equally glorious. Each is equally interested in us: Our salvation is due to Their joint-operations and combined counsels; and therefore, They should have an *equal* place in our thoughts and affections. Confine not your minds to the grace of the Father in choosing and in so loving His people as to give His only-begotten Son for them, for we are required to “honour the Son, even as they honour the Father” (Joh 5:23). Confine not your meditations to the amazing condescension and inconceivable sufferings of the Son on behalf of His saints, but contemplate also “the love of the Spirit” (Rom 15:30), as He quickened you when dead in sins, as He indwells you, as He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto you. Seek to be filled with the *Triune* God.

“Now we may be said to be filled with the fulness of God when the soul has a satisfying view of God’s love and grace, when it has views of God’s pardoning mercy and of the plenteous redemption which is in Christ, when the soul is led to view the riches of the Covenant of life and peace which is between the Father and the Son, and is led to see God in all His Divine persons and perfections engaged for His people; and when by faith, we are enabled to see that the Father’s boundless love is toward us; that the Son’s salvation, with all its blessings, was wrought out for us and belongs unto us; that the Holy Spirit, with all the fulness of grace, will be in us in time and in eternity, as the fountain of endless comfort and joy. When also we see and are fully persuaded of our election by the Father, of our salvation by the Son, and of our regeneration by the Holy Spirit, we may be said to be filled with all the fulness of God. To be filled with the fulness of God is to have a blessed and spiritual view of the glories of Divine grace, of the eternal and matchless excellencies of Jesus Christ, and from what we behold of Him in the light of the Spirit, to have our hearts drawn powerfully after Him and our souls resting confidently upon Him” (Sam E. Pierce).

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” First, by our contemplation of Him *objectively*: The affections of the new man drawing out the heart after its Author, faith enabling us to take in such satisfying views of Him as lead to intimate fellowship with Him, fill the soul with a real and absorbing knowledge of Him, and cause us to make Him our all-sufficient Portion. Second, by our receiving *subjectively* from Him, God communicating unto us out of the plenitude of His own being. To be filled with Him thus is to have Him imparting all that He can bestow upon us and all that we are capable of receiving. It is a request that the God of all grace would so shower down upon His saints His richest blessings, that they should have no further sense of want, or rather should have no aching emptiness. It is a request that we whose hearts had by nature been empty of any good, who had drunk only from the streams of this world—but to “thirst again” (Joh 4:13); who had experienced the insufficiency and vanity of all earthly things, might be filled to all satiety with what He bestows from Himself. It is a request for the amplest measure of His grace and consolation, that we may be filled with peace and joy, that no rival will have any power to attract us.

Having sought to explain “all the fulness of God” as it relates to our personal reception and enjoyment of the same, let us now consider more directly the “that ye might be filled.” Was not the apostle here praying that God might more fully possess us in a personal way, that we might be brought to *yield ourselves* more completely to Him? Think of the Christian being “filled” by and with God, not only as a dwelling may be filled with sunlight or a vessel with liquid, but also as a many-roomed house is completely occupied with guests. The saint desires that Christ should dwell in his heart by faith, but is there any restriction upon that desire? Is there any portion of his being marked “private”—reserved solely for *himself*? In other words, is there any part of his complex being not fully given up to God in Christ, which has not yet been consciously, and definitely, voluntarily, and gladly surrendered to His occupancy and sway? That is a searching question which each of us needs to honestly face. If there be any department of my outward life or any compartment of my inner man which is not fully surrendered to God, then I am *not* “filled” with Him. Am I really yielding my *entire* self to Him, so that I am sanctified in my “whole spirit and soul and body” (1Th 5:23)?

In our first article on this passage, we pointed out that it will help us not a little unto an understanding both of the scope of this prayer and the meaning of its petitions if we duly observe *the place* it occupies in this Epistle: At the close of the doctrinal section and as introductory to the practical portion, for it is a turning into supplication the contents of the former and a preparation of heart for obeying the precepts of the latter. Now among those precepts is this: “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18)—that He should occupy us unreservedly, pervading the innermost depths of our beings, energizing and using all our faculties. Have we not reason then to pray, to pray earnestly and daily, that in *this* sense, too, we “might be filled”? Not merely that God may possess me in part, but wholly, that my obedience may be such as to personally receive the fulfillment of Christ’s promise: “My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (Joh 14:23). That the surrender of myself may be so complete that I may say, “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name” (Psa 103:1)—which I cannot do, unless all be freely dedicated unto Him.

How full and many-sided is this fourth petition! In addition to those meanings and applications of it dwelt upon above, we would point out still another, which for want of a better term, we will call its *practical* bearing—namely, that the Christian ought to be filled with a knowledge of God’s will. The believer should indeed have *His* mind upon all things, for to walk in darkness is one of the marks of the wicked. But let it be duly observed that we have placed this signification of the request last, for we shall not have light upon our path, nor Divine wisdom for our problems, unless we are first fully yielded to God. Let us also call attention again unto the relation of this prayer to the section which follows it. Among the exhortations found in that portion is: “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17), i.e. for all the details of our daily lives, for the various decisions we have constantly to make. Hence, in another of the prayers of this apostle, we find him asking for the saints “that ye might be *filled* with the knowledge of his *will*” (Col 1:9). It is not merely an innocent infirmity, but a sin which should humble us, whenever we are ignorant of it. If the Word dwell in us richly, if we be filled with the Spirit, then we *shall have* clear discernment, “good judgment,” a knowledge in all circumstances of that which will be pleasing to Him.

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” While this was, we think, a request which, primarily, the apostle desired God’s people should receive a fulfillment of in *this* life, yet it is by no means to

be restricted thereunto. Coming as it does at the close of the petitions, and in view of the language used in the next verses, it seems clear that Paul's anointed eye was also looking forward to the endless ages of eternity—as ours should too. This view of the petition is also confirmed by the fact that the Greek may be legitimately rendered, "That ye might be filled *unto* all the fulness of God," which, as previously pointed out, suggests the idea of a continuous process, a progressive and enlarging experience—for the ultimate aim of all genuine spiritual desire is to know God so intimately as to be filled to satiety by Him, which will only be when Heaven is reached. Here, human language fails us, for our minds are incapable of conceiving such ineffable heights of bliss. All we can say is that this request expresses an approximation to the supreme perfection, which is begun in this life and shall be forever growing in the holiness and bliss of the future state, though an infinite distance will ever remain between the Creator and the creature. Understood, thus, it is our being filled with all the *glory* of God.

Having considered the particular occasion or "cause" of this prayer, the character in which God is addressed, the rule or measure by which He is entreated to confer His favours, and the several petitions of it, we turn now to contemplate the *doxology* that concludes it. "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph 3:20-21). This doxology may be considered from two viewpoints. First, as an adoring outburst of the apostle's own heart; and second—from the fact of its having been placed on record—as containing needful and valuable instruction for us. Any one with spiritual discernment will at once perceive that, from either of these viewpoints, it forms a most fitting climax and sequel to the prayer itself, constituting as it does a natural termination of it—a reverberation of praise unto the One supplicated. A "doxology" is an expression of adoration which rises above the level of ordinary speech, being more the language of ecstasy. It is a fervent utterance of praise; yet it is not so much the *act* of praise, as it is the realisation of the praise which is due unto God and the consciousness that He is due infinitely more than we are capable of rendering to Him. It is to lose ourselves in Him, overwhelmed with a sense of His ineffable glory.

"Paul's prayer had apparently reached a height beyond which neither faith, nor hope, nor even imagination could go, and yet he is not satisfied. An immensity still lay beyond. God was able to do not only what he had asked, but infinitely more than he knew how either to ask or think. Having exhausted all the forms of prayer, he casts himself on the infinitude of God, in full confidence that He can and will do all that omnipotence itself can effect. His power, not our prayers, nor our highest conceptions, is the measure of the apostle's anticipations and desires. This idea he weaves into a doxology, which has in it more of heaven than of earth" (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878). *That* is the first lesson we are to learn from it: that no bounds should be set upon our expectations from God. "They might stretch their thoughts, enlarge their desires, and multiply their most comprehensive petitions to the utmost, yet they never could reach the whole of what God was able to bestow upon them or what He honourably could do for them in Christ Jesus. Nay, all that yet remained to be done, in order to complete their felicity and glory in soul and body, only accorded to that power which had effected their redemption from the dominion of Satan and their new-creation to holiness" (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

There are three things in that doxology which specially claim our attention: The particular character in which God is here contemplated—"He is able"; the standard to which faith should appeal in prayer—"the power that worketh in us"; the ascription of glory, concerning which we have: Its medium—"the Church"; its Agent—"Christ Jesus"; its perpetuity—"world without end." Let us first consider how blessedly appropriate it is to view God thus in this particular connection. As experienced Christians well know, the certain effect of growing in a spiritual knowledge of God and of the love of Christ is a deepening sense of our own weakness and unworthiness; and it is to meet this, we are here reminded that we have to do with One who is infinitely sufficient to supply our every need and satisfy our every longing. Do you ask, "How can such an one as I expect to obtain such wondrous privileges and enter into the enjoyment of such transcendent blessings as those expressed in the preceding verses?" Hear, and your weak faith shall be re-animated: He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph 3:20)! Or perhaps some reader has well-nigh lost heart and hope in the efficacy of prayer and has become almost stoically content with a state of comparative emptiness. If so, let him ponder Ephesians 3:20, for it reveals the remedy.

For us to be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, for Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith so that we be rooted and grounded in love, for us to be able to comprehend the dimensions and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and for us to be filled with all the fulness of God: Do

such experiences seem visionary and impossible? They should not; they will not, if faith really views God as the apostle here did. Such experiences may indeed exceed anything we have yet attained unto, yea, transcend what we have even seriously thought of and prayed for; yet they *are* possible and realisable even in this life, “according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph 3:20). It is the express design of the Spirit in recording this doxology to encourage us, to afford confidence in our approaches unto God, to enlarge our petitions. The Spirit’s purpose here is the same as was Christ’s in the closing section of that prayer which He gave unto His disciples: The children are to ask of their Father in heaven, remembering “*for thine* is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever” (Mat 6:13). It is a confirmation of faith taken from the excellency of God—His ability, His sufficiency, His glory. However great be our need, His resources are illimitable; however powerful may be our foes, His power to deliver is infinite; however high may soar our desires, He can fully satisfy them.

It will be a great tonic for faith if we take to heart how frequently God is set before us in this most blessed character. “God is able to make all grace abound toward you” (2Co 9:8). “He is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18). “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25). “He is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phi 3:21). “He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2Ti 1:12). He “is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). Yes, *He is able* to save, to succour, to subdue, to sanctify, to supply, to secure, to satisfy, and therefore, He is “able to do [for us] exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20). In this character, God is viewed not only as the omnipotent, but also as the munificent One, as being not only all-powerful, but abundantly generous: God not only gives, but He “giveth to all *liberally*” (Jam 1:5). Very often, His liberality exceeds not only our deserts, but even our desires, bestowing upon us more than we have—either wisdom or confidence—to ask. Many illustrations of that fact are recorded in the Scriptures, and many met with in the experience of God’s children today.

Every Christian already has abundant proof that God can give him and do more for him than he can ask or think, for *He has already done so!* It was not in answer to my prayers that God elected me and inscribed my name in the Book of Life, for He choose me in Christ before the foundation of the world. It was not in response to any petition of mine that an all-sufficient Redeemer was provided for my Hell-deserving soul, for God sent forth His Son into this world to save His people from their sins nearly two thousand years before I had any historical existence. It was not in return for any urgent request of mine that the Holy Spirit quickened me into newness of life when I was dead in trespasses and sins: To pray for life is not a faculty of the unregenerate—rather does the new birth itself capacitate us unto the living desire and the spiritual longing. It is the impartation of life which causes the soul to long for more life. No, His people are spiritually dead and far from Him when He regenerates them, and thereby fulfills to all of them that word: “I am found of them that *sought me not*” (Isa 65:1). What evidences are these that God’s gracious dealings with us are high above not only all our deserts, but our desires, above even our faith and requests!

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

11. Rahab (2:3-5)

“And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country. And the woman took [“had taken”] the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them” (Jos 2:3-5). This passage has presented some formidable difficulties to not a few of those who have carefully pondered it, and perhaps we can best help our readers by seeking to answer the following questions. First, did Rahab do right in defying the king’s authority and betraying her own country? Second, is she to be exonerated in the untruths she here told? Third, if not, how is Hebrews 11:31 to be explained?

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom 13:1). God requires us to render submission to human government: To be obedient to its laws, to pay the taxes it appoints, to cooperate in upholding its authority. Christians especially should set an example as law-abiding citizens, rendering to Caesar that which he has a right to demand from his subjects. Jeremiah 29:7 makes it clear that it is the duty of God’s people to seek the good of the country in which they reside—see the sermon by Andrew Fuller on “Christian Patriotism,” which appeared in these pages a year ago.¹ There is but one qualification, namely, when the powers that be require anything from me which is obviously contrary to the revealed will of God, or prohibit my doing what His Word enjoins. Where such a case arises, my duty is to render allegiance unto God, and not unto any subordinate authority which repudiates His requirements.

The refusal of the three Hebrew captives to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s image and Daniel’s defiance of the decree of Darius which forbade him praying unto God are cases in point (Dan 3:18, 6:10). We must never render to Caesar that to which God alone is entitled. “Fear God. Honour the king” (1Pe 2:17) indicates our relative obligations: God must be feared at all costs; the king is to be cheerfully and universally honoured, so far as that consists with my fearing God. When the religious powers forbade the apostles to preach in Christ’s name, they replied: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Act 5:29). It was thus with Rahab. There was a clash of interests: Loyalty to her king and country; loyalty to God and His servants. In the kind providence of God, such a dilemma is rarely presented to a saint today; but if it were, the lower authority must yield to the higher.

It is indeed the duty of a saint to seek the good of that country which affords him both shelter and subsistence; nevertheless, he is bound to love God and His people more than his country and fellow-citizens. He owes fidelity to the Lord first, and then to the place he lives in; and he is to promote the welfare of the latter so far as it is compatible with the former. In seeking to estimate the conduct of Rahab, we must carefully weigh Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25, and especially Joshua 2:9-11. From her language, it is manifest that she was fully convinced the Lord had purposed the destruction of the Canaanites; and therefore, she must either side with Him and His people against her country, or enter into a hopeless contest against the Almighty and perish under His judgments. By her actions, she exemplified what God requires from every truly converted soul: to renounce allegiance with His enemies—however closely related (Luk 14:26)—and refuse to join with them in opposing His people.

As one who had received mercy from the Lord—for Hebrews 11:31 evidences that sovereign grace had brought her out of darkness into God’s marvellous light before Joshua sent those men to reconnoiter—and as one who knew Jehovah had given the land of Canaan unto Israel, it was plainly the duty of Rahab to do all in her power to protect these Israelish spies, even at risk to her own safety. That principle is clearly enunciated in the New Testament: “We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1Jo 3:16). But now the question arises, in view of that being her duty, was Rahab warranted in resorting to falsehoods so as to protect the two men she had given shelter to? Different opinions have been formed of her conduct, and various arguments employed in the attempt to vindicate her. Some of the best commentators, even among the Puritans, pleaded she was guiltless in this matter; and we know of none who plainly stated that she sinned therein.

¹ *Christian Patriotism* – articles in the July and August, 1945, issues.

One of the most difficult tasks which confronts a Christian writer is that of commenting on the offences of God's dear people: that on the one hand, he may not dip his pen in the pharisaic ink of self-superiority; and that on the other hand, he does not make light of any evil or condone what is reprehensible. He is himself compassed with infirmity and a daily transgressor of God's law, and should be duly affected by a realisation of the same when dealing with the faults of his fellows. Nevertheless, if he be a servant of God, preaching or writing to the saints, then he must remember that "it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1Co 4:2); and he is most certainly unfaithful if—even from a desire to be charitable—he deliberately lowers God's standard of holiness, minimizes that which contravenes it, or glosses over anything which is culpable. Much grace and wisdom is needed if he is to act in both a spirit of meekness and righteousness, of compassion and fidelity.

It is one of the many evidences of the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures that their Author has painted the conduct of the most eminent characters portrayed therein in the colours of reality and truth. Unlike human biographies, which almost always present a one-sided view—setting forth and extolling the virtues of its subjects and ignoring or toning down their vices—the Holy Spirit has not concealed the blemishes of the most distinguished saints: The lapses of Noah, Abram, Moses, David being faithfully chronicled. It is true that their sins are not mentioned in the New Testament, for the sufficient and blessed reason they were all under the atoning blood of the Lamb; nevertheless, the record of them remains on the pages of the Old Testament—left there as a lasting warning unto *us*. Moreover, it is to be borne in mind that the sins of New Testament saints are not to be ignored, but to guide those whose task it is to comment thereon.

The prevarications of Rahab unto the king's officers is appealed to by the Jesuits in support of their pernicious dogma, "The end justifies the means": That if we aim at a praiseworthy object, it is permissible to use questionable or even evil means to attain the same—a principle which has regulated many so-called "Protestants" during the past century, and which is flagrantly flouted before our eyes today throughout Christendom, as seen, for example, in the carnal and worldly devices used to attract young people to "religious" services. But "let us do evil that good may come" is a sentiment entertained by no truly regenerate soul; rather it is detested by him; and Scripture plainly declares of such as are actuated by it that their "damnation is just" (Rom 3:8). Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), the infamous champion of Popery, boldly declared in his work on "De Romano Pontifice" that "If the Pope should err in commending vice or forbidding virtue, the Church is bound to believe vice to be good and virtue to be bad" (Book 4, chapter 5).

Some have pointed out the exceptionally trying position in which Rahab found herself, arguing that considerable latitude should be allowed her therein. We are aware that appeal is often made to that aphorism, "Circumstances alter cases," and while we are not sure what its originator had in mind, this we do know: that no "circumstances" can ever obliterate the fundamental distinction between good and evil. Let the reader settle it in his mind and conscience that it is *never* right to do wrong, and since it be sinful to lie, no circumstances can ever warrant the telling of one. It is indeed true that all transgressions of the Divine Law are not equally heinous in themselves, nor in the sight of God—that some sins are, by reason of certain aggravations, greater than others, even of the same species. Thus, a lie unto God is worse than a lie unto a fellow-creature (Act 5:4), a premeditated and presumptuous lie is viler than one uttered upon a surprise by temptation.

It is also true that attendant circumstances should be taken into account when seeking to determine the *degree* of criminality: It would be a far graver offence for writer or reader to utter falsehoods than it was for Rahab, for we should be sinning against greater privileges and light than she enjoyed. She had been reared in heathendom; yet while that mitigated her offence, it certainly did not excuse her. One preacher who occupied a prominent pulpit in London asked the question: "Was Rahab justified in those falsehoods?" and answered in the affirmative, arguing, "She must either utter them or else betray the spies, and their lives would have been lost." But that is the reasoning of unbelief, for it leaves out *God*. Had Rahab remained silent before the king's officers, declining to give any information, or had she acknowledged that the spies were on her premises, was the Lord unable to protect them?

We much prefer the brief remarks of Thomas Ridgley's to those of his contemporaries. "She would have been much clearer from the guilt of sin had she refused to give the messengers any answer relating to them, and so had given them leave to search for them, and left the event hereof to Providence." Undoubtedly, Rahab was placed in a most trying situation, for as Ridgley went on to point out, "This, indeed, was a very difficult duty, for it might have endangered her life; and her choice to secure them and herself by inventing this lie brought with it a degree of guilt, and was an instance of the weakness of her faith in this

respect.” That last clause brings us to the heart of the matter: She failed to fully trust the Lord, and the fear of man brought a snare. He whose angels had smitten the men of Sodom with blindness (Gen 19:11) and who had slain the fifty men sent to lay hands on His prophet (2Ki 1:9-12) could have prevented those officers finding the spies.

Some have gone even farther than exonerating Rahab, insisting that God Himself *approved* of her lies, appealing to Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 in support. But there is nothing whatever in either of those verses which intimates that the Lord sanctioned her falsehoods. Hebrews 11:31 says nothing more about this incident than that “she had received the spies with peace.” James points out that the faith of Rahab was “justified by works”—*not* by her “words”—and then specified *which* “works,” namely, her receiving of the messengers and her sending them out another way. “But,” it may be asked, “Did not the workings of providence in the sequel go to show God approved of Rahab’s policy? Did He not give success to the same?” Answer: His providences are no Rule for us to walk by or reason from. Though water flowed from the rock which Moses smote in his anger, yet that was no proof God approved of His servant’s display of temper. God indeed graciously overruled Rahab’s conduct, yet that did not vindicate her.

We frankly acknowledge—though to our shame—that were we placed in a similar situation to the one which confronted Rahab, and God should leave us to ourself, we would acquit ourself no better than she did, and probably far worse. Yet that acknowledgement by no means clears her, for two wrongs do not make one right. If God’s restraining hand be removed, or His all-sufficient grace be withheld, the strongest of us is as weak as water. Therefore, none is in any position to point the finger of scorn or throw a stone at her. As Thomas Manton (1620-1677) tersely summed up the case, “Her lie was an infirmity, pardoned by God, and not to be exaggerated by men.” It should be remembered that Rahab had only recently been brought to a saving acquaintance with the Lord. Many young converts have but little clear knowledge of the Truth, and therefore, less should be expected from them than mature saints. They make many mistakes, yet they have a teachable spirit; and as light increases, their walk is more and more regulated by the same.

In closing, let us point out one or two lessons which may be learned from what has been before us. First, we may see therein the refutation of a popular and widespread error—namely, that if our motives be right, the action is a praiseworthy one. It is quite true that an unworthy motive will ruin a good deed—as, for example, contributing to charity in order to obtain a reputation for benevolence, or in performing religious exercises so as to be seen and venerated by men—yet a good motive can never render an evil act a desirable one. Even though Rahab’s design was to protect the lives of two of God’s people, that did not render commendable the deception which she practised on the king’s messengers. Four things are required to render any action a “good work” in the sight of God: It must proceed from a holy principle, be regulated by the Rule of righteousness, be done in a right spirit of faith or love, and be performed with a right end in view—the glory of God or the good of His people.

Second, it is recorded—as in Holy Writ are all the failings and falls of the saints—as a solemn warning for us to take to heart. So far from furnishing examples for us to imitate or refuges for us to hide in, they are so many danger-signals for us to heed and turn into earnest prayer. We are men and women of like passions, as they were subject to. Native depravity still remains in us as it did in them, even after regeneration. In ourselves, we are no stronger than they were, and no better able to resist the inclinations of the flesh. What need has each of us, then, to pray, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe” (Psa 119:117). And even when we are preserved from outward sins, the flesh obtrudes and defiles our best performances. It was “by faith” that Rahab received the spies with peace, and at risk to herself, concealed them on her roof; yet when the officers appeared on the scene, her faith failed, and she resorted to lying. Our godliest deeds would damn us if they were not cleansed by the atoning blood of Christ.

Third, this incident gives real point to and reveals our deep need of crying, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mat 6:13; Luk 11:4). Indeed, that seems the principal lesson to draw from: that I may be kept from any such situation in that, conscious of my weakness, I may be preserved from such a temptation as confronted Rahab. We deem it more than a coincidence that in the very midst of preparing this article, we heard—the first time in five years—from an old reader in Holland. During the last half of that time, while the enemy was occupying that country, our friend and his wife concealed three Jewesses in their home, and the last ten days before liberation actually had two German billeted with them; yet no discovery was made of their refugees. I know not what my friend had done if they had asked him point blank whether he was sheltering any Jews; but I am thankful not to be placed in such a situation myself.

Had I been in his place, I would have begged the Lord to keep from me any such interrogators and counted upon His doing so. Perhaps we may be pardoned for relating an experience—to the praise of the faithfulness of a prayer-hearing God. Some fifteen years ago when residing in Hollywood, California, we occupied a furnished bungalow. The owner was a typical Jewess, and when we gave notice of leaving, she put an advertisement in the local papers and stuck up a prominent sign, “To Let,” at the foot of our drive. Though she knew we kept the Lord’s Day holy and held a small service in our room each Sabbath evening, she insisted it was her right to show over the house those who answered the advertisement. We protested strongly, but she would not heed, saying “Sunday” was always her best letting day. We then told her that our God would keep away all applicants on the coming Sabbath, which she heard with derisive scorn.

That Saturday evening, my wife and I spread the matter before the Lord and begged Him to cause His angel to encamp round about us, and protect us by keeping away all intruders. During the Sabbath, which was a cloudless day, we continued seeking God’s face, confident He would not put us to confusion before our landlady. Not a single caller came to look over the house, and that night, we held our little meeting as usual, undisturbed!—one of those present will read these lines, though not until he does so will he know what has been related. Next day, our landlady, who owned two similar bungalows, stated it was the first time in her ten years’ experience of letting that she had ever failed to let on a “Sunday.” Ah, my reader, God *never* fails those who trust *Him* fully. He will protect you if you confidently count upon Him. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

11. *Its Criteria*

Up to this point, we have dealt almost entirely with the expository side of our subject; now we turn to what is more the experimental aspect of it. Some of our readers will consider this the most important and vital part; while to others, it will make no appeal, being in their judgment better omitted. Those who read principally for intellectual information most appreciate that which supplies new light on things, explains to them what is obscure, or opens to them a difficult passage of Scripture; but they often look with disfavour on that which calls upon them to diligently inquire what *use* they are making of the light they have received—to what practical ends are they turning their new knowledge. Yet this should be the principal concern of each of us. The interpretation of a passage of Scripture is but a means to an end: The personal appropriation and application of it to my own heart and life is the great desideratum. The value of a book, or of an article, lies chiefly in this: Does it help to deliver its reader from the evil powers of this world and serve to assist him in his journey heavenwards?

Though the other aspects of this grand truth which have been before us may both interest and instruct the mind, yet they will afford little real comfort and lasting peace to the heart, until I am personally satisfied that I am reconciled to God, and He is reconciled *to me*. It deeply concerns each one of us to ascertain whether the wrath of God or the smile of God be upon him, whether the Law curses him or pronounces him righteous. It is a matter of utmost moment for us to determine whether we be the serfs of Satan or the friends of Christ, whether we be in a state of nature or of grace. We are plainly warned in Scripture that, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is *not washed* from their filthiness" (Pro 30:12); and if I really value my eternal interests, then I shall seriously and solemnly inquire, "Am I one of that deluded company? Am I numbered among those who sincerely believe that they have been cleansed from their sins by the blood of Christ, but are sincerely mistaken?" More than a mere inquiry needs to be made: There should be an earnest and definite investigation.

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2Co 13:5)—yet that is the very task which the great majority of professing Christians refuse to undertake; and if it be pressed upon them, they see no need for an engaging therein, firmly assured that all is well with them spiritually. It is natural for us to think well of ourselves; yet just to the extent that we are influenced by self-esteem will our judgment be prevented from forming a true estimate of ourselves. And while self-love and self-flattery rule our hearts, we shall decline this essential duty of self-examination. Pride produces presumption, so that its infatuated victims are secure in their conceit that they are heirs of Heaven, when in fact, they have neither title nor meetness thereto. Those thus bewitched cannot be induced to prosecute a course of self-examination, nor will they tolerate a searching and probing ministry—be it oral or written.

What madness has seized those who treat lightly what should become of their souls in eternity! And those who are unwilling for their profession to be thoroughly tested are as truly numbered in that class as those who make no religious profession. Do you say, "There is no need for *my* profession to be tested, for it is a valid one, seeing that for years past, I have been resting on the finished work of Christ." But my reader, God Himself *bids* those claiming to be His people, "Give diligence to make your calling and election *sure*" (2Pe 1:10); and He has given no needless exhortations. O, pit not your vain confidence against infinite wisdom. Bare your heart to the Sword of the Spirit: Shrink not from a faithful and discriminating ministry. Know you not that Satan employs a variety of tactics in seeking to keep a firm hold upon his captives? And one of them is to prevent his deluded victims engaging in this very investigation—lest they should discover that, after all, their hope has rested on a foundation of sand.

"For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be re-proved [discovered]" (Joh 3:20). Does not that *place* those who refuse to examine themselves whether they be in the faith and decline to be "weighed in the balances of the Sanctuary"? It certainly does: It ranks them among evil-doers. Despite all their religious pretensions, the solemn fact is that they "*hateth* the light" which exposes an empty profession; and therefore, they "neither cometh to the light" to be tested by it. And why is this? Because they lack an *honest* heart which desires to know the truth about themselves, no matter how unpalatable it be. Therefore, it is that they find most distasteful and discomfiting those sermons or articles which point out the differences between hypocrites and the sincere, and which show how closely the former may, in many ways, resemble the latter. Even if they began the work of self-examination, it

would prove so obnoxious as soon to be abandoned, and being under the power of a “heart [that] is deceitful above all things” (Jer 17:9) would give themselves the benefit of the doubt.

But different far is it with those in whom a work of grace has been wrought. They have been made to realise something of the deceitfulness of sin and the awful solemnity of eternity; and therefore, refuse to give themselves the benefit of any doubt, being determined at all costs to find out where they stand before God. Of each of them, Christ declares: “But he that doeth truth [is genuine and sincere] cometh to the light, that his [profession and] deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in [by] God” (Joh 3:21). He longs to know whether he be in a state of nature or of grace, and if his assurance of the latter be based on a conjectural persuasion or well-authenticated evidence; whether his faith in Christ be a natural one, or “the faith of God’s elect” (Ti 1:1); whether his repentance be “the sorrow of the world” which “worketh death,” or that “godly sorrow” which “worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of” (2Co 7:10). There is hope for a man who is deeply exercised over such matters; but there is none for those who are complacently satisfied with a false peace.

Readiness to be searched and probed by the Word of God, willingness to go to much pains to learn whether I be treading the Narrow Way which leadeth unto Life, or whether I am on the clean side of that broad road which terminates in destruction is a good sign. As there is nothing that a hypocrite dreads more than to have his rottenness exposed, so there is nothing which an honest heart more longs to know than the real truth about his state before God. The earnest prayer of such an one is: “Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart” (Psa 26:2). But alas, those who are filled with a carnal confidence feel no need of begging the Lord to “prove” *them*, for they are quite sure that all is well with them. Nay, so completely deceived are they by Satan, they imagine it would be an act of unbelief to do so. Poor souls, they “call evil good, and good evil,” and “put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (Isa 5:20).

“Examine me, O LORD, and prove *me*” (Psa 26:2). Is that the cry of *your* soul, my reader? If it be not, then there is strong reason to fear you are yet fatally enthralled by Satan. One of the surest marks of regeneration is that such a soul cries frequently, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psa 139:23-24). Yet it should be pointed out that this must not be made a shelving of our responsibility, a substitute for the performance of our own duty. God hath bidden us, “Examine *yourselves* whether ye be in the faith” (2Co 13:5); and every possible effort must be made by us to do so, taking nothing for granted, but resolutely and impartially scrutinising our hearts, measuring ourselves by the Word, ascertaining whether or not we have the marks and evidences of regeneration. Like the Spouse, we should say, “Let us get up *early*...let us see if the vine flourish” (Song 7:12).

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2Co 13:5) clearly implies that a knowledge of our spiritual state *is* possible. As the natural man perceives his own thoughts, knows what views and motives regulate him, and is acquainted with his own designs and aims, so may the spiritual man be. “Reflection and knowledge of self is a prerogative of a rational creature. We know that we have souls by the operations of them. We may know that we have grace by the effects of it, if we be diligent. As we may know by the beams of the sun that the sun is visible, if we shut not our eyes (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680). Grace discovers itself in its affections and actions, in its operations and influence on the heart and life. If we observe closely the springs of our actions and “commune with” our own heart (Psa 4:4), we should have little difficulty in becoming acquainted with the state of our souls. “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?” (1Co 2:11).

In His parable of the Sower and the Seed, our Lord likened those who hear the Word unto different kinds of soil which received the Seed, and the various results or yields therefrom. His obvious design therein was to supply us with criteria by which we may *measure ourselves*. If, then, I would properly examine myself, I must ascertain if I am no better than the wayside hearer, who received the Word with an evanescent “joy” and yet had “no root” in himself (Luk 8:13) and soon fell away; or the thorny-ground hearer, who suffered the “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches” (Mat 13:22) to choke the Word and render him unfruitful. Or, if by grace I be a good-ground hearer, of whom it is said—not simply that he “believes the Gospel,” but—“which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luk 8:15). *That* is the test: Not knowledge, orthodoxy, or happy feelings, but FRUIT.

Unless a man knows himself to be a child of God, he cannot rationally or lawfully take comfort from the promises which are addressed unto the saints. It is madness and presumption for me to flatter myself

that God has declared He will do this and that for me, unless I am reliably assured that I am one of those to whom such declarations are made. It is the height of folly for me to believe that all things are working together for my good, unless I really love God (Rom 8:28). On the other hand, if I be regenerate and decline to take comfort from the promises, I forsake my own mercies and allow Satan to deprive me of my legitimate portion. That it is not God's will for His people to remain in uncertainty is unmistakably clear from 1 John 5:13: He moved one of His apostles to write a whole Epistle for the express purpose that they might *know* they had eternal life, and that they may believe (more confidently) on the name of the Son of God.

Realising full well that this is the most momentous investigation that any mortal can ever undertake, that sincere souls—conscious of how much is involved—will proceed carefully and cautiously, and making full allowance that an honest heart will be fearful of being deceived in the matter, yet we have never been able to understand why a regenerate soul should find it so difficult to determine whether he be in a state of nature or of grace. We are very much afraid that not a few of God's dear people have been hindered by the teaching they sat under and the general custom which prevailed in the circle where they were. It is indeed deplorable that many Protestants have echoed the dogma of Popery that it is presumptuous for any Christian to aver he *knows* that he has been made a new creature in Christ Jesus. The New Testament contains not a word in support, but much to the contrary. For a saint to doubt his acceptance by God is not a mark of humility, but the fruit of unbelief.

We have been dealing with the Christian's assurance of his state before God in a more or less general way. Let us now be specific and ask, "How is an exercised soul to ascertain whether he has really been restored to the favour and friendship of God? By what criteria or rules is he to test himself in order to discover whether God be at peace with him? By what evidence may he be rationally assured that he is *reconciled* to the moral Ruler and Judge of this world?" Surely that should not be difficult to determine. Is it possible for a truly converted person—who has passed through a radical change in his heart and life, in his thoughts, affections and actions—to yet know nothing about it? Surely a person cannot be awakened out of a state of security in sin, to realise what a vile, unclean rebel he is, and to mourn over the same—and yet perceive nothing about it. For one to radically change his selfish and worldly pursuits, to lose relish for his idols, and to live a life of communion with God—and yet be uncertain such is his case—is impossible.

Grace is as evident in its own nature as corruption is; and its operations and fruits are as manifest and unmistakable as are those to sin. Not only so in ourselves, but in our fellow-saints too. In a time like the present, it is particularly easy to recognise those who are truly reconciled to God. The few *friends* of Christ stand out conspicuously among the vast multitude of His enemies. In a day when lawlessness abounds and every man does "which was right in his own eyes" (Jdg 21:25), those whose lives are ordered by God's Word cannot be mistaken. They "shine as lights in the world," "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation" (Phi 2:15). Noah "walked with God" (Gen 6:9)—though he lived in the midst of the reprobate antediluvians. Elijah was jealous for the glory of God and faithful in maintaining His cause—though his lot was to dwell amid a people who had forsaken God's covenant, thrown down His altars, and slain His prophets (1Ki 19:14).

It may be easier—we are by no means sure it is so—for one to serve God faithfully in a season of revival, than in one of declension; and to journey Heavenwards in the company of a goodly number, than to stand alone—but it is more difficult to identify the saints. As the fire evidences the pure gold, so a day—either of bitter persecution or of wide-spread apostasy—enables us to discern who are out and out for the Lord, and those who have nothing more than a thin veneer of religion. When many of Christ's nominal disciples went back and walked no more with Him, He turned to the apostles and asked, "Will ye also go away?" (Joh 6:67). Whereupon, Simon Peter acting as their spokesman said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (Joh 6:68). "They have made void thy law. *Therefore* I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold" (Psa 119:126-127)—such is the effect upon a true child of God of the defection of his fellows.

But returning to the individual who would ascertain whether or not he be reconciled to God. That problem may be reduced to a simple issue: You are either an enemy of God, or the friend of God—plainly manifesting the one or the other in your conduct. It should not be difficult for you to determine in which class you are. "And you, that were sometime ["afore"] alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled" (Col 1:21). The implication is unescapable: If you have been reconciled to God, then you are no longer fighting against Him; and though as yet, you are very far from being perfect, or all that you should be; nevertheless, no longer is your mind enmity against Him—ever engaged in

wicked works. Nay, if reconciled, the very opposite is the case: You yearn for closer fellowship with Him, you love His Word, honestly endeavour to be regulated by it in all things, and in your measure, are bringing forth good works.

Yes, the issue is a very simple one: To be reconciled to God is for there to be mutual peace between Him and you; and peace is the opposite of war, as love is of hatred. It therefore follows that no soul who is at peace with sin can possibly be at peace with God—for sin is the open enemy of the Holy One. The question to be decided then is: "Have I thrown down the weapons of my warfare against the Most High? Have I enlisted under the banner of a new Captain?" If I be honestly and resolutely fighting against sin, then I must be reconciled to God. Said Christ to His disciples, "For he that is not against us is on our part" (Mar 9:40). There is no third condition: You are either for, or against, God—His friend, or His foe. God's enemies are opposed to Him, leagued with all that is hostile to Him, doing what He forbids and flouting what He enjoins. If then I desire to please Him, am I on the side of His friends, hating what He hates and loving what He loves—must I not be one with Him!

CHRISTIAN SUBMISSION

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Eph 5:21). This is a general exhortation which sums up much of what has been set forth in the fourth and fifth chapters of this epistle. It is founded upon the grand truth of the unity of the mystical Body of Christ, being addressed to the saints; in whom, as living members of that Body, in the building up of which they are both individually interested and personally responsible, according to the measure of grace bestowed upon each (Eph 4:1-7, 16). When bidding them, “speak every man truth with his neighbour,” it was at once added, “*for* we are members one of another” (Eph 4:25). Holding firmly to the Head of faith, they were to walk in the power of that Spirit who secured them in Christ for salvation and joined them to each other in His love (Eph 5:18-20). Above all, it was to be kept in their remembrance that corporately, they were God’s “temple” (Eph 2:19-21), and individually, His “children” (Eph 5:1); and so were exhorted to “walk in love” (Eph 5:2) and “in the fear of God” (Eph 5:21). Therefore, they should submit themselves not only to God in their individual relation to Him, but also to one another.

Ephesians 5:21 is also to be regarded as standing at the head of that section of the epistle which runs on to the end of Ephesians 6:9, enunciating the general principle which is illustrated by the details of the verses that follow. “Submitting yourselves one to another” certainly does not signify that true Christianity is a species of spiritual communism, which reduces all to one common level. So far from breaking up the ordinary relations of life and producing disorder, lawlessness, and insubordination, it confirms every legitimate authority and makes each just yoke lighter. “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God...Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Rom 13:1, 7). “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief” (Heb 13:17). “Fear God. Honour the king” (1Pe 2:17). “Submitting yourselves one to another”—according to your different situations and relations in the church and in the community, and that subjection which is established by God’s Word and ordered by His providence.

This call to mutual subjection, then, not only crowns the series of precepts going before, but is also made the foundation of an exposition of Christian deportment in those natural and social relations to which special obligations belong, and in which Christians are likely to find themselves placed. The Gospel does not abolish civil distinctions, but binds the believer unto a keeping of the order set up by God. In the light of what immediately follows, where wives are enjoined to be in subjection to their husbands, children to their parents, and servants to their masters, some have concluded that “submitting yourselves one to another” signifies nothing more than “render obedience unto whom it is due.” But this is an unwarrantable narrowing of its scope to restrict it unto the duty of inferiors to superiors, for the terms of this injunction are not qualified. Nor does such a limitation accord so well with other Scriptures. But more: Such an interpretation is not in keeping with what follows—for husbands, parents, masters are also addressed, and *their duties* pressed upon them.

While the duty of the wife’s subjection to her husband is insisted upon, yet the obligations of the husband to his wife are also enforced. If children be there required to render obedience to their parents, the responsibility of fathers is also stated. While servants are instructed how to conduct themselves unto their masters, the latter are taught to treat their employees with due consideration and kindness. There, too, the *balance* is blessedly preserved. Power is not to be abused. Authority must not degenerate into tyranny. Law is to be administered mercifully. Rule is to be regulated by love. Government and discipline must be maintained in the state, the church, and the home; yet governors are to act in the fear of God, and instead of domineering over their subjects, seek their good and serve their interests. Christians are not to aspire after dominance, but usefulness. Self-denial rather than self-assertiveness is the badge of Christian discipleship. Saints are likened unto sheep, and not goats or wolves. Submitting yourselves one to another means mutually serving one another, and seeking each other’s wellbeing and advantage in all things.

“Sin is the transgression of the law” (1Jo 3:4)—that is to say, it is a revolt against God’s authority, a defying of Him, a species of self-will. Sin chafes at any restraints determined to have its own way. Sin is self-centered, imperious, and indifferent to the welfare of others. Yokes and restrictions are intolerable unto sin, and every attempt to enforce them meets with opposition. That resistance is evinced from earliest infancy, for a thwarted babe will cry and kick because not suffered to have its own way. Because all are born

in sin, the world is filled with strife and contention, crime and war. But at regeneration, a principle of grace is communicated, and though sin be not annihilated, its dominion is broken. The love of God is shed abroad in the renewed heart to counteract its native selfishness. The yoke of Christ is voluntarily assumed by the believer, and His example becomes the Rule of his daily walk. Made a member of His body, he is henceforth to lay himself out in promoting the interests of his brethren and sisters. He is under bonds to do good unto all men, especially to those who belong to the Household of Faith.

It is because sin indwells the Christian, he needs to have this injunction, "submitting yourselves one to another" frequently pressed upon him. Such is poor human nature that when a man is elevated to a position of honour, even though it be a regenerate man who is called to serve as a deacon, he is prone to lord it over his brethren. A most solemn warning against this horrible proclivity is found in Luke 22:24: "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." That strife was among the twelve apostles, while they sat in the Saviour's presence after the Supper! Alas, how little has that warning been heeded! How many since then have aspired for the precedence. How often a spirit of envy and strife has been engendered by those who strove for superiority in the churches. How few realise that doing good is better than being great; or rather, that the only true and noble greatness consists in being good and doing good—to spend and be spent in the service of others. Greatness is not being toadied unto, but ministering to those less favoured.

Nevertheless, there is a subordination and condescension appointed by God which we are required to observe. This is true of *ecclesiastical* power. God has ordained that there shall be teachers and the taught, governors and the governed. He raises up those who are to have the supervision of others, and they are required to subordinate themselves to their authority (Heb 13:17). But their rule is administrative and not legislative, directive more than authoritative, "and managed by a council rather than a court," as Thomas Manton (1620-1677) expresses it. Here, too, there must be *mutual* submission, for in both governors and the governed, there is mutual service. The governors themselves are but "ministers" (1Co 4:1): They have indeed an honourable office, yet they are only *servants* (2Co 4:5) whose work is to feed the flock, to act as directors or guides by word and example (1Ti 4:12). Though they "are over you in the Lord" (1Th 5:12), yet not "as being lords over God's heritage" (1Pe 5:3); but as motivated by love for souls, seeking their edification, gently endeavouring to persuade, rather than compelling and tyrannizing.

There is also *political power*, or governmental authority, in the civil state, which is God's ordinance and unto which His people must yield for His sake. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well" (1Pe 2:12-13). Thus, there is an obligation of conscience to submit unto our civil governors, both unto the supreme and the subordinate magistrate—the only exception being when they require something from me which clashes with God's Rule, for to act contrary to *that* would be defiance of Divine authority; and therefore, would be for the Devil's sake rather than the Lord's. Honour, subordination, and obedience are due unto the ministers of state; nevertheless, they, in turn, are under the Divine dominion, "for he is the *minister* of God to thee for good" (Rom 13:4). The magistrate, the member of the cabinet (or senate), and the king himself, are but the servants of God, to whom each must yet render an account of his stewardship; in the meantime, each must perform his duty for the good of the commonwealth, *serving* the interests of those under him.

So, too, of the *economical power*, that of the husband, parent, and master. There are not only duties pertaining to those relations, but mutual obligations wherein the power of the superior is to be subordinated to the interests of the inferior. The husband is the head of the wife, and she is required to own him as her lord (1Pe 3:6); but that gives him no right to act as a tyrant and make her the slave of his lusts. He is under bonds to love and cherish her, to give honour to her as unto the weaker vessel, to seek her happiness and do all in his power to lighten her burdens. Parents are to govern their children and not to tolerate insubordination, yet they must not provoke them to wrath by brutal treatment, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, teaching them to be truthful, industrious, honest, looking after the good of their souls, as well as bodies. Masters are bidden to give unto their servants, "that which is just and equal; knowing that" *they* also "have a Master in heaven" (Col 4:1) who will sanction no injustice and condone no harshness. God has so tied us one to another that everyone is to do his part in promoting the common good.

Power is bestowed upon men by God, not for the purpose of their self-exaltation, but for the benefit of those they rule. Power is to be exercised with goodwill and benevolence, and deference is to be rendered by the subordinate—not sullenly, but freely and gladly, as unto God. "For, brethren, ye have been called unto

liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but *by love serve* one another" (Gal 5:13) interprets for us "submitting yourselves one to another" (Eph 5:21). It is the *mutual* submission of brotherly love which is there enjoined, of that love which "seeketh not her own" (1Co 13:5), but ever labours for the good of its objects. It is that mutual subjection which one Christian owes to another, not seeking to advance himself above his fellows and domineer over them, but which is selfless, bearing one another's burdens. It is in the exercise of *that* spirit that we please God, adorn the Gospel, and make it manifest that we are the followers of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. It is by mortifying our pride and selfishness, by the exercise of mutual affection, and by discharging the office of respect and kindness unto the children of God, we show forth that we have passed from death unto life.

"Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom 12:10). The Greek word there for "preferring" signifies "to take the lead or set an example." Instead of waiting for others to honour or minister unto me, I should be beforehand in deferring unto them. Where Christian love be cultivated and exercised, there is a thinking and acting respectfully unto our brethren and sisters. "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phi 2:3). That does not mean the father in Christ is to value the opinions of a spiritual babe more than his own, still less than he is to feign a respect for the spirituality of another which he does not honestly feel. But it does signify that if his heart be right, he will so discern the image of Christ in His people as to make deference in love to them both an easy and pleasant duty, putting their interests before his own; and judging himself faithfully, he will discover that "the least of all saints" (Eph 3:8) suits no man better than himself. The exercised and humble believer will rather put honour on his brethren than seek it for himself.

If then God has called you into the ministry, it is not that you may ape [mimic] the peacock, or set yourself up as a little pope. You are not called to lord it over God's vineyard, but to *labour in it*, to minister unto His people. The greatest of the apostles declared, "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself *servant unto all*, that I might gain the more" (1Co 9:19). But One infinitely greater than Paul is your Pattern. Behold Him humbling Himself to perform the most menial office, as He girded Himself with a towel, stooped down, and washed the feet of His disciples! And remember, it is unto the ministers of His Gospel that He said, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him" (Joh 13:14-16). A haughty and arrogant spirit ill becomes *His* servants.

That holy balance between "call no man your father upon the earth" (Mat 23:9) and "submitting yourselves one to another" (Eph 5:21) was perfectly exemplified by the Lord Jesus who, though God incarnate, was also Jehovah's Servant. If on the one hand, we find that He refused to be in bondage to the doctrines and commandments of the Pharisees (Luk 11:38; Mat 15:2), and overrode their traditions with His authoritative, "I say unto you" (Mat 5:20-22, etc.); on the other hand, we behold Him submitting unto every ordinance of God, and perfectly exemplifying every aspect of lowly submission. As a Child, He was "subject unto" His parents (Luk 2:51). Ere He began His ministry, He submitted to be baptized of John, saying, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Mat 3:15). He sought not His own glory (Joh 8:50), but rather the glory of the One who sent Him (Joh 7:18). He denied Himself food and rest that He might minister to others (Mar 3:20). The whole of His time was spent in going "about doing good" (Act 10:38). He bore patiently and tenderly with the dullness of His disciples, and broke not the bruised reed, nor quenched the smoking flax (Mat 12:20). And He has left us an example that *we* should follow *His* steps.

Submitting ourselves one to another means, according to each, the right of private judgment and respecting his convictions. It imports a readiness to receive counsel and reproof from my brethren, as David did when he was king (Psa 141:5). It connotes a cheerful denying of self as to seek their good. It signifies doing all in my power to minister unto their holiness and happiness. As one of the old worthies put it, "The saints are 'trees of righteousness' whose fruit is to be eaten by others; candles, which spend themselves in giving light and comfort to those about them." To obey this precept, we require to be clothed with *humility*. It is the proud who cannot endure subjection, and who consider it beneath them to lend a helping hand to those less favoured. *Love* must be warm and active, if superiors and inferiors are to treat one another with kindness and respect. Where love reigns, none will be disdained or slighted. "In the fear of God," this submission is to be rendered: In conscience to His command, with a regard for His glory.

THE EARTH

Part I

“The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein” (Psa 111:2). The works of the Lord in creation, providence, and grace are “great”—prodigious, wonderful, perfect. Each of them is worthy of our most attentive consideration, careful examination, and prayerful contemplation. Those works—whether in the natural sphere or the spiritual—evidence and display the perfections of the Workman; and it will be both to our pleasure and profit to seek them out and ponder what they have to teach us, both concerning God Himself and His care for us. The Hebrew word which is here rendered “sought out” is elsewhere translated “enquired,” “examined,” “regard.” It is a comprehensive term which signifies, “to diligently investigate and thoughtfully weigh.” If only we have eyes to see, hearts to perceive, and ears to hear, the very ground we walk on and every object in “Nature” preaches a sermon to us on God’s wisdom, power, goodness, and faithfulness. What follows illustrates our meaning: It is an excerpt from the Letters of James Hervey (1714-1758).

This terraqueous globe is intended not only for a place of habitation, but a storehouse of conveniences. If we examine the several apartments of our great abode, if we take a general inventory of our common goods, we shall find reason to be charmed with the displays both of nice economy and of boundless profusion.

Observe the *surface* of this universal message. The ground course, as it may seem, and trodden by every foot, is nevertheless the laboratory where the most exquisite operations are performed; the shop, if I may so speak, where the finest manufacturers are wrought. Though all generations have, each in their order, been accommodated by its productions, though all nations under Heaven are, to this very day, supplied by its liberalities, it still continues inexhausted. It is a recourse always new, a magazine never to be drained.

As this is a property very remarkable and unspeakably valuable, it deserves our more particular regard. Was it reversed, what would become of the world, both rational, animal and vegetable? In commercial affairs, *usury* is looked upon as the canker of an estate: A corroding worm which eats into the heart, and consumes the very vitals of our substance. The earth borrows immense sums yearly, and these she repays with an interest prodigiously large, almost incredible. Yet is she never impoverished! Or if impoverished in some degree the repose of a single year, with a little cultivation from the owner is sufficient for the reparation of all her losses. *Old age* weakens the most vigorous animals. Even the hardiest oaks are impaired by time. A state of barrenness and decay awaits them all, and admits neither of prevention, nor of remedy. But the earth, which is the mother and nurse of us all, is subject to none of these infirmities! She is now almost six thousand years old, yet discovers no sign of a broken constitution, nor any one symptom of exhausted strength. In spring, she blooms like a virgin; in summer, she sparks like a bride; in autumn, she teems like a matron. If gray hairs seem to be upon her during the wintry months, she is sure to drop them when the frosts are gone and the sun approaches. She never fails at that season to re-assume all the graces and to re-exert all the vigour of youth. Though she has been pregnant with thousands and thousands of vintages and harvests, though she has suckled unnumbered millions of green and flowery families, her womb is as strong and lively to conceive, her breasts are as copious and milky to nourish, as if she was but just delivered of her first-born. To what is this unequalled and ever-ceasing fertility owing? What but that mighty Word proceeding from the mouth of Jehovah: “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest...shall not cease” (Gen 8:22). How short the decree, but how long and lasting its efficacy! It has reached to this hour, it will reach to distant ages, it will extend itself to the very end of Time.

Here are *quarries* stocked with stones, inferior in beauty to the jeweler’s ware, but much more eminently beneficial. Which, when properly ranged and cemented with a tenacious mortar, form the convenient abodes of peace, and build the strongest fortifications of war: Defending us from inclement weather and the more formidable assaults of our enemies. They constitute the arches of the bridge which convey the traveler with perfect security over the deep and rapid stream, enabling both man and horse to pass with easy intercourse from one bank of the broadest river to another. These give us the rocky girdles of our quays, and strengthen the arms, the stupendous arms of the mole; which stretch themselves far into the ocean, curb the impetuosity of the surge, and screen the helpless barque; which tempestuous waves, like a savage disappointed of its prey, foam, and rage around.

These stony treasures are comparatively *soft* while they continue in the bowels of the earth, but acquire an increasing *hardness* when exposed to the open air. Was this remarkable peculiarity reversed, what difficulties would attend the labours of the mason! His materials could not be extracted from their bed, nor fashioned for his purpose, without infinite toil. Suppose his work completed, it would not long withstand the fury of the elements, but insensibly mouldering or incessantly decaying would elude the expectations of the owner; perhaps might prove an immature grave, instead of a durable dwelling.

Here are vast *layers of clay*, which, however contemptible in its appearance, is abundantly more advantageous than the rocks of diamond or the veins of gold. This is moulded with great expedition and ease into vessels of any shape and of almost every size. Some so delicately fine, that they compose the most elegant and ornamental furniture for the tea-table of a princess. Others, so remarkably cheap, that they are ranged on the shelves and minister at the meals of the peasant. All so perfectly neat that no liquid takes the least taint, nor the nicest palate any disgust from their cleanly services. The Creator, who never forgets and never neglects even the meanest of the people, has distributed this most necessary kind of earth in the greatest abundance. It is found in every country, almost in every field. It lies near the surface, and is obtained with little labour, and with very little expense. Thus hast Thou, O God, of Thy goodness, prepared for the poor.

Which shall we most admire, the bountiful heart, the liberal hand, or the all-discerning eye of our great Creator? How observable, how admirable is the precaution in removing these useful, but cumbrous, wares from the superficies, and stowing them in proper repositories or lumber-rooms beneath our feet! Were they scattered over the surface, the ground would be choked and embarrassed with the enormous heaps. Our roads would be blocked up, and scarce any portion left free for the operations of husbandry. Were they buried extremely deep, or sunk to the centre of the globe, it would cost us immense pains to procure them; or rather, they would be quite inaccessible. Were they uniformly spread into a pavement for Nature, the trees could not strike their roots, nor the herbs shoot their blades; but universal sterility must ensue. Whereas, by their present disposition, they furnish us with a magazine of metallic without causing any diminution of our vegetable treasures. Fossils of every splendid and serviceable kind enrich the bowels, while bloom and verdure embellish the face of the earth.—*James Hervey, published 1789.*

