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**STUDIES**  
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*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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**Arthur W. Pink** was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886, and born again by God's Spirit in 1908. He studied briefly at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago before his pastoral work in Colorado, California, Kentucky, and South Carolina, USA, and in Sydney, Australia. In 1934, he returned to his native England, taking his final residence on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, in 1940, where he remained until his death in 1952.

*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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# LOST

What multitudes of people there are who have no concern over, in fact, no consciousness of, their woeful condition! While they do not regard themselves as perfect, yet they are not aware that there is anything seriously wrong with them. They are respectable people, law-abiding citizens, and nothing particular ever troubles their conscience. They consider that they are certainly no worse than their religious neighbours, and though they scarcely ever read the Bible or enter a church, they fully expect to go to heaven when they die. Some of them will indeed admit that they are sinners, but imagine that their good works far outnumber their bad ones. A smaller class of them were sprinkled as infants, attended a Bible class as children, said their prayers each night, and later joined the church. Nevertheless, to this moment, they have never realized that they are the enemies of God, an abomination in the eyes of His holiness, and that hell is their just deserts. How is this sad state of affairs to be accounted for? 11 Corinthians 4 tells us.

“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not” (verses 3-4). The apostle’s design was to point out that the reason why people are not saved under the preaching of the Gospel is not because of any ambiguity in it, but owing to the malignant influence of Satan. They see no beauty or glory in the Gospel, no suitableness in it unto their case, and therefore do they despise and reject it. Though Satan rules in their hearts and lives (Eph 2:2), yet it is by their own free consent. They voluntarily obey him and submit to his will. His dominion over them is maintained by keeping their minds in darkness, deceiving and deluding them, blinding them by pride, prejudice, and the workings of their own corruptions. But the fault and blame are wholly theirs, for they are determined to follow their own course at all costs, turn a deaf ear to the most earnest entreaties and solemn warnings and disregard the remonstrations of their own conscience.

Nowhere but in the Scripture of truth can we learn what is the real condition of the natural man. There his case is diagnosed with unerring precision by the divine Physician. Many are the terms used therein by the Holy Spirit to describe the solemn and direful state to which the fall has reduced every descendant of Adam; and among them probably none is more pointed and awesome than is the term *lost*. How dismal is its sound! How much is summed up in that single word! It signifies that the natural man is in a sinful, wretched, and parlous state, that he has departed from his Rule, that he is astray from God, that he has willfully and wantonly forsaken the path of duty. Lost: a traveler from time to eternity treading the road that leads to certain and everlasting destruction. A creature who has forfeited the approbation and favour of his Maker, and is now an outcast from Him. One who has squandered his substance in riotous living, and is now a spiritual bankrupt and pauper. Out of the way of peace and blessing, and utterly incapable of finding his way back to it.

The Scriptures are far from depicting fallen man as being only partly ruined, or representing his case as being so little changed that by diligent endeavour and persevering effort

he can restore himself to his original glory. "The wicked are estranged from the womb" (Psa 63:3), and every sin they commit takes them a step nearer the everlasting burnings. They are living in this world "without God," and therefore as alienated from Him, "having no hope" (Eph 2:12). Nor are there any exceptions. The Word of Him that cannot lie declares, "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psa 14:3). "Man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish" (Psa 49:12). "It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways" (Psa 95:10). You may, my reader, have been born of Christian parents and had a pious upbringing, but if you be out of Christ—no matter how much respected by your fellows, or how religious—you are *lost*, and so lost that you may utterly despair of all self-help.

How that awful fact gives the lie to a delusion which is held by so many. The general idea is that man is now on probation, and that unless he does certain things and lives a particular kind of life, he will ultimately be lost. But such a concept is at direct variance with the clear teaching of Holy Writ. As we have seen, 11 Corinthians 4:3 speaks of "them that *are* lost"—not which will be. If the reader has not surrendered to the Lordship of Christ and put his trust in the atoning blood, he is lost this very moment, and in the most imminent danger of perishing eternally. He is like a man with closed eyes sporting on the edge of a precipice. Fearful beyond words is the condition of fallen man. His case is as hopeless as that of a dying person whose disease is incurable. A lost sheep, a lost child, is a pitiful object, but what mind can gauge or pen depict the tragedy of a *lost soul*? Lost now, lost forever, unless a sovereign God intervenes and performs a miracle of mercy for its recovery.

Not only lost now, but lost when we entered this world, yea, before our existence began, and therefore did Christ announce, "The Son of man is come to save that which *was* lost" (Mat 18:11). Lost in Adam, for when the covenant head apostatized, all whom he represented fell in him and died spiritually. Thus man is lost *privatively*, for he is no longer what he was originally—in a state of uprightness, in fellowship with his Maker, able to perform His will. All of that was forfeited when he sinned in his first parent. Lost *positively*, in that man is now what he should not be, namely a defiled creature, a guilty criminal, a child of disobedience. Lost *judicially*, under the curse of God's broken Law, sentenced to death, "condemned already" (Joh 3:18), the wrath of God abiding on him (Joh 3:36). Lost *meritoriously*, for his transgressions deserve eternal death, which is the wages of sin, and fully has he earned them. Lost *experientially* in point of ability or power to recover himself, "not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). In the fallen creature, there is no help, for he is "without strength" (Rom 5:6). The moral impotency of man is such that he is utterly incapable of performing a single spiritual act: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may he also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer 13:23).

Thus man is lost in every way, and in every sense. Federally, by the imputation to him of the guilt of his representative's offence. Effectually, by the transmission of a corrupt nature from his parents. Actually, by his own evil conduct, "thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hos 13:9). Manifestatively, by the forming of evil habits, so that now he is "holden with the cords of his sins" (Pro 5:22). Lost to God, for *He* has no love, no service, no glory from

the unregenerate, so that they deprive Him of the honour of their creation. Man is lost to himself—to all reason and rational inducements, to right conceptions and perceptions, to every consideration of God's claims upon him. Lost to all sense of shame for his horrible condition in the eyes of the Holy One. So lost as to have "pleasure in unrighteousness" (2Th 2:12). Lost to piety and true happiness. Out of the way of holiness, peace, and security. Lost in sin, in ignorance, and error. Lost irretrievably, like a sheep that wanders farther and farther astray, until it perishes. Man is utterly unable to find his way back to God, for he is in total darkness—a wanderer in a pathless desert, perishing in a howling wilderness.

What makes man's case yet worse is that he has no desire to be recovered. He has perversely set himself up to be his own master, and stubbornly determines to please himself and carve out his own career. Rather than return unto God, the unregenerate would take any road which leads farther away from Him. They resent His expostulations and resist the strivings of His Spirit. If not with their lips, with their hearts, "They say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways" (Job 21:14). Yea, they would much prefer to be annihilated than yet meet God face to face, and have to give an account of themselves to Him (Rom 14:12). They hate His holiness and dread His justice, while despising His goodness and abusing His mercies. The only "life" they know has its objects in this world, and its enjoyment in gratifying the lusts of the flesh. None will know how utterly man is lost until either they experience His wrath in hell or behold His glory in heaven, and can then measure the fearful distance they have departed from Him.

Now, dear reader, if you be Christless, the above describes *your* woeful case, and, as we have stated, it sets forth the unerring diagnosis of God Himself. You are at this moment a *lost soul*. That is not merely the opinion of the writer, but the solemn sentence of your Judge. Oh, that you were so in your own apprehension. Not that that is a condition of salvation or of your accepting the Gospel offer, for it is the work of Christ for sinners, and not that of the spirit in them, which is the only foundation on which a scriptural hope may be built. Yet the whole need not a physician, but they who know themselves to be sick, and until a miracle of grace be wrought upon him, no soul can have a feeling sense of his lost condition. For until then, he is deaf to God's calls, and without any godly sorrow for sin. Does the reader say, "But I have been saved," our reply is, Make quite sure you have scriptural *proof* thereof in your heart and life.

## EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

### *19. The Commandment Belied (2:8-9)*

As our title intimates, there is a close relation between the two verses we are here to consider, in fact the latter is so intimately connected with the foregoing that we will begin by setting both of them before the reader.

*"Again, a new commandment I write unto you,  
which thing is true in him and in you: because*

*the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.  
He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his  
brother, is in darkness even until now."*

In the preceding chapter we sought to make it quite clear that the "commandment" referred to is not an entirely different one from what had previously been given, that the "new" one differs not from the old in substance, but receives this appellation from its having been renewed and beautified by Christ, and because it is now enforced by new considerations and motives. The same term is used again of the "new song" sung by the saints in heaven (Rev 5:9), and that is not a fresh one absolutely, for, as Psalm 40:3 shows, the redeemed are learning to lisp it even now.

By correctly defining "the beginning" of 2:7, as the commencement of Christian experience (in the case of the apostles, under the ministry of Christ) we learn that the precept of brotherly love is the law of the new life—the spiritual cement which in all generations has bound together the whole company and community of the saints. The old commandment received a new embodiment and manifestation in the eternal Lover of our souls, and by His example acquired a new significance and meaning. This is the more evident if we examine and ponder the context of John 13:34. There was no commandment which required Christ to wash the feet of His disciples: it was a spontaneous act, which rose above any mere deed of obedience, prompted by and as an expression of His love to His disciples—the gushing forth of His heart in a manner and measure as amazed them (Joh 13:6, 8). In like manner, love is to be the spring and motive which moves His followers to serve one another, and to evince their union with Him.

We cannot truly love Christ without also loving His brethren. Moreover, they too are joined to one another by a new bond of union, as fellow heirs and fellow travelers unto their heavenly inheritance. Therefore did the apostle go on to say, "which thing [namely the exercise of brotherly love] is true [is realized] in him and in you." The repetition of the preposition is very suggestive, marking as it does the minute accuracy of Scripture, and evidencing the Spirit's jealousy of the honour of Christ. Had John said "true in him and you," he would have affirmed something which was common to both, without any difference—true alike in Christ and His members. But the insertion of the second "in" admits of a distinction, and implies that it is true in another sense, in a modified way, in us than what is true in Him. True in Him originally, in us derivatively; in Him essentially, in us reflectively; in Him radically, in us imitatively; in Him perfectly, in us faultily. Here too He has "the pre-eminence." "Which thing is true" imports which is actually realized, which is a historical fact, a matter of present observation.

"*Because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.*" Upon which S. E. Pierce (1746-1829) said, "By which I conceive the Jewish state, and the present state of the Church is to be understood. The former dispensation is finally closed, it is past, never to return. The present Gospel state of the Church is such that the true or clear light of the Gospel and its ordinances now shineth, and will remain unshaken until our Lord's second coming in His kingdom and glory." The darkness is past because the Sun of righteousness has arisen, and a full and final revelation of God has been made unto men (Heb 1:1-2). The ineffable glory of God has been openly displayed in and by His incarnate Son. The mists of darkness or obscurity which hovered over things in the previous era have been dispelled,

and light has been shed on all its symbols. This statement is parallel with 2 Corinthians 5:17, which expresses not the great change wrought in a soul at regeneration, but the dispensational alteration effected by the appearing of Christ, namely that change of state produced by the new covenant's supplanting the old, the ordinances of the Mosaic economy being superseded by the Christian baptism and the Lord's supper.

*"Because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth."* That these words have also an experiential force, as well as a dispensational application, is clear from the fact that they are explanatory of the preceding clause—as its opening "because" makes apparent: "which thing is true in him and in you." The members must be conformed to their Head, believers must walk suitably to the Christian order. But that is possible only as a miracle of grace is wrought in them, and thus this sentence describes what takes place at their regeneration, when He who at the first "commanded the light to shine out of darkness" shone in our benighted hearts unto "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Co 4:6), and He effectually called us "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1Pe 2:9), and when He "delivered us from the power of darkness," and "translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col 1:13), so that now we are "the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not [any longer] of the night, nor of darkness" (1Th 5:5). When the light of the glorious Gospel shone with power in our souls, the darkness of unregeneracy was past.

It appears to this writer that the Holy Spirit provided us with a broad hint here that this clause possesses a double force, by employing a word which admits of an alternative rendering, for *parago* is also translated "passeth away" in verse 17. The dark shadows of Judaism are forever past, but it is more accurate to say that the darkness of nature is passing for the Christian, since his path shines "more and more unto the perfect day." The acute Calvin (1509-1564) understood the words as having a relative force rather than an absolute one, for he remarked "not that every one of the faithful becomes wise the first day as much as he ought to be (for even Paul testifies that he laboured to apprehend, Phi 3:12), but that the knowledge of Christ is sufficient to dissipate darkness. Hence daily progress is necessary and the faith of every one has its dawn before it reaches the noon-day. But as God continues the inculcation of the same doctrine, in which He bids us to make advances, the knowledge of the Gospel is justly said to be the true light."

In bringing to a conclusion our remarks upon verse 8 it should be pointed out that our English version fails to make clear the beautiful shading of the Greek. In the first clause of its second half "alethes" signifies true as opposed to lying and fictitious—cf. John 8:31, "My disciples indeed," in contrast with the many nominal ones—whereas "alethinos" in the final clause means true and substantial, as opposed to what is vague, shadowy, symbolical. Hence it occurs again and again in connection with Christ, who is "the true light" (Joh 1:9), "the true bread" (Joh 6:32), "the true tabernacle" (Heb 8:2), "the faithful and true witness" (Rev 3:14). Archbishop Richard C. Trench (1807-1886), that master of words, says that our translators have erred in not rendering "very" as an adjective as well as an adverb—as in the Nicene Creed<sup>1</sup> it is rendered "very God of very God." John Wyclif's<sup>2</sup> ver-

<sup>1</sup> **Nicene Creed** (AD 325) – an early creed or profession of faith of the Christian church. It is called "Nicene" because it was adopted in the city of Nicaea by the first ecumenical council which met there. It has been normative for the Anglican Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, and many

sion (see the Hexapla) translated John 15:1, "I am the very Vine." Thus, as Levi Palmer pointed out, "Christ is the great reality, the very light"—the substance of all the shadows and emblems of the Levitical system.

*"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now."* The pondering of this verse in the light of the whole of its context is not only a help to an understanding thereof, but is also another instance of such serving to bring out several features which are not perceptible if only a detached view be taken of it. In a previous chapter we pointed out that, contrary to the opinion of superficial students of this epistle, John presents his thoughts and develops his subjects in a most orderly manner. We also called attention to his fondness for triads and gave a number of examples of the same. Now in this second section of his letter, which runs from 2:3 to 2:12, we find both of these features exemplified. In his first division there was a threefold exposing of "liars" (1:6, 8, 10), and a threefold predication made of the saints (1:7, 9; 2:1). Likewise, in this second division there is a threefold testing of professing Christians, as is clear from the repeated "he that saith" at the beginning of 2:4, 6, 9. As others before us have pointed out, this testing is made by the commandment of God, the walk of Christ, and the operation of the Spirit, for by it alone is anyone brought into the light.

Two out of three of those professions are discovered to be worthless (verses 4 and 9), and over against them is set the two-fold "we know" of verses 3 and 5. Thus the contents and structure of the whole of this passage evince painstaking deliberation. It is clear that from verse 3 onwards the apostle had before him a particular reference to the precept of brotherly love, for though the plural ("commandments") be used in verses 3 and 4, yet he employs the singular ("word") in verse 5. It reminds us of Paul's statement in Galatians 5:14, "For all the law [in regard to our fellow men—for that was the point he was enforcing] is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Equally clear is it that if the second division be interpreted in connection with the first its theme is, He who walks "in the light" must necessarily love his brother. Thus the two divisions correspond with 1:3: "that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son," denominated "light" in 1:5. Fellowship with God is dwelt upon in 1:6-7; fellowship with believers as the consequent in 2:7-11. Clearly, then, the knowledge of God spoken of in 2:3, is that of a participation of nature, which results in conformity of character.

In view of what is stated so emphatically in verse 8 we are left in no doubt of exactly what is purported by anyone saying "he is in the light," though the same may be expressed in several ways. It is making claim that he is in communion with God in Christ (1:5, 7). It is averring that he is a born-again soul, for it is only by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit that we are made "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col

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Protestant denominations. The Nicene Council was called in the face of the Arian controversy. Arius, a Libyan presbyter in Alexandria, had declared that although the Son was divine, he was a created being and therefore not co-essential with the Father, and "there was when he was not." This made Jesus less than the Father, which challenged the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Nicene Creed explicitly affirms the co-essential divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup> John Wyclif (c.1328-1384) – English Scholastic philosopher, theologian, lay preacher, translator, reformer, and university teacher at Oxford in England, who was known as an early dissident in the Roman Catholic Church during the 14th century. He is sometimes called "The Morning Star of the Reformation," and was also an early advocate for translation of the Bible into the common language. He completed his translation directly from the Vulgate into vernacular English in the year 1382.



1:12). Thus it is to declare himself to be a real Christian. But if such a one hates his brother, his claim is invalid, for his profession is repudiated by his conduct. Such a one has mistaken an intellectual attainment for a spiritual experience. He may indeed be charmed by the magnanimous spirit of the Gospel, admire its sublime and transcendent ethics, or extol its logical doctrines and profound depths; nevertheless the very light which he eulogizes is still something outside himself, for he has never been experientially turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God (Act 26:18), nor has the day star arisen in his heart (2Pe 1:19).

*“He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness.”* His language conforms to the Christian state, but his disposition agrees not therewith. In reality he belongs to that prolific generation who “profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient” (Ti 1:16). John is referring to one who makes a public acknowledgment that he loves Him who is “the true light,” but if he did, then he would also love those who are His brethren, for Christ is in them (Gal 2:20). True, there is still much of the flesh evidenced by them, nevertheless if they be “in Christ,” then He is in them, and He cannot be hid (Mar 7:24), and where any of His perfection shine forth, however feebly, a regenerated heart is drawn out unto the same. It is impossible to be in communion with God and not to love His people. When any heart be divinely illuminated with a saving knowledge of God in Christ, it is so renovated and transformed as to produce an answerable disposition unto all others who have experienced a like miracle of grace within them.

The one who claims to be a Christian but hates any bearing the image of Christ is to be charged with making a false profession. The two things are utterly inconsistent. No matter how fully assured he may be, or how loud his profession, he is yet in a state of nature—unregenerate. He is in the kingdom of Satan, and under the power of darkness: he was born therein, and has never been delivered from the same. So far from one who hates those who belong to the Lord Jesus enjoying fellowship with Him who is the light, he is still a subject of the prince of darkness, the instigator and director of all the malice and malevolence which is vented against and upon Christ’s seed. But alas, how many there are in the assemblies and churches today who assume what is not true; yea, comparatively few who lay claim to being spiritually enlightened give real proof of the same. Note well that John did not allow that such a one was in the light, but merely that he “saith he is.” We too should be very slow in accrediting the claims of those who do not satisfactorily attest the same.

*“He that hateth his brother is in darkness.”* That all hatred is not sinful is clear from Psalm 45:7, for there it is said to the glory of the God-man, “Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness.” Really, love and hatred are but the opposite poles of the same moral principle: “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil” (Psa 97:10, and cf. 119:113)—love for the One necessarily begets hatred of the other. Hatred becomes sinful only when it is exercised against that which is entitled to be loved. Love and hatred—two of the principal influencing principles of action—are natural affections, and they are good or evil according to the objects to which they are applied and affixed. The one has its use as much as the other: aversion and shunning are as necessary as longing and pursuit. Love was made for God and all good; hatred for sin—the latter being put in man at the beginning, that he might fly from temptation and evil. As carnal men hate the truth (Psa 50:17), so the saint is

to hate all error and falsehood (Psa 119:104). "The fear of the LORD *is* to hate evil" (Pro 8:13), and therefore it is our duty to arm ourselves and take every precaution against it. There are many who forbear sin who do not abominate it.

Those powerful natural affections which God placed in man when He made him have been misplaced by the fall, so that he now loves what he ought to hate (Joh 3:19), and hates what he should love (Rom 8:7). Hence the divine work of grace is to renovate and restore the disordered affections to their right center and fix them upon their proper objects. The one or the other will inevitably regulate and dominate the life. "The human heart is a soil that must produce a crop of some sort. It cannot lie fallow. In the absence of the fruits of the Spirit, it will produce the weeds of sin...He that is not with Christ is against Him (Mat 12:30). Where life is absent death is present. The antithesis of light is darkness, and there is no twilight in the kingdom of heaven. He that is not in the light is in the darkness; and he that loves not his brother must therefore hate him. The human heart may be like the house that was cleansed and garnished, but still left vacant. Morality may, to some extent, restrain the passions and beautify the outward character; but unless love is enthroned, hatred must inevitably establish the reign of darkness" (L. Palmer).

*"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness."* The "brother" is, of course, a real child of God, for there is not a single instance in the New Testament where a fellow man as man is designated a brother. The only brotherhood mentioned therein is the Household of Faith. The one who hates him (no matter what be his profession) is unregenerate. Therein is the awful malignity of this hatred seen, in the fact that it has a child of God for its object: hence the added words "even until now." Such hatred attests the utter depravity of his moral judgment and demonstrates that he is led captive by the devil at his will. As there is an innate contrariety between virtue and vice, fire and water, so there is between the seed of the serpent and the seed of Christ (Gen 3:15). Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, it is so against all those who bear His image. There is ever that in true piety which stirs up the venom of the unregenerate. So far from one who hates the followers of Christ being in the light, he is both in and of the world (Joh 15:19).

The hatred that is spoken of here is very much more than dislike of a person, for we may pity and desire to help one whom we dislike. But such is far from being the case with one who is abhorred. From the antithetical terms used by our Lord in Matthew 6:24, it is clear that to hate is to "despise." It is to detest and hold another in utter contempt. It is not a transient motion of the affections, but a deeply rooted species of loathing. Hatred is all for injury; it is a murderous lust which desires the destruction of its object. This is clear from the cases of Cain and Abel, and of Esau and Jacob. In each of those instances hatred was called into exercise by a spirit of envy: the one being jealous because his brother's offering was accepted by God, whereas his own was rejected; the other because his brother received from their father the blessing which he coveted. The same evil crop sprang up again in Jacob's family, for because of his partiality unto Joseph; his brethren "hated him" (Gen 37:4), and took the first opportunity which came their way to get rid of him. This hatred issues from an active and implacable enmity, causing its possessor to bear ill-will and malice unto another, to loathe and abhor him. Obviously such a malignant spirit cannot possess a regenerated soul, least of all be exercised against a brother or sister in Christ.

This hatred is the exercise and manifestation of that enmity which God Himself has placed between the seed of the serpent and the seed of Christ. Whereas the Lord restrains its working in some more than in others, yet it is present in all of the unregenerate. Though it may not be vented equally upon every child of God, nevertheless all of them are its objects. The wicked hold in utter contempt everyone who treads the highway of holiness and shows forth the virtues of his Master. As those who truly love Christ love all who are manifestly His, and that because they are His, so the children of the devil hate all who are Christ's, because they are His. They despise them as simpletons who are missing the best of this life. They are envious of their fortitude under stress and their peace in the midst of tribulation. The workers of iniquity are filled with a spirit of revenge against them, because their godliness condemns their ungodliness. The righteous are thorns in their sides, and they are so in proportion as they follow the example which Christ has left them, and walk in separation from the world. Those who are in the dark detest the children of light because they refuse to "run with them to the same excess of riot," and therefore do they "speak evil" of them (1Pe 4:4).

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

### *71. Spoils of Victory (13:1-2)*

The thirteenth chapter of Joshua is another chapter which offers very little scope for the commentator, for it consists largely of geographical details. After a brief but blessed word from the Lord to Joshua himself, the first six verses contain a list of those parts of the land which had not yet been possessed by Israel, together with an assurance from God that He would drive out from before His people the inhabitants of those sections also. In the next six verses, the Lord gives orders concerning the dividing or apportioning of Canaan, naming some of the places therein and the bounds thereof. Then comes a reference to the portion which Moses had allotted unto the two and a half tribes on the eastward side of Jordan, with a detailed description of the same. Parenthetically, mention is made of Israel's slaying of Balaam, and twice over we are informed that Moses gave no inheritance to the tribe of Levi. Thus, its contents admit of no unified treatment. Its central subject being, perhaps, best described as the spoils of victory enjoyed by Israel and the respective portions therein assigned to her tribes.

Canaan was (as we have previously pointed out) at once a divine gift, yet as to their occupying of the same, it was the result of Israel's own prowess. It was bestowed upon them by free grant from God, nevertheless, it had to be conquered by them. Therein there was an accurate shadowing forth of the Christian's inheritance. That too is wholly of divine grace and mediatorial purchase, but it is not actually entered into by the heirs of promise without much effort on their part. It is at this point that theologians have so often gone wrong, by attributing either too much or too little unto the creature. Only by cleaving very closely to Holy Writ *as a whole*—and not be singling out detached fragments—are we preserved

from serious error. On the one hand, we must see to it that we return right answers to the questions, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1Co 4:7); on the other, we must give due place to such exhortations as, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luk 13:24) and "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest" (Heb 4:11); and not ignore such statements as, "knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance" (Col 3:24). Only thus will the balance of truth be preserved.

It is indeed true that the child of God has nothing good or spiritual but what the Lord has freely bestowed upon him. But does that mean he is as passive a "receiver" as the earth is when fructified by heaven's refreshing showers and genial sunshine? Great care needs to be taken in answering that question lest we contradict the Word of truth. Certainly he is no co-operator with Christ in the work of his redemption. There is not the least warrant for us to say, "God will do His part if we do ours." There is no dividing of the honours. The glory is God's alone, and we have *no ground* for boasting. Most assuredly the elect have nothing to do with their election, for God chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world, and there is not a line in His Word to show that His choice was determined by anything praiseworthy which He foresaw in them. Those ordained to be vessels of honour were "clay of the same lump" as the vessels appointed to dishonour. Nor had they a thing to do with their redemption, for all that was required to make atonement for their sins and reconcile them to God was accomplished by Christ centuries before they existed. Nor had they anything whatever to do with their regeneration, for they were dead in trespasses and sins when the Spirit quickened them into newness of life.

But it is quite wrong to infer from the above that the regenerated soul remains a passive agent. Equally wrong is it to suppose that he is now possessed of any self-sufficiency, that his new nature empowers him to perform his duty. Though he has become a living branch of the Vine, yet he is entirely dependent upon the Vine's nourishing and fructifying. But we must not confine ourselves to *that* particular figure and relationship. The Christian is a moral agent, and grace has been given him to improve. Means of grace have been provided, and he is responsible to employ the same. He has a conflict to engage him, a race to run. There is a world for him to overcome, a devil to resist, a salvation to be worked out with fear and trembling. True, in and of himself he is quite incapable of accomplishing such tasks; nevertheless, through Christ he "can do all things" (Phi 4:13). He must tread the narrow way if he would actually enter into the fullness of Life, and is required to endure unto the end if he is to be finally saved. He must fight the good fight of faith if he is to enter into the eternal inheritance. These things are just as true and real as those mentioned in the preceding paragraphs.

It must not be forgotten that Scripture itself records, and without the least condemnation or criticism, such utterances as "by the word of thy lips *I have* kept me from the paths of the destroyer" (Psa 17:4). "I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word" (Psa 119:101). "I keep under my body" (1Co 9:27). "I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith" (2Ti 4:7). Those are not carnal boastings but true statements of fact, and due place must be given to them in our theological system, or our doctrinal beliefs are very defective. True indeed, it was by divine grace that those men conducted themselves thus, yet *they* were active moral agents therein, and

not passive ciphers. Thus also was Canaan a divine gift unto Abraham and his descendants, but they had to fight—fight long and hard—in order to enter into possession of the same. True also that the Lord fought for them, and that their victories must be ascribed unto Him who so signally showed Himself strong in their behalf; nevertheless, that altered not the fact that *they* fought and subdued their foes. Both the divine and the human sides are to be recognized and owned by us.

In like manner, our salvation has the same two sides unto it. God is indeed both the Alpha and the Omega thereof, yet He deals with us as rational creatures and enforces our responsibility in connection with the same. So far as we can discover, the plants in the garden and the trees in the orchard owe their growth and fertility entirely to the Creator. But it is otherwise with believers. They are required to use the means of grace which God has appointed, and look to Him to bless the same. The vegetables and trees are incapable of taking precautions against pests and tornadoes, but *we* are obligated to avoid evil, resist temptation, and take shelter from the storm. Eternal life is a divine gift (Rom 6:23), but we are to “lay hold on” it (1Ti 6:12). The celestial inheritance is “the purchased possession” of Christ for His people (Eph 1:14), yet it is also “the reward” of service unto the Lord (Col 3:24). Grace is freely given, but we are to use it, and must improve the same if we would receive more (Luk 8:18; Mat 25:16). “Seek the LORD, and his strength: seek his face evermore” (Psa 105:4)—*there* is the meeting-place of the two sides! We have no sufficiency of our own, but if grace be duly sought (Heb 4:16), then “our sufficiency is of God” (2Co 3:5).

*“Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the LORD said unto him, Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed”* (13:1). Unlike Moses, of whom it is recorded that at the close of a still longer life, his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated (Deu 34:1), the strenuous life Joshua had lived took heavy toll of him, and the infirmities of old age had come upon him. Probably he had then reached the century mark, for he was one of the twelve originally sent forth by Moses to spy out the land, and therefore would be at least as old as Caleb, who was then eighty-five (14:10), and most likely quite a few years more, for he was but 110 at the time of his death (24:29). But it is blessed to see that, despite his increasing bodily weakness, the Lord did not desert him in his old age, but now honoured him with a special visit and a most gracious communication. And that, dear reader, is recorded for the particular comfort and encouragement of His aged pilgrims. Unto them He has given the sure promise, “And even to your old age I am he [the unchanging One]; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isa 46:4), and that blessed assurance it is their holy privilege to rest upon day by day with childlike faith.

It is to be noted that after informing His servant that he was old and stricken in years—for the Lord never flatters man, nor withholds His truth (except in judgment) from man—He did *not* say, “but there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed”; instead it was “*and there remaineth.*” Thus, He was not saying this by way of reproach. It appears to us that God so addressed Himself to Joshua on this occasion, first, to *instruct* him. To let him know that He was no Egyptian taskmaster, who imposed burdens grievous to be borne; rather did He tenderly remember that Joshua was dust. By virtue of growing frailty, he would be unfit to complete so vast a task as conquering the whole of Canaan—the major part of

which remained to be done. Second, to *humble* him. While Joshua had much ground to be thankful for, the considerable success with which the Lord had crowned his efforts, he had no reason to be elated, for the enemy was still in possession of the remoter sections of Israel's inheritance. Third, it was, as the following verses make clear, for the purpose of acquainting him with his immediate *duty*.

While the Lord took knowledge of the enfeebled frame of His servant, yet He did not for that reason encourage him to be slack. On the contrary, He assigned him a new, though much lighter task. It is not the revealed will of God that His people should spend their old age in idleness. He does not preserve them through all the dangers of youth and the trials of maturity that they should be mere cumberers of the ground. He may well suffer them to become exceedingly tottery and perhaps bedridden and entirely dependent upon others, yet even so, it is their privilege and duty to beg Him to make good in them that precious word, "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age: they shall be fat and flourishing" (Psa 92:14). They may still commune with the Lord, and manifest the effects thereof. The decay of nature is no reason why grace should languish. Even when thoroughly helpless, the fruits of patience, meekness and gratitude may be borne, and they may carry themselves as the monuments of God's goodness and the memorials of His faithfulness, and thereby "*show forth his praises*." Though the strenuous efforts of earlier years be no longer possible, the *ministry of prayer* is available unto the very end, and who can say that more will not be accomplished therein for eternity than by any other spiritual activity?

As intimated above, one of the Lord's designs in now appearing unto Joshua was to make known unto him his duty; yea, this seems to have been His leading object. What that duty consisted of was revealed in verse 7. He was to superintend in the apportioning of the land unto the nine and a half tribes—the other two and a half having already been allotted their heritage by Moses. It was most essential that *he* should be the one to perform this task. Clothed as he was with divine authority, called of God to be Israel's head, so markedly used by Him in vanquishing the armies of the Amorites and destroying their strongholds, none so well fitted as he now to divide the spoils of victory. Enjoying the confidence of the congregation, it behoved him to set about this important task while life and sufficient strength remained, and not leave unto some successor to do what could be far better and more appropriately done by himself. The decisions of the one who had in the hearing of the nation commanded the sun and the moon to stand still would not be challenged by the tribes; whereas it was not nearly so likely that they would freely accept the rulings of another. Joshua then must not delay.

"*This is the land that yet remaineth [i.e. to be possessed]: all the borders of the Philistines, and all Geshuri*" (verse 2). From there to the end of verse 6 follows a list of the more remote sections of Palestine which were still occupied by the heathen. Here, then, by clear implication, was another task assigned unto Joshua—to stir up the people unto further efforts, that while he could not personally take any further part in the fighting, he must press upon the nation the duty still devolving upon *them*. Instead of now taking their ease and being satisfied with those portions of their inheritance which had already been secured, they must continue to "*possess their possessions*" (Oba 1:17), and not miss God's best for them. It is highly probably that the great majority of Israel were quite ignorant of the extent of the land, unacquainted with the terms of the promise made by the Lord unto Abraham in

Genesis 15:18-21, etc. During their lengthy sojourn in Egypt, their ancestors had lapsed into idolatry (see Lev 17:7; Eze 20:7-8; 23:3), and so unacquainted were they with the Lord Himself that when JEHOVAH commissioned Moses to lead His people out of the house of bondage he asked, "When I...say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me to you; and they shall say to me, *What is his name?* what shall I say unto them?" (Exo 3:13).

Sufficient attention has not been paid unto what has just been pointed out. While it be far from *excusing* the conduct of Israel under Moses—in view of the wondrous deliverance the Lord wrought for them, and the signal favours shown by Him unto them at the Red Sea, at Sinai, and during the forty years that followed—yet it does supply the key which *explains* much that otherwise is altogether unaccountable. Their children had been reared in the wilderness, and now they had entered Canaan under Joshua. It is likely that they knew little or nothing of its boundaries. Thus, we consider it was for this reason that it was now necessary for the Lord to instruct Joshua by the details furnished in 13:2-5, that he might inform the people of the full extent of that land which had been given to them. The spiritual application of this unto ourselves is not difficult to perceive. Even after their regeneration, God's people are totally ignorant of the unsearchable riches that are theirs in Christ, until informed of the same from the Scriptures. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1Co 2:9). Nevertheless, it at once follows, "But God *hath revealed them* unto us by his Spirit"—in His Word, and as we diligently search that Word, we learn what those things are.

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out three reasons why the Lord commissioned Joshua to acquaint Israel with the fact that "there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed," and to amplify that statement by announcing to them all the geographical details given in verses 2-5. First, that they might be more affected with God's goodness in giving them so extensive a portion, and thereby be engaged to love and serve Him. He would have them occupied with the divine bounty, that their obedience to Him might be prompted by gratitude and not by a slavish fear. And thus it is to be with His people today. Deep appreciation of His grace and goodness is to prompt them to run in the path of His commandments. Second, that they might not be tempted to make any league or contract any dangerous familiarity with those neighbours, so as to learn their ways; but might be jealous of them, as those who kept them out of their rightful inheritance. In like manner, Christians, as they contemplate the possession purchased for them, are to conduct themselves as strangers and pilgrims in this scene, keeping their garments unspotted from the world, walking with God in separation therefrom. Third, that they might keep themselves in a posture of war, and not think of putting off their harness as long as there remained any of the land to be possessed.

In closing this article, a final word upon the application of verses 1-5 to *the aged pilgrim*. You may, dear reader, be stricken in years, nevertheless the fact must be faced that "there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." No matter what be your growth in grace or the extent of your progress in spiritual things, you are not as completely conformed to the image of Christ as you should be, nor have you as fully possessed your possessions (Oba 1:17), as it is your privilege to do. Take a leaf out of the apostle's book.

Near the close of his life, he declared, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, *I press toward* the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phi 3:13-14). Do thou the same. As for verses 2-5, we too should sit down and draw up a list of those parts of our heritage not yet experientially possessed by us—and note that verse 2 is headed by the most difficult one, for the later Scriptures show that Israel had most trouble from the Philistines. Do you ask, What good could that do? It should humble. It should prompt to more definite prayer. We read of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2Co 10:1). Are those graces made good in you?

## THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

### *8. Its Extent, Part 1*

Neither the scientist, the philosopher, nor the psychologist can correctly diagnose the fatal malady which has seized upon all mankind, and still less is any of them able to gauge the full extent thereof. For a right and true knowledge of the latter, as much as of the former, we are shut up to what the Holy Spirit has revealed in Holy Writ. There we are shown that man has become not only a fallen and corrupt creature, but a totally depraved one. That he is not only a criminal before the divine law, but a foul and repulsive object in the eyes of his Maker. There are two inseparable properties or effects in connection with sin—pollution and guilt, for neither of them can be detached from its being. Where there is sin, there is a stain. Uncleaness, ugliness, filthiness, and such-like expressions, indicate not only a property of sin objectively considered, but also the effect which it produces in its subjects. It defiles, leaving the impress of its odious features behind it, making the soul the reflection of its own hideousness. Wherever it touches, it leaves its filthy slime, rendering its subject hateful and abominable.

No representations of sin are more common in the Scriptures than those taken from its defiling effects. Throughout it is portrayed as ugly and revolting, unclean and disgusting. It is figured by leprosy, the most loathsome disease which can attack the human frame. It is likened to wounds, bruises and putrefying sores. It is compared to a cage of unclean birds. The inseparable connection of the two notions of the beautiful and good and the ugly and sinful pervades the moral teaching of both Testaments. That connection is ethical and not aesthetical. To reverse the order would be to reduce righteousness to a matter of taste, and to make regulating authority dependent upon its appeal to our sentiments. As another has said, "The aesthetical sentiment should be regarded as a reflection from the moral sphere, a transfer to the sensitive world of those perceptions which are found in their purity only in the realm of the spiritual and divine. Sin is the really and originally ugly, and nothing else is ugly except in consequence of its analogies to sin." The ugliness which it creates is its own blot. It has deranged the whole structure of the soul, and morally ulcerated man from head to foot.



“We are all as an unclean thing” (Isa 64:6) is how God’s Word describes us—foul and filthy. That pollution is a deep and unmistakable one, of a crimson dye (Isa 1:18). It is likened unto the blackness of the Ethiopian (Jer 13:23), which cannot be washed away by the nitre of repentance or the soap of reformation (Jer 2:22). It is an indelible pollution, for it is “written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of the heart” (Jer 17:1). The great deluge did not remove it from the earth, nor did the fire that came down upon Sodom wash it out. It is ineradicable, for the fire of hell to eternity will not take away the stain of sin in the souls that shall be there. It is spreading like leaven and leprosy; yea, it is universal, for it has defiled all the faculties of the inner man, so that there is “no soundness in it” (Isa 1:6). Soul and body are alike contaminated, for we read of the “filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2Co 7:1). It extends to the thoughts and imaginations, as well as to words and deeds. It is malignant and deadly—“the poison of asps” (Rom 3:13). “I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live” (Eze 16:6)—the doubling of that expression shows the deadly nature of the pollution.

Sin is as loathsome as it is criminal, exhaling foul vapours which are a stench in the nostrils of the Lord. Hence, the very day that man corrupted himself, his Maker could no longer endure him, but drove him out of the garden (Gen 3:24). The Scriptures liken man to foxes for their subtlety, to wild bulls for their intractableness, to briars and thorns for their hurtfulness, to swine for their greediness and filthiness, to bears and lions for their cruelty and bloodthirstiness, to serpents for their hatefulness. However unpleasant and forbidding this subject, it is an integral part of “the counsel of God” (Act 20:27) which His servants are not at liberty to withhold. They are not free to pick and choose their themes, still less to tone them down. Rather is each one bidden by his Master, “Speak unto them *all* that I commanded thee: be not dismayed at their faces” (Jer 1:17). Insane asylums, prisons and cemeteries are depressing sights, yet they are painful facts of human history. Refusal to consider fallen man’s condition helps no one. Until we are brought to believe and realize this truth, we shall never despair of self and look away to Another. This solemn side of the picture is indeed dark, yet it is the necessary background to redemption.

The effects of the fall are not only more terrible, but much wider-reaching than are commonly supposed. Yet this would not be the case were our thoughts formed by the teaching of Holy Writ thereon. God’s Word is plain enough. It declares that “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). Those words are as impressive as they are solemn. In Genesis 1:31, we read, “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good”—but here the Omniscient One is portrayed as taking a universal survey of the condition of mankind, and recording His righteous verdict unto their utter condemnation. They announce His unerring diagnosis of their inward state in terms which fully explain their outward conduct. The spring of all their actions is thoroughly corrupt. It is to be duly noted that the translators of the Authorized Version have given a fuller rendering in the margin, informing us that the Hebrew word signified “the whole imagination,” including the purposes and desires. The very fount of man’s being was defiled, and a most offensive sight did it present unto the Holy One.

The heart is the moral centre from which all the issues or outgoings of life proceed, and none but God knows *how* “evil” it is. The thoughts which are formed within such a heart are vain and sinful. The imagination or formation of them, their very first motions, are evil. The Hebrew word for “imagination of the heart” signifies *matrix*, the frame in which our thoughts are cast. Observe that “every imagination” is evil. No good ones are intermingled with them—they are unrelieved badness. It is not simply the outward acts, but the first movements of the soul unto an object. There we have the source from which all the wickedness of men proceeds—the corrupt humours within us are in a constant fermentation. Man’s heart is such that, left to itself, it will always be producing inordinate affections and motions. They are “*only* evil” without exception, wholly so, not a single virtuous one among them. Furthermore, they are “evil *continually*,” without intermission all the days of our lives. Such is the habitual state of every unregenerate soul, and therefore are all his works evil and dead ones.

“The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21). The former verse described human nature and conduct as it was prior to the flood; this one shows what man still is after it. The great deluge had swept away the whole of that corrupt generation to which Enoch had prophesied and Noah had preached in vain, but it had not cleansed man’s nature. That remained as vile as hitherto. Man continued to be conceived in iniquity and born in sin, and that which is bred in the bone ever comes out in the flesh. From the first moment of his existence, every descendant of Adam is a defiled creature, fit only for God’s abhorrence. His very thoughts while in embryo are essentially evil—every one of them is so. The Hebrew word for “youth” (*neurim*) is rendered “childhood” in 1 Samuel 12:2, and both personal experience and observation sadly verify this solemn fact. As Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) said, “Not a moment of man’s life wherein our hereditary corruption doth not belch its froth.”

“Behold, He putteth no trust in His saints [for they are but mutable creatures in themselves]; yea, the heavens are not clean in His sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?” (Job 15:15-16). What a description of human nature is this—obnoxious to God, corrupt in itself! Filthy indeed is man, for sin is of a defiling nature, polluting the soul with all its faculties and the body with all its members. Man is thoroughly unclean, as his life bears witness, his very righteousness being “as filthy rags”—so impure that naught but the blood of Christ can cleanse him. With such a character, man is never weary of sinning. Even when worn out by age, his lusts are still active within. As Peter expresses it, “They cannot cease from sin,” for it is their very nature to be sinful. Possessed of a disposition which craves indulgence with a greedy appetite, seeking satisfaction thereof with as passionate an earnestness as parched throats in the burning desert long for the quenching of their thirst, man delights in iniquity, and, so far as he is left to follow his inordinate propensities, he is continually seeking to take his fill thereof.

“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecc 8:11). Such is the perversity of corrupt human nature that it abuses the very patience and forbearance of God; since the divine judgment is not visited at once upon evil-doers, they set themselves against the Lord and promise themselves immunity. Thus it was with those in the days of Noah. God deferred the flood for one hundred and twenty years, giving them ample “space for repentance,” but

instead of availing themselves thereof, they regarded His threats as idle ones, and became increasingly corrupt and violent. Thus it was with Pharaoh, who only hardened his heart when respite was granted him. And thus it is still. Though the marks of the divine displeasure against our generation are multiplied, they grow more and more daring and desperate in defying God's Law, sinning with a high hand and presuming on their security.

"The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead" (Ecc 9:3). As Christ was, and is, "full of grace and truth" (Joh 1:14), the natural man is filled with unrighteousness and wickedness. He is filled with such enmity against God that as his corruptions kindle the same, so divine and spiritual things stimulate and stir it into action. That awful enmity comprises the sum of all evil. "Madness is in their heart." They are so infatuated as to seek their pleasures in the things which God hates. They cast off all the restraints of reason and conscience (cf. Jer 50:38) as their heady and violent passions press them forward into sin. And, as we have just seen above, the divine delay in taking vengeance upon them but emboldens them unto more wickedness. Who but a madman would strengthen himself against the Almighty and rush into evil, heedless of danger and disaster? Who but madmen would plan a "festival" of money-squandering and merriment when the clouds of war hang so darkly over the nation? They are maddened by their lusts, mad against piety. "After that they go to the dead" signifies more than the grave, namely gathered to their own company—the dead in sin, and not "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb 12:23).

The teaching of the Lord Jesus was, of course, in perfect harmony with that of the Old Testament. He never flattered human nature or extolled its excellencies. Instead, He painted it in the darkest of colours, announcing that He had "Come to seek and to save that which was *lost*" (Luk 19:10). For the benefit of young preachers, here is an outline. Fallen man has lost all likeness to God, all communion with God, all love for God, all true knowledge of God, all delight in God, all favour with God, all power toward God, and has thrown off all subjection to God—compare also our cover-page article. The Saviour was not deceived by religious pretences or fair profession. Even when many believed in His name as they saw the miracles which He did, "Jesus did not commit himself unto them...for he knew what was in man" (Joh 2:23-25). By declaring, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mat 9:13), He had not only intimated the need—be for His mission—for there had been no occasion for His coming among men unless they were perishing—but imported there were *none righteous* (Rom 3:10), for He called upon all to repent (Mar 1:15; Luk 13:5).

When Christ asserted, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:3), He showed how desperate is his plight, for the new birth is not a mere correcting of some defect, nor the righting of a single faculty, but an entire renovation of the soul. The same Spirit which formed Christ in the virgin's womb must form Him in our hearts to fit us for the presence of God. When he averred that "men loved darkness rather than light" (Joh 3:19), He exposed their awful depravity—that they were not only *in* the darkness, but *delighted* therein, and that "because their deeds were evil" (Joh 3:19). When He stated that "the wrath of God abideth on" the unbeliever (Joh 3:36), Christ testified to man's awful condition. When He said, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you" (Joh 5:42), He again revealed their fearful state, for since all goodness or virtue con-

sists in love to God and our neighbour, then where love be wanting, goodness or virtue has no existence. His “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44), plainly showed the moral impotency of every descendant of Adam, an impotency which consists of turpitude and baseness, namely an inveterate opposition to God, due to its bitter hatred of Him—none will seek unto one he loathes—before ever he does so, he must be given an entire change of disposition.

“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man” (Mar 7:21-23). Note well that Christ employed “heart” in the singular number, for such is the common and uniform one of all mankind. Here the Lord made known what a loathsome den is the centre of man’s being, and that out of the abundance of its evil issues all those horrible crimes—they take their rise from that fountain which is poisoned by sin, being the external expressions of corrupt nature. Man is vile and polluted. “If ye then, *being evil*” (Mat 7:11). In those words too the Son of God expressed His estimate of fallen mankind; they not only *do* that which is evil, but *are so* in their very nature. As the Psalmist said, “Their inward part is very wickedness” (verse 9). It is to be duly noted that those words were spoken by Christ not unto open enemies but to His own disciples, and that His language affirmed that by birth they were defiled both root and branch. How they abase human pride! Those who prate about the dignity and nobility of human nature fly in the face of Christ’s solemn verdict to the contrary.

“The Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him” (Joh 14:17). Oh, my reader, what a truly dreadful condition this world is in! As Christ said to the auditors of His day, “Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not” (Joh 8:45), so now—men are so infatuated with lies, they cannot receive the Spirit of truth. In those fearful words, the Son of God represented the unregenerate as not having the least degree of spiritual discernment and knowledge, which is the same thing as being completely destitute of holiness. Nothing but total depravity can render men so wholly blind to spiritual things as to be thoroughly opposed to and blankly despise and reject them.

## INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

### *Part 12*

17. *Exposition of the parables.* This is another branch of our subject unto which at least one whole article ought to be devoted, but the danger of overtaxing the patience of some of our readers renders it inadvisable. Because of the great simplicity of their nature and language, it is commonly supposed that the parables are more easily understood than any other form of scriptural instruction, when the fact is that probably more erroneous teaching has been given out through misapprehending the force of some of *their* details than is the case with anything else in the Word. Great care needs to be taken with them—especially is

it important to ascertain and then keep in mind *the scope* or leading design of each one. But instead of so doing, only too often they are approached solely for the purpose of finding apparent support for some particular doctrine or idea which the preacher desires to prove. And in consequence, not a little in them has been wrested from its original purport, and made to signify what is flatly contradicted by other passages. Here, too, the Analogy of Faith must be held steadily in view, and our interpretation of each parable made to square therewith.

The children's definition that "a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning" expresses the general idea. It is a form of teaching whereby spiritual things are represented under sensible images. Parables are virtually *word pictures*, bearing somewhat the same relation to the instruction of those to whom they are addressed as do the pictorial illustrations used in books to elucidate for the reader the printed page. From the relation to the truth presented or lesson enforced can be gathered certain important but simple and obvious principles, which need to be borne in mind in the study of our Lord's parables. First, the parable, as an illustrative picture, can only present its subject *partially*. No picture can give every aspect or exhibit every side of its object, any more than an architect's "ground plan" of a building shows its second and third storeys, far less depict it as when completed—though it might *suggest* something of them. So a parable sketches for us only certain aspects of the subject. Hence we find them in groups—all in a group representing the same subject, but each one setting forth a distinct feature of the same—as in those of Matthew 13, dealing with the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." Hence, too, those of Luke 15 show us not only grace *receiving* sinners, but seeking, finding, clothing, feasting them.

Second, parables are *subordinate* to direct teaching, being designed not for proof, but for illustration of a doctrine or duty. It is always to be deplored when professing Christians are guilty of setting one part of the Scriptures against another, but when a parable is used to nullify some plain doctrine or commandment of God, absurdity is added to irreverence. Hence, to appeal unto Matthew 18:23-25 in proof that the God of all grace may revoke His forgiveness, or to deny man's responsibility on the ground that "the lost piece of silver" of Luke 15 portrays the sinner by an inanimate object, is both foolish and profane. Third, it is equally apparent that we must seek to determine Christ's *principal aim* or the chief moral lesson which He intended to enforce in each one, yet that obvious duty is much neglected. Only too often parables are treated as though their design was left open to conjecture and their lessons to uncertain inference. Such an impious idea and loose way of handling them is clearly refuted by those which Christ Himself explained to His disciples. Thus we are not left entirely to our own resources, for those interpreted by the Lord are to be regarded as specimens—each setting forth some distinct truth, every detail possessing a significance.

Fourth, it is important to obtain a right understanding of the parabolical *representation* itself, since it supplies the basis of the spiritual instruction. Unless we understand the natural allusion, we cannot give a satisfactory exposition of the language in which it is set forth. Care has also to be taken that we do not extend the representation beyond the bounds in which it was intended to move. That representation becomes obvious when we concentrate upon the leading idea of the parable and allow its details to make that more distinct. A parable must not be broken into parts but looked at as a whole, though let it not be forgot-

ten that every detail contributes unto its central truth, there being no mere verbiage. Usually *the context* makes clear what is its purpose and purport. Thus the parable of the king taking account of his servants (Mat 18:23) was in reply to Peter's inquiry in verse 21; that of the rich fool in Luke 12 was occasioned by a spirit of covetousness on the part of one who desired to obtain a part of his brother's inheritance. Those in Luke 15 grew out of what is related in its opening verses. Parables bear upon the more fundamental aspects of duty and deportment rather than on the minute details of either.

As intimated above, much erroneous teaching has resulted from failure to heed those simple rules. Thus, certain theologians who are basically unsound upon the Atonement have argued from the parable of the prodigal son that, since no sacrifice was needed to reconcile him to the Father or provide access to the bosom of His love, God pardons absolutely, out of pure compassion. But that is a manifest wresting of the parable, for it is not as a Father but as the righteous Governor that God requires a satisfaction to His justice. Equally so is it a serious misrepresentation of the grace of the Gospel if we reason from the parable of the unmerciful servant (Mat 18:23-25) that divine grace is ever exercised unto men *except through* a propitiatory sacrifice, a reparation made to the broken Law, which God has accepted (Rom 3:24). Those parables were never intended to teach the *ground* of divine forgiveness. It is wrong to force any parable to display a whole system of theology. Some have even drawn from Christ's forbidding His disciples to pluck up the tares an argument against the local church's exercising such a strict discipline as would issue in the disfellowship of heretical or disorderly members—refuted by His teaching in Revelation 2 and 3, where such laxity is severely rebuked.

Equally dangerous and disastrous is that interpretation which has made the parable of the labourers in the vineyard teach salvation by works. Since that parable affords a notable example of the importance of heeding the setting, we will offer a few remarks thereon. After the rich young ruler's refusal to leave all and follow Christ, and His seeking to impress upon His disciples the solemn warning of that sad spectacle, Peter said, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Mat 19:22-27). The Lord returned a twofold answer. The first part, as the question was legitimate, declaring that both here and hereafter there should be abundant reward to those who followed Him (verses 28-29). In the second part, our Lord searched Peter's heart, intimating that behind his inquiry was a wrong spirit—a carnal ambition which He had so often to rebuke in the apostles, shown in their disputes as to which of them should be greatest in the kingdom and which should have the chief seats therein. There was a mercenary spirit at work in them which considered *they* had claim to higher wages than others, since they were *the first* to leave all and follow Christ, thereby magnifying their own importance and laying Him under obligations. Hence, the parable of Matthew 20:1-15 is preceded by the words, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first," and followed by similar words.

Since there be no room to doubt that the parable of the labourers in the vineyard was designed to illustrate the words in Matthew 19:30 and 20:16, it is clear that it was never intended to teach the way of salvation—to interpret it so is entirely to miss its scope. The Lord's object was manifestly to impress upon His disciples that, unless they mortified the same, the evils of the heart were of such a character as to rob the earliest and most prolonged external devotion of all value, and that the latest and briefest service unto Him

would, by reason of the absence of self-assertion, be deemed worthy in His sight of receiving reward equal to the former. Moreover, He would have them know that He would do what He would with His own—they must not dictate the terms of service. It has been justly observed by Bishop Trench in his notes on this parable that an “agreement was made by the *first* hired labourers (20:2) before they entered upon their labour—exactly the agreement which Peter wished to make, ‘What shall we have?’—while those subsequently engaged went in a simpler spirit, trusting that whatever was right and equitable the householder would give them.”

18. *Words with different meanings.* There are many terms in the Scriptures which are by no means employed uniformly. Some have diverse senses, others are given varied shades of one general sense. That does not mean they are used arbitrarily or capriciously, still less in order to confuse the minds of the simple. Sometimes it is because the original term is too full to be expressed by a single English equivalent. Sometimes it occurs with another form of emphasis. More often it is the various applications which are made of it to several objects. Thus, it is an important part of the expositor’s task to trace out those distinctions, and, instead of confounding the same, make clear each fresh sense, and thus “rightly divide the word of truth.” Thus the Greek word *Paracletos* is rendered “Comforter” of the Spirit in John’s Gospel, but “advocate” of Jesus Christ in his first Epistle (2:1). There appears to be little in common between those expressions, but when we discover that the Greek term means “one called to one’s side (to help),” the difficulty is removed, and the blessed truth is revealed that the Christian has *two* divine Helpers: a practical and a legal; one within his heart and one in heaven, one ministering to him, the other engaged for him.

The Greek word *diatheke* occurs thirty-three times; its common meaning—like the Hebrew *berith*—being “covenant.” In the Authorized Version, it is so rendered twenty times, and “testament” thirteen. Now a covenant is, strictly speaking, a contract between two parties, the one promising to do certain things upon the fulfilment of certain conditions by the other; whereas a testament or will is where one bequeaths certain things as gifts. There seems to be nothing in common between the two concepts, in fact that which is quite contrary. Nevertheless, we believe our translators rightly rendered the term *both ways*, though not always happily so. Most certainly it should be “covenant” in 11 Corinthians 3:6; Revelation 11:19. It is rightly rendered “covenant” in Hebrews 8:6 and “testament” in 9:15, for a statement is there made to illustrate a certain correspondency between the preparatory and the ultimate in God’s dispensations. A will does not become valid while the person making it is alive. It can only take effect after his decease. Hebrews 9:15-17 treats of a disposition showing the manner in which men obtain an inheritance through the riches of divine grace. Thus, instead of using *syntheke*, which more exactly expressed a covenant, the Holy Spirit designedly employed *diatheke*, which was capable of a *double* application.

Let us now consider a few examples wherein the same English word is given a number of variants. As in the well-known words of our Lord, “Let the dead bury their dead” (Mat 8:22), so the word “see” is used in two different senses in Hebrews 2:8-9, “But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus...crowned with glory, and honour,” where the first refers to open sight, the second to faith’s perception. “Ransom” is by *power* as well as by price. Sometimes God defended or delivered His people by destroying His

enemies, Proverbs 21:18; Isaiah 43:3; Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea. Many have been much perplexed by the markedly different applications made of the word "burden" in Galatians 6:2, 5: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ...Every man shall bear his own burden." The former has in view the burdens of the Christian's infirmities, which should be sympathetically, prayerfully and practically shouldered by his brethren and sisters. The latter has reference to individual responsibility, his personal state and destiny, which he must himself discharge, that cannot be shifted upon others. The Greek word for the former is "weights" or loads—calling for a friendly hand. The latter signifies a "charge" or trust imposed.

The meaning of the term "flesh" appears to be so obvious that many would regard it as quite a waste of time to look up its various connections in Scripture. It is hastily assumed that the word is synonymous with the physical body, and so no careful investigation is made. Yet, in fact, "flesh" is used in Scripture to include far more than the physical side of our being. We read of "the will of the flesh" (Joh 1:13) and "the works of the flesh" (Gal 5:19), some of which are acts of the mind. When it is said, "The Word was made flesh" (Joh 1:14), we are to understand that He took unto Himself an entire human nature, consisting of spirit (Luk 23:46), soul (Joh 12:27), and body. "In the days of his flesh" (Heb 5:7) signifies the time of His humiliation, in contrast with His present exaltation and glory. Again, the average reader of the Bible imagines that "the world" is the equivalent of the whole human race, and consequently many of the passages in which it occurs are wrongly interpreted. Many too suppose that the term "immortality" calls for no critical examination, concluding that it refers to the indestructibility of the soul. But we must never assume that we understand anything in God's Word. If the concordance be consulted, it will be found that "mortal" and "immortal" are never applied to man's soul, but always to his *body*.

"Holy" and "sanctify" represent in our English Bibles one and the same Hebrew and Greek word in the original, but they are by no means employed with a uniform significance, being given quite a variety of scope and application—hence the diverse definitions of men. The word is such a pregnant one that no single English term can express it. That it signifies more than "set apart" is clear from what is said of the Nazarite, "All the days of his separation he is *holy* unto the LORD" (Num 6:8)—"All the days of his separation he is separated" would be meaningless tautology. So of Christ, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb 7:26), where "holy" means much more than "separate." When applied to God, it imports His ineffable majesty (Isa 57:15). In many passages, it expresses a moral quality (Rom 7:12; Ti 1:8). In others, it refers to cleansing (Eph 5:26; Heb 9:13). Often it means to hallow or dedicate to God (Exo 20:11; Joh 17:19). As the term is applied to the Christian, it connotes, broadly speaking, (1) that sacred relationship Godward into which grace has brought us in Christ; (2) that blessed inward endowment by which the Spirit has made us meet for God and capacitated us to commune with Him; (3) the changed life resulting therefrom (Luk 1:75; 1Pe 1:15).

The word "judgment" is another which calls for real study. There are judgments of God's *mouth* which His servants must faithfully declare (Psa 119:13), namely the whole revelation of His will, the rule by which we are to walk and by which He will yet judge us. Those "judgments" (Exo 21:1) are the divine edicts which make known the difference between right and wrong. There are also judgments of God's *hand*, "I know, O LORD, that



thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psa 119:75). Those are for the gracious discipline of His children; whereas those upon the wicked (Eze 5:15) are judicial curses and punishments. In some passages, they express the whole of God's providential ways, many of which are "a great deep" (Psa 36:6), "unsearchable" (Rom 11:33) to any finite mind, not to be pried into by us. They intimate His sovereign rule, for "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne" (Psa 97:2), likewise the rectitude of Christ's administration (Joh 9:39). "He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles" (Isa 42:1) imports the righteous doctrine of His Gospel. In Jude 14 and 15, the reference is to the solemn transactions of the last day. "Teach me good judgment and knowledge" (Psa 119:66) is a request for discretion, a clearer apprehension to apply knowledge rightly. To "*do* justice and judgment" (Gen 18:19) signifies to be equitable and just in our dealings.

## WELCOME TIDINGS

Because of the prevalence of evil and the comparative scarcity of godliness, the saints of all ages have felt how suitable it was to make use of that prayer, "It is time for thee, LORD, to work" (Psa 119:126), though perhaps it may be questioned if they always gave those words the right sense, for in view of the next clause, "for they have made void thy law," the reference appears to be "work in judgment" rather than mercy. Be that as it may, while every renewed heart longs to see God working more manifestly and extensively in mercy, yet do we not often fail to realize that God *is now working* graciously, and withhold from Him that praise which is His due? Most frequently He works secretly and silently, unobtrusively, by the "still small voice," but none the less really. He is still gathering out His own elect, feeding His sheep, maintaining a witness to Himself in the earth. The following unsolicited testimonies from our readers bear witness thereto; and other ministries, both oral and written, are being used of Him today. Then be not backward in lifting up your hearts in thanksgiving unto Him.

"I write to acknowledge with deep thankfulness the help received through the ministry of the Word in the *Studies*...unique in written ministry today" (England). "It is good to receive such studies, which open for us the meaning of God's Word. It is a rare thing these days" (English preacher). "I still pray for you and thank the Lord for sparing you and giving help for so many years" (Ireland). "The articles on depravity are very enlightening, and reveal to me that very few indeed believe in the total depravity of man, and fewer have any idea of the far-reaching effects of the fall. They have shown me very forcibly the need of being much before God in prayer" (Scotland). "I continue to thank God for the teaching I have received through reading and re-reading your precious *Studies*. All other supplies have dried up" (Scotland). "Words of mine would fail to convey the spiritual help and blessing your magazine brings" (Wales). "My sincere thanks for your excellent articles. They have been a great help in my endeavour to serve the Master as a lay preacher" (Welsh coal-miner).

"I always look forward to their coming, and thank God for giving you the food to distribute to His hungry people. It is impossible to say which articles help most" (Canada). "Your magazine always comes as a welcome guest, and the Holy Spirit has always used your expositions to encourage me" (Canada). "It has been over twenty years since we saw you at----. I am thankful for that meeting. Your *Studies* have been a great help to us both" (New Jersey). "My wife and I thank God for the rich blessings we have received from the *Studies*, not only for the past year, but all the time we have been receiving them" (Pennsylvania). "I especially appreciate the fact that your magazine is not given over to speculations on prophecy or in holding up the filth of our times. It is by far the richest in Bible exposition of a practical type" (Minnesota preacher). "Your *Studies* have been of untold inspiration and value to me during the year" (Florida preacher). "I have found your articles very helpful in my own preaching. It is a very rare thing these days to find someone teaching the doctrine of election" (Kentucky).

"Surely the Lord has given to you the gift of providing much spiritual food to make our own by feeding upon it. The more I read your writings the more I am amazed at your Bible knowledge, and when I consider that it has been acquired through your own unceasing self-denial and application—by God's grace—I am inspired to press on in my own small way" (Oregon). "Especially have I loved your *Studies* on First John. So glad to learn *why* God leaves sin in His people" (Alabama). "I have been especially struck with the humbling truth presented in 'The Doctrine of Human Depravity.' It so puts me as a sinner in my place—the dust; and it so exalts the grace of God in seeking such a fallen creature as I" (Washington). "I am enjoying your pen ministry very much. There is very little call to repentance in preaching today" (Wisconsin).

"Your *Studies* have been of much blessing to me, and I read them over and over again. They have been a real source of spiritual refreshment for one who is serving the Lord in this part of His vineyard" (Costa Rica). "May God give you more strength to continue this blessed magazine" (Syria). "We have received much blessing from your articles, and been made to realize again and again our own nothingness and unworthiness; but also have learnt more of the faithfulness of our gracious God" (New South Wales). "We thank our Lord Jesus for the *Studies*, and trust you will both be strengthened to continue the good work. Only eternity will reveal all that it means to those who receive them and dig deeply" (Victoria). "Looking back at the twenty-nine years' issues in my possession, I marvel at your patience and other virtues that have enabled you to maintain such a continuance of faithful service for so long" (New Zealand). ❧