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# STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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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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## NONCONFORMITY

“And be not conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2). In the preceding verse the believer’s duty Godward is set forth: the same is continued here, first warning against that which will seek to prevent a continuance of his surrender and dedication to Him. The relation and attitude of a believer unto this world is a matter of no small moment, and one upon which the Scriptures have not a little to say. Christ gave Himself for our sins “that He might deliver us from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4), therefore we are bidden “Love not the world, neither the things in the world” (1Jo 2:15), and we are warned “the friendship of the world is enmity with God: whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jam 4:4). But before proceeding further, we must ask, Precisely, what is meant here by “this world”? What is signified by “conformity” to it? Is the Christian’s nonconformity to be a relative or absolute one? If the former, where is the line to be drawn? It should be obvious that answers to these questions must be obtained ere we are in a position to render intelligent obedience to this Divine precept.

“This world” is in contrast with another “world”: it is the present and temporal world, as distinguished from the future and eternal one, and since faith is engaged with the latter, then the former is that system of things which is the enemy of faith. It is that world which hated Christ (Joh 15:18) and whose princes crucified Him (1Co 2:8). It is that world the whole of which “lieth in the wicked one” (1Jo 5:19). It is therefore the mass of mankind who are strangers to God, haters of His holiness and of all who exhibit His image (Joh 15:19; 1Jo 3:1). It is both a society and a system. The members of it are described as “men of the world, which have their portion in this life” (Psa 17:11)—whose chief good resides in the things of time and sense, whose consuming object is to crowd as much as possible of earthly joy into their brief lives. All who are self-willed and self-pleasing belong to its wide empire. As a system it is under the dominion of Satan: he is its “prince” (Joh 16:11), regulating its politics and policy; its “god” (2Co 4:4), directing its religion.

This world is therefore the embodiment of Satan’s spirit: bearing his image, and wearing his livery. In their unregenerate days the saints too “walked 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” (Eph 2:2)—mark well those last words, for they define the outstanding feature of its subjects. The language of their hearts is “What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? and what profit shall we have, if we pray unto Him?” (Job 21:15); while their secret thought is “The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard” (Psa 94:7). The world listens willingly to its seducer and readily credits his lies. They are persuaded that God’s commandments are grievous and His service hard, yet they cherish the idea that somehow His indulgence may be safely counted upon in the end. Enlightened eyes should have no difficulty in recognizing what is and what is not a part of “this world” and the need of separation from it. The world is the open foe of Christ, and it is acting the traitor’s part for any of *His* followers to hold close converse with the enemy’s camp.

“*And be not conformed to this world.*” In view of what immediately precedes, this means, Allow not the evil example of those surrounding you to mar or modify the completeness of your devotedness unto God. Be not like the unregenerate in heart and life. Be neither animated by their spirit nor regulated by their principles. Fashion not your ways after the *disobedience to God* which marks them. This is evident too from what follows, for the antithesis drawn in the second half of the verse shows plainly what is prohibited in the first: “but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” The unregenerate would fain have you believe that He is a hard Taskmaster, that His commandments are unreasonable and harsh. But so far from that being the case, if you run in the way of His commandments, you shall have experiential proof that God’s preceptive will is blessed, agreeable to the one who yields thereto, yea most excellent. The transformation begins *within*: the “mind” here signifies the entire inner man; the soul is *purified* by “obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1Pe 1:22).

“Be not conformed to this world” means neither that the Christian is to decline all intercourse with its subjects nor that he should impose upon himself any restraints not required by Scripture in order to make himself as unlike the world as possible. If, on the one hand, we must sedulously avoid any sinful com-

pliance with the world, on the other, we need to be on our guard against a vain singularity which springs from self-righteousness and which repudiates the spirit and liberty of the Gospel. If instead of blindly following a multitude to do evil, or fashioning ourselves after the traditions, customs and whims of men, we are resolutely determined (by grace) to be guided by the Word, and have our “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb 5:14), little difficulty will be experienced in applying this Divine injunction to all the varied details of our lives. To renounce the society of the world was the error of those who fled to the monastery, for that made it impossible for them to “let their light shine before men” (Mat 5:16).

Nor is the Christian required to renounce the duties of relative life or to become careless in the discharge of the same. Rather is he to conduct himself according to the rules of God’s Word in that station wherein His providence has placed him, whether husband or wife, parent or child, master or servant, magistrate or civilian; bearing rule or yielding obedience as unto God, being faithful and diligent in the management of his temporal affairs. Neither are Christians required to refuse a moderate use of the comforts and conveniences of life, suitable to the place which God has appointed for them in the world. It is nothing but pride and “will-worship” which supposes there is anything praiseworthy in long fastings, abstaining from pleasant food, wearing meaner clothes than are suited to their rank of life. There is certainly great need of constant watchfulness against allowing lawful things to become harmful to us by their abuse, yet not a few have adopted an austerity which the New Testament nowhere enjoins. Some attract as much attention to themselves by their *prudery* as others do by their *pride*.

Taking upon ourselves unpleasant tasks and the practice of outward severities may be carried to great lengths without their performers having a spark of life. The mortifications and bodily macerations practiced by the Brahmins of India far exceed the most zealous superstitions and self-imposed severities obtaining among fanatics in Christendom. There is a “strictness” which arises from ignorance rather than knowledge, which is wholly concerned about *externals*, and which in reality gratifies the spirit of self in one way as much as it seems to deny it in another. It is possible to starve the body in order to feed pride, but to those who fear God and order their lives by His revealed will, “every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving” (1Ti 4:4). In seeking to avoid the sin of epicureanism, let us beware of the folly of spartanism.

Notwithstanding the above limitations, the precept “Be not conformed to this world” is very extensive. Christians are “strangers and pilgrims” on earth (Heb 11:13; 1Pe 2:11). Heaven is their country, and Christ is their King. They are to be known and noticed as *His subjects*. They are not to be assimilated to the sentiments of “the children of disobedience,” regulated by their counsels, nor dominated by their aims and ambitions. Believers are neither to be allured by the smiles of unbelievers, nor intimidated by their frowns. They are neither to be swayed by their opinions and objects, nor to adopt their standard of expediency. “Be not conformed to this world” means allow not your characters to be moulded by the influences of this present scene, where all who are unregenerate act according to the principles and proclivities of fallen human nature. The things which mark “this world” are its *spirit*—selfishness: self-will, self-seeking; its *pursuits*—the things of time and sense; its *inspirer*—Satan and not Christ; its *religion*—which is but a pose, a convenience, a sop for the conscience.

Christ declares of His disciples, “they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (Joh 17:14). They count its religion a delusion, they regard its principles as corrupt, they deem its happiness an empty bubble, and they know that its course is hellward. Just to the extent to which we are not conformed to this world, but are transformed by the renewing of our minds, walking in subjection to His scepter, do we really witness for and honour our Master; and the world itself is conscious of that fact, for it is quick to see the inconsistencies of those claiming to be His followers, and despises them for the same. The world perceives and derides the insincerity of empty professors. Reader, you are either a man of God or a man of the world. You are either pursuing shadows and missing the Substance, or proving for yourself that in keeping God’s commandments “there is great reward” (Psa 19:11).



## THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

### 65. 1 Peter 5:10-11

There are seven things which we propose to consider regarding this prayer. First, *the suppliant*, for there is an intimate and striking relation between the experiences of Peter and the terms of his prayer. Second, *its setting*, for it is closely connected with the context, particularly with verses 6-9. Third, *its Object*, namely “the God of all grace”—a title extra dear to His people, and especially appropriate here. Fourth, *its plea*, for so we regard the clause, “who hath called us unto His eternal glory.” Fifth, *its petition*: “make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.” Sixth, *its qualification*: “after that ye have suffered a while,” for though that clause precedes the petition, yet when treating the verse homiletically, it logically follows it. Seventh, *its doxology*: “to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” The prayer as a whole is a very sublime one. Its contents are remarkably full, and richly repay a careful study of and devout meditation upon it. Our present task will be rendered the easier, for we purpose making considerable use of Thomas Goodwin’s (1600-1680) excellent and exhaustive exposition of the passage, since we feel he was favoured with much light from it, and wish to share with our readers what has been of no little help and blessing to us personally.

“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (verse 10). In those words the apostle appealed unto Him who is the Fountain of grace, and with such a One to look unto the chief of sinners need not despair. Next, he mentioned that which gave proof unto all believers that He is indeed the God of all grace, having effectually called them from death unto life and brought them out of nature’s darkness into His own marvelous light. Nor is that all: nay, it is but an earnest of what He has designed and prepared for them, since He has called them unto His eternal glory. The realization of *that* moved the apostle to request that—following a season of testing and affliction—He would complete His work of grace within them. Therein we have it clearly implied that God will preserve His people from apostasy, move them to persevere unto the end, and, notwithstanding all the opposition of the flesh, the world, and the Devil, bring them safe to heaven.

1. *Its suppliant*. The one who approached God thus was Simon Peter. While Paul had much more to say about the grace of God than any other of the apostles, it was left to poor Peter to denominate Him “the God of all grace.” The reason for this and the appropriateness of the same is not far to seek. While Saul of Tarsus is the outstanding New Testament trophy of *saving* grace (for King Manasseh is an equally remarkable case in the Old Testament), surely it is Simon who is the most conspicuous New Testament example (for David supplies a parallel under the Mosaic era) of the *restoring and preserving* grace of God. What is it that appears the greater marvel to a Christian, which most moves and melts his heart before God: the grace shown to him while he was dead in sin, and which lifted him out of the miry clay and set him upon and within the Rock of ages; or that grace exercised toward him *after* conversion—which bears with his waywardness, ingratitude, departure from his first love, grievings of the Holy Spirit, dishonourings of Christ; and yet, notwithstanding all, loves him unto the end and continues ministering unto his every need? If the reader’s experience be anything like that of ours, he will have no difficulty in answering.

Who but one who has been made painfully sensible of the plague within him, who has had so many sad proofs of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of his own heart, and who has perceived something of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, not only in the light of God’s holiness but as it is committed against the dying love of his Saviour, can gauge the sad fall of that one who was not only accorded a place of honour among the twelve ambassadors of the King of glory, but was privileged to behold Him on the mount of transfiguration and was one of the three who witnessed more than any others His agonies in the Garden? And then to hear him, a very short time afterwards, denying Him with oaths! And who but one who has personally experienced the “longsuffering of God,” and has himself been the recipient of His “abundant mercy,” can really estimate and appreciate the amazing grace which moved the Saviour to look so sorrowfully yet tenderly upon the erring one as to cause him to go forth and “weep bitterly”; and the abounding grace which led Him to have a private interview with him after His resurrection (1Co 15:5; Luk 24:34), and, above all, the infinite grace which not only recovered His wandering sheep, but restored him to the apostolate (Joh 21:15-17)? Well might *he* own Him as “the God of *all* grace”!

2. *Its setting.* If this be closely examined, it will be found there is much to be learned and admired. Before entering into detail, let us observe the context generally. In the foregoing verses, the apostle had been making a series of weighty exhortations, and since those in verses 6 to 9 are preceded by impressing upon the public servants of God their several duties (verses 1-5), a word to them first. Let all Christ's under-shepherds emulate the example which is here set before them. Having bidden believers to walk circumspectly, the apostle bent his knees and commended them to the gracious care of their God, seeking for them those mercies which he felt they most needed. The minister of Christ has two principal offices to discharge for those souls which are committed to his care (Heb 13:17): to speak for God *to* them, and to supplicate God *for* them. The Seed which the minister sows is not likely to produce much fruit unless he personally waters it with his prayers and tears. It is but a species of hypocrisy for him to exhort his hearers to spend more time in prayer if *he* be not a frequenter of the throne of grace. The pastor has only fulfilled half his commission when he has faithfully proclaimed all the counsel of God: the other part is to be performed in private.

The same principle holds good equally of those in the pew. The most searching sermon will profit the hearer little or nothing unless it be turned into fervent prayer. So too with what we *read*! The measure in which God is pleased to bless these articles unto you is to be determined by the influence they have upon you and the effects they produce in you—the extent to which they bring you to your knees in earnest supplication seeking power from the Lord. From exhortation the apostle turned to supplication. Let us do likewise, or we shall be left without the necessary strength to obey the precepts. To the various duties inculcated in the context was added this prayer for Divine enablement for the discharge of them, however arduous, and for the patient endurance of every trial, however painful. Observe too the blessed contrast between the assaults of the enemy in verses 8 and 9 and the character in which God is here viewed. Is not that designed to teach the saint that he has nothing to fear from his vile adversary so long as he has recourse unto Him in whom resides every kind of grace which is needed for his present walk, work, warfare and witness? Surely this is one of the principal practical lessons to be drawn from our prayer as we view it in the light of its context.

Certain it is that we shall never be able to “resist steadfastly in the faith” him who is as a roaring lion, and who walketh about “seeking whom he may devour,” unless we daily look to and cast ourselves upon “the God of all grace.” And equally sure is it that Divine grace is needed by us if we are to “be sober, be vigilant.” We need strengthening grace that we may successfully resist so powerful a foe as the Devil; courage-producing grace if we are to do so steadfast in the faith; and patience-producing grace in order to meekly bear afflictions. Not only is every *kind* of grace available for us in God, but every *measure*, so that when we find one exhausted we may obtain a fresh one. One of the reasons why God permits Satan to assail His people so frequently and so fiercely is that they may prove for themselves the efficacy of His grace. “God is able to make all grace abound toward you: that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2Co 9:8). Then let us bring to Him every pitcher of our needs and draw upon His inexhaustible fullness. “The ocean is known by several names, according to the shores it washes, but it is the same ocean. So is it ever the same love of God, though each needy one perceives and admires its special adaptation to *his* needs” (F. B. Meyer, 1847-1929).

But, as Goodwin showed, there is a yet more definite relation between our present prayer and its context, and between both of them and the experience of Peter. The parallels between them are so close and numerous that they cannot be undesigned. Christ had bidden His servant, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation” (Mat 26:41), and in his epistle he exhorts the saints “be sober, be vigilant.” Again, the Saviour had warned him, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired thee, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luk 22:31)—as the Puritan expressed it, “and shake forth all grace out of him.” So in verse 8, he gives point to his call for sobriety and vigilance by saying, “because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.” Then the Saviour informed him, “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.” And as Goodwin pointed out, faith's not failing is Satan's foiling.” Answerably thereto, the apostle in his exhortation added, “whom resist steadfast in the faith”—the *gift* of faith, as Calvin expounded it. Though Peter's self-confidence and courage failed him, so that he fell, yet his faith delivered him from giving way to abject despair, as Luke 22:61-62 shows.

Once more: our Lord concluded His address to Simon by saying: “and when thou art converted [brought back, restored] strengthen thy brethren” (Luk 22:32). Answerably thereto, the apostle wrote, “knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (verse 9), and

then prayed that, after they had suffered a while, the God of all grace would “perfect [or restore] them, stablish, strengthen, settle them,” which had been the very case with himself. Finally, Goodwin observed that Christ, when strengthening Peter’s faith against Satan, set His “*But I have prayed for thee*” over against the worst the enemy could do; and therefore he too, after portraying the adversary of the saints in his fiercest character, as “a roaring lion,” brings in by way of contrast, “*But the God of all grace, who hath called you unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect,*” thereby assuring them that He would be their Guardian, Undertaker, Strengtheners. If, notwithstanding his sad lapse, *he* was recovered and preserved unto eternal glory, that is a sure pledge that *all* the truly regenerate will be so. How wondrously Scripture (Luke 22) interprets Scripture (1 Peter 5)!

Ere passing on to our next section, let us note and admire how the particular instruments whom God employs as His penmen in communicating His Word were personally qualified and experientially fitted for their several tasks. Who but Solomon was so well suited to write the book of Ecclesiastes, the man who was afforded such exceptional opportunities to drink from all the poor cisterns of this world, and then to record the fact that no satisfaction was to be found in them; thereby providing a fitting background for the Canticles, wherein a Satisfying Object *is* displayed? How appropriate was the selection of Matthew to be the writer of the first Gospel, for he was the only one of the Twelve who held an official position before his call to the ministry (a tax-gatherer in the employ of the Romans), and he alone of the four Evangelists presents Christ in His official character as the Messiah and King of Israel. Mark, the one who ministered to another (2Ti 4:11), is the one chosen to set forth Christ as the Servant of Jehovah. Who so eminently adapted to write upon the blessed theme of Divine love (as he does throughout his epistles) as the one who was so highly favoured as to lean upon the bosom of God’s Beloved? So here *Peter* is the one who so feelingly styles the Deity “the God of all grace.” And so it is today: when God calls any man to the ministry, He experientially equips him, qualifying him for the particular work He has for him to do.

3. *Its Object.* “The God of all grace.” Nature does not reveal Him as such, for man has to work hard and earn what he obtains from her. The workings of Providence do not, for there is a stern aspect as well as a benign one to them, and, as a whole, they rather exemplify the truth that we reap according as we sow. Still less does the Law, as such, exhibit God in this character, for its reward is a matter of debt and not of grace. It is only in the Gospel that He is clearly made manifest as “the God of all grace.” Our valuation of Him as such is exactly proportioned by our devaluation of ourselves, for grace is the gratuitous favour of God unto the undeserving and ill-deserving, and therefore we cannot truly appreciate it until we are made sensible of our utter unworthiness and vileness. He might well be “the God of inflexible justice and unsparing wrath” unto rebels against His government. Such indeed He is to all who are out of Christ, and will continue so for all eternity. But the glorious Gospel discovers to hell-deserving sinners the amazing grace of God to pardon, and to cleanse the foulest who repent and believe. Grace devised the plan of redemption: grace executed it: grace applies it and makes it effectual.

Peter first made mention of “the *manifold* grace of God” (1Pe 4:10), for nothing less would avail those who are guilty of “manifold transgressions” and “mighty sins” (Amo 5:12). The grace of God is “manifold” not only numerically but *in kind*, in the rich variety of its manifestations—every blessing we enjoy is to be ascribed thereto. But “the God of *all* grace” is even more comprehensive; yea, incomprehensible to all finite intelligences. This title, as we have seen, is set over against what is said of the Devil in verse 8, where he is portrayed in all his terribleness: as our “adversary” for malice, likened unto a “lion” for strength, unto a “roaring lion” for dread, “walketh about” for his unwearied diligence, “seeking whom he may devour” unless God prevent. How blessed and consolatory the contrast, “But God”—the Almighty, the Self-sufficient and All-sufficient One; “the God of *all* grace.” How comforting is the singling out of *this* attribute when we have to do with Satan in point of temptation! If the God of all grace be *for* us, who can be against us? When Paul was so severely tried by the messenger (angel) of Satan who was sent to buffet him, and he thrice prayed for its removal, He assured him of this relief: “My *grace* is sufficient for thee” (2Co 12:10).

Though mention be made frequently in the Scriptures of the grace of God and of His being gracious, yet nowhere but in this verse do we find Him denominated “the God of all grace.” There is a special emphasis here which claims our best attention: not simply “the God of grace” but “the God of *all* grace.” As Goodwin showed, He is so essentially in Himself, and in His eternal purpose concerning His people, and in His actual dealings with them. They personally receive constant proof that He is indeed so, and those of them whose thoughts are formed from the Word know that the benefits with which He daily loads them are

the outworkings of His *everlasting design* of grace toward them. They need to go still farther back, or raise their eyes yet higher, and perceive that all the riches of grace He ordained, and of which they are made the recipients, are from and in His very *nature*. "The grace in His nature is the fountain or spring; the grace of His purposes is the well-head, and the grace in His dispensations the streams." It was the grace of His nature which caused Him to form "thoughts of peace" toward His people (Jer 29:11), as it is the grace in His heart which moves Him to fulfill the same. In other words, the grace of His very nature, what He is *in Himself*, is such as guarantees the making good of all His benevolent designs.

As He is the Almighty, self-sufficient and omnipotent, with whom all things are possible, so He is also an all-gracious God in Himself—lacking no perfection to make Him infinitely benign. There is therefore a sea of grace in God to feed all the streams of His purposes and dispensations that are to issue therefrom. Here then is our grand consolation, that all the grace there is in His nature, and which makes Him to be the "God of all grace" unto His children, renders certain not only that He will manifest Himself as such unto them, guarantees the supply of their every need, but ensures the lavishing of the exceeding riches of His grace upon them in the ages to come (Eph 2:7). Look then beyond those *streams* of grace of which you are now the partaker, unto Him who is "full of grace" (Joh 1:14), and ask for continual and larger supplies from Him. The straitness is in ourselves and not in Him, for in God there is a boundless and limitless supply. We beg the reader (as we urge ourselves) to remember that when he comes to the Mercy-seat (to make known his requests) he is about to petition "the God of all grace," that in Him there is an infinite ocean to draw upon, and that He bids him "open thy mouth *wide*, and I will fill it" (Psa 81:10), and has declared "according unto your faith be it unto you."

The Giver is greater than all His gifts, yet there must be a personal and appropriating *faith* in order for any of us to *enjoy Him*: only so can we particularize what is general. God is the God of all grace unto *all* saints, but faith has to be individually acted upon Him if He is to be known and delighted in as such by *me*. An example of this we have in Psalm 59, where David declared "The God of *my mercy* shall prevent [or "anticipate"] me" (verse 10). There we find him appropriating God *unto himself* personally. Take it first of the essential mercy of God, that which is in His very nature, and observe how he says again in verse 17: "Unto Thee, O *my Strength*, will I sing: for God is my defence, the God of my mercy"—"the God of all grace." The God of *my mercy*": I lay claim to Him as such—all the mercy there is in God is *my mercy*. Since He be my *God*, then all there is *in Him* is mine. On the same account, it was the mercy (or grace) which is in Him that moved Him to become my God at the first, that made Himself over to me, saying, "I will be his God, and he shall be My son" (Rev 21:7). "If any one saint had the needs that all the brotherhood have, and nothing would serve his case but all the grace of God which He has for the whole, He would lay it all upon *him*" (Goodwin).

Second, take it of the *purposing* mercy of God, and each individual saint had appointed and allotted him that which he may term "my mercy." God hath set apart in His decree a portion so abundant that it can never be exhausted either by thy sins or thy wants. "The God of mercy shall prevent me"—from all eternity He has *anticipated* and made full provision for my needs, as a wise father has a medicine chest prepared with remedies for the ailments of his children. "It shall come to pass, that *before* they call, I will answer" (Isa 65:24). What an amazing condescension it is that God should make this a characteristic of Himself—that He becomes the God of the mercy of every particular child of His! Third, take it of His *dispensing* mercy, that which is actually bestowed upon us moment by moment. Here too has the believer every occasion to say "The God of my mercy," for every blessing enjoyed by me proceeds from His hand. This is no empty title of His, but one that ensures He will make it good, directing Him to take care of my interests in every way: that as He is my God personally, so also of my need.





## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

### 45. Strategy, Part 2

In our last, we pointed out that in Joshua 8:1, the Lord gave unto His servant a word of cheer, a word of instruction, and a word of promise. His “fear not, neither be thou dismayed” was to graciously reassure Joshua’s heart after the dishonourable repulse Israel had met with upon their first assault on Ai—the reasons for their defeat having been shown. In its wider application, it was a message of comfort to the whole nation, after their elders had duly humbled themselves before the Lord, that they must not be unduly cast down nor suffer Satan to induce them to give way to a spirit of despair. The word of instruction was an intimation of the Divine will of what was now required from Joshua and those under his command: “take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai.” Therein their presumptuous conduct in 7:3 was denounced, and an order was given for them to return to the Divine pattern which they had received in 6:3. The word of promise was addressed unto their faith: “See! I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land.” *That* was spoken from the standpoint of the certainty of the Divine counsels, and faith was to receive it without question.

The word of instruction received amplification in the second verse: Ai and its inhabitants were to be utterly destroyed. In this instance, Israel were given permission to take the cattle as a spoil unto themselves. Finally, the strategy to be followed was made known: an “ambush” was to be laid for the city from its rear. Next we are told, “So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose out thirty thousand men of valour, and sent them away by night” (8:3). That is to be regarded as an act not only of obedience but of faith too, or rather as “the obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5, margin). It is a great mistake to suppose that faith in God renders needless our discharge of duty or the use of all lawful means: instead, it is to energize unto the one and to look unto God for His blessing upon the other. Confidence in God does not produce passivity, nor will the diligence which it evokes issue in self-confidence. True faith ever produces good works, yet those works are performed in a spirit of dependence upon the Lord. It is written: “The way of man is not in himself” (Jer 10:23), but it is written again: “This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isa 30:21). Thus does Scripture always guard Scripture!

“And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready” (8:4). Though victory was Divinely guaranteed, that did not preclude the discharge of their responsibilities. Faith in God was to operate in the performing of His commandments. Accordingly, Joshua issued very definite orders to those thirty thousand of his soldiers, telling them where to go and how to conduct themselves. As we said at the close of our last article, equally explicit are the instructions given to the Christian in connection with his spiritual warfare, and the measure of his success therein will very largely be determined by how closely he adheres to the same. It is to be noted that the force which was to lie in wait behind the city was “sent away by night” (verse 3), and thus its members were deprived of their rest, calling for self-denial on their part. *That* is the first and chief task appointed the believer: as Israel had to overcome and dispossess the Canaanites ere they could enter into their inheritance, so we have to get the victory over the flesh, the world and the Devil before there can be any present possessing of our possessions and enjoyment of the same. Before Christ can be followed, *self* has to be “denied,” and the *cross* (self-sacrifice) accepted as the regulating principle of our lives (Mat 16:24).

That to which we have just called attention receives confirmation in I Corinthians 9:24-27, where Paul says, first, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but only one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain,” likening the Christian life unto the running of a race—which calls for rigorous training, vigorous exertion, and patient endurance. Then he informs them what is required, and is essential, in order to succeed therein: “And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things”: that is, he puts a bridle upon his appetites, is abstemious in the use of comforts, and exercises a strict self-control at every point. Next, the apostle made mention of his own life, which exemplified what he had just said, and which sets before us an example to follow: “*I therefore* so run, not as uncertainly”—I myself practice such self-discipline as being absolutely necessary in order to ensure success. I conduct myself in such a manner and order my life in such a way that the outcome is not left in any doubt. I run within the lines marked out—keeping to the prescribed path of duty; pressing on till the goal is reached, exerting myself to the utmost unto the end.

Then, slightly varying his figure, and coming closer to what Joshua 8 has in view, the apostle added: "So fight I, not as one that beateth the air"—I conduct myself, and so observe the rules of the contest, that there can be no uncertainty that I shall be "more than conqueror through Him that loved us." Paul daily denied himself, mortified his lusts, and consequently he knew that the crown of life was thereby ensured. He did not waste his energies or spend his strength for naught. All his efforts were directed to the grand purpose of subjugating the desires of the flesh and bringing all his members into subjection to God. Alas, how many professing Christians today *are* wasting their energies upon tasks which God has never assigned them! Then in verse 27 he frankly stated the awful alternative: if I fail to make my body the servant of my soul, by yielding its members unto God (Rom 6:19) and fighting against the lusts of the flesh and temptations of Satan, then eternal disgrace will be my portion. Finally, let it be carefully noted that the apostle *continues* his exhortation to self-denial and caution in the tenth chapter (as its opening word indicates) from the case of Israel, who doubtless felt, as they stood on the other side of the Red Sea, that all danger was past and their entrance into Canaan was certain; yet, because of yielding to evil lusts, they were destroyed in the wilderness (verses 1-15).

Thus we see how that the principles which were to regulate Joshua and his men were the same as those which are to govern Christians in connection with their spiritual warfare. "The two Testaments, like our two eyes, mutually enlighten and assist each other" (A. Searle). They were to proceed with the utmost confidence in God, yet with entire submission to Him. They were to act faith in His sure promise, and at the same time render implicit obedience to His precept. They were to go forward fully assured that Jehovah had given Ai into their hands, nevertheless they must adhere strictly to the strategy He had specified. So, though told "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom 16:20), we are definitely bidden to resist him steadfast in the faith (1Pe 5:9). Our confidence is "that He which hath begun a good work in us will finish it" (Phi 1:6), nevertheless, in the very next chapter we are exhorted "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (verse 12). Mighty foes and powerful forces are arrayed in the fight, but the ultimate issue is not in doubt: "forasmuch as ye *know* that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1Co 15:58).

Unto the thirty thousand who were to lie in ambush behind the city Joshua had said, "go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready"—awake, alert, prepared promptly to make the most of any favourable opportunity which should be presented to them. Such must be the demeanour and spirit of the soldiers of Jesus Christ: "be sober, be vigilant" precedes the call to resist our adversary "steadfast in the faith" (1Pe 5:8-9). Then Joshua added, "And I, and all the people that are with me, will approach unto the city; and it shall come to pass when they come out against us, as at the first, that we will flee before them" (verse 5). How different was this policy from their boldly walking around the walls of Jericho! How humiliating to proud flesh to have to turn their backs upon the Canaanites! Surely it is obvious from such a course of procedure that Israel had *missed* God's best! True, the enemy was routed and utterly destroyed, and his city reduced to ashes, yet the method which the Lord here called upon Israel to adopt made it but too plain that they only entered into His second best for them.

"For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first: therefore we will flee before them" (verse 6). Those words expressed a deduction which Joshua drew from what the Lord had said to him in verse 1, for since His announcement that He had given the king of Ai and his people and his city into Israel's hand was accompanied by instructions for them to lay an ambush for the city from the rear (verse 2), it logically followed that the success of such strategy depended upon the army of Ai being lured out of it. Yet in the light of the whole context, it is clear that we have here something more than a mental inference, namely *faith's conclusion*. Joshua was warranted in having the utmost confidence in the successful outcome of this plan, because he was employing the means which the Lord had appointed, and was resting on His promise in verse 1, and therefore counted upon His *blessing* the same by drawing forth the forces of the enemy and thus leaving their city unprotected. This has been placed upon record for *our* learning and encouragement, particularly for ministers of the Gospel: if they adhere strictly to the methods and means God has appointed, and they look to Him for His blessing on the same, then whatsoever He has purposed shall assuredly be accomplished thereby.

From the above, we see how that we should profit from past experiences, especially those wherein disaster overtook us. Note how in the fifth verse Joshua had declared, "they will come out against us *as at the first*." That knowledge was now put to good use, and by availing himself of the same Joshua turned a previous defeat into a success. As Joshua perceived what course the king of Ai would follow, so Christians are

told concerning their great adversary, “we are not ignorant of his devices” (2Co 2:11)—nor are we of the various allurements and snares of the world, and least of all of the treachery and wickedness of our own hearts. Great care needs to be taken and honesty exercised upon this point, for while on the one hand the Word makes it very plain that Satan tempts and assaults the saints, on the other hand we are all too prone to father upon him our own sinful brats. It may not always be easy to decide whether a solicitation unto evil originated with our own lusts or the Devil, yet this is sure, that he can gain no advantage over us without our own consent, and therefore whenever we yield to his seductions the fault and guilt are ours, and instead of blaming Satan we must unsparingly condemn ourselves and confess the same to God.

This is obviously the principal practical lesson for us to draw from this detail of verse 6: that our knowledge of the enemy’s policy and tactics should be turned to good account, or otherwise we fail to profit from God’s exposure of the same in the Word of Truth. “For we are not ignorant of his devices”: from what is revealed in Holy Writ, from what we observe by carefully noticing the falls of our fellows, and from what we learn from our personal experience, we are cognizant of his favourite methods, baits, subtleties, and lines of approach; and such knowledge *increases* our responsibility to be ever on our guard, to take measures to counteract the same, and, as Joshua here did, turn them to our advantage. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and when we know beforehand from which direction the attack upon us is most likely to take place, we can not only forestall the same, but turn it to good account. The favourite devices of Satan are to prejudice unbelievers against the Truth, and so engulf them in the pleasures of the world that they lose sight of the interests of their souls and the inestimable importance of the world to come, to mar the believer’s testimony for Christ, and to destroy the peace of Christian assemblies by fomenting a spirit of strife and jealousy.

Ere passing on from this point, let us remind the young preacher that he may gather a wealth of suitable material from the Scriptures themselves should he desire to make a sermon on “Satan’s devices.” In such case, he should, of course, concentrate mainly on those which were employed upon Eve in Genesis 3, and those upon our Lord in Matthew 4. Without furnishing a complete list, he may supplement them from the following: Satan seeks to puff up (1Ch 21:1), to stir up to rebellion against the Divine providences and encourage hard thoughts of God (Job 1:11; 2:7-9), to produce a spirit of cowardice and induce us to betray Christ, as in the case of Peter (Luk 22:31), to consort and bargain with the open enemies of Christ and lead us to betray Him (Joh 13:2), to drive to despair and self-destruction (Mat 27:5), to foster the spirit of covetousness and attempt to impose upon the Holy Spirit (Act 5:3), to tempt to marital infidelity (1Co 7:5), to undue severity (2Co 2:6-11), to corrupt our minds from the simplicity which is in Christ (2Co 11:2), to pose as an angel of light and transform his ministers as the ministers of righteousness (2Co 11:14-15), to deny the Truth (2Ti 2:25-26), to intimidate (1Pe 5:8), and to slander God’s servants and saints (Rev 12:10).

“Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city: for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand” (verse 7). Joshua was still addressing the thirty thousand of his men who were to lie in wait behind Ai until the opportune moment arrived for them to fall upon it. That would be when the main force of Israel had made a frontal approach in order to tempt its defenders to come out against them, and on their being thus drawn out into the open, Israel would pretend to flee, inducing them to pursue and leave their homes defenceless. “*Then ye shall rise up,*” seizing the favourable opportunity without delay. The success of the plan required the full *co-operation* of Joshua’s men. Not all of them were appointed to the same stations or allotted the same tasks, but each was required to play his part faithfully. Had those who were to accompany Joshua refused to turn tail when the men of Ai advanced upon them, those who formed the ambush had their long wait in vain; and unless *they* acted promptly in occupying the soldierless city, then Joshua’s plan had failed. Hence it was that Joshua had bidden them, “be all ready,” that they might immediately avail themselves of the great advantage which his ruse offered them.

The spiritual application to us of the above is obvious. The Lord’s people are called upon to act together in their spiritual warfare. Not all are assigned positions of equal honour, nor are they given the same tasks to perform, yet they must supplement one another and act in conjunction if the interests of their Master’s cause are to be furthered, and if they are not to be humiliated before the common enemy. Unless the pastor has the full co-operation of his church officers, he is placed at a most serious disadvantage, and unless the rank and file of the members co-operate with both, little success will crown their efforts. Nor is it sufficient for one local church to fulfill its spiritual functions; there must be *mutual accord* and concerted action on the part of the several battalions of Christ’s soldiers if the enemy is to be defeated. Is it not the deplorable absence of such united effort on the part of God’s people that explains the comparative impo-

tency of modern Christianity? While a spirit of jealousy and discord prevails, and factions and schisms so largely obtain, corporeate fellowship is impossible, and where there is no fellowship there can be no united front presented before the powers of darkness, and therefore no Ais captured to the glory of God.

Let us now observe and admire the blessed *balance* of Truth as exemplified in the passage which is now before us. In the last three or four verses which have engaged our attention, it is the human-responsibility side of things which is manifestly in view, the several duties which the different parts of Israel's army were called upon to perform, and perform them they *must* if success was to attend their efforts. Nevertheless, Joshua was most particular in guarding the Lord's glory, and in letting his men know that it was *the Divine blessing* upon their efforts which would make them prosperous. This is clear from his words: "Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city, for the Lord God will deliver it into your hands." *There* was the Divine-grace side of things! The two things are not contradictory but complementary, as in "the hand of the diligent maketh rich" and "the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich" (Pro 10:4, 22). Both are consistent: the one reveals the primary cause, the other the subordinate and instrumental one. Neither will be effectual without the other. The sluggard looks for prosperity without diligence; the self-sufficient or practical atheist, from diligence alone; but the balanced Christian, from the blessing of God in the exercise of diligence. That wise combination keeps him both active and humble, energetic, yet dependent on God. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psa 127:1), yet if they build not, there will be no "house"!



## THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

### 29. *In Glory, Part 2*

We are now to consider some of the details revealed in Scripture about the death of a child of God. It is a most important and practical subject, and, though a solemn one, a very blessed one too; for it is then that the saint enters into glory. Let it be pointed out that if we be prepared for God's summons to pass from hence, then, whether His messenger be death or the appearing of the Lord of life, we shall be equally ready. On the other hand, those who are unprepared for death, yet profess to be daily looking for that Blessed Hope, are woefully deceiving themselves that *they* will be among the number who shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. What we have here said requires no proof: it is self-evident that since a saint's departure from this scene is in order for him to enter the presence of God, that if he be prepared for *that*, it can make no difference to his soul whether death or Christ personally be the one to conduct him thither. Let the Christian make his calling and election sure (2Pe 1:10) by ascertaining that he has a valid title to heaven through Christ (Rom 5:11) and a personal meetness by the miracle of the new birth (Joh 3:5; Col 1:12), and he has no good reason to dread either death or the Redeemer's return.

Death may be defined as the dissolution of that union which exists between the constituent elements of human nature: it is a separating of the immaterial part of man from the material, an emerging of the soul from the body. But that severance in the Christian for a while produces no separation of either his soul or his body from the Lord Jesus. The union there is between the redeemed and regenerate members of Christ's mystical body and their glorious Head is indissoluble and endless, and is both the basis and security of every blessing they enjoy in time and eternity. His people are as truly His in death as in life. Their union with Christ is the same, nor is their interest in Him lessened. As the beloved Hawker said, "The covenant rots not in the grave, however their bodies moulder into dust." Moreover, that separation which the believer sustains of soul and body at death is but for a season; and, among other blessings with which it is accompanied, will be amply compensated on the resurrection morning, when an everlasting union shall be effected between them, nevermore to be broken.

Let us now consider four expressions used in the New Testament in connection with the death of a believer, none of which be it noted, contains the least suggestion of an experience to be dreaded. (1) The apostle Paul spoke of his decease as a *departing* from this world: "having a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better" (Phi 1:23). Young's concordance defines the word as signifying "to loose up (an anchor)." It is a nautical term, which describes a vessel leaving her temporary moorings. The figure is a suggestive and picturesque one. The hour for sailing has arrived. The anchor is weighed, the gangway raised, the ropes are released, and fond farewells are said and waved to beloved friends who have come to see us off. The ship now moves gently away from the quay, down the river, into the vast reaches of the ocean beyond. *That* is what death is to a Christian: a loosening of those moorings which bound him to the earth, a gliding out into a life of freedom, a going forth unto another Country. This same figure is used again in "the *time* of my departure is at hand" (2Ti 4:6)—the exact hour of sailing has been Divinely appointed!

(2) The apostle Peter likened his impending dissolution unto the *taking down of a tent*: "knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me" (2Pe 1:14 and cf. Joh 21:18-19). In the previous verse he had similarly spoken of his body, declaring that he would continue urging upon the saints their obligations and duties "as long as I am in this tabernacle," or better "tent." The body, for whose wants the majority of our fellows are as anxious as though it were the whole man, is but a *tent*. The figure is a very suggestive one. A "tent" is a frail structure, designed only for temporary occupation, is suited for use in the wilderness, and is exchanged for a "house eternal in the heavens." In the fourteenth verse Peter employed a mixed metaphor, as Paul did in II Corinthians 5:1-4, where the breaking up of the earthly house of our tabernacle is spoken of as our being "unclothed." Here, then, is the Christian concept of death: it is no more terrible or distressing than the removing of a tent (which is easily taken down), or the putting off of our garments when retiring to rest—to be resumed at the dawn of a new day!

(3) Death is likened unto an *exodus*. The term is used first in connection with our Saviour: when He was transfigured before His disciples on the holy mount, there talked with Him Moses and Elijah, "who spake of His *decease*, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luk 9:31). The Greek word is *exodus* and is found again in Hebrews 11:22, where it is recorded that "By faith Joseph when he was a dying [in

Egypt] made mention of the departing [*exodus*] of the children of Israel.” It is hardly to be thought that Moses and Elijah would confine their speech unto Christ’s death, but would rather converse upon “the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow” (1Pe 1:11). Dr. Lightfoot (1601-1675) was of the opinion that Christ’s exodus included His ascension, pointing out that Israel’s exodus from Egypt was a “triumphant and victorious one.” The term literally means “exit,” and Manton regards its scope in Luke 9:31, as including Christ’s death, resurrection (Act 2:24) and ascension (Luk 24:51). Peter also made use of the same term when he referred to his *own* “decease” or exodus (2Pe 1:15), thereby giving it a general application unto *all* of God’s people.

Here, then, is another simple but suggestive figure to express the blessedness of a believer’s departure from this life. Like the previous one, this also imports the going forth on a journey; but, in addition, the leaving behind of the house of bondage and the making for the promised inheritance—the anti-typical Canaan. There is a striking analogy between the death of a Christian and Israel’s emancipation from the cruel slavery of Pharaoh. One of the distinct features of the Christian’s life in this world is his groaning under the burden of the indwelling sin (Rom 8:23; 2Co 5:2), a crying “who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” But death is, for him, a snapping of his fetters, an escaping from the bonds that hold him, a going forth from sin and sorrow into freedom and immortality. Israel’s exodus from Egypt was a leaving behind of all their enemies, and such is death for the saint: the world, the flesh, the Devil, all that opposes God and hinders him, for ever done with. Israel’s exodus included their safe passage through the Red Sea, a crossing over unto the farther shore, their faces turned unto the land of milk and honey. How eagerly should the Christian welcome death!

The death of God’s people is likened unto a *sleep*. This is the most familiar figure of all, and since it is used much more frequently in the Scriptures, and because certain errorists have perverted its meaning, we will dwell longer upon it. To the saints in his day, the apostle said, “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep” (1Th 4:13). We regard it as a mistake to restrict that to their bodies: obviously it is their *persons* (“them”) which are “asleep”; yet that by no means warrants the conclusion which some have drawn—that at death the soul passes into a state of total inactivity and unconsciousness. Such a verse proves too much for the case of “soul sleeping,” for it would make it teach that the soul *died* with the body, since “sleep” is here an image of death; which would be in direct variance with our Lord’s words, “Fear not them which are able to kill the body, and are *not able* to kill the soul” (Mat 10:28). Even in this life, when the body is soundly asleep, the soul or mind is not inactive, as our dreams manifestly evidence.

Whether or not Luke 16:19-31, be a “parable,” certain it is that our Lord was there setting forth the condition of both the righteous and the unrighteous immediately after death, and if their souls then pass into a state of oblivion, His language would be utterly misleading when He declared the one to be “comforted” and the other “tormented” (verse 25). So too His promise to the dying thief had been meaningless unless he was to enjoy the company of Christ in Paradise that day and enter upon all the delights of that place. Further, it would not be true that “death” is one of the things which is unable to separate believers from receiving manifestations of God’s love and their enjoyment of the same (Rom 8:38-39) if they pass from this world into a state of insensibility. Again, Paul, who was favoured with such intimate and precious fellowship with Christ in this world, had never been in any “strait” between his desire to remain in the flesh for the sake of his converts and his longing to “depart,” had the latter alternative meant the complete suspension of all his faculties, without any communion with God. Nor had he spoken of “the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23) if they are without life and light, peace and joy, immediately after death.

While rejecting the false glosses put upon this figurative expression, let us be careful the enemy does not rob us of its true import, and thereby deprive of the comfort it contains. Was it not for the consolation of His disciples (and all His people) that the Saviour said: “I go to awake our friend Lazarus out of his *sleep*” (Joh 11:11)? Again, we are told that after the first Christian martyr had knelt down and prayed for his enemies, he “fell asleep” (Act 7:61)? How much more was conveyed by that statement of the inspired historian than had he merely said that Stephen *expired*! Amid the curses of his foes, and while their stones were crushing the life from his body, he “fell asleep.” Inexpressibly blessed is that! As the sleep of the body brings welcome relief when it is racked with pain, so death delivers from spiritual warfare and puts an end to all the woundings of the believer’s soul by indwelling sin. As sleep gives rest from the toils and burdens of the day, so that we are oblivious to the perplexities and trials which harass our waking hours, so

death for the saint puts a period to all the things which occasioned him anxiety and distress down here: he is released, henceforth, from all cares and troubles.

No doubt the principal idea which this figure should convey to us is the entire *harmlessness* of death. What is there in sleep to dread? Instead of being an object of horror, it is a merciful provision of God's for which we should be most grateful. It comes to us not as a rough and terrifying foe, but approaches gently as a kind friend. Christ has removed the "sting" from death (1Co 15:56-57), and therefore it can no more harm one of His redeemed than could a hornet whose power to injure has been destroyed. In employing this comforting metaphor, God would have His people assured that they have nothing more to fear from the article of death than in lying down on their beds to slumber. Again, sleep is of but *brief duration*: a few hours of repose, and then we arise refreshed and reinvigorated for the duties of another day. In like manner, death is but a sleep, an entering into rest, and resurrection will be the restoration and glorification of our bodies. Finally, death is likened to a sleep to intimate *how easily* the Lord will quicken our mortal bodies. The sceptic may ridicule as an impossibility the truth of resurrection, but to Christ it will be simpler than waking a sleeper. A slumbering person is aroused most easily by one *speaking* to him, and "the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall *hear His voice*" (Joh 5:28)!

In addition to those figurative expressions, which so manifestly depict the harmlessness of death, God has made many plain statements in His Word for the comfort and assurance of His saints. It is evident from Genesis 15 that He preached the Gospel to Abraham in clear terms: not only the basic doctrine of justification by faith and the righteousness which is imputed to the believer, but also that state of blessedness into which all His people enter immediately upon their death. First, He made known to the "father" or prototype of all the faithful of what heaven is and wherein the happiness of the saints consists: "I am thy Shield" in this life, "and thy exceeding great Reward" in the life to come (verse 1). For as Goodwin pointed out, "Reward is after the finishing of work, and what is this reward but the blessedness of heaven? Christ Himself says no other, nor no more of it, 'The Lord is the portion of Mine inheritance.' For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, knowing that 'in Thy presence is fullness of joy.'" Second, God informed him that the condition of his soul should be: "thou shalt go to thy fathers *in peace*" (verse 15). No wonder Balaam said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his" (Num 23:10).

What a blessed declaration is this: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psa 116:15)—then certainly it ought not to be dreadful in theirs! That verse presents an aspect of our subject which is all too little considered by Christians. They look at it, as at most other things, too much from the human angle: but here we have what may be termed the Godward side of a believer's death—it is *precious* in His sight! The Hebrew word *yaqar* is rendered "costly" in I Kings 15:17, "honourable" in Psalm 45:9, "excellent" in Psalm 36:7. It occurs again in "precious stones" (1Ki 10:10), yea, is used of Christ Himself—"a precious Cornerstone." Whatever form it takes, and no matter what be the attendant circumstances, such is the death of His people unto the Lord: an honourable, costly, excellent, precious thing. Note well the words "in the sight of the Lord": His eyes are then fixed upon them in a peculiar and special manner. Their death is precious unto Him because it releases them from sin and sorrow, because it is sanctified by His own death for them, because it is a taking unto His immediate presence of those upon whom He set His heart from all eternity, because they are the trophies of His own victory, and because they then "enter into the joy of their Lord."

In the closing verses of I Corinthians 3, a number of things are mentioned as appertaining to God's children: "all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, *or death*, or things present, or things to come; all are yours." Those words were first addressed to shame some who sought pre-eminence in the house of God and whose affections were too much set upon things on the earth; yet they are full of instruction and comfort for us today. The ministry of God's servants, the things God has provided for us in the world, life or death, are equally ours. Death is ours not by way of punishment and curse, but as a privilege and blessing. It is ours not as an enemy, but as a friend. It is our conquered foe, and is not to be feared, for it has neither strength nor sting to harm us: Christ, our victorious Captain, has disarmed it of both—"He hath abolished [rendered null and void] death" (2Ti 1:10). Life and death are administered by God so as to fulfill His gracious designs unto His people. Death is theirs because they share in Christ's triumphs over it, because it furthers their interests and ministers to their well-being, because it is a means of their inexpressible advantage, removing them from a world of ills, conducting them into a world of glory and bliss.

What a word is this: "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev 14:13). Here was a special and immediate revelation from heaven. It was to be placed upon imperishable record for the comfort of believers to the end of time. "*Blessed* are the dead": pronounced so by God, happy in themselves. Not "blessed shall they be" at the resurrection morning, though that will be their case; but "blessed *are*" they at the moment. Why? Because they "die in the Lord": whether conscious of the fact or not, they die in union and communion with Him, His smile of approbation resting upon them. To die in the Lord is "to die in the favour of God, in a state of peace with Him as members of His mystical body" (Manton). But more: they are blessed "from henceforth," without delay or cessation, which at once gives the lie to their lapsing into a state of entire unconsciousness. "Yea, saith the Spirit." Here is solemn confirmation: "the Holy Spirit maketh affidavit" (Manton). They "rest from their labours": not only the toils of their temporal callings, but their conflicts with sin. "And their works do follow them": "we carry nothing out of the world with us but the conscience and comfort of what we have done for God" (Manton).

We will conclude this article by borrowing a few thoughts (though clothing them mostly in our own language) from Thomas Boston's (1676-1732) counsels on why a Christian should be reconciled to death, and then how to prepare for it. Some dread the prospect of leaving behind their wives and children in this cold world: yet they have a reliable Guardian to commit them unto. Says He, "Leave thy fatherless children: I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in Me" (Jer 49:11). But death will remove me from my dearest friends! True, yet it will conduct unto your best Friend; and if those you leave are God's children, you will meet them again in heaven. But the approach and pains of death are sometimes very dreadful! Not nearly so terrible as pangs of conscience caused by apprehensions of Divine wrath; remember that each pang of bodily disease brings you a step nearer unto a soul made every whit whole. But I am naturally timorous, and the very thoughts of death alarm me! Then familiarize yourself with it by frequent meditations thereon, and especially view the bright side of the cloud, and by faith look beyond it.

That there may be a readier disposition of heart and preparedness of mind, make it your care to "have always a conscience void of offence toward God and men" (Act 24:16). Walk closely with God, maintain a diligent and strict course in the way of His precepts; and because of the infirmities which cleave to us in this present state, renew your repentance daily and be ever washing in that Fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness. Be constantly engaged in weaning your heart from this world. Let the mantle of earthly enjoyments hang loosely upon you, that it may be easily dropped when the summons comes to depart for heaven. Set your affections more and more upon things above, and pass through this wilderness scene as a stranger and pilgrim. We are ready for heaven when our heart is there before us (Mat 6:21). Be diligent in laying up *evidences* of your title to heaven, for the neglect of so doing renders uncomfortable the dying pillar of many a Christian. Grieve not the Holy Spirit, so that *He* will bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God (Rom 8:16).





## GLORIOUS SINAI

In all our approaches unto God in Christ, two things should ever be borne in mind by us. First, the amazing and sovereign grace which has delivered us from a bondage immeasurably worse than that experienced by the Hebrews in Egypt, and which grace has “brought us unto God” (1Pe 3:18) and made us “a kingdom of priests” unto Himself (1Pe 2:9). Second, the awe-inspiring majesty and ineffable holiness of God, and our native meanness and depravity. If either of these be lost sight of, we shall entertain an ill-formed concept of the Divine character, and if we be unduly occupied with one to the virtual exclusion of the other, then our own characters will suffer and the worship which we offer unto God will be sadly defective. On the one hand, we should approach the Divine footstool in the freedom and joy of those who are accepted in the Beloved (Heb 10:22), otherwise the spontaneity and fervor of our praise will be choked. On the other hand, it is equally necessary that we draw nigh unto the Majesty on high “with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28), or, because of an unholy and unbecoming familiarity, we are in grave danger of offering “the sacrifice of fools” (Ecc 5:1). “Hallowed by Thy name” should ever be our first concern when approaching the Father!

That holy balance was blessedly preserved on glorious Sinai. It has been far too generally overlooked by our moderns that, whatever awe-inspiring grandeur and solemn majesty attended the promulgation of the Decalogue, uttered as it was amid sounds and sights which filled the beholders with amazement and terror, yet that very Law proceeded from Him who is love, and was given by God in His character of the gracious and faithful Redeemer of His people, as well as their rightful Lord. Nevertheless, the whole transaction was manifestly designed to teach His ransomed people their proper place, and to show them that while the Lord had brought them unto Himself (19:4), yet an infinite distance separates between the Creator and the creature, the Infinite and the finite. As we said in these pages (in our “Gleanings in Exodus”) more than twenty years ago, “Such a view of God’s majesty as Israel werefavoured with at Sinai is the crying need of our day. The eye of faith needs to see Him not only as our Father and as the God of all grace, but also as the ‘High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity’ (Isa 57:15), as the ‘great and dreadful God’ (Dan 9:4), as the apostle beheld Him in Revelation 1:13-18. Let it not be forgotten that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are one and the same.” Though the Decalogue proceeded from God as Israel’s Redeemer, it did not on that account assume a less stringent character. Being an expression of the Divine dominion and a revelation of Law in form as well as in substance, it could not but assume a predominantly authoritative tone. Its precepts were therefore given in the form of explicit announcements of duty and stern prohibitions against the ways of transgression. The benign spirit which breathes in its preface is not absent from the body of its enactments, as appears in the assurance of mercy unto the thousands who should love God and keep His commandments, and in the promise of long life in the land to those who honoured their parents. But those were more “the relieving clauses of the Code” as one expressed it; the substance of the whole being in the imperative form. “Thou shalt not do this,” “thou shalt do that,” leaves no doubt that the course prescribed is the one which *ought* to be taken, which *must* be taken if the Divine approbation is to be enjoyed. As Calvin pointed out, the Moral Law throughout both commands and prohibits: each duty prescribed implying an abstention from everything contrary thereto, each prohibition involving the performing of the opposite good. As the Psalmist said, “Thy commandment is exceeding broad” (119:96).

None but the Ten Commandments were spoken by Jehovah in the hearing of Israel, and they alone were inscribed by His own finger upon the tables of stone—thereby intimating *their* fundamental and lasting nature. Subordinate to them and closely related are the statutory directions recorded in Exodus 21-23, there called “judgments.” Therein a series of particular cases are legislated for by way of illustrative examples of how the Moral Law was to be applied to the everyday life of the Hebrews, restricting and regulating them, yet without unduly cramping their liberty. We urge each reader to give a careful consideration to those three chapters, noting how the principle of *brotherly love* is enforced throughout. *That* was to be exercised even toward him from whom an injury had been received. Where one had acted unjustly toward another, the wronged one was forbidden to take revenge. Even though an enemy, if a neighbour’s ox strayed or his ass fell helplessly beneath a burden, assistance was to be rendered (22:4-5). Love to every neighbor was enforced (Lev 19:18), not in words merely, but also in giving to him in time of need without usury, thereby manifesting toward him the spirit of Divine beneficence (22:25-27 and cf. Eph 5:1-2).

Glorious Sinai! From it was given the wisest, justest, and best legislation which was ever furnished a nation for the regulation of its social, economic, and domestic life, as well as its religious; statutes which inculcated the exercise of justice and mercy alike and which exemplified a spirit both of holiness and magnanimity. Selfish or careless disregard of animals was penalized (21:33-34). The rights of private property were protected (22:5-6). The special regard of God for the widow and fatherless was pressed on the people (23:22-24). Consideration for the poor was enjoined (22:25-27; 23:10-12). Kindness unto strangers was inculcated (23:9). The plea which some might take, that any loss sustained by a neighbour (as from the kindling of a fire which spread to another's vineyard, or leaving open a pit into which his ox fell) was the result of *inadvertency* rather than malice, was ruled to be invalid, because men were held responsible to promote the good and avoid the injury of all around them. The death penalty was indeed attached to the more flagrant violations of the Decalogue (as of witchcraft, which involved an act of homage to the Devil), yet while wilful murder must be avenged, provision was made for the unwitting man-slayer (21:13-14). Very, very different were such benign precepts from the principles which regulated all the nations of antiquity.

Such was the moral and judicial law which constituted the charter upon which the nation of Israel was incorporated under the immediate and special government of God, and which formed the terms of that covenant mutually entered into at Sinai. Under it God engaged to grant Israel an entrance into Canaan, to protect them in it, to make the land fruitful and the nation victorious and prosperous, to continue His oracles and ordinances among them so long as they did not, as a people, reject His authority, apostatize to idolatry, or tolerate open wickedness. *Those* corporate offences, or those offences when committed by a majority and countenanced by their leaders, constituted a *breach* of the covenant and a forfeiture of its privileges, as also did the national rejection of Christ afterwards. True believers, or the regenerate minority among them, God treated with personally according to the everlasting Covenant of Grace (2Sa 23:5), even as true Christians now are; whereas the unbelieving majority were, as individuals, under the Covenant of Works, as at present (Rom 5:12, 18); but the *national* covenant with the Hebrews was not, strictly speaking, either the one or the other, but had something in it of the nature of each—which must ever be the case where God is enforcing human accountability.

The Sinaitic Covenant can only be fully understood as it is viewed, first, as a system of religion and government designed for the immediate use of Israel as a nation during the Mosaic era. While they remained obedient to its terms, they continued to occupy Canaan and enjoy all the blessings of the Theocracy—under the dominion of God as *King* (1Sa 8:7)—but it had no relation to the spiritual and eternal salvation of individuals. Second, that it was of a mixed nature, being neither purely evangelical nor purely legal. Third, that it was preparatory to another and better economy by which it was to be succeeded when its temporary purpose had been fulfilled. Its initial design was to order the religious and civil life of Israel; its ultimate, to pave the way for the appearing of Christ. “The economy of Moses, whatever prominence it gave to the Law, was unquestionably a dispensation of the Covenant of Grace. So far from superseding the promise given to Abraham, or making it void or of ‘none effect,’ it was expressly founded upon it, and designed to carry it on to its accomplishment. That economy gathered up into itself all prior revelations of Divine truth” (James Buchanan, on “The Doctrine of Justification”—Cunningham Lectures, 1867).

The charter which contained the articles of the Covenant was written in a book (Exo 24:4, 7) and was “sealed” or ratified with blood. As John Owen (1616-1683) pointed out (in his exposition of Hebrews 9:19), “The same blood was on the book, wherein the covenant was recorded, as upon the people that entered into it....It was sprinkled as it lay on the altar where atonement was made, and this was plainly to signify that atonement *was to be made* with blood for sins committed against that book, or the Law contained in it. Without *this*, that book would have been unto the people like that given to Ezekiel, that was written within and without, and there was ‘written thereon lamentations and mourning and woe’ (2:10)—nothing but curse and death could they expect from it. But the sprinkling of it with blood as it lay upon the altar was a testimony and assurance that atonement should be made by blood for the sins against it.” How fully and emphatically that statement is borne out, the first half of the book of Leviticus and the whole subsequent history of God's dealings with Israel clearly shows; and how much better taught were the despised Puritans than our conceited Dispensationalists appears to any spiritual eye which takes the trouble to compare the writings of one with the other.

Immediately following upon the confirmation of the covenant by the shedding and sprinkling of blood, a scene is presented which, for wonderment and blessedness, has no parallel elsewhere in the whole of the Old Testament. Here we behold not only Moses and Aaron and his two sons, but also seventy of the elders of Israel in the very presence of God: yea, thoroughly at ease there, eating and drinking before Him! To duly appreciate that amazing event, we must mark closely its setting. In the immediate context (24:5-8) we are shown the division made of the blood of sacrifice between Jehovah and the Hebrews, and the sprinkling of the latter with the portion assigned to them, the manifest design of which was to give an emblematic but palpable exhibition of *the oneness* which now subsisted between the two parties of the covenant. By nature they stood far apart from each other, for sin had made a fearful breach between man and his Maker—a breach which no human efforts could possibly bridge. But what man could not do the Lord most graciously accomplished. He appointed an altar and suitable offerings to be sacrificed thereon, and having accepted for Israel the blood of atonement, by that portion of it which was sprinkled upon the altar, they were thereby brought into a capacity of union and fellowship with Him.

Let the reader pause and attentively ponder and admire what has just been pointed out. Glorious Sinai! The Gospel of the grace of God was there proclaimed in the hearing and acted out before the eyes of the Lord's people on that very mount. It is too often lost sight of that, as the Gospel published by the Lord Jesus and His apostles contained a renewed revelation of the Law (Mat 5:17; Rom 3:31), so at the promulgation of the Law there was made a clear revelation of the Gospel. Such was indeed the case, and failure to perceive those facts will be imperfectly to apprehend either the one or the other. After God had graciously accepted on Israel's behalf the blood of atonement, and they had solemnly declared their adherence to the terms on which the national agreement was to be maintained, as recorded on the tables, or the covenant and the "judgments" or statutes connected therewith, the compact was formally ratified by the sprinkling of the other half of the blood upon them. Thus were they impressively taught the grand truth that God and His people *shared* part and part: the pure innocent life which He provided and accepted on their behalf was also regarded as *theirs*: a vital and sacred bond united the two into one: they were now the *friends* of Jehovah, admitted into close communion with Him!

"Then went up Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel" (24:9-10). Note well the opening word. Each time we meet with this "then" in the Scriptures, we should stop and ask *when*, seeking in the context the answer, thereby obtaining the key which opens the significance of what immediately follows. In the present instance, the answer to our "when" is, right after the blood had been applied! Precious beyond words is this, revealing as it does the inestimable value of the sacrificial blood, and the wondrous privileges it procures for those who are sprinkled with it. Here we behold how that atoning and applied blood secured for Israel's leaders, and the seventy elders as the representatives of the whole nation, the right of access into the immediate presence of their reconciled and covenant God. Most blessedly did that prefigure what we are told in Hebrews 10: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us" (verses 19, 20); and again, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. *Therefore* are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple" (Rev 7:14-15).

"And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness (24:10). Having averred their submission to God and been sprinkled with the blood, they were now honoured with special tokens of His favour and manifestations of His glory. It is worthy of particular mention that this was the first time the Lord took the title of "the God of Israel," that is their *covenant* God. Pertinently did Matthew Henry (1662-1714) point out: "Nothing is described but that which was under His feet, for our conceptions of God are all below Him, and fall infinitely short of being adequate." The description which is here given of the "paved work" which was under the feet of Israel's God is both highly significant and exquisitely beautiful. The "sapphire stone" is the symbol of the Divine government, the throne of God, as a reference to Ezekiel 1:26, shows, and its mention *here* intimates that the Sinaitic covenant formed the basis of all the future providential dealings of God with Israel. The "body of heaven in his clearness" seems to speak of the Divine *counsels*, for in Christ God has made known His mind and will in perfect clarity (Joh 1:18; Heb 1:1-2).

"And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He laid not His hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink" (verse 11). What a truly amazing and blessed occasion! "But yesterday it would have been death to them to 'break through and gaze,' but now they saw God! And such was their 'boldness,' due to the blood

of the covenant, that they did 'eat and drink' in the Divine presence" (Sir Robert Anderson ). That the God of Israel "laid not His hand upon" the official representatives of the nation was a negative way of saying that He was reconciled to them, that His smile of approbation was upon them. Not only was the Gospel of the grace of God visibly enacted upon "the mount of the Lord," but the precious privileges and benefits which it confers upon those who savingly believe the same were most blessedly adumbrated. Here we behold not only a bringing nigh unto God of those who availed themselves of its provisions, but a granting of a sight of Himself. Nay, more: they are at perfect peace with Him, in intimate fellowship with Himself! Glorious, glorious Sinai, for it is *there* we witness a redeemed people treated as God's friends, partaking of the meat of the peace offering, eating and drinking, thoroughly at home in His immediate presence! Heaven itself contains no grander experience.



## THE VALUE OF FEAR

“Of some have compassion, making a difference; and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire” (Jude 1:22-23), that is, make them afraid, threaten and terrify them, that they may be saved. Some spirits must be dealt with gently, others roughly—therefore “make a difference,” rather than let any perish. Some must be led to heaven by the way of hell. It is a desirable fear which is a means to pull a soul out of the fire. We are saved by faith, as it receiveth and taketh hold of Christ; we are saved by fear as it takes hold of us and driveth us to Christ. By faith we see and apply our help in Christ, and by fear we are brought to see our need of His help. Christ used the argument of the fear of hell to cure His friends of the fear of man and to dissuade them from deserting Him and the truth of the Gospel: “I say unto you My friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him” (Luk 12:4-5). We may parallel it with that expression of Paul’s: “Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say, Rejoice.” So Christ to His friends ‘fear.’ Some might object: Is this suitable counsel to a friend, to bid him be afraid? Should he be kept in heaven’s way by fear of hell? Enemies have cause of fear, but should friends? Yea, saith Christ, I say *again* to you My friends, fear Him. It is good to bid a friend fear, when that fear tendeth to his good. Paul, writing to saints and applying the doctrine of free grace to the believing Romans, yet tells them: “If you live after the flesh, ye shall die” (8:13), even die *eternally*. He threatens them with hell who were candidates of heaven, that he might keep them out of the ways of death.

It is indeed most noble to obey out of love. Yet is good to fear the Lord and His wrath. It is most excellent to say, we fear the Lord because there is mercy with Him, but it is our duty to fear the Lord because there is justice and judgment with Him. A good heart will improve the judgments of God as well as His mercies, and the wrath of God as well as His love. Every word of God is good and hath a savour of life unto life in it, by the working of the Spirit. It is best and most Gospel-like when we can say, “having these *promises* we cleanse ourselves in the fear of the Lord” (2Co 7:1). But it is well when we can say: “Having these *threatenings* we cleanse ourselves and perfect holiness in His fear.” “Seeing we have a kingdom that cannot be moved, let us have grace to serve Him with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28).—Jos. Caryl, 1658.

