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**STUDIES**  
**IN THE**  
**SCRIPTURES**

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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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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# STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

### *9. The Advent of the Spirit*

It is highly important we should closely observe how that each of the Eternal Three has been at marked pains to provide for the honour of the other divine Persons, and as particular must we be to give it to Them accordingly. How careful was the Father to duly guard the ineffable glory of the Darling of His bosom when He laid aside the visible insignia of His deity and took upon Him the form of a servant. His voice was then heard more than once proclaiming, “This is my beloved Son.” How constantly did the incarnate Son divert attention from Himself and direct it to the One who had sent Him. In like manner, the Holy Spirit is not here to glorify Himself, but rather Him whose Vicar and Advocate He is (Joh 16:14). Blessed is it then to mark how jealous both the Father and the Son have been to safeguard the glory and provide for the honour of the Holy Spirit.

“If I go not away, the Comforter will not come (Joh 16:7). He will not do these works while I am here and I have committed all to Him. As My Father hath visibly ‘committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father’ (Joh 5:22-23), so I and My Father will send Him, having committed all these things to Him, that all men might honor the Holy Spirit, even as they honour the Father and the Son. Thus wary and careful are every one of the Persons to provide for the honour of each other in our hearts” (Thomas Goodwin, 1670 [1600-1680]).

The public advent of the Spirit, for the purpose of ushering in and administering the new covenant, was second in importance only unto the incarnation of our Lord, which was in order to the winding up of the old economy and laying the foundations of the new. When God designed the salvation of His elect, He appointed two great means—the gift of His Son for them and the gift of His Spirit to them, thereby each of the Persons in the

Trinity being glorified. Hence, from the first entrance of sin, there were two great heads to the promises which God gave His people—the sending of His Son to obey and die, the sending of His Spirit to make effectual the fruits of the former. Each of these divine gifts was bestowed in a manner suited both to the august Giver Himself and the eminent nature of the gifts. Many and marked are the parallels of correspondence between the advent of Christ and the advent of the Spirit.

1. God appointed that there should be a signal coming accorded unto the descent of each from heaven to earth for the performance of the work assigned them. Just as the Son was present with the redeemed Israelites long before His incarnation (Act 7:37-38; 1Co 10:4), yet God decreed for Him a visible and more formal advent, which all of His people knew of. So though the Holy Spirit was given to work regeneration in men all through the Old Testament era (Neh 9:20, etc.), and moved the prophets to deliver their messages (2Pe 1:21), nevertheless, God ordained that He should have a coming in state, in a solemn manner, accompanied by visible tokens and glorious effects.

2. Both the advents of Christ and of the Spirit were the subjects of Old Testament prediction. During the past century, much has been written upon the Messianic prophecies, but the promises which God gave concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit constitute a theme which is generally neglected. The following are among the principal pledges which God made that the Spirit should be given unto and poured out upon His saints—Psalm 68:18; Proverbs 1:23; Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 36:26, 39:29; Joel 2:28; Haggai 2:9. In them the descent of the Holy Spirit was as definitely announced as was the incarnation of the Saviour in Isaiah 7:14.

3. Just as Christ had John the Baptist to announce His incarnation and to prepare His way, so the Holy Spirit had Christ Himself to foretell His coming and to make ready the hearts of His own for His advent.

4. Just as it was not until “the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son” (Gal 4:4), so it was not until “the day of Pentecost was fully come” that God sent forth His Spirit (Act 2:1).

5. As the Son became incarnate in the holy land, Palestine, so the Spirit descended in Jerusalem.

6. Just as the coming of the Son of God into this world was auspiciously signaled by mighty wonders and signs, so the descent of God the Spirit was attended and attested by stirring displays of divine power. The advent of each was marked by supernatural phenomena—the angel choir (Luk 2:13) found its counterpart in the “sound from heaven” (Act 2:2), and the Shekinah “glory” (Luk 2:9) in the “tongues like as of fire” (Act 2:3).

7. As an extraordinary star marked the “house” where the Christ-child was (Mat 2:9), so a divine shaking marked the “house” to which the Spirit had come (Act 2:2).

8. In connection with the advent of Christ there was both a private and a public aspect to it. In like manner too was it in the giving of the Spirit. The birth of the Saviour was made known unto a few, but when He was to “be made manifest to Israel” (Joh 1:31), He was publicly identified, for at His baptism the heavens were opened, the Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove, and the voice of the Father audibly owned Him as His

Son. Correspondingly, the Spirit was communicated to the apostles privately, when the risen Saviour “breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (Joh 20:22), and later He came publicly on the day of Pentecost, when all the great throng then in Jerusalem were made aware of His descent (Act 2:32-36).

9. The advent of the Son was in order to His becoming incarnate, when the eternal Word was made flesh (Joh 1:14), so too the advent of the Spirit was in order to His becoming incarnate in Christ’s redeemed, as the Saviour had declared to them, the Spirit of truth “shall be *in* you” (Joh 14:17). This is a truly marvelous parallel. As the Son of God became man, dwelling in a *human* “temple” (Joh 2:19), so the third Person of the Trinity took up His abode *in men*, to whom it is said, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1Co 3:16). As the Lord Jesus said to the Father, “A body hast thou prepared me” (Heb 10:5), so the Spirit could say to Christ, A body has thou prepared me (see Eph 2:22).

10. When Christ was born into this world, we are told that Herod “was *troubled*, and all Jerusalem with him” (Mat 2:3). In like manner, when the Holy Spirit was given, we read, “And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were *confounded*” (Act 2:5-6).

11. It had been predicted that when Christ should appear He would be unrecognized and unappreciated (Isa 53), and so it came to pass. In like manner, the Lord Jesus declared, “The Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him” (Joh 14:17).

12. As the Messianic claims of Christ were called into question, so the advent of the Spirit was at once challenged, “They were all amazed, and *were in doubt*, saying one to another, What meaneth this?” (Act 2:12).

13. The analogy is yet closer. As Christ was termed “a winebibber” (Mat 11:19), so of those filled with the Spirit it was said, “These men are full of new wine” (Act 2:13)!

14. As the public advent of Christ was heralded by John the Baptist (Joh 1:29), so the meaning of the public descent of the Spirit was interpreted by Peter (Act 2:15-36).

15. God appointed unto Christ the executing of a stupendous work, even that of purchasing the redemption of His people. Even so the Spirit has been assigned the momentous task of effectually applying to His elect the virtues and benefits of the atonement.

16. As in the discharge of His work the Son honoured the Father (Joh 14:10), so in the fulfillment of His mission the Spirit glorifies the Son (Joh 16:13-14).

17. As the Father paid holy deference unto the Son by bidding the disciples “Hear ye him” (Mat 17:5), in like manner the Son shows respect for His Paraclete by saying, “He that hath an ear, let him *hear what the Spirit saith* unto the churches” (Rev 2:7).

18. As Christ committed His saints into the safe-keeping of the Holy Spirit (Joh 16:7; 14:16), so the Spirit will yet deliver up those saints unto Christ, as the word “receive” in

John 14:3 plainly implies. We trust that the reader will find the same spiritual delight in perusing this article, as the writer had in preparing it.

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### *69. The Faith of Joseph (11:22)*

At the early age of seventeen, Joseph was carried away into a foreign country, into a heathen land. There he remained for many years surrounded by idolators and during all that time he, probably, never came into contact with a single child of God. Moreover, in those days there was no Bible to read, for none of God's Word had then been committed to writing. Yet amid all sorts of temptations and trials, he remained true unto the Lord. Thirteen years in prison did not embitter him, being made lord over Egypt did not spoil him, evil examples all around did not corrupt him. O the mighty power of divine grace to *preserve* its favoured objects. But let the reader carefully bear in mind that, in his earliest years, Joseph had received a godly training! O how this ought to encourage Christian parents—do your part in faithfully teaching the children, and with God's blessing, it will abide with them, even though they move into a foreign land.

It may strike some of our readers that the apostle made a strange selection here from the remarkable history of Joseph. No reference is given unto his faithfulness to God in declaring what He had made known to him (Gen 37:5), his chastity (Gen 39:10), his patience under affliction (Psa 105:18-19), his wisdom and prudence (Gen 39:22; 47:14), his fear of God (Gen 42:18), his compassion (Gen 42:24), his overcoming evil with good (Gen 45:10), his reverence to his father, and that when he was advanced unto outward dignity above him (Gen 48:12), his obedience to his father (Gen 47:31). Instead, the whole of his memorable life is passed over and we are introduced to the final scene. But this seeming difficulty is at once removed if we bear in mind the Spirit's scope in this chapter, namely, to encourage the fearful and wavering Hebrews, by bringing before them striking examples of the efficacy and sufficiency of faith to carry its favoured possessor safely through every difficulty and ultimately conduct him into the promised inheritance.

Not only was there a particular reason in the case of those who first received this epistle, why the Holy Spirit should conduct them unto the expiring moments of Joseph, but there is also a wider purpose why (in this description of the whole life of faith) He should do so. Faith is a grace which honours God and stands its possessor in good stead, in death as well as in life. The worldling may appear to prosper and his journey through life seem to be smooth and easy, but how does he fare in the supreme crisis? What support is there for his heart when God calls him to pass out of time into eternity? "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?" (Job 27:8). Ignorance may exclude terror and sottishness may still the conscience, but there can be no true peace, no firm confidence, no triumphant joy for those out of Christ. Only he can die worshipping and glorifying God for His promises who possesses genuine faith.

If the kind providence of God preserves his faculties unto the end, a Christian ought not to be passive in death and die like a beast. No, this is the last time he can do anything for God on earth and therefore he should take a fresh and firm hold of His everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, (2Sa 23:5) going over in his mind the amazing grace of the Triune God toward him; the Father, in having from the beginning, chosen him unto salvation; the Son for having obeyed, suffered, and died in his room and stead; the Holy Spirit for having sought him out when dead in sins, quickened him into newness of life, shed abroad the love of God in his heart, and put a new song in his mouth. He should review the faithfulness and goodness of God toward him all through his pilgrimage. He should rest on the promises and view the glorious future awaiting him. Thereby, praise and thanksgiving will fill his soul and mouth, and God will be greatly honoured before the onlookers.

When faith is active during the dying hours of a saint, not only is his own heart spiritually upheld and comforted, but God is honoured and others are confirmed. A carnal man cannot speak well of the world when he comes to pass through the dark valley. No, he dares not commend his worldly life to others. But a godly man can speak well of God and commend His covenant to others. So it was with Jacob (Gen 48:15-16). So it was with Joshua, “Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof” (Jos 23:14).

So was it also with Joseph. He could have left to his sons nobility of blood, a rich patrimony in Egypt, but he brought them to his father to receive *his* blessing (Gen 48:12). And what was that? To invest them with the right of entering into the visible privileges of the covenant. Ah, to Joseph, the riches of Egypt were nothing in comparison with the blessings of Zion. And so again now, when his hours on earth were numbered, Joseph thinks not of the temporal position of honour which he had occupied so long, but was engaged only with the things of God and the promised inheritance. See here the power of a godly example. Joseph had witnessed the last acts of his father and now he follows in his steps. The good examples of superiors and seniors are of great force unto those who look up to them—how careful they should be, then, of their conduct! Let us seek to emulate that which is praiseworthy in our betters—Philippians 3:17; Hebrews 13:7.

“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones” (Heb 11:22). First, let us observe *the time* when Joseph’s faith was here exercised. It was during his closing hours upon earth. Most of his long life had been spent in Egypt, and during its later stages, had been elevated unto a dizzy height. For as Acts 7:10 tells us, he was made “governor” or lord over Egypt, and over all Pharaoh’s house. But neither the honours nor the luxuries which Joseph received while in the land of exile made that holy man forget the promises of God, nor bound his soul to the earth. His mind was engaged in higher things than the perishing baubles of this world. Learn then, my reader, it is only as our hearts ascend to heaven that we are able to look down with contempt upon that which this world prizes so much.

From the case of Joseph we may see that earthly honour and wealth do not *in themselves* injure. Where there is a gracious heart to manage them, they can be employed with advantage and used to God's glory. Many examples may be cited in proof of this. God has ever had a few of His saints even in Caesar's "household" (Phi 4:22). Material things are God's gifts and so must be improved unto His praise. There is as much faith, yea more, in moderating the affections under a full estate, as there is in depending upon God for supplies when we have nothing. Nevertheless, to learn "*how to abound*" (Phi 4:12) is a hard lesson. To keep the mind stayed upon God and the heart from settling down here, calls for much exercise of soul. Therefore are we exhorted, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Psa 62:10)—but be thankful for them, and seek to use them unto God's honour.

No, the poor do not have such temptations to overcome as do the rich. The poor are driven to depend upon God. They have no other alternative save abject despair. But there is more choice to those who have plenty. *Their* great danger is to lose sight of the Giver and become immersed in His gifts. Not so with Joseph. To him Egypt was nothing in comparison with Canaan. Then let us seek grace to be of his spirit. True greatness of mind is to count the highest things of earth as nothing when weighed against the things of heaven. It is a great mercy when the affluence of temporal things do not take the heart off the promises of God nor weaken faith in them, but for this there has to be a constant crying unto Him to quicken our spiritual sensibilities, keep us in close communion with Himself, wean us from things below.

But neither the riches nor the honours of Egypt could secure Joseph from death, nor did they make him unmindful or afraid of it. The time had arrived when he saw that his end was at hand and he met it with a confident spirit. And thus it should be with us. But in order to do this we must be all our lifetime preparing for *that* hour. Reader, there can be no dissembling then. Allow me to ask, Is your soul truly yielded up to God? Do you hold this world with a light hand? Are God's promises your daily food? Life is held by a very uncertain tenure. Unless the Lord returns first, death will be the last great enemy which you have to contend and you will need to have on all your armour. If you have not on the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation, what will you do in the swellings of the Jordan, when Satan is often permitted to make his fiercest attack?

"By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel" (Heb 11:22). Let us consider next *the strength* of his faith. It will be noted by the careful reader that the margin gives an alternative rendering, namely, "By faith Joseph, when he died, *remembered* the departing of the children of Israel." The Greek will allow of either translation and personally we believe that the *fullness* of the Spirit's words requires that both meanings be kept before us. That which is in view here is very striking and blessed. The word "remembered" shows that Joseph's mind was now engaged with the promise which the Lord had made to Abraham, recorded in Genesis 15:14-16. The alternative translation he "*made mention of* the departing of the children of Israel," signifies that Joseph testifies his own faith and hope in the sure words of the living God.

*At the end of Joseph's long and memorable career, his thoughts were occupied not so much with what God had wrought for him, but with what He had promised unto His*



people. In other words, he was dwelling not upon the past, but with that which was yet future. In his heart were the “things hoped for” (Heb 11:1)! More than two hundred years had passed since Jehovah had spoken what is recorded in Genesis 15. Part of the prediction which He there made had been fulfilled, but to carnal reason there seemed very little prospect that the remainder of it would come to pass. First, God had announced that the seed of Abraham should be “a stranger in a land that is not theirs” (Gen 15:13), which had been confirmed when Jacob carried all his household down into Egypt. Second, God had declared the descendants of Abraham should “serve” the Egyptians and “they shall afflict them four hundred years” (Gen 15:13), but to outward sight, *that* now appeared most unlikely. The posterity of the patriarchs had been given favour in Pharaoh’s eyes (Gen 45:16-18), the “best” of the land was set apart for their use (Gen 47:6), there they multiplied exceedingly (Gen 47:27), and so great was the respect of the Egyptians that they “mourned” for Jacob seventy days (Gen 50:3). Joseph himself was their great benefactor and deliverer from the famine. Why, then, should his descendants be hated and oppressed by them? Ah, faith does not reason, but *believes*.

Third, God had declared that He would judge the Egyptians for their afflicting of His people (Gen 15:14), which was fulfilled in the awful plagues recorded in the early chapters of Exodus. Finally, God had promised “and afterward shall they come out with great substance...in the fourth generation they shall come [into Canaan] hither again” (Gen 15:14, 16). It was unto this that the heart of Joseph was now looking forward and nothing but *real* spiritual faith could have counted upon the same. If, after his death, the Hebrews (without a leader) were to be sorely afflicted and that for a *lengthy* season, if they were to be reduced unto helpless slaves, who could reasonably hope that all this should be followed by their leaving the land of Egypt with “great substance,” and returning to the land of Canaan? Ah, FAITH is fully assured that God’s promises *will be* fulfilled, no matter how long they may be delayed.

Faith is gifted with long-distant sight and therefore is it able to look beyond all the hills and mountains of difficulty unto the shining horizon of the divine promises. Consequently, faith is blessed with patience and calmly awaits the destined hour for God to intervene and act. Therefore does it heed that word, “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come,” (Hab 2:3). Though the Hebrews were to lie under Egyptian bondage for a long season, Joseph had not a doubt but that the Lord would, in His appointed time, bring them forth with a high hand. God’s *delays*, dear reader, are not to deny our prayers and mock our hopes, but are for the disciplining of our hearts—to subdue our impatience, which wants things in our *own* way and time, to quicken us to call more earnestly upon Him, and to fit us for receiving His mercies when they are given.

God often defers His help until the very last moment. It was so with Abraham offering up Isaac. Only when his son had been bound to the altar and he had taken the knife into his hand to slay him, did God intervene. It was so with Israel at the Red Sea (Exo 14:13). It was so with the disciples in the storm, “the ship was covered with the waves,” before Christ calmed the sea (Mat 8:24-26). It was so with Peter in prison. Only a very few hours before his execution did God free him (Act 12:6-8). So, too, God works in mysterious ways *His* wonders to perform and often in a manner quite contrary to outward likelihood.

The history of Joseph affords a striking example. He was first made a slave in Egypt and this in order to his being made ruler over it—who would have thought that the prison was the way to the court! So it was with his descendants. When their tale of bricks was doubled and the straw withheld, who would have looked for deliverance! Yes, *God's* ways are strange to flesh and blood. Often He allows error to arise to clear the truth. Bondage often makes way for liberty, persecution and affliction have often proved blessings in disguise.

“And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Gen 50:24). How plainly and how blessedly does this bring out the *strength* of Joseph's faith! There was no hesitancy or doubt. He was fully assured that God cannot lie and that He would, “*surely*” make good His word. Equally certain is it that God's promises unto us will be fulfilled, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5). Therefore may the dying saint exclaim, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (Psa 23:4). So too our faith may look beyond the grave unto the glorious resurrection, and say with David, “My flesh also shall rest *in hope*” (Psa 16:9).

“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel” (Heb 11:22). Let us now take note of the *breadth* of his faith. A true Christian is known by his affection for Zion. The cause of Christ upon earth is *dearer* to him than the prosperity or disposition of his personal estate. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1Jo 3:14). Thus it was with Joseph. Before he gave commandment concerning his bones, he was first concerned with the future exodus of Israel and their settlement in Canaan! How different with the empty professor, who is ruled by self-love and has no heart for the people of God. He may be interested in the progress of *his own* denomination, but he has no concern for the Church at large. Far otherwise is it with the genuine saint, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy” (Psa 137:5-6). So Joseph, at the very time of his death, was engaged with the future happiness of God's people.

Beautiful indeed is it to see the dying Joseph unselfishly thinking about the welfare of others. O may God deliver the writer and reader from a narrow heart and a contracted spirit. True faith not only desires that it shall be well with our own soul, but with the Church at large. Behold another lovely example of this in the case of the dying daughter-in-law of Eli, the high priest, “And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken” (1Sa 4:22)—not my father-in-law is dead, not my husband has been slain, but “the glory is departed.” But most blessed of all is the case of Him of whom Joseph was here a type. As our precious Saviour drew near the cross, yea, on the very night of His betrayal, it is recorded that “having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (Joh 13:1). The interests of God's people were ever upon His heart.

Let us note how another aspect of the *breadth* of true faith was illustrated by Joseph. Faith not only believes the promises which God has given to His saints individually, but also lays hold of those given to the Church collectively. There have been many seasons when the cause of Christ on earth has languished sorely, when it has been in a low state spiritually, when eminent leaders had been all called home, and when fierce persecution

broke out against the little flock which they had left behind. Even so, they still had that sure word, "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mat 16:18). In all ages the enemy has sought to destroy the people of God, but the Lord has defeated his designs and rendered his opposition ineffectual. O for a faith to *now* lay hold of this promise, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him" (Isa 59:19).

"And gave commandment concerning his bones" (Heb 11:22). The reference here is to what is recorded in Genesis 50:25, "And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence." This brings out another characteristic of his faith—the *public avowal* of it. Joseph's faith was no secret thing, hidden in his own heart, about which others knew nothing. No, though he had occupied for so long an eminent situation, he was not ashamed to now let others know that he found his support and confidence in the promises of God. He had been of great dignity and authority among the Egyptians, and his fame for wisdom and prudence was great among the nations. It was therefore the more necessary for him to *openly renounce* all alliance with them, lest posterity think he had become an Egyptian. Had he liked and loved the Egyptians, he had wanted his tomb among them, but his heart was elsewhere.

"And gave commandment concerning his bones" (Heb 11:22). This was not a superstitious request, as though it made any difference whether our bodies be deposited in "consecrated" ground or no. Rather it was, first, to exhibit his belief in the promises of Jehovah. Though he could not go in person into the land of Canaan, yet he would have his bones carried thither and thus symbolically (as it were) take possession of it. Second, to confirm the hope of his brethren and thus draw their hearts from the goodly portion in Goshen. He would sharpen the desire of the nation to earnestly aspire after the promised redemption when he was dead. Third, to establish a public memorial, by which, on all occasions, his posterity might call to mind the truth of the promise.

Proof that this dying request of Joseph's was designed as a *public memorial* is found in noting a significant change between the wording of Genesis 50:24 and 50:25. In the former, Joseph "said unto his brethren," in the latter, he "took an oath of the children of Israel" (cf. Exo 13:19). By the heads of their tribes, he brought the whole people into this engagement—binding on after generations. Thus Joseph established this monument of his being of the favoured seed of Abraham. Joseph's requesting his brethren to "take an oath" illustrates the power of example, cf. Genesis 47:31! He made reference to his "bones" rather than to his "body," because he knew another two centuries must yet run their course. The whole transaction was an emblematic pledge of *the communion of saints*. Though the Christian at death be cut off from his loved ones on earth, he is introduced unto the spirits of the just in heaven.

## THE LIFE OF DAVID

### *21. His Final Words with Saul*

“There are few periods in the life of David in which his patient endurance was displayed more conspicuously than in his last interview with Saul. Saul had once more fallen into his power, but David again refused to avail himself of the advantage. He would not deliver himself by means that God did not sanction, nor stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed. Recognition of the excellency of David and confession of his own sin was extorted, even from the lips of Saul” (Benjamin W. Newton, 1807-1899).

In the preceding article, we followed David and his lone attendant as they entered the camp of Saul, and secured the king’s spear and the cruse of water which lay at his head. Having accomplished his purpose, David now retired from his sleeping enemies. Carrying with him clear evidence that he had been in their very midst, he determined to let them know what had transpired, for he was far from being ashamed of his conduct—when our actions are innocent, we care not who knows of them. David now stations himself within hailing distance, yet sufficiently removed that they could not come at him quickly or easily. “Then David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of an hill afar off; a great space being between them” (1Sa 26:13). This was evidently on some high point facing the “hill of Hachilah” (1Sa 26:3), a wide valley lying between.

“And David cried to the people, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, Answerest thou not, Abner?” (1Sa 26:14). David now hailed the sleeping camp with a loud voice, addressing himself particularly unto Abner, who was the general of the army. Apparently he had to call more than once before Abner was fully aroused. “Then Abner answered and said, Who art thou that criest to the king?” (1Sa 26:14). Probably those were words both of anger and contempt—annoyance at being so rudely disturbed from his rest and scorn as he recognized the voice of the speaker. Abner had so lightly esteemed David and his men that he had not considered it necessary to keep awake personally, nor even to appoint sentinels to watch the camp. The force of his question was, Whom do you think *you* are, that you should address the monarch of Israel! Let not the servants of God deem it a strange thing that those occupying high offices in the world consider them quite beneath their notice.

“And David said to Abner, Art not thou a valiant man? and who is like to thee in Israel? wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king? for there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord” (1Sa 26:15). David was not to be brow-beaten. “The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion” (Pro 28:1). Where the fear of God rules the heart, man cannot intimidate. Paul before Agrippa, Luther before the Diet of Worms, John Knox before bloody Queen Mary are cases in point. My reader, if you tremble before worms of the dust, it is because you do not tremble before God. David boldly charged Abner with his criminal neglect. First, he reminded him that he was a valiant “man,” i.e., a man in office and therefore duty bound to guard the person of the king. Second, he bantered him in view of the high position he held. Third, he informed him of how the king’s life had been in danger that night as the result of his culpable carelessness. It was tantamount to telling him he was disgraced forever.

“This thing is not good that thou hast done. As the LORD liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master, the LORD’S anointed” (1Sa 26:16). By martial law, Abner and his officers had forfeited their lives. It should be duly noted that David was not here speaking as a private person to Saul’s general, but as the servant and mouthpiece of God, as is evident from “as the LORD liveth.” “And now see where the king’s spear is, and the cruse of water that was at his bolster” (1Sa 26:16). David continued to banter him. The force of this word was, Who is *really* the king’s friend—you who neglected him and left him exposed, or I that spared him when he was at my mercy! You are stirring up Saul against me and pursuing me as one who is unfit to live, but *who*, now, is worthy to die? It was plainly a case of the biter being bit.

“And Saul knew David’s voice, and said, Is this thy voice, my son David?” (1Sa 26:17). The king at once recognized the voice of him that was denouncing Abner and addressed him in terms of cordial friendship. See here another illustration of the instability and fickleness of poor fallen man. One day thirsting after David’s blood and the next day speaking to him in terms of affection! What reliance can be placed in such a creature? How it should make us the more revere and adore the One who declares, “I am the LORD, I change not” (Mal 3:6). “And David said, It is my voice, my lord, O king” (1Sa 26:17). Very beautiful is this. Though David could not admire the variableness and treachery of Saul’s character, yet he respected his office and is here shown paying due deference to the throne. He not only owned Saul’s crown, but acknowledged that he was *his* sovereign. Tacitly, it was a plain denial that David was the rebellious insurrectionist Saul had supposed.

“And he said, Wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant? for what have I done? or what evil is in mine hand?” (1Sa 26:18). Once more (cf. 1Sa 24:11, etc.) David calmly remonstrated with the king. What ground was there for his being engaged in such a bloodthirsty mission? First, David was not an enemy, but ready to act as his “servant” and further the court’s interests. Thus he suggested it was against Saul’s own good to persecute one who was ready to do his bidding and advance his kingdom. Equally unreasonable and foolish have been other rulers who hounded the servants of God. None are more loyal to the powers that be, none do as much to really strengthen their hands, as the true ministers of Christ and therefore, they who oppose them are but forsaking their own mercies.

Second, by pursuing David, Saul was driving him from his master and lawful business, and compelling to flee the one who wished to follow him with respect. O the exceeding sinfulness of sin. It is not only unreasonable and unjust (and therefore denominated “iniquity”), but cruel, both in its nature and in its effects. Third, he asked, “What have I done? or what evil is in mine hand?” Questions which a clear conscience (and that only) is never afraid of asking. It was the height of wickedness for Saul to persecute him as a criminal, when he was unable to charge him with any crime. But let us observe how that by these honest questions David was a type of Him who challenged His enemies with “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (Joh 8:46), and again, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?” (Joh 18:23).

“Now therefore, I pray thee, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If the LORD have stirred thee up against me, let Him accept an offering” (1Sa 26:19). It is likely

that David had paused and waited for Saul to make reply to his searching queries. Receiving no answer, he continued his address. David himself now suggested two possible explanations for the king's heartless course. First, it might be that the Lord Himself was using him thus to righteously chastise His servant for some fault. It was *the divine side* of things which first engaged David's mind, "If the LORD have stirred thee up against me." This is a likelihood which should always exercise the conscience of a saint, for the Lord "doth not afflict willingly" (Lam 3:33), but usually because *we* give Him occasion to use the rod upon us. Much of this would be spared if we kept shorter accounts with God and more unsparingly judged ourselves (1Co 11:31). It is always a timely thing to say with Job, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me" (Job 10:2). Should the Lord convict him of any offense, then, "Let him accept an offering" (1Sa 26:19). David would then make his peace with God and present the required sin offering. For the Christian, this means that, having humbled himself before God, patiently confessed his sins, he now pleads afresh the merits of Christ's blood, for the remission of their governmental consequences. But secondly, if God was not using Saul to chastise David (as indeed He was), then if evil men had incited Saul to use such violent measures, the divine vengeance would assuredly overtake them—they were accursed before God. It is blessed to note the mildness of David on this occasion. So far from reviling the king and attributing his wickedness unto the evil of his own heart, every possible excuse was made for his conduct.

"But if they be the children of men, cursed be they before the LORD; for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the LORD, saying, Go, serve other gods" (1Sa 26:19). This was what pained David the most—not the being deprived of an honourable position as servant to Saul, not the being driven from home, but being exiled from Canaan and cut off from the public means of grace. No longer could he worship in the tabernacle, but forced out into the deserts and mountains, he would soon be obliged to leave the Holy Land. By their actions, his enemies were saying in effect, "Go, serve other gods," driving him into a foreign country, where he would be surrounded by temptations. It is blessed to see that it was the having to live among *idolaters*, and not merely among *strangers*, which worried him the more.

Ah, nought but the sufficiency of divine grace working in David's heart could, under such circumstances, have kept him from becoming utterly disgusted with the religion which Saul, Abner, and his fellows professed. But for *that*, David had said, "If these be 'Israelites, then let me become and die a Philistine!" Yes, and probably more than one or two readers of this article have, like the writer, passed through a similar situation. We expect unkind, unjust, treacherous, merciless treatment at the hands of the world, but when they came from those whom we have regarded as true brethren and sisters in Christ, we were shaken to the very foundation, and but for the mighty power of the Spirit working within, would have said, "If *that* is Christianity, I will have no more to do with it!" But, blessed be His name, God's grace *is* sufficient.

"Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of the LORD: for the king of Israel is come out to seek a flea, as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains" (1Sa 26:20). In these words David completed his address to Saul. First, he gave solemn warning that if he shed his blood, it would fall before the face of the Lord, and *He* would not hold him guiltless. Second, he argued that it was far beneath the dignity

of the monarch of Israel to be chasing the son of Jesse, whom he here likens unto “a flea”—an insignificant and worthless thing. Third, he appeals again to the King’s conscience by resembling his case to men hunting a “partridge”—an innocent and harmless bird which when attacked by men offers no resistance, but flies away, such had been David’s attitude. Now we are to see what effect all this had upon the king.

“Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly” (1Sa 26:21). This is more than the wretched king had acknowledged on a former occasion and yet it is greatly to be feared that he had no true sense of his wickedness or genuine repentance for it. Rather was it very similar to the remorseful cry of Judas, when he said, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood” (Mat 27:4). These words of Saul’s were the bitter lament of one who, too late, realized he had made shipwreck of his life. He owned that he had “sinned”—broken God’s law—by so relentlessly persecuting David. He besought his son to return, assuring him that he would do him no more injury, but he must have realized that *his* promises could not be relied upon. He intimated that David’s magnanimity had thoroughly melted his heart, which shows that even the worst characters are capable of recognizing the good deeds of God’s people.

“Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly” (1Sa 26:21). O what a fool he had been—in opposing the man after God’s own heart, in alienating his own son, in so sorely troubling Israel, and in bringing madness and sorrow upon himself! And how exceedingly had he “erred”—by driving away from his court the one who would have been his best friend, by refusing to learn his lesson on the former occasion (1Sa 24), by vainly attempting to fight against the Most High! Unsaved reader, suffer us to point out that these words, “I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly” are the wail of the lost in hell. Now it is too late, they realize what fools they were in despising the day of their opportunity, in neglecting their souls’ eternal interests, in living and dying in sin. They realize they “erred exceedingly” in ignoring the claims of God, desecrating His holy Sabbaths, shunning His Word, and despising His Son. Will this yet be *your* cry?

“And David answered and said, Behold the king’s spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it” (1Sa 26:22). This at once shows the estimate which David placed on the words of the king. He did not dare to trust him and return the spear in person, still less accompany him home. Good impressions quickly pass from such characters. No good words or fair professions entitle those to our confidence who have long sinned against the light. Such people resemble those spoken of in James 1:23-24, who hear the Word and do it not, and are like unto a man “beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and *straightway forgetteth* what manner of man he was.” Thus it was with Saul. He now said that he had sinned, played the fool, and erred exceedingly, yet this deterred him not from seeking unto the witch of Endor!

“The LORD render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness: for the LORD delivered thee into my hand today, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the LORD’S anointed” (1Sa 26:23). This was very solemn, David now appealed to God to be the Judge of the controversy between himself and Saul, as One who was inflexibly just to

render unto every man according to his works. David's conscience is quite clear in the matter, so he need not hesitate to ask the Righteous One to decide the issue. Good for us is it when we too are able to do likewise. In its final analysis, this verse was really a prayer. David asked for divine protection on the ground of the mercy which he had shown to Saul.

"And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the LORD, and let him deliver me out of all tribulation" (1Sa 26:24). It is to be noted that David made no direct reply to what Saul had said, but his language shows plainly that he placed no reliance in the king's promises. He does not say, "As thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in *thine* eyes," but rather, "in the eyes of the LORD." His confidence was in God alone and though further trials awaited him, he counted upon His power and goodness to bring him safely through them.

"Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail" (1Sa 26:25). Such were the final words of Saul unto David. Patient faith had so far prevailed as to extort a blessing even from its adversary. Saul owned there was a glorious future before David, for he who humbleth himself shall be exalted. There was a clear conviction in the king's mind that David was favoured by God, yet that conviction in nowise checked him in his own downward course. Convictions which lead to no amendment only increase condemnation. "So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place." (1 Sa 26:25). Thus they parted, to meet no more in this world. Saul went forward to his awful doom. David waited God's time to ascend the throne.

## HEART WORK

### *Part Three*

"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1Sa 16:7). How prone we are to be occupied with that which is evanescent, rather than with the things that abide. How ready to gauge things by our senses, instead of by our rational powers. How easily we are deceived by that which is on the surface, forgetting that true beauty lies within. How slow we are to adopt God's way of estimating. Instead of being attracted by comeliness of physical features, we should value moral qualities and spiritual graces. Instead of spending so much care, time, and money in the adorning of the body, we ought to devote our best attention unto the developing and directing of the faculties of our souls. Alas, the vast majority of our fellows live as though they had no souls and the average professing Christian gives very little serious thought unto the same.

Yes, the Lord "looketh on the heart." He sees its thoughts and intents, knows its desires and designs, beholds its motives and motions, and deals with us accordingly. The Lord discerns what qualities are in our hearts—what holiness and righteousness, what wisdom and prudence, what justice and integrity, what mercy and kindness. When such graces are



lively and flourishing, then is fulfilled that verse, "My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies" (Song 6:2). God esteems nothing so highly as holy faith, unfeigned love, and filial fear. In His sight, a "meek and quiet spirit" is of "great price" (1Pe 3:4). O to be careful in the cultivation of that which gives *Him* delight, then "keep thy heart with all diligence" (Pro 4:23).

The sincerity of our profession largely depends upon the care and conscience we have in keeping our hearts. A very searching example of this is found in 2 Kings 10:31, "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart." Those words are the more solemn because of what is said of him in the previous verse, "And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel" (1Ki 10:30). Jehu was partial in his reformation, which showed his heart was not right with God. He abhorred the worship of Baal which Ahab had fostered, but he tolerated the golden calves which Jeroboam had set up. He failed to put away all the evil.

Ah, my reader, true conversion is not only turning away from gross sin, it is the heart forsaking *all* sin. There must be no reserve, for God will not allow any idol, nor must we. Jehu went so far, but he stopped short of the vital point. He put away evil, but he did not do that which was good. He heeded not the law of the Lord to walk in it "with all his *heart*." It is greatly to be feared that those who are heedless are graceless, for where the principle of holiness is planted in the heart, it makes its possessor circumspect and desirous of pleasing God in all things—not from servile fear, but from grateful love—not by constraint, but freely—not occasionally, but constantly.

"My son, give me thine heart" (Pro 23:26). "The heart is that which the great God requires and calls for from every one of us. Whatever we give, if we do not give Him our hearts, it will not be accepted. We must set our love upon Him. Our thoughts must converse much with Him. And on Him, as our highest end, the intents of our hearts must be fastened. We must make it our own act and deed to devote ourselves to the Lord and we must be free and cheerful in it. We must not think to divide the heart between God and the world. He will have all or none, 'Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with *all* thy heart' (Deu 6:5). To this call we must readily answer, My Father, take my heart, such as it is, and make it such as it should be. Take possession of it and set up Thy throne in it" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

"Keep thy heart with all diligence" (Pro 4:23). Guard it jealously as the dwelling place of Him to whom you have given it. Guard it with the utmost vigilance, for not only is there the enemy without seeking entrance, but there is a traitor within desirous of dominion. The Hebrew for "with all diligence" literally rendered is, "above all." Above all the concerns of thy outward life, for careful as we should be as to that, it is before the eyes of men, whereas the heart is the object of *God's* holy gaze. Then "keep" or preserve it more sedulously than your reputation, your body, your estate, your money. With all earnestness and prayer, labour that no evil desire prevails or abides there, avoiding all that excites lust, feeds pride, or stirs up anger, crushing the first emotions of such evils as you would the brood of a scorpion.

Many people place great expectations in varied circumstances and conditions. One thinks he could serve God much better if he were more prospered temporally. Another, if he passed through the refining effects of poverty and affliction. One thinks his spirituality would be promoted if he could be more retired and solitary. Another, if only he could have more society and Christian fellowship. But my reader, the only way to serve God better is to be content with the place in which He has put you and therein *get a better heart!* We shall never enter into the advantages of any situation, nor overcome the disadvantages of any condition, until we fix and water the root of them in ourselves. It is out of *the heart* are the “issues of life” (Pro 4:23). and not from our surroundings. “Make the tree good, *and* his fruit good” (Mat 12:33). Get the heart right and you will soon be superior unto all “circumstances.”

“But how can I get my heart right? Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?” Answer—you are creating your own difficulty by confounding “heart” with “nature.” They are quite distinct. It is important to recognize this, for many are confused thereon. There has been such an undue emphasis upon the “two natures in the Christian,” that often it has been lost sight of that the Christian is *a person* over and above his two natures. The Scriptures make the distinction clear enough. For example, God does not bid us keep our “nature,” but He does our “heart.” We do not believe with our “nature,” but we do with our “hearts” (Rom 10:10)! God never tells us to “rend” our nature (Joe 2:13), “circumcise” our nature (Deu 10:16), “purify” our nature (Jam 4:8), but He does our “hearts”! The “heart” is the very center of my responsibility, and to deny that I am to improve and keep it, is to repudiate human accountability.

It is the devil who seeks to persuade people that they are not responsible for the state of their hearts and may no more change them than they can the stars in their courses. And the “flesh” within finds such a lie very agreeable to its case. But he who has been regenerated by the sovereign grace of God, cannot, with the Scriptures before him, give heed unto any such delusion. While he has to deplore how sadly neglected is the great task which God has set before him, while he has to bemoan his wretched failure in making his heart what it ought to be, nevertheless, he wants to do better and after his duty has been pressed upon him—as it now has upon the readers of these articles—he will daily seek grace to better discharge his duty, and instead of being totally discouraged by the difficulty and greatness of the work required, he will cry the more fervently to the Holy Spirit for His enablement.

The Christian who means business will labour to have a “willing” heart (Exo 35:5)—which acts spontaneously and gladly, not of necessity. A “perfect” heart (1Ch 29:9)—sincere, genuine, upright. A “tender” heart (2Ch 34:27)—yielding and pliable, the opposite of hard and stubborn. A “broken” heart (Psa 34:18)—sorrowing over all failure and sin. A “united” heart (Psa 86:11)—all the affections centered on God. An “enlarged” heart (Psa 119:32)—delighting in *every* part of Scripture and loving *all* God’s people. A “sound” heart (Pro 14:30)—right in doctrine and practice. A “merry” heart (Pro 15:15)—rejoicing in the Lord alway. A “pure” heart (Mat 5:8)—hating all evil. An “honest and good heart” (Luk 8:15)—free from guile and hypocrisy, willing to be searched through and through by the Word. A “single” heart (Eph 6:5)—desiring only God’s glory. A “true” heart (Heb 10:22)—genuine in all its dealings with God.

The duty of keeping the heart with the utmost diligence is binding upon the Christian at all times. There is no period or condition of life in which he may be excused from this work. Nevertheless, there are distinctive seasons, critical hours, which call for more than a common vigilance over the heart and it is a few of these which we would now contemplate, seeking help from above to point out some of the most effectual aids unto the right accomplishment of the task God has assigned us. General principles are always needful and beneficial, yet details have to be furnished if we are to know how to apply them in particular circumstances. It is this lack of definiteness which constitutes one of the most glaring defects in so much modern ministry. Mere generalizations and platitudes are substituted for specific instructions and God has good reason to complain today, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos 4:6).

1. *In times of Prosperity.* When providence smiles upon us and bestows temporal gifts with a lavish hand, then has the Christian urgent reason to keep his heart with all diligence, for that is the time we are apt to grow careless, proud, earthly. Therefore was Israel cautioned of old, "And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; *then beware* lest thou forget the LORD" (Deu 6:10-12). But they heeded not that exhortation for "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked" (Deu 32:14).

Many are the warnings furnished in Scripture. Of Uzziah, it is recorded, "When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2Ch 26:16). Of the king of Tyre, God said, "Thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches" (Eze 28:5). Of Israel, we read, "And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. *Nevertheless* they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee" (Neh 9:25-26). And again, "Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols" (Hos 8:4); "according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images" (Hos 10:1). "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me" (Hos 13:6).

Sad indeed are the above passages, the more so because we have seen such a tragic repetition of them in our own days. O the earthly-mindedness which prevailed, the indulging of the flesh, the sinful extravagance, which were seen among professing Christians while "times were good"! How practical godliness waned, how the denying of self disappeared, how covetousness, pleasure and wantonness possessed the great majority of those calling themselves the people of God. Yet great as was their sin, far greater was that of most of the preachers, who instead of warning, admonishing, rebuking, and setting before their people an example of sobriety and thrift, criminally remained silent upon the crying sins of their hearers, and themselves encouraged the reckless spending of money and the indulgence of worldly lusts. How, then, is the Christian to keep his heart from these things in times of prosperity?

First, by seriously pondering the dangerous and ensnaring temptations which attend a prosperous condition, for very, very few of those that live in the prosperity and pleasures of this world escape eternal perdition. "It is easier (said Christ) for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mat 19:24). O what multitudes have been carried to hell in the cushioned chariots of earthly wealth and ease, while a comparative handful have been whipped to heaven by the rod of affliction. Remember too that many of the Lord's own people have sadly deteriorated in seasons of worldly success. When Israel was in a low condition in the wilderness, then were they "holiness unto the LORD" (Jer 2:3), but when they fed in the fat pastures of Canaan they said, "We are lords; we will come no more unto thee" (Jer 2:31).

Second, diligently seek grace to heed that word, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Psa 62:10). Those riches may be given to try thee, not only are they most uncertain things, often taking to themselves wings and flying swiftly away, but at best they cannot satisfy the soul and only perish with the using. Remember that God values no man a jot more for these things. He esteems us by inward graces and not outward possessions, "In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Act 10:35). Third, urge upon thy soul the consideration of that awful Day of Reckoning, wherein, according to our receipt of mercies, so shall be our accountings of them, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luk 12:48). Each of us must yet give an account of our stewardship. Of every dollar we have spent, of every hour wasted, of every idle word uttered!

2. *In times of Adversity.* When providence frowns upon us, overturning our cherished plans and blasting our outward comforts, then has the Christian urgent need to look to his heart and keep it with all diligence from replying against God or fainting under His hand. Job was a mirror of patience, yet his heart was discomposed by trouble. Jonah was a man of God, yet he was peevish under trial. When the food supplies gave out in the wilderness, they who had been miraculously delivered from Egypt and who sang Jehovah's praises so heartily at the Red Sea, murmured and rebelled. It takes much grace to keep the heart calm amid the storms of life, to keep the spirit sweet when there is much to embitter the flesh, and to say "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Yet this is a Christian duty! To help thereunto.

First, consider, fellow-Christian, that despite these cross providences, God is still faithfully carrying out the great design of electing love upon the souls of His people and orders these very afflictions as means sanctified to that end. Nothing happens by chance, but all by divine counsel (Eph 1:11) and therefore it is that "All things work together *for good* to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). Ah, beloved, it will wonderfully calm thy troubled breast and sustain thy fainting heart to rest upon that blessed fact. The poor worldling may say, "The bottom has dropped out of everything," but not so the saint, for the eternal God is *his* refuge and underneath him are still the "everlasting arms." Then, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (Joh 14:27). The very afflictions which are so painful unto flesh and blood are designed for our spiritual blessing. God chastens for "our *profit*" (Heb 12:10).

It is ignorance or forgetfulness of God's loving designs which makes us so prone to chafe under His providential dealings. If faith were more in exercise we should, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations" or "trials" (Jam 1:2). Why so? Because we should discern those very trials were sent to wean our hearts from this empty world, to tear down pride and carnal security, to refine us. If, then, my Father has a design of love unto my soul, do I well to be angry with Him? If not now, later, you will see those bitter disappointments were blessings in disguise and will exclaim, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psa 119:71).

## DISPENSATIONALISM

### *4. The Israel of God*

We have now reached an aspect of our subject which the greatest confusion prevails today in many quarters. So one-sided is the teaching which has been given out about the "Jews" and "Israel," so dogmatic have been the assertions made by "dispensationalists," and so firmly have many grasped them as the very truth of God, that the minds of thousands are strongly prejudiced against anything which challenges the "new light" which it is claimed God gave unto certain men two or three generations ago, the use of which "light" has made the Bible "a new book" unto those who have received this novel method of interpreting and applying the sacred Scriptures. When we say "novel," we mean that which differs radically from the principles of exegesis employed by the servants of God in all previous ages. While it is a fact that all the truth was not recovered at the Reformation and that the godly Puritan teachers are not to be regarded as infallible, yet prudence requires us to make doubly sure of our ground, ere we take up a position which opposes much of the teaching of God's servants during that most highly favored period.

God has plainly bidden us, "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God" (1Jo 4:1). "Try" them by His unerring Word. Nor is this something which can be accomplished in a few moments, not even by those well versed in Holy Writ, still less by those having only a mere smattering of its contents. No, we need to emulate the Bereans, who "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Act 17:11). Nor is this all that is required, it is written, "The *meek* will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way" (Psa 25:9). There must be a willingness to unlearn, if we have unconsciously imbibed error, there must be the realization that none of us know anything yet as we ought to know (1Co 8:2), and therefore there must be an humbling of ourselves before God, an acknowledgment of our great ignorance, and a prayerful waiting upon Him for the guidance and help of His Spirit. Only thus shall we be enabled to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1Th 5:21).

While it be true that the Word of God is inexhaustible and that the Holy Spirit is constantly granting further openings up of its contents to the saints, so that fresh beams are ever shining forth from the Sun of truth, nevertheless, the Spirit never contradicts Himself.

Though what He vouchsafes unto one may augment that which He gave unto other teachers of the Word, yet these varied revelations *never oppose* each other. In view of this fact, the children of God are supplied with a sure rule by which they may measure the teachings of all who claim to be the servants of Christ. There is an "Analogy of Faith" (see Greek of Rom. 12:6, last clause) to which all sound teaching must necessarily conform, and anything which conflicts with its basic principles, is at once proven to be erroneous. So too there are "the footsteps of the flock" (Song 1:8), the imprints of those who have gone before and thereby we may know that any guide today who seeks to direct us along another and contrary path will only lead us *away from* the highway of truth.

In his earlier years, the writer of these articles was considerably influenced by men who loudly insisted that in the Scriptures "Jew" meant "Jew" and not a Christian, that "Israel" meant "Israel" and not the Church. These more recent "dispensationalists" were only carrying out unto their logical conclusions the principles which regulated the earlier Plymouth Brethren in their "prophetic" writings. For instance, Mr. J. N. Darby (1800-1882) declares again and again in his "Synopsis" that, "We must ever bear in mind that Israel was an earthly people." But in later years, made increasingly suspicious by the source from which these strange teachings emanated (for it is today our settled conviction that the Plymouth Brethren are radically unsound and unscriptural on many fundamental doctrines), we have prayerfully endeavoured to *test* these assertions and as we laid them in the balances of the sanctuary, we discovered that they were "found wanting." We do not ask the reader to accept *our* verdict, but to carefully weigh what follows and form a judgment of his own.

First of all let us examine this supposedly illuminating declaration that "Israel was an earthly people." To say the least, it is a very silly and senseless statement. Of course they were an "earthly people," for no one supposed they were a "lunar" people, inhabiting the moon, nor a "marine" people, living in the sea. The Egyptians, the Babylonians, and every other nation was equally an "earthly" people. Even the writer and all Christian readers are also an "earthly" people, for neither our bodies nor our souls have yet been removed to heaven! Probably it will be replied that which Mr. Darby and others meant was Israel's *inheritance* was an "earthly" one. Very well, but even *that* statement is almost as unsatisfactory and misleading, unless it be explained and amplified. Was the inheritance of the patriarchs an "earthly" one? Hebrews 11:14-16 plainly shows otherwise. Was Moses' inheritance an "earthly" one? Hebrews 11:26 clearly answers, No. Was David's? If so how could he speak of himself as "a *stranger* in the earth" (Psa 39:12; 119:19)?

Second, we now charge the "dispensationalists" with gross carelessness in failing to distinguish between things that differ. The remarkable fact is that the very men who boast so loudly of their skill to "rightly divide the word of truth" have failed wretchedly to differentiate between one who is a Jew outwardly and one who is a Jew inwardly, between the carnal Israel and the spiritual Israel. Some of the originators of the weird and erroneous scheme we are now rebutting, who were better read than their modern disciples, *were* acquainted with the distinction we have just named, (a distinction which was observed by all godly teachers from the days of the apostles until the early part of the nineteenth century), but apparently had an insatiable lust for originality and wishing to be looked up to as men who had taken a tremendous step forward in the understanding of God's Word,

they disdained the “old paths” (Jer 6:16) and hewed out a new one for themselves and their credulous admirers.

In substantiation of the simple but important distinction named above, let us now direct the careful attention of the reader to the Scriptures. “Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart” (Psa 73:1). Who are the ones referred to under the name “Israel” in this verse? The nation of Israel? all the fleshly descendants of David who were alive when Asaph penned that Psalm? Obviously no, for it most certainly could not be said of the far greater part of *them* that they had “clean hearts.” See Psalm 12:1! A “clean heart” is not natural to men, either Jews or Gentiles, for by descent from Adam all are born into this world with hearts which are foul and desperately wicked. A “clean heart” is one which has been cleansed by the sanctifying operations of divine grace (Ti 3:5), through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus on the conscience (Heb 10:22), and by a God-communicated faith (Act 15:9). Thus, the second clause of Psalm 73:1 *obliges* us to understand the “Israel” of the first clause as the *spiritual* Israel—God’s chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people—and as obviously, excludes carnal Israelites.

Again, when the Lord Jesus exclaimed concerning Nathanael, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” (Joh 1:47), exactly what did He mean? Was nothing more signified than, “Behold a fleshly descendant of Jacob?” Assuredly it was not. Christ’s language here was discriminating, as discriminating as when He said, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples *indeed*” (Joh 8:31). When the Saviour said that they were “disciples indeed,” He intimated they were such not only in name, but in fact—not only by profession, but in reality. And in like manner, when He affirmed that Nathanael was “an Israelite indeed,” He meant that he was a genuine son of Israel, a man of faith and prayer, honest and upright. The added description “in whom is no guile” supplies still further confirmation that a saved and spiritual character is there in view. Compare “Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile” (Psa 32:2).

“Behold Israel after the flesh” (1Co 10:18). Here again discriminating language is used. Why speak of “Israel after *the flesh*” unless it be for the express purpose of distinguishing them from Israel after the Spirit, that is, the regenerated and spiritual Israel? Israel “after the flesh” were the natural descendants of Abraham, but *spiritual* “Israel,” whether from Jews or Gentiles, are those who are born again and who worship God in spirit and in truth. Surely it must now be plain to every unbiased reader that the term “Israel” is used in the Scriptures in more senses than one and that it is only by noting the qualifying terms which are added that we are able to identify *which* “Israel” is in view in any given passage. Equally clear should it now be that to talk of Israel being an “earthly people” is very loose and misleading language, and badly needs modifying and defining.

Nothing but confusion can prevail if we fail to observe that many words and phrases are employed in Holy Writ with varying significations. Yea, false doctrine will be taught by those who insist that each term used by the Holy Spirit has but one and uniform meaning. Many, many examples could be furnished in illustration of this. How many have erred through making the word “flesh” always refer to the physical body. What dishonouring views of the atonement have been fostered by those who interpret “the

world” of John 3:16 and 1 John 2:2 to mean the whole human race. What shallow views are encouraged by those who see no difference between the “repentance” of Judas (Mat 27:3) and that repentance which is “unto salvation” (2Co 7:10). How much of the terrible superficiality of modern “evangelism” is due to failure in distinguishing between the intellectual “believing” of John 12:42-43 and Acts 8:13, and the heart “believing” of Romans 10:10. In the same way, untold damage has been wrought by those ignoring (or denying) the scriptural distinction between carnal “Israel” and spiritual “Israel,” between the natural seed of Abraham and his mystical children.

“Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Gal 3:7). The “children of Abraham” are of *two kinds*, physical and spiritual, those who are his by nature and those who are connected with him by grace. “To be the children of a person, in a figurative sense, is equivalent ‘to resemble him and to be involved in his fate, good or bad.’ The idea is of similarity both in character and circumstances. To be ‘the children of God’ is to be like God, and also, as the apostle states it to be, ‘heirs of God.’ To be ‘the children of Abraham’ is to resemble Abraham, to imitate his conduct, and to share his blessedness” (Dr. John Brown, 1784-1858). To which we may add, to be “the children of the wicked” (Mat 13:38) is to be conformed to his vile image, both in character and conduct (Joh 8:44) and to share his dreadful portion (Mat 25:41).

The carnal Jews of Christ’s day boasted, “Abraham is our father,” to which He made answer “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (Joh 8:39). Ah, the *spiritual* children of Abraham “*walk in the steps of that faith*” which he had (Rom 4:12). Those who are his spiritual children are “*blessed with faithful Abraham*” (Gal 3:9). The apostle was there combating the error which the Judaizers were seeking to foist upon the Gentiles, namely, that none but Jews, or Gentiles proselyted by circumcision, were the “children of Abraham” and that none but those could be partakers of his blessing. But so far from that being the case, all unbelieving Jews shut heaven against themselves, while all who believed from the heart, being united to Christ—who is “*the Son of Abraham*” (Mat 1:1)—enter into all the blessings which God covenanted unto Abraham.

The *double* significance pertaining to the expression “children” or “seed” of Abraham was very plainly intimated at the beginning, when Jehovah said unto the patriarch, “In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed *as the stars* of the heaven, and *as the sand* which is upon the sea shore” (Gen 22:17). What anointed eye can fail to see in the likening of Abraham’s seed unto the “stars of heaven” a reference to his *spiritual* children, who are partakers of the heavenly calling (Heb 3:1), and in the likening of his seed unto the “sand which is upon the seashore” a reference to his *natural* descendants, who occupied the land of Palestine! The same principle may be seen receiving exemplification again in the person of Abraham’s grandson, who was the immediate progenitor of the heads of the twelve tribes. He had a *dual* name, being first designated “Jacob,” which was his name according to nature, and then “Israel” (Gen 32:28) which was his name according to grace. How very striking to find that the *first* time the name “Israel” occurs in Scripture it was given to a man who now had a *double* name!

“Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom 9:6). In this verse the apostle begins his discussion of the



rejection of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles, and shows that God had predetermined to cast off the nation as such and extend the Gospel call to all men indiscriminately. He does this by showing God was free to act thus (vv. 6-24), that He had announced through His prophets He would do so (vv. 25-33). This was a particularly sore point with the Jew, who erroneously imagined that the promises which God had made to Abraham and his seed included all his natural descendants, that those promises were sealed unto all such by the rite of circumcision, and that those inherited all the patriarchal blessings. Hence their claim, “*We have Abraham to our father*” (Mat 3:9). It was to refute this error, common among the Jews (and now revived by the “dispensationalists”), that the apostle here writes.

First, he affirms that God’s Word was not being nullified by his teaching (Rom 9:6, first clause), no indeed. His doctrine did not contravene the divine promises, for they had never been given to men in the flesh, but rather to men in the spirit—regenerate. Second, he insisted upon an important distinction (Rom 9:6, second clause), which we are now seeking to explain and press upon our readers. He points out there are *two* kinds of “Israelites”—those who are such only by carnal descent from Jacob and others who are so spiritually, these latter being alone the “children of the promise” (Rom 9:8)—cf. Galatians 4:23, where “born after the flesh” is opposed to born “by promise”! God’s promises were made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, AS BELIEVERS, and they are the spiritual food and property of *none but believers*, Romans 4:13, 16. Until this fact be clearly grasped, we shall be all at sea in understanding scores of the Old Testament promises.

When the apostle here affirms that “They are not all *Israel*, which are *of Israel*” (Rom 9:6), he means that, not all the lineal descendants of Jacob belonged unto “the Israel *of God*” (Gal 6:16), those who were God’s people in the *highest* sense. So far from that being the case, many of the Jews were not God’s children at all (see John 8:42, 44), while many who were Gentiles by nature, have (by grace) been made “fellowcitizens with the [Old Testament] saints” (Eph 2:19) and “*blessed with faithful Abraham*” (Gal 3:9). Thus the apostle’s language in the second clause of Romans 9:6 has the force of—Not all who are members of the [ancient] visible church are members of the true church. The same thought is repeated in Romans 9:7, “Neither, because they are the [natural] seed of Abraham, are they all children”—that is the “children [or inheritors] of the promise,” as verse 7 explains—“but, in Isaac [the line of God’s election and sovereign grace] shall thy [true and spiritual] seed be called.” God’s promises were made unto the *spiritual* seed of Abraham and not to his natural descendants as such.

## THE RIGHT USE OF THE LAW

*By John Newton*

Dear Sir: You desire my thoughts on 1 Timothy 1:8, “We know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully,” and I willingly comply. I do not mean to send you a sermon on the

text, yet a little attention to method may not be improper upon this subject, though in a letter to a friend. Ignorance of the nature and design of the law is at the bottom of most religious mistakes. This is the root of self-righteousness, the grand reason why the Gospel of Christ is no more regarded, and the cause of that uncertainty and inconsistency in many, who, though they profess themselves teachers, understand not what they say, nor whereof they affirm. If we previously state what is meant by the law, and by what means we know the law to be good, I think it will, from these premises, be easy to conclude what it is to use the law lawfully.

The law, in many passages of the Old Testament, signifies the whole revelation of the will of God, as in Psalm 1:2. But the law, in a strict sense, is contradistinguished from the Gospel. Though the apostle considers it at large in his epistles to the Romans and Galatians, I think it is evident that, in the passage you have proposed, the apostle is speaking of the law of Moses. But to have a clearer view of the subject, it may be proper to look back to a more early period.

The law of God, then, is, in its largest sense, that rule or prescribed course which He has appointed for His creatures, according to their several natures and capacities, that they may answer the end for which He has created them. Thus it comprehends the inanimate creation—the wind and storm fulfill His word or law. He hath appointed the moon for seasons and the sun knoweth his time for going down and going forth, and performs all his revolutions according to his Maker's pleasure. If we could suppose the sun was an intelligent being and should refuse to shine, or should wander from the station in which God has placed him, he would then be a transgressor of the law. But there is no such discord in the natural world. The law of God in this sense, or what many choose to call the law of nature, is no other than the impression of God's power, whereby all things continue and act according to His will from the beginning, for "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Psa 33:9).

The animals, destitute of reason, are likewise under a law, that is, God has given them instincts according to their several kinds, for their support and preservation, to which they invariably conform. A wisdom unspeakably superior to all the contrivances of man, disposes their concerns and is visible in the structure of a bird's nest, or the economy of a bee hive. But this wisdom is restrained within narrow lines. They act without any remote design and are incapable either of good or evil in a moral sense.

When God created man, He taught him more than the beasts of the earth and made him wiser than the fowls of heaven. He formed him for Himself, breathed into him a spirit, immortal and incapable of dissolution, gave him a capacity not to be satisfied with any creature-goodness, endowed him with an understanding, will, affections, which qualified him for the knowledge and service of his Maker, and a life of communion with Him. The law of God, therefore, concerning man, is that rule of disposition and conduct to which a creature so constituted ought to conform, so that the end of his creation might be answered and the wisdom of God be manifested in him and by him. Man's continuance in this regular and happy state was not necessary as it is in the creatures, who, having no rational powers, have properly no choice, but act under the immediate agency of divine power. As man was capable of continuing in the state in which he was created, so he was capable of

forsaking it. He did so and sinned by eating the forbidden fruit. We are not to suppose that this prohibition was the whole of the law of Adam, so that if he had abstained from the tree of knowledge, he might in other respects have done (as we say) what he pleased. This injunction was the test of his obedience and while he regarded it, he could have no desire contrary to holiness, because his nature was holy. But when he broke through it, he broke through the whole law and stood guilty of idolatry, blasphemy, rebellion, and murder. The divine light in his soul was extinguished, the image of God defaced. He became like Satan, whom he had obeyed, and lost the power to keep that law which was connected with happiness. Yet, still the law remained in force. The blessed God could not lose His right to that reverence, love, and obedience, which must always be due to Him from His intelligent creatures. Thus Adam became a transgressor and incurred the penalty, death. But God, who is rich in mercy, according to His eternal purpose, revealed the promise of the Seed of the woman and instituted sacrifices as types of that atonement for sin, which He, in the fullness of time, should accomplish by the sacrifice of Himself.

Adam, after his fall, was no longer a public person. He was saved by grace through faith [this, we believe, is a mistake—A.W.P.], but the depravity he had brought upon human nature remained. His children and so all his posterity were born in his sinful likeness, without either ability or inclination to keep the law [though still possessing the requisite faculties—A.W.P.]. The earth was soon filled with violence. But a few in every successive age were preserved by grace and faith in the promise. Abraham was favoured with a more full and distinct revelation of the covenant of grace. He saw the day of Christ and rejoiced. In the time of Moses, God was pleased to set apart a peculiar people to Himself and to them He published His law with great solemnity at Sinai. This law consisted of two distinct parts, very different in their scope and design, though both enjoined by the same authority.

The Decalogue, or ten commandments, uttered by the voice of God Himself is *an abstract of that original law* under which man was created, but published in a prohibitory form. The Israelites, like the rest of mankind, being depraved by sin and strongly inclined to the commission of every evil, this law could not be designed as a covenant, by obedience to which men should be judged, for long before its publication, the Gospel had been preached to Abraham (Gal 3:8). But the law entered that sin might abound, that the extent, the evil, and the desert of sin might be known, for it reaches to the most hidden thoughts of the heart, requires absolute and perfect obedience, and denounces a curse upon all who continue not therein.

To this was subsequently added the ceremonial or levitical law, prescribing a variety of institutions, purifications and sacrifices, the observance of which were, during that dispensation, absolutely necessary to the acceptable worship of God. By obedience to these prescriptions, the people of Israel preserved their legal right to the blessings pronounced to them as a nation and which were not confined to spiritual worshipers only, and there were likewise ordinances (means) and helps to the blessings promised them as a nation, and which were not confined to spiritual worshipers only. And there were likewise ordinances and helps to lead those who truly loved God, and had conscience of sin, to look forward by faith to the great sacrifice, the Lamb of God, who, in the fullness of time, was to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. In both these respects the ceremonial law was abrogated by

the death of Christ. The Jews then ceased to be God's peculiar people (nationally) and justice having expiated sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness, by Christ's obedience unto death, all other sacrifices became unnecessary and vain. The Gospel supplies the place of the ceremonial law to the same advantage as the sun abundantly compensates for the twinkling stars and the feeble shining of the moonlight, which are concealed by its glory. Believers of old were relieved from the strictness of the moral law by the sacrifices which pointed to Christ. Believers under the Gospel are relieved by a direct application to the blood of the covenant. Both renounce any dependency upon the moral law for justification *and both accept it as a rule of life* in the hands of the Mediator, and are enabled to yield it a sincere, though not a perfect obedience.

If an Israelite, trusting in his observance to the moral law, had ventured to reject the ordinances of the ceremonial, he would have been cut off. In like manner, if any who are called Christians are so well satisfied with their moral duties that they see no necessity of making Christ their only hope, the law, by which they seek life, will be to them a ministration unto death. Christ and He alone, delivers us by faith in His name from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us.

The second inquiry is, How we come to know the law to be good? for by nature we do not, we cannot think so. We cannot be at enmity with God and at the same time approve of His law, rather this is the ground of our dislike to Him, that we conceive the law, by which we are to be judged, is too strict in its precepts and too severe in its threatenings, and therefore men, so far as in them lies, are for altering this law. They think it would be better if it required no more than we can perform, if it allowed us more liberty and especially if it was not armed against transgressors with the penalty of eternal punishment. This is evident from the usual pleas of awakened sinners. Some think, "I am not so bad as some others," by which they mean, God will surely make a difference and take favourable notice of what they suppose good in themselves. Others plead, "If I should not obtain mercy, what will become of the greater part of mankind!" by which they plainly intimate that it would be hard and unjust in God to punish such multitudes. Others endeavour to extenuate their sins, as Jonathan once said, "I did but taste a *little* honey, and I must die. These passions are natural to me, and must I die for indulging them?" In short, the spirit and strictness of the law, its severity and its leveling effects, confounding all seeming differences in human characters and stopping *every* mouth without distinction, are three properties of the law which the natural man cannot allow to be good.

These prejudices against the law can only be removed by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is His office to enlighten and convince the conscience, to communicate an impression of the majesty, holiness, justice, and authority of the One with whom we have to do, whereby the evil and desert of sin are apprehended. The sinner is then stripped of all his vain pretenses, is compelled to plead guilty, and must justify his Judge even though he should condemn himself. It is His office likewise to discover the grace and glory of the Saviour, as having fulfilled the law for us and as engaged by promise to enable those who believe in Him to honour it with a due obedience in their own persons. Then a change of judgment takes place and the sinner consents to the law, that it is holy, just, and good. Then the law is acknowledged to be *holy*. It manifests the holiness of God and a conformity to it is the perfection of human nature.

There can be no excellence in man, but so far as he is influenced by God's law, without it, the greater his natural powers and abilities are, he is but so much the more dangerous and mischievous. It is assented to as *just*, springing from God's indubitable right and authority over His creatures, and suited to their dependence upon Him and the abilities with which He originally endowed them. And though we, by sin, have lost those abilities [but not our original faculties—A.W.P.], His right remains unalienable and therefore He can justly punish transgressors. And as it is just in respect to God, so it is *good* for man. His obedience to the law, and the favour of God therein, being his proper happiness and it is impossible for him to be happy in any other way. Only as I have hinted, to sinners these things *must* be apprehended according to the Gospel and to their new relation by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has obeyed the law and made atonement for sin on their behalf, so that through Him they are delivered from condemnation and entitled to all the benefits of His obedience. From Him likewise they receive the law *as a rule* enforced by His own example and their unspeakable obligations to His redeeming love. This makes obedience pleasing, and the strength they derive from Him makes it easy.

We may now proceed to inquire in the last place, What is it to use the law lawfully? The expression implies that it may be used unlawfully and it is so by too many. It is not a lawful use of the law to seek justification and acceptance with God by our obedience to it, because it is not appointed for this end, or capable of answering it, in our circumstances. The very attempt is a daring impeachment of the wisdom and goodness of God, for if righteousness could come by the law, then Christ had died in vain (Gal 3:21), so that such a hope is not only groundless, but sinful and when persisted in under the light of the Gospel, is no less than a willful rejection of the grace of God.

Again, it is an unlawful use of the law, that is, an abuse of it, an abuse both of law and of Gospel, to pretend that its accomplishment by Christ releases believers from any obligation to it as a rule. Such an assertion is not only wicked, but absurd and impossible in the highest degree, for the law is founded in the relation between the Creator and creature, and must unavoidably remain in force so long as that relation subsists. While He is God, and we are creatures, in every possible or supposable circumstance, He must have an unrivaled claim to our reverence, love, trust, service, and submission. No true believer can possibly admit a thought or wish of being released from his obligation of obedience to God, in whole or in part. He will rather start from it with abhorrence. But Satan labours to drive unstable souls from one extreme to another, and has too often succeeded. Wearied with vain endeavours to keep the law, that they might obtain life by it, and afterwards taking up with a notion of the Gospel devoid of power, they have at length despised that obedience which is the honour of a Christian and essentially belongs to his character, and have abused the grace of God to licentiousness. But we have not so learned Christ.

To speak affirmatively—the law is lawfully used as a means of conviction of sin. For this purpose it was promulgated at Sinai. The law entered that sin might abound—not to make men more wicked, though occasionally, and by abusing it, it has that effect, but to make them sensible *how wicked* they are. Having God's law in our hands, we are no longer to form our judgment by the maxims and customs of the world, where evil is called good and good evil, but are to try every principle, temper, and practice by this standard. Could men be prevailed upon to do this, they would soon listen to the Gospel with attention. On

some, the Spirit of God does thus prevail. Then they earnestly make the jailer's inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" (Act 16:30). Here the work of grace begins and the sinner, convicted in his own conscience, is brought to Jesus for life.

Again, when we use the law as a glass, to behold the glory of God, we use it lawfully. His glory is eminently revealed in Christ, but much of it is with a special reference to the law and cannot be otherwise discovered. We see the perfection and excellence of the law in His life. God was glorified by His obedience as a man. What a perfect character did He exhibit! yet it is no other than a transcript of the law. Such would have been the character of Adam and all his race, had the law been duly obeyed. It appears, therefore, a wise and holy institution, fully capable of displaying that perfection of conduct by which man would have answered the end of his creation. As we see the inviolable strictness of the law in His death, the glory of God in the law is manifested. Though He was the beloved Son, and had yielded personal obedience in the utmost perfection, yet, when He stood in our place, to make atonement for sin, He was not spared. From what He endured in Gethsemane and upon the cross, we learn the meaning of that awful sentence, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Eze 18:4).

Another lawful use of the law is to consult it as a rule and pattern, by which to regulate our spirit and conversation. The grace of God, received by faith, will dispose us to obedience in general, but through remaining darkness and ignorance, we are much at a loss as to particulars. We are, therefore, sent to the law, that we may learn how to walk worthy of God, who has called us to His kingdom and glory, and every precept has its proper place and use.

Lastly, we use the law lawfully when we improve it as a test whereby to judge of the exercise of grace. Believers differ so much from what they once were, and from what many still are, that without this right use of the law, comparing themselves with their former selves or with others, they would be prone to think more highly of their attainments than they ought. But when they recur to this standard, they sink into the dust, and adopt the language of Job, "Behold I am vile" (Job 40:4) and "I cannot answer thee one of a thousand" (See Job 9:3).

From hence we may collect, in brief, how the law is good to them that use it lawfully. It furnishes them with a comprehensive and accurate view of the will of God and the path of duty. By the study of the law, they acquire an habitual spiritual taste of what is right or wrong. The exercised believer, like a skillful workman, has a rule in his hand, whereby he can measure and determine with certainty. Whereas others judge, as it were, by the eye and can only make a random guess, in which they are generally mistaken. It likewise, by reminding them of their deficiencies and short-comings, is a sanctified means of making and keeping them humble, and it exceedingly endears Jesus, the law-fulfiller to their hearts and puts them in mind of their absolute dependence upon Him every moment.

If these reflections should prove acceptable to you, I have my desire and I send them to you by the press, in hopes that the Lord may accompany them with His blessing to others. The subject is of great importance and were it rightly understood, might conduce to settle some of the angry controversies which have been lately agitated. Clearly to understand the distinction, connection, and harmony between the law and the Gospel, and their mutual

subserviency to illustrate and establish each other, is a singular privilege and a happy means of preserving the soul from being entangled by errors on the right or the left.

*I am etc., John Newton, 1765, Author of "Oh for a closer walk with God," "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound," "There is a fountain filled with blood," etc.*

## DANGEROUS DAINTIES

"When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee" (Pro 23:1). We suppose that this verse has little or no voice for many of our readers, inasmuch as there is scarcely any likelihood *they* will ever be invited to dine with the President of the U.S.A. or the King of Great Britain. Alas that such a thought should find place in any Christian's mind. Alas that the tendency to carnalize God's Word should now be so general. Alas that our spiritual interpreters of the Living Oracles have well-nigh vanished from the earth. Yet even though there be no anointed teacher available to open up the Scriptures, ought it not to be self-evident that the Holy Spirit would never have placed such a verse as this in the Word if it had no application unto the rank and file of God's people? And ought not *that* very consideration cause us to prayerfully seek for its hidden significance?

"When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee." There are other "rulers" mentioned in Scripture beside *civil* ones. Do we not read of "rulers of the congregation" (Exo 16:22), the "ruler of the synagogue" (Luk 8:41), as well as the "rulers of the darkness of this world" (Eph 6:12)? O how necessary it is to compare Scripture with Scripture! And to do that, a good concordance is essential—a book of far greater importance and value for the Christian than a dictionary. But perhaps some carping reader, who has been infected with the subtle poison of "dispensationalism," objects, "But the 'rulers of the congregation' and of the 'synagogue' were 'Jewish,' and so pertain not to gatherings professedly Christian." Alright, then turn to Matthew 24:45, where the Lord Jesus spoke of "a faithful and wise servant" whom He hath made "*ruler* over His household."

It is the last-quoted Scripture which furnishes the key to our present passage, for the purpose why Christ makes him "ruler over His household" (let the P. B.'s carefully take note of the "one man ministry" here!) is "to give them *meat* in due season" (Mat 24:45). Thus when the Holy Spirit, in Proverbs 23:1, bids us "consider diligently" what is before us when we sit to eat "with a ruler," He is referring to an *ecclesiastical* "ruler" or preacher. Now, not all of the religious "rulers" in Christendom today have been appointed by God. No indeed, far from it. Personally the writer very much doubts if two out of each thousand of the preachers, ministers, and missionaries the world over have been *divinely* called! Many of them are self-appointed, some of them sent out by men, most of them raised up by Satan.

The attentive reader of the Old and New Testaments will find that the false prophets have, in every age, greatly outnumbered the true. It is for this reason that God commands us to “believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because *many* false prophets are gone out into the world” (1Jo 4:1). Thus the admonition given in Proverbs 23:1 has always been a timely one for God’s people to pay strict attention unto, and perhaps it was never more needful to give heed unto it than in the degenerate and apostate time in which *our* lot is cast. The preaching we listen to, and in measure absorb, has precisely the same effect upon our souls as does the food we eat have upon our bodies. If wholesome, it is nutritious—if injurious, it works harm.

“When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee.” The tragic thing is that many of God’s own children today are so unspiritual, and therefore so spiritually ignorant, that *they know not how* TO “consider diligently” what is set “before them.” They know not what tests to apply, nor how to examine what they hear. So long as the preacher is “orthodox” and approved by those whom they consider “sound in the Faith,” they think his message is alright. So long as the preacher holds to the “fundamentals” of the Faith, they suppose that he is a true servant of God. So long as the preacher sticks close to the letter of Scripture, they imagine their souls are being fed with the sincere milk of the Word. Alas for the credulity of such unwary souls.

Is the reader ready to ask, “But what *other* tests are we to apply?” Let us help you to answer your own question by asking another. *What* criterion do you apply to the material food you eat? Are you satisfied if it has been prepared and cooked according to the best culinary books? Of course not. The chief thing is, *what effect* does your food produce? Does it agree with or upset your digestive system? Does it promote or injure your health? We are agreed, are we not? Very good, now apply the same rule or test unto the spiritual—or, we should say, more correctly, the “religious”—food of which you are partaking. *What effect* is it having upon your character and conduct, what is it producing in your heart and life?

But we must not stop there with a mere generalization. If souls are to be helped today, the servant of God must be precise and enter into details. Ponder carefully these questions, dear reader. Does the preaching you listen to come home to your heart in the power of the Holy Spirit? If not, what is the use of hearing it? Does the preaching you hear pierce you, search your conscience, condemn you, and make you cry, “O wretched man that I am”? Or does it add to your store of intellectual knowledge, minister to your complacency, and make you feel self-satisfied? Do not treat these questions lightly, we beg you, or you are very likely to prove your own worst enemy. Face them fairly and squarely, as in the presence of God.

“Consider *diligently*” what is set before thee from the pulpit, for it *must* do one of two things—help or harm you. It either promotes humility or feeds pride. It either stimulates to work out your own salvation “with fear and trembling,” or it fosters carnal security and self-confidence. It either drives you to your knees, or it more and more lulls your spiritual sensibilities. It either makes you more conscientious and careful about all the details of your daily life, or more careless and callous. It either causes you to cry unto God day and night for Him to work in your heart a deeper and more constant hatred of evil, or (probably



unconsciously) leads you to think more lightly of sin—excusing “little” failures, and consoling yourself with the thought that none of us reach perfection in this life; whereas God says, “Be ye holy in *all* manner of conversation” or “behaviour” (1Pe 1:15).

“And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite” (Pro 23:2). This is strong language, is it not? Yes, and the subject calls for it. So very few realize the fearful consequences which follow from a disregard of that command of Christ’s, “*Take heed what ye hear*” (Mar 4:24). False doctrine has the same effect upon the soul as poison does upon the body. But Satan appeals to the pride of so many and succeeds in making them believe *they* are immune, that they are so “well established in the truth” that listening to error cannot injure them. Therefore does the Holy Spirit say, “*Be not deceived*: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1Co 15:33), not they may, but DO! Yes, even though you are quite unaware of it.

“And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.” This is plainly a word of warning for those who are consumed with curiosity to hear every new “evangelist” or “Bible-teacher” who comes to town—those who have an insatiable appetite to sample every religious “feast” (?) that is spread in their community. *That* is what is meant by “a man given to appetite,” one who craves to hear the latest pulpit or platform sensationalist. To all such God says, Take yourself in hand, and use no half measures to check this dangerous tendency. It is at your imminent peril you disregard this divine admonition. If you disobey, Satan will either slay you or else drug, and put you soundly to sleep.

“Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat” (Pro 23:3). Yes, he has “dainties” to offer you, that is why so many are attracted to his table. These “dainties” are skillfully varied to meet different tastes. For “prophetic students,” they are spicy items from the newspapers, served under the name of “signs of the times.” But these are “deceitful meat,” for they leave the soul starved and barren. There is *no spiritual* nutriment in them! For the energetic young people, there is a pleasing presentation of “Christian service,” calling upon them to engage in “work for the Lord.” These too are “deceitful meat,” for they neither edify (build up) nor lead to a closer walking with Christ, instead, they take the eye *off Christ*, unto the “perishing multitudes,” as though God were unable to save His own elect without *our* assistance! “Keep *thy* heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23) is God’s word unto you.

For others there is a regular exposition of “*our* doctrines” which are indeed “dainties” unto those of a theological turn of mind. “Yes, but ‘our doctrines’ are *Scripture* doctrines and surely *they* cannot be ‘deceitful meat’!” Ah dear friend, Satan frequently transforms himself into “an angel of light.” He knows full well that no harm will be done unto *his* cause while doctrinal dissertations are addressed to the intellect and the conscience is not searched. Unless there be a *practical application* made of each Scripture doctrine, the heart is not touched nor the soul humbled, instead, pride is fed and the head is merely stuffed with a theoretical knowledge of the truth. Mark this well—doctrine *divorced from* experimental and practical preaching is highly injurious!

What the writer and reader most need is not “dainties,” but “bitter herbs” (Exo 12:8) to purge us of pride, independency, self-love! We need to be fed “with the bread of tears” (Psa 80:5) and “the water of affliction” (Isa 30:20). Only that ministry truly helps which

causes us to mourn before God, which brings us into the dust, which makes us loathe ourselves. Perhaps some will reply, "I want a ministry where *Christ* is exalted." Good, but do you relish a ministry which gives you to see how *un-Christlike* you are in your ways, how little you are following the example which He has left us? A faithful and well-balanced ministry of "Christ" includes His teaching upon discipleship, His claims and demands upon us, His precepts and warnings. Beware of flesh-pleasing "dainties," dear reader.

We pass over the intervening ones and come to verse 8 of Proverbs 23, "The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words." Yes, if you are really a child of God, *this* is what the Spirit will, sooner or later, work in you. He will yet make your heart nauseated with those flesh-pleasing "dainties" which you now so much relish. He will yet cause *you* to turn with disgust from that which the empty professors feed upon with such avidity. We speak from painful experience. Sheep cannot thrive on that which goats eat! If your preacher is admired and eulogized by white-washed worldlings, you may be certain that his ministry cannot help you. If large crowds enthusiastically hear him, it is a sure sign that he is not ministering the Word in the power of the Spirit!

In closing, let us point out that all we have said above about "considering diligently" what preaching you attend, applies with equal force to listening-in to the radio! "*Take heed what ye hear.*" If it does not make your conscience more tender, it will make it more callous. The same applies to your *reading*. The great majority of the "orthodox" and "sound" magazines being printed today, can only *harm* you, for they contain nothing to make you weep before God, nothing to increase the "fear of the Lord" in your soul, nothing that will lead to an increasing mortifying of your members which are upon the earth. If you have proven this to be the case, then from now on *shun them* as you would a plague. "Cease ye from man" (Isa 2:22) and feed upon the Word.

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*Ill that He blesses is our good,  
And unblest good is ill,  
And all is right that seems most wrong  
If it be His sweet will.*

