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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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## SLEEPING

*This article and its companion one are not written to entertain the curious, but with the endeavour of giving God His true place, by moving His people unto more thankfulness for what are loosely termed, "His common mercies."*

It seems strange that the average person should spend at least one-third of his short life in the sleep state. In comparison with eternity, how exceedingly brief is the span of our mortal existence! Yet the God-fearing soul cannot doubt it has been wisely ordered by his Creator that such a proportion of that span should be passed in unconsciousness. The Saviour Himself, whose life was infinitely more important than ours, was no exception, for we are told that He slept (Mat 8:24)—though often the hours of darkness were spent by Him in prayer while others were slumbering (Mar 1:35; Luk 6:12). Sleep has been aptly defined as "the nurse for tired nature." What cause for gratitude have we that frayed nerves and weary muscles are refreshed and renewed by a few hours of repose! How glad is many a one whose body is racked with pain throughout the day to obtain a few hours' respite during the unconsciousness of night! Sleep is indeed a merciful provision of God's, which none of us appreciate as highly as we should.

Common as is this mercy, yet there is an element of mystery about it, for none can define exactly what it is. Nor can any produce it by a mere effort of will. It is not sufficiently recognized that the same One who gave us being also puts us to sleep each night. Yes, even when tired out from the heavy labour of the day, we become unconscious almost as soon as our head rests on the pillow. At some time or other, the majority of us are made painfully aware of the fact that we cannot put ourselves to sleep. When a hacking cough refuses to be silenced, when an over-active brain or disturbed mind declines to relax, when what is termed "insomnia" affects us, the more eagerly sleep is sought, the more it eludes us. "And the LORD God *caused* a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept" (Gen 2:21) is the *first* reference to our subject in the Scriptures; and while that instance was an extraordinary one, yet it was illustrative of a principle of universal application—our sleep is "caused" by our Maker, and is not brought on by ourselves.

Ere proceeding farther, let us here utter an earnest word of warning against attempts to produce artificial sleep, or cure insomnia, by the use of drugs. Any attempt to *force* "nature" is dangerous, and usually leads to disaster. In nine-tenths of cases, the effect is, in the end, to increase the disorder. Most narcotics and soporifics have to be taken in larger doses if they are to produce any continued effect; and frequently, the patient becomes the slave of narcotic habits. No form of stimulant is free from risk. Anyone who attempts to do by *artificial strength* what cannot be done by natural—to supply by the use of some stimulant a temporary energy for activity to which one would be unequal without it—is courting trouble. There is always a proportionate reaction, and sometimes a collapse is the outcome. Far better to spend the night in restless tossing, than resort to what is likely to issue in a complete breakdown. Better still, seek the cause. Millions today are suffering from nervous disorders as a result of Sabbath desecration, forfeiting the physical and mental benefits which rest from secular tasks and occupying the mind with divine things produces.

There are other passages of Holy Writ, besides Genesis 2:21, which teach that sleep is not only a merciful provision of the Creator's, but also a divine gift, *caused by Him*. On one occasion, the Psalmist said, "Thou holdest mine eyes waking" (Psa 77:4). The Hebrew word for "holdest" here is a very strong one, being rendered to "lay thee [keep] hold on" in 2 Samuel 2:21, and "fastened" in Esther 1:6. Asaph was unable to close his eyes, sleep being withheld from him. Another example where sleep was divinely denied is that of Ahasuerus, of whom we read, "On that night could not the king sleep" (Est 6:1); or as the margin more literally renders it, "Sleep fled away"—the whole context showing that it was a case of divine interposition which prevented his slumbers. Sometimes the LORD withholds sleep that He may give us "songs in the night" (Job 35:10); at others, that we may "meditate on [Him] in the night watches" (Psa 63:6); at others, to bring sin to remembrance, that it may be confessed unto Him. The next time the reader suffers from sleeplessness, let him call to mind that awful night when the Saviour was hounded from court to court and denied any rest.

Conversely, we are told that "*he giveth his beloved sleep*" (Psa 127:2). Most blessed is that. It is not that He "sendeth" it as one from a distance, but that He Himself gives sleep—personally bringing and graciously laying it upon our eyes. That sleep is a fitting emblem of the spiritual rest which He bestows upon the righteous. But let us look at the verse as a whole: "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep." There appears to be a contrast drawn. All the in-

dustry of the natural man avails him nothing without the blessing of God—sorrow is then his portion. But the godly man, though diligent in business (Rom 12:11), is enabled confidently to commit all his affairs unto the LORD, and close his eyes at night with a mind free of carking<sup>1</sup> care. “So he giveth his beloved sleep,” as He did Peter, on the eve of his probable execution, as he lay in prison chained between two soldiers—sleeping so sweetly and soundly that an angel’s stroke was needed to arouse him (Act 12:6-7)!

“I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety” (Psa 4:8). We are never more helpless and unable to protect ourselves than when wrapped in slumber. We are lost to all apprehensions of danger, and lie exposed to the violence of storms, the perils of fire, the menace of robbers, and the assaults of the evil one. At that time, we have no concern for ourselves, being incapable of thinking, much more so of providing for our safety. But the LORD is our Protector equally during the hours of darkness as of the light. The One who provided for me when I was awake watches over my body when I am asleep. I am under the care of Him who “shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psa 121:4). Though I be alone, I am not alone; and therefore it is my privilege to lie down in His loving arms, peacefully assured that I shall be supported and secured by His right hand. But a comfortable bed should cause us to contrast Him who often had no other couch than the cold mountain side (Joh 7:53; 8:2).

Our preservation during the hours of darkness is a notable instance of God’s concern for our welfare. “When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid...and thy sleep shall be sweet” (Pro 3:24). What comforting assurance that breathes! It is a word for us to lay hold of by faith and rest on. If I trustfully give myself in charge to my Father, there is nothing to fear. Plead His promise, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psa 34:7). Hundreds of times has this writer made personal use of the same, especially during the years when the two of us lived alone in a wooden house in an isolated part of the U.S.A. countryside, and retired to rest many times with the temperature below zero, which required us to leave a fire burning all night in a stove in the kitchen beneath us. When we lie down in the arms of a “faithful Creator” (1Pe 4:19) and covenant God, fear is removed and sleep is sweet. “No pillow so soft as a divine promise, no coverlet so warm as an assured interest in Christ”—Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892).

While one would scarcely be dogmatic on the point, yet it appears to us Scripture teaches that sleep is not only designed for the refreshing of our bodies, but is also a time for the instructing of our minds. Those of an energetic and ambitious disposition are apt to regard the hours spent in sleep as so much time wasted, but such a concept may well be more erroneous than many suppose. Who can say to what extent those things which make a deep impression on our consciousness during the day are made the subjects of the cogitations of the subconsciousness during the sleep state? Did not David aver<sup>2</sup> “my reins [conscience and thoughts] also *instruct* me in the night seasons” (Psa 16:7)? Our fathers (so much wiser in many respects than their sons) when called upon to make some important decision were wont to say, “I will sleep on it and D.V.,<sup>3</sup> let you know tomorrow,” having in mind something more than a prayerful deliberation of the same. This writer can testify from repeated experience that “when deep sleep falleth upon men,” the LORD “openeth” the spiritual “ears” and eyes, and “sealeth their instruction” (Job 33:15-16).

In closing, a word of warning: While sleep is both necessary and desirable—for without it we could neither go to our work nor enjoy the blessings of providence—yet it can be sinfully perverted. Therefore we are enjoined, “Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty” (Pro 20:13). Alas, what creatures we are—liable to abuse every gift God bestows! May His grace preserve us from giving Him occasion to say, “How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?” (Pro 6:9). Slothfulness must not be regarded as an infirmity, but as a sin which affects the whole body, and if not watched, grows upon us with unperceived power.



<sup>1</sup> **carking** – being anxious.

<sup>2</sup> **aver** – assert as a fact.

<sup>3</sup> **D.V.** – *Latin*, Deo Volenti; literally, “as God wills.”

## THE EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

### *7. Fullness of Joy (1:4)*

“And these things write we unto you, that your joy [and ‘ours’] may be full.” A common desire animated and regulated the apostles: to promote the glory of their Master and the good of His people—the two things being inseparably connected. They had themselves experienced the unspeakable blessing and blessedness of intimate fellowship with Christ, and the bliss which ever accompanies it; and therefore, they longed that their fellow saints should, according to their measure, freely and fully participate in the same. They desired that their converts should be bright and buoyant Christians, whose hearts would rise above the trials and troubles of this life, rejoicing in the Lord, finding their satisfying and everlasting portion in Him. Accordingly, they one and all, in both their oral and written ministry, employed themselves in setting forth the person and perfections, the offices and work, the Lordship and example, of the Christ of God—knowing full well that it was only by means of a spiritual knowledge of His excellency, an interest in His salvation, the maintaining of a close walk and daily communion with Him, that fullness of joy would be experienced in the souls of those whose welfare they had so much at heart.

Those words, “that your joy may be full” were not penned by an inexperienced visionary or youthful dreamer, aglow with an enthusiasm which would shortly be dampened by bitter disillusionment. Instead, they were written by a very aged person who was thoroughly acquainted with the dark side of life, with the sins and sorrows which beset a Christian, and who knew that it was through “much tribulation” that any entered “into the kingdom of God” (Act 14:22). But it was to no mere natural emotion he had reference—an exuberance of spirit suited only to high festivals, an enthusiasm raised to the point of excitement. Radically different is the spiritual joy which he had in view. This is a divine grace communicated to and situate in the depths of the soul, which the storms of this world cannot reach. It is something which is suited to everyday life and work, for it is a calm and serene frame of mind, as well as a happy state of heart. Far more was implied than actually expressed in John’s language, for where fullness of joy exists, there is a separation from the world, a close fellowship with God in Christ, a treading of wisdom’s ways, and thus, the Lord is honoured and His people helped.

Fellowship with the Lord is the grand marvel of redemption, and a fullness of joy in the redeemed is its crowning blessing. In Christ, there is matter for perpetual delight: “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound [of the Gospel]: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted” (Psa 89:15-16). Such is the believer’s right and privilege; and if it be not actually realized in his experience, the fault is all his own. The ministers of the Word are “helpers of your joy” (2Co 1:24). The one who feeds thereon will exclaim, “Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer 15:16). How the heart is gladdened by answered prayers (Psa 116:1)! We have great reason to “call the sabbath a delight” (Isa 58:13), and to “rejoice and be glad in it” (Psa 118:24). Contemplations of God’s perfections: “My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD” (Psa 104:34). The one who is baptized should go “on his way rejoicing” (Act 8:39). The Lord’s Supper is a spiritual feast for the elevating of the Christian’s heart.

Piety, peace, and joy are what ought most to characterize the saints. To “worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phi 3:3) are the marks of the true circumcision. There are three things in connection with that rejoicing. First, an apprehension of our saving interest in Christ and of the glorious benefits we have by Him, for otherwise, how can we glory in Him (1Co 1:30-31)? Second, corresponding affections which result therefrom: love to Him, exultation of soul, feasting upon Him, and joy in Him. Third, an open expression of the same: evidencing that our satisfying portion in Him has made us lose all relish for the things of the world. What we prize most best demonstrates what we are, for where a man’s treasure is there will his heart be also (Mat 6:21). Each of us is discovered by his complacency or displacency: “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit” (Rom 8:5). Thus, to be comparatively miserable manifests a Christian to be in a backslidden state, and places a question mark on the genuineness of his profession. A miserable believer is no credit to Christ, and has a depressing effect upon his brethren.

The advantages and *benefits* of spiritual joy are real, many, and great. It diffuses sunshine over the whole life, supplying vigour for service, lightening our cares, animating for conflict, and making obedience a delight. Joy enlarges the heart and quickens us in the way of God: "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh 8:10). It overcomes that natural deadness and dullness in holy duties which arises partly from indwelling corruptions, and partly from the remissness of our wills toward heavenly things. But when there is rejoicing in Christ, irksome and difficult tasks become pleasant and easy. The joy of the LORD is His cordial to fortify us against the infelicities and calamities of this world, whether they be the common afflictions incident to men or persecutions for righteousness' sake—making bitter things sweet to us (see Hab 3:17-18). It enables us to bear opposition and reproaches with courage and constancy: "And they departed...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Act 5:41). It greatly encourages and cheers our fellows: "My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad" (Psa 34:2).

We cannot prosper in our souls nor flourish in the house of the LORD, unless we be assured of that peace which He has made by the blood of His Cross and are daily delighting ourselves in Him. Yet, though the Saviour has not only made His redeemed secure for eternity, but would have them happy in time, the fact remains that many of them are frequently oppressed with dullness and despondency. God does not appear to be the light of their countenance, and their spirits seem to have caught little of heaven's lustre. If they be children of light and of the day, why is it that they are so often gloomy and cast down, and manifest so little of that brightness which should mark those who have been given "everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" (2Th 2:16)? No doubt cases differ considerably, and a variety of causes account for the failure of so many to enjoy their birthright. Space will permit us to name only two or three of the principal hindrances.

Prominent among them is a *defective ministry*. In view of our text, we place this first. How few ministers could warrantably say, "These things preach we unto you *that your joy may be full*"! What numbers of them are almost for ever talking about the increased wickedness which is in the world, the likelihood of another war, the menace of the atom bomb, or the waning spirituality of the churches—things that tend to horrify rather than edify, to depress rather than delight their hearers. Many others confine themselves very largely to a dwelling upon the shortcomings and failures of God's people as though it were most desirable for them to cherish doubts and fears. Others are all for the performance of duty and discharge of obligations, which, if stressed disproportionately, can but promote a proud and legal spirit. There is so very little of that preaching of *Christ*, which draws out the renewed heart unto Him, which leads to a closer walking and more intimate communing with Him, and which not only fills the saint with joy, but at the same time instills a deeper abhorrence of sin, and inspires a stronger desire to honour and please Him.

Second, *the lack in many Christians of a definite assurance* of their acceptance. How can one experience the peace of being reconciled to God, or the joy of knowing his sins are forgiven, while he be constantly debating whether or not he be His child? Not a few of His people dishonour the Father's gift to them of His Son, in whom they *have* redemption and eternal life, by not estimating that gift at its true value. They do not take God at His Word, and believe that the death of Christ has cancelled all the guilt of His people, that He will by no means cast out any sinner who comes to Him for salvation, and that through Him they have full access and welcome to the Father's house and heart. They have not really learnt the first lesson of the Gospel, the sufficiency of the divine love: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1Jo 4:9-10)—and consequently, they withhold from Him that full confidence which the manifestation of such love calls for, and which He delights to receive from those upon whom He has bestowed such favours.

Third, even when a Christian is well assured of his salvation, he may dim and dampen the joy of it by *failing to walk as a child of light* (Eph 5:8). To do so, he must cast off the "unfruitful works of darkness" (verse 11), so far and so soon as he discovers them to be such. God hates sin, and sent His Son to save us *from* our sins (Mat 1:21). If then we turn again to folly, yield to the lusts of the flesh, and "allow" evil in our hearts and lives, then the Holy One will withdraw from us the light of His countenance. Yet even in this case, He has made most gracious provision for our immediate and complete restoration to the knowledge of His favour and the joy of His smile: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jo 1:9). The moment any emotion, thought, or deed is revealed to us as sin, we should penitently confess the same, and then rejoice in the divine declaration that the blood of Christ has washed away all the stain of it. Thus, if we live up to our holy privilege, not even our

sins should cloud the sunshine of God's love, or destroy the happy consciousness that He dwells in us, and we in Him.

When John penned the words, "And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full," it is highly probable that he had in mind those statements which he had heard from his Master: "These things have I spoken unto you, that *my joy* might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (Joh 15:11). "And these things I speak in the world, that they might have *my joy* fulfilled in themselves" (Joh 17:13). It is to be carefully observed that both these utterances fell from the lips of the Saviour upon the night of His betrayal. Very remarkable and blessed is it to hear Him—with the terrible crucifixion staring Him in the face—speaking of His *joy*. What a proof that spiritual joy is in no wise created or regulated by circumstances or external conditions! And how those striking declarations ought to correct a one-sided view which only too many have taken of Christ's earthly life! Here too there is a *balance* to be preserved. He was indeed "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3), in a measure and degree which none else ever has been or can be, for His human sensibilities were more refined than ours. His were undulled by sin, and therefore, He felt the effects of sin far more keenly and had a greater capacity for pain than we have.

The sorrows and sufferings of Christ were many, poignant, and inconceivable. It could not be otherwise with One of infinite purity surrounded by those who were hostile to God and enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself. And while we must always keep sight of that fact and be deeply affected with the same in our souls, it is not to exclude from our view and thoughts the *other side* of His experience. Because He was a man of sorrows, we are not to conclude that He was a miserable and melancholy person, that during the years He trod this earth, He was a stranger unto joy. Admittedly, we enter here the realm of mystery, and need to tread very cautiously and reverently with unshodden feet; yet we must not close our eyes to what is clearly revealed in the Scriptures. Not only must we bear in mind that the One who then tabernacled in this scene of wickedness was God, as well as man, not only need we to distinguish sharply between what He endured officially and what He experienced personally, but we are also required to take into careful consideration what is said of Him in the Psalms—as well as in the Gospels—if we are to obtain the complete pictures.

That the Lord Jesus possessed a real, deep, and abiding joy is clear not only from His own utterances in John 15 and 17, but is equally evident from other considerations. He could aver, "The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup," and add, "Therefore my heart is *glad*" (Psa 16:5, 9)—JEHOVAH was unto Him a fount of ceaseless consolation. As the connection between 1 John 1:3-4 imports, joy is inseparable from fellowship; and since the Son enjoyed unbroken fellowship with the Father until the three hours of darkness, fullness of joy must have been experienced by Him. Again, Christ found infinite satisfaction in discharging the commission assigned Him: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (Joh 4:34). God's commandments were never irksome or grievous to Him in the slightest degree, but rather were most blessed, as His "*I delight* to do thy will, O my God" (Psa 40:8) attests. Wisdom's ways are "ways of pleasantness" (Pro 3:17), and Christ ever walked therein. He found His joy in concurring with the Father's appointments: since God had ordered His lot, though He had not where to lay His head (Mat 8:20; Luk 9:58), He declared, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places" (Psa 16:6). Contemplating the Father as "Lord of heaven and earth," sovereignly hiding truth from one and revealing it to another, Christ "*rejoiced* in spirit" and said, "even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Luk 10:21).

Think not, then, of Christ during His earthly life as but "a man of sorrows" (Isa 53:3); contemplate Him too as One who was filled with joy. That the two things are in nowise incompatible is clear from the apostle's experience: "As sorrowful, yet *always rejoicing*" (2Co 6:10). Christ's joy consisted not only in the things which we have mentioned above, but also in the assurance of the Father's full approbation that was ever His: that He did "always those things that please him" (Joh 8:29). He found, too, unspeakable comfort in His consciousness of the Father's abiding presence: "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone" (Joh 8:29). Since holiness and happiness are inseparably conjoined, deep joy must have been the portion of the Holy One, for He ever walked in the light of God's countenance. What joy was His in the saving of sinners appears from His "layeth it [the recovered sheep] on his shoulders, *rejoicing*" (Luk 15:5). Finally, He endured the Cross "for *the joy* that was set before him" (Heb 12:2)—in faith's apprehension and hope's anticipation of the reward for His perfect work, He rejoiced.

We come now to the question: Is fullness of joy attainable by the Christian in this life? Assuredly it must be, or John had never written our present text. Assuredly it must be, for why did the Lord Jesus say

unto His disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be *full*" (Joh 15:11)? Therein Christ told out the fullness of His heart, intimating His desire concerning His own. If it were not attainable, then why has the Saviour also bidden us, "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (Joh 16:24)? Ah, is not the littleness and feebleness of our joy due to the paucity of our faith and the smallness of our hope? Has not the eternal Lover of our souls freely invited us, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly" (Song 5:1)? If fullness of joy be not experienced by us, then certainly we are living far below our privileges. The straitness is in ourselves, and not in Him or His revealed will. The Lord knows all about our temperaments, circumstances, trials, and corruptions; yet, notwithstanding, bids us "rejoice evermore" (1Th 5:16), having made full provision for us to do so.

Did not this same John say to those whom he addressed in his second epistle, "I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be *full*" (2Jo :12)? Nor can we legitimately set aside the force of all these passages by saying they express the ideal rather than the actual, that they set before us the standard at which we are to aim, and not what is realized by any soul in this time state. Such an evasion is at once ruled out of court by Acts 13:52: "And the disciples were *filled with joy*, and with the Holy Ghost"—and *they* were men subject to like temptations and passions as we are! As pardoned sinners, accepted in Christ, made sons and heirs of God, we should "rejoice in the Lord *always*" (Phi 4:4). We must not be content with a fitful and occasional joy, but rather see to it that we keep this holy fire ever aflame upon the altar of our hearts. It is both our privilege and our right to feed and feast upon the Lamb and satisfy our souls unto a holy satiety.

Throughout our exposition of 1 John 1:4, we have followed the Authorized Version, but a word requires to be said upon the Revised rendering: "That *our* [the apostles'] joy may be full." Really, it comes to the same thing, for the joy of the minister is largely bound up in the spiritual prosperity of those to whom he ministers, their happiness being mutual. Paul called the Philippians his "joy and crown" (Phi 4:1), and said of the Thessalonians, "For ye are our glory and joy" (1Th 2:20); while John said to those addressed in his second epistle, "I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth" (2Jo :4), and in his third epistle, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3Jo :4). As the saints are partakers of the joy of God's servants, so they, in turn, of theirs, for they rejoice in the same Saviour.





## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

### 59. *Miracles (10:11)*

The spiritual ignorance and skepticism of the day in which we are living calls for a clear and unhesitating setting forth of the teaching of God's Word upon this subject. It is the duty of every preacher and Sabbath-School teacher to bring before the rising generation what Holy Writ reveals thereon. Without any drawing upon the imagination, yet by the use of vivid and picturesque language, it is one which can be made deeply interesting to the young. Broadly speaking, the miracles of the Bible are of two kinds or classes: manifest and supernatural judgments of God upon the wicked; gracious and mighty interpositions of God on behalf of His people. Of the former, we may instance the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire from heaven; of the latter, the opening of a way through the Red Sea so that Israel passed through dryshod. Briefly, we would define a miracle as a supernatural event brought about by a special act of divine providence, an extraordinary display of God's power. It is an event occurring in the natural world, which is apparent to the senses and of such a nature that it can be rationally attributed only to the immediate act of God. As a special and more obvious interposition of God, a miracle differs from His common or ordinary providences.

The objection made by infidels against miracles, that they are contrary to nature and its established order, is quite pointless, for it entirely leaves out of consideration the fact that they are due to the direct intervention of One who is superior to those laws and can alter the mode of their operation whenever it pleases Him. The various ways and means by which God governs the universe demonstrate both His freedom and His sovereignty. Matter is ruled by forms, bodies by souls, inferior bodies by celestial, the visible world by invisible angels, angels and souls immediately by God. Nor do the same things always keep the same track or follow the same course. In Moses' time, the flowing sea stood up as a wall and the flinty rock flowed as a river. In Joshua's day, the glorious sun was halted in his race and remained quite stationary for a whole day. In Elijah's life, the iron swam; and in Daniel's, the fire did not burn. During Christ's ministry, there were numerous excesses of nature, actings by prerogative, displays of divine glory. Such variety in the motions of nature exhibits the perfect freedom and superintendence of nature's LORD.

Whatever philosophical difficulties miracles may present to unbelief, the explanation which the Bible gives of them is far more rational and satisfactory than any that human wisdom can supply. The theories and hypotheses advanced by atheists are incredible and irrational, for they are at once unphilosophical and unscientific. But once the living God be postulated as their Author, One who is eternal and almighty, infinite in wisdom and goodness, supernatural works are to be expected. To say that miracles are "impossible" is absurd and the acme of arrogance, for the one who makes such an assertion virtually assumes himself to be possessed of omniscience—endowed with all knowledge. To *deny* that they exist is, if possible, still worse, for it is a deliberate closing of the eyes to that which confronts us on every side. *Creation* is a miracle, for it immeasurably transcends the capabilities and even the understanding of the natural man. The combined wit and resources of all physicists and scientists in the world could not *create* so much as a single blade of grass. No wonder the LORD asks puny man, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding" (Job 38:4).

The *sustentation* and preservation of creation is a miracle. None but the One who gave them being could provide for and maintain such an innumerable multitude of creatures. Even if the wise of this world *were able* to bring into existence a blade of grass, they could not keep it alive a single day if deprived of the soil, and denied the water and sunshine which God provides. The *regulation* of the created system is a miracle. Man may tamper with the clocks in his "daylight-saving" schemes, but he cannot make the sun rise an hour earlier or set an hour later. He may sinfully fret and fume at the weather, but he can no more alter or modify it by any of his devices than he can change the tides of the sea. *Providence* is a continuous miracle, supplying the needs of not only a billion human beings, but myriads of animals, the birds of the air, and the denizens of the deep. "Thou openest *thine* hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled" (Psa 104:28-29)—so dependent is the world on its Maker's bounty. Man may attempt to "ration," but when God calls for a famine, he is helpless before it.

Strictly speaking, a miracle is something more than an unusual occurrence or mysterious prodigy, for the effects of the electric telegraph had been such unto those who lived a thousand years ago, but today they are explainable by natural laws. Contrariwise, the more fully a real miracle be comprehended, the

more evident it is that such a phenomenal effect is above all the powers of nature, and must be attributed to an immediate<sup>4</sup> act of God's intervention. Nor are we justified in regarding such interventions as anarchical infractions of nature's order, but rather as the interposition of the divine will, directing events unto the out-working of His purpose, every miracle being wrought in strict accord with His decrees. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* so admirably expresses it, "God, in His ordinary providence, makes use of means, yet is free to work without [Hos 1:7], above [Rom 4:19], and against [2Ki 6:6; Dan 3:27] them at His pleasure."<sup>5</sup> It must not be thought that the Creator has brought into existence a system or instituted such laws as tie His own hands. No, "Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Psa 135:6).

Great care needs to be taken how we employ such expressions as "nature" and "the laws of nature," for they were coined by those who had no knowledge of or faith in the living God, and are commonly used by men who would exclude the thought of God's immediate presence and power in the universe. But the Scriptures teach us to see the hand of *God* operating directly in all that is attributed to "natural causes" by the sceptics. The Christian rejects the idea that the universe is naught but a vast machine which works involuntarily, necessarily, and uniformly. Instead, he acknowledges a present God in providence, as well as creation. As he admires the flowers which spring from the tiny seeds, renewing the original grace and beauty of the parent plant, he traces the immediate influence of the Creator, as truly and as much as in making Aaron's rod to bud (Num 17:8). Nor is the vegetating of the seed any less a divine work and marvel because it is multiplied by millions and repeated year by year for successive ages. What unbelief terms "the course of nature" is but the agency of *God*. He is operating on the right hand and on the left, constantly maintaining and directing all things, though men discern Him not. Without Him, not a sparrow falls on the ground (Mat 10:29).

That the so-called "laws of nature" *are* being continually modified in their action by the intervention of divine will, appears plainly in the marked differences in the weather from year to year. Though [the Isle of] Lewis be situated so far to the west, this writer has witnessed snow lying on the ground during July! That is, of course, very exceptional, but it illustrates what has just been said, as do also the frequent falsifications of the "weather prophets," even of those who claim that it "runs in cycles." The same thing is exhibited in the longevity of different individuals: not only do no two centenarians give the same recipe for the attaining of old age, but many of them have been of frail physique and delicate constitution—and if naught but physical properties and laws determine the event, then the strongest should live the longest and the weakest die early. The material world abounds in such exceptions. "Cut off a snail's head and it will grow out again; cut off a crab's head, but it will not grow out again. Cut off a crab's claw and it will grow out again, but cut off a dog's leg and it will not grow out again"—Peter M. Roget (1779-1869), *Animal and Vegetable Physiology Considered with Reference to Natural Theology*.

Why such marked variations in the seasons? Why such disparity in the health and mentality of members of the same family? Why those differences in the operation of the very same properties and laws of animal substance? "It is as easy for God to turn nature out of its settled course as it was to place it in the station it holds and the course it runs"—Stephen Charnock (1628-1680). Verily, "He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Psa 115:3). Rightly did Robert Haldane (1764-1842) argue, "To affirm that a suspension or alteration of the laws of nature is impossible, is to confer on them the attribute of deity, and to declare they are supreme and having no superior, precludes the existence of God as well as miracles, or it represents Him as subordinate to His own laws"—*The Evidence and Authority of Revelation, Vol. 1*. We say again that what is called "the course of nature" is nothing but the *direct agency of God*, the exercise of His will, wisdom, and power. "Nature" would cease to move were its Maker to withdraw His energy from it. It can no more operate of itself than it could produce itself. Those laws by which God usually conducts the government of the material creation were originally adjusted by Him, are now preserved by His power, and are deviated from whenever He pleases.

"And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Bethhoron, that the LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword" (Jos 10:11). It will be recalled that when the Gibeonites made their peace with Joshua and entered into a league with him, five kings of the Amorites gathered their armies together and made war upon their capital. They sent to Joshua

<sup>4</sup> **immediate** – without the intervention of another cause; direct.

<sup>5</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647); Chapter 5, "Of Providence," Section 3.

an urgent appeal for help, which he answered at once by marching at the head of his men through the night. Coming upon the Canaanites unexpectedly, and probably before they had made their dispositions and appointed sentries, they threw them into consternation. Moreover, "And the LORD discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter"; thereby signifying His approval of Israel's sparing the lives of the Gibeonites by now giving them the most glorious victory in all their wars. As the remaining Amorites fled, the LORD employed against them the artillery of heaven, which demonstrates how hopeless is the case of those who have Him for their enemy.

In casting down the great stones of hail upon the Amorites, we may observe what a *variety of means* God uses in executing His will. In overwhelming the antediluvian world, He employed a deluge of rain; in the destruction of Sodom, fire from heaven; in the overthrow of Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea, by removing the wheels of their chariots and drowning them. Therein we behold His sovereignty exemplified, as it is too in ministering unto His people. This was not the first time God made the hail a messenger of judgment, for He did so in the seventh plague upon Egypt (Exo 9:22-26). Many of the premillenarians believe that "hail" will be one of the weapons again used by God in His judgments on the earth (Rev 16:21). This awful visitation on the Canaanites had been foretold: "Hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, Which I have reserved...against the day of battle and war?" (Job 38:22-23)—Job was probably written before Joseph's birth.

There are three things which were singular and striking about the hail in Joshua 10. First, its great size; second, its force and efficacy—being like bullets from a machine gun, slaying men outright. Occasionally, we have read of hail of unusual dimensions, which did great damage to crops and cattle, but not of it effecting such wholesale slaughter of human beings as on this occasion. Third, its *discrimination*—none of the Israelites being killed! This is the feature which most evidently evinced the miraculous nature of this hail. Though Joshua's men must have been in close combat with the Canaanites and more or less mixed up with them as they pursued them, none of the deadly missiles fell on God's people. This was even more remarkable than what occurred under the seventh plague, for whereas the LORD then sent it throughout all the land of Egypt, none fell in Goshen (Exo 9:26); but here it fell all round the Israelites, yet without one of them being harmed—illustrating that word, "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh *thee*" (Psa 91:7).

There is probably an allusion to this miracle and others of a similar nature in Psalm 18:13-14—both passages speaking of the LORD "discomfited them" and "scattered [chased] them," and mentioning the hail. There was no escaping His wrath. Hopeless is the plight of all who provoke Him. When the appointed hour of His vengeance arrives, none can deliver himself. Thus will it be with everyone who mocks Him and persecutes His people. They shall discover, to their eternal undoing, that it is "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31). That more died from the hailstones than Israel slew with the sword made good God's word unto Joshua, "Thine eyes have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto these two kings: so shall the LORD do unto all the kingdoms whither thou passest. Ye shall not fear them: for the LORD your God he shall fight for you" (Deu 3:21-22). And to Him may the Christian look in his spiritual warfare, and "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31).

The opening verses of Psalm 44 supply a striking and blessed commentary upon what has been before us: "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them." This was a God-honouring acknowledgment. Canaan was His gift unto Israel, and *He* put them in possession of it. Their warriors, indeed, were not inactive, but it was the light of His countenance which inspired them with valour. God was the Conqueror of Canaan. Without *His* power working in and for them, all their efforts had been in vain. By employing the artillery of heaven against the five kings, the LORD made this the more evident.

And what is the application which we are to make of the same? First, give unto the LORD the honour which is due to Him, and freely ascribe our victories unto Him. Whatever success be ours, it is wholly due to the might and goodness of God. Without His blessing, all our endeavours would be useless. Second, recognize and own His sovereign *grace* to be the fount from which proceed all His actings on our behalf; "because thou hadst a favour unto them" (Psa 44:3). Third, make known to our children the miracle-working power of God, especially what He has wrought for us. Fourth, count upon Him undertaking for us:

He is the same almighty God and Saviour now as then! What we read of in Scripture and have heard from our fathers should strengthen faith, encourage prayer, stimulate hope: "Thou art *my* King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob" (Psa 44:4). Thou art my sovereign LORD, my sure Defence against all enemies, my all-sufficient Redeemer. Intervene on my behalf, confound my foes, grant me the victory. Thou hast but to speak, and it is done; to "command," and it standest fast.



## THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

### 3. *Its Imputation, Part 2*

Having proved from Scripture that God constituted Adam the covenant head and federal representative of his race, we are now to show that the guilt of his original sin was imputed unto all his posterity. Were there no explicit statements to that effect in the Bible, we should be obliged to infer the same, for with *those* principles such a conclusion is inevitable. If the one was acting in the name and on the behalf of many, then the latter are legally responsible for what he did, and must suffer the consequences of his conduct—be it good or evil. Had Adam survived the test to which he was subjected, had he remained obedient to his Maker and LORD, then his obedience had been reckoned to the account of all his seed, and they had been joint partakers of his reward. But if he revolted from the divine government and preferred his own will and way, then the punishment he incurred must be visited also upon the whole of his constituency. Such a procedure is neither merciful nor unmerciful, but a matter of *righteousness*. Justice requires that the penalty of a broken law shall be visited upon its transgressors. A precept without penalty is simply advice, or at most, a request; and compliance therewith, merely a species of self-pleasing, and not submission unto authority. To divest the divine Law of its sanction would be to reduce God to a mere supplicant—begging His creatures to behave themselves.

Not only had God the sovereign right to constitute Adam the covenant head of his race; not only was it strictly and legally just that its members should be held accountable for what he did, whether it issued in their weal or woe; but consider the *meetness*<sup>6</sup> of such an arrangement. Since the loyalty and subjection of man to his Maker must be put to the proof, only two alternatives were possible: either the human race must be placed on probation in the person of a suitable representative and responsible head, or each individual member must enter upon probation for himself. “The race must either have stood in a full-grown man, with a full-orbed intellect, or stood as babies, each entering his probation in the twilight of self-consciousness, each deciding his destiny before his eyes were half-opened to what it all meant. How much better would that have been? How much more just? But could it not have been some other way? There was no other way. It was either the baby, or it was the perfect, well-equipped, all-calculating man—the man who saw and comprehended every thing. That man was Adam”—G. S. Bishop.

Fresh from the hands of his Creator, with no sinful heredity behind and no depraved nature within him—but instead endowed with holiness and indwelt by the Spirit of God—Adam was well equipped for the honourable position assigned him. His fitness to serve as our head, and the ideal circumstances under which the decisive test was made, must forever close every honest mouth from objecting against the divine arrangement and the fearful consequences which Adam’s failure has brought down upon us. It has been well said that, “Had we been present, had we and all the human race been brought into existence at once, and had God proposed to us that we should choose one who was to be our representative, that He might enter into covenant with him on our behalf—should not we, with one voice, have chosen our first parent for this responsible office? Should we not have said, ‘He is a perfect man and bears the image and likeness of God—if anyone is to stand for us, let it be this man Adam’? Since the angels which stood for themselves fell, why should we wish to stand for ourselves? And if it be reasonable that one stand for us, why should we complain when God has chosen the same person for this office that we should have chosen had we been in existence and capable of choosing ourselves?”—G. S. Bishop.

Ere proceeding farther, let it be insisted upon that God is nowise to be blamed for Adam’s fall. After a thorough and extensive investigation, Solomon declared, “Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Ecc 7:29). There, the streams of human folly and iniquity are all traced back to their fountain-head of corruption. Man was created without irregularity or blemish; but he departed from his original rectitude. And why? Because he vainly supposed he could *better himself*. “They”—that is, Adam and Eve at first, followed by their crazed descendants—“sought out many inventions.” Significant and suggestive word! What are “inventions” but devices to improve things? And what gives rise to such attempts but dissatisfaction with present conditions? Our first parents thought to find a superior way of happiness by kicking off their traces. Instead of being content with what their Maker had given and appointed them, they preferred their own will to God’s, their inventions rather than His insti-

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<sup>6</sup> *meetness* – fitness; suitability.

tutions. They forsook their rest in the LORD and sought to improve their case. They promised themselves liberty, only to become the slaves of Satan.

The course taken by our first parents is that which has been followed ever since by all their children, as is intimated in the change from the singular number to the plural in Ecclesiastes 7:29. As indicated above, we do not (as most expositors) regard the prime reference in that passage as being to the “aprons” of “fig leaves” (Gen 3:7) which Adam and Eve sewed together; but rather, to their original sin in being *dissatisfied* with the state in which God had placed them—vainly imagining to improve their lot by leaning unto their own understanding, following the desires of their hearts, and responding to the evil solicitation of the serpent. Thus it has been, and still is, with their descendants. They have turned from the Creator to the creature for their comfort: having forsaken the Living Fountain, they engage themselves in hewing out “broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer 2:13)—preferring the “far country” to the Father’s house. Their search after wisdom, their mad quest for pleasure, their pursuit of wealth and worldly honours, are but so many “inventions” or attempts to better their lot, and proofs of a restless and dissatisfied heart! Had our first parents been content with the goodly heritage which their Maker assigned them, they would not have coveted that which He had prohibited. And today, the remedy for covetousness is *contentment*—see Hebrews 13:5!

We therefore subscribe unhesitatingly to the dictum of John Calvin (1509-1564): “It is clear that the misery of man must be ascribed wholly to himself, since he was favoured with rectitude by the divine goodness, but has lapsed into vanity through his own folly.” God expressly forbade Adam to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He plainly warned him what would be the consequence of disobedience. Though He made man a mutable creature, yet not evil, Adam had ability to stand, as well as to fall. He was fully capable of loving God as his chief good, and of moving toward Him as his last end. There was light in his understanding to know the rule he was to conform unto. There was perfect harmony between his reason and his affections. It was therefore easier for him to continue in obedience to the precept than to swerve from it. Though man was created defectible, yet he was not determined by God influencing his will, by any positive act, to apostasy. God did not force him, but suffered him to act freely. He did not withdraw any grace from him, but left him to that power with which He invested him at his creation. Nor was God under any obligation to sustain him supernaturally, or withhold him from sinning. God created Adam in a righteous state, but he deliberately cast himself and his posterity into a forlorn state.

Adam took things into his own hands, revolted from God, and trampled His law beneath his feet. It behoves us to consider well the relation between that foul deed and the universal miseries consequent thereon, for it supplies the clue to all the dark confusion which perplexes us within and without. It tells us why infants die, why they are estranged from God from the womb (Psa 58:3), and why each of us is born into this world with a “heart [that] is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9). It is because Adam forfeited his Maker’s approbation and incurred His awful displeasure, with all the terrible effects thereof. In Adam, *we* broke the covenant of works: we offended in his offence and transgressed in his transgression; and thereby departed from God’s favour and fell under His righteous curse. “Thus man apostatized, God was provoked, the Holy Spirit forsook His polluted temple, the unclean spirit took possession, the divine image was defaced, and Satan’s image imposed in its place”—Thomas Scott (1747-1821). Through the sin of its head, the race was ruined and fell into a state of most horrible moral leprosy. Ours is a fallen world: averse to God and holiness, iniquity abounding in it, death reigning over it, lust and crime characterizing it, suffering and misery filling it.

Accordingly, it is written, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). In the light of Genesis 3, that is surely a strange and startling statement, for that chapter makes it clear that Eve fell before Adam did! Why then is it not said, “by one woman,” or at least “by one man and woman sin entered into the world”? Because, as Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) long ago pointed out, “Moses tells us the *history* of Adam’s fall, and Paul explains the *mystery* and the consequences thereof”; in other words, Romans 5 opens to us the significance and scope of the Eden tragedy. The opening word of verse 12 indicates that a logical proposition is there advanced, which is confirmed by the “as” and “so.” The reason why no notice is taken of Eve is that throughout what follows the apostle is treating of the *condemnation* of all mankind, and not of the *vitiation*<sup>7</sup> of human nature. That condemnation is due solely to our having revolted from God in the person of our

<sup>7</sup> **vitiation** – making corrupt; weakening morally.

legal representative, and since Adam alone sinned in *that* capacity, no mention is made of Eve—headship always pertains to the man, and not to the woman.

Before proceeding farther, let us say a few words upon the *relation* of this most important passage. In the preceding chapters, Paul had dealt at length with the depravity and sinfulness of mankind (especially in Romans 1:18-32; 3:10-20) and had declared that even Christians in their unregenerate days were ungodly, without strength, enemies to God (Rom 5:6, 10)—here he shows *why* they were so, Adam's offence being the cause and source thereof. Second, he had refuted the proud but erroneous view of the Jews, who regarded themselves as holy because of the seed of a holy father (Rom 2:17-3:9); and consequently, they utterly lacked a true estimate of their desperate condition by nature and practice, or a sense of their dire need of divine grace—here the apostle takes them back to a higher ancestor than Abraham, even Adam, who was equally the father of Jew and Gentile, both alike sharing his guilt and inheriting his curse. Third, Paul had presented the grand doctrine of justification by faith (Rom 3:21-31) and had illustrated the same by the cases of Abraham and David—here he shows Adam was a "figure" of Christ (Rom 5:14), that the one sustained an analogous relation to his race as the other did to His seed, that each transacted as the one for the many, and that therefore, the Gospel principle of *imputation* (Christ's righteousness reckoned to the account of the believer, Rom 3:21-31) is no novelty, but identical with the one on which God acted from the beginning.

To proceed, observe that it is not "through" but "*by one man.*" But exactly what is meant by "*sin entered the world*"? Three explanations are possible. First, sin as an *act* of disobedience: by one man, rebellion against God began. But Genesis 3 shows otherwise: transgression of God's Law was initiated by Eve! Second, sin as a principle of *depravity*: by one man originated our sinful nature. This is the view generally taken. But it is equally untenable, for the corruption of our nature is as much by the mother as by the father. Moreover, if such were the force of "sin" in the first clause, then the closing one would perforce read, "for that all are *sinful.*" Furthermore, verses 13 and 14 explain and furnish proof of what is asserted in verse 12, and it would be meaningless to say, "a sinful *nature* is not *imputed.*" Finally, all through this passage, "sin" and "righteousness" are contrasted, and righteousness here is judicial and not experiential—something reckoned to our account and not infused into us. "Righteousness" in this passage signifies not a holy nature, but conformity to the Law's demands; and therefore, "sin" cannot be corruption of nature, but rather the cause of our condemnation. Thus, third, by one man *guilt* entered into the world, exposing the race unto God's wrath.

"By one man sin *entered.*" Sin is here personified as an intruding enemy, coming as a solemn accuser as well as a hostile oppressor. It entered "the world," not the universe, for Satan had previously apostatized. "And *death* by sin," which is not to be limited to mere physical dissolution, but must be understood of the penal consequences of Adam's offence. All through this passage, death is opposed unto "life," and life includes very much more than physical existence or even immortality of soul. When God told Adam, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17), He signified, first, die *spiritually*—that is, be alienated from the source of divine life. Second, in due course, die *physically*—thy body shall go to corruption and return to the dust. Third, die *eternally*, suffer "the second death" (Rev 20:14), be cast into the lake of fire, there to suffer forever—unless a miracle of grace redeems and delivers thee, of which there is no record anywhere in Holy Writ.

"And so death *passed upon* all men" because of their complicity in the one man's sin. It is not that "death" as a principle of evil gained admittance and polluted the nature of his offspring, but that the penal sentence of death was pronounced upon them. Having been charged with his transgression, they must suffer the consequence of the same. The apostle's design was to show the *connection* between the one man's sin and the resultant misery of the many. By his disobedience, all men were constituted sinners—guilty criminals before God—and therefore sharers of the sentence passed upon Adam. "In Adam all die" (1Co 15:22). Those words explain the "by man came death" of the preceding verse, and show that all die by virtue of their relation to the covenant head of our race—die because of their legal union with him. Even physical death is far more than "nature's debt," or the inevitable outcome of our frail constitution: it is a *penal affliction*, a part of sin's "wages." We are subject to mortality because we were "in Adam" by federal representation; we partake of his fallen nature because we are partners of his guilt and punishment. We are born into this world neither as innocent creatures, nor to enter upon our probation: rather do we come into it as *culprits* condemned to death by the divine Law.

Every man, woman, and child is adjudged guilty before God. The ground of our condemnation is something *outside* of ourselves. Inward corruption and alienation from God are the consequences and not the cause of our condemnation. Antecedent to any personal act of ours (as such), we stand accursed by the divine Law. Since "death" came as the result of "sin," since it is the penal sentence upon it, that sentence cannot be passed upon any save those who are *guilty*. If, then, death was "passed upon *all* men," it must be because all are guilty—all participated legally in Adam's offence. Clear and inevitable as is that inference, we are not left to draw it ourselves. The apostle expressly states it in the next words: "For that all have sinned"—"for that," or, "because in consequence of." Here then is the divinely given reason *why* the death penalty is passed upon "all men"—because "all have sinned," or, as the margin and the R.V.<sup>8</sup> more accurately render it, "in whom all sinned." The apostle is not here saying that all men sinned personally, but *representatively*. The Greek verb "sinned" is in the aorist tense, which always looks back to a past action that has terminated. The curse of the Law falls upon us first, not because we are sinful, but because we were federally guilty when our covenant head sinned.

In Romans 5:12, the apostle was not referring to the corrupting of mankind. It is true that as a result of our first parents' sin, the springs of human nature were polluted; but this is not what Paul was writing of. Instead, he went behind *that*, and dealt with the *cause* of which moral depravity is but one of the effects. A corrupt tree can indeed produce nothing but corrupt fruit, but why are we born with corrupt hearts? Such is more than a terrible calamity: it is *a penal infliction* visited upon us because of our prior criminality. Punishment presupposes guilt, and the punishment is given to all because *all* are guilty; and since God accounts all guilty, then they must be participants in Adam's offence. Well did George Whitefield (1714-1770) say, "I beg leave to express my surprise that any person of judgment should maintain human depravity, and not immediately discover its necessary connection with the imputation, and how impossible it is to secure the justice of God without having recourse to it; for certainly the corruption of human nature, so universal and inseparable, is one of the greatest punishments that could be inflicted upon the species...Now if God has inflicted an evident punishment upon a race of men perfectly innocent, which had neither sinned personally nor yet by imputation; and thus while we imagine we honour the justice of God by renouncing imputation, we in fact pour the highest dishonour upon that sacred attribute."

Death, penal death, has been passed upon all men because all sinned in Adam. That the "all have sinned" cannot signify their own personal transgressions is clear, because the manifest design of Romans 5:12 is to show that *Adam's sin* is the cause of death; because physical death (a part of sin's wages) is far more extensive than personal transgression—as appears from so many dying in infancy; and because such an interpretation would destroy the analogy between Adam and the One of whom he was "the figure," and would lead unto this comparison: as men die because they sin personally, so all earn eternal life because they are personally righteous! Equally evident is it that "all have sinned" cannot mean death comes upon men because they are depraved, for this too would clash with the scope of the whole passage: if our *subjective* sinfulness be the ground of our condemnation, then our subjective holiness (and not Christ's merits) is the ground of our justification. It would also contradict the emphatic assertion of verse 18: "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation." Thus, we are *obliged* to understand the "all have sinned" of verse 12 as meaning all sinned *in Adam*.

If the federal headship of Adam and the imputation of his sin unto all his posterity be repudiated, then what alternative is left us? Only that of the separate testing of each individual. If the race was not placed on probation in the first man, then each of his offspring must stand trial for himself. But the conditions of such a trial make success impossible, for each probationer would enter upon it in a state of spiritual death! The human family is either suffering for the sin of its head, or it is suffering for nothing at all. "Man is born unto trouble" (Job 5:7), and from it there is no escape. What then is the explanation of the grim tragedy now being enacted on this earth? Every effect must have a previous cause. If we be not born under the condemnation of Adam's offence, then why are we "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3)? "Now either man was tried and fell in Adam, or he has been condemned without trial. He is either under the curse (as it rests upon him from the beginning of his existence) for Adam's guilt, or for no guilt at all. Judge which is

<sup>8</sup> R.V. — The Revised Version of the Bible is a revision of the King James Version of 1611. The work was entrusted to over 50 scholars from various denominations in Britain. The New Testament was published in 1881, the Old Testament in 1885. The best known of the translators were Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. The stated aim was "to adapt King James' version to the present state of the English language without changing the idiom and vocabulary," and "to adapt it to the present standard of biblical scholarship." The Greek text used is believed by some to be of higher reliability than the *Textus Receptus* used for the KJV, although many scholars disagree. The R.V. is regarded as the forerunner of the entire modern translation movement.



more honouring to God: a doctrine which, although profoundly mysterious, represents Him as giving man an equitable and most favourable probation in his federal head, or that which makes God condemn him untried, even before he exists”—Professor Robert L. Dabney (1820-1898).



## PRIVATE JUDGMENT

### *Part 3*

“But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren” (Mat 23:8). In every generation, there are those of an officious spirit who aspire to leadership, demanding deference from their fellows. Such men—especially when they are endowed with natural gifts above the average—are the kind who become the founders of new sects and parties, and insist upon unqualified subjection from their followers. *Their* interpretation of the Scriptures must not be challenged, their dicta are final. They must be owned as “rabbis” and submitted to as “fathers.” Everyone must believe precisely what *they* teach, and order all the details of his life by the rules of conduct which they prescribe, or else be branded a heretic and denounced as a gratifier of the lusts of the flesh. There have been, and still are, many such self-elevated little popes in Christendom, who deem themselves to be entitled to implicit credence and obedience, whose decisions must be accepted without question. They are nothing but arrogant usurpers, for Christ alone is the Rabbi or Master of Christians; and since all of His disciples be “brethren,” they possess equal rights and privileges.

“And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven” (Mat 23:9). This dehortation has ever been needed by God’s people, for they are the most part simple and unsophisticated, trustful and easily imposed upon. In those verses, the Lord Jesus was enforcing the duty of private judgment, bidding believers suffer none to be the dictators of their faith or lords of their lives. No man is to be heeded in spiritual matters any further than he can produce a plain and decisive “Thus saith the LORD” as the foundation of his appeal. To be in subjection to any ecclesiastical authority that is not warranted by Holy Writ, or to comply with the whims of men, is to renounce your Christian freedom. Suffer none to have dominion over your mind and conscience. Be regulated only by the teaching of God’s Word, and firmly refuse to be brought into bondage to “the commandments and doctrines of men,” with their “Touch not; taste not; handle not” (Col 2:21-22). Instead, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” (Gal 5:1); yet “not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God” (1Pe 2:16)—yielding unreservedly to *His* authority. Rather than conform to the rules of the Pharisees, Christ was willing to be regarded as a Sabbath-breaker!

“Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand” (2Co 1:24). Weigh well those words, my reader, and remember they were written by one who “was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles” (2Co 11:5); and here he declaims all authority over the faith of these saints! In the previous verse, he had spoken of “sparing” them; and here, “Lest it should be thought that he and his fellow ministers assumed to themselves any tyrannical power over the churches, or lording it over God’s heritage, these words are subjoined”—John Gill (1697-1771). The word “faith” may be understood here as either the grace of faith or the object thereof. Take it of the former: ministers of the Gospel can neither originate, stimulate, nor dominate it—the Holy Spirit is the Author, Increaser, and Lord of it. Take it as the object of faith, that which is believed: ministers have no divine warrant to devise any new articles of faith, nor to demand assent to anything which is not plainly taught in the Bible. “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1Pe 4:11), neither withholding anything revealed therein, nor adding anything of his own thereto.

Paul’s work was to instruct and persuade, not to lord it over his converts and compel their belief. He had written his first letter to the saints in answer to the queries they had sent him; and at the beginning of this second epistle explains why he had deferred a further visit to them, stating that he was prepared to stay away until such time as they had corrected the evils which existed in their assembly. He refused to oppress them. “Faith rests not on the testimony of man, but on the testimony of God. When we believe the Scriptures, it is not man, but God whom we believe. Therefore, faith is subject not to man, but to God alone...The apostles were but the organs of the Holy Spirit; what they spake as such they could not recall or modify. They were not the lords, so to speak, of the Gospel...Paul therefore places himself alongside of his brethren, not over them as a lord, but as a joint believer with them in the Gospel which he preached, and a helper of their joy, co-operating with them in the promotion of their spiritual welfare”—Charles Hodge (1797-1878). If Paul would not, then how absurd for any man to attempt to exercise a spiritual dominion in matters of faith or practice!

“The elders which are among you I exhort...Feed the flock of God which is among you...not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1Pe 5:1-3). These are part of the instructions given unto ministers of the Gospel as to how they are to conduct themselves in the discharge of their holy office, and we would earnestly commend them to the attention of every pastor who reads this article. They are divinely forbidden to abuse their position and assume an absolute authority or rule imperiously over the saints. Their task is to preach the truth and enjoin obedience to Christ, and not unto themselves. They are not to act arbitrarily or in a domineering spirit, for though they be set over believers in the Lord (1Th 5:12) and are to “rule”—and therefore to be submitted unto in their lawful administration of the Word and the ordinances (Heb 13:17)—yet they are not to arrogate to themselves dominion over the consciences of men, nor impose any of their own inventions; but instead, teach their flock “to observe all things whatsoever [Christ has] commanded” (Mat 28:20).

The minister of the Gospel has no right to dictate unto others, or insist in a dogmatic manner that people must receive what he says on *his* bare assertion. Such a spirit is contrary to the genius of Christianity, unsuited to the relation which he sustains to his flock, and quite unbecoming a follower of Christ. No arbitrary control has been committed to any cleric. True ministerial authority or church rule is not a dictatorial one, but is a spiritual administration under Christ. Instead of lording it over God's heritage, preachers are to be “ensamples to the flock” (1Pe 5:3): personal patterns of good works, holiness, and self-sacrifice; models of piety, humility, and charity. How vastly different from the conduct enjoined by Peter has been the arrogance, intolerance, and tyrannical spirit of his self-styled successors! Nor are they the only ones guilty thereof. Love of power has been as common a sin in the pulpit as love of money, and many of the worst evils which have befallen Christendom have issued from a lusting after dominion and ecclesiastical honours.

Such is poor human nature that good men find it hard to keep from being puffed up and misusing any measure of authority when it be committed unto them, and from not doing more harm than good with the same. Even James and John so far forgot themselves that, on one occasion, they asked Christ to grant them the two principal seats of power and honour in the day of His glory (Mar 10:35-37). Mark well this part of His reply: “Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them” (verse 42)—they love to bear sway, and, like Haman, have everybody truckle to them. “But so shall it *not be* among you” says Christ to His ministers—eschew any spirit of domineering, mortify the love of being flattered and held in honour because of your office. “But whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all” (verses 43-44)—those who are to be accounted the greatest in Christ's spiritual kingdom are the ones characterized by a meek and lowly heart, and those who will receive a crown of glory in the day to come are those who most sought the good of others. “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (verse 45)—then make self-abnegation and not self-exaltation your constant aim.

“Prove *all* things: hold fast that which is good” (1Th 5:21). This is yet another verse that, by clear and necessary implication, teaches the privilege and right of private judgment, and makes known the duty and extent to which it is to be exercised. Linking it with what has been before us in the preceding paragraphs, it shows that if it be unwarrantable for the servants of Christ to usurp an absolute power, it is equally wrong for those committed to their care to submit thereto. Church government and discipline are indeed necessary and scriptural; yet not a lordly authority, but a rule of holiness and love, wherein a spirit of mutual forbearance obtains. God does not require the minds and consciences of His children to be enslaved by any ecclesiastical dominion. Each one has the right to exercise his own judgment and have a say and vote upon all matters pertaining to his local assembly; and if he does not, then he fails in the discharge of his responsibility. Well did one of the old divines say on Psalm 110:1, “Christ is Lord to employ, to command, whom and what He will. To Him alone must we say, ‘Lord, save me, I perish.’ To Him only must we say, ‘Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?’ (Act 9:6). To Him only must we go for instruction—‘Thou hast the words of eternal life’ (Joh 6:68).”

It scarcely needs to be said that the right of private judgment certainly does not mean that we are at liberty to bring the Word of God to the bar of human reason and sentiment, so that we may reject whatever does not commend itself to our intelligence, or appeal to our inclinations. The Bible does not submit itself unto *our* opinion, or give us the option of picking and choosing from its contents; rather is it our critic (Heb 4:12). “The law of the LORD is perfect” (Psa 19:7), and, the best of us being very imperfect, it is madness

to criticize it. But when we hear preaching from it, we must *try* what is said whether or not it accords with the Word, and whether the interpretation be valid or strained. It is a fundamental truth that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1Ti 1:15); yet even in the days of the apostles there were those who, while acknowledging Him as the only Saviour, taught that there was no salvation apart from circumcision. Accordingly, the church met at Jerusalem "to *consider* of this matter" (Act 15:4-11). So must *we* "consider" all we hear and read, whether it agrees with the divine Rule, taking nothing for granted.

"*Prove* all things." This is not optional, but obligatory: we are divinely commanded to do so. God's Word is the only standard of truth and duty, and everything we believe and do must be tested by it. Thousands have sought to evade this duty by joining Rome and allowing that system to determine everything for them. Nor are the majority of the members of non-popish churches much better, being too indolent to search and study the Bible for themselves, believing whatever their preachers tell them. Beware, my reader, of allowing *any* influence to come between your soul and God's Word. How early did the Holy Spirit have occasion to say to one of the primitive churches which had given way to a spirit of partisanship and bigotry, "Who then is Paul? And who is Apollos?" When the mind rests upon the human instrument, not only is spiritual progress in the truth immediately arrested, but the living power of what truth is already attained dies out of the enslaved heart, being displaced by dogmas received on human authority. Divine truth then degenerates into a party distinction, for which many zealously contend in naught but a sectarian spirit.

The origin of all sectarianism is subjection to men: human authority supplanting the authority of God, the preacher becoming the dictator. We must not suffer any to arrogate the place and office of the Holy Spirit. No human system can feed the soul: it has to come into immediate and quickening contact with the living and powerful Word of God in order to be spiritually nourished. Even where real Christians are concerned, many had their religious beliefs formed before they were converted, receiving them from their parents or the churches they attended, and not directly from God and His Word. Therefore, they, too, need to heed this divine injunction: "*Prove all things*; hold fast that which is good" (1Th 5:21). Bring your beliefs to the test of the Scriptures, and you are likely to discover that it is much harder and more painful to *unlearn* some things than it is to learn new ones. Very few think for themselves, and fewer still are really willing to "*buy* the truth" (Pro 23:23) and set aside their former opinions, no matter what may be the cost. Much grace is needed for that! Since the eternal interests of our souls are involved, it is the height of folly for us to depend upon the judgment of others, for the ablest ministers are fallible and liable to err.

"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things *were so*" (Act 17:11). Those Bereans sat in judgment upon the teaching of the apostles! They are commended for doing so! Not only was it their privilege and duty, but it is recorded to their honour. But mark *how* they discharged this duty. They brought all that they heard from the spoken discourse to the test of the written Word. They did not judge by their own preconceptions, views, prejudices, feelings, or partialities, but by God's Word. If what they heard was in accord therewith, they were bound to receive and submit to it; but if it was contrary thereto, they were equally bound to refuse and reject the ministry that taught it. That is recorded as an example to us! It reveals *how* we are to exercise this privilege of private judgment. The apostles claimed to be sent of God, but were they really preaching the truth? The Bereans gave them a ready hearing, but took the trouble to examine and try their teaching by the Scriptures, and searched them daily whether they were so. Do thou likewise, and remember that Christ commended the Ephesian saints because they *had tried* those who said they were apostles and "found them liars" (Rev 2:2).

The right of private judgment does not mean that each Christian may be a law unto himself, and still less lord over himself. We must beware of allowing liberty to degenerate into license. No, it means the right to form our own views from Scriptures, to be in bondage to no ecclesiastical authority, and to be subject unto God alone. Two extremes are to be guarded against: slavery to human authority and tradition, [and] the spirit of self-will and pride. On the one hand, we are to avoid blind credulity; on the other hand, an affectation of independence or the love of novelty, which disdains what others believe in order to obtain a cheap notoriety of originality. Private judgment does not mean private *fancy*, but a deliberate conviction based on Holy Writ. Though I must not resign my mind and conscience to others, or deliver my reason and faith over blindfold to any church, yet I ought to be very slow in rejecting the approved judgment of God's servants of the past. There is a happy medium between limiting myself to what the Puritans and others taught, and disdaining the help they can afford me. Self-conceit is to be rigidly restrained. Private judgment is to be exercised humbly, soberly, and impartially, with a willingness to receive light from any quarter.

Ponder the Word for yourself; but mortify the spirit of haughty self-sufficiency, and be ready to avail yourself of anything likely to afford you a better understanding of the truth. Above all, daily beg the Holy Spirit to be your teacher. "Prove all things": when listening to your favourite preacher, or reading these articles! Accord your brethren the same right and privilege you claim for yourself.



## WELCOME TIDINGS

"LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power" (2Ch 14:11); rather has He been pleased generally to employ small and feeble instruments. It is His glory to use the weak and to perfect strength out of the mouth of babes, thereby staining the pride of the flesh. That fact has been and still is a great encouragement to us. Though no organization be behind us and our circulation is a wee one, yet by the LORD's gracious "help," this monthly messenger is feeding hungry souls far and wide. The following excerpts will rejoice our prayer-helpers.

"I delight to read through your findings in Joshua" (Lewis). "We do look forward to them. They are so faithful—so different from the teaching of the day" (Scotland). "I continue to find the ministry in the Studies very precious" (Scottish preacher). "The more I read them, the more I love them" (Glasgow). "I have received much help and searching from your writings. More and more do I feel my need of divine grace, for the heart is deceitful, the flesh is weak, and we are prone to stray" (English preacher). "What a privilege is mine to have been permitted to receive the Studies for another year. Just now I am re-reading the earlier ones on Joshua, which exactly fit my (Jordan) trial, which has not grown less. Psalm 55:22 is realized" (England). "They are most helpful and valuable. There is little strong meat in these days, and you, by God's grace, do provide that" (English preacher). "I found 'Glorious Sinai' a most helpful and refreshing study" (England). "The Studies are a real help both mornings before business and evenings after business" (Devon). "They are a wealth of Calvinistic teaching to me; and in every article, I find that the once reading is insufficient. So much, in so little compass" (Belfast). "It has always been a delight to get into a quiet place with Studies. As you unfold things new and old out of the Scriptures, it is really a feast of fat things to me" (Ireland). "We would give thanks to our God for your preservation for another year, and pray that if it be His holy will, you may be preserved for many years" (Wales).

"I am a reader of your most precious and effective ministry. I have thanked God for ever directing your magazine into my hands" (Canada). "Since reading the Studies, God has shown me for the first time our utter worthlessness, and His marvelous mercy in saving us, in a way not realized before" (Canada). "I cannot express in words the help your magazine has been to me and my ministry. Thank you for such rich meat" (Canadian preacher). "We thank God for your letters to us during the past three years, and ask His strength and blessing on your behalf in the ministry of the pen" (Minnesota). "Through your printed expositions, I have learned much, and have sought to pass it on to others" (Wisconsin preacher). "How I need the counsel, the admonition, and the good solid food they contain. There is so much to distract in this world. How profitable it is to come home after the work of the day and read the Studies" (Minneapolis). "Your work has been a tremendous help to open the Scriptures" (Pennsylvania preacher). "I have reread your articles many times and found them far superior to anything else obtainable" (Ohio). "Studies move me to the depths, and at the same time, uplift me. I read them over and over" (Oregon).

"Your magazine is next to my Bible in reading: it is real spiritual food to the soul" (Florida). "It would be impossible for me to tell you how much your writings have blessed my own heart and how deeply they have affected my ministry of the Word of God" (Illinois preacher). "Very seldom I read your magazine without the feeling to get down on my knees and offer up praise to God and not the creature" (Texas). "I find much blessing in your publication, and praise the Lord for the privilege of perusing and meditating on it" (South Dakota). "I have enjoyed the Studies for the past four years, and want to continue taking them as long as they continue on the present foundation of the Bible." "Have especially enjoyed the articles on 'Human Depravity'—your thoughts are excellent" (Georgia preacher). "I get a great blessing from the reading of your splendid magazine. It has been a source of much joy spiritually. May God bless you and your good wife" (Tennessee preacher). "For some months, I have been moved to write you of the blessings we have received from your penned thoughts. Your forthright manner refreshes, and we trust and pray, if it please God, your ministry may continue many years more. How rare to find overflowing wells of sweet water" (Missouri). "I have found your expositions of the Scriptures a great blessing to my ministry. How I praise the Lord for the insight which He has given you into His Word" (Arizona pastor). "I sincerely appreciate the faithful work that you are doing in expounding the Word, and will continue to pray the Lord's blessing upon your labours. I recently distributed extra copies among my students, and it is my impression that some of them will contact you" (Massachusetts).

“They are of much spiritual value to me. Would that I could live up to the standard set in God’s Word” (New South Wales). “I find the Studies my greatest comfort” (Queensland). “I find in every article something suited to my need” (Victoria). “The standard is still very high, and I am glad you and your wife have been able to continue this unique ministry” (New Zealand). “It is a great encouragement to get these Studies when there is no one who cares for our souls” (New Zealand). “We consider the Studies the most instructive periodical we have seen, and now that we are more isolated, we value them increasingly. The Joshua articles have been timely and helpful. We are glad to have them, as they are our only source of instruction apart from the Bible” (Australia).

