

A lit candle, a magnifying glass over an open book, and a quill pen.

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SCRIPTURES

ARTHUR W. PINK

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JANUARY

DIVINE BLESSINGS

“The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it” (Pro 10:22). Temporal blessing, as well as spiritual, comes from Him. “The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich” (1Sa 2:7). God is the sovereign Disposer of material wealth. If it be received by birth or inheritance, it is by His providence. If it comes by gift, He moved the donors to bestow. If it accumulates as the result of hard work, skill or thrift, He bestowed the talent, directed its use, and granted the success. This is made abundantly clear in the Scriptures. “The LORD hath blessed my master greatly...he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold” (Gen 24:35). “Isaac sowed in that land, and received the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him” (Gen 26:12). So it is with us. Then say not in your heart, “The might of my hand or brains has gotten me this temporal prosperity.” “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth” (Deu 8:17-18). When riches are acquired by God’s blessing on honest industry, there is no accusing conscience to sour the same, and *if* “sorrow” attend the use or enjoyment of them, it is due entirely unto our own folly. But it is upon the spiritual blessings which God bestows upon His people that we shall now write.

“Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts” (Psa 65:4). There is no doubt that the primary reference there (though not the exclusive one) is unto “the man Christ Jesus” (1Ti 2:5), for as God-man, He is what He is by the grace of election, when His humanity was chosen and fore-ordained unto union with one of the Persons in the Godhead. None other than JEHOVAH proclaimed Him “mine elect, in whom my soul delighted” (Isa 42:1). As such, He is “the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zec 13:7), the “Heir of all things” (Heb 1:2). Christ was not chosen for us, but for God: and we were chosen for Christ, to be His bride.

*“‘Christ, be My first elect,’ He said,
then chose our souls in Christ the Head.”*

The essence of all blessedness is to be in Christ, and those who partake of it do so by the act of God—as the fruit of His everlasting love unto them. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:3-4). In that initial blessing of election, all others are wrapped up, and, in due course, we are made partakers of them.

“As the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Psa 83:3), is both the duty and privilege of every sin-laden soul to come unto Christ to rest, nevertheless, it is equally true that no man can come to Him except the Father draw him (Joh 6:44). Likewise it devolves upon all who hear the Gospel to respond to that call, *“Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear and your soul shall live”* (Isa 56:3), yet how can those who are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) do so? They cannot: They must first be divinely quickened into newness of life. A beautiful figure of that divine operation is here set before us. In eastern lands, the earth is hard, dry, barren—so our natural hearts. The “dew” descends from above silently, mysteriously, imperceptibly, moistening the ground, imparting vitality unto vegetation making the mountain-side fruitful. Such is the miracle of the new birth. Life is communicated by divine fiat. Not a probationary or conditional one, not a fleeting or temporal one, but spiritual and endless, for the stream of regeneration can never dry up. When God “commands,” He *communicates* (cf. Psa 42:8; 68:28; 111:9); as the blessing is a divine favour, so the manner bestowing it is sovereign. That is solely His prerogative, for man can do nothing but beg. “Zion” is the place of all spiritual blessings (Heb 12:22-24).

“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, LORD, in the light of thy countenance” (Psa 89:15). This is one of the blessed effects of divine quickening. When one has been born of the Spirit, the eyes and ears of his soul are opened to cognize spiritual things. Observe that it is not merely they *“hear the joyful sound,”* for many do that without any experiential knowledge of its charm; but *“know”* from its message being brought home in power to their hearts. That “joyful sound” is “the glad tidings of good things” (Rom 10:15), namely, “that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1Ti 1:15). Such souls as inwardly know that heavenly music are indeed blessed, for as they are assured of free access unto God through the blood of Christ, the beneficent light of the divine countenance is beheld by them. There is probably an allusion in Psalm 89:15. First, the sound which was made by Aaron as he went into the holy place and came out thereof (Exo 28:33-35), which was indeed a “joyful sound” unto the people of God, for it gave evidence that their high priest was engaged before the Lord on their behalf. Second, a general reference to the sound of the sacred trumpets which called Israel to their solemn feasts (Num 10:10). Third, a more specific one to the trumpet of jubilee (Lev 25:9-10), which proclaimed liberty to bondmen and restoration of their inheritance to them who had forfeited it. So the announcement of the Gospel of liberty to sin captives is music to those given ears to hear.

“Blessed are all they that put their trust in him” (Psa 2:12). The critical reader will observe that we are following a strictly logical order. First, election is the foundation blessing, being “unto salvation” and including all the means thereof (2Th 2:13). Second, the bestowment of eternal life which capacitates the favoured recipient to welcome experientially the joyful sound of the Gospel. And now there is a personal and saving embracing thereof. It is to be carefully noted that the words of our present text are preceded by “Kiss the Son,” which signifies: Bow in submission before His sceptre, yield to His kingly rule, render allegiance to Him (1Sa 10:1; 1Ki 19:18). It is most important to note that order—and still more so to put it into practice: for Christ must be received as “Lord” (Col 2:6) *before* He can be received as Savior: note the order in 2 Peter 1:11; 2:20; 3:18. They “put their trust in him” signifies to take refuge in—they repudiate their own righteousness and evince their confidence in Him by committing themselves to His keeping for time and eternity. His gospel is their warrant for doing so, His veracity their security.

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Psa 32:1). This is an intrinsic part of the blessedness of putting our trust in Him. The “joyful sound” has assured them that “Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6), and that He will by no means cast out anyone who

comes unto Him (Joh 6:37). Therefore do they express their faith in Christ by fleeing to Him for refuge. Blessed indeed are such, for, having surrendered to His lordship and placed their reliance in His atoning blood, they now enter into the benefits of His righteous and benevolent government. More specifically, their “iniquities are forgiven and their sins are covered” (Psa 85:2)—“covered *by God*, as the ark was covered with the mercy seat, as Noah was covered from the flood, as the Egyptians were covered by the depths of the sea. What a cover that must be which hides forever from the sight of the all-seeing God all the filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit” (Charles H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892). Paul quotes those precious words of Psalm 32:1, in Romans 4:7, in proof of the grand truth of justification by faith. While the sins of believers were all atoned for at the cross and an everlasting righteousness then procured for them, they do not become actual participants of the same until they believe (Act 13:39; Gal 2:16).

“*Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee: in whose heart are the ways of them*” (Psa 84:5). This is another accompaniment of the new birth. The regenerated is given the spirit of “a sound mind” (2Ti 1:7), so that he now perceives himself to be not only without any righteousness of his own, but is conscious of his weakness and insufficiency. He has made the name of the Lord his strong tower, having run into it for safety (Pro 18:10), and now he declares “in the LORD have I righteousness and strength” (Isa 14:24)—strength to fight the good fight of faith: to resist temptations, to endure persecution, to perform duty. While he keeps in his right mind, he will continue to go forth not in his own strength, but in complete dependence upon and reliance in the strength that is in Christ Jesus, thereby proving the sufficiency of His grace. Those “ways” of God’s strength are the divinely appointed means of grace for the maintenance of communion: feeding on the Word, living on Christ, adhering to the path of His precepts.

“*Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways*” (Psa 128:1). Here is another mark of those under the divine benediction—to have such a deep reverence on the spirit as results in regular obedience to Him. The fear of the Lord is a holy awe of His majesty, a filial dread of displeasing Him. It is not so much an emotional thing as a practical, for it is idle to talk about fearing God if we have no deep concern for His will. It is the fear of love which shrinks from dishonouring Him, a dread of forgetting His goodness, and abusing His mercy. Where *such* “fear” is, all other graces are found. The blessedness of such is not always apparent to carnal reason, nevertheless, it is a fact certified by the divine veracity.

EXPOSITION OF JOHN’S FIRST EPISTLE

13. Sin Prohibited (2:1)

*“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye
sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate
with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”*

At the close of our last chapter we expressed the opinion that the forgiveness and cleansing of 1:9, includes both a judicial and experiential one, an objective and subjective, but that the same is

difficult for the finite mind to grasp fully, and still more so to express clearly. It should ever be borne in mind that with God there is no such thing as past, present and future, though in condescension to our infirmities He sometimes so represents things in His Word. Time limitations do not exist with the eternal "I am": all is an ever-present now. This needs to be remembered in connection with the Atonement. In the view of God, Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and therefore the Old Testament saints, from Abel onwards, enjoyed all those benefits which His sacrifice procured as truly as do believers in this Christian era. Therefore, theologians are only creating their own difficulties when they wrangle among themselves as to whether or not the sins which believers commit after their conversion were blotted out from before God when Christ cried "It is finished." The important point to be concerned about is when do we enter into the good of Christ's redemption.

Certainly no one is saved by Christ's sacrifice until he be converted, that is until he repents of his sins and trusts in the cleansing blood. Equally certain is it that we cannot repent of sins before they be committed. Those who insist that it is dishonouring to the blood of Christ to speak of repeated applications thereof to those who contritely acknowledge their sins need to be told that it is most dishonouring to the holiness and government of God to talk of His pardoning sins before they are owned before Him. Both Old and New Testament alike distinguish between the blood shed (Heb 9:22) and the blood of sprinkling (12:24), and we must do so too, especially in connection with the antitypical fulfillment of Leviticus 16:21, and Numbers 19:2-9. As shed, the blood of Christ has met all the claims of God, so that He can now righteously pardon those who plead its merits. As shed, the blood of Christ has a cleansing virtue, and as sprinkled it actually removes defilement, as the apostle declares in Hebrews 9:13-14, where he shows the antitypical fulfillment of Numbers 19:9, in that the blood of Christ purges the conscience.

The question as to when the Christian's sins were put away from before God and he was discharged from the guilt and penalty of them admits of more than one answer. Vicariously the penalty of his sins was fully borne by Christ upon the cross, and the guilt of them was remitted when God raised his Surety from the dead. Yet personally he is not formally forgiven any sins until he savingly believes on Christ. The Lord Jesus purchased and procured a right unto God's elect receiving forgiveness, but they do not individually enter into the enjoyment of that blessing until their faith is placed in Him. At the cross the Saviour secured certain benefits for His people, but they do not become partakers thereof before they are converted. Distinction must also be made between that general pardon which is received the moment we first lay hold of Christ and the more specific and detailed forgiveness which we stand in need of repeatedly, daily. To say that there is no need for Christians to pray for forgiveness because all their sins were atoned for at the cross betrays great confusion of thought, and flatly contradicts Scripture. As well might an Israelite have argued against the offering of the daily lamb because all of his iniquities were remitted on the annual day of atonement (Lev 16:21). The satisfaction of Christ is indeed eternally valid before God and allows of no repetition or addition; but considering forgiveness as the act of God as the moral Governor of the world, it is continuous unto the same persons.

It is the inconformity of sin to the Law of God and its loathsomeness to His holiness, and as it is attended with defilement and shame to us, that has to be confessed. Our daily sins displease the Holy One, and it is our duty to acknowledge them. It becomes us to humble ourselves before Him on their account. The righteousness of God requires that we own our guilt and seek His remission of it. The Old Testament saints asked for pardon, "O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great" (Psa 25:11), and requested Him to "look upon the face of thine anointed" (Psa 84:9). And can New Testament saints do less? No, Christ Himself taught them to pray "Forgive us our debts"

(Mat 6:12), and that prayer is assuredly suited unto Christians today, for it is addressed “our Father!” In so making request, we ask Him to be gracious unto us for Christ’s sake and not to lay to our charge the sins we have committed (Act 7:60; 2Ti 4:16)—“enter not into judgment with thy servant” (Psa 143:2). Applying unto God for the forgiveness of our sins is a coming to the throne of grace “that we may obtain mercy” (Heb 4:16). “To the very end of life the best Christian must come for forgiveness, just as he did at the first—not as the claimant of a right, but as a supplicant of favour” (John Brown, 1722-1787).

We need to distinguish between the purchase of our pardon by Christ and its actual bestowment upon us by the Father. After David was assured “the Lord also hath put away thy sin” (2Sa 12:13), we find that he begged God’s forgiveness of the same (Psa 51:1). Let it be distinctly pointed out that in asking God for forgiveness we do not pray as though the blood of Christ had never been shed, or as though our tears and prayers made any compensation to divine justice. Nevertheless, renewed sins call for renewed repentance. While we do not need another Redeemer, we do need a fresh exercise of mercy unto us and a fresh application of the cleansing blood to our hearts. That, too, is included in the petition of Matthew 6:12: grant a gracious manifestation of Thy mercy. “Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice” (Psa 51:8). We ask for a comforting sense of His forgiveness, that we may again have “the joy of His salvation.” It is the assuring of our hearts of the divine forgiveness, the same being efficaciously made known to the mind and conscience.

As this writer understands 1 John 1:9, it is not a legal forgiveness of God considered as Judge which is in view, but the governmental pardon of God as the moral Governor of this world and the Father of His children. It necessarily follows from its language that if believers do not confess their sins, then those sins are neither forgiven nor cleansed. 1 Corinthians 11:31, appears to us a parallel passage: “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged,” and as the preceding verse shows, those who failed to do so brought down upon themselves sickness and death. As Robert S. Candlish (1806-1873) pointed out, the forgiveness and cleansing includes more than the remission of punishment: “Our sins are so forgiven as to ensure that in the forgiveness of them we are cleansed from all unrighteousness—all unfair, deceitful and dishonest dealing about them; all such unrighteous dealing about them, either with our own conscience or with our God. The forgiveness is so free, so frank, so full, so unreserved, that it purges our bosom of all reserve, all reticence, all guile; in a word, of all unrighteousness. And it is so because it is dispensed in faithfulness and righteousness.” God deals with us neither complacently nor indulgently, but as equally true to Himself and to us.

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man [“any one,” Greek] sin, we have an advocate with the Father” (2:1).

As we shall see, these words are intimately related to what precedes; but before dwelling upon that we will outline the contents of our verse and consider them in order. First, there is the apostle’s affectionate address unto those he was here dehorting.¹ Second, the immediate design which he had before him in now addressing them: that “ye sin not.” Third, the provision made in case there should be failure. Fourth, the striking balance of truth here presented.

“My little children.” Such indeed are all God’s people, metaphorically speaking, and it is divine grace which has made them so. It is the power of the Spirit which casts down proud reasonings, self-righteous pretensions, “and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (2Co 10:5), and makes us “become as little children.” And such in spirit we are to con-

¹ **dehorting** – exhorting a person not to undertake a particular course of action; advising or counseling against.

tinue—dependent, trustful, conscious of our weakness and helplessness: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1Pe 2:2). There was, as others before us have pointed out, a peculiar pertinency in John’s thus addressing them.

“It is probable that he was the only surviving apostle when he wrote this epistle, and his old age and long-continued usefulness, faithfulness, and love for Christians must have given him a kind of parental authority over the whole Church, as far as it adhered to the pure Gospel of Christ. It was therefore peculiarly proper for him to address them as his spiritual family, whose welfare he had greatly at heart; and as most of them were young in years compared with this beloved and venerated disciple, who probably was the oldest Christian on earth at that time” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

The form of salutation “My little children” combines the two notes of tenderness and authority. As someone has reminded us, “It is a notable triumph of godliness when age is redolent with the earnestness and diligence, of youth.” Throughout the first chapter John had been presenting objective doctrinal statements, but now he was going to make practical application of the same and address himself to the conscience of his readers. “In this there is an example to all who would be teachers of others, whether pastors or parents, or any who would be to them ‘helpers in Christ.’ It shows the spirit in which they should labour, and the object at which they should aim. That spirit should be affectionately ‘speaking the truth in love,’ ever in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves” (James Morgan, 1799-1873). Yet care needs to be taken against suffering that tender and gentle spirit to degenerate into a servile timidity, which brings the teacher almost to apologize for presuming to exhort others. There are not a few ministers in this effeminate age who need to heed that word: “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee” (Ti 2:15).

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.” The “these things” makes it plain that the first two verses of chapter 2 are intimately related to what has been stated in the first, and thus in those words the Holy Spirit, through the apostle, emphasizes the need and importance of carefully observing the context. The real force of many a verse can only be perceived as we note and ponder its connection and coherence with what precedes. In this instance the reference looks back to all John had said from the opening of his epistle. First, he had set before his readers the glorious person of the Mediator as “the Word of life” and as the Author and Giver of eternal life. If, then, such be the Lord Jesus, and such His mission, what ought we to expect will issue therefrom? Surely that “he shall save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21). Second, he had shown that a saving knowledge of Christ produces fellowship and joy. And what but holiness must be the result thereof? Third, he had made clear his design and the tendency of his message by a presentation of the character of God and of those who enjoy communion with Him in Christ: they walk in the light, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses them from all sin. Thus, the purifying influence of such fellowship is obvious.

Finally, John had given a brief but comprehensive outline of the divine life in the soul of the believer. It is marked by the conviction of sin (1:8) and the confession of his sins (1:9). The effects of such exercises of soul must be the bringing forth of fruits meet for repentance, i.e. an increasing hatred of sin and godly sorrow for the same. In view of all this, the propriety of his applicatory injunction “sin not” is apparent. Between such things as he had mentioned and the practice or indulgence of sin there is an absolute contrariety: they are altogether incompatible with each other. Light and darkness are no more opposed than are fellowship with God and the allowance of sin. In view of all that I have said, this is the practical application you are to make. It might be summarized “therefore sin not.” By thus tracing the connection of his “these things write

I unto you” and the dehortation “sin not” we perceive the fuller force of John’s “my little children,” in which, for the first time, he directly addressed his readers, namely that he was speaking of their responsibility, and therefore did he express both his warm love to them and his parental authority, and as Gill² said, “it might serve to put them in mind of their weakness in faith, knowledge and spiritual strength, that they might not entertain too high notions of themselves, as if they were perfect, without infirmity.”

More specifically our present verse is to be connected with 1:6-10, wherein a double proposition is presented. First, that fellowship with God is conditioned upon a repudiation of, and separation from, “darkness.” Second, that fellowship is accompanied by an owning of the principle of indwelling sin and confession of its works. John had a definite design before him when he made those statements, which is plainly expressed in 2:1, and that design is likewise twofold: to exhort and comfort—to deter from moral laxity and afford relief unto those who, despite their endeavours to the contrary, often failed to realize their ideal. First, “sin not,” second, if you should, there is an Advocate to plead your cause. But how do these practical consequences follow from the preceding doctrinal propositions? Why that 1:6-7, lead to the conclusion that believers ought not to sin; yet verses 8 and 9 presuppose they will do so. Even fellowship with Him who is light does not eradicate innate darkness; nevertheless, that is not to be condoned or excused by us, but diligently and unsparingly resisted. Yet our best efforts therein are but partly successful, and this is deeply distressing to a tender conscience.

“But though all sin that was pardoned, was pardoned upon the account of the blood of Christ, which had a property to cleanse from all sin, and that confession was a means to attain this forgiveness, purchased by our Saviour’s blood, yet men might suck in this poisonous doctrine of licentiousness, believing that upon confession they should immediately have forgiveness, though they walked on in the ways of their own hearts. And, on the other side, many good men might be dejected at the consideration of the relics of sin in them, which the apostle asserts no man was free from in this life. In 2:1, therefore, he prevents these two mistakes which men infer from the former doctrine: that we may not presume by the news of grace, nor despond by a reflection of our sin. Though I have told you that forgiveness of sin is to be had upon confession, yet the intent of my writing is not to encourage a voluntary commission. If you do commit sin, you must not be so cast down as if the door of mercy were clapped against you; no, there is One above to keep it open for every one that repents and believes” (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680).

“These things write I unto you, that ye sin not.” The standard of conduct which the Gospel sets before us is no less holy and perfect than that of the Law: no indulging of the flesh is permitted, no self-pleasing tolerated. When our Lord healed the impotent man His word to him was “sin no more” (Joh 5:14); and though it was not then His province to condemn to death the woman taken in adultery, so far from making light of her crime He said “go, and sin no more” (Joh 8:11). Nor was John the only one of the apostles who made this exacting demand upon the Lord’s people. “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21) said Paul; and again, “Awake to righteousness, and sin not” (1Co 15:34). Likewise Peter, in his first epistle: “But as he which called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1:15). And again, “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you

² **John Gill** (1697-1771) – Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar. Author of *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, *The Cause of God and Truth*, and his nine-volume *Expositions of the Old and New Testaments*. Born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, England.

as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (2:11-12).

Everywhere in Scripture the Gospel is represented to be “the doctrine which is according to godliness” (1Ti 6:3), which forbids us to regard sin as the normal element of the Christian life, or even to consider its commission as inevitable. Not only are we to reject with abhorrence the devilish idea that the grace of God and the sacrifice of Christ give license to sin, but we are not even to view them as a provision for the weakness of the flesh. “Sin not” is the peremptory and unqualified demand. It was as though the apostle had said, I would have you so narrowly watch your hearts and ways that no evil might slip into your lives, no wrong thoughts be allowed, no idle words be uttered. I would have you make this your serious and constant aim: not merely that you are to sin as little as you can, but that you are not to sin at all. Great care needs to be taken against lowering or whittling down the exalted standard of moral purity which God has set before us. “Sin not” is not to be restricted unto the commission of merely gross and flagrant offences, nor to open acts in the outward life, but to all inward sinning too.

Each statement of Holy Writ is to be given its full and fair meaning, and is never to be toned down or modified by us. “Sin not” is the standard of excellence which God has set before us, for the Holy One can claim nothing less, and our obligation fully to measure up to the same is beyond contradiction. It is the unabating requirement of the Gospel, for the object of Christ’s death was not only to make atonement for the sins committed by His people, but to supply motives to fortify and restrain their souls against continuing therein (2Co 5:14-15). To sin not is the Christian’s exalted ideal, the earnest pursuit of which is to engage all his faculties and powers. It is what every renewed heart ardently longs to attain unto. Few of our readers will be inclined to call into question the statement that nothing short of complete conformity to the image of Christ should be the daily endeavour of every saint, yet how few appear to make this their fixed resolution and purpose. Nothing short of abstaining from everything which is displeasing to Christ should be the task we set ourselves, and that without any secret reserve. Our eyes are to be fixed on our Rule and not on our infirmities. Say not beforehand a measure of failure is certain, but rather “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi 4:13).

The Gospel is designed to inspire love to God and holiness, and every part of it reveals the malignant nature and evil effects of sin, and bids us hate, dread, and flee from it. “Sin not.” To make anything less than that the daily business of our lives is opposed to divine grace, for it teaches its recipients to deny ungodly and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this world (Ti 2:12). It is antagonistic to saving faith in Christ, for that receives Him as Lord as well as trusts Him as Saviour, and if we are being ruled by Satan instead of rendering obedience to Christ we are not partakers of His salvation (Heb 5:9). It is presumption and not faith which trifles with temptation. It is contradictory to repentance, which includes both a godly sorrow for sin and the sincere purpose to forsake it. That spiritual repentance which is the gift of God (Act 5:31, 2Ti 2:25) not only turns the heart from sin, but against it, and therefore serves as a check against evil inclinations. It conflicts with sincere love to God, for that seeks to glorify Him in all things, and makes duty a delight. It is contrary to the injunction which a renewed conscience imposes upon the will, for though the will may, and does, oppose the conscience and follow the impulses of the flesh, yet conscience never consents or condones, but judges and condemns.

Finally, for the Christian to allow himself in any sin is directly opposed to his redemption by the blood of Christ. What a word is that by the Spirit of God: “Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s (1Co 6:19-20).

“Your time is redeemed—use it as a consecrated talent in His cause. Your minds are redeemed—employ them to learn His truth and to meditate on His ways. Thus make them armouries of holy weapons. Your eyes are redeemed—let them not look on vanity; close them on all sights and books of folly. Your feet are redeemed—let them trample on the world and climb the upward hill of Zion, and bear you onward in the march of Christian zeal. Your tongues are redeemed—let them only sound His praise and testify of His love. Your hearts are redeemed—let them love Him wholly, and have no seat for rivals. A redeemed flock should live in redemption’s pastures. The Redeemer’s freedmen should evidence that they are called to holy liberty, and that their holy liberty is holy service. The chain of sin is broken. The chain of love now holds them” (H. Law of Wells, 1862).

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

65. Challenged (11:1-5)

One or two details in the closing verses of chapter 10, which lack of space prevented a consideration of in our last issue, must be noticed here. First, it is blessed to observe that all which is recorded from verse 28 onwards manifests how fully the faith expressed by Joshua in verse 25 was vindicated. There he had encouraged the captains of his men of war, for as they placed their feet upon the necks of the five conquered kings of the Amorites, he boldly said unto them, “Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the LORD do to *all* your enemies against whom ye fight.” What implicit confidence in believing God did he there display! There is nothing in the context to show that Israel’s leader had received a recent assurance from his Master to that effect; rather do we consider that his heart was resting upon that word he had long ago received through Moses—“Thine eyes have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto these two kings [namely, Og king of Bashan, and Sihon of the Amorites, who opposed Israel in the wilderness and were overthrown]: so shall the LORD do unto *all* the kingdoms whither thou passest” (Deu 3:21).

There can be no doubt that that promise became the “sheet anchor” of Joshua when he came to be elevated to the position of commander-in-chief of Israel’s forces. He had “mixed faith” with the same (Heb 4:2) and it became the stay of his soul until his arduous and dangerous task had been completed. He had already received more than one definite “earnest” of the Lord’s making good that word—Jericho and Ai had fallen before them, and the five kings of the Amorites had been utterly routed. But much heavier fighting now lay before them. They had barely made a beginning, and far more yet remained to be accomplished. But Joshua had no doubts, no fear of the outcome. His trust was in the Lord of hosts, and he was not afraid to commit himself *before others*. Fully assured of the divine fidelity, he boldly avowed his confidence therein before and unto his brethren. What an example for Christian leaders to follow! “My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall *hear thereof*, and be glad” (Psa 34:2). The confident language of those who are well acquainted with the Lord is an inspiration to those of their brethren of less ex-

perience. They who have proved the Lord's goodness should give free expression thereto that others may be confirmed in their trust of a faithful God. Thus it was here with Joshua.

"And the LORD delivered Lachish into the hand of Israel, which took it on the second day" (10:32). That detail marks a difference from the other Canaanitish towns captured by them. Libnah (verse 30), Eglon (35), Hebron (37) and Debir (39) were apparently mastered in a single attack; but not so Lachish. Spiritually, that teaches the Christian that some of his lusts are more powerful than others, and require a longer and more determined effort on his part to subdue them. And, too, an initial failure to enter into possession of a particular portion of our inheritance must not deter us from making a second effort to do so. Charles Ellicott (1819-1905) pointed out that it appears from other Scriptures too that Lachish was a fortress of considerable strength. When Sennacherib king of Assyria "came up against all the fenced cities of Judah" (2Ki 18:13), although he personally "laid siege against Lachish, and all his power with him" (2Ch 32:9), yet he had to abandon his attempt to reduce it (2Ki 19:7-8). At a later date, when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah in the reign of its last king, *Lachish* was one of the two places which were the last to be conquered: "for these defenced cities remained of the cities of Judah" (Jer 34:7).

Our reason for here calling attention to the above historical fact is twofold. First, because it supplies a striking illustration of the divine inspiration of the Bible from its minute accuracy and consistency. Those three passages, though lying so far apart, agree in showing that Lachish was a city of considerable strength and one which was more than ordinarily difficult to capture. It is one of innumerable evidences of the authenticity or genuineness of Holy Writ, which by silent testimony bears witness to its perfect harmony. This argument, drawn from unmistakable *coincidence without design*, will have greater weight with those best qualified to weigh evidence. In the mouths of three independent witnesses (Joshua, the writer of 2 Chronicles, and Jeremiah), the truth of what they wrote is hereby established, for their separate allusions unto Lachish are unstudied and without collusion, yet are they thoroughly consistent and concordant. Second, because by comparing Joshua 10:32, with those latter passages, we learn that Israel succeeded where such mighty warriors as Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar failed, which teaches the valuable lesson that under God His people are able to achieve what the natural man cannot!

"And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel" (10:42). Another indication of the divine authorship of the Bible are those words. There is no magnifying of the human instrument, no paying homage to a national hero, but, instead, a placing of the glory where it rightfully belongs. This is but one of a score of similar passages in which we may perceive the Holy Spirit's jealousy of the divine honour, wherein Israel's successes are attributed unto JEHOVAH's showing Himself strong in their behalf. This He does in a variety of ways, for when the Lord fights *for* His people, He fights *against* their enemies. In the case of Pharaoh and his army, He filled them with a spirit of madness, so that they rushed headlong to their destruction; in others, He instilled a spirit of fear so that they fled when no man pursued them (2Ki 7:6-7), and then is made good that word, "The flight shall perish from the swift...and he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith the LORD" (Amo 2:14-16). A true humility in Christ's servants today will recognize and readily acknowledge the same principle when their labours are made to prosper.

"And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal" (vs. 43), which seems to intimate that, during the lengthy campaign in which they had been engaged, none of the Hebrews were slain, but that their complete force returned safe and sound to their headquarters. It is not without reason that the Holy Spirit mentions by name the place where their camp was situated, for it points at least three most important and valuable lessons for us. *First*, Gilgal was, spir-

itually speaking, the place of self-judgment and conscious weakness (see our Joshua articles 27 and 28), for it was there that the Israelites were circumcised (4:19; 5:2-3), and that should ever be the place unto which the Christian has recourse *after his victories*, for only as he preserves a sense of his own nothingness will his strength be maintained. *Second*, Gilgal was the place of divine fellowship: “the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover” (5:10); only as communion with God is maintained, may we count upon Him granting us further success in the fight of faith. *Third*, Gilgal was the place where the tabernacle was erected (6:6), where the priesthood officiated, where sacrifices were offered, and where the Lord manifested His presence.

We would fain believe that when Joshua and all his men returned to Gilgal that, before acquainting their families with the details of how graciously and wondrously the Lord had wrought for them in their battles, they first offered sacrifices of thanksgiving unto Him, and rendered public praise for the notable successes which He had vouchsafed them. The least they could do was to acknowledge Him who was the Bestower of their conquest. And the same is true of us, my readers. The only fitting way in which we can celebrate our spiritual triumphs is to give the whole of the glory of them unto their Author, as that is likewise the best preparative for the further fighting which lies before us. We are diligent and earnest in making supplication unto the Lord when we are hard pressed by the foe, and we should be equally explicit and fervent before Him when He has granted us deliverance. He requires us to make known our requests *with thanksgiving* (Phi 4:6), and it is more and more our conviction that one chief reason why so many of our requests are refused is that we fail to appreciate sufficiently those He *has* granted. God will not set a premium upon ingratitude.

But even though the Christian returns to the place of self-abasement after his victories, enters into sweet communion with the Lord, and duly acknowledges His favours, he must not expect that henceforth all will be plain sailing for him. It was not so with Joshua and Israel, for the very next thing we read after their return to Gilgal is, “*And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor had heard those things, that he sent to Joab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph...And they went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many. And when all these kings were met together, they came and pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel*” (11:1-5)! Here is a throwing down of the gauntlet with a vengeance. Hitherto the Canaanites had acted on the defensive, for it was Israel who assaulted Jericho and Ai, and the attack of the five kings had not been against Joshua, but the Gibeonites; but now, they took the offensive, fiercely challenging Israel’s right to remain in Canaan.

There is an old saying that “Any fool can make money, but it takes a wise man to *keep* it.” Certainly it requires much diligence and care for the Christian to retain what he has acquired spiritually, to maintain the progress he has made, to consolidate that portion of his heritage which he has entered into, for the great enemy of souls will strive hard to deprive him thereof. He challenged our first parents in Eden while in their sinless condition, for it was abject misery unto him to see them happy. This principle runs all through Genesis. When God prospered Abraham in Canaan and his flocks and herds increased, such strife arose between his herdsmen and Lot’s that they could no longer dwell together in peace. Later, the Philistines filled with earth the wells which his servants had dug (Gen 26:15), and when Isaac’s men dug new ones, the men of Gerar objected, challenging their right to the same, and striving with them (Gen 26:20-21). When JEHOVAH made known His purpose that Rebekah’s elder son should serve the younger, she had the effrontery to contest His decision (Gen 25:23; 27:6, etc.). When by means of dreams it was

made known that the rest of his brethren should be subservient to Joseph and pay him homage, they determined to prevent the fulfillment thereof.

Even Joseph challenged the desire of his dying father to bestow his principal blessing upon Ephraim (Gen 48:17). When the Hebrews were peacefully settled in Goshen, “there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph” (Exo 1:8), who was jealous of and fiercely assailed them. And all these things have been recorded for *our* instruction, to teach us to expect that attempts will be made to dispossess us of our rightful portion. Yea, we find that Satan blatantly and impiously assaulted the Holy One, challenging Him to supply proof of His deity—since you be the Son of God, “command that these stones be made bread.” So too during His public ministry. Again and again he stirred up the priests and Pharisees to demand by what authority He did this and that. Such opposition is epitomized in the parable of the wheat and tares—no sooner had Christ sown the good seed in the field than His right thereto was challenged by Satan’s sowing darnel therein.

The devil sought to rob the apostles of their portion, as is clear from the words of Christ: “Satan hast desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luk 22:31)—His use of the plural pronoun shows that more than Simon was involved. How long was it after Pentecost before the enemy stirred up Saul of Tarsus to persecute the primitive Christians and encompassed the death of Stephen? No sooner had Peter been divinely sent unto Cornelius and a blessed work of grace commenced among the Gentiles than there was determined opposition and an attempt made to bring the same to an end by denying Peter’s rights to evangelize the Gentiles. The Book of Acts records instance after instance of attacks made upon the peace and prosperity of one church after another. What force do all the above examples give to our need of taking heed of that exhortation, “*Hold fast* that which is good” (1Th 5:21), for the flesh, the world, and the devil will combine in seeking to get us to relinquish the same. Because of the corruptions of our hearts, the temptations of Satan, the allurements of the world, we are in real danger of letting go what is more precious than rubies. Having bought the truth, we must resolutely see to it that we “sell it not” (Pro 23:23).

It is not without good reason that the Lord has bidden His people to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering” (Heb 10:23), and never was it more imperative that they attended to that injunction. We must, despite all opposition and persecution, continue in and press forward along that narrow way which leads unto life, for only he that endures unto the end shall be saved (Mat 24:13). No matter how fiercely you be assailed, surrender not your ground, but steadfastly maintain your profession. That “hold fast” presupposes inducements to compromise and renounce. It signifies the putting forth of our utmost endeavours to remain steadfast. “Hold that *fast* which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Rev 3:11). Adhere firmly thereto in faith and with a good conscience; never was it more needful to do so. The character of these times demands unflinching loyalty and unswerving devotion to Christ and to all He has committed to us. “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” (2Co 9:24)—it is not the *start* but the *end* which determines the fitness to wear the crown.

Thus it will be seen, once again, that the passage before us contains lessons of deep importance for the Christian, particularly regarding his spiritual warfare and present enjoyment of his heritage. The children of Israel had made quite a little progress in their conquest of Canaan, but now they were very seriously challenged as to their occupancy. A most formidable attempt was being made to dispossess them, yea, utterly to vanquish them. In chapter 10, only five kings united in their attack upon Gibeon, but here there was a federation of all the remaining kings of Palestine. The vastness of the forces deployed by them appears in “even as the sand that is on the sea shore,” and with them were “horses and chariots very many” (verse 4). Ah, my reader, Satan

will not readily admit defeat! He did not in connection with Job, but renewed his assault again and again. “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return... Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first” (Mat 12:43-45)!

The believer must be prepared for such challenges being made to him, for if Satan opposed our invulnerable Head, it is not to be expected that he will leave alone the vulnerable members of His mystical body; and though at the command of Christ he departed from him, it was only “for a season” (Luk 4:13). So it is with us. We may be enabled by grace so to resist the devil that he will flee from us (Jam 4:7), yet we may be sure that it will not be long before he returns and resumes the conflict. Nor are his efforts confined to individual saints—he assaults their assemblies too, as the New Testament and all ecclesiastical history of this Christian era shows—how many churches’ candles have been put out by him because of lack of watchfulness on their part, or through failure to take a firm stand against him! That word of the apostle to the church officers at Ephesus needs to be laid to heart by all holding a similar position today: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock... Therefore watch” (Act 20:28-31).

These paragraphs are not being written merely to fill up space, but in the endeavour to supply young believers with a timely warning, to put them on their guard against the onsets of their adversary. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and though we may not be ignorant of Satan’s devices, yet all of us need to be frequently reminded of them. At no one point does he more often assail than in seeking to take from us what is ours. In Matthew 13:19, our Lord solemnly pointed out that the wicked one is able to catch away that which was sown in the heart, yet the fault is our own if we suffer him to do so. He will endeavour to rob us of some divine promise which we are trying to rest upon, by denying our personal title to the same. He will challenge our warrant to some particularly helpful portion of the minister’s sermon, saying that it pertains not to us. He will call into question our right to peace of conscience and joy of heart. He will oppose us when reading the Word or engaged in prayer. In short, we must expect to be challenged by him at every point, and seek grace steadfastly to resist him.

In concluding this article, let us take note that Joshua 11 opens with the word “And,” which intimates that this formidable federation of the Canaanites took the field against Israel while they were at Gilgal (10:43), which is one reason why we have entitled this meditation “Challenged.” There is nothing which more enrages Satan than to behold the saints taking the place of conscious weakness before the Lord, or enjoying blessed communion with God as they feast with Him upon the Lamb; yet there is never a time when it is so certain that he will meet with no success as he attempts to vent his enmity against them, for it is impossible for him to injure any who “dwelleth in the secret place of the most High,” for of such it is declared, he “shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty,” and therefore can he confidently affirm, “I will say of the LORD, he is my refuge and fortress; my God; in him will I trust.” For the promise to him is “Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler” (Psa 91:1-3). Those who live a life of fellowship with God are assured of His protection, and may therefore preserve a holy serenity of mind, assured that He will repel their foes and defend them. Nevertheless, as Scott pertinently pointed out, “The believer must never put off his armour, or expect durable peace, till he closes his eyes in death.”

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

6. Its Nature, Part 1

In our last article, we showed how Scripture casts light upon the great moral problem of how an inherently corrupt nature originates in each child from the beginning of its existence, *without* its Creator being the Author of sin. David declared, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5). Carefully did he describe his depravity as innate and not created, as derived from his mother and not his Maker, that defilement is transmitted directly from Adam through the channel of human propagation. The same fact was expressed by our Lord when He said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (Joh 3:6). In the Old Testament, the word “flesh” is used as a general term for human nature or mankind, “Let *all flesh* bless his holy name” (Psa 145:21)—that is, all men; “all flesh is grass” (Isa 40:6)—the life of every member of our race is frail and fickle. The term occurs in the New Testament in the same sense: “except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved” (Mat 24:22); “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Rom 3:20)—i.e. by his own obedience no man can merit acceptance with God.

But since mankind be fallen and human nature is depraved, the term “flesh” becomes the expression of that fact, and every time it is used in Scripture, in a moral sense, has reference to *the corruption* of our entire beings, without any distinction between our visible and invisible parts—body and mind. This is evident from those passages where “the flesh” is contrasted with “the spirit” or the new nature, Romans 8:5-6; 1 Corinthians 2:11; Galatians 5:17. When the apostle declared, “For I know that in *me* (that is, in *my flesh*,) dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18), he had reference to far more than his body with its appetites, namely his entire natural man, with all its faculties, powers and propensities; the whole was polluted, and therefore nothing good could issue from him until divine grace was imparted. Again, when we find included in that incomplete list of the horrible “works of the flesh” supplied by Galatians, such things as “hatred, emulations, wrath, and envyings” (Gal 5:20-21), it is quite plain that the word takes in far more than the corporeal parts of our persons; the more so when we find that these works are set over against “the fruit of the spirit,” each portion of which consists of the exercise of some *inward* quality or grace.

Thus it is clear that when Christ declared “that which is born of the flesh is flesh,” He signified that that which is propagated by fallen man is depraved, that whatever comes into this world by ordinary generation is carnal and corrupt, causing the heart itself to be deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. It is evident also from the immediate context (verses 3-5), for what He affirmed in verse 6 was in order to demonstrate the absolute need of regeneration. Our Lord was there opposing the first birth to the new birth, and showing how imperative is the latter by the fact that we are radically tainted from the outset. All by nature are essentially evil, nothing but “flesh,” everything in us contrary to holiness. Our very nature is vitiated, and by no process of education or culture can it be refined and made fit for the kingdom of God. The faculties which men receive at birth have a carnal bias, an earthly trend, a disrelish of the heavenly and divine,

and are inclined only to selfish aims and groveling pursuits. In the most polished or religious society, equally with the vulgar and profane, “that which is born of the flesh is flesh” and can never be anything better. Prune and trim a corrupt tree as much as you will, it can never be made to yield good fruit. Every man must be born again before he can be acceptable to a holy God.

Coming more directly to our present subject, we shall now attempt to supply an answer to the still more difficult question: In what does the vitiation of man by the fall consist, precisely what is the nature of human depravity? That is far more than a question of academical interest which concerns none but teachers of theology. It is one of deep doctrinal and practical importance, and which it behooves all of us, especially preachers, to be quite clear upon, for a mistake at this point is very liable to lead to the most erroneous conclusions and serious consequences. Such has indeed proved to be the case—for not a few, who were sound and orthodox in many other respects, have answered this question in such a way as inevitably led them seriously to weaken, if not altogether to repudiate, the *full responsibility* of fallen man, and caused them to become hyper-Calvinists and Antinomians. We shall, therefore, endeavour most carefully to define and describe the present condition of the natural man, beginning with the negative side, under which will be pointed out a number of things in which human depravity does not consist.

1. The spirit is not extinguished.

First, the fall does not result in the extinguishment of that *spirit* which was a part of man’s complex being when created by God—it did not either in the case of our first parents or in any of their descendants. It has, however, been argued from the divine threat made to Adam, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” that such was the case, that since Adam did not immediately die physically, he must have done so spiritually. That is certainly a fact, yet it requires to be interpreted by Scripture. It is quite wrong to suppose that because Adam’s body died not, his spirit did. It was not something in Adam which died, but Adam himself—in his relation to God. The same is true of his offspring: they are indeed “dead *in* trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1) toward God, from the beginning of their existence, but nothing *within them* is positively dead, in the ordinary meaning of that word. In the scriptural sense of the term, “death” never signifies annihilation, but separation. At physical death, the soul is not extinguished but separated from the body; and the spiritual death of Adam was not the extinction of any part of his being, but the severance of his fellowship with a holy God.

The same is true of all his children. The exact force of the solemn statement that they are “dead in trespasses and sins” is divinely defined for us as “being *alienated from* the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18). When Christ represented the Father as saying, “This my son was dead, and is alive again” (Luk 15:24), He most certainly did not mean that he had ceased to exist, but that while the prodigal remained “in the far country,” he was cut off from Him, and that he had not returned to Him. The lake of fire into which the wicked shall be cast is designated “the second death” (Rev 20:14), not in order to signify that they shall then cease to be, but because they are “punished with everlasting destruction *from* the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2Th 1:9). That fallen man *is* possessed of a spirit is clear from “the LORD, which...formeth the spirit of man within him” (Zec 12:1), from “what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him?” (1Co 2:11), and from “the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecc 12:7). Man was created a tripartite being, consisting of spirit and soul and body (1Th 5:23), and no part thereof ceased to exist when he fell.

2. None of man's faculties are lost.

Second, the fall did not issue in the loss of any of man's *faculties*. It did not divest man of reason, conscience, or moral taste, for that would have been to convert him into another species of being. As reason remained, he still had the power of distinguishing between truth and falsehood; conscience still enabled him to distinguish between what was right and wrong, between what was a duty and a crime; and moral taste capacitated him to perceive the contrasts in the sphere of the excellent and beautiful. It is most important that we should be quite clear at this point—the fall has not touched the substance of the soul—that remains entire with all its original endowments of intellect, conscience, and will. These are the characteristic elements of humanity, and to deprive him of them would be to unman man. They exist in the criminal as well as in the saint. They all have an essential unity in the unity of the human person, that is to say, they are co-ordinate faculties, though each has a sphere that is peculiar to itself. Collectively, they constitute the rational, moral, accountable being. It is not the mere possession of them which renders men evil or good, but the manner and motive of their exercise which makes their actions sinful or holy.

No, the fall deprived man of no mental or moral faculty, but it took from him the power to use them aright. They were all brought under the malignant influence of sin, so that he was no longer capable of doing anything pleasing to God. Depravity is all-pervading, extending to the whole man. It was not, as different theorists have supposed, confined to one department of his being—to the will as contradistinguished from the understanding, or to the understanding as contradistinguished from the will. It was not restricted to the lower appetites as contrasted with our higher principles of action; nor did it obtain in the heart alone, considered as the seat of the affections. On the contrary, it was a disease from which every organ has suffered. As found in the understanding, it consists of spiritual ignorance, blindness, darkness, folly. As found in the will, it is rebellion, perverseness, a spirit of disobedience. As found in the affections, it is hardness of heart, a total insensibility to and disrelish of spiritual and divine things. The entrance of sin into the human constitution has not only affected all the faculties so as to produce a complete disqualification for any spiritual exercise in any form, but it has crippled and enervated them in their exercise within the sphere of truth and holiness. They were vitiated in respect to everything bearing the image of God—of goodness and excellence.

3. Man's freedom is not lost.

Third, the fall has not resulted in the loss of man's *freedom of will*, or his power of volition as a moral faculty. Admittedly, this is a much harder point to treat of than either of the above, not because Scripture is ambiguous, but because of the philosophical and metaphysical difficulties it raises in the minds of those who give careful thought thereto. Certain it is that the fall did not reduce man to the condition of a stock or stone, or even into an irrational animal. He retained that rational power of volition which was a part of his original constitution, so that he was still able to choose spontaneously. Equally certain is it that man is not free to do as he pleases in any absolute sense, for then he would be a god, omnipotent. In his unfallen state, Adam was made subservient to and dependent upon the Lord. So it is with his children: their wills are required to be fully subordinated to that of their Maker and Governor. Moreover, their freedom is strictly circumscribed by the supreme rule of divine providence, as it opens doors for or shuts doors against them.

As pointed out above, though each distinct faculty of the soul has a sphere that is peculiar to itself, yet are they co-ordinate, and therefore the will is not to be thought of as an independent,

self-determining entity, standing apart from the other faculties and superior to them, capable of reversing the judgments of the mind or acting contrary to the desires of the heart—rather is the will influenced and determined by them. As G. S. Bishop most helpfully pointed out, “The true philosophy of moral action and its process is that of Genesis 3:6. ‘And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food [sense-perception, intelligence], and a tree to be desired [affections], she took and ate thereof [the will].’” Thus the freedom of the will is also limited by the bounds of human capabilities. It cannot, for example, go beyond the extent of knowledge possessed by the mind—it is impossible for me to cognize, love and choose any object I am totally unacquainted with. Thus, it is the *understanding*, rather than the will, which is the dominant faculty and factor. Hence, when Scripture delineates the condition of fallen men, it attributes their alienation from God to “the ignorance that is in them” (Eph 4:18), and makes regeneration to begin with “renewed in knowledge” (Col 3:10).

The limitations of human freedom pointed out above pertain alike to man unfallen or fallen, but the entrance of sin into the human constitution has imposed much greater limitations. While it be true that man is as *truly* free now as Adam before his apostasy, yet he is not so *morally* free as he was. Fallen man is free in the sense that he is at liberty to act according to his own choice, without compulsion from without; yet, since his nature has been defiled and corrupted, he is no longer free *unto* that which is good and holy. Great care needs to be taken at this point, lest our definition of the freedom of fallen man clashes with such Scriptures as Psalm 110:3, John 6:44, Romans 9:16, for he only wills now according to the desires and dictates of his evil heart. It has been well said that “The will of the sinner is like to a manacled and fettered prisoner within a cell: his movements are hampered by his chains and circumscribed by the walls that confine him. He is indeed free to walk, but in a manner so constrained and within an area so bounded that his freedom is bondage”—bondage to sin.

Whether we understand by “the will” simply the faculty of volition by which the soul chooses or refuses, or whether we regard the “will” as the faculty of volition together with all else within us which affects the choice—reason, imagination, longing—yet fallen man is quite free in *exercising volition* according to his prevailing disposition and desire at the moment. Internal freedom is here used in contrast with external restraint or compulsion, and where such be absent then the individual is at liberty to decide according to his pleasure. Where the Arminian errs so seriously on this point is to confound *power* with “will,” insisting that the sinner is equally able to choose good as evil, for that is a repudiation of his total depravity or complete vassalage to evil. By the fall, man came under bondage to sin, and became the captive of the devil; yet, even so, he first yields *voluntarily* to the enticements of his own lusts before he commits any act of sin, nor can Satan lead him into any wrongdoing without his own consent.

The natural man does as he pleases, but he pleases himself only in one direction—selfward and downward, never Godward and upward. As Romans 6:20 says of the saints while in their unregenerate state, “For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free *from* righteousness.” In all his sinning, man acts as a free agent, for he is forced neither by God nor Satan. When he breaks the law, he does so by his own option, and not by coercion from another. In so doing, he is freely acting out his own fallen nature. Thus it is a mistake to say that a bias of the mind or propensity of heart is destructive of his volition. Both must be self-moved. The murderer is not compelled to hate his victim. Though he cannot prevent his inward hatred by any mere exercise of will, yet he *can* refrain from the outward act of murder by his own volition, and therefore is he blameworthy when he fails to do so. These are indisputable facts of our own consciousness!

4. Man's responsibilities are not reduced.

Fourth, the fall has not resulted in any reduction, still less the destruction, of *man's responsibility*. If all of the above be carefully pondered, this should be quite evident. Human responsibility is the necessary corollary of divine sovereignty. Since God be the Creator, since He is supreme Ruler over all, and since man be but a creature and a subject, there is no escape from his accountability unto his Maker and rightful Lord. If we be asked to define more distinctly—responsible *for what?*—we reply that man is obligated to answer unto the relationship which exists between him and his Creator—he occupies the place of creaturehood, subordination, utter dependency for every breath he draws, and therefore must he acknowledge God's dominion, submit to His authority, and love Him with all his strength and heart. The discharge of human responsibility is simply the recognition of God's rights and acting accordingly, a rendering to Him of His due. It is the practical acknowledgment of His ownership and government. We are justly required to be in constant subjection to His will, to employ in His service the faculties He has given us, to use the means He has appointed, to improve the opportunities and advantages He has vouchsafed us. Our whole duty is to glorify God.

From the above definition, it should be crystal clear that the fall did not, and could not to the slightest degree, cancel or impair human responsibility. The fall did not change the fundamental relationship subsisting between the Creator and the creature. God is the Owner of sinful man as truly and as fully as He was of sinless man. God is still our sovereign, and we His subjects. Furthermore, as pointed out above, fallen man is still in possession of all those faculties which qualify for discharging his responsibility. Admittedly, the babe in arms and the poor idiot are not morally accountable for their actions, but, by parity of reason, those who have reached the age when they are capable of distinguishing between right and wrong *are* morally accountable for their deeds. Fallen man, though his understanding be spiritually darkened, is still possessed of rationality. Fallen man, though under the dominion of sin, has his power of volition, and is under binding obligation to make, every time, a right and good choice. To resist temptations and refrain from evil-doing, as every human court of justice worthy of the name rightly insists.

Whatever difficulties may be theoretically involved by the fact that man's nature is now totally depraved and that he is in bondage to sin, yet God has not lost His right to command because man has lost his power to obey. While the fall has cast us out of God's favour, it has not released us from His authority. It was not God who took from man his spiritual strength and deprived him of his ability to do that which is well pleasing in His sight. Man was originally endowed with power to meet the requirements of his Maker, and it was by his own madness and wickedness that he threw away his power. But as a human monarch does not forget his rights to allegiance from his subjects when they turn rebels, but rather maintains his prerogative by demanding that they cease their insurrection and return to their fealty, so has the King of kings an infinite right to demand that lawless rebels shall become loyal subjects. If God could justly require of us no more than we are now able to render Him, it would follow that the more we enslave ourselves by evil habits, the less our liability—a palpable absurdity!

Not only is man's responsibility insisted upon throughout the Scriptures from *Genesis* to *Revelation*, but it is also asserted by man's own conscience! Whatever quibbles the individual raises from depravity, and however he argues from his moral impotency that his deeds are not criminal, he repudiates such reasoning where his fellow sinners are concerned. When others wrong him, he neither denies their accountability nor offers excuse for them. If he be cruelly slandered, robbed of his possessions or maltreated in his body, instead of saying of the culprit,

“Poor fellow, he could not help himself—Adam is to blame,” he promptly applies to the police and seeks redress in the law courts. Moreover, when the sinner is quickened and awakened by the Holy Spirit, so far from complaining against God’s righteous demands, he freely owns himself as deserving to be eternally damned for his vile rebellion, acknowledges that he was fully responsible for the same, that he is “without excuse” (Rom 1:20), feels the burden of his guilt, and lies in the dust before God in sincere repentance.

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 6

The word “interpretation” has in this connection both a stricter or narrower meaning and a looser or wider one. In the former sense, it signifies to bring out the grammatical force of the passage; in the latter, to explain its spiritual purport. If the expositor confine himself rigidly unto the technical rules of exegesis, though he may be of some service to the pedant, he will afford little practical help to the rank and file of God’s people. To discourse upon the chemical properties of food will not feed a starving man, neither will tracing out the roots of the Hebrew and Greek words (necessary though that be in its proper place) the better enable Christ’s followers to fight the good fight of faith. That remark connotes neither that we despise scholarship on the one hand nor that we hold any brief for those who would give free rein to their imagination when handling the Word of God. Rather do we mean that the chief aim of the expositor should be to bring together the truth and the hearts of his hearers or readers, that the former may have a vitalizing, edifying, transforming effect upon the latter.

In the preceding articles of this series, it has been pointed out that the interpreter’s task is to emulate those described in Nehemiah 8:8, of whom it is said, “They read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and *gave the sense*, and caused them to understand the reading,” and to do *that* the preacher must needs spend many hours every week in his study. Each word in his text must be given its precise and definite meaning according to its general scriptural usage (unless there be very clear intimation to the contrary in the passage before him), or otherwise it would be arbitrary license, and he would expound God’s oracles not by their own terms but by his own fancies or preconceived ideas. The laws of language must never be violated or the meanings of words changed to suit ourselves. We are not to evacuate the true force and import of any term, but to explain it on sound principles, and not by forced constructions of Jesuitical evasions.

The task of the interpreter is to determine, by strict exegetical investigation, the exact import of the words used by the Holy Spirit, and, as far as he possibly can, give forth God’s thoughts in his own language. It is to ascertain and fix the exact meaning of the terms used in Holy Writ and scrupulously to avoid the interjection of his personal opinions. He must insert nothing of his own, but simply endeavour to give the real sense of each passage before him. On the one hand, he must not ignore, conceal, or withhold anything that is manifestly in it; on the other hand, he must not add to or twist anything therein to suit his own caprice. Scripture must be allowed to speak for

itself, and it *does so* only so far as the preacher sets forth its genuine import. Not only is he to explain its *terms*, but also the nature of the *ideas* they express, otherwise he is apt to make use of scriptural terms and yet give them an unscriptural sense. One may discover with accuracy the meaning of each word in a passage, and yet, from some misconception of its scope or bias in his own mind, have a faulty apprehension of what the passage really teaches.

Carelessness which would not be tolerated in any other connection is, alas, freely indulged in with the Bible. Artists who are most particular in selecting their colours when painting a natural object are often most remiss when assaying to portray a sacred one. Thus Noah's ark is represented as having a number of windows in its sides, whereas it had but one, and that on the top! The dove, which came to him after the flood had subsided, is pictured with an olive *branch* instead of a "leaf" (Gen 8:11) in its mouth! The infant Moses in the ark of bulrushes is depicted with a winsome smile on his face instead of tears (Exo 2:6)! Let no such criminal disregard to the *details* of Holy Scripture mark the expositor. Instead, let the utmost care and pains be taken to ensure accuracy, by scrutinizing every detail, weighing each jot and tittle. The word for "*search the scriptures*" (Joh 5:39) signifies diligently to track out, as the hunter does the spoor of animals. The interpreter's job is to bring out *the sense* and not merely the sound of the Word.

In enumerating, describing, and illustrating some of the laws or rules which are to govern the interpreter, we have already considered: *First*, the need for recognizing and being regulated by the interrelation and mutual dependence of the Old and New Testaments. *Second*, the importance and helpfulness of observing how quotations are made from the Old in the New—the manner in which and purposes for which they are cited. *Third*, the absolute necessity for strictly conforming all our interpretations unto the general Analogy of Faith—that each verse is to be explained in full harmony with that system of truth which God has made known to us, and that any exposition is invalid if it clashes with what is taught elsewhere in the Bible. *Fourth*, the necessity of paying close attention to the whole context of any passage under consideration. *Fifth*, the value of ascertaining *the scope* of each passage, and the particular *aspect* of truth presented therein. Through lack of space, we were unable to complete our treatment of this division, so will do so here.

There is not a little in the Sermon on the Mount which forcibly illustrates this rule, for many of its statements have been grievously misunderstood through failure to perceive their scope or design. Thus, when our Lord declared, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in her heart" (Mat 5:27-28), it has been supposed that He was setting forth a *higher standard* of moral purity than the one enunciated from Sinai. But such a concept is at direct variance with His design. After solemnly affirming (in verse 17) that so far from its being His mission to destroy the Law or the prophets, He had come to fulfil them (i.e. enforce and comply with their requirements), He certainly would not, immediately after, pit Himself against their teaching. No, from verse 21 onwards He was engaged in making known that righteousness which He required in the citizens of His kingdom, which exceed the righteousness "of the scribes and Pharisees" (Mat 5:20), who were retailing the dogmas of the rabbis, who had "made the commandment of God of none effect" by their traditions (Mat 15:6).

Christ did not say, "Ye know what *God* said at Sinai," but "ye have heard that it was said by *them* of old time," which makes it unmistakably clear that He was opposing the teaching of the elders who had restricted the seventh commandment of the Decalogue to the bare act of unlawful intercourse with a married woman; insisting that it required conformity from the inward affections, prohibiting all impure thoughts and desires of the heart. There is much in Matthew 5-7 which cannot be rightly apprehended except our Lord's principal object and design in this address

be clearly perceived. Until then, its plainest statements are more or less obscure and its most pertinent illustration irrelevant. It was not the *actual* teaching of the Law and prophets which Christ was here rebutting, but the erroneous conclusion which religious teachers had drawn therefrom and the false notions based on them—and which were being so dogmatically promulgated at that time. The sharp edge of the Spirit's sword had been blunted by a rabbinical toning down of its precepts, thereby placing a construction upon them which rendered them objectionable to the unregenerate.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Mat 5:38-39) supplies another example of the need for ascertaining the scope of a passage before attempting to explain it. Through failure to do so, many have quite missed the force of this contrast. It has been supposed that our Lord was here enjoining a more merciful code of conduct than that which was exacted under the Mosaic economy. Yet if the reader turns to Deuteronomy 19:17-21, he will find that those verses gave instruction to Israel's “judges,” that they were not to be governed by sentiment, but to administer strict justice unto the evil-doer—“eye for eye,” etc. But this statute, which pertains only to the magistrate enforcing *judicial* retribution, had been perverted by the Pharisees, giving it a *general* application, thereby teaching that each man was warranted in taking the law into his own hands. Our Lord here forbade the inflicting of *private revenge*, and in so doing maintained the clear teaching of the Old Testament (see Exo 23:4-5; Lev. 19:18; Pro 24:29; 25:21-22, which expressly forbade the exercise of personal malice and retaliation).

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended and the floods came, and the wind blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock” (Mat 7:24-25). How many sermons have had read into them from those verses what is not there, and failed sadly to bring out what *is* in them, through not understanding their scope. Christ was not there engaged in proclaiming the Gospel of the grace of God and revealing the alone ground of a sinner's acceptance with Him, but was making a practical and searching application of the sermon He was here completing. The opening, “Therefore,” at once intimates that He was drawing a conclusion from all He had previously said. In the preceding verses, Christ was not describing meritmongers or declaiming against those who trusted in good works and religious performances for their salvation, but was exhorting His hearers to enter in at the straight gate (verses 13-14), warning against false prophets (verses 15-20), denouncing an empty profession. In the verse immediately before (verse 23), so far from presenting Himself as the Redeemer, tenderly wooing sinners, He is seen as the Judge, saying to hypocrites, “Depart from Me ye that work iniquity.”

In view of what has just been pointed out, it would be, to say the least, a strange place for Christ to introduce the Evangel and announce that His own finished work was the only saving foundation for sinners to rest their souls upon. Not only would that give no meaning to the introductory, “Therefore,” but it would not cohere with what immediately follows, where, instead of pointing out our need of trusting in His atoning blood, Christ showed how indispensable it is that we *render obedience* to His precepts. True indeed that there is no redemption for any soul except through “faith in His blood” (Rom 3:25), but that is not what He was here treating of. Rather was He insisting that not everyone who said unto Him, “Lord, Lord,” should enter into His kingdom, but “he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat 7:21). In other words, He was testing profession, demanding reality—that genuine faith produces good works. They who think themselves to be savingly trusting in the blood of the Lamb, while disregarding His command-

ments, are fatally deceiving themselves. Christ did not here liken the one who heard and *believed* His sayings to a wise man who built his house secure on a rock, but instead the one who “heareth and *doeth them*”—as in verse 26, the builder on the sand is one who hears His sayings “and doeth them not.”

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28). “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jam 2:24). Unless the *scope* of each writer be clearly apprehended those two statements flatly contradict each other. Romans 3:28 is a conclusion from what had been advanced in verses 21-27—all boasting before God being rendered impossible by the divine method of salvation. From the very nature of the case, if justification before God be by faith, then it must be by faith alone—without the mingling of anything meritorious of ours. James 2:24, as is clear from verses 17-18 and 26, is not treating of how the sinner obtains acceptance with God, but how such a one supplies *proof* of his acceptance. Paul was rebutting that legalistic tendency which leads men to go about and “establish their own righteousness” by works; James was contending against that spirit of licentious antinomianism which causes others to pervert the Gospel and insist that good works are not essential for any purpose. Paul was refuting meritmongers who repudiated salvation by grace alone; James was maintaining that grace works through righteousness and transforms its subjects: showing the worthlessness of a dead faith which produces naught but a windy profession. The faithful servant of God will ever alternate in warning his hearers against legalism on the one hand and libertarianism on the other.

6. *The need of interpreting Scripture by Scripture.* The general principle is expressed in the well-known words “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1Co 2:13), for while the preceding clause has reference more especially to the divine inspiration by which the apostle taught, as the authoritative mouthpiece of the Lord, yet both verses 12 and 14 treat of the *understanding* of spiritual things, and therefore we consider that the last clause of verse 13 has a double force. The Greek word rendered “comparing” is used in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament again and again to express the act of interpreting dreams and enigmas, and Charles Hodge (1797-1878) paraphrased “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” by “*explaining* the things of the Spirit in the words of the Spirit.” He pointed out that the word “spiritual” has no substantive connected with it, and thus most naturally agrees with “words” in the former sentence. For these reasons, we consider that 1 Corinthians 2:13 enunciates a most valuable and important rule for the understanding and interpreting of God’s Word, namely, that one part of it is to be explained by another, for the setting side by side of spiritual things serves to illuminate and illustrate one another, and thereby is their perfect harmony demonstrated. Something more than a confused or vague knowledge of the Scriptures is to be sought after—the ascertaining that one part of the truth is in full accord with other parts makes manifest their unity—as the curtains in the tabernacle were linked together by loops.

To a very large extent, and far more so than any uninspired book, the Bible is a self-explaining volume—not only because it records the performance of its promises and the fulfillment of its prophecies, not only because the types and antitypes mutually unfold each other, but because all the fundamental truths may be discovered by means of its own contents, without reference to anything *ab extra* or outside itself. When difficulty be experienced in one passage, it may be resolved by a comparison and examination of other passages, where the same or similar words occur, or where the same or similar subjects are dealt with at greater length or explained more clearly. For example, that vitally important expression “the righteousness of God” in Romans 1:17—every other place where it occurs in Paul’s epistles must be carefully weighed before we can be sure of

its exact meaning, and having done so, there is no need to consult heathen authors. Not only is this to be done with each word of note, but its parts and derivatives, adjuncts and cognates, are to be searched out in every instance, for often light will thereby be cast upon the same. That God intended us to study His Word thus is evident from the *absence* of any system of classification or arrangement of information being supplied us on any subject.

The principal subjects treated of in the Scriptures are presented to us more or less piecemeal, being scattered over its pages and made known under various aspects, some clearly and fully, others more remotely and tersely in different connections and with different accompaniments in the seven passages where they occur. This was designed by God in His manifold wisdom to make us search His Word. It is evident that, if we are to apprehend His full-made-known mind on any particular subject, we must collect and collate all passages in which it is adverted to, or in which a similar thought or sentiment is expressed; and by this method we may be assured that, if we conduct our investigation in a right spirit, and with diligence and perseverance, we shall arrive at a clear knowledge of His revealed will. The Bible is somewhat like a mosaic, whose fragments are scattered here and there through the Word and those fragments have to be gathered by us and carefully fitted together if we are to obtain the complete picture of any one of its innumerable objects. There are many places in the Scriptures which can be understood only by the explanations and amplifications furnished by other passages. ❧

FEBRUARY

DIVINE CURSINGS

It is unspeakably solemn to learn that these blessings and cursings proceed from the same mouth, yet a little reflection will convince the reader that such must be the case. God is light as well as love, holy as well as gracious, righteous as well as merciful, and therefore does He express His abhorrence of and visit His judgments upon the wicked, as truly as He blesses and manifests His approbation unto those who are well pleasing in His sight. An eternal heaven and an eternal hell are the inevitable and ultimate “pair of opposites.” Plainly is this awesome duality displayed in the natural world, for if, on the one hand, our senses are charmed by the golden sunsets, the flowering gardens, the gentle showers and the fertile fields, on the other hand, we are shocked and terrified by the fearful tornado, the devouring blights, the devastating flood and the destructive earthquake. “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God” (Rom 11:22). From mount Ebal were announced the divine curses (Deu 27) and from mount Gerizim the divine blessings (Deu 28). The one could not be without the other. Thus too will it be in the last Day, for while Christ will say unto His brethren, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” yet unto those who despised and rejected Him shall He say “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire” (Mat 25:34, 41).

“Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life” (Gen 3:17). That was one of the consequences which attended Adam’s apostasy from God, a part of the divine vengeance which fell upon him. And as we have recently shown in our articles upon the doctrine of human depravity, because the first man stood as the covenant head and legal representative of his race, the judgment which came upon him is shared by all his descendants. Adam was made the vice-regent of God in this scene—given dominion over all things mundane—and when he fell the effects of his awful sin were made evident on every hand. His fair inheritance was blasted, the very ground on which he trod was cursed, and so that henceforth it brought forth “thorns and thistles,” compelling him to toil for his daily bread in the sweat of his face. Every time any of us seeks to cultivate a plot of land, the numerous woes it produces, hindering our efforts, supply a very real proof of the divine sentence pronounced in Genesis 3, and evince that we belong to a fallen race.

“Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD” (Jer 17:5). A thorough acquaintance with ourselves ought to render the warning of the solemn execration unnecessary, yet sad experience proves otherwise. Have you not sufficient knowledge of yourself—your changeableness and utter unreliability—to

discover that “he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Pro 28:26)? Then why should you suppose that any of your fellows are more stable and dependable? The best of Adam’s race, when left to themselves, are mournful spectacles of fickleness and frailty, “Surely men of low degree are vanity and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity” (Psa 62:9). To seek either the patronage or protection of man is an affront to the Most High, for it is putting that confidence in the creature which the Creator alone is entitled to. The folly of such wickedness is emphasized in “and maketh *flesh* his arm”—leaning upon that which is frail and helpless (2Ch 32:8; Mat 26:41; Rom 8:3). How the Christian needs to turn this awful malediction into prayer for deliverance from temptation to look unto man for help or relief! Indirectly, yet more powerfully, this verse supplies proof that Christ is far more than man, for if he calls down a divine curse for one to put his trust in man for any temporary advantage, how much more so if he trusts in a mere creature for eternal salvation!

“If ye will not hear, and ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart” (Mal 2:2). The Lord is very tender of His honour, and will not share His glory with another (Isa 48:11), and those who lay not that fact to heart are certain to call down upon themselves divine wrath. Those words of Malachi 2:2 were addressed in the first instance unto the priests of Israel. The prophet had been reproving them for their sins, and now he declared that if they would not seriously attend to his expostulations, and glorify God by sincere repentance and reformation of conduct, then He would send a blight upon their temporal mercies. It is a most signal favour for any man to be called to minister publicly in the name of the Lord, but infidelity therein entails the most dreadful consequences: often are they given up to blindness of mind, hardness of heart, searedness of conscience. The principle of this malediction has a much wider bearing, applying both to those who hear the Gospel and a nation which is blessed with its light. Who with any spiritual discernment can fail to perceive that Britain, so highly favoured of God in the past both spiritually and temporally, is now being visited with this very curse?

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8). God is very jealous of His Gospel, and this verse should also convince His servants and people of the solemn responsibility resting upon them to preserve it in its purity. The Gospel of God makes known the only true way of salvation, and therefore any corrupting of the same is not only dishonouring to its Author, but most dangerous and disastrous to the souls of men. The apostle was inveighing against those who were inculcating an impossible mixture of Law and Gospel, insisting that circumcision and compliance with the ceremonial rites of Judaism were equally necessary as faith in Christ for justification. His was not the language of intemperate zeal, for he unqualifiedly repeats the same in the next verse, but a holy fidelity which expressed his detestation of such error as not only insulted the Savior but would prove fatal to those who imbibed it. The alone foundation of a sinner’s hope is the merits of Christ. His finished work of redemption, and those who would *plus* the same by any doings of their own, are headed for eternal destruction, and therefore any who teach men so to do are cursed of God and to be abhorred by His people.

“For as many as are of the works of the laws are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10). The first part of this verse means: all who count on being saved by their own performances, or rely upon their own obedience for acceptance by God, are under the curse of His Law, exposed to His wrath. Justification by Law-keeping is an utter impossibility for any fallen crea-

ture. Why so? Because God's Law requires flawless and perpetual conformity, sinless perfection in thought and word and deed, and because it makes no provision for failure to comply with its holy and righteous terms. It is not sufficient to hear about or know the requirements of God's Law—they must be met. Thus it is obvious that a law which already condemns cannot justify, and that any who hope to merit God's favour, by their fickle and faulty attempts to obey it, are woe-fully deceived. "To expect to be warmed by the keen northern blast, or to have our thirst quenched by a draught of liquid fire, were not more, were not so, incongruous" (John Brown, 1722-1787). This statement was made by the apostle to show that every man is under divine condemnation until he flees to Christ for refuge.

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal 3:13). Here is the glorious Gospel summed up in a brief sentence: The curse has been borne for all those who believe, visited upon the Saviour. A way has been opened whereby guilty sinners may not only escape from the curse of the Law, but actually be received into the favour of God. Amazing grace! Matchless mercy! All who put their trust in Christ are delivered from the Law's sentence of doom so that they shall never fall under it. Righteously delivered, because, as the Surety of His people, Christ was born under the Law, stood in their law-place, had all their sins imputed to Him, and made Himself answer-able for them. The Law, so finding Him, charged Him with the same, cursed Him, and demanded satisfaction. Accordingly was He dealt with by the supreme Judge, for "God spared not his own Son" but called upon the sword of justice to smite the Shepherd (Zec 13:7). By His own free consent, the Lord Jesus was "made a curse" by God Himself, and, because He paid the ransom price, all believers are "redeemed"—delivered from God's wrath and inducted into His blessing. Reader, you must either be cursed of God for ever, or put your trust in Christ made a curse for sinners.

"But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned" (Heb 6:8). This is in sharp contrast with the previous verse. The good-ground hearer "*bringeth forth*"—the Greek signifying a production of that which is normal and in due season. The graceless profession "*beareth thorns*"—the Greek word connoting an unnatural and monstrous production. There, "herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed"; here, worthless "thorns and briers." The one "receiveth blessing from God," the other is "nigh unto cursing"—about to be visited with divine judgment. Are you, my reader, bringing forth good fruit, or evil thorns?

EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

14. Sins Provided For (2:1-2)

"*Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness*" (1Ti 3:16). Not only so in connection with the two natures united in the person of the God-man Mediator, but also in regard to the two opposing natures which at present exist in all those on earth who are members of His mystical body. This it is which alone casts light upon the strange conflict which is being ceaselessly waged within them, and which explains many a paradox in Holy Writ. A forceful example of the latter is

found in the first chapter of our epistle. In it “The apostle seems to have said both that believers are free from sin and also that they have sin (verses 7 and 8); that they cannot sin and yet that they do sin (verses 6, 10). The explanation is that these verses contain the antithesis of Christian experience. In all realms there are apparent contradictions. Night is a contradiction of day, winter a contradiction of summer, and infancy is at the antipodes of old age” (Levi Palmer). The same antithesis of Christian experience, or contradictory elements, is brought forward into 2:1, where the apostle declares:

“My little children, these things I write unto you, that you sin not,” yet at once adds “And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father.”

Admire the blessed balance of truth there, and observe the order in which it is presented. There is no turning of the grace of God into lasciviousness by making light of sin, but a forbidding of us to commit any. “Sin not” needs to be turned into fervent prayer: “Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not” (Psa 17:5). “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” “Cleanse thou me from secret [unsuspected] faults” (Psa 19:12). But more, “sin not” is to be made our firm and fixed resolution. So far from complacently expecting to fail, we must do as the Psalmist did: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa 119:11). That is the use we are to make of God’s Word: to get it deeply rooted in our affections, so that holy conduct will result from it, and that we may be able to bear testimony: “by the word of thy lips I have kept *me from* the paths of the destroyer” (Psa 17:4). It must also be our diligent endeavour: “Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men” (Act 24:16).

“*Sin not.*” Allow not yourself in any; no, not in what men term “little” ones. Yield to no temptation. Keep yourself unspotted from the world. Even though divine provision is made for sin, yet God’s demand is “cease to do evil; learn to do well” (Isa 1:16-17). “This is the order and method of the doctrine of the Gospel. First, to keep us from sin, and then to relieve us against sin. But here the deceit of sin enters. It puts this new wine into old bottles, whereby the bottles are broken, and the wine perishes as to our benefit from it. It changes this order of Gospel truth. It takes up the last first, and then excludes the use of the first utterly. If any man sins there is pardon provided, is all the Gospel that sin would willingly suffer to abide in the minds of men. When we would come to God by believing, it would be pressing the former part of being free from sin; when the Gospel proposes the latter principally, or the pardon of sin for our encouragement. When we are come to God and should walk with Him, it will have only the latter proposed, that there is pardon for sin, when the Gospel principally proposes the former, or, keeping ourselves from sin. The grace of God brings salvation, having appeared to us to that end and purpose” (John Owen).³

“*These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father.*” Observe well how cautious and discriminating was John in the selection of his language here. First, so far from regarding the commission of sin as something which is to be expected as the common experience of all God’s children, he changes the number from “that ye sin not” to “if any man sin.” Second, even then such a fall is not contemplated as inevitable, but only as possible, and therefore, instead of saying “when,” he uses the hypothetical “if.” Third, the antithesis between the two sentences had been made even plainer and more direct had our translators rendered the opening word of the second member “But if any man sin”—as *kai* is translated

³ **John Owen** (1616-1683) – called “The Prince of the Puritans,” a chaplain in the army of Oliver Cromwell and vice-chancellor of Oxford University. Most of his life he served as a minister in congregational churches. His written works span forty years and run to twenty-four volumes representing among the best resources for theology in the English language. Born to Puritan parents in the Oxfordshire.

in John 1:21; Acts 16:7; 1 John 2:27, which in each instance more suitably points a contrast. Finally, the tense of the verb which the apostle here employs is to be carefully noted: he did not say “But if any man sinneth,” but “sin.” It is not a continuous repetition which is in view, but a single and past act—as his use of the aorist connotes.

“*We have an advocate with the Father.*” Here too we could call attention to the nicety of the apostle’s diction, as appears in his selection of the pronoun. It would naturally be expected that after saying “But if any man sin” John had written “he has an advocate.” Or, if he employed the plural number in keeping with the first part of the verse, he had continued to use the “you.” Why then this change to “we have an advocate”? Because he would include himself! Beautiful is it there to behold the apostle’s modesty. He does not address himself to his little children as from an elevated plane, as one whose spiritual experience was far removed from and superior to theirs, but instead he places himself on the same level as them, as personally needing the mediation of Christ—so far was he from imagining himself qualified to act as a mediator for others! How much we lose, dear Christian friends, through a careless reading of God’s Word, failing to note and weigh every jot and tittle in it! John’s change from the “ye” to “we” might well be made the text for a sermon on “The Humility of the Apostles.”

By John’s inclusion of himself in the “we,” it is quite possible that he also intimated that his preceding “If any man sin” was to be understood as without any distinction. If any child of God, let him be what he will—a babe or a father in Christ, rich or poor, high or low—this Advocate belongs to him. Every believer is His client, for since He makes intercession for them “that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25), no such comer is excluded. Note well, it is not “But if any man sin he had an advocate,” as though Christ would no longer take the case of such a one, but “we have”—“in the present tense, which notes duration, a continued act. We have an Advocate, i.e. we constantly have, we have Him as long as life endures” (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680). Observe too that John did not say, “but if any man repents we have an advocate,” for in no sense is either our contrition or confession a moving cause of Christ’s mediation, rather are they the effects or fruits thereof. Nothing but the apprehension of the love of Christ and His present gracious advocacy is so well calculated to melt the backslider’s heart.

In a most striking and blessed manner our present verse contains both exhortation and consolation. “But if any man sin” despite God’s prohibition, while he must not be unconcerned, neither should he yield to despondency. For on the one hand it was not their affections which clove to sin, but sin which did cleave to their affections. And on the other, while God makes no allowance for sin, He has made provision for it. Therefore, “We must not sin that grace may abound, but when we have sinned, we must make use of abounding grace” (Matthew Henry).⁴ From the inspired example left us here by the apostle, it is clearly as much the preacher’s duty to comfort as to admonish; it is as necessary for him to make known the divinely provided relief for sin as to warn against it. “The valiant soldier will be most furiously attacked by the enemy, and may sometimes be foiled, and despondency is as inimical to watchfulness, diligence, and holy obedience, as even carnal security itself. No man, on scriptural principles, can conclude himself to be any better than a hypocrite who habitually commits sin because God is ready to pardon the penitent; but the fallen, who desire to arise and renew the combat, have encouragement so to do” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

⁴ **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) – Presbyterian preacher, author, and commentator. His *Exposition of the Old and New Testament* (1710) easily holds first place among devotional commentaries for its blending of good sense, quaintness, original and felicitous remark, and genuine insight into the meaning of the sacred writers.

If God's children should sin, it is not "they are rejected by Christ and forfeit their salvation" but instead, "we have [not "had"] an advocate," who undertakes for them and pleads their cause before God. "It is not an Advocate for sin, though for sinners. He does not vindicate the commission of sin or plead for the performance of it: He is no patron of iniquity. Nor does He deny that His clients have sinned, or affirm that their actions are not sins: He allows in court all their sins, with all their aggravating circumstances. Nor does He go about to excuse or extenuate them. But He is an Advocate for the non-imputation of them, and for the application of pardon to them. He pleads in their favour that these sins have been laid upon Himself, and He has borne them, and His blood has been shed for the remission of them, and that He has made full satisfaction for them; and therefore in justice they ought not to be laid to their charge, but that forgiveness of them should be applied unto them, for the relief and comfort of their burdened and distressed consciences" (John Gill, 1697-1771).

"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Most blessedly was this typed out under the Levitical economy. When Aaron entered the holy place, he bore the names of the twelve tribes upon his breast plate (Exo 28:9), to signify that he was to have such care and love for them as those who were the dearest objects of his affections. And thus it is with the High Priest of the spiritual Israel. Christ presents His people before God as those who are inestimably dear unto Him. He not only died for them, but lives for them (Rom 5:10). He died to render satisfaction to God on their behalf; He lives to keep them secure. This was one chief end of His ascension and session at God's right hand. Christ entered "into heaven itself" for what end?—"now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb 9:24). Though there is a great change in His condition from a state of humiliation to a state of exaltation, yet there is no change in His office or in His attitude unto His redeemed. He came here from the Father to make known His gracious purpose, and He has returned to Him to sue out the benefits which He so dearly purchased. "When His offering was accepted, He went to heaven, to the supreme Judge, to improve this acceptance of His sacrifice" (Charnock).

Christ not only died for our offences, but He rose again for our justification (Rom 4:24). His redemptive work is not only a historic fact, but a present, living, efficacious reality, for He is seen on high "a Lamb as it had been slain" (Rev 5:6). The present advocacy of Christ expresses the glorious truth that He has undertaken our cause before God, and performs for us all that such an office implies—defending us, securing our rights as His ransomed people. His being seated at "God's right hand" imports that He is possessed of power and authority. It was promised that He should be "a priest upon his throne" (Zec 6:13). He is not begging for favours or gratuitous benefits, but suing out a right: all His transactions there are in a way of satisfaction and purchase. Christ sits at God's right hand as no silent and inactive Spectator, but as an industrious and mighty Intercessor: to prevent the sins of His people making any breach, to preserve a perpetual amity between God and them. Thus we have "a Friend at court" who spreads before the Father the odours of His merits as the all-sufficient answer to every indictment which Satan prefers against us.

An advocate presupposes an adversary, and that He appears to defend our cause. This is indeed a great mystery about which we can know nothing whatever save what God has been pleased to reveal. In Revelation 12:10, the devil is termed "the accuser of our brethren...which accused them before our God day and night." From this it appears that when the saints fall into sin the adversary charges them with the same before God, demanding sentence of judgment upon them—as he did Job of that of which he was not guilty. In Zechariah 3 we see the high priest in filthy garments and Satan resisting him. But Christ calls on the Father to rebuke him, saying, "Is

not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” Orders were given for his filthy garments to be taken away, his iniquity was caused to pass from him and he was clothed with change of raiment, and a “fair mitre” set on his head! The Advocate admitted the iniquity of His client, but defied Satan on the ground that his sin was pardoned and a righteousness had been procured for him. This is recorded to assure us that no charged preferred against any whom Christ represents will succeed.

“We have an advocate with the Father.” That blessed statement is as much designed for our comfort as is the fact that Christ is now acting as the Attorney of His redeemed, for it tells of His gracious relation and disposition toward them on whose supreme will their case depends. It emphasizes the grand fact that the heart of the Judge of all (Heb 12:23) is toward and not against His people. And as Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) pointed out, “he says not only ‘an advocate with His Father,’ though that had given much assurance; or with ‘your Father,’ though that might afford much boldness; but indefinitely ‘with the Father,’ as intending to take in both—to assure us of the prevailing efficacy of Christ’s intercession from both.” “Jesus Christ the righteous;” in Himself (Jer 23:5), in the ground of His admission into this office (Heb 1:9), and in the cause He pleads. He asks for nothing which is in the least degree opposed to the strict requirements of the Law. He requests not the Father to show mercy at the expense of justice. There is no compromise of holiness in God’s pardoning His children, for Christ made full atonement for all their sins.

The work of advocacy belongs to and is part of Christ’s priestly office, as the type (Lev 16:12-14) evinces. As Aaron’s entering into the holy of holies after the atoning sacrifice had been offered was a figure of Christ’s ascension after His passion, so the incense he bore there adumbrated the prayers of Christ on high. Christ’s intercession respects the procuring of grace and mercy for His people, and all that they need while left in this scene; but His advocacy relates only to their sins—it is that part of His intercession wherein He undertakes our defense when accused by the adversary. That advocacy is inseparably connected with His being our “propitiation,” for His oblation on earth is the foundation of His intercession in heaven. The saint also has “another Advocate” within him, for the Greek word rendered “Comforter” in John 14:16, 15:26, and 16:7, is the one translated “advocate” in 1 John 2:1. As the result of Christ’s intercession on high, the Holy Spirit within the believer convicts him of his sins, moves him to confess them before God, and thereby our broken communion is restored.

“And he is the propitiation for our sins” (verse 2). Those words are in part an explanation of the ground on which Christ’s advocacy rests, and in part an amplification of “the righteous” of the preceding verse. Christ’s advocacy is based upon the fact that He has taken away our unrighteousness. The word “propitiation” means precisely the same thing as the Old Testament term “atonement” (the same Greek word being found in the Septuagint⁵ version of Leviticus 23:27; Numbers 5:8, rendered by “atonement”), providing it is understood in its scriptural signification, namely as a penal and sacrificial satisfaction unto divine holiness and justice, for the expiation of sin and the averting of vengeance. That is what atonement is—“at-one-ment,” or reconciliation, is what it effected. The force of the Hebrew word appears plainly in such a passage as Numbers 16:46, namely as that which pacifies God’s wrath (compare 2Sa 24:15, 18). Thus to atone or propitiate is to placate (it is rendered “appease” in Genesis 32:20) by means of an adequate compensation—“kaphar” is translated “satisfaction” in Numbers 35:31-32.

As the word “vicarious” relates Christ’s sacrifice unto those in whose stead it was made, so the term “propitiation” relates it to God as the One to whom it was offered, as a reparation to His

⁵ **Septuagint** – a Greek translation of the Old Testament, commonly abbreviated as LXX, which derives from its alleged “seventy” translators; made approximately 3rd century BC, it was the Bible of the early church.

broken Law and the dishonor done Him by sin. The grand end of Christ's mediation is the appeasing of God's anger and the securing of His favour. Note carefully He "is our propitiation," for the apostle is not referring to what Christ was in His death, but what He is in consequence thereof, to meet our present needs. He entered heaven as the propitiation of the Church and on that basis is now serving as the Medium of forgiveness and the Maintainer of communion. He is the Advocate with the Father on behalf of His sinning people, pleading His righteousness and blood for them. That plea is founded on His sacrifice, which was presented for the entire election of grace, and therefore God justly forgives them. It is because Christ is such that His erring people may have the most confident recourse to Him in every time of need.

"And not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Universalists and Arminians⁶ have misunderstood the sound of those words through failure to ascertain their sense. They cannot mean that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of all mankind, or every Scripture which teaches the eternal punishment of the lost would be falsified; or, on the other hand, the oblation of Christ is largely a failure and He will not "see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied" with the fruits. Those propositions ought to be so self-evident as to require no argument. Justice—divine justice least of all—does not demand a double payment for the same debt, and if Christ rendered full satisfaction unto God for the sins of the entire human race, then not a single member of it can possibly perish. Our verse is not announcing a possibility, but an actuality: it is not Christ's willingness to be a propitiation for "the whole world" if they threw down their weapons and trusted in Him, but that He is so, and therefore if the whole world here is to be understood without restriction, then the verse teaches universal salvation and Scripture contradicts itself. But it does not: as here we have a "world" saved, so in 1 Corinthians 11:32, a "world" lost!

As its opening "And" indicates, this declaration of verse 2 must not be separated from verse 1. Beyond controversy, John is there addressing Christians, and Christians only. His design was to deter them from sinning, and to point out that in case they did it was not to be supposed that they had forfeited their salvation, for divine provision was made for just such an emergency. The contrite believer (1:9) has a twofold ground of assurance set before him., First, he has an advocate with the Father, and second, He is the propitiation for his sins. Parallel passages show that none but Christians may draw comfort therefrom, for Christ is the Advocate of none others. Those for whom He makes intercession are defined by the "us" of Romans 8:34, and the "them that come unto God by him" of Hebrews 7:25. "He disowns in His mediatory prayer the whole unbelieving world...As He prayed not for the world on earth (Joh 17:9), so much less does He in heaven" (Charnock), for He knows that no prayer of His can add one to the number of God's elect.

But why did John say "and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world"? To stain the pride of the Jews, and to comfort the despised Gentiles. Throughout the Mosaic economy the sacrifices were available for none but Israelites and proselytes who were circumcised and permitted to enjoy some of their privileges. During the days of His public ministry Christ forbade His disciples to go into the way of the Gentiles (Mat 10:5-7), but after His resurrection He commissioned them to preach the Gospel to every creature and make disciples of all nations, for at the cross "the middle wall of partition" (Eph 2:14) was broken down; therefore did He die outside Jerusalem (Heb 13:12) to intimate that His sacrifice had been offered for the whole election of grace, and not for believing Israelites only. John was one of the three apostles "unto the circumcision" (Gal 2:9) and that his epistle was addressed principally to saved Jews is evident: they alone

⁶ **Arminians** – followers of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), Dutch theologian, born in Oudewater, the Netherlands. He rejected the Reformers' understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God's predestination of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will.

had the old commandment from the beginning (2:7), had known Christ “from the beginning” (2:13), and only from Jewish Christian assemblies would “antichrists” have gone out (2:18-19).

Thus “He is the propitiation for our sins” is Jewish Christians, and “also for the...whole world” signifies Gentile believers also. That interpretation is necessitated by John 11:51-52, which supplies a threefold parallel. First, “he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation”—“He is the propitiation for our sins.” Second, “and not for that nation only”—“and not for ours only.” Third, “but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad,” which explains “and also for the...whole world” in which God’s children were dispersed—cf. “both theirs and ours” (1Co 1:2): if the “whole world” signified the race, the previous clause would be meaningless, for there could be no “also”! That the word “world” is used as a general expression rather than an absolute one is clear from many passages. “All the world wondered after the beast” (Rev. 13:3), yet there were some who received not his mark nor worshipped his image (20:4)! Satan, “deceiveth the whole world” (Rev 12:9), yet not God’s elect (Mat 24:24)! “The whole world lieth in wickedness” (1Jo 5:19), not so those who are in Christ. Such expressions as “all flesh” (Act 2:17), “the Gentiles” (Act 11:18), “all men” (1Ti 2:4), “The Saviour of the world” (1Jo 4:14) are indefinite expressions which include God’s elect at large, in contradistinction from Jews only. As they were too self-centered (Act 11:1,2; Gal. 2:12), so individual Christians lay too much stress on what Christ did for me, instead of dwelling upon what He did for the whole Church!

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

66. The Challenge Met (11:5-6)

Before developing the central theme suggested by the verses which are now to be before us, let us offer a few comments upon their setting. “And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor had heard those things, that he sent” a message to many of his fellow kings, and they, with their armies, met together to fight against Israel (11:1-5). It has been pointed out by another that “Jabin seems to have held in northern Palestine a similar position of power and influence to what Adonizedek king of Jerusalem did in the south.” If the reader refers back to 10:1-5, he will find that that king had done precisely the same thing, except that his assault was made not directly against Israel, but upon the Gibeonites who had made peace with them. It is a trite remark to say that “history repeats itself,” nevertheless, it is one which casts an unfavourable reflection upon fallen human nature, for it is tantamount to acknowledging that one generation fails to profit from the faults of those who preceded them and avoid the fatal pits into which they fell. What proof that all are “clay of the same lump” (Rom 9:21), and that “As in water face answereth to face so the heart of man to man” (Pro 27:19).

“When Jabin...had *heard* those things” (11:1). Once more we meet with this important word—compare 2:10; 5:1; 9:1; 10:1, and note the various reactions of those who received such tidings. It is true that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17),

yet it is also a fact that “The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them” (Pro 20:12). True alike both naturally and spiritually, for morally man is both deaf and blind to the things of God (Mat 13:13-14), and therefore the voice of mercy is disregarded and the sinner perceives no beauty in Christ that he should desire Him. To his need and to the remedy he is alike insensible. Until a miracle of grace is wrought within him, his imagination is darkened and his heart closed against God. That is why multitudes that hear the Gospel with the outward ear profit not, and those who *are* saved under it and receive it into their hearts do so solely because *God* has made them to differ from their unbelieving fellows. Jabin “had heard” of the destruction of Jericho and Ai, but instead of trembling thereat, he hardened his heart. Thus do sinners rush madly to destruction notwithstanding the repeated warnings they received from the deaths of their godless fellows.

That which is recorded in the beginning of Joshua 11 looks back to and is the sequel of what was briefly noticed by us in 9:2. That was preliminary, a consulting together, and probably a determining and promising how strong a force each king was prepared to contribute unto the common cause. *This* was the materialization of their plans and the actual taking of the field by their armies. As we intimated in the November 1949 article, this was a new departure, for up to that point the Canaanites had acted more or less on the defensive, but upon hearing of the overthrow and burning of Ai, they determined to take the offensive. First, the various kings mentioned in 11:1-3, considered that, now that *their own interests* were seriously threatened, it was time to unite their forces and make a massed attack upon Israel. Second, the king of Jerusalem and his satellites agreed to fall upon the Gibeonites. The latter was the first to be carried into execution, and, though it met with failure and the utmost disaster, Jabin and his confederates (which appears to have included all the Canaanites to the utmost western and northern borders) were undeterred, and, instead of casting themselves upon Israel’s mercy, determined to destroy them in battle.

This “league of nations,” or uniting together of several kings and making common cause, was no new thing, even at that early date, for Genesis 14:1-3 reveals that centuries before there had been what might well be designated “the western block of nations” assailing “the eastern power and its tributaries.” But this movement was to meet with no more success than had the concerted measures taken by Adonizedek. “And they went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many” (11:4). A real challenge was now made to Israel’s further occupancy of the land, and a most terrifying sight must it have presented to the natural eye. This vast assembly was not only far more numerous than any force which Israel had previously encountered, but it was much more formidable and powerful, being provided with a great number of horses and chariots, whereas Israel’s army was on foot (Deu 17:16)—note the absence of the mention of *horses* in Genesis 24:35; 26:14; Job 1:3—they are seen first in Egypt (Gen 47:17).

As a protest against the slavish literalism which now exists in certain circles, and as a demurrer against those who insist that the words of Revelation 7:9, “a great multitude, which no man could number,” mean exactly what they affirm, a few words require to be said upon our being told that the assembled hosts of the Canaanites were “even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude.” One had supposed that any person of average intelligence and education would at once perceive that such language is hyperbolic, and therefore not to be understood according to the strict letter of it. Such a rhetorical figure is frequently used in Scripture for the purpose of producing a vivid impression. Thus, in the days of Moses, the Lord declared He had multiplied Israel “as the stars of heaven for multitude” (Deu 1:10). When the Midianites assailed Israel, it is said, “They came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without

number” (Jdg 6:5) and “as the sand by the sea side for multitude” (7:12). The Philistines who gathered themselves together against Saul are described as “the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude” (1Sa 8:5). When God’s judgments were on Israel, He declared, “Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas” (Jer 15:8). Nineveh is said to have multiplied its merchants “above the stars of heaven” (Nah 3:16).

Thus, “as the sand which is upon the sea shore” is a proverbial expression to signify a great number. Before such massed armies, Israel might well be affrighted, especially since they were at such a disadvantage, entirely on foot. In the light of Judges 4:3, it is highly probable that the chariots commanded by Jabin were of iron, and, as was customary of those used by the ancients in warfare, armed with terrible scythes, to cut down men as they drove along. Doubtless such a host would be fully assured of an easy victory, but they were to discover, as others both before and since have done, that “the race is not to the swift, not the battle to the strong” (Ecc 9:11). The size and might of this assembly only made its overthrow the more notorious and demonstrated more evidently that it was the Almighty who fought for Israel. Since they were the aggressors, Israel was fully justified in destroying them. In like manner will God, in the day of judgment, have abundant cause to cast into hell those who have rebelled against Him and strengthened themselves against the Almighty (Job 15:25).

We entitled the preceding article “Challenged,” and concluded by pointing out that the last verse of Joshua 10 shows us Israel at Gilgal—the place of conscious weakness and of communion with God—and that while there the enemy could not harm them. In substantiation of that statement, we quoted the opening verses of Psalm 91, “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (verse 1). Without attempting to indicate the typical allusions of that figurative language, or entering into any niceties of exposition, suffice it to say that spiritually it signifies that they who live in close fellowship with God are in the place of safety and security. No evil can reach them there, or, as Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) expressed it, “the outstretched wings of His love and power cover them from all harm.” “I will say of the LORD, he is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in him will I trust” (verse 2). *That* was the inference the Psalmist drew from that fact, the application he made to himself of that blessed promise. Confiding in the Lord, resting on His word, he knew that he was fully protected from all the storms of life and the malice of his foes. No matter how many, how powerful, how relentless his enemies, he was resolved to trust in Him who was his covenant God, his All in All.

“Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day” (Psa 91:3-5). In those words, we are permitted to hear the Psalmist’s holy soliloquy, assuring himself that, regardless of what form the enemy’s attack should take or when it came, he had an unfailing shield in the Lord, and therefore there was nothing for him to fear. And that is just as true today, my reader, as it was three thousand years ago. He who unreservedly places himself in the hands of God is perfectly secure in the midst of all dangers—infallibly so in connection with his soul, and reasonably so in regard to his body—and therefore should he enjoy full serenity of mind when his godless fellows are filled with alarm and terror. But let it be carefully noted that verse 1 is the foundation on which rests all that follows. It is only as close communion with God be maintained that the soul will be able to confide in and rely upon Him in seasons of stress or peril. While we dwell in the secret place of the most High, the most skillful deceiver cannot beguile nor the most formidable foe harm us.

The greater the dangers menacing God's people, the greater support may they ask for and expect from Him. The more entirely their hearts be fixed on Him as their strength and deliverer, the more certainly shall their spiritual enemies be subdued by them. See this most strikingly exemplified here in Joshua 11. "And when all these kings were met together, they came and pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. And the LORD said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them; for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel" (verses 5-6). First, let us observe that JEHOVAH here made good the word that He had given through Moses; "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest *horses, and chariots*, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them; for the LORD thy God is with thee...to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (Deu 20:1, 4). How this reminds us of the declaration, "He is faithful that promised" (Heb 10:23)! One of the titles which Deity has taken unto Himself is "The faithful God" (Deu 7:9). How safely then may He be relied upon! None ever yet really trusted Him in vain.

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them; for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel" (11:6a). Very striking indeed is that statement and most blessed. Does the reader perceive its real force as he weighs its connection with what immediately precedes? Surely it is apparent; the challenge made by the Canaanites was not simply against Israel, but against Israel's *God*! It is like what we find in the opening chapters of Job, where something very much more than a satanic attack upon that patriarch is in view. The evil one dared to assail *JEHOVAH Himself*, for when He asked him, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" we are told that "Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about this house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land" (1:8-10). That was a maligning of the divine character, for it was tantamount to saying that Job worshipped God not for what He is in Himself, but merely for what He had bestowed upon him.

What we have just pointed out is made yet plainer in Satan's next words: "But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face"—so far from adoring Thee because of Thy personal perfections. Job merely renders a mercenary service for what he gets from Thee. Base insinuation was that—Job is Thy dutiful servant not because he has any love for Thee or genuine regard to Thy will, but from selfish principles, and *that* reflects no credit on Thee. It was an impugning of the divine character, a blasphemous challenging of God's own excellency. As the sequel shows, the Lord accepted the challenge, and by so doing made fully evident the adversary's lie, for after he had been allowed to slay his sons and seize his possessions, the Lord gave Job the same commendation as before: "a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil, and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him" (2:3). Thus did God glory over the baffled devil and upbraid him for his failure, for Job was equally loyal to Him in adversity as in prosperity. Still Satan was not satisfied: "All that a man hath will he give for his life...touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face" (2:4-5). And again he was proved a liar, for the patriarch declared, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (13:15).

Though the circumstances were different, the same principle was really involved here in Joshua 11—the devil's enmity against and opposition to God. For it was the Lord who had given Canaan unto Abraham and his seed, and He it was who had brought them into it. Palestine was Israel's by right of divine donation. But now the occupancy of their inheritance was hotly chal-

lenged. All those kings with their armies were determined to destroy them. The gauntlet was thrown down; let it be put to the issue was the language of their actions. The Lord promptly accepted the challenge, and let it be known unto Israel that “he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye” (Zec 2:8). Blessed figure of speech was that; telling not only of the inherent weakness and tenderness of the Lord’s people, but intimating their nearness and dearness unto Himself. God strongly resents any affront done to them, and will severely punish those who seek to harm them. Therefore did the Lord immediately assure Joshua that there was no reason for him to be dismayed by this imposing force of the enemy; they were but flinging themselves upon “the thick bosses of *his* bucklers” (Job 15:26), rushing headlong to their destruction, as would be made to appear on the morrow. So likewise, in the end, will all the words of the devil be destroyed.

A most important truth is exemplified in all that has been pointed out above, yet one that is little apprehended by God’s people today—namely, that Satan’s assault upon them is really an attack upon their Lord—upon them only because of their relationship to Him. That is illustrated again in Acts 9, for when He arrested Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, as he was “breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” He said, “why persecute thou *me*?”—it was the devil who was impelling Saul, as it was Christ, and not merely His disciples, against whom he was venting his animosity. And thus it is now. As God suffered Satan to afflict Job so sorely, not because that patriarch had given occasion to be severely chastised, but in order that his integrity might the more plainly appear and the divine character be vindicated, so He still permits the adversary both to tempt and buffet His people, that their steadfastness (in varying degrees, but always from a total apostasy) may redound to His own glory. As we are told in 1 Peter 1:7, “That the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”—not only, and not principally, *theirs*, but primarily and pre-eminently *God’s*.

The practical value of this important truth scarcely requires to be pointed out. Since it be the Lord Himself rather than His redeemed, against whom the venom of the serpent is ultimately aimed, how secure are the saints in His hand! Secure, because His own personal honour is involved in their preservation. He has given definite assurance that “This is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (Joh 6:39), that they shall “never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (Joh 10:20), and therefore, if the devil were to bring about the eternal destruction of a single one of them, Christ would be eternally disgraced. But such a calamity is utterly impossible, for though Satan be mighty, the Son of God is almighty. Upon that act, in full persuasion of the everlasting preservation of every soul who has fled to the Lord Jesus for refuge, may each believer rest with implicit confidence. Here, then, is yet another important lesson taught the believer in this invaluable book of Joshua concerning his spiritual warfare, namely, that the contest is, ultimately, between Satan and his Savior, and therefore the issue cannot be in the slightest doubt; as surely as Joshua and the children of Israel overcame and vanquished all the Canaanites who came against them, so will Christ and His Church triumph gloriously over the devil and his angels.

But further. It is the believer’s privilege to realize, especially when fiercely assaulted and sorely pressed by the foe, that the outcome of the fight in which he is engaged rests not with him but with the Captain of his salvation, and therefore to Him he may turn at all times for succor and for victory. What the Lord said here unto Joshua, the Christian should regard as being said unto himself: “Be not afraid because of them.” Those who are now arrayed against the Christian and who seek his destruction shall soon themselves be destroyed. “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom 16:20), and meanwhile, as the apostle immediately added, “The

grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. Amen.” But just as that assuring word spoken to Joshua was addressed unto his *faith* and could be enjoyed only by the exercise of that grace in the interval before its fulfillment, so serenity of mind, while menaced by his foes, can only be the believer’s as he by faith appropriates that promise unto himself. Then let his triumphant language be, “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid” (Isa 12:2). In proportion as he does so will he be warranted in resting on that declaration, “Surely he *shall deliver thee* from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers” (Psa 41:3-4).

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

6. Its Nature, Part 2

Under this aspect of our subject we are endeavouring to supply an answer to the questions: What is connoted by the term “total depravity”? Wherein lies the essential difference or differences between man as unfallen and fallen? Precisely what is the nature of that awful malady which now afflicts us? In the January issue, we dwelt upon what it does not consist of, showing that man has not ceased to be a complete and tripartite being, that he is in possession of that spirit which is a necessary part of his constitution; that the fall has not resulted in the loss of any faculties of his soul; that he has not been deprived of the freedom of his will or power of volition; and that there has been no lessening of his responsibility as an accountable creature unto God. Turning now to *what has* resulted from the fall, it will be found that there is here both a privative and a positive side, that there were certain good things of which we were deprived, and that there were other evil things which we derived. Only as both of these are taken into consideration can we obtain a full answer to our question.

First, by the fall, man lost *the moral image of God*. As briefly pointed out in the second article of this series, the “image of God” in which he was originally created refers to his moral nature. It was that which constituted him a spiritual being, and, as John Calvin (1509-1564) expressed it, “It includes all the excellencies in which the nature of man surpasses all the other species of animals.” More particularly what that “image” consisted of is intimated in Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10, where a detailed summary of the same is supplied, for our being “renewed” therein (at regeneration) clearly implies it to be the *same* divine image in which man was made at the beginning. In those two passages it is described as consisting of “righteousness and true holiness” and the “knowledge of God.” Let us now enlarge a little upon each of those component parts.

By “righteousness,” we are to understand, as everywhere in Scripture, conformity to the divine Law. Before the fall, there was an entire harmony between the whole moral nature of man and all the requirements of that Law which is “holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12). This was very much more than a merely negative “innocence” or freedom from everything sinful, or even bias or tendency toward it, which is all that Socinians allow; namely something nobler, higher and more spiritual. There was perfect agreement and concord between the constitution of our first parents and the rule of conduct set before them, not only in their external actions, but also in the

very springs of those actions, in the innermost parts of their beings—in their desires and motives, in all the tendencies and inclinations of their hearts and minds. As Ecclesiastes 7:29 declares, God “made man *upright*,” which refers not to the carriage of his body, except so far as that shadowed forth his moral excellence. That righteousness was lost at the fall, but is, in principle, restored at regeneration, when God writes His laws in our hearts and puts them in our minds—imparts to us a love for and relish of them, makes us willingly subject to their authority.

By “holiness,” we are to understand chastity and undefilement of being. As righteousness was that which made Adam *en rapport* with the divine Law so holiness was that which rendered him meet for fellowship with his Maker. There was in him that spotless purity of nature which fitted him for communion with the Holy One, for “holiness” is not only a relationship, but moral quality too—not only a separation from all that is evil, but the endowment and possession of that which is good. JEHOVAH is “glorious in holiness” (Exo 15:11), and therefore those with whom He converses must be personally suited to Himself—none but the pure in heart shall see God (Mat 5:8). It is inconceivable that God would, by an immediate act, have created any other kind of rational and responsible being than one that was pure and perfect, the more so since he was to be the archetype of mankind. As James H. Thornwell (1812-1862) so aptly expressed it, “Holiness was the inheritance of his nature—the birthright of his being. It was the state in which all his faculties received their form.” That holiness was lost when man fell, but by regeneration and sanctification it is restored to the elect who are made “partakers of his holiness” (Heb 12:10)—a principle of holiness being communicated to them at the new birth, which develops as they grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord.

By “knowledge,” we are to understand the cognition of God Himself. As Adam’s holiness or purity of heart capacitated him to “see God” in the spiritual sense of the word, so also was he enabled thereto by the Holy Spirit’s indwelling of him. As Goodwin pointed out, “Where holiness was, we may be sure the Spirit was too...the same Spirit [as in the regenerate] was in Adam’s heart to assist his graces and to cause them to flow and bring forth, and to move him to live according to those principles of life given to him” (Vol. 6, p. 54). It is clear from the nature of the case that, since Adam was created in maturity of body, he must have been created in maturity of mind, that there was then resident in him what we acquire only by slow experience. Adam was able to apprehend and appreciate God for what He is in Himself; he had a true and intuitive knowledge of the perfections of Deity, the heartfelt realization of their excellence. That knowledge of God was lost at the fall, by Adam and to his offspring, but it is restored to the elect at regeneration, when He shines “in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6).

Second, by the fall, *man lost the life of God*. The soul was not only made by God but *for God*; fitted to know, enjoy, and commune with Him; and its life is in Him. But evil necessarily severs from the Holy One, and then, instead of being alive in God, the soul is dead in sin. Not that the soul has ceased to be, for Scripture distinguishes sharply between life and existence, as in “But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth” (1Ti 5:6). It is a moral or spiritual death, not of being, but of *well-being*. “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1Jo 5:12). To have the Son of God for my very own is to have everything that is really worth having; to be without Him, no matter what temporal things I may momentarily possess, is to be an utter pauper. “Life,” spiritual and eternal life, is a comprehensive expression to include all the blessedness which man is capable of enjoying here and hereafter. He that hath life is eternally saved, accepted in the Beloved, admitted into the divine favour, made partaker of the

divine nature, is righteous and holy in the sight of God; he that is without “life” is destitute of all these things.

To be separated from God is necessarily to be deprived of everything which makes life worth living, for He is “the fountain of life” (Psa 36:9), and therefore of light, of glory, of blessedness. No finite mind can conceive, still less can any human pen express, the fullness of those words “the fountain of life.” We can but compare other passages of Scripture which make known something of their meaning. As we do so, we learn that there is at least a three-fold life which His people receive from God. First, His benign approbation: “in his *favour* is life” (Psa 30:5). In Leviticus 1:4, it is rendered “accepted” and in Deuteronomy 30:16, “the good will of him that dwelt in the bush.” But the verse which best enables us to understand its force is “O Naphtali, *satisfied with favour*, and full with the blessing of the LORD” (Deu 33:23)—those who are favourably regarded by Him need nothing more, can desire nothing better. To have the “good will” of the triune JEHOVAH is life indeed, the acme of blessedness; contrariwise, to be out of His favour is to be dead unto all that is worthwhile.

Second, *joy and blessedness of soul*, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee...to see thy power and thy glory...Because thy lovingkindness is better than life” (Psa 63:1-3). The life which His people receive from God is that which capacitates them to delight themselves in Him. Thus it was here. David had been rapt in adoration by the divine attributes. It was the longing of his soul to have further communion with God, and this he was resolved to seek diligently, to have enlarged views of the divine perfections and experiential discoveries of His excellence, as an anticipation of the felicity of heaven. *That* he prized more than anything else. The natural man values his life above all else. Not so the spiritual; to him God’s “lovingkindness” is better than all the comforts and luxuries of temporal life, better than the longest and most prosperous natural life. The lovingkindness of God is itself the present spiritual life of the saint, as it is also both an earnest and a foretaste of the life everlasting. It refreshes their hearts, strengthens their souls, and sends them on their way rejoicing.

Thousands of his fellows are weary of life, but no Christian is every weary of God’s lovingkindness. The latter is infinitely better than the “life” of a king or a millionaire, for it has no sorrow added to it, no inconvenience in it, no evils attendant upon it. Physical death will put a period to the earthly existence of the most privileged, but it will not to God’s lovingkindness, for that is from everlasting to everlasting. It is esteemed by the believer beyond everything else, for it is the spring from which every blessing proceeds. It was in God’s lovingkindness that the covenant of grace originated. It was His lovingkindness which gave Christ unto His people and them unto Him. It is by His lovingkindness they are drawn to Him (Jer 31:3), given a saving knowledge of Him, brought to know personally the love which He bears to them. Without God’s lovingkindness life is but death. Well then may each believer exclaim, “Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall *praise thee*”—I will revel in Thy perfections and exult in Thyself; I will seek to render somewhat of the homage which is Thy due.

Again, that life which His children receive from God consists not only in being the objects of His benign approbation, in the experiential enjoyment of His lovingkindness, but also in the reception of a principle of righteousness and holiness by which they are fitted to appreciate Him, and for want of which the unregenerate cannot enjoy Him, for they are “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18). It is clear, both from the immediate context and from the remainder of the verse, that the “life of God” there has a particular reference to holiness, for the contrary thereto appears in “that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in *the vanity* of their mind.” The contrast is further pointed in “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of

God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” The unconverted are wholly dominated by their depraved nature. Their minds are in a state of moral fatuity, engaged only with vain things, their understandings are devoid of spiritual intelligence, lacking any power to apprehend truth or appreciate the beauties of virtue; their souls estranged from God, with an inveterate aversion from Him; their hearts calloused, steeled against Him. Thus the corruption and depravity of the natural man are seen over against the grace and holiness communicated at the new birth, here termed “the life of God.”

Third, by the fall man lost *his love for God*. There are two cardinal affections that influence unto action: love and hatred. The one cannot be without the other, for that which is contrary to what is desired will be repellent—“Ye that love the LORD, hate evil” (Psa 97:10). Of the perfect Man, the Father said, “Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Psa 45:7). So of the triune JEHOVAH, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Rom 9:13). It is the great work of grace in the redeemed to direct and fasten those affections upon their proper objects; when we put right our love and hatred, we prosper in the spiritual life. Fallen man differs from unfallen in this: they both have the same affections, but they are *misplaced* in us, so that we now love what we should hate, and hate what we should love; our affections are like bodily members out of joint—as if the arms should hang down backward. To bestow our love and hatred aright is the very essence of true spirituality—to love all that is good and pure, to hate all that is evil and vile. For love moves us to seek union with and make our own, as hatred repels and makes us leave alone what is loathsome.

Now love was made *for God*, for He alone is its adequate and suited object—for all that is of Himself—His attributes, His Law, His ordinances, His dealings with us. But hatred was made for the serpent and sin. God is infinitely lovely in Himself, and if things are to be valued according to the greatness and excellence of them, then God supremely so, for every perfection centres and is found in its fullness in Him. To love Him above everything else is an act of homage due to Him, for who and what He is. There is everything in God to excite esteem, adoration and affection. Goodness is not an object of dread, but of attraction and delight. Now all that God required from Adam, He freely furnished him with. Since he was created with perfect moral rectitude of heart and with a holy temper of mind, he was fully competent to love Him with all his being. He saw the divine perfections shining forth. The heavens declared His glory, the firmament showed His handiwork, and His excellence was mirrored in everything around him. Thereby he realized what God deserved from him, and he was duly affected with His blessedness. His heart was filled with a sense of His ineffable beauty, and admiring and adoring thoughts of Him filled his mind, moving him to render unto Him that worship and submission to which He is infinitely entitled.

Love for God was what gave unity of action to all the faculties of Adam’s soul, for since it was the dominant principle in him, it rendered all the exercises of them as so many expressions of devotion to Him. Hence, when love for God died within him, his faculties not only lost their original unity and orderliness, but *the power* to use them aright. All his faculties came under an evil and hostile influence, and were debased in their action. The natural man is without a single spark of true affection for God: “But I know you,” said the omniscient Searcher of hearts to the religious Jews, “that ye have not the love of God in you” (Joh 5:42). Being without any love to God, all the outward acts of the natural man are worthless in His sight, “They that are in the flesh *cannot* please God” (Rom 8:8), for they lack the root from which they must proceed in order for any fruit to be desirable unto Him. Love is that which animates the obedience which is agreeable to God: “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (Joh 14:23). Love is the very life and substance of everything which is gratifying unto God.

As the principle of obedience, love takes the precedence, for faith works by love (Gal 5:6); hence the order in that injunction, “Let us consider one another to provoke [1] unto love and [2] to good works” (Heb 10:24)—stir up the affections and good works will follow, as a stirring up of the coals causes the flames to arise. It is love which makes all the divine commandments to be “not grievous” (Joh 5:3). We heartily agree with Charnock’s dictum, “In that one word *love*, God hath wrapped up all the devotion He requires of us,” and certainly our souls ought to be ravished with Him, for He is infinitely worthy of our choicest affections and strongest desires. Love is a thing acceptable in itself, but nothing can be acceptable to God without it. “They that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (Joh 4:24)—the most decorous and punctilious forms of devotion are worthless if they lack vitality and sincerity. True worship proceeds from love, for it is the exercise of heavenly affections, the pouring out of its homage to Him who is “altogether lovely.” Love is the best thing we can render God, and it is His right in every service. Without it we are an abomination unto Him, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha” (1Co 16:22).

Fourth, by the fall our first parents and all mankind *lost communion* with God. This was enjoyed at the beginning, for God made man with faculties capable of this privilege, and designed them to have holy converse with Him. Indeed, this was the paramount blessing of that covenant which Adam was placed under, and it was a foretaste of that more intimate communion which would have been his eternal portion had he survived his probation. But the apostasy of Adam and Eve could not but first deprive them, and then their posterity, of this inestimable privilege. This was the immediate and inevitable result of their revolt, whether we contemplate it from either the divine or the human side, “for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” (2Co 6:14). Two cannot walk together except they be agreed (Amo 3:3). The Holy One will not favourably manifest Himself unto rebels or admit them into His presence as friends. Nor had our first parents any longer the desire that He should do so, but rather very much to the contrary. Having lost all love to God, they had no relish for Him, but now hated and dreaded Him.

Here, then, my reader, is the terrible nature of human depravity. From the privative side, it consists of man’s loss of the moral image of God—consciously felt by our first parents in the shameful sense they had of their nakedness. The loss of the life of God, so that they became alienated from His favour, devoid of joy, emptied of holiness—faintly perceived by them, as was evident from their attempt to make themselves more presentable by manufacturing aprons of fig leaves. The loss of their love to God, so that they no longer revered and adored Him, but were repelled by His perfections, was manifested by them in fleeing from Him as soon as they were conscious of His approach. The loss of communion with God, so that they were utterly unfit for His presence—adumbrated by His driving them from Eden. None but the regenerate can estimate how irreparable was man’s forfeiture by the fall, and how dreadful is the condition and case of the natural man; and *their* apprehension thereof is exceedingly meager in this life.

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 7

In His grace and wisdom, God has fully provided against our forming misconceptions of any part of His truth, by employing a great variety of synonymous terms and different modes of expression. Just as our varied senses, though each imperfect, are effective in conveying to our minds a real impression of the outside world by means of their *joint operation*, so the different and supplementary communications of God, through the many penmen of Scripture, enable us to revise our first impressions and enlarge our views of divine things, widening the horizon of truth and permitting us to obtain a more adequate conception of the same. What one writer expresses in figurative language, another sets forth in plain words. While one prophet stresses the goodness and mercy of God, another emphasizes His severity and justice. If one evangelist exhibits the perfections of Christ's humanity, another makes prominent His deity; if one portrays Him as the lowly servant, another reveals Him as the majestic King. Does one apostle dwell upon the efficacy of faith, then another shows the value of love, while a third reminds us that faith and love are but empty words unless they produce spiritual fruit. Thus, Scripture requires to be studied as a whole, and one part of it compared with another, if we are to obtain a proper apprehension of divine revelation. Very much in the New Testament is unintelligible apart from the Old; not a little in the Epistles requires the Gospels and the Acts for its elucidation.

More specifically. The value of comparing Scripture with Scripture appears in the *corroboration* which is afforded. Not that they require any authentication, for they are the Word of Him who cannot lie, and must be received as such, by a bowing unreservedly to their divine authority. No, but rather that our faith therein may be the more firmly and fully fixed. As the system of double entry in book-keeping provides a sure check for the auditory, so in the mouths of two or three witnesses the truth is established. Thus, we find our Lord employing this method in John 5, making manifest the excuselessness of the Jews' unbelief in His death by appealing to the different witnesses who attested the same (verses 32-39). So His apostle, in the synagogue at Antioch, when establishing the fact of His resurrection, was not content to cite only Psalm 2:7 in proof, but appealed also to Psalm 16:10 (Act 8:33-36). So too in his epistles, a striking example of which is found in Romans 15 where, after affirming that "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers," he added, "and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy," quoting Psalm 18:49 in proof; but since this was a controverted point among the Jews, he added further evidence—note his "And again" at the beginning of verses 10-12. So also "by *two* immutable things [God's promise and oath]...we might have strong consolation" (Heb 6:18).

Scripture needs to be compared with Scripture for the purpose of *elucidation*. "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink for thou shalt heap

coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee” (Pro 25:21-22). The commentators are about equally divided between two entirely diverse views of what is signified by the figurative expression “coals of fire” being heaped upon the head of an enemy by treating him kindly. One class contending that it means the aggravating of his guilt, the other insisting that it imports the destroying of a spirit of enmity in him, and the winning of his good will. By carefully comparing the context in which this passage is quoted in Romans 12:20, the controversy is decided, for that makes it clear that the latter is the true interpretation, for the spirit of the Gospel entirely rules out of court the performing of any actions which would ensure the doom of an adversary. Yet an appeal unto the New Testament ought not to be necessary in order to expose the error of the other explanation, for the Law, equally with the Gospel, enjoined love to our neighbor and kindness to an enemy. As John tells us in his first epistle, when inculcating the law of love, he was giving “no new commandment,” but one which they had had from the beginning; but now it was enforced by a new example and motive (2:7-8).

“He could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them” (Mar 6:5). So determined are some Arminians to deny the almightiness of God and the invincibility of His will that they have appealed to this passage in proof that the power of His incarnate Son was limited, and that there were occasions when His merciful designs were thwarted by man. But a comparison of the parallel passage in Matthew 13:54-58, at once gives the lie to such a blasphemous assertion, for we are there told “He did not many mighty works *there* because of *their unbelief*.” Thus it was not any limitation in Himself, but something in them, which restrained Him. In other words, He was actuated by a sense of propriety. The emphasis both in Mark 6:5 and Matthew 13:58 is on the word “there,” for, as the context shows, this occurred at Nazareth where He was lightly esteemed. To have performed prodigies of power before those who regarded Him with contempt had, in principle, been casting pearls before swine; as it had been unfitting to have wrought miracles to gratify the curiosity of Herod (Luk 23:8)—elsewhere He did many supernatural works. In Genesis 19:22, the Lord could not destroy Sodom until Lot had escaped from it, while in Jeremiah 44:22, He “could no longer bear” the evil doings of Israel—it was moral propriety, not physical inability.

Comparison is useful also for the purpose of *amplification*. Not only does one Scripture support and illuminate another, but very often one passage supplements and augments another. A simple yet striking example of this is seen in what is known as the Parable of the Sower, but which perhaps might be more aptly designated the Parable of the Seed and the Soils. The deep importance of this parable is intimated to us by the Holy Spirit in His having moved Matthew, Mark and Luke to record the same. The three accounts of it contain some striking variations, and they need to be carefully compared together in order to obtain the complete pictures therein set forth. Its scope is revealed in Luke 8:18: “Take heed therefore *how* ye hear.” It speaks not from the standpoint of the effectuation of the divine counsels, but is the enforcing of human responsibility. This is made unmistakably clear from what is said of the one who received the seed into good ground—the fruitful hearer of the Word. Christ did not describe him as one “in whom a work of divine grace is wrought,” or “whose heart had been made receptive by the supernatural operations of the Spirit,” but rather as he that received the Word in “an honest and good heart.” True indeed the quickening work of the Spirit must precede anyone’s so receiving the Word as to become fruitful (Act 16:14), but that is not the particular aspect of the truth which our Lord was *here* presenting; instead, He was showing what the hearer himself must seek grace to do if he is to bring forth fruit to God’s glory.

The sower Himself is almost lost sight of (!), nearly all of the details of the parable being concerned with the various kinds of soil into which the seed fell, rendering it either unproductive or yielding an increase. In it Christ set forth the reception which the preaching of the Word meets with. He likened the world to a field, which He divided into four parts, according to its different kinds of ground. In His interpretation, He defined the diverse soils as representing different kinds of people who hear the preaching of the Word, and it solemnly behooves each of us diligently to search himself, that he may ascertain for sure to which of those grounds he belongs. Those four classes—from the descriptions given of the soils and the explanations Christ furnished of them—may be labeled, respectively, the hard-hearted, the shallow-hearted, the half-hearted, and the whole-hearted. In the first, the seed obtained no hold; in the second, it secured no root; in the third, it was allowed no room; in the fourth, it had all three, and therefore yielded an increase. The same four classes have been found in all generations among those who have sat under the preaching of God's Word, and they exist in probably every church and assembly on earth today; nor is it difficult to distinguish them, if we measure professing Christians by what the Lord predicated of each one.

The first is the "wayside" hearer, whose heart is entirely unreceptive—all the highway is beaten down and hardened by the traffic of the world. The seed penetrates not such ground, and "the fowls of the air" catch it away. Christ explained this as being a picture of one who "understandeth not the word" (though it be his duty to take pains and do so—1 Corinthians 8:2), and the wicked one takes away the Word out of his heart—Luke 8 adds, "lest they believe and be saved." The second is the "stony-ground" hearer—i.e. ground with a rock foundation over which lies but a thin layer of soil. Since there be no depth of earth, the seed obtained no root, and the scorching sun caused it soon to wither away. This is a representation of the superficial hearer, whose emotions are stirred, but who lacks any searching of conscience and deep convictions. He receives the Word with a natural "joy," but (Matthew's account) "when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." These are they who have no root in themselves, and consequently (as Luke's account informs us) "for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away." Theirs is naught but a temporary and evanescent faith, as we much fear is the case with the great majority of the "converts" from special missions and "evangelistic campaigns."

The third, or thorny-ground, hearer is the most difficult to identify, but the Lord has graciously supplied fuller help on this point by entering into more detail in His explanations of what the "thorns" signify. All three accounts tell us that they "grew up," which implies that no effort was made to check them; and all three accounts show that they "choked" the seed or hindered the Word. Matthew's record defines the thorns as "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches." Mark adds "and the lust of other things entering in," while Luke mentions also "the pleasures of this life." Thus we are taught that there is quite a variety of things which hinder any fruit being brought to perfection—against each of which we need to be much on our prayerful guard. The good-ground hearer is the one who "understandeth" the Word (Mat 8:23), for unless its sense be perceived, it profits us nothing—probably an experiential acquaintance therewith is also included. Mark 4 mentions the "receiving" of it (cf. James 1:21), while Luke 8 describes this hearer as receiving the Word "in an honest and good heart," which is one that hates all pretence and loves the truth for itself, making application of the Word to his own case and judging himself by it; "keeps it," cherishes and meditates upon it, heeds and obeys it; and "brings forth fruit with patience."

In a preceding article, we called attention to Matthew 7:24-27, as an example of the importance of ascertaining the scope of a passage. Let us now point out the need for *comparing it*

with the parallel passage in Luke 6:47-49. In it the hearers of the Word are likened unto wise and foolish builders. The former built his house on the foundation of God's Word. The building is the character developed thereby and the hope cherished. The storm which beat upon the house is the trial or testing to which it is subjected. Luke alone begins his account by saying the wise man came to Christ—to learn of Him. His wisdom appeared in the trouble he took and the pains he went to in order to find a secure base on the rock. Luke's account adds that he "dugged deep," which tells of his earnestness and care, and signifies spiritually that he searched the Scriptures closely and diligently examined his heart and profession—that digging deep is in designed contrast with the "no depth of earth" (Mark 4:5) of the stony-ground hearer. Luke alone uses the word "vehemently" to describe the violence of the storm by which it was tested—his possession survived the assaults of the world, the flesh and the devil, and the scrutiny of God at the moment of death; which proves he was a *doer* of the Word and not a hearer only (Jam 1:22). Useless is the confession of the lips unless it be confirmed by the life.

The comparing of Scripture with Scripture is valuable for the purpose of *harmonization* or preserving the balance of truth, thus preventing our becoming lop-sided. An illustration of this is found in connection with what is termed "the great commission," a threefold record of which, with notable variations, is given in the last chapter of each of the Synoptic Gospels. In order to obtain a right or full knowledge of the complete charge Christ there gave unto His servants, instead of confining our attention to only one or two of them—as is now so often the case—the three accounts of it need to be brought together. Luke 24:47 shows it is just as much the minister's duty "that *repentance* and remission of sins should be preached in his name" as it is to bid sinners "believe on him"; and Matthew 28:19-20, makes it clear that it devolves as much upon him to baptize those who believe and then to teach them to observe all things whatsoever He commanded as to "preach the gospel to every creature." Quality is even more important than quantity! One of the chief reasons why so few of the Christian churches in heathen lands are self-supporting is that missionaries have too often failed in thoroughly indoctrinating and building up their converts, leaving them in an infantile state and going elsewhere seeking to evangelize more of their fellows.

Failure to heed this important principle lies at the foundation of much of the defective evangelism of our day, wherein the lost are informed that the only thing necessary for their salvation is to "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." Other passages show that repentance is equally essential, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mar 1:15). "Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Act 20:21). It is important to note that wherever the two are mentioned repentance always comes *first*, for in the very nature of that case it is impossible for an impenitent heart to believe savingly (Mat 21:32). Repentance is a realization of my blameworthiness in being a rebel against God, a taking sides with Him and condemning myself. It expresses itself in bitter sorrow for and hatred of sin. It results in an acknowledgement of my offences and the heart abandonment of my idols (Pro 28:13), a throwing down the weapons of my warfare, a forsaking of my evil ways (Isa 55:7). In some passages, like Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19, repentance alone is mentioned. In John 3:15; Romans 1:16; 10:4, only "believing" is specified. Why is this? Because the Scriptures are not written like lawyers draw up documents wherein terms are wearily repeated and multiplied. Each verse must be interpreted in the light of Scripture as a whole; thus where "repentance" only is mentioned, believing is implied; and where "believing" alone is found, repentance is presupposed.

7. *Briefer statements are to be interpreted by fuller ones.* It is an invariable rule of exegesis that when anything is set out more fully or clearly by one writer than another, the latter is always

to be expounded by the former, and the same applies unto two statements by the same speaker or writer. Particularly is this the case with the first three Gospels—parallel passages should be consulted, and the shorter one interpreted in the light of the longer one. Thus, when Peter asked Christ, “How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?” and our Lord answered, “Unto seventy times seven” (Mat 18:21-22). It must not be taken to signify that a Christian is to condone wrongs and exercise grace at the expense of righteousness; for He had just previously said, “If thy brother shall trespass against thee go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear [heed] thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (verse 15). No, rather must Christ’s language in Matthew 18:22 be explained by His amplified declaration in Luke 17:3-4—“If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him: and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I *repent*; thou shalt forgive him.” God Himself does not forgive us until we repent (Act 2:38; 3:19). If a brother repents not, no malice is to be harboured against him, yet he is not to be treated as though no offence had been committed.

Much harm has been done by some who without qualification, pressed our Lord’s words in Mark 10:11, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her,” thereby subjecting the innocent party to the same penalty as the guilty one. But that statement is to be interpreted in the light of the fuller one in Matthew 5:32. “Whosoever shall put away his wife, *saving* for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced [for any other cause] committeth adultery”—repeated by Christ in Matthew 19:9. In those words, the sole Legislator for His people propounded a general rule—“*Whosoever* putteth away his wife causeth her to commit adultery,” and there He put in an *exception*, namely, that where adultery has taken place, he *may* put away, and he *may* marry again. As Christ there teaches the lawfulness of divorce on the ground of marital infidelity, so He teaches that it is lawful for the innocent one to marry again after such a divorce, without contracting guilt. The violation of the marriage vows severs the marriage bond, and the one who kept them is, after divorce is obtained, free to marry again. ❧

MARCH

GOD'S LOVE TO US

By “us” we mean His people, for whereas we read of the love “which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39), Holy Writ knows nothing of a love of God *outside* of Christ. “The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works” (Psa 145:9), so that He provides the ravens with their food. “He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Luk 6:35), and His providence ministers unto the just and the unjust (Mat 5:45); but His *love* is reserved for His own elect. That is unequivocally established by its *characteristics*, for the attributes of His love are identical with Himself. Necessarily so, for “God is *love*,” and in making that postulate, it is but another way of saying God’s love is like Himself—from everlasting to everlasting, immutable. Nothing is more absurd than to imagine that anyone beloved of God can eternally perish or shall ever experience His everlasting vengeance. Since the love of God is “in Christ Jesus,” it was attracted by nothing in its objects, nor can it be repelled by anything in, of, or by them, “having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (Joh 13:1). The “world” in John 3:16 is a general term used in contrast with the Jews, and that verse must be so interpreted as not to contradict Psalm 5:5-6; 7:11; John 3:36; Romans 9:13.

The chief design of the Gospel is to commend the love of God in Christ, for *He* is the sole channel through which it flows. It is not that the Son has induced the Father to love His people, but rather was it His love for them which moved Him to give His Son to them and for them. As Ralph Erskine (1685-1752) well said, “God hath taken a marvelous way to manifest His love. When He would show His power, He makes a world. When He would display His wisdom, He puts it in a frame and form that discovers its vastness. When He would manifest the grandeur and glory of His name, He makes a heaven, and puts angels and archangels, principalities and powers therein. And when He would manifest His love, what will He not do? God hath taken a great and marvelous way of manifesting it in Christ: His person, His blood, His death, His righteousness.” “All the praises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God” (2Co 1:20). As we were chosen in Christ (Eph 1:4), as we were accepted in Him (Eph 1:6), as our life is hid in Him (Col 3:3), so are we beloved in Him—“the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus”: in Him as our Head and Husband, which is why nothing can separate us therefrom, for that union is indissoluble.

Nothing so warms the heart of the saint as a spiritual contemplation of God’s love. As he is occupied therewith, he is lifted outside of and above his wretched self. A believing apprehension thereof will fill the renewed soul with holy satisfaction, and make him as happy as it is possible

for anyone to be this side of heaven. To know and believe the love which God has toward me is both an earnest and foretaste of heaven itself. Since God loves His people in Christ, it is not for any amiableness in or attraction about them, “Jacob have I loved.” Yes, the naturally unattractive, yea, despicable, Jacob—“thou worm Jacob” (Isa 41:14). Since God loves His people in Christ, it is not regulated by their fruitfulness, but is the same at all times. Because He loves them *in* Christ, the Father loves them *as* Christ. The time will come when His prayer shall be answered, “That the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (Joh 17:23). Only *faith* can grasp those marvelous things, for neither reasoning nor feelings can do so. God loves us in Christ. Oh, what infinite delight has the Father as He beholds His people in His dear Son! All our blessings flow from that precious fountain.

God’s love unto His people is not of yesterday. It began not with their love to Him No, “we love him, because he first loved us” (1Jo 4:19). We do not first give to Him, that He may return to us again. Our regeneration is not the motive of His love. Rather is His love the reason why He renews us after His image. This is often made to appear in the first open manifestation of it, when so far from its objects being engaged in seeking Him, they are at their worst. “Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread My skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness; yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the LORD God, and thou becamest [manifestatively] mine” (Eze 16:18). Not only are its objects often *at* their worst when God’s love is first revealed to them, but actually *doing* their worst—as in the case of Saul of Tarsus. Not only is God’s love antecedent to ours, but it was borne in His heart toward us long before we were delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son. It began not in time, but bears date of eternity—“I have loved thee with an everlasting love” (Jer 31:3).

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1Jo 4:10). It is very clear from those words that God loved His people while they were in a state of nature, destitute of all grace, without a particle of love to or faith in Him; yea, while they were enemies unto Him (Rom 5:8, 10). Clearly that lays me under a thousand times greater obligation to love, serve and glorify Him than had He loved me for the first time when my heart was won by His excellence. All the acts of God unto His people in time are the expressions of the love He bore them from all eternity. It is because God loves us in Christ, and has done so from everlasting, that the gifts of His love are irrevocable. They are the bestowments of “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” The love of God indeed makes a change *in us* when it is “shed abroad in our hearts,” but it makes none in Him. He sometimes varies the dispensation of His providence toward us, but that is not because His affection has altered. Even when he chastens us, it is in love (Heb 12:6), having our good in view.

Let us now look more distinctly at some of the operations of God’s love. First, in *election*, “We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit [His quickening] and belief of the truth” (1Th 2:13). There is an infallible connection between God’s love and His selection of those who were to be saved. That election *is* the consequence of His love is clear again from Deuteronomy 7:7: “The LORD did not [1] set his love upon you, nor [2] choose you, because ye were more in number than any people.” So again in Ephesians 1:4-5: “In love: having predestinated us into the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” Second, in *redeeming* them. As we have seen above from 1 John 4:10, out of His sovereign love, God made provision of Christ to render satisfaction for their sins, though

prior to their conversion, he was angry with them in respect of His violated Law, and provoked holiness by their transgressions. And “how shall he not with him *also* freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32)—another clear proof that His Son was *not* “delivered up” to the cross for all mankind, for He gives *them* neither the Holy Spirit, a new nature, nor repentance and faith.

Third, *effectual* calling. From the enthroned Saviour, the Father sends forth the Holy Spirit (Act 2:33). Having loved His elect with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness does He draw them (Jer 31:3), quickening into newness of life, calling them out of darkness into His marvelous light, making them manifestatively His children, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1Jo 3:1). If filiation does not issue from God’s love as a sure effect thereof, to what purpose are those words? Fourth, *healing their backslidings*: “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely” (Hos 14:4)—without reluctance or hesitation. “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it” (Song 8:7). Such is God’s love unto His people—invincible, unquenchable. Not only is there no possibility of its expiring of itself, but the black waters of their backslidings cannot extinguish it, nor the floods of their unbelief put it out.

“Love is strong as death” (Song 8:6). Nothing more irresistible than death in the natural world, nothing so invincible as the love of God in the realm of grace. As Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) remarked, “What difficulties does the love of God overcome! For God to overcome His own heart! Do you think it was nothing for Him to put His Son to death?...When He came to call us, had He no difficulties which love overcame? We were dead in trespasses and sins, yet from the great love wherewith he loved us. He quickened us—in the grave of our corruption: ‘lo, he stinketh’—even then did God come and conquer us. After our calling, how sadly do we provoke God! Such temptations that if it were possible the elect should be deceived. It is so with all Christians. No righteous man but he is ‘scarcely saved’ (1Pe 4:18), and yet saved he *is*, because the love of God is invincible: it overcomes all difficulties.”

Scarcely any space is left over for an application, yet one is hardly necessary for such a theme. Let God’s love daily engage and engross your mind by devout meditations thereon that the affections of your heart may be drawn out to Him. When cast down in spirit, or in sore straits of circumstances, plead it in prayer, assured that His love cannot deny anything good for you. Make God’s wondrous love to you the incentive of your obedience unto Him—gratitude requires nothing less.

EXPOSITION OF JOHN’S FIRST EPISTLE

15. Obediential Assurance (2:3)

*“And hereby we do know that we know him,
if we keep his commandments.”*

Simple as this verse appears to be, and as it really is, yet a careful and critical examination of it raises five questions, on none of which do the commentators return a uniform answer.

First, with what is its opening “And” to be linked, precisely what is the connection between verse 3 and those that follow with what has preceded?

Second, which Person in the Godhead is specifically alluded to by the pronouns “Him” and “His”—the Father or the Son?

Third, what is the meaning of the word “know” here, and what distinction are we required to make between its double usage?

Fourth, what is the precise force of the “if”—is it a calling into question, the testing of profession, or the drawing of a logical inference?

Fifth, whose precepts are referred to in the “His commandments,” and which particular ones are in view—those of the Law or those of the Gospel, or both? A hasty conclusion must not be jumped to on any of these points, but care taken to supply proof before definite answers are returned. Guesswork is impious where God’s Word is concerned.

What is the connection?

If 1:5, to the end of 2:2, is read consecutively, it should be evident that we have there a complete paragraph, in which the apostle has covered the whole subject of sin in relation to believers. A close reading of 2:3, to the end of 2:11, also makes it clear that those verses are to be regarded as another distinct and complete section, wherein the obedience of God’s children is in view. But some may demur at the statement that a new division, treating of a different subject, commences at 2:3, seeing that it opens with the word “And.” While such an objection is not to be ignored, it must not be allowed to shake our impression that the two separate aspects of truth are there set forth: rather must we seek the relation between them. That there is a connection and relation, and probably an intimate one, is certainly intimated by the conjunction uniting them, and it is a matter of no little importance to discover or trace out their coherence, otherwise we are liable to bring a legalistic element into our understanding of 2:3, 5. Nor is the link, or links, between the two passages at all difficult to discover.

For a general statement, perhaps John Calvin’s (1509-1564) can scarcely be improved on, for he pointed out, “John here reminds us that the knowledge of God derived from the Gospel is not ineffectual, but that obedience flows from it.” Stating almost the same thing in another form, we may say that gratuitous remission of sin is not a thing apart, but is ever accompanied by those sanctifying operations of the Spirit which cause the pardoned to express their gratitude by subjection unto God’s revealed will. The grand truth of Christ’s advocacy and propitiation will not, when savingly apprehended, induce a careless walk or encourage a spirit of lawlessness. Where Christ is truly known as Lord and Saviour, His authority is gladly owned; if He is loved, there will be no question about obedience. A spiritual apprehension of what Christ has done and is now doing for us is the most effective means and motive unto a God-honouring life: as the heart is brought under the power of the same, it is blessedly disposed unto every good word and work. After mentioning the gracious provision which God has made for the sins of His people, and the maintenance of their fellowship with Him, the apostle turned to consider the outward evidences of a spiritual knowledge of and communion with Christ.

But still more definitely: 2:3-6 is to be regarded as an amplification of 1:5-7, for the emphatic “This then is the message which we have heard of him” must be steadily borne in mind as we go through the entire epistle. There the apostle summarized what he and his fellows had heard from the lips of their Master and had seen so perfectly exemplified in His own life, namely that “God is light,” and in order to enjoy communion with Him the darkness must be shunned. In 1:7, he had affirmed that “if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another,”

and though the light will increasingly make manifest our imperfections and defilements, yet, if we duly confess the same, the blood of Christ will cleanse us from all sin. Now, here in 2:3-6, “walk in the light” is declared to be a keeping of the divine commandments and a following of the example which Christ has left us; while the resultant fellowship is seen in the “we do know that we know him” and the “abideth in him.” Finally, the opening “And” confirms our interpretation that God’s people alone are referred to in the whole of 2:2.

Which Person in the Godhead is specifically alluded to by the pronouns “Him” and “His”—the Father or the Son?

Several spiritually minded and scholarly expositors regard the pronouns “Him” and “His” in our text as relating to Jesus Christ, the nearest antecedent, but most of the more recent writers insist that they relate to “the Father” with whom Christ is the Advocate. After carefully weighing their respective opinions, we fail to see any argument which necessarily excludes either the One or the Other, and therefore we much prefer to follow the older commentators who included both Persons. Our present verse is speaking of a saving knowledge, and where that is in view, while the divine Persons may be distinguished, they are not to be separated. None can approach the Father except by the Son (Joh 14:6), and none can come unto the Son unless the Father draw him (Joh 6:44). As Christ declared unto those who opposed Him, “Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also” (Joh 8:19), and as He told His disciples, “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (Joh 14:9). The One cannot be known apart from the Other: “no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Mat 11:27).

As pointed out above, there is an intimate relation between 2:3-11, and 1:5-2:2, and for exegetical reasons we consider the pronouns of 2:3, look back to the One spoken of in 1:5. There we are informed that “God is light”—here that we “know Him” as such and conduct ourselves accordingly, for it is not merely a notional but an influential knowledge which John treats of. Now “God is light” is to be understood of the Godhead, and particularly of the triune God made known through Christ, “for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily [or personally]” (Col 2:9). It is true that God is light in Himself essentially, yet not so unto fallen men—outside of Christ God is unknown, and man is in total spiritual darkness. In like manner, “God is love.” He is so essentially, yet not unto fallen men—outside of Christ “God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29). “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (Joh 17:3): here again the Two are joined together, for the Father cannot be known apart from the Mediator.

What is the meaning of the word “know”?

“Hereby we do know that we know him.” As one eminent expositor said, “It must be so as He is Father in Christ, so that hereby is implied that the knowing of God absolutely is not saving: it must be relative, in the glorious dispensation and mystery which is by Jesus Christ.” But we must now inquire, What is meant here by our knowing Him, and particularly knowing that we know Him? We say here, for this is another term which is far from being used uniformly in the Scriptures. In some passages, as, for example, Ecclesiastes 3:14, and the words of Nicodemus to Christ, “we know that thou art a teacher come from God” (Joh 3:2), “know” has the force of “believe,” as it has also in John 17:3. In other places it signifies “approve,” as in “They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew *it* not” (Hos 8:4, and cf. Mat 7:23). In yet others it goes farther, and signifies “love”: “I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine” (Joh 10:14, and cf. 1Co 8:3). But its commonest meaning is to be sure or as-

sured, as in “One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see” (Joh 9:25) and “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom 8:28).

As it is with natural things so also with spiritual: there is a radical difference between a notional and experiential knowledge. I may be theoretically assured that a certain thing would be helpful or harmful to me, but I know actually and factually that fire burns, that water refreshes, that food strengthens, for I have proved it for myself. In like manner, there is a very real distinction between knowing about the Lord and in knowing the Lord Himself. As one can see the one consists merely of information concerning Him and the other is a personal and a saving acquaintance with Him. In the Scriptures we are told that at first “many of the Samaritans...believed” in Christ because of the testimony borne to Him by the woman at the well; but later, when they came into His presence and listened to His teaching, they declared, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (Joh 4:39, 42). Thus too Paul bore witness: “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2Ti 1:12)—from what he had already received from Him, he could confidently trust Him for the future. Such knowledge is vastly different from mere conjecture, it is based on something more than a probability, namely a certainty.

Christ can only be savingly known as we receive the Spirit’s testimony concerning Him, surrender ourselves fully unto His control, and trust in Him with all our hearts. Then shall we obtain inward evidence of His reality and the verity of His offer. It is said of Him that He “knew no sin” (2Co 5:21): there the term connotes experience: that He had no practical acquaintance with it—having no carnal nature as we have. Thus to know Christ savingly is to have personal proof of His redemptive power: to pardon and cleanse, to subdue our passions, to speak peace to the conscience, to draw out our affections unto things above, and to have a vital realization of other divine influences of that Spirit which proceeds from Him. Finally, the word “know” also imports to acknowledge, as we are told of a certain Pharaoh “which knew not Joseph” (Exo 1:8), that is he had no regard for his memory, no sense of what Egypt owed to him, and therefore refused to be kind unto his people for his sake. In this sense, the term occurs in “And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (Joh 10:4-5): the sheep respond to Christ’s voice—they publicly own Him, but refuse allegiance to all impostors.

“The knowledge of Christ has become expressive of a personal and saving interest in His work and grace. There is great propriety in this use of the term. Knowledge is the result of observation and experience. It implies certainty. If we say we know a man, it supposes we have had intercourse with him, and have proved what sort he is. If we know a country we must have been there and seen it and become versant with its inhabitants, soil, and products. If we know a medicine, we must have used or analysed it, and so become acquainted with its constituents and properties. Now this is precisely the force of the term when we speak of the knowledge of Christ. Hence it is the characteristic of believers in our text: ‘we know Him.’ We know His power, for we have proved it; we know His wisdom, for we have been guided by it; we know His love, for we have enjoyed it; and we know His truth, for we have ever found Him faithful. How thankful we should be that this is the nature of true religion. It is not a speculation about which there is uncertainty. It is not a doubtful opinion. It is knowledge. It is a reality of which we may know ourselves. They who attained it may say ‘we know him’” (James Morgan, 1799-1873).

But is this really the case with all of God's children, uniformly so in their consciousness? No, indeed, far from it. Some of them are often full of doubts and made to question the reality of their relationship to Christ. And there is no little occasion for them to do so. As they behold what shipwreck some have made who started out so promisingly, apparently progressing more swiftly than themselves, they ask, Shall I end thus? As they hear the pratings of graceless professors who talk so fluently of divine things, and behold their carnal and worldly lives, they wonder if their knowledge of Christ be only a theoretical and theological one. As they are frequently made painfully conscious of the risings of indwelling sin, and often have to cry "Iniquities prevail against me" (Psa 65:3), they are fearful of being deceived on this important matter. Yet none of these occasions affords a legitimate reason why any born-again soul should call into question his regeneration or saving knowledge of Christ. As Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) said on this verse, "This ought not to be. It is too solemn a thing to be left to chance or conjecture. I believe there are saved ones who do not know of a surety that they are saved. They are raising the question often that never ought to be a question.

"No man ought to be content to leave that unsettled, for mark thee, if thou art not a saved man, thou art a condemned man. If thou art not forgiven, thy sins lie on thee. Thou art now in danger of hell if thou art not secure of heaven, for there is no place between these two. Thou art either a child of God, or not. Why say ye 'I hope I am a child of God, yet I do not know; I hope, yet know not I am forgiven?' In such suspense ye ought not to be. Thou art either one or the other—either a saint or a sinner, either saved or lost, either walking in the light or walking in the darkness." We fully endorse those sentiments, for there is scriptural warrant for the same. John tells us that one of the very purposes for which the Spirit moved him to pen this epistle was to give assurance to the hearts of God's people: "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe [more confidently] on the name of the Son of God" (5:13). Thus one of its chief designs is to resolve all doubts and displace them with certainty.

That declaration of 5:13, shows that it is of deep importance that the Christian should know he has eternal life. For to be in doubt thereof is to reflect upon the veracity of God, whose Word declares that he has (Joh 5:24). It is to call into question the gracious work of the Spirit within him. It is much to his own spiritual loss. It deprives him of the greatest comfort which any soul can experience in this life, for to be assured that Christ is mine and I am his is a perennial joy and unfailing consolation under the heaviest trial. As one has said, "you who are living on 'perhapses' and 'maybes' are living on dust and ashes." Such knowledge as John here treats of inspires confidence. What assurance it gives in prayer to know that I am making requests unto my Father—we can never ask believingly until such be the case. What courage it conveys for meeting temptations—shall a child of God panic and flee before the devil? It kindles the highest degree of love. To know that I know Him cannot but draw out my affections unto Him, and cause me to ask "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits unto me?"

Now here in our text we are supplied with a sure recipe for the attainment and preservation of this sound state of the soul's health. It is the first of seven passages in this epistle wherein are made known how a scriptural assurance is secured (for the time being we will leave the reader to search for the other six), namely by a keeping of the divine commandments: "hereby we do know that we know him." Here is another instance where the same word occurs in a passage with two distinct meanings. To make them clearer we would paraphrase our text thus: In this way may God's children be sure that they have a saving faith in and acquaintance with Him—by fulfilling His precepts. It is by means of a willing, impartial and habitual compliance with God's will that

we obtain evidence of the genuineness of our profession and supply proof that we really love Him. It is by a walking in subjection to Him that we may be sure we are in the narrow way that leads unto life. It is for this reason that we have entitled our chapter “Obediential Assurance,” for the validity of their persuasion is attested by a practical subjection to God’s authority.

What is the precise force of the “if”?

It is to be duly noted that the apostle was here emulating his Master, for He had clearly taught the same thing: “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Joh 15:14). Friendship entails obligations—the pleasing of and promoting the interests of one another. As to the design of the “if ” in our text, we regard it as being threefold. First, as investigative, a testing of profession or putting to the proof of those who averred a saving knowledge of God. Then, as now, there were many who claimed to know God in Christ, but their knowledge was a barren one. Second, as discriminative, supplying God’s people with a criterion which if put to use would preserve them from being imposed upon by hypocrites. Third, as demonstrative, the sure evidence by which a Christian may determine his own state before God. The tree is known by its fruits, and if mine be bearing that which is spiritual and heavenly it cannot be one of nature’s planting. Thus the force of the “if ” is double: hereby we may be assured that we truly know God spiritually providing we keep His commandments, or/and inasmuch as we do so. There cannot be real fellowship with God without its having a vital influence on the heart and a transforming effect upon the life.

Whose precepts are referred to in the “His commandments”?

But who is there who really keeps God’s commandments? All of His people, for whereas the unregenerate are designated “the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2), the regenerate are addressed “as obedient children” (1Pe 1:14). There is a twofold keeping of God’s commandments: a legal and an evangelical. The former pertains to the Covenant of Works, wherein an absolute and perfect obedience, without failure or cessation, is demanded on pain of death. The latter marks the Covenant of Grace, wherein a filial and sincere obedience, though full of defects, is accepted by God—its blemishes being blotted out by the blood of Christ and its inadequacy covered by His merits. God looks at the heart, and where it beats true unto Him with a genuine desire and determination to please Him—grieving over and confessing that which displeases Him—He accepts the will for the deed. Love fastens not its eyes upon defects. Thus we find God testifying of David, notwithstanding his sad lapses, “He kept my commandments and my statutes” (1Ki 11:34); Christ declaring of His apostles, despite their failures, “They have kept thy word” (Joh 17:6); and the Holy Spirit bearing witness to the patience of Job (Jam 5:11), though he had not a little impatience.

The keeping of God’s commandments signifies and includes that we make His will the rule of our lives, using His Word as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. That it works effectually in our souls, inclining our hearts and governing our wills. That we hold it in our memories and delight to meditate daily thereon. That we genuinely endeavour and prayerfully strive to perform God’s precepts. That we obey them implicitly, simply because they are God’s commandments, and not because they commend themselves to our reason, are agreeable to our inclinations, or conducive to our interests. That we obey them impartially, for if we be regulated by what God commands, then we shall be by whatsoever He enjoins—without any picking or choosing. That we do so cheerfully, regarding each commandment as an expression of the will of Him who loves us and whom we love and long to please. That we do so perseveringly, for if we really love Him we shall not stop obeying Him. Such obedience is not in order to salvation, but from gratitude for having been saved; nor is it performed in our own strength, but by grace duly sought from above.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

67. The Challenge Met (11:6-7)

In our last, we considered the divine response made to the formidable movement inaugurated by Jabin and his fellows. The Lord promptly took up the cudgels on behalf of His menaced people. He assured His servant that he need entertain no fear whatever about the outcome, promising him, “I will deliver them up all slain before Israel” (11:6). In like manner is the Christian to be assured, and therefore it is his holy privilege to enter upon and engage in the good fight of faith resting on the sure pledges of God, confident of a successful issue, “He is faithful that promised” (Heb 10:23). The more we meditate upon the veracity of the Promiser the more will faith be strengthened. In proportion as we truly realize that we have to do with One who cannot lie, the greater confidence shall we have in His Word. Instead of being so much occupied with the difficulties of the way (which will but engender doubts), we need to look above unto Him, who has given us such “exceeding great and precious promises” (2Pe 1:4), to be the stay of our hearts, to cheer and gladden us. Those promises are to be treasured up in our minds, for they are both the food of faith to nourish and strengthen it and the fuel of faith to stoke and energize it. Otherwise, it will lack that which is necessary for its activity, as a fire will not burn without wood or coals—thus coldness of heart is due mainly to faith being deprived of its fuel!

There will be little or no success in our spiritual warfare unless we make much of the divine *promises*, and still more of the Promiser Himself. The foes that have to be encountered are far too powerful to be overcome by any might of ours, and therefore must we look to Him whose soldiers we are. If we do so, no matter how great our weakness or formidable the task assigned, the Lord will not fail us, “Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised” (Heb 11:11). There were strong impediments in the way of her faith, and at first, she was staggered by them, but as she regarded the immutability and fidelity of the Promiser, her doubts were stilled, faith prevailed, and strength was given. As Thomas Manton (1620-1677) well said, “Every divine promise has annexed to it the challenge, ‘Is anything too hard for the Lord?’” As in Sara’s case, so with us, very often there is a fight with unbelief before faith is established on the promise. But instead of suffering obstacles to hinder faith, they should be made a help to it—arguing, Here is a grand opportunity for me to prove the sufficiency of my God. He never promises more than He is able to perform. His word never exceeds His power, “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also *will do it*” (1Th 5:24).

It should be duly considered that this massing of the Canaanites against Israel occurred not soon after they entered the land, nor did they encounter anything like such an opposing force either at Jericho or Ai. No, rather was this trial met with after they had made considerable progress in taking possession of their heritage. Thus it was too with the father of all them that believe—each new test of Abraham’s faith was more severe than the preceding ones. And so it is in the Christian life. Thus, it is the mature and *aged warrior* to whom this word is most appropriate, “Be

not afraid.” Why should Joshua fear? Since God had so wondrously delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt, overthrown Pharaoh and his chariots in the Red Sea, provided for them all through their wilderness journey, miraculously opened the Jordan for them to enter into Canaan, most certainly He was not going to abandon them now and allow them to perish at the hands of Jabin and his armies. No indeed, when God begins a work He never stops when it is but half done, but always completes and perfects it (Phi 1:6). So it was with Israel under Joshua; and so it is with every elect vessel, “Whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom 8:30). Much takes place between the one and the other, but though death itself occurs (as has been the case with His people for the last six thousand years), the former guarantees the latter.

Let then the tried and aged pilgrim take comfort from the Lord’s dealings with Israel, and give no place whatever to Satan’s lie that God has tired of him. Like the fiend that he is, the devil seeks to attack us most fiercely when much oppressed by circumstances or at our weakest physically. When natural vigour has abated and the increasing weight of years be felt, he will seek to inject the most God-dishonouring doubts into the minds of His people. Reject them with abhorrence, and rest on the divine assurance, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5). He who has cared for His child all through the years most certainly will not forsake him or her in the time of old age. He who has responded to your cries in former days will not turn a deaf ear now that your voice has grown feeble. “He shall deliver thee in six troubles [has he not done so?]: yea, in seven [the final one] there shall no evil touch thee” (Job 10:19). Past deliverances are sure earnest of future ones, “And even to your old age I am he: and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I *will* bear: even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isa 46:4). Those are the “I wills” of Him who is the truth. Rest your whole weight on them.

But resting upon the promises does not mean that the saint may shirk any of his duties, or even relax in the performing of them. Rather do such divine assurances involve corresponding obligations. That is clear from the two halves of the verses quoted in our opening paragraph, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering: (*for* he is faithful that promised)” (Heb 10:23). That “for” is very forceful, supplying us with a powerful motive unto steadfastness and diligence. Since God be faithful to us, we ought to be faithful unto Him. To hold fast the profession of our faith is a comprehensive expression which includes every aspect of the Christian life, and the knowledge that God will infallibly make good His word unto us is to animate unto fidelity in the carrying out of its engagements. The divine promises are not only comforting pillows on which to rest our weary heads, but cordials to strengthen, spurs to move us, encouragements for us to press forward along the way, arguments for us to make use of in prayer. The divine promises are the food of faith, and faith is for producing good works. That is the practical application which the apostle made of the divine assurances in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, “*Therefore*, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

So far from annulling the believer’s responsibility or countenancing any slackness in the discharge of the same, spiritual privileges involve additional obligations. But alas, man is such a creature of extremes that even a Christian, when he be deeply impressed with the aspect of the truth, is very apt to become so absorbed with it as to lose sight of and leave out of his reckoning the counter-balancing aspect of the truth. Because *God* performs everything for us, it does not mean there is nothing for *us* to do. If we ascribe the glory unto Him to whom alone it is due, we shall freely own to the Lord, “for *thou* also hast wrought all our works in us” (Isa 26:12); nevertheless, that does not alter the fact He has bidden us “work out *your own* salvation with fear and trembling” (Phi 2:12), yet that too is immediately followed with, “For it is God which worketh in

you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” There the *two sides* of the truth are placed in juxtaposition, and notice well the order in which they are set before us. First the enforcing of our duty, and then the encouraging motive to inspire us therein. The latter is not added to induce indolence, but in order to encourage effort. We have no scriptural warrant to expect that God will show Himself strong in our behalf unless we make conscience of His precepts and use the means He has appointed. Our bread is divinely guaranteed (Isa 33:16), nevertheless, it must be labored for (Joh 6:27).

The relation of Philippians 2:13 to 2:12 is a double one, being designed both to cheer and to humble us. The child of God is very conscious of his weakness, and knowing that the world, the flesh, and the devil are arrayed against him, and contemplating the tasks set before him—tasks which are spiritual and far above the compass of mere nature—he asks, How can I possibly accomplish them? The answer is, divine assistance is assured. The believer is not left to himself, but the omnipotent God operates within as well as for him, and therefore is he to go forth in the confidence that divine grace will be sufficient for him. Help is indeed needed by him, and if he conducts himself aright that help will certainly be given. On the other hand, he is required to work out his own salvation “with fear and trembling,” that is, in a spirit of humility and lowliness. But how is that possible unto those who are proud and independent? We are all of us Pharisees by nature—boastful and prone to self-glorying. How then can we be emptied of such a spirit? And again Philippians 2:13 supplies the answer. From this consideration—since it be God who works in me all that is praiseworthy, then I have nothing to boast of. I am constantly to remind myself that it is God who makes me to differ from those of my fellows whom He leaves to themselves. The strongest inducement possible to produce a self-abasing spirit is the realization that, apart from Christ, we can do nothing (Joh 15:5).

Above, we have said that there will be little or no success in our spiritual warfare unless we make much of the divine promises. Let us now add that the same is equally true of the divine *precepts*. That also is taught us in Joshua 11:6, for immediately after assuring His servant, “Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel,” the Lord added, “*thou* shall hough their horses and burn their chariots with fire.” God’s promises are not designed to further slothfulness, but to stimulate to the performance of duty. God does not work in us to promote idleness, but to “will and to do of his good pleasure.” When the farmer sees God working by softening the ground with gentle showers, he is encouraged to plough and plant his fields. When the yachtsman perceives God working by stirring the becalmed air with a breeze, he is encouraged to hoist his sails. So it is spiritually. Grace is given the regenerate for them to *use*—“stir up the gift of God which is in thee” (2Ti 1:6). We are to “work out” what God has wrought in us, yet in complete dependence upon Him. We must beware of abusing the truth of divine operations and take to heart the warning of the lazy servant who hid his talent in the earth.

To be a successful warrior I must be able to say with David (and none obtained more military victories than he!), “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart” (Psa 114:111). We agree with Charles Bridges (1794-1869) that when “testimony” occurs in the singular number, it has reference to the Bible as a whole—the entire revelation of God’s will unto mankind—but found in the plural, it is chiefly the preceptive parts of Scripture which are in view. This is borne out by verse 138: “Thy testimonies that thou hast *commanded*,” and “I have *kept* thy precepts and thy testimonies” (168). David had chosen God’s statutes or precepts as his “heritage” to lie upon. Not the world did he select for his happiness, but a heritage of holiness and wisdom, one which would not fail in time and one that would endure for ever. He

made this choice because he realized their value—that they are like their Author, namely, “righteous and very faithful” (138), and because he loved them exceedingly (167). So too did the apostle bear witness: “I *delight* in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22)—only then will our obedience be acceptable unto Him. “I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies,” and as Spurgeon said, “If we keep God’s testimonies, they will keep us—right in opinion, comfortable in spirit, holy in conversation, hopeful in expectation.”

The divine testimonies are as necessary and essential unto the believer in his spiritual warfare as are the divine assurances. It is the fight of faith which we are called to wage, and, as God’s promises are its food, so His precepts are its *directors*. Faith has three great tasks to perform: to trust implicitly in God, to render obedience to His revealed will, and steadfastly to resist all that is opposed thereto. The promises provide encouragement for the first, the precepts light for the second, and the Lord Himself must be looked unto for strength for the third. So it was in Joshua 11:6. The divine promise then was immediately followed by a precept, Joshua was required to hough the horses of the Canaanites and burn their chariots with fire. Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out that this new campaign upon which Joshua was now entering “was a glorious one, no less illustrious than the former in the success of it, though in respect of miracles, it was inferior to it in glory. The wonders God then wrought for them, were to initiate and encourage them to act vigorously themselves. Thus the war carried in by the preaching of the Gospel, against Satan’s kingdom, was at first furthered by miracles; but the warfare by then was sufficiently proved to be of God, and the managers of it are now left to the ordinary assistance of divine grace in the use of the sword of the Spirit, and must not expect hailstones, or the standing still of the sun.”

The order given to Joshua for the houghing of the horses of the Canaanites and the burning of their chariots involved, of course, the vanquishing of them in battle. Accordingly we are told, “So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly: and they fell upon them” (verse 7). Though it was the Lord Himself who had accepted the challenge of Jabin and his confederates, and had assured His servant that He would deliver them up all slain before Israel on the morrow, this did not signify that he and his men were to remain passive—mere spectators of God’s working. He was indeed about to act mightily *for* them, yet at the same time *by and through them*! This also needs to be made clear and emphasized in certain quarters today—not only where hyper-Calvinism or a species of fatalism holds sway, but also where a certain type of the “victorious life” teaching is misleading souls. For the one is as paralyzing as the other. The Christian is informed that the reason why he so often yields to external temptations or is overcome by indwelling sin is because he is making the great mistake of trying to fight his foes personally; that they will never be conquered until he, “by faith,” turns them over to Christ and counts upon His vanquishing them for him; that the battle is not his but the Lord’s—that He triumphed over Satan and all his hosts at the cross—and that if we yield ourselves completely to Him, His victory will be ours without any effort on our part.

There is just sufficient veneer of the truth to give this line of teaching a plausible appearance, yet there is also more than enough repudiation of Scripture to convince all who are subject to God’s Word of its error. Seemingly it supplies a blessed solution to the most distressing problem in the Christian life, and at the same time appears to honour Christ, but in fact, it repudiates human responsibility, and falsifies the teaching of our Lord. Faith is not only to rest upon the divine promises and rely upon what Christ has done for His people, it is also required to bring forth good works, run in the way of His commandments, follow the example He has left us. When one of the leaders of this modern movement declares, “As I trust Christ in surrender, there need be *no fight* against sin, but complete freedom from the power and even the desire of sin,” he not only incul-

cates what is contrary to the recorded experience of God's people in all ages, but he takes direct issue with Scripture itself. The Bible speaks of "striving against sin" (Heb 12:4), wrestling against principalities and powers (Eph 6:12), bids the believer "fight the good fight of faith" (1Ti 6:12), enjoins him to "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ...that he may please him who has chosen him to be a *soldier*" (2Ti 2:3-4), and calls upon him to "put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph 6:11).

It is obvious that the above references, and others of a similar nature, would be quite useless, meaningless, if the ideal state of Christian living were a merely *passive* thing, and if it be summed up in the catchword of one of its popular advocates, "Let go, and let God." Most assuredly, the believer cannot gain the victory by his own powers; instead, he is to seek strength from the Lord, and then to use the same actively and strenuously. To speak of a *passive* "overcomer" is to employ words without meaning. To make the believer a mere onlooker of the Lord's exploits is to reduce him to something less than a moral agent. "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" must not be so misunderstood and misapplied as to neutralize the exhortation "Let us run with patience [i.e. perseverance] the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1). "Running," like "wrestling" and "fighting," is a figure which expresses the putting forth of vigorous endeavour. True, we are to be "looking unto Jesus" while thus engaged, yet *run* we must. True also that the Christian is to reckon on the blessed fact that his Saviour has triumphed over Satan, and yet that does not alter the fact that *he* is required to "resist the devil." True, God has promised to tread Satan under our feet shortly, yet he is not there now, and more than Christ's enemies have yet been made His footstool (Heb 10:13). The ultimate victory is sure, yet it has to be *fought for* by each one of us.

Thus it was in Joshua 11. Divine assurance that Jabin and his army would be slain on the morrow had been given, yet that did not release Israel from performing *their* duty. God had made no announcement that He would destroy the Canaanites by fire from heaven, as He did the cities of the plain (Gen 19) or that He would cause the earth to open her mouth and swallow them up as in the case of Korah and his company (Num 16). Instead, He had promised to "deliver them up all *slain* before Israel"—a word which imported, according to its common usage, being killed in battle. That His servant so understood it is evident, for we are told that he and all the men of war with him "fell upon them." Joshua did not seek a defensive position and dig trenches for the protection of his men, and then sit down and wait for the Lord to work. No, with full confidence in his Master's promise, he took the initiative, acted aggressively, and launched an attack upon the foe—boldly, suddenly, unexpectedly. God had said "to morrow I will deliver them up," and, taking Him at His word, Joshua delayed not. Probably *that* was the very last thing which the hosts of Jabin were expecting, and they would be thrown into the utmost confusion from the very outset.

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

6. Its Nature, Part 3

We have already pointed out a number of things in which the depravity of human nature *does not* consist, and, in our last, some of the inestimable blessings of which man *was deprived* by the fall. We now turn to the affirmative side, or a consideration of those evils which *have come* upon human nature as the result of our first parents' apostasy from God. We do not agree with those who teach that what is transmitted from Adam and Eve to their descendants, via the channel of natural generation and propagation, is a merely negative thing—the absence of good. Rather are we fully persuaded that something positive, an active principle of evil, is communicated from parents to their children. While we do not consider that sin is a substance or material thing, we are sure that it is very much more than a mere abstraction and nonentity. Man's very nature is corrupted. The virus of evil is in his blood. While there is privation in sin—a nonconformity to God's Law—there is also a real positive potency in it to mischief. Sin is a power, as holiness is a power, but a power working to disorder and death.

It has been said by some orthodox divines that "Men's natures are not now become sinful by putting anything in them to defile them, but by taking something from them which should have preserved them holy," But we much prefer the statement of the Westminster Catechism: "The sinfulness of that estate into which man fell consisteth in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of the righteousness wherein he was created, *and* the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed and disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually, which is commonly called original sin, and from which sin proceed all actual transgressions." That fallen human nature is not only devoid of all godliness, but also thoroughly impregnated with everything that is devilish, may surely be argued from the two different kinds of sin of which every man is guilty—those of omission, wherein there is failure to perform good works, and those of commission, or positive contumacy of the law of God. Something answerable to *both* of those must exist in our sinful nature, or otherwise we should predicate a cause inadequate to produce the effect. While the absence of holiness explains the former, only the presence of positive evil accounts for the latter.

There are many names given in Scripture to original sin or the depravity of human nature which serve to cast light upon its nature. The following list makes no claim to being complete, though it probably contains the most significant ones. It is called the plague of the heart (1Ki 8:38), "foolishness bound up in the heart" (Pro 22:15), "the stony heart" (Eze 11:19), "the evil treasure" of the heart (Mat 12:35). It is designated "the poison of asps" (Rom 3:13), "the old man," because it is derived from the first man and is part and parcel of us since the beginning of our own existence, and "the body of sin" (Rom 6:6), for it is a whole assembly of evils, "sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom 7:17). It is denominated "another law in my members" (Rom 7:23) because of its unvarying nature and power, "the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2), "the carnal mind" which is "enmity against God" (Rom 8:7). It is frequently spoken of as "the flesh" (Gal 5:17) because

conveyed by natural generation, “the old man, which is corrupt” (Eph 4:22), “the sin which doth so easily beset us” (Heb 7:1), man’s “own lust” (Jam 1:14) which inclines him to evil deeds.

It should be quite plain from the above definitions and descriptions of congenital sin that the human constitution is not merely negatively defective but positively depraved. There is not only in man’s heart the lack of conformity unto the divine Law, but a positive deformity. Not only is the natural man without any desire for holiness, he is born with a disposition which is now radically opposed thereto, and therefore not only has he no love for God, but he is full of enmity against Him. Sin is also likened to “leaven” (1Co 5:6-7), and that is far more than the negation of the right savour which should be in bread, namely, a positive sourness which affects it and makes it unsavoury. Sin is not only the absence of beauty, but the presence of horrid ugliness; not simply the unlovely, but the hateful; not only the want of order, but real disorder. As “righteousness” expresses objectively the qualities which constitute what is good, and “holiness” that subjective state which is the root of righteousness, so *sin* includes not only outward acts of transgression, but the evil and rotten state of the whole inner man which inclines to and animates those external iniquities. Very far from being only an “infirmity,” indwelling sin is a loathsome disease.

In seeking to define and describe the nature of depravity from the positive side, we would say, first, that the fall has brought man’s soul *into subjection to death*. But it must be remembered that for the soul to be under the dominion of death is a very different thing from the body being so. When the body dies it becomes as inactive and insensible as a stone. Not so in the case of the soul, for it still retains its vitality and all its powers. Fallen man is a rational, moral, responsible agent, but his internal being is thoroughly deranged. Alienated from the life of God, he can neither think nor will, love nor hate, in conformity to the divine Rule. All the faculties of the soul are in full operation, but they are all unholy, and consequently, man can no more fulfill the design of his being than does a physical corpse. Dreadful and solemn are the analogies between the two. As a dead body is devoid of the principle which formerly vitalized it, so the soul has been abandoned by the Holy Spirit who once inhabited it. As a physical corpse rapidly becomes a mass of corruption and a repulsive object, such is the depraved soul of man unto the thrice holy God. As a lifeless body is incapable of renewing itself, so is the spiritually dead soul completely powerless to better itself.

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). “The design of the apostle in this and some following verses is to show the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and to set forth the sad estate and condemnation of man by nature, and to magnify the riches of the grace of God, and represent the exceeding greatness of His power by conversion” (John Gill, 1697-1771). More clearly and fully did Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan, expound the striking coherency of this passage with its context. In the nineteenth verse of the preceding chapter, Paul had prayed that saints might duly apprehend and appreciate the greatness of that power which had been exercised by God in their salvation—that it was precisely the same as the divine might put forth for the resurrection and exaltation of His Son and which had now wrought an analogous change in them. The mighty power which had quickened Christ had also quickened them. Thus the blessed scope and end of the Holy Spirit here was to bring out the *answerable parallel* or show the analogous change which God had so wondrously wrought in them—that, what had been effected for Christ their Head, had been also in them His members, the one being of glorious pattern of the other.

In connection with Christ’s exaltation, three things were conspicuous. First, the condition of humiliation and death from which He was delivered and raised. Second, the sublime state of life and honour unto which He was exalted. Third, the Author thereof: God, whose almighty power was eminently manifested by the vast difference there was between those two states. Correspond-

ing to the glorious miracles, described in the closing verses of Ephesians 1, is what is so graphically portrayed in the opening verses of chapter 2. First, the dreadful state in which God's elect were by nature, namely, one of death in sin and such a death as brought its subjects under complete bondage to sin and Satan, so that they walk not in conformity to the divine law, but according to the corrupt maxims and customs of the world—being guided not by the Holy Spirit, but energized and directed by the evil spirit, here denominated “the prince of the power of the air.” Without any regard for God's will or concern for His glory, they gave free rein to the lusts of the flesh and the desires of their carnal minds. But second, notwithstanding their horrible condition, God, who is rich in mercy, had raised them from the grave of sin and made them one with Christ in the heavenlies, by a vital and indissoluble union. And third, this marvel had been effected solely by the invincible power and amazing grace of God, without any co-operation of theirs.

That death which had come upon man's soul is at least a threefold one. First, he is dead in law, like a murderer in the condemned cell awaiting execution. Second, he is dead vitally, without a single spark of spiritual life. Thus he is totally dead unto God and holiness, cast out of His favour without any power to recover it. He is dead in opposition to justification, and also dead in opposition to being regenerated and sanctified. And third, he is dead to all that is excellent. As “life” is not simply existence, but well-being, so “death” is not the negation of existence, but the absence of all the real pleasures of existence. In its scriptural sense, life signifies happiness and blessedness; death, wretchedness and woe. As the utmost natural misery which can befall man is for him to die—for “a living dog is better than a dead lion” (Ecc 9:4)—so spiritual death is the strongest expression which can be used to import our moral wretchedness. The former divests him of all those excellencies which are proper to him as man, but the latter makes him worse than a stone, for when he is dead he stinks, which a stone does not. So it is spiritually; the natural man is not only without any comeliness in the sight of God, but he is a stench in His nostrils.

In the first three verses of Ephesians 2, “there is an exact description of the state of man by nature, so complete and compendious a one as is nowhere together, that I know, in the whole Book of God” (Goodwin). The careful student will have observed that there is one detail in it upon which the Holy Spirit has placed special emphasis, namely, the one we are here treating of, for in verse 5 He *repeats* the words “dead in sin.” Three things are outstanding in sin, its guilt, its pollution, and its power, and in each of those respects man is in his natural estate “dead in sin.” “Thou art but a dead man,” said God to Abimelech (Gen 20:3). That is, thou art guilty of death by reason of this act of thine. It is said of Ephraim that “when he offended in Baal, he *died*”—sentence of condemnation came upon him (Hos 13:1). So of its pollution, for in Hebrews 6:1, we read of “repentance from *dead* works,” because every deed the natural man performs issues from a principle of corruption. So too of its power, for every sin man commits disables him the more unto God; his very activity in sin *is* his death, and the more lively he be in sin, the more dead will he become toward God.

That there *is* such a threefold death of which fallen man is the subject is further evident from the nature of the work of grace in the elect. For their spiritual death must needs answer to their spiritual quickening, and that is clearly threefold. There is a threefold life to which we are restored by Christ. There is, first, a life of justification from the guilt of sin and the condemnation and curse of the Law—termed by Christ “passing from death unto life” (Joh 5:24), and by the apostle “justification of life” (Rom 5:18). This is entirely objective, having respect to our status or standing before God, and is a greater relative change than for a condemned murderer to receive pardon. Second, there is a life of regeneration from the power and dominion of sin, called by Christ being “born again” (Joh 3:3), when a new nature or principle of holiness is communicated.

This is wholly subjective, having respect to the change wrought in the soul when it is divinely quickened. Third, there is a life of sanctification from the pollution of sin, promised by God through the prophet, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you” (Eze 36:25). This is something experiential, consisting of a purifying of the heart from the love of sin, referred to as “the washing of regeneration” (Ti 3:5). The first is judicial, the second spiritual, and the third moral—the three comprising the principal parts of God’s so-great salvation—the glorification of the saint is yet future.

Second, the fall has brought man *into hopeless bondage to sin*. When the Holy Spirit assures the saints, “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14), He necessarily signifies that all those still under the covenant of works *are* beneath sin’s dominion, that it holds full sway over them. As the Lord Jesus declared, “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (Joh 8:34), that is to say, sin is his *master*. Nevertheless, he yields voluntary and ready submission to sin’s orders, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness” (Rom 6:16). No one outside themselves coerces and compels them. The dominion of sin is not even an indwelling force against the will and endeavours of those who are under it, but it is connatural and congenial to them. Even though, occasionally, conscience feebly protests, its voice is silenced by the clamourings of lust, to which the will freely complies. The dominion of sin over the natural man is entire, for it pervades the spirit with all its powers, the soul with all its faculties, the body with all its members and it does so at all times and under all circumstances.

Sin is likened unto a monarch ruling over his subjects—“as sin hath *reigned* unto death” (Rom 5:21). Its kingdom is world-wide, for all the children of Adam are its subjects. Sin occupies the throne of the human heart, until almighty grace deposes it. Sin has taken possession of the complete soul, and under its direction and influence it constantly acts. The mind is in subjection to evil as a governing principle which determines all its volitions and acts, for sin’s lustings are so many imperial and imperious edicts. Yet we say again, this rule of sin is not a force upon the mind to which it makes opposition, for the soul is a *subject*—as a king continues to occupy the throne only by the consent and free allegiance of *his* subjects. While the soul cannot but will evil because of the reign of sin, yet its volitions are spontaneous. The dominion of sin consists in its determining influence upon the will, and this sway it retains to the end, unless victorious grace makes a conquest of the soul by the implantation of a contrary principle, which opposes the influence of indwelling sin, and disposes the will to contrary acts. Let conscience remonstrate never so sharply against the fatal choice, sin ever regulates the decisions and deeds of the natural man.

This dominion of sin “is not a propensity to some particular evil, but an inclination to deviate from the rule of our duty taken in its *full compass*. Yet, as the mind is incapable of exerting itself in all manner of ways and about all sorts of objects at once and in one instant, it is sometimes acting in one manner and sometimes in another as it is variously affected by the different objects about which it is conversant; but all its actions are evil. And those who study their hearts most will best understand the surprising variety of ways wherein evil concupiscence acts its part in the soul. In the several stages of human life, this sway of sin discovers itself. In childhood, by folly proper to that age. In youth, it exerts itself in various ways, by a low ambition, pride, and a strange fondness for sinful pleasures. In the state of manhood, by a pursuit of the transitory things of this world, and this is often under specious pretences of more extensive usefulness; but, in fact,

men are acted upon by a spirit of covetousness. In an advanced age, by impatience, etc.” (John Brine, 1703-1765).

The dominion of sin is made to appear more plainly and openly in some than in others, by their following a course of gross and flagitious evil, though it is just as real and great in those whose wickedness is more confined to the mind and heart. Scripture speaks not only of the “filthiness of the flesh,” but of “the spirit,” too (2Co 7:1), i.e. vile imaginations, envy and hatred of our fellows, inward rebellion, and ragings against God when His will crosses ours. A sovereign God permits and controls the direction and form it takes in each one. Our lot is cast in a day when the power and reign of sin is more manifest in the world than it has been for several generations. Nor is the reason for this far to seek. It is not because human nature has undergone any deterioration, for that is impossible—it has been rotten to the core since the time of Cain and Abel. No, rather is it because God would the more evidence the lie of Evolutionism and men’s proud boasts of “human progress” by increasingly removing His restraining hand, and thereby allowing the horrid corruptions of men’s hearts to become more visible and obvious. There are indeed degrees of wickedness, but none in the root from which it proceeds Every man’s nature is equally depraved, and everyone in an unregenerate state is wholly dominated by it.

So mighty is the power of sin that it has made all the sons of men its slaves. Few indeed realize that they are held fast by the cords of their sins (Pro 5:22), and still fewer wherein its strength lies. Sin is a powerful thing in itself, for it has a will of its own (Joh 1:13), a mind of its own (Rom 8:6-7), passions (Rom 7:5), yea, fiery ones (Rom 1:27); but as 1 Corinthians 15:56, informs us, “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.” The first part of that statement is obvious, but the second calls for some explanation. Sin is manifestly what puts venom into the dart of death and gives it its power to hurt and slay. Sin places a painful sting in death from the fact that it was what brought death into the world; had there been no sin, there had been no death. But more. It is sin, unpardoned sin, which makes death so dreadful, for not only does the king of terrors put a final end to all the pleasures of sin, but it conducts its subject unto certain judgment. But wherein is the Law of God “the strength of sin”? The Law is “holy...and just, and good” (Rom 7:12). How then can it be the strength of that which is corrupt, evil and abominable?

Most assuredly, the Law does not give the slightest encouragement to sin, rather does it sternly forbid it. The Law is not the essential but the accidental strength of sin, because of sin’s inherent depravity, as the pure rays of the sun result in the horrid steams and noxious stench rising from a dunghill. As the presence of an enemy calls into exercise the malice which lies dormant in the heart, so the holy requirements of the Law presenting themselves before man’s corrupt heart stir it unto active opposition. Thereby the exceeding sinfulness of sin is the more fully demonstrated, for its potency to evil is drawn forth by any restraint being laid upon it—the more a thing be forbidden, the more it is desired. Though fire and water be opposite elements, that is not so evident while there is distance between, but let them meet together and great is the spluttering and striving betwixt them. If the heart of man were pure, the Law would be acceptable unto it, but since it be depraved, there is fierce resentment against its spiritual precepts.

As the Law makes no provision for pardon, the natural effect of guilt is to widen the breach between the sinner and God. Sensible (as in some measure the most degraded are) of the divine displeasure, he is prone to withdraw farther and farther from the divine presence. Every augmentation of guilt is an augmentation of his estrangement. The more the sinner sins, the wider becomes the gulf between himself and God. This it is which gives strength to sin. It provokes the malignity of the heart against the Law, against all holy order, against the Judge. It exasperates the spirit of rebellion to unwanted fierceness, and makes the sinner desperate in his sin, causing its

subjects to become increasingly reckless, and, as they perceive the brevity of life, to plunge more eagerly into profligacy. As frosty weather causes the fire to burn more fiercely, so the Law renders man's enmity against God more violent. So Saul of Tarsus found it in his experience, for when the divine prohibition, "Thou shalt not covet," was applied in power to his heart, he tells us that "sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence" (Rom 7:7-8).

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 8

8. The need of *collecting and collating* all passages dealing with the same subject, where cognate terms or different expressions are used. This is essential if the expositor is to be preserved from erroneous conceptions thereof, and in order for him to obtain the full mind of the Spirit thereon. Take as a simple example those well-known words, "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Mat 7:7). Few texts have been more grievously perverted than that one. Many have regarded it as a sort of blank cheque, which anybody—no matter what his state of soul or manner of walk—may fill in just as he pleases, and that he has but to present the same at the throne of grace and God stands pledged to honour it. Such a travesty of the truth would not deserve refutation were it not now being trumpeted so loudly in some quarters. James 4:3 expressly states of some, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss"—some who "ask" do *not* receive! And why! Because theirs is but a carnal asking—"that ye may consume it upon your own lusts"—and therefore a holy God denies them.

Asking God in prayer is one thing; asking becomingly, rightly, acceptably and effectually is quite another. If we would ascertain *how* the latter is to be done, the Scriptures must be searched for the answer. Thus, in order to ensure a divine hearing, we must approach God through the Mediator, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you" (Joh 16:23). But to ask the Father in His name signifies very much more than just uttering the words "grant it for Christ's sake." Among other things, it signifies asking in Christ's person, as identified with and united to Him; asking for that which accords with His perfections and will be for His glory; asking for that which *He* would were He in our place. Again, we must ask in faith (Mar 11:24), for God will place no premium upon unbelief. Said Christ to His disciples, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (Joh 15:7), where two further conditions are stipulated. In order to receive, we must ask according to God's will (1Jo 5:14) as made known in His Word. What a deplorable misuse has been made of Matthew 7:7, through failure to interpret it in the light of collateral passages!

Another example of failure at this point is the frequent use made of Galatians 6:15, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (or "new creation"). It is most proper and pertinent to use that verse when showing that neither the ceremonial ordinances of Judaism nor the baptism and Lord's supper of Christianity are of any

worth in rendering us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. So too, though much less frequently, we are reminded that, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love” (Gal 5:6), that is out of gratitude to God for His unspeakable Gift, and not from legal motives—only for what they may obtain. But how very rarely does the pulpit quote, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1Co 7:19)—that which respects our submission to the divine authority, our walking in subjection to God’s will, is omitted. It is only by placing these three verses side by side that we obtain a balanced view. We are not vitally united to Christ unless we have been born again; we are not born again unless we possess a faith that works by love; and we have not this saving faith unless it be evidenced by a keeping of God’s commandments.

It is the duty of the expositor to gather together the various descriptions and exemplifications given in Scripture of any particular thing, rather than to frame a formal definition of its nature, for it is in this way that the Holy Spirit has taught us to conceive of it. Take the simple *act of saving faith*, and observe the numerous and quite different expressions used to depict it. It is portrayed as believing on the Lord Jesus Christ (Act 16:31), or the reposing of the soul’s confidence in Him. As a coming to Him (Mat 11:28), which implies the forsaking of all that is opposed to Him. As a receiving of Him (Joh 1:12), as He is freely offered to sinners in the Gospel. As a fleeing to Him for refuge (Heb 6:18), as the manslayer sought asylum in one of the cities provided for that purpose (Num 35:6). As a looking unto Him (Isa 45:22), as the bitten Israelites unto the serpent upon the pole (Num 21:9). As an acceptance of God’s testimony, and thereby setting to our seal that He is true (Joh 3:33). As the entering of a gate (Mat 7:13) or door (Joh 10:9). As an act of complete surrender or giving of ourselves to the Lord (2Co 8:5), as a woman does when she marries a man.

The act of saving faith is also set forth as a calling upon the Lord (Rom 10:13), as did sinking Peter (Mat 14:30), and the dying thief. As a trusting in Christ (Eph 1:13) as the great Physician, counting upon His sufficiency to heal our desperate diseases. As a resting in the Lord (Psa 37:7), as on a sure foundation (Isa 28:16). As an act of appropriation or eating (Joh 6:51) to satisfy an aching void within. As a committal (2Ti 1:12)—as a man deposits his money in a bank for safe custody, so we are to put our souls into the hands of Christ for time and eternity (cf. Luke 23:46). As faith in His blood (Rom 3:25). As a belief of the truth (2Th 2:13). As an act of obedience unto God’s holy commandment (2Pe 2:21) in complying with the terms of the Gospel (Rom 10:16). As a loving of the Lord Jesus Christ (1Co 16:22). As a turning unto the Lord (Act 11:21)—which implies a turning from the world. As a receiving of the witness of God (1Jo 10:9-10) as an all-sufficient ground of assurance, without the evidence of feeling or anything else. As a taking of the water of life (Rev 22:17). Most of these twenty expressions are figurative, and therefore better fitted than any formal definition to convey to our minds a more vivid concept of the act and to preserve from a one-sided view of it.

Much harm has been done by incompetent “novices” when treating of the subject of *regeneration*, by confining themselves to a single term—“born again.” This is only one of many figures used in Scripture to describe that miracle of grace which is wrought in the soul when he passes from death unto life and is brought out of darkness into God’s marvellous light. It is termed a new birth because a divine life is communicated and there is the commencement of a new experience. But it is also likened to a spiritual resurrection, which presents a very different line of thought, and to a “renewing” (Col 3:10) which imports a change in the original individual. It is the person who is divinely quickened and not merely a “nature” which is begotten of God. “Ye must be born again” (Joh 3:7), not merely something *in you* must be—“*he* is born of God” (1Jo 3:9). The same person who was spiritually dead—his whole being alienated from God—is then made alive; his

whole being reconciled to Him. This must be so, otherwise there would be no preservation of the *identity* of the individual. It is a new birth of the individual himself, and not of something in him. The nature is never changed, but the person is—relatively, not absolutely.

If we limit ourselves to the figure of the new birth when considering the great change wrought in one whom God saves, not only will a very inadequate concept of the same be obtained, but a thoroughly erroneous one. In other passages it is spoken of as an illuminating of the mind (Act 26:13), a searching and convicting of the conscience (Rom 7:9), a renovating of the heart (Eze 11:19), a subduing of the will (Psa 110:3), a bringing of our thoughts into subjection to Christ (2Co 10:5), a writing of God's Law on the heart (Heb 8:10). In some passages something is said to be removed from the individual (Deu 30:6; Eze 36:26)—the love of sin, enmity against God; while in others something is communicated (Rom 5:5; 1Jo 5:20). The figures of creation (Eph 2:10), renewing (Ti 3:5), and resurrection (1Jo 3:14) are also employed. In some passages this miracle appears to be a completed thing (1Co 6:11; Col 1:12), in others, as a process yet going on (2Co 3:18; Phi 1:6). Though the work of grace be one, yet it is many-sided. Its subject is a composite creature and his salvation affects every part of his complex being.

Physical birth is the bringing into this world of a creature, a complete personality, which before conception had no existence whatever. But the one regenerated by God had a complete personality *before* he was born again. Regeneration is not the creation of an individual which hitherto existed not, but the spiritualizing of one who already exists—the renewing and renovating of one whom sin has unfitted for communion with God, by bestowing upon him that which gives a new bias to all his faculties. Beware of regarding the Christian as made up of two distinct and diverse personalities. Responsibility attaches to the individual and not to his “nature” or “natures.” While both sin and grace indwell the saint, God holds him accountable to resist and subdue the one and yield to and be regulated by the other. The fact that this miracle of grace is also likened to a resurrection (Joh 5:25) should prevent us forming a one-sided idea of what is imported by the new birth and “the new creature,” and from pressing some analogies from natural birth which other figurative expressions *disallow*. The great inward change is also likened to a divine “begetting” (1Pe 1:3), because the image of the Begetter is then stamped upon the soul. As the first Adam begat a son in his own image (Gen 5:3), so the last Adam has an “image” (Rom 8:29) to convey to His sons (Eph 4:24).

What has been pointed out above applies with equal force to the subject of *mortification* (Col 3:5). That essential Christian duty is set forth in the Scriptures under a great variety of figurative expressions, and it is most needful that we take pains to collect and compare them if we are to be preserved from faulty views of what God requires from his people on this important matter of resisting and overcoming evil. It is spoken of as a circumcizing of the heart (Deu 10:6), a plucking out of the right eye and cutting off of the right hand (Mat 5:29-30), which tells of its painfulness. It is a denying of self and taking up of the cross (Mat 16:24). It is a casting off of the works of darkness (Rom 13:12), a putting off of the old man (Eph 4:22), a laying apart of all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness (Jam 1:21)—each of which is necessary *before* we can put on the armour of light or the new man, or receive with meekness the ingrafted Word, for we have to cease doing evil ere we can do well (Isa 1:16-17). It is a making no provision for the flesh (Rom 13:14), a keeping under the body, i.e. of sin (Rom 6:6; Col 2:11) and bringing it into subjection (1Co 9:27), a cleansing of ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (2Co 7:1), and abstinence from all appearance of evil (1Th 5:22), a laying aside of every weight (Heb 12:1). In this month's “Depravity” article (paragraph 3), the various names of original sin are listed.

9. Equally necessary is it *not to sever* what God has joined together. By nature all of us are prone to run to extremes, particularly so those with a philosophical turn of mind, who, seeking for unity of thought, are in great danger of *forcing* a unity into the sphere of their limited knowledge. To do this, they are very apt to sacrifice one side or element of the truth for another. I may be quite clear and logical at the expense of being superficial and half-orbed. A most solemn warning against this danger was supplied by the Jews in connection with their interpretation of the Messianic prophecies by dwelling exclusively upon those which announced the glories of Christ and neglecting those which foretold His sufferings, so that even the apostles themselves were evilly affected thereby, and rebuked by Christ for such folly (Luk 24:25-26). It is at this very point that the people of God, and particularly His ministers, need to be much on their guard. Truth is two-fold (Heb 4:12); every doctrine has its corresponding and supplementary element, every privilege its implied obligation. Those two sides of the truth do not cross each other, but run parallel with one another; they are not contradictory but complementary, and both must be held fast by us if we are to be kept from serious error.

Thus, we must never allow the grand truth of God's sovereignty to crowd out the fact of human responsibility. The will of the Almighty is indeed invincible, but that does not mean that we are nothing better than inanimate puppets. No, we are moral agents as well as rational creatures, and throughout are dealt with by God as such. "It must needs be that offences come," said Christ, but He at once added, "woe to that man by whom the offence cometh" (Mat 18:7). There the two things are joined together—the infallible certainty of the divine decrees, the culpability and criminality of the human agent. The same inseparable conjunction appears again in that statement concerning the death of Christ, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by *wicked* hands have crucified and slain" (Act 2:23). Again, our zeal for the doctrine of election must not suffer us to ignore the necessity of using means. They who reason, "If I be elected, I shall be saved whether or not I repent and trust in Christ," are fatally deceiving themselves—"chosen you to salvation *through* sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2Th 2:13) is proof. None are ever saved until they believe (Luk 8:12; Heb 10:39), and therefore all are to be exhorted to do so.

Particular redemption (Christ making atonement for the sins of His own people only) must not prevent His servants from preaching the Gospel to every creature and announcing that there is a Saviour for every sinner out of hell who appropriates Him for his own. Sunder not the two halves of John 6:37—all that the Father gives Christ shall come to Him, albeit the individual must *seek Him* (Isa 55:6; Jer 29:13). Nor does the inability of the natural man annul his accountability, for though no man can come to Christ except the Father draw him (Joh 6:44), his refusal to come is highly blameworthy (Pro 1:24-31; Joh 5:40). Nor is a divided Christ to be presented to sinners for their acceptance. It is a delusion to imagine that His priestly sacrifice may be received, while His kingly rule is refused, that His blood will save me, though I despise His government. Christ is both "Lord and Saviour" and in that unalterable order (2Pe 1:11; 3:2, 18), for we must throw down the weapons of our warfare against Him and take His yoke upon us in order to find rest unto our souls. Thus, repentance and faith are equally necessary (Mar 1:15; Act 20:21).

While justification and sanctification are to be sharply distinguished, nevertheless, they must not be divorced (1Co 1:30; 6:11). "Christ never comes into the soul unattended. He brings the Holy Spirit with Him, and the Spirit His train of gifts and graces. Christ comes with a blessing in each hand; forgiveness in one, holiness in the other" (Thomas Adams, 1600-1662). Yet how rarely is Ephesians 2:8-9 completed by the quoting of verse 10! Again, the twin truths of divine preservation and Christian perseverance must not be parted, for the former is accomplished via

the latter and not without it. We are indeed “kept by the power of God,” yet “through faith” (1Pe 1:5), and if in 1 John 2:27, the apostle assured the saints “ye *shall* abide in him,” in the very next verse he called on them *to* “abide in him”; as Paul also bade such work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, and then added “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13). Balaam wished to die the death of the righteous, but was not willing to live the life of one. Means and ends are not to be separated. We shall never reach heaven unless we continue in the only way (the “narrow” one) which leads thereto. ↪

APRIL

OUR LOVE TO GOD

Identification of the Godly

That there is such a thing as a human creature exercising love to God is clear from Scripture, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom 8:28). And they are identified in the remainder of that verse, “to them who are the called according to his purpose”—they who are effectually called from death unto life in consequence of God’s eternal decree. So too we read of “the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1Co 2:9). Divine love is reciprocal. In due time, God sheds abroad His love in the hearts of those whom He has loved from everlasting, so that they in return love Him. As another has said, “When love hath descended from heaven to earth, it hath finished half its course; but when it ascends from earth to heaven again, then the circle is completed.” Our love to Him is but a small stream that flows from and runs back to the ocean of God’s love. This love is not of natural kindling, but from the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit. Then the understanding is made to perceive, the judgment to esteem, the will to choose, and the whole soul to delight in God. The renewed person now sees there to be nothing in heaven or earth to be desired in comparison with Him.

This is one of the essential characteristic features of all the regenerate. They differ considerably in gifts and attainments, but one thing they have in common—they are all lovers of God. Never has a single individual been born into the kingdom of God which was destitute of affection for Him, “every one that loveth is born of God” (1Jo 4:7). Some are but “babes,” weak in faith; some are “young men,” strong in the Lord; others are “fathers,” of long experience and spiritual maturity. But one and all love God. Once they were as their fellow sinners, at enmity with God, but now they bear Him good will. The spirit of adoption has taken captive their hearts, and they love God with a little child’s fervent, adoring, confident affection. They love Him for His infinite perfections, His wisdom, grace, faithfulness, holiness. They love Him as He is revealed in Christ—the Image of the invisible God. They love Him for His merciful overtures to them through the Gospel. They love Him for what He has done for them, and for what He has promised yet to do. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1Jo 4:19). Gratitude is not a mean virtue, but a noble endowment, and supplies the most powerful of all spiritual motives unto a godly walk.

Love to God is a sure evidence of grace in the soul. As saving faith is a fruit of effectual calling, so also is affection for God—the two cannot be separated, for faith “worketh by love” (Gal 5:6). Nevertheless, no Christian, when in his right mind, will ever *boast of* his love. Rather will he

be strongly inclined to doubt if he has any, and certainly he will be *ashamed* of the degree of it. This writer truly is. As he thinks how feeble, how fickle, is his affection for God, and how little genuine obedience it produces, he is confounded. Yet, by grace, he can say with poor Peter, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee” (Joh 21:17)—though my conduct, through the weakness of the flesh, appeared to give the lie thereto—*Thou* perceivest that the beating of my heart *is* toward Thee. Since there be the recognition and realization in His people that they love God because He first loved them, that His love was spontaneous, of mere grace, unattracted by anything amiable in them, there will necessarily be a sense of utter unworthiness in their love to Him. And thus the Christian’s love to God is a very lowly and humble affection.

Love is as needful for the spiritual life as blood is for the natural. In neither case can the one exist without the other. Yet, though all the regenerate have love to God, not all of them are equally aware of the fact, nor are all Christians sensible of it in the same way at all times. But a personal persuasion of our love to God is most desirable. Those things which the more deeply concern us ought the more seriously to affect us. None should deny its existence simply because they are dissatisfied with the degree or intensity of their love. God is indeed to be loved above everyone and everything else, and loved with all our being and strength, yet the best of His people sadly fail to render unto Him that which is His due. To find the heart going out more to a near relative than to God, or to grieve more over some temporal loss than for an offence against the Lord, must occasion great concern to a conscientious soul. Nevertheless, such an experience is not, of itself, a proof that we have *no love* to God, especially if devotedness to our kith and kin does not cause us to neglect Him.

Love to God is not to be determined by its elevation. Some writers have insisted that naught but disinterested love is worthy of the name—that God must be loved for what He is, and our neighbour as His creature. But there is a love of gratitude as well as of complacency, which makes a thankful return unto Him for His great love in Christ. This is expressly stated in 1 John 4:19, “We love him, because he first loved us.” Not only did God’s love precede ours, being set upon us when we were entirely loveless, but it is the cause of ours. Not only as the divine power created it in us, but as the *motive* which we are conscious of in our love. If our hearts had never been deeply affected by that transcendent love which moved God to give His own Son to die for such hell-deserving wretches as we know ourselves to be, should we have ever had any affection unto Him? No, indeed. Nor is there anything “legalistic” in this, if David hesitated not to leave it on record, “I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications” (Psa 96:1). I need not be ashamed to own that I love Him because He heard my cry for mercy and washed my sins away by the blood of the Lamb.

Love to God is not to be measured so much by its sensible stirrings or lively acts as by its solid esteem and settled constitution. Some Christians are naturally more emotional and lively, and therefore more easily stirred. Nor is love to be gauged by our feelings, but determined by our purpose of heart and sincere endeavours to please God. Partly because the act may be more lively where the affection be less firm in the heart. The passions of suitors are greater than the love of husbands, yet not so deeply rooted, nor do they so intimately affect the heart. Straw is soon enkindled, and its heat quickly spent, but coals burn longer and more constantly. And partly because the objects of sense do more affect and urge us in the present state. While the flesh remains in the believer, he will be more sensibly stirred by the things which agree with his carnal nature.

We very much doubt if any regenerated person ever loved God for His essential goodness before he loved Him for His beneficial goodness. The first thing which consciously awakens our love to God is a sense of favours received from Him—because the Father gave His Son for me,

because the Son shed His blood for me, because the Holy Spirit quickened me. Later, as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, there comes the realization that He is to be loved for what He is in Himself. Love to God consists in a well-pleasedness in having Him as the soul's all-sufficient portion, of a delight in Him, of satisfaction in Him. Sometimes it is expressed in longings after and yearnings for Him. "With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early" (Isa 26:9). Sometimes it is declared in speaking well of Him to others (Psa 34:1-3; Mal 3:16). Often it is breathed forth in prayer (Psa 84:2), and in praise (Song 5:10). Occasionally it is revealed in exclamations of wonderment (1Jo 3:1). It is manifested in sincere efforts to please Him, making His glory the purpose and end of our actions, and therefore in detestation of all sin. It appears at its best when, in a time of sore trial and temporal straitness, its possessor "rejoices in the LORD" (Hab 3:17-18).

Here are a few *tests*. Have you been convicted of and made to mourn over your natural enmity against God, that not only was your heart dead as a stone toward Him, but filled with antagonism to and disrelish of Him? Do you love God for His *holiness* as well as His grace? Has it wrought in you a filial fear of displeasing Him, so that you jealously watch your heart lest it lead you away from Him and His ways (Heb 12:28)? Does it regulate your life, influence your walk, and move you to obedience? Is it weaning you from the creature, separating you from the world, delivering from the things opposed to sincere good love for God? Do you love His *truth*? Some pretend to love all preachers and preaching alike—incapable of distinguishing error from truth. Does it cause you to entertain good thoughts of God when His dispensations cross your will, moving you to place the best construction on the same and attributing them to His wisdom? For "love thinketh no evil" (1Co 13:5)!

God is truly loved above all others when no affection for the creature can draw us deliberately to sin against Him (Job 2:9-10). God is truly loved when we gladly incur and endure the displeasure and frowns of our fellows rather than offend against Him (Luk 14:26). God is truly loved when we make it our *principal concern* to please Him, rather than gratify the flesh or promote our worldly interests. God is truly loved when the heart is wounded and grieved at the dishonour done to Him all around us (Psa 119:53). If your love has waned and you long for it to be revived, doubt not God's love for you (for that will further weaken it), but look again at Christ on the cross. The best food for our love is to feed on His love.

EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

16. Obediential Assurance (2:4-5)

*“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments,
is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth
his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected:
hereby know we that we are in him.”*

Our title suggests that there is more than one kind of assurance, and such is indeed the case; nor do we refer to the difference between a genuine and a false one, but to those that are real and true. Like so many other subjects treated of in Scripture, Christian assurance has more than one side to it, though many are unaware of the fact. Broadly speaking they may be reduced to two: an objective and a subjective. The one is a firm persuasion resting on something without us, namely, the Word of God; the other upon something within us—the work of God’s Spirit. Each is obtained by faith, and both are equally sure, though the latter be not attended with the same degree of certainty. The former is foundational, the other evidential.⁷ “Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and state of salvation—which hope of theirs shall perish—yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God; which hope shall never make them ashamed.

“This certainly is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirit that we are the children of God: which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*).⁸ It will be seen that that statement relates not to a simple assurance, but to a complex one, which rests on several grounds. There is an assurance conveyed by the direct action of faith, when it receives and rests upon Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel, and His promise that He will never cast out such a one is relied upon. There is also an assurance which springs from the reflex action of faith, when the believer sees himself in the mirror of God’s Word and perceives in himself “the inward evidences of those graces” which are the scriptural marks of a saving change wrought in his soul by the Holy Spirit. The latter cannot exist without

⁷ **foundational...evidential** – The objective assurance we have from God’s promises in His Word is foundational. It is the basis of our faith. The subjective assurance is that which we gather from the evidence of change that we see in our lives.

⁸ **Westminster Confession of Faith** – one of the great confessions of the Christian faith, produced in 1645-1646 by an assembly of 121 theologians appointed by the “Puritan” Long Parliament to make proposals for reforming the Church of England.

the former, nor will the former be without the latter, except in those rare cases where regenerated souls are taken at once to heaven.

Whereas the unsaved are to be plainly informed that there is a sure ground in the Gospel for the chief of sinners to rest his faith and hope upon, and that there can be no spiritual experience or inward evidence to confirm his hope until he looks away unto Christ as his Saviour; on the other hand, those who profess to have done so are to be exhorted to make their calling and election sure (2Pe 1:10) unto themselves and their fellow saints, by bringing forth those fruits which manifest them to be trees of the Lord's planting. Now in this epistle John enters into some detail in showing what those fruits consist of, the presence of which attests the saving nature of their possessor's faith, and the absence of which demonstrates the emptiness of such a one's profession. In other words, the fact of regeneration may be certainly inferred from the presence of those marks which according to God's Word pertain unto those who have been born again. Conversely, of those who affirm themselves to be regenerate but tread not the highway of holiness, but instead "have corrupted themselves," it has to be said "their spot is not the spot of His children: they are a perverse and crooked generation" (Deu 32:5).

Now it is this evidential assurance of which John treats in the passage before us. First he declares, "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." In this way do we obtain sure confirmation that our acquaintance with Christ is a saving one. Christians may be convinced that a new nature has been imparted to them if they clearly perceive themselves to have new thoughts, tastes, impulses, desires, and acts. "As light proves the shining of the sun, as movement proves the existence of life, so this new experience assures us that our faith is not in vain. It is not without works, and therefore it is not dead" (Levi Palmer). David could say, "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts" (Psa 119:100)—not because he lived in a later and "more enlightened" age, nor by mental industry and extensive reading, but by entire submission to the supreme authority of the divine will. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" (Joh 7:17)—obedience is the grand means for removing doubts. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in [or "by"] God" (Joh 3:21): he who acts uprightly and conscientiously fears not for God to scrutinize him and knows that divine grace must be operating within him. So intimately connected are spiritual knowledge and obedience that it is most difficult to define that exact relation and interrelation between them. It has been remarked that the one is both the cause and the effect of the other, the root and fruit alike; but it would be more accurate to say they are completely interdependent. Thus we find David testifying, "Through thy precepts I get understanding," and then asking, "give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies" (Psa 119:104, 125), yet there is not the least inconsistency between the two things. Paul prayed that the saints might be filled with spiritual understanding, in order that they should walk worthily of the Lord, thereby "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:9-10). "Let me give you an illustration of this point. When our Lord met the disciples at Emmaus and talked with them, they did not know Him while He talked with them. But when think you did they know that they knew Him? Why, not until they performed an act of obedience by offering hospitality to a stranger. Then He was known to them in the breaking of bread" (Charles H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892). The lack of practical obedience to Christ lies at the root of the majority of doubts and fears!

Well did Thomas Scott (1747-1821) remark upon this verse, "What then shall we say to the unguarded language of some persons who have argued or asserted that sanctification is not the proper ground of assurance and evidence of our justification, and that it is legalistic for men to look to their works as the proof of their being true believers? We can only say that they directly

contradict the apostle, and that they are most certainly mistaken.” There is a vast difference between saying that the ground of assurance for acceptance with God is my obedience to His commandments, and declaring that the genuineness of my profession is to be tested thereby. As John Calvin (1509-1564) pointed out, “But we are not hence to conclude that faith recumbs on works, for though every one receives a testimony to his faith from his works, yet it does not follow that it is founded on them, since they are added as an evidence. Then the certainty of faith depends on the grace of Christ alone; but piety and holiness of life distinguish true faith from that knowledge of God which is fictitious and dead: for the truth is that those who are in Christ, as Paul says, ‘have put off the old man’ (Col 3:9).” The soundness of our knowledge is to be gauged by the obedience which it produces.

“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (verse 4). In those words the apostle declares that any knowledge of God which issues not in obedience to Him is worthless, and that the lawless one affirming a saving acquaintance with God is a deceiver. John’s immediate design was to expose the vain pretences of the Gnostics, who claimed to know God in a very profound and intimate way. They imagined that they understood the very essence of God’s being and the mysterious manner of His subsistence, and therefore acquired or appropriated the name of Gnostics, or “knowing ones.” But they kept not the divine commandments, affecting themselves to be occupied with higher things, which raised them above God’s precepts; and therefore they disdained His ordinances. John was also refuting the error of Antinomians, who, under the guise of magnifying divine grace, set aside the Law as the believer’s rule of conduct. Peter refers to them in his second epistle and declares that the “liberty” they preached was naught but “bondage” (verse 19); while Jude branded them as deniers of our Lord Jesus Christ (verse 4). But in its wider scope, our text is an exposure of all graceless professors.

It is an easy matter for anyone to say “I know God,” but whether or not such be the case must be put to the trial. It raises the question, What kind of knowledge is mine? Is it merely a natural and notional one, or a spiritual and influential? Do I know Him with a filial fear and holy love, or just intellectually, as the demons do (Mar 1:24)? This calls to the duty of self-examination, and shows the importance of making sure that I really have a saving interest in Christ. It requires me to ascertain if that great change has been wrought in me which regeneration ever effects. The defects and deficiencies of the Christian’s life are indeed many, nevertheless the one who has been born again evidences it by habitually walking with God. Nor will the real children of God resent the challenging of their faith or the testing of their knowledge. Rather are they deeply concerned, and willing to go to considerable pains in order to be scripturally assured that their knowledge is radically different from that of empty professors or conscienceless hypocrites, that their faith is a divinely communicated one, that their experience is sound and genuine and not delusive and counterfeit, evidenced by a conscientious compliance with God’s will.

Whether our knowledge of God be a saving one is not to be determined by the soundness of our creed nor by the depth and liveliness of our feelings, but by a radical change of heart which has produced a new disposition (2Co 5:17), which moves us to a willing, steady, and diligent compliance with and conformity to God’s preceptive will. It is in this way that we may confirm the sincerity of our profession and the reality of our state. Contrariwise, anyone who avows himself to have passed from death unto life, yet makes no conscience of the divine authority, but is a self-pleaser, supplies evidence that he is a liar. Thus it is that the Lord’s people are both to identify themselves and to be known unto others. See this principle illustrated in the case of Saul of Tarsus, when, in response to his inquiry, “Who art thou, Lord?” Christ was revealed to him, he at

once asked, "What wilt thou have me to do?" (Act 9:5-6). As soon as he knew Christ, he desired to obey Him, and unmistakably and lastingly was that desire exemplified to the end of his course. Nor was his in any wise an exceptional case, rather was it in this respect "a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1Ti 1:16).

Unto all who are in Christ is that promise made good, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb 8:10), so that they understand, love and obey them. It is in this way that we are renewed in knowledge after the image of God (Col 3:10). That knowledge is a practical and persuasive one, which powerfully influences its subject and produces a walking in the light. When God writes His laws upon our hearts, our affections and wills answer to every titlle in them, with a genuine desire and determination to perform the same. There is a complete harmony between the renewed soul and God and a correspondency of will. That correspondency was expressed by David thus: "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek" (Psa 27:8); and by Paul: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom 7:22). And though he was harassed with another and contrary law warring against the same and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members, causing him to cry for deliverance, yet he not only thanked God that he would yet be fully delivered, but could say "with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." The particular design of these verses is to take forth the precious from the vile. In them the apostle describes one of the vital differences which there is between the sheep and the goats. Of the latter it is said, "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him" (Ti 1:16). They adopt the same language as the saints, believe the same doctrines, claim to be resting on the finished work of Christ, and are quite sure of their salvation; yet evince little or no concern for His precepts. They talk glibly, but walk carelessly. This is exceedingly solemn, for those who tread not in the way of God's precepts are strangers to Him. A man spiritually knows no more than he practices, for spiritual knowledge is radical and influential. It exerts both a restraining and a constraining power, causing its subject to loathe and shun evil and to love and pursue that which is good. Therefore they who keep not God's commandments have no experiential acquaintance with Him. "We cannot know Him as Lord and Father, without being dutiful children and obedient servants" (Calvin).

While John describes quite a number of distinct marks whereby God's children may surely recognize themselves and also identify those who have a form of godliness but know nothing of its living and transforming power (2Ti 3:5), it is both highly significant and deeply important to note that he has given the precedence unto obedience, for without it any other apparent features of spirituality are but spurious. Though this be by no means the only evidence of a saving knowledge of God, it is the first and foremost, and where it be absent it is useless to look for others. As Christ asked those whom He addressed, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luk 6:46). Habitual disregard of His commandments is utterly incompatible with the owning of Him as our Lord. A disobedient life is a blank repudiation of a Christian profession. To avow that I know God savingly while self-will orders my life is a blatant assumption, for it is thoroughly lacking in reality. If I disregard that which Christ has appointed to be observed and done by His disciples, then that is absent which marks me as one.

He *"is a liar, and the truth is not in him,"* As John proceeds to develop his subject his language becomes increasingly emphatic. In 1:7, he had affirmed that those who walk in the light have fellowship with God in Christ, but in 2:3, he used a stronger expression of those who keep

His commandments—thereby they “do know that they know Him.” So, contrastedly, in 1:6, it was asserted that if we profess to have fellowship with God and yet walk in darkness “we lie, and do not the truth,” whereas here the apostle roundly and positively declares of the one who claims to know God and yet “keeps not [observe the tense!] his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” It should be pointed out that the final clause is much more than a bare repetition in a negative form of the preceding one, being explanatory not only of his being a liar but of his being disobedient: he kept not His commandments because he lacked the “impulsive power of a new affection,” which impels to holy action. And here we would answer the final question in the opening paragraph in our last chapter: “His” refers to God in Christ, and therefore the “commandments” include those of both the Law and the Gospel—amplification and verification of this statement will be given (D.V.) under our exposition of 2:7-8.

“*He is a liar,*” for he professes that which his life refutes. He may know much about Christ and have many ideas of Him floating in his brain, but it is a glaring falsehood for one who makes no conscience of His Law to say he has a saving knowledge of Him. As Spurgeon pointed out, it is more than a verbal lie, namely, a doctrinal one, for it is horrible heresy to aver⁹ a personal acquaintance with the Saviour and live a life of self-pleasing—the two things are utterly incompatible. It is a practical lie, for he completely falsifies such a profession. One who poses as a Christian when he is not “hangs out false colours on Sunday and all through the week plays the liar’s part.” It is a corrosive lie, eating into the soul of its utterer and corrupting it, for he who has no compunction in testifying falsely of his relation unto God soon becomes inured to deceiving his fellows. Some of the most shameless trickeries and robberies have been committed by those posing as ardent Christians. It is a damning lie, for the one who is guilty of this God-dishonouring falsehood is signing and sealing her own death warrant, challenging the dread sentence of eternal perdition (Rev 21:8).

“*But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him*” (verse 5). Here the apostle returns to the thought of verse 3, and describes those who know the grace of God in truth (Col 1:6 and cf. Eph 4:21), though the careful reader will observe the change from “his commandments” to “his word.” That was not simply for the avoidance of tautology,¹⁰ but because the latter is a more comprehensive expression, taking in the entire communication which God has made us. It is first and foremost a commanding Word, which demands the subordination of our reason and judgment to it, the submission of our affections and wills, the subjugation of our likes and dislikes. But it is also a Word of doctrine to be believed and held fast. We are required to be as jealous of God’s truth as we are responsive to His will, to be as sound in our faith as holy in our conduct, to hate false teaching as we do the garment spotted by the flesh. It is also a Word of threatening, to be respected and treated with fear and trembling—as Joseph did (Gen 39:9), and not trifled with as was the case with Adam and Eve. It is a Word of promise and consolation, to be embraced or appropriated (Heb 11:13) and rejoiced in (Jer 15:16). As such that Word is to be kept as a whole, and in all its parts.

The “*love of God*” is an ambiguous phrase, for it may be understood either objectively or subjectively, as the love which God Himself bears and manifests unto His people or as that which they exercise toward Him; but whichever it is it comes to much the same thing, since theirs is but the reflex of His—the outflowing of that which He has shed abroad in their hearts. As the expression comes before us again in chapter 4, we will reserve till then (D.V.) a fuller consideration of

⁹ **aver** – claim.

¹⁰ **tautology** – repeating oneself.

its precise significance, as well as what is intended by its being “perfected”: suffice it now to say that by God’s love being “perfected” we understand its having accomplished its design or reached its end in producing obedience. The aim of God’s love in choosing His people is to make them holy (Eph 1:4). The purpose of Christ’s love in redeeming His people is that they may be “zealous of good works” (Ti 2:14).

As Calvin pointed out with his usual perspicuity¹¹—greatly excelling that of most who have followed him—“this misunderstood clause intimates what a true keeping of God’s Word consists of, even love to Him.” “What doth the LORD thy God require of thee...to love him...to keep the commandments of the LORD” (Deu 10:12-13); “therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10), for love is dynamical, the most effectual of all influences and motives. Love is intensely practical—seeking to promote the interests of its object—or it is an empty name. Where there be love in the heart it will soon appear in the life; of all the affections it is the hardest to conceal. Love for God and obedience to Him are inseparable. Love reaches its objective when we please God—as a grafted tree has when laden with fruit. Consequently the Word is precious unto those who love God because it is His Word, and therefore they treasure it in their affections and memories and give proof thereof in their daily walk.

In verses 3 and 5 the Christian is shown how he may test the nature of his knowledge of God and the reality of his love for Him, namely, by the effects they produce. If my knowledge of Him be something more than a self-acquired and notional one, namely, that which the Spirit has wrought in me, then it has subdued my pride, humbled my heart, and brought me into subjection to God’s revealed will. It will produce in me that spirit which was manifested by Cornelius when he said to Peter, “Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” (Act 10:33). Our own wisdom and whims will be so subordinated to God’s authority that we shall be willing to be weighed in the balances of His Word, to bring everything to its touchstone, ready to be corrected and reproved by it; and that not spasmodically or only for a season, but constantly: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (Joh 8:31). God’s Word becomes everything to such a soul: his delight, his food, his rule, his chart. In like manner, if the love of God be in my heart it will operate powerfully, so that sin is hated and holiness panted after, and therefore my greatest burden and grief is to sin against Him, as my supreme delight is to commune with and enjoy Him. “Hereby know we that we are in him”—belong to Him.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

68. Challengers Vanquished (11:7-9)

Our design in these articles has been to supply something more than a bare exposition of the book of Joshua, namely, to point out some of the bearings which its contents have upon us today.

¹¹ **perspicuity** – clarity.

A true understanding of God's Word is indeed of first importance, for unless its meaning be rightly apprehended, of what service will it be unto us? Yet it is *the use* to which we put it, the measure in which we appropriate its principles and precepts to the regulating of our daily walk, that is equally important. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (Joh 13:17), that is the test. Thus, to spare no pains in endeavouring to arrive at the meaning of God's Word, that he may give a sound interpretation of the same, is only a part of the duty resting upon the minister of the Gospel, and especially *the teacher* of God's people. Another part of his work, equally necessary and exacting, is for him to make practical application unto his hearers of each passage he takes up, to point out the various lessons it inculcates, to accommodate it unto the present condition and circumstances of those to whom he ministers. Only so will he emulate the example left him by the divine Teacher of the Church. Only so will he pursue the same course that was followed by His apostles. Only so will he be of the greatest service unto His needy, tried and often sorely perplexed people. It is not the elucidation of mysteries or light upon prophecy that they most need, but that which will comfort, strengthen, and stimulate them.

Such a policy as just intimated will indeed slow down the speed of one who undertakes to go systematically through a whole book of Scripture, or even a single chapter thereof. But so far from speed being a virtue, it is more often a vice, as much in modern life tragically shows. "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa 28:16) holds good of the "opening up" of God's Word, as it does of everything else, and must be heeded if souls are to be really edified. But though such a method will not make for swiftness, yet by God's blessing (on much prayerful meditation), it will produce something far more substantial and satisfying than the superficial generalizations which now so widely obtain, both in the pulpit and in the religious press. As the old adage says, "Slow but sure is sure to do well." Instead of seeing how quickly we could race through the book of Joshua, we have endeavoured to ascertain and then point out the practical application of its contents unto ourselves and our readers. Particularly have we dwelt at length upon the many things in it which illustrate the various aspects of the Christian's spiritual warfare, the snares he must avoid, the rules he must observe, the means he must employ, in order to success therein. We have sought to call attention to the grand incentives and the real encouragements furnished by this book to "fight the good fight of faith" (1Ti 6:12), and to show how strength for the same is to be obtained.

In addition, we have endeavoured to remove those "stumblingblocks" (Isa 57:14) which various types of error lay in the path of the Christian warrior. Let us now add a few words to what was said at the close of our last concerning the misleading teaching of certain sections of what is known as "the victorious life" movement. While on the one hand, we heartily concur with their deploring of the carnal and worldly walk of the rank and file of professing Christians, and agree that many of God's own people are living far below their privileges in Christ; yet on the other hand, we neither endorse their language nor believe the remedy they prescribe is the true one. All of their leaders are decidedly Arminianistic, which at once evinces that they are unsafe guides to follow. It is scripturally warrantable to say that some believers are living Christ-dishonouring lives and acting contrary to God's revealed will, but that is very far from justifying the oft-made assertion that He desires to do this or that in and for them, but they will not let Him. That would connote a thwarted Redeemer, and obviously, a *defeated* Christ could not be the Leader of any "victorious" followers! Such a "Christ" is very different from Him who is no less than "the mighty God" (Isa 9:6). Verily, "the legs of the lame are not equal" (Pro 26:7), and they who are proudest of their consistency are often the most inconsistent in their beliefs and conduct.

To contend for holiness of life is indeed praiseworthy, and to urge God's people to "possess their possessions" and enjoy now the rich heritage which is theirs in Christ is also a thing most needful. Yet zeal requires to be tempered with knowledge, and if a spirit of fanaticism is to be avoided, all must be tested by Holy Writ (1Th 5:21). Satan is never more dangerous than when he appears as an angel of light (2Co 11:14). To carnal reason, it seems that Christ's acceptance of the devil's challenge to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple had been an outstanding act of faith in God to preserve Him from all injury. Nevertheless, His reply shows that such had been an act of presumption and contrary to Scripture (Mat 4:5-7). Likewise, it may strike us as most honouring to Christ to say that He is ready to do all for us if we surrender wholly to His control—but the fact is that He will no more relieve us of personally contending with our foes than He would repent and believe for us in order to our being saved. Strengthen us He will, if we seek His grace aright, yet that strength will be given for the purpose of equipping us to fight the good fight of faith. As the apostle declared, "I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily" (Col 1:29). Nor is there anything in that statement the least derogatory to His glory; but very much to the contrary.

Resuming our remarks upon Joshua 11. In view of the great preponderance of Jabin's forces over Israel's, and the weighty advantage he had in being possessed of so many horses and chariots, while they were on foot, there can be no doubt that he was not only fully confident of victory, but that he considered the initiative lay entirely in his own hands, and that there was not the least likelihood of their launching any attack upon him. Yet that was the very thing that happened. "So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly: and they fell upon them" (verse 7). Therein we behold the confidence, the obedience, the daring and the promptness of faith. Joshua's confidence lay not in his own military skill, nor in the valour of his men, but in the sure promise of the One whom he served. The assault which he now made upon the Canaanites was not dictated by caprice,¹² feelings, or carnal reason, but was in compliance with the orders which he had received from the Lord. His falling suddenly upon Jabin and his army was not due to any impatience or anxiety for the issue to be immediately determined, but was the result of laying hold of the Lord's "tomorrow" in the preceding verse. His action was not a venturesome or foolhardy one, but a daring to rely upon his God when faced with what to sight appeared a hopeless situation—as the Hebrews, and later Daniel, feared not to defy the edicts of the king of Babylon (Dan 3:16-18; 6:10).

"And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephoth-maim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining" (verse 8). Thus did Israel's God make good His word through Moses (Deu 20:1), fulfil the promise made to His servant, and vindicate the faith of Joshua. Thus was provided yet another proof of how firm is the foundation on which has rested the faith of God's people in all generations. And thus too did He demonstrate His acceptance of the impious challenge of Jabin and his fellows, and make it clear that, "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD" (Pro 21:30)—another verse, by the way, whose language is not to be taken absolutely and where an interpreter is needed to bring out its sense. As a matter of fact, all the wisdom of Satan and all the policy of the unregenerate is directed, immediately and actively, against the Lord, yet *all in vain*. He that sitteth in the heavens laughs at the most determined and concerted projects of men against Himself and His Anointed, and fulfills His pleasure despite them (Psa 2:1-6). As well attempt to stop the sun from shining or the ocean

¹² **caprice** – whim; a sudden change of mood or behavior.

from moving as seek to nullify the decrees of the Almighty. All who make war with the Lamb shall most certainly be vanquished by Him (Rev 17:14).

The total failure of Jabin's long-planned project demonstrated clearly that there is "no counsel against the Lord" which has the remotest possibility of succeeding. The best-contrived policy against Him comes to foolishness. "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness [not "ignorance"!]: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong" (Job 5:13). Pharaoh's counsel to depress the Hebrews issued in their being increased (Exo 1:8-12), Ahithophel's counsel was befooled at the very time when "it was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God" (2Sa 16:23; 17:7, 14, 23, with 15:31), Ahab's attempt to falsify God's word by seeking to ward off the threatened stroke against his life (1Ki 22:30-34), Athaliah's deep-laid plot to exterminate the family of David and thereby frustrate the divine promise (2Ki 11:1), the blatant boast and wicked design of Sennacherib against Judah (2Ch 32:21; Isa 30:31), the strong and repeated efforts of the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin to prevent their building of the temple (Ezr 4:6), and later the craft of Sanballat to oppose the erecting of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2, 4, 6), the determination of Haman to slay all the Jews (Est 3), Herod's seeking to kill the infant Saviour (Mat 2)—all came to naught, as inevitably they should do when opposing the decrees of heaven.

"And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel" (Jos 11:8), thereby fulfilling the promise which He had given unto Joshua the day previously (verse 6). Blessed is it to learn from this, and many other passages, that the wicked, equally with the righteous, are in the hands of Him who made them and are entirely at His sovereign disposal. One of the chief designs of Scripture is to reveal unto us the several relations which God sustains unto His creatures. He is not only their Creator, but their Lawgiver and Ruler, their King and Governor, and, ultimately, their Judge, to whom they must yet render an account of their deeds. Since the reprobate as well as the elect are represented as clay in the hand of the divine Potter determining their eternal destiny (Rom 9:21-24), then certainly He has full control of them and their actions while they be in a time state. This is a very real and substantial part of the believer's consolation, that his God "doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan 4:35), and therefore that neither Satan nor any of his children can make the least move against one of the Lord's people without His express permission and the removing of His providential hindrances.

"And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel." What a commentary was that upon "The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect" (Psa 33:10)! Not only are the wicked the subjects of God's government, but their every action is controlled by Him and made subservient to His eternal purpose, yet *without* His having any part in their wickedness. Was it not so in the cases of Pharaoh and Judas (Rom 9:17-18; Luk 22:22)? And is it possible to select more extreme ones? If then the greatest of all rebels fulfilled the purpose of the Almighty (though quite unwittingly so far as they were concerned), then think it not strange that it is so with all lesser rebels. Nimrod and his fellows thought to erect a tower whose top should reach unto heaven, but God frustrated them (Gen 10). Abimelech king of Gerah sent and took Sarah unto himself, but God suffered him not to touch her (Gen 20:6). Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness and hired himself out unto Balak to go and curse Israel, but the Lord so interposed that that prophet had to confess to his chagrin, "Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed: and I cannot reverse it" (Num 23:20). "Surely the wrath of man shall [be made to] praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (Psa 76:10).

“The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all” (Psa 103:19)—over the evil and the good, over the demons and those they indwell as truly as over His Church. God rules in the decisions of the senate, the tumults of the people, the fury of battle, as really as in the ragings and tides of the sea. The plotting of kings, the ambitions of aggressors, the avarice of conquerors, are fully controlled by the Most High. He presides in their councils, determines their decisions, decides which nations they shall attack, bending their minds to comply with His eternal decrees. Unmistakably, repeatedly, uniformly, is that the teaching of Holy Writ. Note well what the Lord said of that heathen monarch who was so filled with the lust of conquest, “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so...but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few” (Isa 10:5, 7). The Assyrian had other designs of a more ambitious scope, but God changed the direction of his thoughts, and caused him to be His instrument of retribution in inflicting judgment upon a people who had sorely provoked Him. God employed him, unknown to himself, as “the rod of his anger.” Thus, he was in *God’s hand* and his actions determined by Him.

“And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel...and they smote them, until they left them none remaining” (verse 8). See here the utter futility and madness of fighting against the Almighty! When He “delivered them up” unto their justly deserved death, what could they do? Nothing, they were helpless, unable to escape the due reward of their iniquity. “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished; but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered” (Pro 11:21). Thus it was with Jabin and his hosts. Their confederacy in evil came to naught. Their number, strength, and unanimity availed them nothing now that God’s hour of vengeance had arrived.

Therein we have a solemn anticipation and adumbration of the judgment awaiting the world of the ungodly. The Lord has solemnly declared that He “repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them” (Deu 7:10); and again, “Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them” (Psa 21:8-9). Out of Christ, there is no protection from God’s justice. When He appears to judge the world, the stoutest heart will melt in terror and the most obdurate¹³ will cry to the rocks, “Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come: and who shall be able to stand?” (Rev 6:16-17).

“And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burned their chariots with fire” (verse 9). In the flush and excitement of victory, Israel’s leader failed not to comply with the orders he had received from his Master, and it is blessed to see how the Holy Spirit has taken notice of and recorded the same, thereby showing us the value which God places upon obedience. Not only so, but the chronicling of these details here is for our spiritual instruction, intimating as they do once more that *further victories* are not to be expected by us unless we remain in complete subjection to the divine will.

The continued blessing of God on our efforts to overcome our foes is dependent upon the maintenance of lowliness and submission unto Him, for if pride or self-will is allowed, then the Holy Spirit is grieved. Humility ever expresses itself in obedience to God. What is recorded here in verse 9 explains what follows to the end of the chapter, where we are shown how Joshua’s pro-

¹³ **obdurate** – obstinate.

gress remained unretarded. In what particular way this “houghing” was done, we are not informed, so we cannot be sure whether the horses were only rendered powerless for warfare or completely destroyed. In view of burning the chariots, it seems more likely that they would be killed, so as to prevent other Canaanites from using them, the more so since they would be of no value to Israel.

“And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burned their chariots with fire.” What proof was this that “There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety” (Psa 31:16-17)! As God can save those who are without armies, so those with them are helpless if He be against them—as was clearly demonstrated at the Red Sea. It is a striking fact that the most glorious days of military victory for Israel were when the veto of Deuteronomy 17:16 was strictly regarded by them. In addition to their remarkable exploits in the time of Joshua, we may recall their victories over Sihon and Og (Num 21:23-26, 33-35), their overcoming of Sisera and his nine hundred chariots of iron (Jdg 4:3-16), and David’s victory over the king of Zobah, with his thousand chariots (2Sa 8).

On the other hand, it is equally noticeable that Israel’s declension dates from their transgression of Deuteronomy 17:16 (1Ki 4:26; 10:26), and that defeat came from the very quarter in which they foolishly placed their confidence (2Ch 12:2-9 and compare Isa 31:1). All of which goes to show, “The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety [or “victory”] is of the LORD” (Pro 21:31). It may also be pointed out that later, when Israel renounced this vain confidence, God healed their backsliding (Hos 14:3-4).

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

6. Its Nature, Part 4

Third, the fall has resulted in *man’s mind being enveloped in darkness*. As physical blindness is one of the greatest natural calamities, spiritual blindness is much more so. It consists not of universal ignorance, but a total incapacity to take in a real knowledge of divine things. As it is said of the Jews, “blindness in part is happened to Israel” (Rom 11:25). Men may become very learned in many things, and by exercising their minds upon the Scriptures, they may acquire a considerable letter-knowledge of its contents; but they are quite unable to obtain a vital and effectual knowledge thereof. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1Co 2:14), and spiritual perception he has none. This darkness which is upon the mind renders the natural man incapable of perceiving the excellence of God, the perfection of His Law, the real nature of sin, or his dire need of a Saviour. Should the Lord draw nigh and ask him, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” his answer ought to be, “Lord, that I might receive my sight” (Mar 10:51).

This darkness is upon the noblest part of man's being, his soul; and upon the highest faculty of it, the mind, which performs the same office for it as does the eye to the body. By means of our visive¹⁴ organ, we cognize¹⁵ material objects, distinguish between them, recognize their beauty or repulsiveness. By the mind, we think, reason, understand, and are enabled to weigh and discern between the true and the false. Since the mind occupies so high a place in the scale of our beings, and since it be the most active of our inward faculties, ever working, then what a fearful state the soul must be in for its very eye to be *blind*! It is "like a fiery, high-metalled horse whose eyes cannot see, furiously carrying his rider upon rocks, pits, and dangerous precipices" (John Flavel, 1630-1691). Or, as the Son of God declared, "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Mat 6:22-23).

Much is said in the Scriptures about this terrible affliction. Men are represented as groping at noonday (Deu 28:29), yea, "they meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night" (Job 5:14). "They know not, neither will they understand." And why? "They walk on in darkness" (Psa 82:5). It cannot be otherwise—alienated from Him who is light, they must be in total spiritual darkness. "The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble" (Pro 4:19)—insensible of the very things which are leading to everlasting woe. Moral depravity inevitably results in moral darkness. As a physically blind eye shuts out all natural light, so the blinded eye of the soul excludes all spiritual light. It renders the Scriptures profitless to them, for in this respect the case of the Gentiles is identical with that of the Jews, "But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament" (2Co 3:14). Consequently, the highest wisdom they count folly, and objects which are in themselves the most glorious and attractive are despised and rejected.

It is a great mistake to suppose that depravity is confined to the heart or to any one of the faculties which is more immediately conversant with the distinctions of right and wrong. As a radical disease extends its influence to all the functions of the body, so depravity extends to all the powers of the soul. Sin is as really blindness to the mind as it is hardness to the heart, and therefore has it departed from its original tendencies. Its actions, however intense, are only in the wrong direction. This it is which alone affords a satisfactory explanation of the mental aberrations of men and the immoral conceptions they have formed of deity. As we attempt to contemplate the manifold forms of religious error, both ancient and modern, the various superstitions, the disgusting rites of worship, the monstrous and hideous symbols of the Godhead, the cruel flagellations and obscenities which prevail in heathen lands—when we consider all the abominations which have long passed and still pass under the sacred name of divine worship, and ask *how* such delusions originated and have been propagated, it is not sufficient to trace them to sin in general—rather must they be attributed to a deranged mind. Only a debased and darkened understanding adequately accounts for the horrible lies which have taken the name of truth, and the fearful blasphemies which have been styled worship.

This moral darkness which is upon the mind appears in the speculations about deity by philosophers and metaphysicians, for they are ever erroneous, defective, and degrading, when not corrected by divine revelation. All such speculations are necessarily vain when they attempt to deal with things which transcend the scope of our faculties—which undertake to carry knowledge beyond its first principles, and essay to comprehend the incomprehensible. The creature being de-

¹⁴ **visive** – seeing.

¹⁵ **cognize** – perceive.

pendent and finite can never hope to compass an absolute knowledge of anything. "Intelligence begins with principles that must be accepted and not explained; and in applying those principles to the phenomena of existence, apparent contradictions constantly emerge that require patience and further knowledge to resolve them. But the mind, anxious to know all and restless under doubts and uncertainty, is tempted to renounce the first principles of reason and to contradict the facts which it daily observes. It seeks consistency of thought, and rather than any gaps should be left unfilled, it plunges everything into hopeless confusion. Instead of accepting the laws of intelligence and patiently following the light of reason, and submitting to ignorance where ignorance is the lot of his nature as limited and finite, and joyfully receiving the partial knowledge which is his earthly inheritance, man, under the impulse of curiosity, had rather make a world that he does understand than admit one which he cannot comprehend. When he cannot stretch himself to the infinite dimensions of truth, he contracts truth to his own little measure. This is what the apostle means by *vanity of mind*" (J. H. Thornwell, 1812-1862).

The only way of escape for fallen man from such vanity of mind is for him to reject the serpent's poison. "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5), and submit unreservedly to divine revelation, according to our Lord's word in Matthew 11:25, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes"—to renounce all such self-acquired knowledge, forsake all our own erroneous conclusions and fancies, and take the place of a little child before Him. But that is just what the pride of the depraved creature refuses to do. Sin has not only counteracted the normal development of reason; it has so thoroughly deranged the mind that, as Christ declared, "men loved darkness rather than light" (Joh 3:19). They are so infatuated with their delusions that they prefer error to the truth. That which may be known of God is clearly manifested on every hand, but man refuses to see (Rom 1:19-21). But though they be carried away with the darkness of their corruptions, the light still shines all around them. As created, all men may and ought to know God; but, as fallen, practical atheism is their sad heritage.

But if the acutest intellects of men, in their fallen and degenerate condition, could not of themselves form any accurate or just speculative knowledge of God and His government, there is yet a profounder ignorance which requires to be noticed, namely, that theoretical knowledge of God which there is in those countries that have been favoured with the Gospel. By the light of the Christian revelation, many a humble peasant has been made familiar with truths of which Plato and Aristotle knew nothing. Thousands are notionally sound upon questions which perplexed and confounded the understandings of presumptuous sophists. They believe that God is spirit, personal, eternal, and independent; that He made the heavens and the earth, and controls all His creatures and all their actions. They are persuaded that He is as infinitely good as He is infinitely great. Yet despite this knowledge they glorify Him not as God. They *lack* that loving light which warms as well as convinces. They have no communion with Him. They neither love nor adore Him. In order to a spiritual, vital, and transforming knowledge of God, their dead hearts must be quickened and their blind eyes opened, and in order to *that* there must be an atonement, redemption, reconciliation with God. The cross is the only place where men can truly find God, and the incarnate Son the only One in whom God can be adequately known.

If man's mind were not enveloped by darkness, he would not be deceived by Satan's lies or allured by his baits. If man were not in total spiritual darkness, he would never cherish the delusion that the filthy rags of his own righteousness could render him acceptable to the Holy One (Isa 64:6). If he were not blind, he would perceive that his very prayers are an abomination unto the Lord (Pro 15:8). Though this incapability of understanding heavenly things be common to all the

unregenerate, it is more heightened in some than in others. As all are equally under the dominion of sin, yet some forge themselves additional fetters of evil habits by drinking in iniquity like water (Job 15:16). So many of the sons of men immerse themselves in greater darkness by the strong prejudices of their own contracting, through pride and self-will. Others are still further incapacitated to take in spiritual things, even theoretically, by a judicial act of God, giving them over wholly to follow the dictates of their own minds. “He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted” (Joh 12:40, and cf. 2Th 2:10-12).

Fourth, the fall has issued in man’s becoming *the bondslave of Satan*. That is another mysterious but very real thing, about which we can know nothing except what is revealed thereon in Holy Writ; but its teaching leaves us in no doubt upon the fact. It reveals that men are, morally, the devil’s children (Act 13:10; 1Jo 3:10); that they are his captives (2Ti 2:26), under his power (Act 26:18; Col 1:13); that his lusts they are determined to do (Joh 8:44). He is described as the strong man armed, who holds undisputed possession of the sinner’s soul, until a stronger than he dispossesses him (Luk 11:21-22). It speaks of men being “oppressed of the devil” (Act 10:38), and declares, “The god of this world [the inspirer and director of its false religions] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image [Revealer] of God, should shine unto them” (2Co 4:4). The heart of fallen man is the throne on which he reigns, and all the sons of Adam are naturally inclined to yield themselves slaves to him. The awful reality of his indwelling men was authenticated beyond the possibility of doubt by the cases of demoniacal possession of Christ’s day.

Their corrupt nature gives Satan the greatest advantage against men, for they are as ready to comply as he is to tempt. No age or condition of life is exempted from his assaults, and, suiting his evil solicitations according to their varied temperaments and tempers, they are easily overcome. The longer he rules over men, the more guilt they contract, and the more do they come under his dominion. To be his bondslave is a state of abject misery, for he purposes naught but the eternal ruin of his victims, and every step they take in that direction furthers his evil designs and increases their wretchedness. He is as ready to laugh at and mock them for the pangs and pains which their folly brings upon them as he was to tempt and solicit their service. Yet he has *no right* to their subjection. Though God permits him to rule over the children of disobedience, He has given him no grant or warrant which renders it *lawful* for him to do so. Thus, he is an usurper, the declared enemy of God, and though sinners are suffered by Him to yield themselves up to the devil’s control, that is far from being by divine approbation.

Ephesians 2:2-3 contains the clearest and concisest description of this awful subject, and to it we now turn. “Wherein [a status and state of being dead in trespasses and sins] in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” The first thing we would observe about this verse is that the world and the prince of the power of the air are definitely linked together. For the dead in sin are said to “walk according to” the one equally as the other. The only difference being that the second statement is amplified by the clauses which follow, wherein we are shown *why* they so walked. The identifying of the world with Satan is easily understood. Three times our Lord denominated him “the prince of this world,” and 1 John 5:19 declares, “The whole world lieth in wickedness.” The world is distinguished from the Church of Christ—the children of God. The two opposing companies and the radical difference between them was intimated at the beginning, in the word of Jehovah unto the serpent, when He made mention of “thy seed” and “her

seed” (Gen 3:15). Those two seeds were referred to by Christ in His parable of the tares, and designated by Him “the children of the kingdom” and “the children of the wicked one” (Mat 13:38).

Our Lord also spoke of the “kingdom” of Satan (Mat 12:26), by which He referred not only to his power and dominion, but to his subjects and officers being an *organized company*—in opposition to “the kingdom of God’s dear Son” (Col 1:13). Thus, by the world, “the world of the ungodly” (2Pe 2:5) is meant, not only the sum total of the children of the devil, in contradistinction from the children of God, but more especially the *joining together* of all the unregenerate, which greatly augments their strength and malignity. “As in coals, though each coal hath fire in it, yet lay all those coals together and the fire is strengthened; so there is an intensification from this union of all the parts, from the *connecting* of this world. The collection of all carnal men in one and the same principles, practices, and ways, are meant by ‘the world’” (Thomas Goodwin, 1600-1680). By its “course” is connoted, first, its “age” or time, each generation having a more or less distinct dress or character, but ever essentially the same “evil world” (Gal 1:4). Second, its mould or manner, its custom or way of life—its “spirit” (1Co 2:12) and “fashion” (1Co 7:31). The unregenerate walk according to the same maxims and morals, and do as the generality of their fellows do, because in each is the same depraved nature.

“According to the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2). The world is what it is because under the dominion of Satan. The mass of the unregenerate are likened unto the sea (Isa 57:20), for being bound by a common nature, they all move together as the waters of the sea follow the tide. But as Goodwin said, “If the wind comes and blows upon the sea, how it rageth, how strong are the streams then! There is a breath, a spirit, the spirit of the power of the air, namely, the devil sendeth forth an influence whereby, as the wind that bloweth upon the trees which way it bloweth, so he bloweth and swayeth the hearts of the multitude one way...when all the coals lie together, they make a great fire, but if the bellows be used, they make the fire more intense.” Thus, the Holy Spirit has here given us a double explanation of *why* the unregenerate follow the course which they do. As each one enters and grows up in the world, being a social creature, he naturally goes with the drove of his fellows, and being possessed of the same evil lusts, he finds their ways agreeable to him. The world, then, is the *exemplary* cause according to which men shape their lives, but the devil is the *impelling* cause.

Since the fall, this malignant spirit has entered into human nature in a manner somewhat analogous to that in which the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of believers. He has an intimate access to our faculties, and though he cannot, like God’s Spirit, work at the roots so as to change and transform their tendencies, yet he can ply them with representations and delusions which effectually incline them to fulfil his behests.¹⁶ He can cheat the understanding with appearances of truth, fascinate the fancy with pretences of beauty, and deceive the heart with semblances of good. By a whisper, a touch, a secret suggestion, he can give an impulse to our thoughts and turn them into channels which exactly subserve his evil designs. Men not only do what he desires, but he has a *commanding power* over them, as his being termed a prince plainly implies, and, therefore, are they said to be “taken captive...at his will” (2Ti 2:26), and when converted, they are delivered from his power (Col 1:13). Yet he does not work *immediately in all hearts*, as the Spirit in the regenerate, for he is not omnipresent, but employs a host of demons as his agents therein.

One man can influence another only from without by external means, but Satan can also affect from within. He is able not only to take thoughts out of men’s minds (Luk 8:12), but to place thoughts in them, as we are told he “put into the heart of Judas” to betray Christ (Joh 13:2), and

¹⁶ **behests** – commands.

he works thus *indiscernibly* as a spirit—as he sowed his tares secretly in the night. As men yield to and comply with the devil’s insinuations, he gains increasing control over them, and God permits him to enter and indwell them, as Matthew 12:29 shows. So too when Satan would move anyone unto some particularly awful sin, he takes possession of him, as we read that after Judas had consented to the vile insinuation which the devil had put into his heart, he “entered into” him (Luk 22:3) in order to ensure the carrying out of his design by strengthening the traitor to do his will. For the word for “entered” there is the same as in Mark 5:13, where the unclean spirits entered into the herd of swine, which brought about their destruction. He is able to “fill the heart” (Act 5:3), giving an additional impulse to evil as a person filled with wine is abnormally fired. But let it be pointed out, there is *no* record in Scripture of either the devil or a demon ever taking possession of a *regenerate* person.

But though the devil works thus in men, and works effectually, yet all their sins are *their own*, for the Spirit is careful to add, “worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2). Man consents first, and then the devil strengthens his resolution. That appears again in Peter’s reproaching of Ananias for yielding to temptation. “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” (Act 5:3). He does no violence either to the liberty or the faculties of men, disturbing neither the spontaneity of the understanding nor the freedom of the will. As the work of God’s Spirit in His elect is by no means inconsistent with their full responsibility and their entire moral agency, so the work of the devil in the reprobate makes it none the less *their* work, and, therefore, the dupes of his craft are without excuse for their sins. Unlike the Holy Spirit, the devil has no creative power. He can impart no new nature, but can only avail himself of what is already there for him to work upon. He avails himself of the constitution of man’s nature, especially of his depravity as a fallen being. He gives an impetus and direction to his free but evil tendencies. Rightly did Goodwin point out that “as no man doth sin because God decrees him to sin, and therefore none can excuse himself with that: so no man can excuse himself with this, that Satan worketh in him.”

Here then, my reader, is the nature of human depravity as seen from the positive side. The fall has brought man into subjection to the power of death, into hopeless bondage to sin, has completely enveloped his mind in darkness, and has issued in his being the bondsman of Satan. From that dreadful state, he possesses not a particle of power to deliver himself or even to mitigate his wretchedness. In addition, it has filled him with enmity against God (Rom 8:7), but that aspect we reserve for our next division, when (D.V.) we shall consider the *vileness* of human depravity.

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 9

10. *The simple negative often implies, conversely, the positive.* This is a very simple canon of exegesis, yet one to which the attention of the young student needs to be called. A negative statement is, of course, one where something is denied or where the absence of its opposite is supposed. In common speech, the reverse of a negative usually holds good, as when we declare, “I

hope it will not rain today,” it is the same as saying, “I trust it will remain fine.” That this rule obtains in Scripture is clear from the numerous instances where the antithesis is stated, “Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” is explained in “Thou wilt show me the path of life” (Psa 16:10-11). “I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart,” and then the positive side at once follows: “I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation” (Psa 40:9-10). “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour...Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour,” etc. (Eph 4:25, 28). Many other examples might be given, but these are sufficient to establish the rule we are here treating of.

Now the Holy Spirit has by no means always formally drawn the antithesis, but rather has in many instances—that we might exercise our minds upon His Word—left *us* to do so. Thus, “A bruised reed shall he not break and smoking flax shall he not quench” (Mat 12:20) signifies that He will tenderly care for and nourish the same. “The scripture cannot be broken” (Joh 10:35) is the equivalent of, “It must be, it most certainly will be, fulfilled.” “Without me ye can do nothing” (Joh 15:5) implies that in union and communion with Him we “can do all things” (Phi 4:13). Incidentally, note how the former serves to define the latter: it is not that I shall then be able to perform miracles, but fitted to bring forth *fruit*! “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2Co 6:14) has the force of “Come out from among them and be ye separate,” as verse 17 shows. “Let us not be desirous of vain glory” (Gal 5:26) imports “Be lowly in mind and esteem others better than yourself” (Phi 2:3). “These things write I unto you, that ye sin not” (1Jo 2:1) equals “My design is to inculcate and promote the practice of holiness, as all that follows clearly shows.”

Negative commandments enjoin the opposite good. “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain” (Exo 20:7) implies that we are to hold His name in the utmost reverence and hallow it in our hearts. Negative threatenings are tacit affirmations, “The LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain”—rather will He condemn and punish him. Negative promises contain positive assurances. “A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa 51:17) means that such a heart is acceptable unto Him. “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psa 84:11) is tantamount to saying that everything which is truly good for such will certainly be bestowed upon them. Negative conclusions involve their opposites, “The father of the fool hath no joy” (Pro 17:21) purports that he will suffer much sorrow and anguish because of him—oh, that wayward children would make conscience of the grief which they occasion their parents. “To have respect of persons is not good” (Pro 28:21), but evil. Negative statements carry with them strong assertives, “Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment” (Job 34:12), rather will He act holily and govern righteously.

11. In sharp contrast with the above, it should be pointed out that in many cases *statements put in the interrogative form have the force of an emphatic negative*. This is another simple rule which all expositors should keep in mind. “Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” (Job 11:7)—indeed no. “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” (Mat 6:27)—none can do so by any such means. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mat 16:26)—nothing whatever, nay, he is immeasurably worse off. “Ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Mat 23:33)—they cannot. “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” (Joh 5:44)—such is morally impossible. “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom 10:14)—they

will not. On the other hand, the question of Matthew 6:30 is a strong affirmation, while that of Matthew 6:28 is a prohibition.

12. *The right use of reason* in connection with the things of God. This is another rule of exegesis which is of considerable importance, yet one that requires to be used with holy care and caution, and by one of mature judgment and thorough acquaintance with the Word. For that reason, it is not to be employed by the novice or inexperienced. The Christian, like the non-Christian, is endowed with rationality, and the sanctified exercise thereof certainly has its most fitting sphere in the realm of spiritual things. Before considering the application of reason to the expounding of the truth, let us point out its more general province. Two examples thereof may be selected from the teaching of our Lord. “Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” (Mat 6:30). Here we find Christ demonstrating, by a simple process of logic, the utter unreasonableness of distrustful anxiety in connection with the supply of temporal necessities. His argument is drawn from the consideration of divine providence. If God cares for the field, much more will He for His dear people. He *evidences* His care for the field by clothing it with grass, *therefore*, much more will He provide clothing for us.

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Mat 7:11). Here again the Lord shows us how this faculty is to be employed by a process of holy reasoning. He was speaking on the subject of prayer, and presented an argument for assuring His disciples of their being heard at the throne of grace. The argument is based on a comparison of inequalities and the reason drawn from the less to the greater. It may be framed thus—If earthly parents, though sinful, are inclined to listen to the appeals of their little ones, most certainly our heavenly Father will not close His ears to the cries of His children. Natural parents *do*, in fact, respond to and grant the requests of their little ones, *therefore*, much more will our Father deal graciously and generously with His. It is said of Abraham that he accounted or reckoned that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:19), i.e. he reasoned thus within himself—There is nothing impossible with God. Likewise the apostle, “For I reckon [convince myself by logical reasoning] that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). Other illustrations of Paul’s inspired reasoning are found in Romans 5:9-10 and 8:31-32. In all of these instances, we are taught the legitimacy and right use of reasoning.

The Lord Jesus often argued, both with His disciples and with His adversaries, as with rational men, according to the principles of sound reasoning. He did so from prophecy and the conformity of the event to the prediction (Luk 24:25-26; Joh 5:39, 46). He did so from the miracles which He performed (Joh 10:25, 37-38; 14:10-11) as being incontrovertible evidence that He was sent of God, and reproved His despisers for failing to identify Him as the Messiah. His “Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?” (Luk 12:56-57) was a direct and scathing rebuke, because on its lowest ground they had failed to use properly their reasoning powers, as Nicodemus *did*: “We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him” (Joh 3:2). So, too, the apostle when exhorting believers to flee from idolatry added, “I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say” (1Co 10:15).

In his masterly exposition of Hebrews 4:3, John Owen (1616-1683) pointed out that the apostle’s argument there rested upon the logical rule that “unto immediate contraries, contrary attributes may certainly be ascribed, so that he who affirms the one, at the same time denies the other;

and on the contrary, he that denies the one, affirms the other. He that saith it is day, doth as really say it is not night, as if he had used those formal words.” Only by that principle of logic is the force of Paul’s reasoning apparent. His whole design in Hebrews 4:1-11 was to demonstrate by various testimonies and examples that unbelief cuts from the rest of God, whereas faith gives an entrance thereinto. In verse 3 he affirms, “For we which have believed do enter into rest,” in substantiation of which he adds, “as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest.” There the apostle again quoted from Psalm 95 (see Heb 3:7, 11, 15, 18). From the sad experience of Israel’s failure to enter into God’s rest because of their unbelief and disobedience, Paul drew the obvious and inescapable conclusion that *believers* “do enter” therein.

We repeat, it is only by that principle of logic that the apostle’s argument in Hebrews 4:3 can be understood. If any of our readers be inclined to take issue with that statement, then we would respectfully urge them to turn unto and carefully ponder that verse, and see if they can perceive *how* the proof-text cited supplies any confirmation of the proposition laid down in its opening clause. From that exposition, Owen pointed out, “And here by the way we may take notice of the *use of reason*, on logical deductions, in the proposing, handling and confirming of sacred supernatural truths and articles of faith. For the validity of the apostle’s proof in this place depends upon the certainty of the logical maxim before mentioned, the consideration of which removes the whole difficulty. And to deny this liberty of deducing consequences, or one thing from another, according to the just rules of ratiocination,¹⁷ is quite to take away the use of the Scripture, and to banish reason from those things wherein it ought to be principally employed.”

In Hebrews 8:13 is found another and yet much simpler example of reasoning upon Scripture. “In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.” The apostle’s design in this epistle was to exhibit the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and exhort Hebrew believers to cleave steadfastly unto Christ, the true light and substance, and not to return unto the shadows and symbols of a system which had then served its purpose. Among other reasons, he had appealed to the promise of a “new covenant” made by Jehovah in Jeremiah 31:31-34. This he had cited in Hebrews 8:8-12, and then he *drew a logical inference* from the word “new”—God’s calling this better economy a new one clearly implied that the previous one had become obsolete—just as the Psalmist (102:25-26), when affirming that the present earth and heavens would perish, added as proof that they should “wax old like a garment.” Thus the declaration made in Hebrews 8:13 is (by way of logical deduction) adduced as a proof of the proposition stated in 8:7, “For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.”

In Ephesians 4:8, Paul quotes from Psalm 68:18, and then shows us how we are to make a right use of reason or to exercise the intellectual and moral faculties. “Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended?” The exaltation of Christ *presupposed* a previous humiliation. Again, “Do you think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?” (Jam 4:5). But as Thomas Manton (1620-1677) pointed out in his exposition of that verse, such a statement is nowhere found in the Bible in those particular terms, adding “The Scripture ‘saith’ that which may be *inferred* from the scope of it by just consequence. Immediate inferences are as valid as express words. Christ proved the resurrection not by direct testimony, but by argument (Mat 22:32). What the Scripture doth *import* therefore by good consequence should be received as if it were expressed.” Still another of the apostles had recourse to reasoning when he

¹⁷ **ratiocination** – methodical reasoning.

said, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater” (1Jo 5:9), and infinitely more dependable; hence, the excuselessness of those who reject it.

Those who are familiar with the writings of Augustine (354-430) and John Calvin will have observed how frequently they drew the inference that whatever be freely *bestowed* by God is something of which fallen man, considered in himself, *is destitute*. It is an obvious deduction of reason, and a sure canon of exegesis, which is of simple and universal application, that everything which is graciously supplied in and by Christ is wanting in our natural condition. Thus, every verse which speaks of eternal life as a divine gift, or which makes promise of it to those who believe, necessarily presupposes that we are without it, and therefore spiritually dead. So too the Christian’s receiving of the Holy Spirit (Act 2:38; Gal 3:2; 4:6) takes it for granted that in their unregenerate condition, they were without Him, having forfeited His indwelling presence by sin; the same being graciously restored to us by the mediation of Christ (Joh 7:39; Gal 3:14). As the result of the fall, the Holy Spirit was—in the exercise of divine justice—withdrawn from the human heart, and in consequence, it was left not only without a divine inhabitant, but a prey of all those influences—natural, worldly, satanic—which, in the absence of the Holy Spirit, inevitably draw the affections away from God, but at regeneration the Spirit is again given (Eze 34:27).

While the faculty of reason is vastly superior to our bodily senses (distinguishing man from and elevating him above the animals), it is greatly inferior unto faith (the gift of God unto His people), and that, in turn, unto the Holy Spirit—upon whom we are dependent for the directing of the one and the strengthening of the other. There is much confusion of mind and not a little wrong thinking on the part of the saints concerning the place and extent which reason may and should have in connection with the Scripture. Assuredly, God has not subordinated His word to our reason for us to accept only what commends itself to our judgment. Nevertheless, He has furnished His people with this faculty, and though insufficient of itself, it is a valuable aid in the understanding of truth. While reason is not to be made the measurer of our belief, yet it is to be used as the handmaid of faith, by comparing passage with passage, deducing inferences and drawing consequences according to the legitimate laws of logic. Never is the faculty of reason so worthily employed as in endeavouring to understand Holy Writ. If on the one hand, we are forbidden to lean unto our own understanding (Pro 3:5), on the other, we are exhorted to apply our hearts to understanding (Pro 2:2).

God has supplied us with an unerring standard by which we may *test* every exercise of our reason upon His Word, namely, the Analogy of Faith.¹⁸ And it is *there* that we have a sure safeguard against the wrong use of this faculty. Though it be true that very often more is implied by the words of Scripture than is actually expressed, yet reason is not a law unto itself to make any supplement it pleases. Any deduction we make, however logical it seems, any consequence we draw, no matter how plausible it be, *is erroneous* if it be *repugnant*¹⁹ to other passages. For example, when we read, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mat 5:48), we may conclude that sinless perfection is attainable in this life, but if we do so we err, as Philippians 3:12 and 1 John 1:8 show. Again, should I draw the inference from Christ’s words, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44), that therefore I am in no wise responsible *to come* unto Him, that my inability excuses me. Then I certainly err, as John 5:40 and other passages make clear. ❧

¹⁸ **Analogy of Faith** – method of biblical interpretation where clearer, related Scriptures are used to interpret a particular passage.

¹⁹ **repugnant** – incompatible.

MAY

FRIENDS

At the very beginning of human history, God Himself declared, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18). He was not made for solitude, but society, not to live in isolation, but in company with others. Yet since God spoke those words, sin has entered the world and human nature has become depraved. But Christ too has entered it, and His Spirit is conforming a chosen people unto His holy image. There are therefore two totally distinct classes of people on earth, the regenerate and the unregenerate, and it makes a tremendous difference, both to the formation of character and the ordering of our lives, from which of these classes each of us selects his most intimate associates. Scripture plainly warns us that “the friendship of the world is enmity with God: whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jam 4:4). To His own people He has said, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph 5:11), and again, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for...what communion hath light with darkness?...Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing” (2Co 6:14, 17). Thus, though he be a social creature, it is rank disobedience and disloyalty unto his Master for the Christian to be friendly with those who are His enemies.

For wise and good reasons, God has ordained, and orders His providences accordingly, that many of His people shall have considerable contact with the unregenerate, labouring with them side by side as they earn their daily bread, thereby affording them occasion to shine as lights in dark places and to witness for Him by their ways and workmanship (Ti 2:9-10). While it be a Christian’s duty to seek to promote their welfare and to heed the injunction, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men” (Gal 6:10), that is very far from signifying that he is to make any of them his bosom companions or seek their company after the day’s labour is finished. Great care needs to be taken in the selection of those we propose making free with, and particularly does the young believer need to be much in prayer for discernment that he may make a wise selection of those who are the most suitable companions for him, for nothing is more deadening to the spirit than consorting with the world. It is not the ones who are most congenial to our natural tastes but those who are walking the closest with God, and are most likely to help us spiritually, who should be sought unto.

The choice of our friends is a matter of great practical importance, and therefore much caution and care should be exercised therein. Not only is each person known by the company that he keeps, but, for better or worse, he is morally affected by the same. Voluntarily or involuntarily,

we become like those with whom we intimately associate. “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Pro 13:20). As a close observer of human nature expressed it, “Companionships influence us by way of communication and suggestion, by combination and co-operation for good or evil ends, by confirmation or assimilation to our companions themselves.” It must be so, for there are such interchanges of thought and feeling that they serve to mould one another’s thinking, regulate their emotions, and direct their aims—and, the closer be the bond of intimacy and the freer the interchange, the greater is the influence of the one upon the other. They will inevitably either elevate or degrade their conceptions, determine the objects of attachment, affect the moral judgment, tendering or dulling the conscience. “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Pro 27:17)—as to associate with those who are well informed serves to stimulate the mind and quicken thought.

“Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul” (Pro 22:24-25). Such is poor human nature that we are much more easily contaminated by evil company than we are refined by the good. Most essential is it, then, that we fraternize with none but those who will set before us an example of true piety, encourage us in the work of mortification and the denying of self, inspire to heavenly mindedness, provoke unto good works and zeal for the glory of God. The real friend is not the one who humours my fancies and flatters my vanity, but who has my highest interests at heart, and acts accordingly. Our lot is cast in a day when real friends are like genuine jewels—precious, but rare. Each of the Lord’s people should be able truthfully to say, “I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked” (Psa 26:4-5). That is the negative side; positively, his testimony should be, “I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts” (Psa 119:63).

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Pro 27:6). One of the offices of real friendship is to give reproofs where such are seen to be needful, for as the preceding verse tells us, “Open rebuke is better than secret love.” This is a task which calls for much grace and wisdom. All reproofs do not proceed from love, nor are they given in a friendly spirit and manner. Only too often do they issue from self-righteousness and a delight in finding fault, and are delivered in a fleshly way. Yet even then we should prayerfully ponder what has been said to us. Genuine godliness desires to have its faults corrected, and often that means they require to be pointed out. “Let the righteous smite me: it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head” (Psa 141:5). It may wound my pride and hurt my feelings, but it can do me no harm; yea, with God’s blessing, it will do me much good if I receive it with meekness. The spirit and manner in which a reproof be *given* constitute a real test of character, and still more so how it be *received*. The fool will resent it, and the proud be offended, but the truly humble are more willing to be admonished than praised.

The fear of displeasing and severing the ties of friendship is not to suffer us to maintain a guilty silence. I must discharge my duty at all costs, and deliver my own soul. “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise [no matter what be the consequences] rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him” (Lev 19:17). Here the deceitfulness of the human heart is divinely exposed. It is not love which causes silence in order to avoid hurting his feelings, but hatred if you rebuke not his sin. Moreover, if he truly hates sin, he will welcome its being pointed out to him; but if he takes it ill and henceforth gives you the cold shoulder, then his “friendship” is not worth having. He may indeed feel keenly your rebuke, and at first the flesh rise up in opposition thereat; but if he be truly spiritual, he will soon recover himself and realize that you acted the part of a true friend towards him, esteeming you the more highly on account of

the same. “Reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge” (Pro 19:25). “Yea, rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee” (Pro 9:8); but, “he that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame”—will be insulted for his pains (Pro 18:24).

“A man that hath friends must show himself friendly” (Pro 18:24). Friendship is reciprocal. Not only must there be a mutual spirit of give and take, but if it is to be of real service, I must “show myself friendly” when rebuked, by evidencing myself to be amenable²⁰ and manifesting gratitude for such faithful dealings with me. *That* is part of the spiritual meaning of Proverbs 18:24. “Reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (Pro 6:23), for they are one of the means God uses in convicting us of sins of which we are unconscious. “Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel” (Pro 27:9). That is another office of friendship (note its coming right after verse 6!), to advise when the other is in perplexity and trouble. Such tenderness and sweetness will heal the wounds which the reproofs have made! “Sympathy is the balm of friendship” (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677).

All friendship pales into utter insignificance when compared with that of Christ’s. “Greater love hath no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friend” (Joh 15:13). But though no man ever yet manifested greater love than that, *His* far exceeded it, for He laid down His life for those who were His *enemies* (Rom 5:10). “And what amazing, what everlasting, what unexampl’d proofs did He give of His friendship! He engaged from everlasting as our Surety. He took our nature, married our persons, paid all our debts, bore the whole weight of our sins and His Father’s wrath; and having died for us, He took up both the person and causes of all His people. He is now carrying on the whole purpose of redemption, and never intermits one moment an unceasing attention to our present and eternal interests. Neither will He, until He hath brought home all His redeemed to glory, that where He is there they may be also” (Robert Hawker, 1753-1827).

The friendship of Christ imports²¹ [*first*] a hearty welcome unto all who respond to His gracious invitation to come unto Him. *Second*, that such will be the objects of His loving ministrations. *Third*, an inestimable privilege on their part to be admitted into such a relationship. *Fourth*, His gracious carriage to treat with them so familiarly—manifesting Himself unto and opening His heart to them (Joh 15:15). *Fifth*, a pressing duty, that they carry themselves as His friends, so valuing communion with Him as to eschew²² whatever would mar it, seeking to please and glorify Him in all things (Joh 15:14).

²⁰ **amenable** – open and responsive.

²¹ **imports** – means; signifies.

²² **eschew** – avoid.

EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

17. Christ Our Exemplar (2:6)

*“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself
also so to walk, even as he walked.”*

That is supplementary to verses 3-5, completing what is set forth therein. The “he that saith” intimates that it is the testing of profession which is still in view—here a yet severer and more searching trial is made. First, a saving knowledge of God must be demonstrated by a keeping of His commandments. Then the scope of our subjection unto God is enlarged upon, by showing it includes the keeping of His “Word”—a being regulated by the entire written revelation He has given us, regarding every jot and tittle in it as of divine authority. Now the nature of that obedience is defined. A mere outward compliance with the divine precepts, no matter how punctilious²³ and comprehensive it be, is not sufficient. We are required to walk even as Christ walked—to be regulated by the same principles, actuated by the same motives, directed unto the same ends as His were. Thus this verse describes the kind of obedience which is necessary in order to our having fellowship with the Father and with His Son. Walking in the light is not enough: it must be such a walking as marked that of the Lord Jesus.

It has been remarked that to have fellowship with God, to know Him, to love Him, to be in Him, and to abide in Him are expressions which, in John's epistle, all mean substantially the same thing. No doubt this is so, nevertheless there are shades of distinction between them, and it is to our loss if we fail to perceive the same. In our judgment there is a designed gradation and intensification in the several expressions used in the passage we are now studying, just as there is in the different tests of profession there named. First, John shows how we may know that we know Him, then how we may be assured that we are in Him, and now of our abiding in Him. The first signifies a saving acquaintance with God in Christ; the second, that we are one with or united to Him; the third, that we are rooted and grounded in Him. It should be pointed out that the Old Testament saints knew God as truly and intimately as did the New Testament saints (for the latter were certainly not more favoured in this respect than were Enoch, Abram, Moses, David, etc.), and that they blessedly realized they were covered by the wings of El Shaddai (Psa 36:7) and underneath them were the everlasting arms (Deu 33:27).

To come to Christ, to be in Christ, to abide in Christ, and to walk according to Christ express four of the principal aspects and distinguishing features of the Christian life. In 1:7, the walking is with God in holy communion; here it is walking before God, and outwardly before men. In 2:4, profession is made of knowing God in Christ, which is simply an avowal of His name and salvation; but in 2:6 the claim is made of abiding in Him, which signifies a continuation of the same,

²³ **punctilious** – precise; meticulous.

for perseverance is necessary to confirm it, as our Lord declared, “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Mat 24:13). As a number of things are included by the term “coming” to Christ, and still more by being “in Him,” so several distinct concepts are imported by abiding in Him. It signifies to rest on Christ alone for the whole of our salvation, to continue in the belief, confession, and acknowledgment of the same, to remain steadfast in His doctrine or teaching, to persevere in obedience to Him. Hebrews 10:23 is an exhortation unto the same: “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” On the other hand, “no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luk 9:62).

Abiding in Christ connotes a lasting experience, in contrast with those evanescent²⁴ effects which a hearing of the gospel produces in so many, which are likened to the early dew which soon evaporates (Hos 6:4). Further light is cast upon the term by our Lord in John 15:4-5, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (and note the two verses that follow). Thus to “abide” in Christ means to live wholly on Him, to be completely dependent upon Him, to cleave thoroughly unto Him, to seek refuge constantly in Him, as in a strong tower, and to be established in Him. Now the onus²⁵ resting on anyone who professes to abide in Christ is a very real and pressing one, a present and lasting one, namely to walk himself even as He walked, and thereby own Him as Lord and Master, making it manifest that he is a partaker of His holiness (Heb 12:10), indwelt by the same Spirit. In no other way can he substantiate his profession, and so honour and glorify Him. Such a walk is not optional but obligatory. There is a real necessity of so doing if we are to furnish clear proof that we belong to and are followers of the Lord Jesus.

In addition to our remarks on the figurative force of “walk” in 1:6-7, we would here point out that it has respect principally to the practical side of things—believing in Christ and a hearty enjoyment of Him are to be translated into deeds. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Col 2:6). Make the reality thereof apparent unto beholders by a gospel practice souring the sweetest sin, making Christ’s yoke easy. Thereby is the trial of faith to be made: not by your degree of confidence, but by the extent of your conquest of sin, subduing your lusts, overcoming of the world. Thereby the beauty of faith is manifested—by letting its light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Faith cannot be seen by our fellows, but its fruits can in a godly walk. Hereby the comfort of faith accrues to ourselves. It is by gospel conformity that a good conscience is maintained and the smile of the Lord enjoyed. “Great peace have they which love thy law” (Psa 119:165), and the effect of righteousness is “quietness and assurance for ever” (Isa 32:17). Thus a godly walk is an intensely practical thing.

The term “walk” also imports progress, for to stand still is not to walk. Walking denotes growth from faith to faith (Rom 1:17), from strength to strength (Psa 84:7), from glory to glory (2Co 3:18). There is no such thing as remaining stationary in the Christian life. If we do not go forward by the strength of grace we shall go backward by the power of corruption. There are indeed those who maintain the routine of outward religious duties, yet who make no advance—as a spinning wheel goes round but is in the same place still. Spiritual walking is in contrast both with lazy listlessness and useless running around in circles. It signifies an increase in the experiential

²⁴ **evanescent** – quickly fading or disappearing.

²⁵ **onus** – burden; responsibility.

knowledge of Christ, a closer conformity to His death, and a better acquaintance with the power of His resurrection, a deeper insight into the mysteries of the gospel. It is true a believer may fall, relapse, backslide, so that his feet are so benumbed he ceases to “walk”; but if he really be a child of God he will profit from his falls; for when he gets to his feet again his falls make him more humble, more dependent, more watchful, more circumspect, and thereby he will run faster in the ways of God.

The term “walk” also connotes permanency, both in the ways and the doctrine of Christ, as is clear from “rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith” (Col 2:7). A single step is not a walk: the figure expresses steady motion. True, different figures are used to set forth other aspects of the Christian life, as in the verse just quoted. The believer is to be active yet rooted, to walk and yet be stable. On the one hand, “be ye steadfast, unmoveable”; on the other side, “always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1Co 15:58). “Like the two feet of a pair of compasses: the one foot of the compass stands steady in the centre, and the other draws the line and goes round. So it is with the believer: his faith is like the foot of the compass that stands fast in the centre, Christ and His doctrine; but his gospel practice is the part that is like the other foot of the compass—it never stands, but ever moves in the way of the Lord” (Ralph Erskine, 1685-1754). Thus, “walking” is also opposed to leaping, for in the former one foot is stationary while the other moves, whereas in the latter both are employed together—to leap out of one doctrine into another is neither walking nor being steadfast in the faith (Eph 4:14).

“Ought himself also to walk, even as he walked.” This is one of several verses in this epistle which takes it for granted that its readers were already acquainted with John’s Gospel (see the fifth paragraph of the introduction of this book), for to walk as Christ walked assumes that they knew how He walked. Now everything recorded in Scripture of our blessed Lord should engage the devoutest attention of His people, yet it is to be feared that many of them give an entirely disproportionate consideration to His walk. While we should indeed be deeply impressed by what one termed “the crises of the Christ”—such as His incarnation, temptation, transfiguration, death, resurrection, and ascension—yet between His virgin birth and His victorious resurrection lay His virtuous life, and that is described at much fuller length than any of those crises! It was by His holy walk that the divine Law was magnified and made honourable in the very place where it had been so despised and dishonoured. It was by His immaculate life that Christ evinced Himself to be a fit sacrifice for sin, the Lamb “without blemish and without spot” (1Pe 1:19).

In the preceding verses the apostle had spoken of keeping God’s commandments and Word; here he makes reference to the only One who ever perfectly did so on this earth. Preeminently was the life of Christ a walk of obedience. His obedience was the absolute conformity of His entire spirit and soul unto the will of His Father, His ready and cheerful performance of every duty which God had appointed Him. This obedience He flawlessly carried out amid the sorest trials, with infinite respect unto Him whose Servant (Isa 42:1) He had voluntarily become. The laws which He kept were, first, those to which He was subject considered simply as man, namely the Ten Commandments; second, those to which He was subject considered as Son of David (Mat 1:1), namely the ceremonial laws of Israel (see Luk 2:21-24, Mat 8:4, and His keeping of the feasts for illustrations of His compliance therewith); third, those which devolved²⁶ upon Him as Mediator, namely carrying out the stipulations of the everlasting covenant—such as becoming incarnate, preaching the gospel, calling His disciples, putting away the sins of His people and bringing in an everlasting righteousness. The closer the four Gospels be read in the light of this

²⁶ **devolved** – were transferred, delegated.

fact, the more clearly will it be seen that obedience to His Father was Christ's supreme mission when He came down to this earth.

Psalm 40:7-10 reveals that it was to comply with what had been written of Him in the volume of God's Book that He became incarnate and delighted to perform God's pleasure. "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (Joh 6:38). Every act of Christ during the thirty-three years that He tabernacled among men was distinctly and designedly an act of submission to God. He was baptized in order to fulfill all righteousness (Mat 3:15). Satan's design in the temptation was to turn aside the Saviour from the path of complete surrender to God's will. But in vain: each assault of the enemy was repulsed by an "It is written" (Mat 4:1-11)—"I refuse to disobey My Father." The perfect Servant chose His ministerial headquarters in accordance with God's revealed will. It was neither force of circumstances nor personal inclination which moved Christ to dwell in Capernaum, but that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah (Mat 4:13-16). Though Christ was tender, sympathetic, and full of compassion, yet the motive prompting Him to heal the sick was the doing of God's will. His miracles of mercy were wrought that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah (Mat 8:16-17). The laying down of His life was in obedience to the Father (Joh 10:18).

As the earthly life of the Lord Jesus was a walk of obedience, so also was it one of faith. In becoming incarnate God's Son took upon Him a dependent nature, and therefore did He live a life of trust in His heavenly Father. The varied actings of His faith, in all its diversified phases, may be seen portrayed, not only in the gospels, but also in the Messianic Psalms and the announcements of Him by the prophets. As the kinsman Redeemer of His people Christ became truly "of one" with the many sons He was to bring to glory, and in all things was "made like unto his brethren" (Heb 2:11, 17). Yet as the Firstborn, here too He has the pre-eminence and therefore is He seen not among those of Hebrews 11, but distinguished from them and placed apart in 12:2, as the grand Model for all racers, the supreme Example of their faith. It is in the earthly life of Jesus, and nowhere else, that we have the ideal Pattern. Each of those mentioned in Hebrews 11 displayed some single aspect of the life of faith; but in the Saviour they were all combined in their consummate excellence. In 12:2, the word for "Author" does not mean so much one who originates as one who "takes the lead," while the term "Finisher" is rendered "Captain" in 2:10, and "Prince" in Acts 3:15. Thus it is as the One going in advance that our Lord is to be "looked to," as the perfect Pattern of faith for us to follow.

The earthly life of Jesus was one of entire dependence upon the Father. Hear Him saying, "Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly" (Psa 22:9-10). How that brings out His uniqueness! In faith, as in everything else, He has "the pre-eminence!" It was not only in manhood, or even in childhood, but from very earliest infancy that He drew His support from the Triune God. The whole of His prayer life exemplified the same fact, expressing as it did His felt need of divine strength and succor. "I live by the Father" (Joh 6:57) was His express avowal. A life of faith is one lived in communion with God, and never did another enjoy such a deep and constant realization of the divine presence as did the Man Christ Jesus. "I have set the LORD always before me" (Psa 16:8) was His confession. "He that sent me is with me" (Joh 8:29) was ever a present reality to His consciousness. From Bethlehem to Calvary He had, by faith, unbroken and unclouded fellowship with the Father.

So too the life and walk of Jesus was one of hope, which is a sure expectation of desired good—sure because promised by Him who cannot lie (Ti 1:2). Hope is that spiritual grace which enables its possessor to look away from the perishing things of time and sense, above the shows

and shams of this world, unto the enduring realities of eternity, and which gives him a present enjoyment (by confident anticipation) of the same. That which enthralls and enchains the ungodly had no power over the perfect man. “I have overcome the world” (Joh 16:33), He declared, and when the devil offered Him all its kingdoms He bade him, “Get thee hence” (Mat 4:10). So vivid was His realization of the unseen that in the midst of earth’s engagements He spoke of Himself as “the Son of man which is in heaven” (Joh 3:13). It was “for the joy set before him” that He endured the cross (Heb 12:2); that which sustained Him was having respect unto the recompense of the reward. That reward was the bliss of knowing He had finished the work which the Father had given Him to do, of being reinstated in the glory which He had with Him before the world was (Joh 17:5), and having effected the salvation of His Church; and so as He faced the immediate prospect of death He averred, “My flesh also shall rest in hope” (Psa 16:9).

The life and walk of Jesus was one of unbounded love. This supplies another link with the context, for in 2:5 we are told, “Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected”—has attained its proper end. Real obedience is nothing more and nothing less than the exercise of love and the directing of it unto what God has commanded. Any external compliance with His precepts which proceeds not from holy affections is worthless. Now as none other kept the Word of God as Christ did, so none other manifested unto Him such pure and transcendent love. When He entered this world He did so declaring, “Lo, I come...I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart” (Psa 40:7-8)—enshrined in My affections. Because He delighted in God’s will, His obedience was not only voluntary, but cheerful and universal, extending to every requirement of the divine Law without any omission or violation. “But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do” (Joh 14:31). “I do always those things that please him” (Joh 8:29).

“I have manifested thy name” (Joh 17:6)—all that God is in a manifestative and communicative way. The Son came down from heaven with this express purpose, that in His incarnation, person, walk, ministry, and atoning sacrifice He should declare the Father (Joh 1:18). In and through and by the incarnate Son the invisible God has opened to us the Holy of Holies and made known what has been kept secret from the foundation of the world. That which was beyond the reach of the human mind was beheld in the reality of a human life when the Word became flesh (Joh 1:14). Christ has presented to our view all the divine attributes. He unfolded God’s wisdom, showed forth His power, revealed His grace, exhibited His faithfulness as the fulfiller of His prophecies and the performer of His promises. Now we cannot do so to the same extent, but we are required to be Godlike in our measure. He is light and we are to “walk as children of light” (Eph 5:8). God is holy, and so must we be in our lives (1Pe 1:15). He is love, and we are to be “imitators of God, and walk in love as Christ also did” (Eph 5:1-2).

Not only did the Lord Jesus honour God in His daily walk by perfectly performing the requirements of the first table of the Law, but equally so in regard to the second table, the demands of which are all comprehended in “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mat 22:39). Blessedly is that expressed in those words, “who went about doing good” (Act 10:38), which like the “He hath done all things well” (Mar 7:37) is one of the terse but pregnant summaries of His peerless life. It presents to us a general but vivid view of His varied and active ministry, the whole of which consisted in promoting the interests of His fellows. Benevolence characterized His entire course among men. His prayers, His teaching, His miracles, His every movement, were directed unto the well-being of others, ever and always He “went about doing good” (Act 10:38)—unto friends and enemies, intimates and strangers alike, unto their bodies as well as their souls. Of

none other could this be said absolutely; of others in their measure, and only as possessed of His Spirit and as they learned of Him.

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” The “even as” is not a note of equality, but of likeness. To make Christ’s life the rule of ours is a pressing Christian duty. But like that word “duty,” “ought” has an unpleasant sound to supercilious²⁷ ears. Nevertheless, the fact remains that many passages set Christ before us as the Model at which it is incumbent that His people should ever aim. How else shall they distinguish themselves from carnal professors and the unregenerate who walk “according to the course of this world” (Eph 2:2)? Repeatedly did Christ speak of His disciples following Him (Mat 16:24, Joh 10:27, etc.). Paul bids us, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1Co 11:1). “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1Pe 2:21). He displayed in His walk that which He requires from His redeemed, that they “may grow up into him in all things” (Eph 4:15). Conformity unto Him is ever to be our endeavour: not only in our conduct, but also in the spirit actuating it. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phi 2:5).

To walk as Christ walked is a moral obligation resting upon the Christian, for he is not his own, but bought with a price (1Co 6:19-20). The sacrifice of Christ demands nothing less; the honour of His name requires it; His love should constrain us thereto. A life of self-pleasing is utterly inconsistent with our union with Him. The Head was holy and humble; shall His members be carnal and proud? In the routine of our daily lives, in each relation we are called to fill—social, commercial, domestic—we should make it a point of honour, and esteem it a holy privilege, to ask, “How would Christ act in such circumstances?” and seek by all that is within us to do likewise. We ought to in order that God may find in us every hour that which is a sweet savour of His Son. Only so shall we “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col 1:10). Only so shall we “shine as lights in the world” (Phi 2:15). Only so shall we “show forth his virtues” (1Pe 2:9, margin). Only so shall we be His witnesses and representatives in this scene. Only so shall we truly glorify Him.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

69. God and War

The title of this article may possibly shock some of our readers, thinking that “Satan and War” would be a more appropriate and accurate one. There are an increasing number today among churchgoers who repudiate the idea that God has anything to do, designedly and directly, with such calamities as tidal waves, earthquakes, or wars. Since there *are* such things, these people attribute them to, and blame them upon, the devil. Their beliefs differ little from the religious conceptions of the ancient Persians and modern Parsees, for Zoroastrianism teaches that there are two Gods presiding over this sphere, a good and an evil one. That all blessings are to be ascribed unto

²⁷ **supercilious** – haughty; arrogant.

the former and all our ills unto the latter. And just as that ancient system of philosophy and religion contains no definite statement as to which of the opposing deities will ultimately triumph, so these modern dualists have so little confidence in the true and living God, and are so determined to dissociate Him from the affairs of this scene, that they talk (and even write) about the likelihood of this earth being blown to smithereens by some devilish kind of bomb, instead of this world being (when it has served His purpose) destroyed *by its Creator* with fire (Psa 50:3), as *He* did the antediluvian²⁸ world by water (2Pe 3:5-7).

It needs to be constantly pressed upon this skeptical generation that the One who made this world is now *governing* it; and that, not merely in a vague and general way, but most definitely and specifically. The Lord God presides over all its affairs, regulates all its events, directs all its inhabitants. If He did not, if there be some creatures beyond His control, some happenings outside His jurisdiction, then there would be no guarantee that everything which transpires on earth (as well as in heaven) shall redound to His glory (Num 14:21), and that all things are working together for good to them that love Him (Rom 8:28). Instead, all confidence in the future would be at an end, all peace of heart and tranquility of mind an empty dream. But Scripture is far too plain on this matter to be misunderstood. “His kingdom ruleth over all” (Psa 103:19), “who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11), “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36). So far from Satan being able to thwart Him, he could not lay a finger upon Job or any of his possessions until the Lord gave him permission to do so (Job 1:12); and the demons could not enter the herd of swine without Christ’s consent (Mar 5:12-13). Nor can the devil gain the slightest advantage over a saint without his own allowance, and, if he resists him steadfastly in the faith, he is obliged to flee from him (Jam 4:7).

Since “all things are of God” (1Co 8:6), then wars must not be excluded. So truly is this the case that His Word declares, “The Lord is a man of war” (Exo 15:3). Thus deity hesitates not to assume unto Himself a militant title. And again He declares, “The LORD mighty in battle” (Psa 24:8), which is illustrated and demonstrated again and again in the history of Israel, when He showed Himself strong in their behalf and slew their foes. “The LORD of hosts mustereth the host of the battle. They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, even the LORD, and the weapons of His indignation, to destroy the whole land” (Isa 13:4-5). It may be objected that these are Old Testament references, and that the spirit of the New Testament denounces all war as now being unlawful. But the New Testament is far from bearing that out. Its teaching thereon is in full accord with the Old. Thus, when the soldiers came to Christ’s forerunner for instruction, asking, “What shall we do?” he did not say, “Fight no more, abandon your calling,” but gave them directions how to conduct themselves (Luk 3:14). When the centurion came to the Saviour and drew an argument from his military calling, our Lord did not condemn his profession or rebuke him for holding such an office. Instead, He highly commended his faith (Luk 7:8-9).

When foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, Christ declared that God would send forth *His* armies (Mat 22:7), so that the Roman legions were but instruments in His hands, directed by Him to effect His judgment. When examined by Pilate, our Lord said, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (Joh 18:36). Those words clearly imply that, though carnal means were then improper for advancing His spiritual kingdom, yet had not His state of humiliation precluded His assumption of the royal scepter, His followers might lawfully have fought to defend His title. Moreover, His qualifying “now” suggests that such a

²⁸ **antediluvian** – of or belonging to the time before the Flood.

time *would* come, as Revelation 19:11 plainly confirms. When the ten kings determine to make the mother of harlots desolate and burn her with fire, we are told, “For God hath put it in their hearts to fulfil his will” (Rev 17:16-17). How entirely different is the God of Holy Writ from the fictitious one of the sentimental dreamers of this effeminate age!

In our previous comments upon Israel’s fighting in Canaan, our principal emphasis has been upon the application thereof unto the *spiritual* warfare in which the Christian is called upon to engage, but our articles would lack completeness if we failed to devote one unto the *literal* side of things. Much of human history consists of a chronicling of wars, and it is a matter of no little concern and importance that we should turn the light of Scripture thereon and ascertain *God’s relation* thereto. Is He but a far-distant Spectator thereof, having no immediate connection with the horrible carnage of the battlefield, or is His agency directly involved in the same? To speculate upon such a matter is not only useless but impious. War is ever a frightful calamity, the more so if it be a civil one, when one part of the populace is madly fighting against another, or when *many* nations become involved or embroiled. At such a time, the suffering and anguish experienced rudely shake the belief of many in an overruling providence; and even God’s own people find it difficult to stay their minds on the Ruler of the universe and trust in His goodness and wisdom, unless they be firmly rooted in the truth.

Those who are familiar with history know how many sad proofs it contains that human beings are often more cruel than are the beasts of the jungle. Lions and tigers kill their prey in order to appease their hunger, but men destroy their fellows only to gratify their insatiable lusts of ambition and avarice. During the course of the centuries, wild animals have killed thousands of mankind, but within the last few years, literally millions have been destroyed by the restless wickedness of those who cared not what immeasurable suffering would result from the meeting of their greedy desires. We cannot sufficiently deplore the depravity of human nature which has made men beasts of prey, or rather devils to one another, seeking whom they may devour. The events of this “enlightened” century only too plainly confirm the teaching of Scripture on the thorough corruption of fallen human nature, that, in their unregenerate condition, men are “hateful, and hating one another” (Ti 3:3). But let us not condemn the ferocity and wickedness of our fellows in any self-righteous spirit, but in the humbling realization that we too are clay of the same lump, and that, if a spirit of benevolence now governs us, it is naught but sovereign grace which makes us to differ.

But while we contemplate with grief, shame, and horror the vile works of men of the same vicious natures as our own, we must by no means overlook and ignore the place which divine providence has in all those occurrences in which they are the actors. God is supreme, and all inferior agents are under His government, held by Him in such effectual control that they can do nothing without Him. In the most tremendous evils which they inflict, they are the ministers of His vengeance. Even when whole nations be destroyed, by whatsoever means, the hand of God is in that work of judgment. We briefly alluded unto this in our last, but deemed it necessary to supplement what was there pointed out. “I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour: city against city, and kingdom against kingdom. And the spirit [courage] of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof...and the Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall reign over them, saith the LORD, the LORD of hosts” (Isa 19:2-4)—words which ought to cause not a few people to revise their ideas on this subject. When cities are reduced to rubble, when civil war afflicts a country, when kingdoms are destroyed, the agency of God is to be acknowledged therein.

The worst tyrants, when inflicting the greatest outrages, are the instruments of God, accomplishing His will. In Jeremiah 25:9, we find Jehovah referring to Nebuchadnezzar as “My servant”—just as He spoke of “My servant Moses” (Num 12:7) and “David My servant” (Psa 89:3). The king of Babylon was just as truly an instrument in effecting the divine purpose as they were—they in delivering and building up, he in punishing and destroying. “Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD...and they shall eat up thy harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds...they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword” (Jer 5:15, 17). God brings judgment upon a nation as surely as He gives blessing—uproots as truly as He plants. “Lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs: they are terrible and dreadful” (Hab 1:6-7). How clearly do those words show that heathen nations are under God’s control and *used* by Him when it serves His purpose.

The Babylonians were employed by the Ruler of this world for the chastisement of His people and commissioned by Him to carry the Jews into captivity. Yet in so doing they incurred great guilt and were made to reap as they had sown. Those things may seem utterly inconsistent unto carnal reason, yet they are not so in reality, for Nebuchadnezzar acted with no thought of fulfilling the divine decrees, but rather to satisfy his own rapacity,²⁹ and therefore was his kingdom providentially destroyed by Him with an unexampled destruction. Others were sent by God to execute His vengeance on Babylon, and, though they in turn were incited by their own passions, nevertheless He it was who called forth their hosts and gave them the victory. “Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it. Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces, and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children” (Isa 13:17-18). How awful does Providence appear here! Even when savage idolators violate every dictate of humanity, they are the executors of the judgments of the Almighty. While their conduct is most horribly guilty, in the divine sovereignty it fulfills God’s will.

“The LORD of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth...He shook the kingdoms: the LORD hath given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strong holds thereof” (Isa 23:9-11). The demolition of Tyre by the Chaldeans was not only the fulfilment of prophecy, but was accomplished by divine agency. God did it, yet man did it. In unconsciously doing the work of the Lord, men act quite freely, and therefore are justly accountable for doing what it was eternally predestined they should do. Philosophy cannot plumb such a depth by its own line, but Scripture clears up the mystery.

Of Cyrus, God declared, “Thou art my battle axe and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms” (Jer 51:20). What is there said of that mighty conqueror is equally true of all conquerors that ever lived, or shall live, on this earth. Conquerors regard themselves almost as gods, but the axes and saws with which men cut and cleave wood might with far better reason exalt themselves to the rank of human creatures. None of them can do anything but what God’s counsel determined before to be done by their hands, and, therefore, it is our bounden duty to give God the glory for all the judgments which are done by them, and to adore His awful providence in all the miseries they inflict upon the guilty kingdoms.

²⁹ rapacity – greed.

It is in the light of all that has been said above that the conquest of Canaan by Israel is to be viewed. Joshua 10:30, 42 makes it quite clear that the sword of Joshua was the sword of the Lord—compare “The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon” (Jdg 7:20). Equally so, it is in the light of various passages found in the Pentateuch that we must consider the severity of God’s dealings with those whom His servant was commissioned to slay. The original inhabitants of Canaan were flagitious³⁰ offenders, not only in being gross idolators, but in trampling underfoot the laws of morality and of humanity. If the reader turns to Leviticus 18:3, 27-28, and then ponders what is recorded between verses 3 and 27, he will perceive the horrible depravity which the Amorites exhibited, for in those verses a black catalogue is supplied of the vile abominations of which they were guilty. Those heathen tribes were like a cankerous sore in the body politic, contaminating the surrounding nations, and therefore it was an act of mercy unto the latter, as well as a just punishment upon the former, that God ordered Joshua to destroy them root and branch. The Lord had borne long with them, but now that the iniquity of the Amorites had come to the full (Gen 15:16), naught but summary judgment suited their case.

Not only is no apology required for the Lord in connection with His solemn works of judgment, but He is to be owned and magnified therein. “O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee” (Isa 25:1-2)—as Israel did when Pharaoh and his hosts were overthrown by the waters of the Red Sea, and as the inhabitants of heaven shall exclaim, “Alleluia: Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments, for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand” (Rev 19:1-2). God is glorious in His works of providence as well as in His works of creation. As He made all things “good” at the creation of the world, so He doeth all things “well” in His government of it. He is to be revered and adored even of those works which He performs by the hand of His creatures. He is glorious in what He does by and through wicked men as well as by His saints—glorious in His acts of vengeance as well as in His acts of grace.

But if the balance of truth is to be preserved on this subject, due place must be given and full regard had to another class of passages, which show that when God deals in judgment—whether it be with individuals or nations—He does so because man’s sinfulness calls for it, and not because He delights therein. This is clear from Ezekiel 14, where, after announcing the “four sore judgments” which He would send upon Jerusalem, the Lord God declared, “And ye shall know that I have not done this without cause” (verses 21-23), for as Jeremiah 22:8-9 informs us, “And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this great city? Then they shall answer, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.” How plain is the testimony of Lamentations 3:33, “For he doth not afflict willingly [from His heart] nor grieve the children of men.” Equally so is Ezekiel 33:11, “As I live, saith the LORD God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked: but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” Therefore are we told that judgment is “His strange work...his strange act” (Isa 28:21), for it is not as agreeable to Him as His works of mercy.

God approves of righteousness wherever it be found, and rewards the same with temporal blessings, but He ever disapproves of sin, and sooner or later visits His anger upon it (Pro 14:34).

³⁰ **flagitious** – infamous; villainous.

Yet even when the dark clouds of His judgment are hanging over a kingdom or an evil system, calamity may be averted by national humiliation before God and reformation of conduct (Exo 9:27-29; Luk 19:41-44; Rev 2:21-22). How much to the point are those words of the Lord in Jeremiah 18:8, “If that nation, against whom I have pronounced [judgment], turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them”—as was most definitely exemplified in the case of Nineveh. That verse has, of course, no reference to the alteration of His eternal decree, but instead enumerates one of the principles by which God *governs* this world, namely, that He deals with nations as with individuals—according to their conduct, making them to reap as they have sown, for His judgment is ever tempered by His mercy (Jdg 3:8-10).

Now each of the two sides of our subject pointed out above was illustrated in Joshua 11. On the one hand, we are told, “For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses” (verse 20)—because they had filled up the measure of their iniquities and were ripe for judgment (compare Mat 23:32; 1Th 2:16; Rev 14:7, 18). On the other hand, we read that, “But as for the cities that stood still in their strength, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only” (verse 13), by which is meant those who remained passive and fought not against Israel. So that, here too, in wrath God remembered mercy. That is one of several passages which show that Israel did not massacre *unresisting* Canaanites (cf. Deu 20:10-11)—Joshua 24:11 shows that those in Jericho assumed a hostile attitude, and therefore we may conclude that those in Ai did so too.

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

7. Its Enormity, Part 1

The theology of the last century has failed lamentably at two essential points, namely, its teaching concerning God, and its teaching concerning fallen man. As an Australian writer recently expressed it, “On the one hand, they have not ascended high enough...on the other hand, they do not descend low enough.” God is infinitely greater and His dominion far more absolute and extensive, and man has sunk much lower and is far more depraved than they will allow. Consequently, a man’s conduct unto his Maker is vastly more evil than is commonly supposed. Its horrible hideousness cannot really be seen except in the light supplied by Holy Writ. Sin is infinitely more vile in its nature than any of us realize. Men may acknowledge that they sin, but it *appears* *sin* to very, very few. Sin was the original evil. Before it entered the universe, there was no evil. “God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). Sin is the greatest of all evils. There is nothing in it but evil, nor can it produce anything but evil—now, in the future, or forever. As soon as sin was conceived, all other evils followed in its train.

We may take a survey of everything in and on the earth, and we cannot find anything so vile as sin. The basest and most contemptible thing in this world has some degree of worth in it, as being the workmanship of God. But sin and its foul stream have not the least part of worth in them.

Sin is wholly evil, without the least mixture of good—vileness in the abstract. Its heinousness appears in the author of it: “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning” (1Jo 3:8). Sin is his trade, and he is the incessant practiser of it. Sin’s enormity is seen in what it has done to man: it has completely ruined his nature and brought him under the curse of God. Sin is the source of all our miseries, all unrighteousness and wretchedness being its fruits. There is no distress of the mind, no anguish of the heart, no pain of the body, but it is due to sin. All the miseries which mankind groan under today are to be ascribed to sin. It is the cause of all penal³¹ evils: “Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart” (Jer 4:18). Had there been no sin, there had been no wars, no national calamities, no prisons, no hospitals, no insane asylums, no cemeteries! Yet who lays these things to heart?

Sin assumes many garbs, but when it appears in its nakedness, it is seen as a black and misshapen monster. How God Himself views it may be learned from the various similitudes used by the Holy Spirit to set forth its ugliness and loathsomeness. He has compared it with the greatest deformities and the most filthy and repulsive objects to be met with in this world. Sin is likened to the scum of a seething pot, wherein a detestable carcass is being destroyed (Eze 24:11-12). To the blood and pollution of a newly born child, before it is washed, salted, and swaddled (Eze 16:4, 6). To a dead and rotting body (Rom 7:24). To the noisome stench and poisonous exhalations which issue from the mouth of an open sepulcher (Rom 3:13). To the image of the devil (Joh 8:44). To putrefying sores (Isa 1:5-6). To a menstruous cloth (Isa 30:22; Lam 1:17). To a canker or gangrene (2Ti 2:17). To the dung of filthy creatures (Phi 3:8). To the vomit of a dog and the wallowing of a sow in the stinking mire (2Pe 2:22). Such comparisons show us something of the vileness and horribleness of sin, yet in reality, it is beyond all comparison.

There is a far greater malignity in sin than is commonly supposed, even by the great majority of church members. Men regard it as an infirmity, and term it a “human frailty” or “hereditary weakness.” But Scripture calls it “an evil thing and bitter” (Jer 2:19), an abominable thing which God hates (Jer 44:4). Few people think it to be so, rather do the great majority regard it as a mere trifle, as a matter of so little moment that they have but to cry in the hour of death, “Lord, pardon me; Lord, bless me,” and all will be eternally well with them. They judge sin by the opinion of the world. But what can a world which “lieth in wickedness” (1Jo 5:19) know about God’s hatred of sin? It matters nothing what the world thinks, but it matters everything what God says thereon. Others measure the guilt of sin by what conscience tells them—or fails to! But conscience needs informing by the Bible. Many of the heathen put their female children and old folk to death, and conscience chided them not. A deadened conscience has accompanied multitudes to hell without any voice of warning. So little filth do they see in sin that tens of thousands of religionists imagine that a few tears will wash away its stain. So little criminality do they perceive in it that they persuade themselves that a few good works will make full reparation for it.

That all comparisons fail to set forth the horrible malignity which there is in that abominable thing which God hates appears in the fact that we can say nothing more evil of sin than to term it what it is, “but sin, that it might appear sin” (Rom 7:13). “Who is like unto thee, O LORD?” (Exo 15:11). When we say of God that He is *God*, we say all that can be said of Him. “Who is a God like unto thee?” (Mic 7:18). We cannot say more good of Him than to call Him *God*. So we cannot say more evil of sin than to say it is *sin*. When we have called it that, we have said all that can be said of it. When the apostle would put a descriptive epithet to sin, he invested it with its own

³¹ **penal** – of or relating to punishments.

name: “that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (Rom 7:13). That was the worst he could say of it, the ugliest name he could give it—just as when Hosea denounced the Ephraimites for their idolatry. “So shall Bethel do unto you because of the evil of your evil” (10:15, margin). The prophet could not paint their wickedness in any blacker colour than to double the expression.

The hideousness of sin can be set forth no more impressively than in the terms used by the apostle in Romans 7:13. “That sin...might become exceeding sinful” is a very forcible expression. It reminds us of similar words used by him when magnifying that glory which is yet to be revealed in the saints, and with which the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared, namely, “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2Co 4:17). No viler name can be found for sin than its own. “If we speak of a treacherous person, we call him a Judas; if of Judas, we call him a *devil*; but if of Satan, we want a comparison, because we can find none that is worse than himself. We must therefore say, as Christ did, ‘When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own.’ It was thus with the apostle when speaking of the evil of his own heart, ‘That sin by the commandment might become’—what? He wanted a name worse than its own. He could find none. He therefore unites a strong epithet to the thing itself, calling it ‘exceeding sinful’” (Andrew Fuller, 1754-1815).

There are four great evils in sin: the total absence of the moral image of God, the transgression of His just Law, obnoxiousness to His holiness, and separation from Him—entailing the presence of positive evil, guilt which cannot be measured by any human standard, defilement the most repulsive, and misery inexpressible. Sin contains within it an *infinite evil*, for it is committed against a Being of infinite glory, unto whom we are under infinite obligations. Its odiousness appears in that fearful description, “filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness” (Jam 1:21), which is an allusion to the brook Kidron, into which the garbage of the temple sacrifices and other vile things were cast (2Ch 29:16). Its hatefulness to God is seen in His awful curse upon the workmanship of His own hands, for He would not anathematize³² man for a trifle. If He does not afflict willingly (Lam 3:33), then most certainly He would not curse without great provocation. The virulence³³ and vileness of sin can only be gauged at Calvary, where it rose to the terrible commission of deicide.³⁴ At the cross, it “abounded” to the greatest possible degree. The demerits of sin are seen in the eternal damnation of sinners in hell, for the indescribable sufferings, which divine vengeance will then inflict upon them, are its righteous wages.

Sin is a species of *atheism*, for it is the virtual repudiation of God—to make of God no God, to set up our wills against His. “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice?” (Exo 5:2). It is a malignant spirit of independence; whether imperceptibly influencing the mind or consciously present, it lies at the root of all evil and human depravity. Man would be lord of himself, hence his ready reception, at the beginning, of the devil’s lie, “Ye shall be as gods” (Gen 3:5). His credence³⁵ thereof was the dissolution of that tie which bound the creature in willing subjection to the Author of his being. Thus, sin is really the denial of our creaturehood, and, in consequence, a rejection of the rights of the Creator. Its language is, “I am. I am my own, and therefore have I the right to live unto myself.” As James Thornwell (1812-1862) pointed out, “Considered as the renunciation of dependence upon God, it may be called unbelief; as the exaltation of itself to the place of God, it may be called pride; as the transferring to another object the homage due to the

³² **anathematize** – curse; condemn.

³³ **virulence** – extreme harmfulness.

³⁴ **deicide** – killing God.

³⁵ **credence** – belief; acceptance.

Supreme, it may be called idolatry; but in all these aspects the central principle is one and the same.”

An atheist is, not only one who denies the existence of God, but also one who fails to render unto God that honour and subjection which are His due. Thus, there is a *practical* atheism as well as a theoretical one. The former obtains wherever there is no genuine respect for God’s authority and no concern for His glory. There are many who entertain theoretical notions in their heads of the divine existence, yet whose hearts are devoid of any affection to Him. And *that* is now the natural condition of all the fallen descendants of Adam. Since there be “none that seeketh after God” (Rom 3:11), it follows that there are none with any practical sense of His excellency or His claims. The natural man has no desire for communion with God, for he places his happiness in the creature. He prefers everything before Him and glorifies everything above Him. He loves his own pleasures more than God. His wisdom being “earthly, sensual, devilish” (Jam 3:15), the celestial and divine are outside of his consideration. This appears in man’s works, for actions speak louder than words. Our hearts are to be gauged by what we do, and not by what we say. Our tongues may be great liars, but our deeds tell the truth, showing what we really are.

How little is it recognized and realized that all outward impieties are the manifestations of an inward atheism! Yet such is indeed the case. As all bodily sores are evidences of the impurity of our blood, so our actions demonstrate the corruption of our natures. Therefore is sin so often termed ungodliness, “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him” (Jude 1:14-15). How vain it is, then, to deny atheism in the heart when there is so much of it in the life! Here too the tree is known by its fruits (Mat 12:33). As an active and operative principle in the soul, sin is the virtual assertion, not only of self-sufficiency, but also of self-supremacy. Rightly did Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) point out, “Those, therefore, are more deserving of being termed atheists who acknowledge a God and walk as if there were none, than those (if there can be any such) that deny God, and walk as if there were one.” To the writings of that eminent Puritan, we are also indebted for part of what precedes and part of what follows.

As all virtuous actions spring from a due acknowledgment of God, so all vicious actions take their rise from a lurking denial of Him. He who makes no conscience of sin has no regard to the honour of God, and consequently none to His being. This is clear from that declaration, “By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil” (Pro 16:6), for it clearly follows that it is in the absence of any awe of Him that they rush into evil. Every sin is an invading of the rights of God. When we transgress His laws, we repudiate His sovereignty. When we lean unto our own understanding and set up reason as the guide of our actions, we despise His wisdom. When we think to find happiness in gratifying our lusts, we slight His excellence, and deem His goodness insufficient to satisfy our hearts. When we commit those sins in secret which we would be ashamed to do in public, we virtually deny both His omniscience and omnipresence. When we lean upon the arm of flesh or put our trust in the means, we disbelieve His power. Sin is called a turning the back upon God (Jer 32:33), a kicking against Him (Deu 32:15), i.e. a treating of Him with the utmost contempt.

People do not like to regard themselves as practical atheists. No, they entertain a much better opinion of themselves than that. They pride themselves on possessing far too much intelligence to harbour so degrading an idea that there is no God. Instead, they are persuaded that creation clearly evidences a Creator. But no matter what their intellectual beliefs may be, the fact remains that they are secret atheists. He who disowns the authority of God disowns His Godhead. It is the unquestionable prerogative of the Most High to have dominion over His creatures, to make known

His will unto them, and to demand their subjection thereto. But their breaking of His bands and their casting away of His cords from them (Psa 2:3) are a practical rejection of His rule over them. Practical atheism, my reader, consists of an utter contempt of God, a conducting of ourselves as though there were none infinitely above us, who has an absolute right to govern us, to whom we must yet render a full account of all that we have done and left undone, and who will then pronounce sentence of eternal judgment upon us.

The natural man renders that homage to himself which is due alone unto God. When he obtains something which makes him glitter in the eyes of the world, how happy is he, for they “receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only” (Joh 5:44). They dote upon their own accomplishments and acquisitions, but delight not in the divine perfections. They think highly of themselves, but contemptuously of others. They compare themselves with those lower than themselves, instead of with those above. He who deems himself worthy of his own supreme affection regards himself as being entitled to the supreme regard of his neighbours. Yet it is naught but self-idolatry to magnify ourselves to the virtual forgetfulness of the Creator. When self-love wholly possesses us, we usurp God’s prerogative by making self our chief end. This consuming egotism appears again in man’s proneness to ascribe his achievements unto his own virtue, strength, and skill, instead of unto Him from whom cometh every good and perfect gift (Jam 1:17). “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?” (Dan 4:30). God smote Herod for not giving Him the glory, when instead of rebuking the people, he accepted their impious adulations (Act 12:23).

The same profane spirit is evidenced by man’s envying the endowments and prosperity of others. Cain was wroth with God, and hated and slew Abel, because his brother’s offering was received and his own refused (Gen 4:3-8). Since it be God who assigns unto each his portion, to look with such a grudging eye upon that enjoyed by our fellows has much of practical atheism in it. It is an unwillingness for God to be the proprietor and distributor of His favours as He pleases. It is assuming the right to direct the Creator what He shall bestow upon His creatures, and a denial of His sovereignty to give more unto one than to another. God disposes of His benefits according to the counsel of His own will, but vain man thinks he could make a better distribution of them. This sin is to imitate that of Satan’s, who was dissatisfied with the station which the Most High had allotted him (Isa 14:12-14). It is a desiring to assume unto ourselves that right which the devil lyingly asserted was his—to give the kingdoms of this world to whom he would (Mat 4:8-9). Thus would man have the Almighty degrade Himself to the satisfying of *his* whims, rather than His own mind.

There is in fallen man a disinclination unto any acquaintance with God’s rule. He hates instruction and casts His words behind his back (Psa 50:17). God has revealed unto man the great things of His Law, but they are counted as a strange thing (Hos 8:12). What He accounts valuable, they despise. The very purity of the divine rule renders it obnoxious to an impure heart. “Water and fire may as well kiss each other, and live together without quarreling and hissing, as the holy will of God and the unregenerate heart of a fallen creature” (Charnock). Not only is man’s darkened understanding incapable of perceiving the excellency of God’s commandments, but there is a disposition in his will which rises up against it. When any part of God’s revealed will is made known to men, they endeavour to banish it from their thoughts. They like not to retain God in their knowledge (Rom 1:28), and therefore do they resist the strivings of the Spirit unto an obedient compliance (Act 7:51). How can a fleshly mind relish a spiritual Law? Since the palate of man be corrupted, divine things are unsavoury to him, and for ever remain so until his taste be restored by divine grace.

The same atheistic spirit is seen again in man's denials of divine providence. They will not allow that God presides over this scene, directing all its affairs, shaping the circumstances of each of our lives. Rather do they ascribe their lot to fortune or fate, to good or ill "luck." Even where intellectually convinced to the contrary, they continually quarrel with God's government of this world, and particularly with His dealings with them. Whenever His will crosses theirs, they rebel and rave. Yet if our plans be thwarted, how fretful are we! Men appraise themselves highly, and are angry if God appears not to value them at the same rate—as if *their* estimation of themselves were more accurate than His. What an evidence of practical atheism is this, that, instead of meekly submitting to God's will and adoring His righteousness, we declaim Him as an unjust Governor, and demand that His wisdom be guided by our folly, and asperse Him rather than ourselves!

What proof is the whole of the foregoing of the fearful enormity of human depravity!

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 10

It is of first importance that the expositor should constantly bear in mind that not only are the substance and the sentiments expressed in Holy Writ of divine origin, but that the whole of its contents are verbally inspired. Its own affirmations lay considerable emphasis upon that fact. Said holy Job, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). He not only venerated God's Word in its entirety, but highly prized each syllable in it. "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Psa 12:6). We believe that is more than a general statement concerning the preciousness, purity, and permanence of what proceeds out of the mouth of Jehovah, for it is to be duly noted that the divine utterances are not simply likened to silver tried in a furnace, but to "a furnace of earth." Though the Holy Spirit has employed the vernacular of earth, yet He has purged what He uses from all human dross, giving some of His terms an entirely different force from their human original, investing many of them with a higher meaning, and applying all with spiritual perfection—as the "purified seven times" purports. Thus, "every word of God is pure" (Pro 30:5).

The Lord Jesus repeatedly laid stress on this aspect of the truth. When making known to His disciples the fundamental requirements of their receiving answers to prayer, He said, "If ye abide in me [maintain a spirit of constant dependence upon and remain in communion with Him], and my words abide in you [forming your thoughts and regulating your desires], ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (Joh 15:7)—for in such cases they would request only that which would be for God's glory and their own real good. Again, He declared, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (Joh 6:63). God's Word then is made up of words, and each one in it is selected by divine wisdom and positioned with unerring precision. It therefore behoves us to spare no pains in seeking to ascertain the exact meaning of each of its terms and most diligently to scrutinize the exact order in which they are placed. For the right understanding of a passage turns first upon our obtaining a correct understanding of its language.

That should be so obvious as to require no argument, yet it is surprising how often that elementary principle is ignored and contravened.

Before stating several more rules which should direct the expositor, particularly those which relate more directly to the interpretation of words and phrases, let us mention several warnings which need to be heeded. *First*, do not assume at the outset that all is plain and intelligible to you, for often the words of Scripture are used in a different and higher sense than they are in common speech. Thus, it is not sufficient to be acquainted with their dictionary meaning, rather do we have to ascertain how they are used by the Holy Spirit. For example, “hope” signifies very much more in the Word of God than it does on the lips of men. *Second*, do not jump to the conclusion that you have arrived at the meaning of a term because its force is quite obvious in one or two passages. For you are not in a position to frame a definition until you have weighed *every* occurrence of it. That demands much toil and patience, yet such are necessary if we are to be preserved from erroneous ideas. *Third*, do not conclude that any term employed by the Spirit has one uniform signification, for that is far from being the case. The force of these cautions will be made the more apparent in the paragraphs that follow.

13. *The limitation of general statements.* General statements are frequently to be limited, both in themselves and in their application. Many examples of this principle occur in the book of Proverbs, and obviously so, for a proverb or maxim is a broad principle expressed in a brief form, a moral truth set forth in condensed and universal language. Thus, “He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it; and he that hateth suretiship is sure” (11:15) enunciates the general rule, yet there are exceptions thereto. “Children’s children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers” (17:6), though that is far from being the case in every instance. “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD” (18:22), as many a man—the writer included—has discovered; yet the experience of not a few has been quite to the contrary. “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it from him” (22:15), yet God reserves to Himself the sovereign right to make that good to whom He pleases—where He blesses not this means, the child is hardened in his perversity. “Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings” (22:29), though sometimes the most industrious meet with little material success.

General statements must be qualified if to interpret them in an unlimited sense clashes with other verses. A case in point is our Lord’s prohibition, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Mat 7:1), for if that injunction be taken without any restriction, it would flatly contradict His precept, “Judge righteous judgment” (Joh 7:24). Yet how often is this precept hurled at the heads of those performing a Christian duty. The capacity to weigh or judge, to form an estimate and opinion, is one of the most valuable of our faculties, and the right use of it one of our most important tasks. It is very necessary that we have our senses “exercised to discern [Greek “thoroughly judge”] both good and evil” (Heb 5:14) if we are not to be deceived by appearances and taken in by every oily-mouthed impostor we encounter. Unless we form a judgment of what is true and false, how can we embrace the one and avoid the other? We are bidden to “beware of false prophets” (Mat 7:15), but how can we do so unless we judge or carefully measure every preacher by the Word of God? We are prohibited from having fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph 5:11), but that requires us to determine *which* are such. Christ was not here forbidding all judging of others, but was reprehending an officious or magisterial, a presumptuous, hypocritical, rash or hasty, unwarrantable, unfair, and unmerciful judgment. Much grace and wisdom are required by us to heed rightly this word of our Master’s.

Another pertinent example is found in our Lord's "swear not at all" (Mat 5:34). In the section of the sermon on the mount in which those words occur, Christ was freeing the divine commandments from the errors of the rabbins and Pharisees, enforcing their strictness and spirituality. In the instance now before us, the Jewish doctors had restricted the Mosaic statutes upon oaths unto the simple prohibition against perjury, encouraging the habit of swearing by the creature and the taking of oaths lightly in ordinary conversation. In verses 34-37, our Lord inveighed³⁶ against those corrupt traditions and practices. That He never intended His "swear not at all" to be taken absolutely is clear from His bidding men to swear by no creature, and from His reprehending all oaths in ordinary conversation. The general analogy of Scripture reveals the need for oaths on certain occasions. Abraham swore to Abimelech (Gen 21:23-24) and required his servant to take an oath (Gen 24:8-9); Jacob (Gen 31:53) and Joseph (Gen 47:31) each took one. Paul repeatedly confirmed his teaching by solemnly calling God for a witness (Rom 9:1; 2Co 1:23, etc.). Hebrews 6:16 indicates that oaths are both permissible and requisite.

There are many expressions used in the Scriptures indefinitely rather than specifically, and which are not to be understood without qualification. Some of them are more or less apparent, others can only be discovered by a comparison and study of other passages treating of the same subject. Thus, "the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Act 28:28 and also 11:18) did not signify that every one of them would do so. Similarly, "The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isa 40:5), and "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh" (Act 2:17) were simply announcements that the grace of God was to overflow the narrow bounds of Israel after the flesh. So too "the world" has a variety of meanings and is very rarely synonymous with all mankind. In such passages as John 7:4 and 12:19, only a very small part of its inhabitants were included. In Luke 2:1, the profane world is in view; in John 15:18-19, the professing world, for it was the religious sections of Israel which hated Christ. In John 14:17 and 17:9, it is the non-elect who are referred to—compare "the world of the ungodly" (2Pe 2:5), whereas in John 1:29 and 6:33, it is the world of God's elect, who are all actually saved by Christ.

Another word which is used in the Bible with considerable latitude is "all," and very rarely is it found *without* limitation. "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Mat 21:22) obviously means whatsoever we ask that is according to God's will (1Jo 5:14). When the apostles said unto Christ, "All seek for thee" (Mar 1:37), that "all did marvel" at His miracles (Mar 5:20), and that "all the people came unto him" in the temple (Joh 8:2), those expressions were far from signifying the sum total of the inhabitants of Palestine. When Luke tells his readers that he "had perfect understanding of all things from the very first" (Luk 1:3), and when we are informed that Christ foretold all things (Mar 13:23) unto His apostles, such language is not to be taken absolutely. In like manner, such statements as "all glorified God for that which was done" (Act 4:21), "this is the man, that teacheth all every where against the people, and the law" (Act 21:28), "thou shalt be his witness unto all men" (Act 22:15), are to be regarded relatively. Consequently, in the light of those examples, when he deals with "He died for all" (2Co 5:15) and "gave himself a ransom for all" (1Ti 2:6), the expositor must ascertain from other Scriptures (such as Isa 53:8; Mat 1:21; Eph 5:25) whether they mean all mankind or all who believe.

The same is true of the expression "every man"; see for instance Mark 8:25; Luke 16:16; Romans 12:3; and compare 2 Thessalonians 3:2; 1 Corinthians 4:5. So too the words "all things."

³⁶ **inveighed** – protested or disapproved vehemently.

Neither “all things are clean unto you” (Luk 11:41), nor “all things are lawful unto me” (1Co 6:12) can be taken at face value, or many Scriptures would be contradicted. “I am made all things to all men” (1Co 9:22) must be explained by what immediately precedes. The “all things” of Romans 8:28 has reference to “the sufferings of this present time,” and the “all things” of 8:32 means the “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2Pe 1:3). The “times of restitution of all things” (Act 3:21) is at once modified by the words immediately following, “which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began”—and most certainly none of them predicted the restoration of the devil and his angels to their pristine glory. “To reconcile all things unto himself” (Col 1:20) must not be understood to teach undiluted universalism, or every passage affirming the eternal damnation of the Christless would be contradicted.

14. *Positive statements with a comparative force.* Many injunctions in Scripture are expressed in an absolute form, yet are to be understood relatively. This is evident from those examples which are there and thus explained, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth” (Mat 6:19) is expounded in the next verse, “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” “Labour not for the meat which perisheth” (Joh 6:27) is not an absolute prohibition, as the “but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life” shows. Likewise, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phi 2:4). We must love our neighbours as ourselves. “So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth” is to be taken relatively, for God frequently employs both the one and the other as instruments to do those very things. “But God that giveth the increase” (1Co 3:7) shows where the emphasis is to be placed, and the One to whom the glory is to be ascribed. “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel: But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible...a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1Pe 3:3-4).

There are, however, numerous examples that are not immediately explained for us, but which the Analogy of Faith makes clear. “And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty: but by My name JEHOVAH was I not known to them” (Exo 6:2-3). Yet it is quite plain from the words of Abraham in Genesis 15:6, 8, from his calling the altar “JEHOVAH-jireh” (Gen 22:14), from Genesis 26:2, 24, and from God’s words to Jacob in 28:13, that the patriarchs *were* acquainted with this divine title. But they did not know Him as the Fulfiller of His promises or in His actual covenant faithfulness. Whereas Moses and the Hebrews were now to be given proof of His word in Genesis 15:13-14, and be brought into the land of Canaan. “Mine eyes are ever toward the LORD” (Psa 25:15) must be understood in harmony with other Scriptures which show there were times when David’s eyes were turned away from the Lord, and, as the result, he fell into grievous sins; nevertheless, that was *the habit* of his heart, the general tenor of his spiritual life. See 1 Kings 15:5 for another comparative statement about David.

“Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire” any longer continued, as what follows shows—the shadows giving place to the substance, “burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required” (Psa 40:6). Those last words are obviously to be understood relatively, for such offerings *were* then required by divine appointment. But the presentation of the most costly sacrifices (the ram, or a bullock) were unacceptable unto Him unless they proceeded from those who sincerely desired to obey and serve Him, as is clear from such passages as Proverbs 21:27; Isaiah 1:11-15. Comparative conformity to the precepts of the *moral* Law was of much greater importance than compliance with the ceremonial (see 1Sa 15:22; Psa 69:30-31; Pro 21:3; Hos 6:16; 1Co 7:19). Worship is rejected unless proffered by love and gratitude. Similarly are we to understand, “For I

spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices” (Jer 7:22)—those were not the primary or principal things I enjoined. No. “But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice.” The design of the whole revelation at Sinai being to inculcate practical subjection to God’s will, the Levitical ritual being a means to that end.

Words that are used to express *perpetuity* are not to be stretched any farther than the known duration of the things spoken of. As when the Jews were commanded to keep certain institutions throughout their generations to be ordinances forever (Exo 12:24; Num 15:15), it was not signified they were to do so throughout eternity, but only during the Mosaic economy. Likewise the everlasting mountains and perpetual hills of Habakkuk 3:6 spoke only of *comparative* permanency and stability, for the earth is yet to be destroyed. “But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth” (Mat 6:3). Neither is this to be taken absolutely, otherwise any act of beneficence which came under the cognizance of our fellows would be prohibited, and that would be contrary to the Analogy of Faith. The primitive Christians did not always conceal their donations, as Acts 11:29-30 demonstrates. Secrecy itself may become a cloak of avarice, and under the pretence of hiding good works, we may hoard up money to spend upon ourselves. There are times when a person of prominence may rightly excite his backward brethren by his own spirit of liberality. This divine precept was designed to restrain the corrupt ambition of our hearts after the praise of men. Christ meant that we are to perform deeds of charity as unobtrusively as possible, making it our chief concern to have the approbation of God rather than the applause of our fellows. When a good work has been done, we should dismiss it from our minds, and instead of congratulating ourselves upon it, press on to other duties which are yet before us.

We are not to conclude from the terms of Luke 14:12-13 that it is wrong for us to invite our friends and relatives to partake of our hospitality, though a comparative is there again expressed in positive language; but rather must we see to it that the poor and needy are not neglected or slighted by us. “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Joh 1:17). How often have those words been misunderstood, yea, wrested, for it is a serious mistake to conclude from them either that there was *no* grace under the Mosaic economy or that there is no law under the Christian. The fact is that the contrast is not between the messages of Moses and Christ, but the characteristics of their ministries. “Ye see me no more” (Joh 16:10), said Christ to His apostles. Yet they *did*! What then did He mean? That they should not see Him again in a state of humiliation, in the form of a Servant, in the likeness of sin’s flesh—compare “like unto the Son of man” (Rev 1:13) because then in His *glorified* state. Acts 1:3 definitely informs us that Christ was seen of the apostles for forty days after His resurrection, and of course He is now seen by them in heaven. When the apostle declared, “I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1Co 2:2), he did not mean that that was his sole theme, but rather that such was his dominant and prominent subject. When we are exhorted “Be careful for nothing” (Phi 4:6), we certainly are not to understand that care to please God is excluded, or that we are not to have deep concern for our sins.

The above examples (many others could be added) show that constant care is needed to distinguish between positive and comparative statements, and between words with an absolute force and those with merely a relative one. ❧

JUNE

ENEMIES

“Why so much about enemies in the Psalms?” is a question raised in some articles upon that book by a recent writer in the U.S.A., to which he returned the significant answer, “Because in the covenant God put enmity between the wicked and the righteous.” Undoubtedly that is the basic, true, and satisfying explanation of why the saint is assailed and menaced by so many foes, though it scarcely accounts for the numerous references thereto in the Psalter itself. From the beginning (Gen 3:15), the Lord Himself placed an inveterate enmity between the serpent and the Saviour and those belonging to the one or the other, and in proportion as the disciples of Christ follow His example—walk as He walked, reflect His image—will they be opposed by Satan and his seed. “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you....The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (Joh 15:18, 20). God has predestinated His children “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29)—first in holiness, then in suffering, afterward in glory.

Scripture reveals the solemn fact that the Christian is menaced by deadly foes, who will show him no quarter³⁷ nor relax in their efforts to destroy him. It may surprise the reader to hear that the Hebrew and Greek words for “enemies” (occasionally rendered “foes” and “adversaries”) occur over four hundred times in the Bible! Subtracting the allusions to the natural enemies of the Jews in the historical books, a large proportion of them are found in the Psalms. Nor is that difficult to account for, for that portion of God’s Word describes in more detail the various *experiences* of His children, especially their inward conflicts, than any other part of it. And a considerable percentage of those references occur in Psalms of Davidic authorship, for none was more suited to write thereon. Here too we see how the divine Potter moulded the vessel for the particular service it was to render Him and His people. Who so well fitted to say so much upon the oppositions and persecutions encountered by God’s people than he who was assaulted by a lion and a bear in his shepherd days (1Sa 17:34), whose life was so persistently sought by Saul, who fought so many battles against the enemies of Israel, whose friendship was betrayed by Ahithophel (2Sa 15:31), and from whose hands his own son sought to wrest the kingdom (2Sa 15)? Thus was the instrument trained for his task and equipped to become the principal mouthpiece in voicing the complaints of God’s people against those who hate them.

³⁷ **quarter** – mercy.

It is very needful for those just starting out on the Christian course to know that they will be hotly opposed and sorely oppressed both from within and from without, that there will be many ill-wishers (often posing as friends) tempting them to return unto the world. Nevertheless, full armour is provided, and they are required to use the same (Eph 6:11), to resist the devil (Jam 4:7), and fight the good fight of faith (1Ti 6:12). As another has said, “You will never pluck the Rose of Sharon if you are afraid to be pricked by the thorns which surround it. You will never reach the crown if you flinch from the cross in the way to it.” His business is to “please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2Ti 2:4). This world is our battlefield, and instead of lying down and waiting to be carried to heaven on flowery beds of ease, our orders are “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1Co 16:13). Ever keep in mind these two things: that Christ regards your enemies as *His*, and therefore will not suffer you to perish at their hands; that He has given express assurance, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2Co 12:9)—then appropriate that promise.

It is also necessary to remember that your foes were all conquered by Christ upon the cross. That there He “spoiled principalities and powers. He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col 2:14). Christ overcame him whom He termed the “strong man,” and took from him all his armour (Luk 11:22), destroying or annulling “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14). At His resurrection, His foes were dispersed. As it was foretold, “Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him” (Psa 68:1). As that same Psalm goes on to say, “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive” (verse 18)—a figure taken from the ancient custom of conquerors having chained to their chariots prisoners caught in battle, thereby making an open display of their victory. While Psalm 110:2 goes on to inform us that the Lord now rules “in the midst of his enemies,” and Psalm 2:9 assures us that in due course He will “dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Because all of this has been, is being, and shall be done *for* us, “we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom 8:37).

But since all this be so, why are there so many and such powerful enemies still active against the believer? For good and sufficient reasons. Not only that the members of Christ’s body may be experientially conformed to their Head, but also that their graces may be called into exercise. All that was pointed out in the above paragraph is addressed unto *faith*, and can only now be apprehended and enjoyed by the same. Not yet have Christ’s foes been made His footstool, but they certainly shall be (Psa 110:1), and for that foreordained moment, He sits at God’s right hand in full expectation (Heb 10:13). Not yet has God trodden Satan beneath the feet of His people, but He has given them the unfailing promise that shortly He will do so (Rom 16:20), and therefore are they to live and fight in confident anticipation of the same. God suffers us to be assailed by our adversaries for our spiritual profit, to test and prove us, to develop our graces. He would keep us wide awake, and if He permits us to be sorely wounded at times, it is to humble us. Nevertheless, we have the divine guarantee that nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35).

God would hereby demonstrate the miracle and marvel of His preserving grace. Adam in paradise had no corrupt lusts within him to entice and no evil world under the curse to seduce him from his allegiance to God, yet, at the first assault of Satan, he fell. Whereas not only are saints surrounded by external foes, but they are indwelt by sin, which is part and parcel of their very beings, claiming the use of all the faculties of their souls and bodies. It is an innate enemy which there is no getting rid of in this life, and when they would fain shake it off and do good, evil is ever present with them (Rom 7:21). Its power is so great that no effort of theirs can subdue it. It is

called a *law* in their members (Rom 7:23), commanding and demanding, a remorseless tyrant which often causes them to cry, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Yet not only does it destroy them not, it is unable completely to prevent them returning the triumphant answer to their own query, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 7:25).

Our foes are many (Psa 25:19), deadly (17:9), lively and strong (38:19), mighty (69:4), scornful (80:6), wrathful (138:7), and often found in our own household (Mat 10:36), in view of which how well suited are these *prayers*. “Consider mine enemies” (Psa 25:19)—“Weigh them, check them, defeat them” (C. H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892). “Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God” (Psa 59:1)—in Thy covenant faithfulness. “Preserve my life from fear of the enemy” (64:1)—that dread of him may not mar my rest in Thee. “Hide me under the shadow of thy wings, from the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about” (17:8-9), which probably alludes to the wings of the cherubim shadowing the mercy seat. “Let me be taken under the protection of that glorious grace which is peculiar to God’s Israel” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). “O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me” (Psa 25:2). “Suffer no wicked mouth to make blasphemous mirth over my distress by asking, Where is thy God?” (Spurgeon). “Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face” (Psa 5:8). Preserve me from straying, and grant a clear apprehension of Thy providential will (compare 27:11).

Blessed is it to mark the Psalmist’s *assurances*. Oh, that writer and reader may be enabled to make them his own. “Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before thee” (69:19), and therefore Thou knowest their designs and my danger. Blessed is it for the believer to realize that. “By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me” (41:11). Note, he did not say because he hath not harassed me, nor that I triumphed over him. “Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us” (44:5). That is the confident language of faith. “God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies” (59:10)—in measure here, fully so hereafter. “Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies” (60:12). Success should be expected, and every measure thereof ascribed wholly unto Him.

Observe too David’s *acknowledgments*. “Thou hast known my soul in adversities; and hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy” (31:7-8), though he may often have gained a temporary advantage over us. “We are like men in prison with the door open—God always provides a way of escape” (Spurgeon). “Thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy” (61:3). What abundant cause have all of us thankfully to own that; then let us not be remiss in doing so.

EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

18. The New Commandment (2:7-8)

“Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.”

In order to an understanding of these verses it is necessary to seek answers to the following questions. What is the relation between them and the context? What is the “old commandment” which is not immediately and formally defined? What is “the beginning” here referred to? Why the seeming repetition in the last two sentences of verse 7? What is the “new commandment” and how is the first clause of verse 8 to be understood, in view of the first clause of verse 7? What is meant by “which thing is true in Him and in you”? What is the precise bearing of the “because” on what precedes, in view of the remainder of the sentence? What is referred to in “the darkness is past and the true light now shineth”? Finally, why is the whole introduced by the term “brethren”? Obviously, the interpreter and teacher is called for here.

It is a mistake made by several of the commentators to suppose that 2:7 begins a new division of the epistle. It does not. Verses 7 to 11 are closely related to those immediately preceding. John is continuing to press for holiness of life, but passes from the general to the particular. In verses 3 to 6 the apostle had shown that the keeping of God’s commandments and following the example left His people by Christ are proofs of the genuineness of their love unto the Father and His Son, and therefore assurances for their hearts of their being and abiding in Him. Tacitly these verses contain an exhortation unto obedience to God and imitation of the perfect walk of Christ, and thus are an amplification of the opening sentence of the chapter. “These things write I unto you, that ye sin not.” In what follows he had intimated what was the positive implication of that prohibition—that his design was to inculcate and promote practical piety in the lives of the saints. Verse 3 had laid the foundation in a general statement, by mentioning the keeping of God’s commandments at large; now, he singles out and dwells upon a more specific commandment, which was at once both old and new.

As to precisely what commandment John had reference to, there does not seem to us the slightest room for doubt. With the great majority of the commentators we consider it is the precept which enjoins the exercise of brotherly love that is here in view. Robert Candlish (1806-1873) and one or two others who were prone to strain after “originality” dissented on the ground that such an interpretation is awkward and unnatural, it being contrary to the apostle’s usual simplicity to spend two verses in describing a commandment which he had not yet mentioned, and brings in only at verse 9. But in 3:23, John tells us we should “love one another, as he gave us

commandment,” and in 4:21, “This commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.” While in his second epistle he declares, “not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another” (verse 5), which surely removes all uncertainty. But that which settles the matter once and for all with the writer are the words of our Lord unto His apostles, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (Joh 13:34).

This will be the best place (though we put it last in our list of questions) to consider why our present passage is addressed “brethren.” That is an endearing term. They had all been born again of the same Spirit, had one and the same Father, even the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and had been delivered by the same Redeemer, and were alike interested in one complete and everlasting salvation. They were bound up in the same bundle of life with Christ, and so were in the highest and truest sense His brethren (Heb 2:11, 17), and therefore brethren one of another—united to each other by the sacred tie of blood, even the blood of the Lamb. Since the apostle was about to address them more immediately on the subject of being “kindly affectioned one to another,” most appropriate was it that he should here address them as “brethren”—thereby reminding them of the obligations involved by such a relationship. Only once more in this epistle does he employ this particular form of address, and that most significantly, when bidding them marvel not at the world’s hatred, when assuring them that love to the brethren is a proof of having passed from death unto life, and when pointing out that, if occasion required it, they were to seal their love by laying down their lives for their brethren (3:13-14, 16).

It is through our failure to examine carefully and weigh thoughtfully every detail of Scripture that we miss so many of its finer shades of beauty. Not only are we at a loss to understand much of that which passes so rapidly before our eyes, and still more so to retain it in our memories, but the minute perfections of the Word are unperceived by us. As we cannot enjoy the delicious flavour of fruit if it be eaten hurriedly, neither can we value the workmanship of the Spirit if we rapidly scan the sacred page. A pertinent illustration of this is found in the appellations³⁸ employed by John when addressing his readers upon different parts of his message to them, for they are used, not simply for the purpose of variety, but in strict accord with his change of subject. Thus it was most fitting that he should begin this chapter, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not,” for older Christians ought not to need such a dehoration.³⁹ Equally suitable was it that now, when, for the first time, he was to write upon brotherly love, he should address them as “brethren.”

“Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning.” Let us consider the wider bearing of this statement here, taking up its more specific reference. John was introducing no novelty or innovation of his own. He desired to make it clear that in pressing a divine commandment he was not adopting a hitherto unheard-of policy in this Christian dispensation or following a strange procedure. He was acting in no wise inconsistently with a regime of pure grace, for grace ever works through righteousness (Rom 5:21) and never at the expense of it (Ti 2:11-12). Privileges do not release from the discharge of duty, but impose additional obligations, or at least furnish motives thereunto. It is a serious mistake to suppose that “commandments” are out of place where love dominates (Eph 5:24; 1Pe 3:6), as it is to argue that the pressing of them upon God’s people in this era is “legalistic.” Such reasonings are

³⁸ **appellations** – names; titles.

³⁹ **dehortation** – dissuasion; advice against something.

once and for all refuted by Christ's words in John 15:10, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."

In declaring that he wrote no new commandment unto his readers, John was emulating his Master. At the beginning of His public ministry Christ had said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Mat 5:17). It was the desire both of the supreme Teacher and of His beloved disciple to allay the prejudices of hearers and readers, by preventing them from supposing they were bringing in something new. The apostle delighted to pattern himself after his Master, not only in his conduct, but also in the methods and manner of his teaching. Nor was there any need whatever for him to invent something new, for the Lord Jesus Himself had delivered all that was ever to be given as from Him: His ministers being required to teach others only those things which He had commanded them (Mat 28:20; Heb 2:3). What a lesson there is here for present day preachers, not to pander to those who, like the Athenians, "spent their time in nothing else, but to tell, or hear some new thing" (Act 17:21). Do not be ashamed to be dubbed "old-fashioned."

J. Reynolds (in Henry's commentary) pointed out, "The precept of love must be as old as human nature; but it might admit of divers enactments, enforcements, and motives. In the state of innocence, had human nature then been propagated, men must have loved one another, as being of one blood, made to dwell on the earth as God's offspring, and bearing His image. In the state of sin and promised recovery, they must love one another as related to God their Maker, as related to each other by blood, and as partners in the same hope. When the Hebrews were peculiarly incorporated, they must accordingly love each other as being the privileged people, whose were the covenants and the adoption, and of whose race the Messiah and Head of the Church must spring; and the law of love must be conveyed with new obligations to the new Israel of God to the gospel-church; and so it is the old commandment or the word which the children of the gospel-Israel had heard from the beginning."

Though that is all doctrinally and historically true, and while the great majority of the commentators since then have, substantially, adopted this explanation of the new-old "commandment," yet we personally consider it misses the mark exegetically, and that through failing rightly to understand what is meant in the repeated expression "from the beginning." It should be carefully noted that the apostle did not say "an old commandment which was from the beginning," but instead, "which ye had" and "which ye have heard from the beginning." As we showed in our exposition of 1:1-2, this expression "the beginning" is used in the New Testament in quite a number of distinct senses, though in this epistle we regard it as having one uniform meaning, namely the beginning of this Christian era, and more particularly the commencement of our Lord's public ministry, when He was openly revealed before the eyes of men, when it was made manifest that none other than Immanuel was tabernacling in their midst. This we are convinced is the reason why the Holy Spirit moved John to add the final clause to verse 7 to explain to us the meaning of the preceding one, and let us know he referred to the "beginning" of their saving knowledge of God, to the time of their conversion—the start of their spiritual lives.

John Calvin (1509-1564) pointed out that some explained the "old commandment" as referring back to Sinai, saying, "that Christ now proclaims no other rule of life under the gospel than what God did formerly under the Law," adding, "this is indeed most true, nor do I object." Alas that so many who now call themselves or at least regard themselves as "Calvinists" do object thereto, that they emphatically deny the Moral Law is the Christian's rule of life, and denounce subjection thereto as a species of "bondage"—a view which is not only falsified by Matthew 5:17, but the plain teaching of the epistles also (Rom 3:31; 7:22, 25; 1Co 9:21). Then, with his usual

perspicuity, the justly renowned reformer and expositor gave it as his opinion that John “calls it the old commandment, not because it was taught the fathers ages before, but because it had been taught them on their very entrance into the religious life. This was one of the first elements of the gospel that they had been thus taught from the beginning; and it served much to claim their faith that it had proceeded from Christ Himself, from whom they had received the gospel.”

With the above view we heartily concur, though we would supplement the fact that, not only had Christ proclaimed this commandment (Joh 15:17), but had Himself perfectly exemplified the same (Joh 13:14-15). Now, since the apostles had themselves experienced such a blessed commendation of it in their beloved Master’s treatment of them, we may be sure that they emphasized this law of fraternal benevolence wherever they ministered unto the saints. As others have pointed out, John himself here gave an instance of the same in his own example, and placed it on record in the intimate appellation he here employed, for his “brethren” signified that those to whom he wrote were near and dear to him, united by that bond of Christian charity unto the practice of which he was soliciting them. Thus in declaring, “I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning,” he assured them it was no novelty he was enjoining, but something they had been familiar with from the day they became Christians. Nor had this precept originated with him, for he had received it from Christ; it was thus a disclaimer that he was broaching any strange doctrine.

But to what does he refer in his “*Again, a new commandment I write unto you*”? Not to an entirely different one, or he had said, “And yet again.” The adverb “again” intimates that the same subject was being considered, but under another aspect. In the New Testament two Greek words are used for “new”: *kainos*, which refers especially to quality, and *neos* which alludes principally to time. It is the former one here. One commandment is in view throughout, but considered from different angles, namely that of brotherly love—not formally named, for all his readers would know the one he referred to. The same object may be at once both old and new—old in itself, new to us. Probably the reader heard the gospel for years, but when the Holy Spirit applied it unto his heart in power it was thoroughly new in his experience. Some have illustrated this commandment’s being both old and new by the grand Reformation. That which was proclaimed by Luther and Calvin was “old,” for it had been taught by Christ and His apostles; again, it was “new,” as purged from the adulterations of Rome. A more scriptural example is found in the Sermon on the Mount, where we hear our Lord enunciating no absolutely new law, setting up no different standard of conduct, but renewing the Decalogue, freed from the glosses and corruptions of the rabbis and Pharisees.

The apostle had in the former verse explained what he meant by the old commandment, declaring it to be the very same as they had been taught and had received “from the beginning”—that which respected brotherly love, as the verses which follow prove. As S. E. Pierce (1746-1829) well expressed it, “It was the old commandment in the same sense as when we read of the old covenant and the new. There ever was but one and the same everlasting covenant, yet the different administrations thereof have been such as to give the denominations of the old and new covenant thereto.” That analogy is both pertinent and illuminating. It is on the basis of the everlasting covenant of grace made by God with Christ, that His elect were saved during the former economy (2Sa 23:5) and that they are so now (Heb 13:21), yet different privileges have been enjoyed by and different duties required from them under Judaism and Christianity. Likewise as our Lord’s commandment to His disciples to love one another required the names of old and new—from the distinct periods of His delivering it unto them—so also it is invested with higher privileges, enforced by superior motives, and contains different enactments from the former.

Some commandments are old in the sense of being antiquated, like the ceremonial laws of Judaism; others are new absolutely, as the Christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Some are both old and new, as those given at Sinai, renewed by Christ and His disciples. At the beginning of His ministry Christ enforced the Decalogue, the sum of which is loving God with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves. At the close He said to His disciples, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you." The Law required that I love my neighbour, which was a natural relationship; but the gospel requires me to love my "brethren" in Christ, which is a spiritual relationship. The Law required me to love my neighbour as myself—to be as zealous in protecting his interests and forwarding his welfare as I am my own. Christ commands us, "That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (Joh 15:12), with a fervent, sacrificial and enduring love. His words in John 13:34, "as I have loved you," are to be interpreted in the light of their context (verses 14-15), where we behold the incarnate Son of God performing a slave's part, washing the feet of His disciples. His was a self-renouncing, self-denying love which shrank not from the meanest office.

Several broad hints have been given above, but we must now furnish a more definite and fuller answer to the question, Why is the old commandment of verse 7 called a new one in verse 8? The terms are used relatively and not absolutely. The old commandment is now considered in a new light and is to be laid hold of with a new vigour. Love for the brethren is now urged on grounds on which it was not under the Mosaic economy. First and foremost, from the example supplied by Christ. He not only expressly ratified the original precept, but had given a pattern of charity such as had never been seen in this world before. In Him it was supremely and sublimely personified. The Lord Jesus displayed a love which was superior to all the faults and failings of its objects, a love which never varied or cooled, which deemed no service too menial and no sacrifice too great. It was new then not in its substance, but in the form given to it by the Redeemer. Perfectly exemplified by Him, it shone with additional luster and appeared with new beauty. Thus we see how intimately this linked with verse 6. In exhorting Christians to walk as their Master walked, the apostle singled out one particular feature thereof—how He conducted Himself toward His brethren.

So far is Christianity from rendering the exercise of love and the performance of good works needless, it imposes additional obligations unto the same, and at the same time furnishes new incentives thereto. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples," said Christ, "if ye have love one to another" (Joh 13:35). And as the example of Christ so plainly exhibited, love is very much more than a nebulous ideal or flowery expression, being an intensely practical thing—more than a beautiful sentiment, namely a mighty force and impelling dynamic. The followers of Christ are required to love one another for His sake, as bearing His image, and as imitating the copy He set before them of compassionate, patient, disinterested affection. They are to have a genuine regard to each other's interests and comforts, a sympathy with their sorrows and a part in their joys. They are to delight in one another's company, to live in peace and harmony, to bear and forbear with each other's frailties. They are to unite together in prayer and worship, to bear each other's burdens, to spare no pains in seeking to build them up in faith and holiness. This new commandment is to be kept forever fresh in the hearts and minds of the saints.

But there are many other respects in which the old commandment is now a new one. It is given to a new society or corporation,⁴⁰ the Christian "brotherhood" (1Pe 2:17). It has received a new exemplification in the Head of that corporation, being abundantly and perfectly realized in Him

⁴⁰ **corporation** – group of people acting as one.

who “loved the church and gave himself for it” (Eph 5:25). It is addressed unto those who are new creatures in Christ Jesus, and therefore are they to love one another for His sake. Thus it is kept from a new principle or nature, received at regeneration. It has come to them with a new power: under the old covenant it was inscribed upon tables of stone, but the Spirit writes it on the hearts of those who are under the new covenant, and it was for this reason that Paul said to the saints, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another” (1Th 4:9). It is invested with new force, even the mediatorial authority of Christ, who, after His resurrection from the dead, was given all power in heaven and in earth (Mat 28:18), and “gave commandments unto the apostles” (Act 1:2). It is to be obeyed in a new manner, according to its multiform application in the precepts found in the Epistles, which are given for the directing of brotherly love.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

70. Conquests Summarized (11:12-12:24)

Before turning to the next section of our book (chapters 13-18), which treats of the apportioning of the land unto the tribes of Israel and their actual entrance into their inheritance, one more article is called for on chapter 11, with a few supplementary remarks upon the twelfth, where we have a breviate⁴¹ of Israel’s conquests. A report is made of the protracted fighting which the complete subjugation of the Canaanites entailed, and this is followed by a list of the thirty-one kings who were vanquished by Joshua. There are a number of details in the former chapter which, despite the five articles we have already written thereon, have not yet been noticed, and which are much too important for us to pass over, for they are details which adumbrate⁴² and illustrate various aspects of that good fight which Christians are called upon to wage. They concern things which, if success is to crown our efforts, contain valuable lessons that we do well to take to heart. Since they be included in the “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning” (Rom 15:4), we cannot afford to ignore them.

When our Lord had miraculously fed the multitude with the five barley loaves and two small fishes, we are told that He bade His disciples to “gather up the fragments...that nothing be lost” (Joh 6:12). A word that needs to be pressed much upon God’s people today, for some of them are following the evil example of this wasteful and wanton generation by being guilty of throwing away much that could well be used or reused. It is in the spirit and according to the general principle contained in that precept of Christ’s that we turn again to Joshua 11, for though we have again and again feasted from its contents in our more or less general survey of them, yet quite a few scattered “fragments” therein claim our attention, and these we shall now endeavour to “gather up” into this present article. Though we lack the ability to do as the apostles did and “fill

⁴¹ **breviate** – short account.

⁴² **adumbrate** – prefigure; foreshadow.

twelve baskets” with the same, yet we trust that by divine assistance we shall be able to provide sufficient to meet the needs of some hungry souls. The Lord graciously grant it.

“And all the cities of those kings, and all the kings of them, did Joshua take, and smote them with the edge of the sword, and he utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded” (11:12). Most express orders had been given to him by his predecessor to do these very things (Deu 7:2; 20:16-17); he was to show no mercy and spare none, for they were drinking in iniquity like water is by the parched. And Moses, in turn, had received these instructions from the Lord Himself. Thus, in the slaughtering of the idolatrous and immoral Amorites, Joshua and his men were not actuated by a spirit of bloodthirstiness or malice, but instead were having regard to the divine precepts. The practical application of this detail unto ourselves should be obvious. Some of God’s statutes enjoin that which is painful unto flesh and blood (Mat 16:24; Phi 3:10), yea, quite contrary to our fallen natures (Mat 5:29-30), yet we must not pick and choose only those which are agreeable to us, but conform to the most trying and disagreeable of them. And, even though it involves antagonizing those nearest and dearest to us (Mat 10:34-35; Luk 14:26), we must, like David, “have respect to all God’s commandments” (Psa 119:6).

“As the LORD commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua: he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses” (11:15). That is to be regarded first as a general statement, summarizing his obedience unto such enactments as Exodus 23:24; 34:11-13; Numbers 33:52; Deuteronomy 12:3, in which he was bidden to overthrow their idols and quite break down their images, to destroy their altars and cut down their groves, to destroy all their pictures and pluck down all their high places, to break down their pillars and burn their groves with fire—in short, so thoroughly to make an end of all the monuments of their religion that the very names of their false gods should be “destroyed out of that place.” Thus, Joshua was not free to follow his own caprice,⁴³ nor left to the exercise of his own judgment, but was required to carry out the detailed orders which he had received from his Master. How conscientiously and thoroughly he did so appears from this inspired record of the Holy Spirit, “He left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded.”

“Would we approve ourselves upright, then we must leave nothing undone which the Lord hath commanded. For though omissions are not so scandalous, either in the world or in the Church, as commissions, they are as certainly acts of disobedience and effects of a will unsubmitted to the divine authority” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821). As our Lord told the Pharisees, who were very punctilious in paying tithe of mint and anise, yet omitted the weightier matters of the Law—judgment, mercy, and faith—“these ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone” (Mat 23:23). Sincere obedience is impartial. He who from a right principle obeys any of God’s commandments will have respect unto all of them. Here is one of the radical differences between gracious souls and empty professors. The latter act for themselves and not for God, and will do no more than what they consider promotes their own interests or enhances their reputation before their fellows. Like the Pharisees, they usually lay stress on the “least” commandments, especially those things which distinguish them from other denominations, and neglect those which relate to moral duties, attending to such externals as the washing of their hands, yet making no serious attempt to cleanse their hearts.

What a searching word is this for both writer and reader to measure himself by, “He left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded”! Therein he conformed to that fundamental injunction, “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor

⁴³ **caprice** – whim; sudden, unaccountable change of mood or behavior.

diminish from it” (Deu 12:32). For men to *add* anything to the precepts of God, as binding upon the conscience or as being essential to personal piety, is an affront upon His wisdom, for it is tantamount to charging Him with an oversight. Equally so, to *diminish* aught from the divine commandments, to ignore or render any of them void, is to despise God’s authority and goodness. If we be wise, even a regard to our own interests will cause us to render unqualified obedience, for God has enjoined nothing but what is for our good, and therefore none of His commandments can be neglected but to our injury and loss. What a solemn word too is this to the preacher! Oh, that he may be able to look his congregation in the face and say truthfully at the close of a pastorate, “I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you” (Act 20:20).

“Joshua made war a long time with all those kings” (11:18). Though the account of his conquest of Canaan be a very brief one and his numerous victories are packed into a small compass, yet it is not to be thought that they were all obtained within a few days (or even weeks) as was the case at Jericho and in the campaign described in chapter 10, but rather occupied a considerable period. Yet, after all, the expression “a long time” is a *relative* one, for the swiftness or slowness of time’s passing is not always to be gauged by the clock. When its span is filled with stress and strain, its flight seems much slower—as it would to the mothers and wives, more than to the fighting men of Israel themselves. Hence in the Hebrew it reads “many days.” But, as a matter of fact, that span of time comprised only seven years, as may be seen by a comparison of Joshua 14:1-10 with Deuteronomy 2:14. For in the former, we learn that Caleb was only eighty-five when Canaan was conquered and but forty when sent forth by Moses to spy out the land; while the latter informs us that thirty-eight of those years had been spent in the wilderness before Israel crossed the Jordan. Thus the whole of Canaan was subdued and occupied by Israel within the space of seven years.

Those words, “And Joshua made war a long time with all those kings,” tells us of his *constancy*, and the stability of those who served under him. They did not take things easy after Jericho was captured, nor relax their efforts when Ai fell before them, but continued steadfast until they had completed the task assigned them. What a noble example for the Christian to follow in the prosecution of his spiritual warfare! Let him not be appalled by the obstacles confronting him, deterred by the number of enemies to be overcome, nor disheartened by his failures along the way. Patience and fortitude must be earnestly sought from above. Though the fight of faith lasts “a long time,” for it is to be without any intermission while we are left in this scene, yet, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal 6:9). It is just because we are so prone to flag in our efforts during the performance of duty that this exhortation is addressed unto us and *repeated* in 2 Thessalonians 3:13! Then let us watch and guard against this evil tendency and persevere unto the end.

“And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities” (verse 21). Apparently a special campaign was made against *them*, and particular notice is here made of the same. Nor is the reason for this far to seek. It will be remembered that when Moses sent forth the twelve men to spy out the land of Canaan and upon their return ten of them threw cold water upon the prospect of Israel’s occupying it. They emphasized the formidable strength of its walled cities and made mention of the Anakims as being of “great stature” in their own sight (Num 13:28-33). But mighty as those men were, and taking refuge as they now did in their fastnesses, Joshua and his men—notwithstanding the difficulty of the mountain passes and attacking these giants in their caves—hunted them out and completely routed the very ones who had originally inspired their unbelieving fathers with such terror.

“Even that opposition, which seemed invincible, was got over. Never let the sons of Anak be a terror to the Israel of God, for even *their* day will come to fall. Giants are dwarfs to Omnipotence; yet this struggle with the Anakims was reserved for the latter end of the war, when the Israelites were become more expert in the arts of war and had had more experience of the power and goodness of God. God sometimes reserves the sharpest trials of His people, by affliction and temptation, for the latter end of their days. Therefore, ‘Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off’ (1Ki 20:11). Death, that tremendous son of Anak, is the last enemy to be encountered, but it is to be destroyed (1Co 15:26). Thanks be to God who will give us the victory” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). The words “Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities” are *not* to be understood absolutely, as the later Scriptures show, for both of the books of Samuel make it clear that the race of these giants had not been completely exterminated, that some of their number succeeded in escaping and either concealed their presence from Israel or took refuge in the surrounding countries. This is more than hinted at in the verse that follows.

“There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained” (verse 22). This was one of the passages used by J. J. Blunt (1794-1855) as an illustration of his striking book, *Undesigned Coincidences*. He pointed out that 1 Samuel 17:4 informs us that the Philistine champion whom David vanquished was “Goliath, of Gath,” whose height was six cubits and a span—ten feet—and then bids the reader mark the value of that description, which though quite casual serves to authenticate its historicity. Next, he reminds us of the testimony of Moses in Numbers 13:32-33, where we are told that certain of the original inhabitants of Canaan were “men of great stature...giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants.” Those details are to be carefully borne in mind in connection with Joshua’s final feat of arms, when, as we have seen, he “cut off the Anakims from the mountains,” and none of them were left in the land of Israel “only [observe the exception] in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod.”

Thus, when we find in the book of Samuel that Gath is most incidentally named as the country of Goliath, that fact squares most unmistakably with the two other independent facts chronicled by two other authors, Moses and Joshua; the one that the Anakims were of gigantic size, the other that some of that almost-exterminated race, who survived the sword of Joshua, actually continued to dwell at Gath! Thus in the mouths of those three witnesses is the Word established, concurring as they do in a manner the most artless and satisfactory, in confirming one particular at least in that remarkable exploit of Israel’s shepherd boy. Since this one particular, and that like a hinge upon which the whole incident moves, is discovered to be a matter of fact beyond all question, and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, we have good reason to regard the other particulars of the same history to be authentic too. But there are also many providential circumstances involved in it which argue the invisible Hand by which David slew his adversary. His being on hand to hear and accept the haughty challenge, his bag with five small stones opposed to the helmet of brass and the coat of brazen mail and the spear like a weaver’s beam, the first sling of a pebble, the panic of the whole host of the Philistines and their overthrow, combine to show that it was no ordinary event, and that “the LORD saveth not with sword and spear,” but that the battle is the Lord’s, and that He gave it into Israel’s hand (1Sa 17:47).

“So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war” (11:23). It is clear from Joshua 13 and the book of Judges, that those words are to be regarded as a *general statement*, probably meaning “the far greater and better part, all before described; all that he went against—he failed not in any of his attempts; no place stood out

against him that he besieged or summoned; all yielded to him” (John Gill, 1697-1771). Thus did God make good His promises unto the patriarchs (Deu 1:8), to Moses (Deu 3:18), and to Joshua (Jos 1:6). And now, for a season, the land “rested from war”—those Canaanites who had escaped, fearing to attack and remaining quiet; the surrounding nations invading them not. The spiritual application of this unto ourselves is both apparent and blessed. However unpleasant and irksome the spiritual warfare of the Christian may be, his patience in tribulation should ever be encouraged by the joyful expectation of hope (Rom 12:12). For ere long, perfect rest above shall be his portion, and that not for a season, but forever.

The twelfth chapter forms a fitting conclusion to the military campaigns of Joshua, containing as it does a summary of his numerous victories and a list of the thirty-one kings which were smitten by him. A short account is there given of the conquests made by Israel both in the times of Moses and of Joshua. The land which the Lord gave unto Israel consisted of two parts, for though it was but a single country, yet its terrain was divided by the Jordan. Thus the conquest of Canaan was a single enterprise, though it was actually accomplished in two distinct stages. That portion on the eastward side of Jordan was subdued by Moses, and given to the two and a half tribes, but the much larger half lay on the western side, and was subjugated by Joshua and allotted unto the nine and a half tribes.

Typically,⁴⁴ that probably has a threefold significance or application. First, *redemptively*, the fruits of Christ’s mediatorial work: far more have benefited therefrom since His death (the Jordan) than those who were saved by Him during the days of His public ministry. Second, *dispensationally*,⁴⁵ in connection with the Church and its members: most probably a much greater number of them being sinners taken out from the Gentiles than those who had formerly been from the Jews.

Third, *spiritually*, in connection with the believer’s salvation: a portion of his inheritance is entered into and enjoyed by him before the Jordan is crossed, but the principal part of it lies on the farther side of death. But while looking for the mystical meaning of this, let us not overlook the practical lesson. “Them did Moses the servant of the LORD and the children of Israel smite: and Moses the servant of the LORD gave it for a possession unto the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh. And these are the kings of the country which Joshua and the children of Israel smote on this side Jordan on the west...which Joshua gave unto the tribes of Israel for a possession according to their divisions” (12:6-7). The linking together of those two things is instructive. “The enjoyment of present blessings should revive the grateful remembrance of former mercies, and the benefit derived from the labours of the living servants of the Lord should remind us to respect the memories of those who have hitherto served Him in their generation. The national covenant mediated by Moses engaged many temporal advantages to Israel” (T. Scott).

“And these are the kings of the country which Joshua and the children of Israel smote on this side Jordan on the west...all the kings thirty and one” (12:7, 24). It may be thought strange that there should have been so many kings in such a small country. In reality, it supplies evidence of the accuracy and veracity of this historical record, for it is in perfect accord with the ancient practice followed in various countries, namely that many of their principal cities had their own separate kings. Historians inform us that when Julius Caesar landed in Britain, he found four kings in the single county of Kent—then how many more would there be in the whole island?

⁴⁴ **typically** – as a type or an emblem.

⁴⁵ **dispensationally** – in God’s “dispensation,” or ordering, of affairs in this world.

How blessedly did Joshua's conquest of all those kings illustrate the truth that the more entirely our hearts be fixed upon the Lord, our strength (11:6-7), the more certainly will our foes—however powerful or numerous—be subdued before us! According to its gematria (the use of letters instead of figures—for our modern numerals were unknown to the ancients), thirty-one equals EL—the name of *God*. If then He be for us, who can be against us?

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

7. Its Enormity, Part 2

In our last, we showed that the heart of the natural man is filled with a secret and unsuspected, yet a real and practical, spirit of atheism—that whatever theological notions he may hold, by his attitude and conduct, he repudiates the very being of God. Even that fearful aspect of man's state does not fully express the desperate and deplorable condition to which the fall has reduced him. Not only is he living in this world “without God” (Eph 2:12)—without any due acknowledgment of or practical subjection to Him—but he has a disposition which is directly contrary to Him (Rom 8:7). With no desire for communion with the true God, he devises false gods and is devoted to them—mammon, pleasures, his belly. Fallen man has cast off all allegiance to God and set up himself in open and undisguised opposition to Him. Not only has he no love for God, but his very nature is wholly averse to Him. Sin has wrought in the whole of his being a radical antipathy to God, to His will and ways, for divine things are holy and heavenly, and therefore bitter to his corrupt taste. He is alienated from God, inveterately opposed to Him.

As an operative principle in the soul, sin is virtually the assertion of self-sufficiency and self-supremacy, and thus it cannot but produce opposition to God. Sin is not only the negation but the positive contrary of holiness, and therefore it can bear naught but antagonism to the Holy One. He who affirms and asserts himself must deny and resist God. The divine claims are regarded as those of a rival. God is looked upon as an enemy, and the carnal mind is enmity against Him; and enmity is not simply the absence of love—a condition of mere indifference—but is a principle of repugnance and virulent resistance. Hence, as John Owen (1616-1683) said (*Indwelling Sin*, chapter 4), “Sin's proper formal object is *God*. It hath, as it were, that command from Satan which the Assyrians had from their king, ‘Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel.’ It is neither great nor small, but God Himself, the King of Israel, that sin sets itself against. There lies the secret, the formal reason of all opposition to good, even because it relates unto God...The law of sin makes not opposition to any duty, but to God in every duty.” Thus, sin is nothing less than high treason against the absolute sovereignty of God.

Terrible beyond words is it that any creature of His hands should harbour enmity against such a glorious being as the great God. He is the sum of all excellency, the source of all good, the spiritual and moral Sun of the universe (Psa 84:11). And yet fallen man is not only His enemy, but his very mind is “enmity against God” (Rom 8:7). Enemies may be reconciled, but *enmity* cannot be. Yea, the only way to reconcile enemies is to destroy their enmity. In Romans 5:10, the apostle

spoke of enemies being reconciled to God by the death of His Son, but when he makes reference to enmity, he says, “having abolished in his flesh the enmity” (Eph 2:15). There is no other way of getting rid of enmity except by its abolition or destruction.

Now enmity operates along two lines: aversion and opposition—God is detested and resisted. Sin brings us into God’s debt (Mat 6:12), and this produces aversion of Him. As debtors hate the sight of their creditors and are loath to meet them, so do they who are unable to meet the just claims of God—exemplified at the beginning, when fallen Adam fled as soon as he heard the voice of his Maker.

Sin is a disease which has ravaged the whole of man’s being, rendering God obnoxious to him. As an inflamed eye cannot endure the light, the depraved heart of man cannot endure to look upon God. He has a deeply rooted and inveterate detestation for Him, and therefore against everything that is of Him. The more spirituality there is in anything, the more it is disliked by the natural man. That which has most of God in it, is the most unpalatable to him. Concerning those in whom enmity is most dominant, God says, “Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof” (Pro 1:25)—not simply this or that part of His revealed will was unacceptable to them, but the whole thereof.

This enmity is universal in its manifestations. Not only is the unregenerate heart indisposed to all holy duties, finding them irksome and burdensome, but it hates God’s Law and rejects His Christ. It abuses His mercies, and despises the riches of His goodness and longsuffering. It mocks His messengers, resists His Spirit, flouts⁴⁶ His Word, and persecutes those who bear His image. Those at enmity with God serve His adversary the devil, and are heartily in love with that world, of which he is prince (Eph 2:2).

Enmity is a principle which ever expresses itself by opposition against its object. It contends with what it loathes. As in the regenerate the flesh lusts against the spirit, so in the unregenerate it fights against God. Enmity is the energy behind every sinful act. Though the interests of particular sins may be contrary to one another, yet they all conspire in a joint league against God Himself. As an able expositor expressed it, “Sins are in conflict with one another: covetousness and profligacy, covetousness and intemperance agree not. But they are one in combining against the interest of God. In betraying Christ, Judas was actuated by covetousness, the high priest by envy, Pilate by popularity, but all shook hands together in the murdering of Christ. And those varied iniquities were blended together to make up one lump of enmity” (W. Jenkyn on Jude, Part II, 1665).

Though there be not in all sins an express hatred of God, nevertheless in every sin there is an implicit and virtual hatred against Him. So deeply rooted is man’s enmity that neither the most tender expostulations nor the direst threatenings will allay it. God may entreat, but men will not heed. He may chastise, but as soon as He lifts His rod, they, like Pharaoh, are as defiant as ever.

The language of men’s hearts and lives unto God is, “Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways” (Job 21:14). Hence man is compared to a wild ass in the wilderness, that “snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure,” rather than come under the yoke of God (Jer 2:24). Fearfully was that fact exemplified all through the long history of Israel, and the carriage of *that* people was but a reflection and manifestation of the nature of all mankind, for “as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Pro 27:19).

The exercise of this enmity is continued without interruption from the very beginning of man’s days to the end of his unregenerate life (Gen 6:5). It varies not at all, ever being consistent

⁴⁶ **flouts** – scorns; shows contempt for.

with itself. Never does sin call a truce or lay down the weapons of its rebellion, but persists in its active hostility to God. Then, if divine grace works not a miracle in subduing such enmity and planting in the heart a contrary principle which opposes the same, what must be the doom of such creatures? “Thinkest thou this, O man...that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?” (Rom 2:3). Vain imagination. Christ will yet say, “Those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me” (Luk 19:27).

But so far from owning that they hate God, the vast majority will not only vehemently deny it, but affirm that they respect and love Him. Yet if their fancied love be analysed, it will be found to have respect only to their own interests. While one concludes that God is favourable and lenient with him, he entertains no hard thoughts against Him. So long as he deems God to be prospering him, he bears Him no ill will. He hates not God as One who confers benefits, but as a Sovereign, Lawgiver, Judge. He will not yield to His government or take His Law as the rule of his life, and therefore does he dread His tribunal.

The only God against whom the natural man is not at enmity is one of his own imagination. The deity whom he professes to worship is not the living God, for He is truth and faithfulness, holiness and justice, as well as being gracious and merciful. The soul of man is a complete stranger to holiness, even when his head be bowed in the house of prayer. But God is not deceived by any verbal acknowledgments or external homage. “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Mat 15:8). It is a god of their own devising and not the God of Holy Writ they believe in. It is an awful delusion to fancy they admire God’s character while refusing His Son to reign over them.

This enmity against God is seen in man’s insubordination to the divine Law. That is the particular indictment which is made against him in Romans 8:6-7, for in proof of the statement that “to be carnally minded is death,” the apostle declared, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God,” and then added by way of demonstration, “for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” It should be quite evident that that final clause was not brought in by way of extenuation⁴⁷ (for that had greatly weakened his argument), but instead to give added force unto the awful fact just affirmed.

A servant who performs not his master’s bidding may or may not be guilty of revolt. He cannot be so charged if the task assigned be altogether beyond his physical powers (the absence of eyesight, or the loss of a limb, or the infirmities of old age); but if nothing but moral perversity (a spirit of malice and defiance) prevents the discharge of his duty, then he is most certainly guilty of open revolt. When we are told that the brethren of Joseph “hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him” (Gen 37:4-5), so far from excusing their evil conduct, that only intensified it. They bore him so much ill will as to be morally incapable of treating him amicably.

Such is the inability of fallen man to be in subjection to God’s Law. Originally made upright, created in the divine image, given a nature in perfect harmony with God’s statutes, endowed with faculties both mental and moral which fully capacitated him to meet their requirements, he is now so hostile to his Maker as to be thoroughly averse to His government, so that he cannot cherish what he abominates. Our respect for God is judged by our conformity to His Law. As love unto God is to be gauged by obedience (Joh 14:21), so is hatred of Him both measured and manifested by disobedience (Deu 5:9-10).

The natural man knows that God opposes the gratification of his corrupt desires, and because His Law prohibits the indulging of his lusts with that freedom and security which he covets, he

⁴⁷ **extenuation** – partial excuse or justification.

hates Him. God commands that which he loathes, and forbids what he longs after. Consequently, man's warfare against God is a double one: defensive and offensive. Defensively, he slights His Word, perverts His gifts, resists the motions of His Spirit (Act 7:51). Offensively, he employs all his members and faculties as weapons of unrighteousness against God (Rom 6:13). To slight and resist the divine Law is to hold God Himself in contempt, for the Law is an expression of His goodness, the transcript of His righteousness, the image of His holiness.

Here, then, is the ground of the enmity of the carnal mind: "it is not subject to the law of God." "The secret is now revealed. God is the moral Governor of the universe. Oh, this is the *casus belli*⁴⁸ between Him and the sinner! This constitutes the real secret of his fall, inveterate hostility to the divine being. The question at issue is: Who shall govern—God or the sinner? The non-subjection of the carnal heart to God's Law—its rebellion against the divine government—clearly indicates the side of this question which the carnal mind takes. You may, my reader, succeed in reasoning yourself into the belief that you admire, adore, and love God as your Creator and Benefactor, and only feel a repugnance, and manifest an opposition, to Him as a Lawgiver. But this is impossible in fact, however specious⁴⁹ it may be in theory...God's nature and His office, His person and His throne, are one and inseparable.

"No individual can possibly be a friend to the being of God who is not equally friendly to His government. Why is the moral Law offensive to the carnal mind? Because of the holiness of its nature and the strictness of its requirements. It not only takes cognizance of external actions, but it touches the very springs of action, the motives that lie concealed in the human heart and regulate the life. It demands supreme affection and universal obedience. To this the carnal mind demurs"⁵⁰ (Octavius Winslow, 1808-1878).

Alas, there are multitudes today, even in so-called Christian countries, who are almost totally ignorant of even *the terms* of God's Law—so intense is the darkness that has now settled upon us. The majority of those who have been brought up under a knowledge of the Law, so far from valuing such a privilege, despise the same. The language of their hearts against God's faithful servants is that which Israel used of old unto His prophet, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee" (Jer 44:16). They "refused to walk in his law" (Psa 78:10).

They had rather be their own rulers than God's subjects, and thereby guide themselves to destruction, than be directed by Him to blessedness. They desire unbridled liberty and will not tolerate the restraints of a command which checks them. Whatever compliance there may be—for the sake of respectability—to any divine precept which forbids a gross outward sin, the heart still rises up against the more spiritual part of the law which requires inward purity. The more man's inward corruptions be curbed and condemned, the more is he enraged. Therefore not only does God charge him with despising His judgments (precepts), but says that his soul *abhors* His statutes (Lev 26:43).

The contrariety there is between man and God appears in an unwillingness that His Law should be observed by any. Not satisfied with being a rebel himself, he would have God left without any loyal subjects in the world, and therefore does he employ both temptations and threats to induce his fellows to follow his evil example—now painting the pleasures of sin in glowing colours, then sneering at and boycotting those who have any scruples. Ordinarily the

⁴⁸ *casus belli* – event that causes or justifies a war.

⁴⁹ *specious* – plausible but false; having the ring of truth while being a lie.

⁵⁰ *demurs* – shows objection.

workers of iniquity consider such as walk with God to be freaks and fools, and take delight in railing at them (1Pe 4:4). Yet it is not because the righteous have wronged them in any way, but that the wicked hate them because they refuse to have fellowship with them in defying God. What proof is this of their awful enmity. Not only are they themselves angry at God's laws, but they cannot bear to see anyone else respecting them. Thus the apostle, after enumerating some of the vilest abominations, brought this indictment against the Gentiles, that they "not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom 1:32)—delighting in accomplishing the downfall of their fellows.

Another form taken by man's enmity is his manufacturing of false gods. Though this act be not so palpably committed by some, yet none is entirely clear of the setting up of something in the place of God, for this sin is common to all mankind, as history clearly shows. From the days of Nimrod until the appearing of Christ, the whole Gentile world was abandoned to this impiety, having "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Rom 1:23). Even Abraham originally, as well as his parents, was guilty of the same (Jos 24:2). From the making of the golden calf at Sinai until carried captives into Babylon, the Israelites repeatedly committed this crime.

Even today, the whole of heathendom abounds with hideous idols, and those parts of Christendom now under the accursed dominion of the Papacy are given up to the worship of idols and the adoration of a woman who acknowledged her own need of a Saviour (Luk 1:47). Yet the awfulness of idolatry is perceived by but few. Satan himself cannot invent a more absolutely degrading and vilifying of the Most High, for it is a calling Him by the names of those senseless objects and repulsive creatures which men erect as representations of Him. The giving to an image that homage which belongs to God is making it equal to Him, if not above Him. It portrays the glorious One as though He had no more excellency than a block of stone or piece of carved wood.

Man's enmity against God is a practical repudiation of His *holiness*, for it cherishes what is directly contrary thereto. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab 1:13). Since God be infinitely good, He has an infinite detestation of evil. But sin is the very element in which man lives, and therefore does he hate everything opposed thereto. Nothing is more distasteful to him than the company of the godly, and the stricter they be in performing the duties of piety, and the more the image of God is seen shining in and through them, the greater the longing of the unregenerate to be free from their presence.

So much is man in love with sin that he seeks to justify himself in the very commission of it; yea, he goes farther and charges it upon the Holy One. Thus it was at the beginning. When arraigned by his Maker, instead of confessing the enormity of his offence, Adam sought to excuse himself by blaming it upon God, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen 3:12). John Gill and others thought (and probably rightly so) that when Cain was charged with the murder of Abel, and answered, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9), he blatantly threw the onus⁵¹ on the Lord—"Thou art the One who should have preserved him from harm." Holy David unholily charged the crime he had contrived upon divine providence (2Sa 11:25). And man still blames God by attributing his sins to his constitution or his circumstances.

This fearful hostility is exercised against the very *being of God*. That was clearly demonstrated when He became incarnate. The Son of God was not wanted here, but was despised and rejected of men (Isa 53:3). They provided no better accommodation than a manger for His cradle (Luk

⁵¹ **onus** – blame; responsibility.

2:7). Before He reached the age of two, such a determined effort was made to slay Him that Joseph and Mary had to flee with Him into Egypt (Mat 2:13-14). Though constantly engaged in going about doing good, both to the souls and bodies of men, He had to declare, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Mat 8:20).

They called Him the vilest names they could think of: a glutton and winebibber (Mat 11:19), a Samaritan (Joh 8:48), a devil (Mat 10:25). Again and again, they took up stones to cast at Him (Joh 8:59). His miracles of mercy allayed not their enmity, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him” (Mat 21:38), and no ordinary death would satisfy them. After heaping the worst possible indignities upon His sacred person and inflicting most barbarous suffering, they nailed Him to a convict’s gibbet,⁵² and then mocked and reviled Him while He was fastened hand and foot to the cross (Mat 27:39). And as the Lord Jesus declared, “He that hateth me, hateth my Father also” (Joh 15:23).

Now such an attitude against God inevitably recoils upon ourselves. Alienated from the Source of all real good and purity, what can the consequence be but to be polluted in every part of our beings—a mass of putrefaction? Fearful indeed is the havoc that sin has wrought in the human constitution. Man’s very nature is abased. No creature so degraded as man, for he alone has erased the image of God from his soul.

Man that was once the glory of creation is become the vilest of all creatures. He who was given dominion over the beasts is now sunk lower, for *they* are not guilty of mad and wicked intemperance, they are not without natural affection toward their offspring (as so many of the human species now are), nor do any of them commit suicide. Man’s apostasy from His Maker could not result in anything less than the complete mutilation of his soul, depriving it of that perfect harmony and balance of its faculties (with which it was originally endowed), robbing them of their primitive excellence and beauty. The whole of our inner man has been seized by a loathsome disease, so that there is now no soundness in it.

Oh, what a mass of villainy is there in fallen man! No wonder that the Scriptures ask, “Who can know it?” (Jer 17:9). None but the very One against who it lifts its vile head. What an awful spectacle is this—to behold the finite in deadly opposition to the Infinite! The creature and the Creator are at direct odds, for while a serpentine nature and a devilish disposition remain unsubdued within him, fallen man will no more seek to glorify the Lord than will Satan himself. The unregenerate detest Him who is light and love. The ox knows its owner, and the ass his master’s crib, but the one who has been endowed with rationality and immortality deigns not to “consider” the hand that daily ministers in mercy throughout his life.

With what longsuffering does He bear with those who treat Him so basely! What abundant cause has the Christian to abhor himself and hang his head in shame as he contemplates the sinfulness of all the sin that still indwells him!

⁵² **gibbet** – a stake or cross for publicly displaying an executed criminal.

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 11

15. *Non-literal language.* We have left this important canon of exegesis until a somewhat late stage, because maturity of judgment is called for in the applying of the same. There is considerable amount of non-literal language in the Word of God, and it is very necessary that the expositor should recognize the same. Great harm has been done through failure to do so, and not a few serious errors have been taught as the result of regarding what was figurative as literal.

Generally speaking, the words of Scripture are to be understood in their plain and simple meaning; yea, their natural and obvious signification is always to be retained unless some evident and necessary reason requires otherwise. As, for example, when Christ bids us pluck out a right eye and cut off a right hand if the same causes us to sin (Mat 5:29-30), or when He charged the scribes and Pharisees with “devouring widows’ houses” (Mat 23:14), for manifestly such language is not to be taken at its face value. But there are many other instances which are not nearly so apparent as those, as when Christ said, “By chance there came down a certain priest that way” (Luk 10:31), meaning that he took that direction without any particular purpose or special design—for a literal understanding of those words would deny the orderings of Providence.

Keen discrimination, both spiritual and mental, is required for distinguishing between the literal and the non-literal in Scripture. That applies in the first place to *the translator*, as a few simple illustrations will show. He has to determine in each occurrence of the word *kelayoth*, whether to render it literally “kidneys” or figuratively “reins”. Our Authorized Version gives the former eighteen times, and the later thirteen. In such passages as Psalms 16:7; 26:2; 73:21, “reins” has reference to the *inner man*, particularly the mind and conscience—as the kidneys are for eliminating the impurities of the blood, so the mind and conscience are to deliver us from evil.

The Hebrew word *ruach* literally means “wind,” and is so rendered ninety times in the Authorized Version; yet it is also used emblematically of *the spirit*, often of the Holy Spirit, and is so over 200 times. Much spiritual wisdom and discernment is required by the translator to discriminate. *Lachash* is rendered “earrings” in Isaiah 3:20, but “prayer” in Isaiah 26:16! The Greek word *presbuteros* literally means “an aged person,” and is so rendered in Acts 2:17 and Philemon 1:9, but in most cases it refers to “elders” or church officers.

Now if great care needs to be taken by the translator in distinguishing between things that differ, equally so of the expositor. Let him duly lay to heart the warnings supplied by the experience of the apostles. How often they failed to grasp the meaning of their Master’s language! When He declared, “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth,” they said unto Him, “Declare unto us this parable,” and He answered, “Are ye also yet without understanding?” (Mat 15:11, 15-16).

When He bade them “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees,” they reasoned among themselves and concluded that it was because they had taken no bread (Mat 16:6-7). When He told them that He had meat to eat that they knew not of, they imagined that someone had ministered to His bodily needs during their absence (Joh 4:32-33). When He said, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth,” they supposed (as any of us would have done!) that He referred to natural sleep. How often is it recorded that they “understood not” the words of Christ (Mar 9:32; Luk 18:34; Joh 8:27; 12:16). They quite missed His meaning when He asked, “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” (Joh 21:22-23).

The figurative element is very prominent in the Scriptures, especially so in the Old Testament, where natural things are commonly used and accommodated to explain spiritual things, suiting its instructions to man’s present state, in which he cannot see the things of God except through the glass of nature. Every Hebrew word has a literal sense and stands for some sensible object, and therefore conveys a comparative idea of some impalpable object. While in the body, we must receive information via our senses. We cannot of ourselves form the least idea of any divine or celestial object but as it is compared to and illustrated by something earthly or material. Inward realities are explained by outward phenomena, as in “Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God” (Joe 2:13), and, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Mat 5:6). Spiritual mercies are set before our eyes under their familiar but expressive pictures in nature, as in “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa 44:3), and, “Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let them bring forth salvation” (Isa 45:8).

Others before us have pointed out that there is a divinely designed analogy between the natural and the spiritual worlds. God so framed the visible realms as to shadow forth the invisible, the temporal to symbolize the eternal. Hence the similitudes so often employed by Christ, drawn by Him from the natural kingdom, were not arbitrary illustrations, but pre-ordained figures of the supernatural. There is a most intimate connection between the spheres of creation and of grace, so that we are taught thereby to look from one to the other.

“By means of His inimitable⁵³ parables, Christ showed that when nature was consulted aright, it spoke one language with the Spirit of God; and that the more thoroughly it is understood, the more complete and varied will be found the harmony which subsists between the principles of its constitution and those of His spiritual kingdom” (Patrick Fairbairn, 1805-1874). Who can fail to perceive both the aptness and the sublimity of the parallel between that allusion from the natural realm and its antitypical⁵⁴ realization: “Until the day break, and the shadows flee away” (Song 2:17), where the reference is unto both the first (Joh 8:56) and second appearing of God’s Son in the flesh (Phi 1:6, 10)?

Words are used in a literal sense when given their plain and natural meaning, [but they are used] figuratively when a term is diverted to an object to which it does not naturally or normally belong. Thus, “hard” is the quality of a stone, but when predicated of the heart, it is employed figuratively. A figure of speech consists in the fact of a word or words being used out of their ordinary sense and manner, for the sake of emphasis, by attracting our attention to what is said. Not that a different meaning is given to the word, but a new application of it is made. The meaning of the word is always *the same* when rightly used, and thus figures carry their own light and explain themselves.

⁵³ **inimitable** – matchless; uniquely excellent.

⁵⁴ **antitypical** – having to do with the fulfillment of a type or figure.

In the great majority of instances, there is no difficulty in distinguishing between the Word of God and His works in creation. For the most part, objects in the natural world are plain and simple, easily distinguished; yet some are obscure and mysterious. There are certain “laws” perceptible which regulate the actions of nature. Nevertheless, there are notable exceptions to most of them. Thus we may be sure that God has not employed language which could only confuse and confound the unlearned, yet the meaning of many things in His Word can be ascertained only by hard labour.

If all Scripture had been couched in highly figurative language and mysterious hieroglyphics, it had been quite unsuited to the common man. On the other hand, if all were as simple as the ABC, there had been no need for God to provide teachers (Eph 4:11). But how is the teacher to determine when the language is literal and when non-literal? Generally, plain intimation is given, especially in the employment of metaphor, where one object is used to set forth another, as in “Judah is a lion’s whelp” (Gen 49:9).

More particularly. First, when a literal interpretation would manifestly clash with the essential nature of the subject spoken of, as when physical members are ascribed to God (Exo 33:23), or when the disciple is required to “take up his cross” (live a life of self-sacrifice) in order to follow Christ (Mat 16:24). Second, when a literal interpretation would involve an absurdity or a moral impropriety, as in “When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: and put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite” (Pro 23:1-2)—give no quarter to your lusts; and heaping coals of fire on an enemy’s head (Rom 12:20). Third, refer to other passages, and interpret such a verse as Psalm 26:6 by Genesis 35:1-2 and Hebrews 10:22.

From all that has been said above, it is evident that we must avoid a stark literalism when dealing with sensory or material representations of immaterial things, and when bodily terms are used of non-bodily ones. “The sword shall devour” (Jer 46:10). To devour is the property of a living creature with teeth, but here, by a figure, it is applied to the sword. “Let my right hand forget her cunning” (Psa 137:5). Here “forgetting,” which pertains to the mind, is applied to the hand—signifying “may it lose its power to direct aright.” “I turned to see the voice” (Rev 1:12) means Him that uttered it.

“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God” (Ecc 5:1) may be taken in both a literal and a figurative sense. In the former, it would signify “Let your gait be demure and your speed unhurried and reverent as you approach the place of worship”; in the latter, “Pay attention to the motions of your mind and the affections of your heart, for *they* are to the soul what the feet are to the body.” It is unto the due ordering of our inward man that our attention should be chiefly directed.

It is also very necessary for the expositor constantly to bear in mind that many of the things pertaining to the new covenant are set forth under the figures of the old. Thus Christ is spoken of as “our Passover” (1Co 5:7) and as Priest “after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb 6:20). Paradise is described as “Abraham’s bosom” (Luk 16:22). The New Testament saints are referred to as “Abraham’s seed” and “the Israel of God” (Gal 3:7; 6:16), as “the circumcision” (Phi 3:3), and as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation” (1Pe 2:9), while in Galatians 4:26 they are informed that “Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” Again, the “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched” (Heb 12:18) refers not to any material mount, but to that order of things which was formally instituted at Sinai, the moral features of which were suitably symbolized and strikingly adumbrated by the physical phenomena which attended the giving of the Law. Likewise, “ye are come unto mount Sion” (12:22) no more signifies a material mount than “we have an altar” (13:12) means that Christians have a tangible altar. It is

the antitypical, spiritual, heavenly Sion which is in view—that glorious state into which divine grace has brought all who savingly believe the gospel.

Again, the expositor needs to be on the alert to detect *ironical language*, for it usually signifies the very opposite to what is expressed, being a form of satire for the purpose of exposing an absurdity and to hold it up to ridicule. Such language was employed by God when He said, “Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil” (Gen 3:22); and when He bade Israel, “Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen: let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation” (Jdg 10:14); by Elijah, when he mocked the prophets of Baal, “Cry aloud: for he is a god: either he is...in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened” (1Ki 18:27); by Micaiah, when he answered Jehoshaphat, “Go, and prosper for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king” (1Ki 22:15); by Job, “No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you” (12:2); in Ecclesiastes 11:9, “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth...walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes”; by Christ, when He said, “A goodly price that I was prized at of them” (Zec 11:13); and by Paul, “now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us” (1Co 4:8).

Nor are we to take literally the *language of hyperbole* or exaggeration, when more is said than is actually meant, as when the ten spies said of Canaan, “the cities are great and walled up to heaven” (Deu 1:28), and when we are told that their armies were “even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude” (Jos 11:4). So too the description given of those that came up against Gideon, “like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels without number” (Jdg 7:12), and, “there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee” (1Ki 18:10).

Further examples are found in: “They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths” (Psa 107:26); “Rivers of water run down mine eyes” (Psa 119:136); “A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time” (Isa 60:22); “Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas” (Jer 15:8, which should be borne in mind when reading Revelation 7:9); “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (Joh 21:25).

16. *The elucidation of the types.* No treatise on hermeneutics would be complete if it ignored this important and interesting department of exposition. Yet such a vast field pertains thereto that it is impossible to do it justice in a few sentences. The New Testament plainly teaches that there is not a little in the Old which anticipated and adumbrated things to come. From earliest times, it pleased God to prepare the way for the grand word of redemption by a series of parabolical representations, and the business of the interpreter is to explain the same in the light of the fuller revelation which God has vouchsafed since then.

Types belong to that sphere which concerns the relation of God’s earlier and later dispensations, and therefore a type may be defined as a model or sign of another object or event which it depicted beforehand, shadowing forth something which should later correspond to and provide the reality of the same. But the question arises, How are we to avoid the erroneous and the extravagant in our selection and unfolding of the types? Space will only allow us to offer the following hints and rules.

First, there must be a genuine resemblance in form or spirit between any person, act, or institution under the Old Testament and what answers unto it in the gospel. Second, a real type must be something which had its ordination from God, being meant by Him *to foreshadow* and prepare the way for the better things under Christ. Thus the resemblance between the shadow and the substance must be real and not fancied, and designed as such in the original institution of the former.

It is that previous intention and pre-ordained connection between them which constitutes the relation of type and antitype. Third, in tracing out the connection between the one and the other, we have to inquire, What was the native import of the original symbol? What did it symbolize as a part of the then existing religion? And then the expositor is to proceed and show how it was fitted to serve as a guide and stepping-stone to the blessed events and issues of Messiah's kingdom. For example, by means of the tabernacle and its services God manifested toward His people precisely the same principles of government, and required from them substantially the identical disposition and character, that He does now under the higher dispensation of Christianity. Fourth, due regard must be had to the essential difference between the actual natures of the type and the antitype—the one being material, temporary, and external, the other spiritual, eternal, and often internal. ❧

JULY

LOST

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

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

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

outcast from Him. One who has squandered his substance in riotous living, and is now a spiritual bankrupt and pauper. Out of the way of peace and blessing, and utterly incapable of finding his way back to it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

EXPOSITION OF JOHN’S FIRST EPISTLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"*Because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.*" Upon which S. E. Pierce (1746-1829) said, "By which I conceive the Jewish state, and the present state of the Church is to be understood. The former dispensation is finally closed, it is past, never to return. The present Gospel state of the Church is such that the true or clear light of the Gospel and its ordinances now shineth, and will remain unshaken until our Lord's second coming in His kingdom and glory." The darkness is past because the Sun of righteousness has arisen, and a full and final revelation of God has been made unto men (Heb 1:1-2). The ineffable glory of God has been openly displayed in and by His incarnate Son. The mists of darkness or obscurity which hovered over things in the previous era have been dispelled, and light has been shed on all its symbols. This statement is parallel with 2 Corinthians 5:17, which expresses not the great change wrought in a soul at regeneration, but the dispensational alteration effected by the appearing of Christ, namely that change of state produced by the new covenant's supplanting the old, the ordinances of the Mosaic economy being superseded by the Christian baptism and the Lord's supper.

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

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

In bringing to a conclusion our remarks upon verse 8 it should be pointed out that our English version fails to make clear the beautiful shading of the Greek. In the first clause of its second half “alethes” signifies true as opposed to lying and fictitious—cf. John 8:31, “My disciples indeed,” in contrast with the many nominal ones—whereas “alethinos” in the final clause means true and substantial, as opposed to what is vague, shadowy, symbolical. Hence it occurs again and again in connection with Christ, who is “the true light” (Joh 1:9), “the true bread” (Joh 6:32), “the true tabernacle” (Heb 8:2), “the faithful and true witness” (Rev 3:14). Archbishop Richard C. Trench (1807-1886), that master of words, says that our translators have erred in not rendering “very” as an adjective as well as an adverb—as in the Nicene Creed⁵⁵ it is rendered “very God of very God.” John Wyclif’s⁵⁶ version (see the Hexapla) translated John 15:1, “I am the very Vine.” Thus, as Levi Palmer pointed out, “Christ is the great reality, the very light”—the substance of all the shadows and emblems of the Levitical system.

⁵⁵ **Nicene Creed** (AD 325) – an early creed or profession of faith of the Christian church. It is called “Nicene” because it was adopted in the city of Nicaea by the first ecumenical council which met there. It has been normative for the Anglican Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, and many Protestant denominations. The Nicene Council was called in the face of the Arian controversy. Arius, a Libyan presbyter in Alexandria, had declared that although the Son was divine, he was a created being and therefore not co-essential with the Father, and “there was when he was not.” This made Jesus less than the Father, which challenged the doctrine of the Trinity. The Nicene Creed explicitly affirms the co-essential divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

⁵⁶ **John Wyclif** (c.1328-1384) – English Scholastic philosopher, theologian, lay preacher, translator, reformer, and university teacher at Oxford in England, who was known as an early dissident in the Roman Catholic Church during the 14th century. He is sometimes called “The Morning Star of the Reformation,” and was also an early advocate for translation of the Bible into the common language. He completed his translation directly from the Vulgate into vernacular English in the year 1382.

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

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

In view of what is stated so emphatically in verse 8 we are left in no doubt of exactly what is purported by anyone saying “he is in the light,” though the same may be expressed in several ways. It is making claim that he is in communion with God in Christ (1:5, 7). It is averring that he is a born-again soul, for it is only by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit that we are made “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12). Thus it is to declare himself to be a real Christian. But if such a one hates his brother, his claim is invalid, for his profession is repudiated by his conduct. Such a one has mistaken an intellectual attainment for a spiritual experience. He may indeed be charmed by the magnanimous spirit of the Gospel, admire its sublime and transcendent ethics, or extol its logical doctrines and profound depths; nevertheless the very light which he eulogizes is still something outside himself, for he has never been experientially turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God (Act 26:18), nor has the day star arisen in his heart (2Pe 1:19).

“He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness.” His language conforms to the Christian state, but his disposition agrees not therewith. In reality he belongs to that prolific generation who “profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient” (Ti 1:16). John is referring to one who makes a public acknowledgment that he loves Him who is “the true light,” but if he did, then he would also love those who are His brethren, for Christ is in them (Gal 2:20). True, there is still much of the flesh evidenced by them, nevertheless if they be “in Christ,” then He is in them, and He cannot be hid (Mar 7:24), and

where any of His perfection shine forth, however feebly, a regenerated heart is drawn out unto the same. It is impossible to be in communion with God and not to love His people. When any heart be divinely illuminated with a saving knowledge of God in Christ, it is so renovated and transformed as to produce an answerable disposition unto all others who have experienced a like miracle of grace within them.

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

"He that hateth his brother is in darkness." That all hatred is not sinful is clear from Psalm 45:7, for there it is said to the glory of the God-man, "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness." Really, love and hatred are but the opposite poles of the same moral principle: "Ye that love the LORD, hate evil" (Psa 97:10, and cf. 119:113)—love for the One necessarily begets hatred of the other. Hatred becomes sinful only when it is exercised against that which is entitled to be loved. Love and hatred—two of the principal influencing principles of action—are natural affections, and they are good or evil according to the objects to which they are applied and affixed. The one has its use as much as the other: aversion and shunning are as necessary as longing and pursuit. Love was made for God and all good; hatred for sin—the latter being put in man at the beginning, that he might fly from temptation and evil. As carnal men hate the truth (Psa 50:17), so the saint is to hate all error and falsehood (Psa 119:104). "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil" (Pro 8:13), and therefore it is our duty to arm ourselves and take every precaution against it. There are many who forbear sin who do not abominate it.

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

"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness." The "brother" is, of course, a real child of God, for there is not a single instance in the New Testament where a fellow man as man is designated a brother. The only brotherhood mentioned therein is the Household of Faith. The one who hates him (no matter what be his profession) is unregenerate. Therein is the

awful malignity of this hatred seen, in the fact that it has a child of God for its object: hence the added words “even until now.” Such hatred attests the utter depravity of his moral judgment and demonstrates that he is led captive by the devil at his will. As there is an innate contrariety between virtue and vice, fire and water, so there is between the seed of the serpent and the seed of Christ (Gen 3:15). Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, it is so against all those who bear His image. There is ever that in true piety which stirs up the venom of the unregenerate. So far from one who hates the followers of Christ being in the light, he is both in and of the world (Joh 15:19).

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

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

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

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

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

Canaan was (as we have previously pointed out) at once a divine gift, yet as to their occupying of the same, it was the result of Israel's own prowess. It was bestowed upon them by free grant from God, nevertheless, it had to be conquered by them. Therein there was an accurate shadowing forth of the Christian's inheritance. That too is wholly of divine grace and mediatorial purchase, but it is not actually entered into by the heirs of promise without much effort on their part. It is at this point that theologians have so often gone wrong, by attributing either too much or too little unto the creature. Only by cleaving very closely to Holy Writ *as a whole*—and not be singling out detached fragments—are we preserved from serious error. On the one hand, we must see to it that we return right answers to the questions, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1Co 4:7); on the other, we must give due place to such exhortations as, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luk 13:24) and "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest" (Heb 4:11); and not ignore such statements as, "knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance" (Col 3:24). Only thus will the balance of truth be preserved.

It is indeed true that the child of God has nothing good or spiritual but what the Lord has freely bestowed upon him. But does that mean he is as passive a "receiver" as the earth is when fructified by heaven's refreshing showers and genial sunshine? Great care needs to be taken in answering that question lest we contradict the Word of truth. Certainly he is no co-operator with Christ in the work of his redemption. There is not the least warrant for us to say, "God will do His part if we do ours." There is no dividing of the honours. The glory is God's alone, and we have *no ground* for boasting. Most assuredly the elect have nothing to do with their election, for God

chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world, and there is not a line in His Word to show that His choice was determined by anything praiseworthy which He foresaw in them. Those ordained to be vessels of honour were “clay of the same lump” as the vessels appointed to dishonour. Nor had they a thing to do with their redemption, for all that was required to make atonement for their sins and reconcile them to God was accomplished by Christ centuries before they existed. Nor had they anything whatever to do with their regeneration, for they were dead in trespasses and sins when the Spirit quickened them into newness of life.

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

It must not be forgotten that Scripture itself records, and without the least condemnation or criticism, such utterances as “by the word of thy lips *I have* kept me from the paths of the destroyer” (Psa 17:4). “I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word” (Psa 119:101). “I keep under my body” (1Co 9:27). “I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith” (2Ti 4:7). Those are not carnal boastings but true statements of fact, and due place must be given to them in our theological system, or our doctrinal beliefs are very defective. True indeed, it was by divine grace that those men conducted themselves thus, yet *they* were active moral agents therein, and not passive ciphers. Thus also was Canaan a divine gift unto Abraham and his descendants, but they had to fight—fight long and hard—in order to enter into possession of the same. True also that the Lord fought for them, and that their victories must be ascribed unto Him who so signally showed Himself strong in their behalf; nevertheless, that altered not the fact that *they* fought and subdued their foes. Both the divine and the human sides are to be recognized and owned by us.

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

ciency of our own, but if grace be duly sought (Heb 4:16), then “our sufficiency is of God” (2Co 3:5).

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

It is to be noted that after informing His servant that he was old and stricken in years—for the Lord never flatters man, nor withholds His truth (except in judgment) from man—He did *not* say, “but there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed”; instead it was “*and* there remaineth.” Thus, He was not saying this by way of reproach. It appears to us that God so addressed Himself to Joshua on this occasion, first, to *instruct* him. To let him know that He was no Egyptian taskmaster, who imposed burdens grievous to be borne; rather did He tenderly remember that Joshua was dust. By virtue of growing frailty, he would be unfit to complete so vast a task as conquering the whole of Canaan—the major part of which remained to be done. Second, to *humble* him. While Joshua had much ground to be thankful for, the considerable success with which the Lord had crowned his efforts, he had no reason to be elated, for the enemy was still in possession of the remoter sections of Israel’s inheritance. Third, it was, as the following verses make clear, for the purpose of acquainting him with his immediate *duty*.

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

As intimated above, one of the Lord’s designs in now appearing unto Joshua was to make known unto him his duty; yea, this seems to have been His leading object. What that duty consisted of was revealed in verse 7. He was to superintend in the apportioning of the land unto the nine and a half tribes—the other two and a half having already been allotted their heritage by Moses. It

was most essential that *he* should be the one to perform this task. Clothed as he was with divine authority, called of God to be Israel's head, so markedly used by Him in vanquishing the armies of the Amorites and destroying their strongholds, none so well fitted as he now to divide the spoils of victory. Enjoying the confidence of the congregation, it behoved him to set about this important task while life and sufficient strength remained, and not leave unto some successor to do what could be far better and more appropriately done by himself. The decisions of the one who had in the hearing of the nation commanded the sun and the moon to stand still would not be challenged by the tribes; whereas it was not nearly so likely that they would freely accept the rulings of another. Joshua then must not delay.

"This is the land that yet remaineth [i.e. to be possessed]: all the borders of the Philistines, and all Geshuri" (verse 2). From there to the end of verse 6 follows a list of the more remote sections of Palestine which were still occupied by the heathen. Here, then, by clear implication, was another task assigned unto Joshua—to stir up the people unto further efforts, that while he could not personally take any further part in the fighting, he must press upon the nation the duty still devolving upon *them*. Instead of now taking their ease and being satisfied with those portions of their inheritance which had already been secured, they must continue to "*possess* their possessions" (Oba 1:17), and not miss God's best for them. It is highly probably that the great majority of Israel were quite ignorant of the extent of the land, unacquainted with the terms of the promise made by the Lord unto Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21, etc. During their lengthy sojourn in Egypt, their ancestors had lapsed into idolatry (see Lev 17:7; Eze 20:7-8; 23:3), and so unacquainted were they with the Lord Himself that when JEHOVAH commissioned Moses to lead His people out of the house of bondage he asked, "When I...say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me to you; and they shall say to me, *What is his name?* what shall I say unto them?" (Exo 3:13).

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

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out three reasons why the Lord commissioned Joshua to acquaint Israel with the fact that "there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed," and to amplify that statement by announcing to them all the geographical details given in verses 2-5. First, that they might be more affected with God's goodness in giving them so extensive a portion, and thereby be engaged to love and serve Him. He would have them occupied with the divine bounty, that their obedience to Him might be prompted by gratitude and not by a slavish fear. And thus it is to be with His people today. Deep appreciation of His grace and goodness is to

prompt them to run in the path of His commandments. Second, that they might not be tempted to make any league or contract any dangerous familiarity with those neighbours, so as to learn their ways; but might be jealous of them, as those who kept them out of their rightful inheritance. In like manner, Christians, as they contemplate the possession purchased for them, are to conduct themselves as strangers and pilgrims in this scene, keeping their garments unspotted from the world, walking with God in separation therefrom. Third, that they might keep themselves in a posture of war, and not think of putting off their harness as long as there remained any of the land to be possessed.

In closing this article, a final word upon the application of verses 1-5 to *the aged pilgrim*. You may, dear reader, be stricken in years, nevertheless the fact must be faced that “there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.” No matter what be your growth in grace or the extent of your progress in spiritual things, you are not as completely conformed to the image of Christ as you should be, nor have you as fully possessed your possessions (Oba 1:17), as it is your privilege to do. Take a leaf out of the apostle’s book. Near the close of his life, he declared, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, *I press toward* the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phi 3:13-14). Do thou the same. As for verses 2-5, we too should sit down and draw up a list of those parts of our heritage not yet experientially possessed by us—and note that verse 2 is headed by the most difficult one, for the later Scriptures show that Israel had most trouble from the Philistines. Do you ask, What good could that do? It should humble. It should prompt to more definite prayer. We read of “the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2Co 10:1). Are those graces made good in you?

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

8. Its Extent, Part 1

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

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

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

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

The effects of the fall are not only more terrible, but much wider-reaching than are commonly supposed. Yet this would not be the case were our thoughts formed by the teaching of Holy Writ thereon. God’s Word is plain enough. It declares that “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). Those words are as impressive as they are solemn. In Genesis 1:31, we read, “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good”—but here the Omniscient

One is portrayed as taking a universal survey of the condition of mankind, and recording His righteous verdict unto their utter condemnation. They announce His unerring diagnosis of their inward state in terms which fully explain their outward conduct. The spring of all their actions is thoroughly corrupt. It is to be duly noted that the translators of the Authorized Version have given a fuller rendering in the margin, informing us that the Hebrew word signified “the whole imagination,” including the purposes and desires. The very fount of man’s being was defiled, and a most offensive sight did it present unto the Holy One.

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

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

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

“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecc 8:11). Such is the perversity of corrupt human nature that it abuses the very patience and forbearance of God; since the divine judgment is not

visited at once upon evil-doers, they set themselves against the Lord and promise themselves immunity. Thus it was with those in the days of Noah. God deferred the flood for one hundred and twenty years, giving them ample “space for repentance,” but instead of availing themselves thereof, they regarded His threats as idle ones, and became increasingly corrupt and violent. Thus it was with Pharaoh, who only hardened his heart when respite was granted him. And thus it is still. Though the marks of the divine displeasure against our generation are multiplied, they grow more and more daring and desperate in defying God’s Law, sinning with a high hand and presuming on their security.

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

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

When Christ asserted, “Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3), He showed how desperate is his plight, for the new birth is not a mere correcting of some defect, nor the righting of a single faculty, but an entire renovation of the soul. The same Spirit which formed Christ in the virgin’s womb must form Him in our hearts to fit us for the presence of God. When he averred that “men loved darkness rather than light” (Joh 3:19), He exposed their awful depravity—that they were not only *in* the darkness, but *delighted* therein, and that “because their deeds were evil” (Joh 3:19). When He stated that “the wrath of God abideth on” the unbeliever (Joh 3:36), Christ testified to man’s awful condition. When He said, “I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you” (Joh 5:42), He again revealed their fearful state, for since all goodness or virtue consists in love to God and our neighbour, then where love be wanting, goodness or virtue has no existence. His “No man can come to me, except the Father which

hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44), plainly showed the moral impotency of every descendant of Adam, an impotency which consists of turpitude and baseness, namely an inveterate opposition to God, due to its bitter hatred of Him—none will seek unto one he loathes—before ever he does so, he must be given an entire change of disposition.

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

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

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 12

17. *Exposition of the parables.* This is another branch of our subject unto which at least one whole article ought to be devoted, but the danger of overtaking the patience of some of our readers renders it inadvisable. Because of the great simplicity of their nature and language, it is commonly supposed that the parables are more easily understood than any other form of scriptural instruction, when the fact is that probably more erroneous teaching has been given out through misapprehending the force of some of *their* details than is the case with anything else in the Word. Great care needs to be taken with them—especially is it important to ascertain and then keep in mind *the scope* or leading design of each one. But instead of so doing, only too often they

are approached solely for the purpose of finding apparent support for some particular doctrine or idea which the preacher desires to prove. And in consequence, not a little in them has been wrested from its original purport, and made to signify what is flatly contradicted by other passages. Here, too, the Analogy of Faith must be held steadily in view, and our interpretation of each parable made to square therewith.

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

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

Fourth, it is important to obtain a right understanding of the parabolical *representation* itself, since it supplies the basis of the spiritual instruction. Unless we understand the natural allusion, we cannot give a satisfactory exposition of the language in which it is set forth. Care has also to be taken that we do not extend the representation beyond the bounds in which it was intended to move. That representation becomes obvious when we concentrate upon the leading idea of the parable and allow its details to make that more distinct. A parable must not be broken into parts but looked at as a whole, though let it not be forgotten that every detail contributes unto its central truth, there being no mere verbiage. Usually *the context* makes clear what is its purpose and purport. Thus the parable of the king taking account of his servants (Mat 18:23) was in reply to Peter's inquiry in verse 21; that of the rich fool in Luke 12 was occasioned by a spirit of covetousness on the part of one who desired to obtain a part of his brother's inheritance. Those in Luke 15 grew out of what is related in its opening verses. Parables bear upon the more fundamental aspects of duty and deportment rather than on the minute details of either.

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

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

Since there be no room to doubt that the parable of the labourers in the vineyard was designed to illustrate the words in Matthew 19:30 and 20:16, it is clear that it was never intended to teach the way of salvation—to interpret it so is entirely to miss its scope. The Lord's object was manifestly to impress upon His disciples that, unless they mortified the same, the evils of the heart were of such a character as to rob the earliest and most prolonged external devotion of all value, and that the latest and briefest service unto Him would, by reason of the absence of self-assertion, be deemed worthy in His sight of receiving reward equal to the former. Moreover, He would have them know that He would do what He would with His own—they must not dictate the terms of service. It has been justly observed by Bishop Trench in his notes on this parable that an "agreement was made by the *first* hired labourers (20:2) before they entered upon their labour—exactly the agreement which Peter wished to make, 'What shall we have?'—while those subsequently engaged went in a simpler spirit, trusting that whatever was right and equitable the householder would give them."

18. *Words with different meanings.* There are many terms in the Scriptures which are by no means employed uniformly. Some have diverse senses, others are given varied shades of one general sense. That does not mean they are used arbitrarily or capriciously, still less in order to confuse the minds of the simple. Sometimes it is because the original term is too full to be expressed

by a single English equivalent. Sometimes it occurs with another form of emphasis. More often it is the various applications which are made of it to several objects. Thus, it is an important part of the expositor's task to trace out those distinctions, and, instead of confounding the same, make clear each fresh sense, and thus "rightly divide the word of truth." Thus the Greek word *Paracletos* is rendered "Comforter" of the Spirit in John's Gospel, but "advocate" of Jesus Christ in his first Epistle (2:1). There appears to be little in common between those expressions, but when we discover that the Greek term means "one called to one's side (to help)," the difficulty is removed, and the blessed truth is revealed that the Christian has *two* divine Helpers: a practical and a legal; one within his heart and one in heaven, one ministering to him, the other engaged for him.

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

Let us now consider a few examples wherein the same English word is given a number of variants. As in the well-known words of our Lord, "Let the dead bury their dead" (Mat 8:22), so the word "see" is used in two different senses in Hebrews 2:8-9, "But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus...crowned with glory, and honour," where the first refers to open sight, the second to faith's perception. "Ransom" is by *power* as well as by price. Sometimes God defended or delivered His people by destroying His enemies, Proverbs 21:18; Isaiah 43:3; Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea. Many have been much perplexed by the markedly different applications made of the word "burden" in Galatians 6:2, 5: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ...Every man shall bear his own burden." The former has in view the burdens of the Christian's infirmities, which should be sympathetically, prayerfully and practically shouldered by his brethren and sisters. The latter has reference to individual responsibility, his personal state and destiny, which he must himself discharge, that cannot be shifted upon others. The Greek word for the former is "weights" or loads—calling for a friendly hand. The latter signifies a "charge" or trust imposed.

The meaning of the term "flesh" appears to be so obvious that many would regard it as quite a waste of time to look up its various connections in Scripture. It is hastily assumed that the word is synonymous with the physical body, and so no careful investigation is made. Yet, in fact, "flesh" is used in Scripture to include far more than the physical side of our being. We read of "the will of the flesh" (Joh 1:13) and "the works of the flesh" (Gal 5:19), some of which are acts of the mind. When it is said, "The Word was made flesh" (Joh 1:14), we are to understand that He took unto Himself an entire human nature, consisting of spirit (Luk 23:46), soul (Joh 12:27), and body. "In the days of his flesh" (Heb 5:7) signifies the time of His humiliation, in contrast with His present exaltation and glory. Again, the average reader of the Bible imagines that "the world" is the

equivalent of the whole human race, and consequently many of the passages in which it occurs are wrongly interpreted. Many too suppose that the term “immortality” calls for no critical examination, concluding that it refers to the indestructibility of the soul. But we must never assume that we understand anything in God’s Word. If the concordance be consulted, it will be found that “mortal” and “immortal” are never applied to man’s soul, but always to his *body*.

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

The word “judgment” is another which calls for real study. There are judgments of God’s *mouth* which His servants must faithfully declare (Psa 119:13), namely the whole revelation of His will, the rule by which we are to walk and by which He will yet judge us. Those “judgments” (Exo 21:1) are the divine edicts which make known the difference between right and wrong. There are also judgments of God’s *hand*, “I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me” (Psa 119:75). Those are for the gracious discipline of His children; whereas those upon the wicked (Eze 5:15) are judicial curses and punishments. In some passages, they express the whole of God’s providential ways, many of which are “a great deep” (Psa 36:6), “unsearchable” (Rom 11:33) to any finite mind, not to be pried into by us. They intimate His sovereign rule, for “righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne” (Psa 97:2), likewise the rectitude of Christ’s administration (Joh 9:39). “He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles” (Isa 42:1) imports the righteous doctrine of His Gospel. In Jude 14 and 15, the reference is to the solemn transactions of the last day. “Teach me good judgment and knowledge” (Psa 119:66) is a request for discretion, a clearer apprehension to apply knowledge rightly. To “do justice and judgment” (Gen 18:19) signifies to be equitable and just in our dealings.

WELCOME TIDINGS

Because of the prevalence of evil and the comparative scarcity of godliness, the saints of all ages have felt how suitable it was to make use of that prayer, “It is time for thee, LORD, to work” (Psa 119:126), though perhaps it may be questioned if they always gave those words the right

sense, for in view of the next clause, “for they have made void thy law,” the reference appears to be “work in judgment” rather than mercy. Be that as it may, while every renewed heart longs to see God working more manifestly and extensively in mercy, yet do we not often fail to realize that God *is now working* graciously, and withhold from Him that praise which is His due? Most frequently He works secretly and silently, unobtrusively, by the “still small voice,” but none the less really. He is still gathering out His own elect, feeding His sheep, maintaining a witness to Himself in the earth. The following unsolicited testimonies from our readers bear witness thereto; and other ministries, both oral and written, are being used of Him today. Then be not backward in lifting up your hearts in thanksgiving unto Him.

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

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

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

“Your *Studies* have been of much blessing to me, and I read them over and over again. They have been a real source of spiritual refreshment for one who is serving the Lord in this part of His vineyard” (Costa Rica). “May God give you more strength to continue this blessed magazine” (Syria). “We have received much blessing from your articles, and been made to realize again and

again our own nothingness and unworthiness; but also have learnt more of the faithfulness of our gracious God” (New South Wales). “We thank our Lord Jesus for the *Studies*, and trust you will both be strengthened to continue the good work. Only eternity will reveal all that it means to those who receive them and dig deeply” (Victoria). “Looking back at the twenty-nine years’ issues in my possession, I marvel at your patience and other virtues that have enabled you to maintain such a continuance of faithful service for so long” (New Zealand). ❧

AUGUST

FOUND

“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luk 19:10). Our very familiarity with those words is apt to deprive them of their impressiveness and make us lose our sense of wonderment at them. First, in connection with the Seeker Himself. This was none other than the Beloved and co-equal of the Father. To engage in His quest, it was needful for Him to leave heaven and come down to this earth. But more—it was required that He become incarnate and take upon Him the nature not of angels, but be made “in the likeness of sin’s flesh” (Rom 8:3). Nor was that sufficient—He had to go where the objects of His search were, and that entailed His being made sin, coming under the curse of the broken Law, being abandoned of God for a season. This was absolutely imperative if any of Adam’s fallen race were to be recovered, for in themselves they were utterly undone, irretrievably ruined, but the Son of God became the Son of man to bring hope to the hopeless, to give life to the dead, to heal the incurable, to—not merely try to, or offer to, but *actually*—seek and save that which was lost.

There could be no possibility of failure in connection with such a mission as that, for the infinite resources of the Godhead guaranteed its complete success, and therefore was it divinely announced of Him as a child, “Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he *shall save* his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21). Not simply that He would be willing on His part so to do, but that, despite their native unwillingness and all other opposition, He *should* save them. Ah, but note who are the ones to be so favoured and blessed—not all mankind, but “his people”—those given to Him by the Father before the foundation of the world (Joh 17:2, 24; Eph 1:4). It was not the “dogs” (Mat 7:6), the “wolves” (Mat 10:16), or the “goats” (Mat 25:32), but the “sheep” that Christ came to seek and to save (Joh 10:16), and for whom He gave His infinitely precious life (Joh 10:11). And that was given at no peradventure or uncertainty, but with the infallible assurance that He “*shall see his seed...he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied*” (Isa 53:10-11).

As the Lord Jesus so plainly and so blessedly taught, He would “go after that which is lost, until he find it” (Luk 15:4), for since a lost sheep never seeks its owner, the Shepherd must seek His sheep. This He does, in marvellous grace, with every one of God’s elect, and therefore does He declare of each of them, “I am found of them that *sought me not*” (Isa 65:1). From the apostle’s quotation of it in Romans 10:20, it is clear that, in its general scope, that verse was a prediction of God’s turning unto the Gentiles after His casting off the Jews. The heathen nations neither sought after God nor called upon His name; yet without any solicitation from them, the preachers of the Gospel were sent unto them. But as John Calvin (1509-1564) pointed out, their case “was a

type of a universal fact.” Such is indeed so, as Old Testament and New abundantly illustrate. The salvation of any lost sinner is due alone to the amazing and sovereign grace of God, and not because of anything he does or purposes doing, for not only is his salvation entirely unbought, but *unsought* by him.

Take the case of *Abraham*, and his is a pattern one, for he is “the father [or prototype] of all them that believe” (Rom 4:11). Joshua 24:2, 14 reveals something of the conditions in which he lived before and at the time when God “found” him. He came of an idolatrous stock who served false gods. When the Lord would humble the proud hearts of Israel, He reminded them of their lowly origin and bade them look “to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father” (Isa 51:1-2)—whom I plucked as a brand from the burning. Acts 7:2 informs us, “The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia.” That was an act of distinguishing favour, for He did not discover Himself to his fellow citizens. As Isaiah 51:2 declares, “I called him *alone*, and blessed him,” and as Joshua 24:3 records, “I took him throughout all the land of Canaan.” Thus, in his case, God was found of one who sought Him not.

Take the case of *Jacob*. If ever there was a man who exemplified in his own person that God has chosen the base things of the world (1Co 1:28), it was he. According to the flesh, there was nothing winsome or pleasing about him. Selfish, scheming, deceitful, untruthful, he was a most unamiable character. There was nothing whatever in him to attract the love of God, yet on the memorable night at Bethel, he found Him whom he sought not. A fugitive from his father’s house, fleeing from his brother’s wrath, most probably with no thought of God in his mind, he laid himself down on the ground to sleep, with stones for his pillows. It was then that the God of all grace appeared unto him and made Himself known as a *giving God* (Gen 28:13), and declared, “I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” He found him when he had nothing, deserved nothing but wrath, gave him everything, and promised to protect him wheresoever he went.

Moses (Exo 3:1-2), the Hebrews in Egyptian bondage, Samuel, David, are further examples. But consider the case of *the woman at the well* (Joh 4), who most unmistakably found the Lord, though she sought Him not. A despised Samaritan, an adulteress, shunned by others, she came at midday—when she supposed the well would be deserted—to draw water. She was unacquainted with the Lord Jesus, and had no expectation of meeting Him and no thought of being converted that day. Poor desolate soul! But Christ was there at the well. There *first*, for He is the Alpha of salvation as well as the Omega of it. He was there waiting for her! He knew all about her desperate need and was ready to minister unto it. He was there to illumine her darkened understanding, to overcome her prejudices, to subdue her rebellious will, to *invite Himself* into her heart. He did so, and she “left her waterpot” and went on her way rejoicing, to witness unto His grace.

Take the case of *Saul of Tarsus*. He was a self-righteous Pharisee, and when such a one came before God, it was not to seek mercy at His hands, but to thank Him that he was not as other men were, and to boast of his good deeds. He belonged to that sect which, instead of welcoming the gracious ministry of Christ, complained that He was the friend of publicans and sinners. But worse: he was filled with enmity against Him and took the lead in persecuting and hounding His people. Not only did he consent to the death of Stephen, but “he made havoc of the church,” entered the homes of its members, and committed them to prison. Having obtained yet greater authority from the high priest of the Jews, and while yet “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” he was found of Christ. So far from seeking Him, he was resisting with all his might, for it is clear from His words in Acts 9:5, that the Spirit had been striving with him; yet, instead of yielding to conviction, he was kicking *against* the pricks!

Does some reader exclaim, “But *my case* was very different from any of those you have described above, being more like that of Nicodemus, Bartimaeus, or the dying thief. I was indeed a great sinner, yet realized my lost condition, and earnestly and diligently sought the Lord”? Even so—and you were but doing what God has commanded all to do (Isa 55:6)—that in no wise clashes with anything we have said. God was equally beforehand in *your* case, for He not only chose you before you chose Him (Joh 15:16), and loved you before you had any love for Him (1Jo 4:19), but acted upon you before you acted toward Him. He had to speak the quickening word before you could come forth from your spiritual grave (Joh 2:43), open your blind eyes ere you were able to see your lost condition, change your heart before you were disposed to seek Him, and draw (Joh 6:44) ere you came to Him. Thus you have no ground for boasting, nothing for which you can take any credit unto yourself. All the glory of your salvation belongs alone unto the Lord.

“And go after that which is lost, until he find it. And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders *rejoicing*” (Luk 15:4-5). How little is *this aspect* of our salvation dwelt upon today, either by those in the pulpit or those in the pew! So self-centred are we, so occupied with what redemption brings to *us*, that we give little thought unto what it means unto the Redeemer Himself. Oh, what holy satisfaction is His each time that He sees of the travail of His soul! How *His heart* is gladdened whenever He secures another of those who were given to Him by the Father! It was in anticipation of the same that He endured the cross (Heb 12:2). Moreover, as Luke 15:6 goes on to inform us, He shares *His joy* with those in the “home” above—each time one of God’s elect is saved, tidings of the same are announced in heaven! “Every display of the Saviour’s grace is a jewel in His mediatorial crown. O what hearts have we, that we are not more humble before Him, more thankful to Him, and more joyful in Him! Lord Jesus help us, Gentile sinners, to look back, to look within, to look up, and to look forward, to excite humility, thankfulness, and joy of heart. Look forward my soul, for heaven is before you. Jesus stands ready to receive you, the Father to embrace you, the Spirit to triumph over you. Glory shall complete what grace has begun” (W. Mason, 1785).

EXPOSITION OF JOHN’S FIRST EPISTLE

20. Light and Love (2:10)

“He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.”

The apostle continues to develop his theme of the relation and interrelation of light and love. As might well be expected, he had begun with a reference to “the love of God,” for His is ever the fountain of ours, whether it be unto Himself or unto His children. As Calvin pertinently remarked, “He pursues the same metaphor. He said that love is the only true rule according to which our life is to be formed (verse 5); he said that this rule or law is presented to us in the Gospel (verse 7); he said lastly, that it is there as the meridian light which ought to be continually looked on (verse 9).

Now, on the other hand, he concludes that all are blind and walk in darkness who are strangers to love. But that he mentioned before the love of God and now the love of the brethren involves no more contrariety than there is between the effect and the cause. Besides, these are so connected together that they cannot be separated”—so united that where the one is the other is found also.

More specifically: in verses 7-11 professing Christians are tested by their response to that divine precept which enjoins the exercise of brotherly love. It is made the criterion of one's being in the light or in the darkness. John began by reminding his readers that the commandment which he was pressing upon them was no invention of his, but rather what they had first heard from the lips of Christ (Joh 13:34). That it was the old commandment which required us to love our neighbour as ourselves, but which had been renewed by the Lord Jesus, perfectly exemplified by Him in His treatment of the apostles, and then enforced by new motives and considerations. Next he had declared that the claim made by anyone to being in the light while yet he hated his brother was a false one, for such conduct demonstrated that he was still in the darkness. Finally, he urges the duty of brotherly love by a high commendation of its exercise (verse 10), and utters a most awful denunciation upon the one who violates the same (verse 11). Such appears to us to be his train of thought.

It is important to take note of the tense of the verbs in our present verse, for a more severe and searching test of Christian profession is in view than in the preceding one: there, it was a question of being in the light; here, of abiding in the light. Thus it is far more than a single act or fleeting affection which is referred to—perseverance is what crowns an action. Yet another link with the context should here be observed. At the close of verse 8 it was stated that “the true light now shineth,” where the reference was more an objective one; now the subjective application is made thereof—shineth in you, and so through you—and not simply upon us as in John 8:12. There is as much difference between external and internal light, and between intellectual and spiritual, as there would have been between the twelve spies returning with only a bare report of what they had seen in the land and their actually bringing with them clusters of the grapes of Canaan upon their shoulders—a beautiful figure of Gospel graces in the heart.

As 1:6-7, has revealed, to walk in the light indicates that one is regenerate and in fellowship with God in Christ. What, then, is the relation of love to light? It is twofold: an effect thereof, and a necessary means for preserving us in the light. “Light is essential to love, and love is inseparable from this light. Light is love's home, and love is light's offspring. Love is born in the light. We have only to know God to love Him, and we have only to see God's image in our brethren to love them. As the light transforms the chrysalis into the butterfly, so light creates love, and wings it for heaven. Love grows in the light. It is a tropical plant, and thrives best in the meridian of spiritual life. Love loves in the light. When God's glory shines in the face of a Christian brother we cannot help loving him. In this sense we can love all through Christ. Onesimus the slave became in Christ Jesus a brother beloved (Phm 1). The nearest way to our brother is through the heart of Christ. Love conquers in the light. This light subdues the flesh and eclipses the glory of the world. Love abides in the light. It is lust that seeks the darkness. Those who love darkness rather than light show that their deeds are evil” (Levi Palmer).

Brotherly love is one of the blessed fruits which issue from a soul's enjoying communion with Him who is light. The exercise thereof is also essential to the maintenance of that communion, for where ill will is cherished against a fellow saint the Holy Spirit is grieved and communion with God is hindered. In verse 9 the existence and exercise of brotherly love is made a test of our being in the light, but in verse 10 it is both the effect and the means of continuing therein. As Robert S. Candlish (1806-1873) also pointed out, “The law of action and reaction is here very noticeable.

Being in the light begets brotherly love. Brotherly love secures abiding in the light. For this brotherly love is love to the true light shining in my brother as in Christ. And such love to the true light, wherever and in whomsoever it is seen shining, as it shines in Christ, must needs cause me to grow up more and more into the true light, to grow up into Christ.” Our affections ever follow our apprehensions, for the heart is reached via the mind, and therefore the measure of our love makes manifest the measure of our spiritual light.

It is no mere verbal claim which is here made, but something that speaks louder than words. It is far more than the use of endearing expressions by the lips being seen and felt in deeds. It is a real, active, benevolent affection, which suffers nothing in its object to quench the same. As hatred is a malignant disposition which fills with ill will against another, so love is a frame of mind that produces respect and esteem for another. As hatred is a murderous lust which seeks to injure, love is a principle which aims at the good of its object. That which is here in view is not a natural trait, but a spiritual grace, yea, the queen of the Christian graces. It is exercised in a great variety of ways: ministering to the body, comforting the mind, promoting the welfare of the soul. It is expressed in practical forms, as far as lies within the power of its possessor. Thus it supplies an external evidence of the inward reality of a real Christian profession, for such outgoings of good will fall more or less under the notice and observation of fellow saints.

“*He that loveth his brother*” for Christ’s sake, and for what he sees of Christ in him, loves him sincerely and cordially—“*abideth in the light.*” What a high commendation of brotherly love is this! He who freely expresses Christian affection unto fellow believers supplies clear evidence that he is a born-again person, in fellowship with God, for out of love to Him issues love to His children. Not only so, but he gives proof that he is walking according to the principles of the Gospel, that he is vitally influenced by the truth he professes, for holy love unto the brethren is a sure criterion of spiritual illumination. Without it he who speaks with tongues is as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Why so? Because unless love inspires my testimony it brings no gain to those who hear it, but is lost on the air. One might be endowed with the gift of prophecy, understand all mysteries, be possessed of all knowledge, yet if he be devoid of love he is “nothing”—a spiritual cipher, contributing naught unto the edification of his brethren. Therefore his most imposing deeds will receive no reward in the day to come.

In that thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians a most sublime description is given of the nature, characteristics and workings of this holy and heavenly love. It is patient and forbearing toward its objects, refusing to take offence at a frown or word. It suffers long and is kind, being neither easily irritated nor repulsed by ingratitude. It is humble and lowly, for it neither envies the prosperity of others nor is puffed up by its own performances. It is unselfish and disinterested: “I seek not yours, but you” (2Co 12:14) is ever its aim. It “thinketh no evil,” harbouring no doubts or suspicions, but places the best construction upon the words and actions of others. It rejoices not in iniquity but rather is grieved when the sins of a brother are apparent. “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it” (Song 8:7), for that love which is the fruit of the Spirit “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

Such is this spiritual love in the abstract, and such is it concretely in its manifestations. Yet it requires to be borne in mind that 1 Corinthians 13 takes no notice of the hindrances which the Christian meets with in the exercise of his love from the workings of the flesh within him or from the opposition of the devil and his agents from without. Light is pure and radiant, but when it shines through a defective medium its beams are blurred. Fire burns and is hot, but when it encounters that which is wet and damp its action is checked. What love consists of in itself is one thing, the allowances which have to be made for our natural make-up, and especially for indwell-

ing corruptions, are quite another. On the one hand we must not deny the fact that, so great is the change which divine grace effects in its subjects, it is likened unto the wolf being fitted to dwell with the lamb, the leopard lying down with the kid, the young lion and the fatling together (Isa 11:6); and on the other hand we are not to ignore the fact that the regenerate require to be exhorted: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice" (Eph 4:31)—set aside whatever corrodes your own mind or wounds the feelings of others.

Let not the reader forget what was pointed out in the preceding chapter on the first clause of the second half of verse 8, according as its verb admits of a twofold rendition—as the translators of the Authorized Version gave it: "because the darkness is past," and "the world passeth away" (verse 17); the former having a dispensational reference to the relative darkness of the Mosaic economy, the symbols and ceremonies of the Levitical system having become obsolete now that they are made good in their antitypes; the latter rendering possessing a practical allusion to the experience of God's children. Though there still be much darkness in them, and though they are more or less influenced by the darkness now surrounding them, nevertheless, as they grow in grace, and in proportion as they enter into God's best for them, the darkness is passing and their path shines more and more unto the perfect day. Yet that perfect day is still future, and so is that complete conformity unto Christ which shall then be the condition of all the redeemed. Meanwhile the flesh opposes and none remains in the light fully and without intermission, and therefore none loves his brother perfectly. But as there ought to be an increase in knowledge and faith, so of love and all other graces.

It is just here that we see again the intimate relation between light and love. When my love to God cools and my communion with Him is broken, then affection for my brethren is proportionately affected. As Candlish pointed out, "It is in the darkness that injuries are brooded over and angry passions are nursed. If you, brother, and I are at variance, it is almost certain to be because there is some darkness about us that hinders us from seeing one another clearly. Let in the light. Let us see one another clearly. Differences between us may still remain, our views on many things may still be as wide as the poles asunder, but we see that we are men of like passions and like appetites with one another. The light shows us we are true brethren in spite of all." When love be in a healthy and vigorous state, we are far from taking offence at the manifestations of the flesh in a brother: rather will such move us to pray more earnestly for his refining and growth. Nothing is a more practical proof of love than to make supplication for those who slight and injure us; nothing is better evidence that we are in the light.

Our verse adds a further commendation or mentions yet an-other advantage resulting from the exercise of brotherly love: "and there is none occasion of stumbling in him." Not only does the expressing of this spiritual grace supply an evidence of regeneration, and is a means for maintaining our communion with God, but it also preserves from scandalous conduct. He who habitually shows himself disposed to goodness and mercy, and manifests a generous and self-denying affection unto his brethren, demonstrates that he is vitally influenced by the principles of the Gospel. True love will move us to dread everything which would hinder the spirituality of others, and therefore takes care to avoid what would be a stumblingblock to them. The Greek word for "occasion of stumbling" is *skandalos*, from which is derived our English word "scandal," which primarily means a snare laid for an enemy. It is rendered "stumblingblock" in Romans 11:9; 1 Corinthians 1:23; Revelation 2:14; and nine times is translated "offence," as in Matthew 16:23; Romans 9:33; Galatians 5:11. The general prevailing disposition of such a one's heart will pre-

vent Satan successfully tempting him to the commission of any gross sin, and his deportment will be such that his fellows will not be evilly influenced by him.

There can be little doubt that when John penned the second half of verse 10 there was before his mind the closing part of Psalm 119:165, “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them,” for his words tally exactly with the Septuagint translation of that verse, except that the apostle changes the plural “them” to him. Spiritual love is a wonderful preservative from and preventive of injuries. Those who love God’s Law not only have “great peace” in their consciences and minds (for where the affections be set upon things above, the heart is content with whatever be its portion on earth), but “nothing shall offend,” or as the margin of Psalm 119:165, reads, “they shall have no stumblingblock”—nothing in God’s providential dealings will scandalize them. Those who love God’s Law are kept from the snares and temptations which the world is so full of, and which bring about the sin and ruin of so many. In the same way, genuine love unto the brethren induces a circumspect walk, delivering from those carnal and satanic pitfalls, because the light in which such affection dwells enables them to see and shun what would be an occasion of falling unto them.

Offences or scandals are of various kinds. Very often offence is taken where none is given. An outstanding example of this is Christ Himself. He is unto the believer “a cornerstone, elect and precious,” but to the unbelieving and disobedient “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence” (1Pe 2:8). Such He was unto the Jews, for His humble appearance was a scandal to them: though He was exactly what their own Scriptures had foretold, yet He was not according to their ideas of what the Messiah should be and do. Christ crucified is still a stumblingblock to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness (1Co 1:23). So too His doctrine was far from being agreeable to them: “the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying” (Mat 15:12), and murmured when He declared “I am the bread which came down from heaven” (Joh 6:41). Some of His own disciples complained “This is a hard saying,” so that He asked them “Doth this offend you?” And many of them “went back, and walked no more with him.” Much of the doctrine of Scripture is still a stumblingblock to the proud and self-willed. The simplicity and spirituality of that worship which alone is acceptable with God is despised by those who crave pomp and pageantry. Yet such offence is causeless, arising solely from human depravity.

But there is also offence given where none is taken. Thus when Peter sought to dissuade Christ from His sufferings, He said “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me” (Mat 16:23)—not that Christ was stumbled thereby, for His heart was immune to evil counsel and to the infection of evil example. From the language of Hebrews 11:24-26, it is clear that Moses was upbraided for turning his back upon such a “golden opportunity,” and was severely censured because when he came of age, he “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.” The godly are unmoved by the world’s scorn, for they have respect unto a recompense greater than anything it can offer them. So too David, instead of being scandalized by the impiety of those surrounding him, and following their wicked course, exclaimed, “They have made void thy law. Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.” (Psa 119:126-127). They who dwell in the light can see honour in disgrace, and beauty in the very things of God most despised by their fellows.

There are two principal things which the devil employs as scandals or stumblingblocks to the saints: the persecutions and the enticements of the world—the one working on their sensibilities, the other on their lusts. By frowns and terrors of the world Satan seeks to draw us to think hardly

of God and dislike the path of holiness. Therefore is it said concerning him, “whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1Pe 5:9). His temptations to the godly are often conveyed by afflictions from the unregenerate, seeking by means thereof to prevail with them to relinquish their Christian duties and grow weary of the ways of God. These tend the more to succeed if he can persuade them that they are the only sufferers. But there is no excuse for God’s people being deceived by such a lie, for there is much in the Scriptures which is designed to remove from us the fear of the world, and to comfort us in trials and tribulations for Christ’s sake, and such passages would be neither pertinent nor serviceable if there were no persecutions for the godly to endure.

The allurements of the world are more dangerous than its oppositions. Though at first the Lord’s people may be discouraged and dismayed when meeting with unfriendliness from the enemies of Christ, yet “God giveth more grace,” and patience and fortitude from Him enable them to hold on their way. But the seductive snares of the world and its flesh-attractive baits do not drive the saints to their knees and cast them upon God as do its cruel slights and threatenings. Present and visible things have a far greater attraction than future and invisible ones unto all except the spiritual. Paul had to lament, “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2Ti 4:10), and in all generations the servants of God have had to taste the same bitter experience. It is by the baits of sense that the majority of our fellows are prejudiced against the strictness of the Gospel’s requirements, and a base opinion of the same is nourished in their hearts by the knowledge that such clashes with their own lusts. Esau preferred the gratification of his fleshly affections to the blessing of the Lord. How the exercise of brotherly love preserves from such snares will be more definitely pointed out in our next.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

72. Spoils of Victory

When Joshua had become old and more or less enfeebled, the Lord appeared unto His servant, and after informing him that there remained yet very much land to be possessed, and naming some of the places and peoples to be conquered, He declared, “*Them will I drive out from before the children of Israel: only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee*” (13:6). It had been so with Moses. Under God, he had begun the task of occupying Canaan (namely that part thereof which lay to the east of Jordan), but only a small beginning had been made. Joshua had been used to carry forward the enterprise considerably, yet it was far from being completed—others would be raised up later to effect the divine purpose. And it has been the same ever since. A start was all that was made by the apostles in the evangelizing of the Gentiles, for when the last of them expired, there remained yet very much land to be possessed. Calvin and Martin Luther (1483-1546) were mightily employed in delivering God’s people from the deadly shackles of Rome. Yet when the last of the Reformers was called home, how much yet remained to be accomplished.

It is the same now. At the close of the most active and self-sacrificing life in the service of Christ, each succeeding minister of His leaves this scene with very much of the world still occupied by the enemy. But observe now the blessed consolation the Lord gave unto Joshua, “Them will I drive out,” *not* “from before *thee*,” for he would not live to see it accomplished, but “from before the children of Israel.” As he had carried forward the work begun by Moses, so others would be divinely appointed and equipped to advance his efforts—the honour of laying the capstone thereon being reserved for David centuries later. A similar assurance should be the very real confidence of every aged minister of the Gospel. There is no statement in Scripture, so far as the writer can perceive, to show that a time will ever come when all upon earth will be saved, or even nominally receive the truth. Yet the divine promise is given, “One generation *shall* praise thy works to another” (Psa 145:4); yea, that some “shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout *all* generations” (Psa 72:5). The words of Christ in Matthew 28:20 make it clear that He will have some of His on earth till the last, and His “all that the Father giveth me shall come to me” (Joh 6:37) proves that neither man nor devil will prevent the salvation of the entire election of grace. “The foundation of God standeth sure...The Lord knoweth them that are his” (2Ti 2:19) provides a grand haven of rest for every anxious heart.

“*Them will I drive out from before the children of Israel: only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites*” (verse 6). We regard this statement as one with a clearly implied proviso attached to it, and as such, addressed to their responsibility, presupposing *their concurrence*. Therefore we agree with Matthew Henry’s (1662-1714) comments thereon, “This promise that He would drive them out from before the children of Israel plainly supposes it as the condition of the promise that the children of Israel themselves must attempt and endeavour their extirpation, must go up against them, else they could not be said to be driven out before them. If afterwards, through sloth or cowardice or affection to these idolaters, they sat still and let them alone, they must blame themselves, and not God, if they be not driven out.” Nor was that Puritan alone in so understanding those words of the Lord. Even the high Calvinist John Gill (1697-1771) remarked thereon, “Which the Lord would deliver into their hands, *providing* they were obedient to His will, for, because they were not, many of those places never came into their possession, though divided to them by lot”; and again (later), “that is on condition of their obedience, for it appears that not only the Sidonians but many others, even the chief, and most of those mentioned, were never possessed by them.”

The same is true of Christians and their eternal inheritance. There are certain *conditions* which they are obligated to meet. “Conditions,” not in the Romish sense, as con-causes with the Father’s choice and the Son’s atonement, nor in the Arminian sense, of an absolute power lying in their own wills and strength to comply therewith. But according to the order of things which God has established, for the enforcing of their moral agency—as there must be a sowing before reaping, the cross before the crown. Principal causes (God’s grace and Christ’s merits) do not exclude necessary means—grace must not be turned into lasciviousness nor Christ made the minister of sin. Scripture is unmistakably plain on this point, “For we are made partakers of Christ, *if* we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end” (Heb 3:14, and note well the “*if*” in Joh 8:51; 1Co 15:2; Col 1:23). As remission of sins is promised to none but those who repent (Luk 24:47; Act 3:19) and believe (Act 10:43), so only he that endures to the end shall be saved (Mat 24:13). “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest [the antitypical Canaan], lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Heb 4:11), as the Israelites in the wilderness. That warning is a *real* one, which we ignore at our eternal peril.

“*Only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites...as I have commanded thee*” (13:6). This was the business in which Joshua was now to engage—to apportion *it*—the entire territory, both what was already subdued and those parts of it which still remained to be conquered. “Now *therefore* divide this land for an inheritance unto the nine tribes and the half tribe of Manasseh, with whom the Reubenites and the Gadites have received their inheritance, which Moses gave them, beyond Jordan eastward” (verses 7-8). Having received orders and authority from God, Joshua was to set about this task at once with all diligence. He was not to wait until all the tribes had actually secured their inheritance, but must define or mark out the portion allotted to each of them, so that they might know the particular section to which he had divine title, and go forward, take and occupy the same. Thus Joshua was to act with full confidence in God. Though he should be called to leave the field of battle and enter his rest, others would be raised up to carry on the conflict until the divine purpose was realized. *This*, we say again, needs to be borne in mind by the Lord’s people in all generations, for considerable *unbelief* is often mingled with their grief when some much-used servant of His is removed from this world—as though the cause of Christ was jeopardized thereby.

Once more Joshua was to count implicitly upon JEHOVAH, to work while it was yet day for him, and to leave the outcome to his Master. Probably the major part of the land was then occupied by the Canaanites, yet he was personally to superintend the allotting of the whole of it to Israel. Thus was he called upon to trust in the Lord with all his heart, and lean not unto his own understanding (Pro 3:5), as had Noah and Abraham before him (Heb 11:7-8). *That* is the principle by which every servant of God is ever to act. As Paul declared, “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2Co 5:7). The apostle and his fellow workers lived and labored by faith, being inspired with courage and strength from having their hearts occupied with things invisible. Theirs was not a single act, but a constant course of trustfulness. To walk by faith is to conduct ourselves in the firm belief of those things we do not see, resting on the sure Word of God, and being practically influenced thereby. It is to live in a steady expectation of things to come—the realities and glories of heaven. It is the opposite of being governed by our senses or regulated by visible objects, for “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1), making them real and precious to the soul.

It was at this point that the predecessor of Joshua had failed—though, through not linking up parallel passages with Numbers 13:1-3, many have not perceived this—another case where Scripture must be compared with Scripture if we are to obtain the complete picture. “And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come. And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you” and sent them forth (Deu 1:22-23). Those words seem to make two things quite evident. First, that this project originated with the people. Second, that Moses failed to discern the distrust which prompted their proposal—his approval thereof being a case of evil communications corrupting good manners. At a later date, when chiding the children of Gad and of Reuben, he said, “Wherefore *discourage* ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD hath given them? Thus did your fathers, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land” (Num 32:7-8), which shows they had a spirit of unwillingness to go up into it.

From the account given in Numbers 13:17-20, we learn that they questioned the value of the promised inheritance, as the language “see the land, what it is...whether it be good or bad...whether it be fat or lean” makes clear. Thus it was rank unbelief in the word of the Lord which lay behind their policy, while their “by what way we must go up” of Deuteronomy 1:22,

showed their lack of confidence in being divinely directed as to the best route to take. What need was there to go and examine the kind of land which the Lord had chosen for them, when He had already informed them that it was one “flowing with milk and honey” (Exo 3:8)? What occasion was there to investigate the approaches into it when there were the pillars of cloud and of fire to guide and show them the way? Nor have *we* any need to ask what God’s will for us is, when He has already made known the same, or to inquire as to our path of duty, when we possess His Word as a lamp unto our feet (Psa 119:105). But alas, Israel had a better opinion of their own policy and judgment than of God’s; and is it not often the same with us?

Though approving of the carnal suggestion of the people, before acting on the same, Moses evidently sought confirmation from the Lord, and we are told that He said, “Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan” (Num 13:2). In thus giving permission, God acted *in judgment*. Deuteronomy 1:6-8 makes it clear that a year previously, Israel had received divine orders to go forward and possess the land which had been given unto their fathers, but as soon as they left Horeb, one sin after another was committed by them (Num 11 and 12). God had been provoked by their waywardness, and in order to make further manifest the hardness of their hearts, He now gave them up to their lusts. The sequel at once demonstrated their unbelief and perversity. God also suffered their desire to be granted in order to serve as a solemn *warning* to His people in all generations. If we profit not from the recorded sins and punishments of others, then is our case indeed inexcusable. When God gratifies our self-will and suffers us to follow the schemes of our own devising, we pay dearly for it. If we have more confidence in our own wisdom or the representations of our senses than we have in the divine counsels, we shall inevitably taste the bitterness of our foolishness.

It seems rather strange that, after a full description of the territory given to the two and a half tribes had previously been furnished in the closing verses of Numbers 32, the middle of Deuteronomy 3, a briefer reference in Deuteronomy 29, and a fuller one again in Joshua 12:4-6, a further account of the same should be *repeated here*. Matthew Henry suggested the following explanation. First, as the reason why the nine and a half tribes should now be assigned their portions, since their brethren had already been provided for, it was just and meet that they should be so too. Second, as the pattern for Joshua now to follow. He was not being ordered to do something unprecedented, for he had been personally present when Moses had distributed the eastern section of Palestine unto the two and a half tribes, and from his example, he might well now act. Third, as an inducement unto Joshua to make no delay in performing this task, that the remaining tribes might no longer be kept out of their heritage. Thus the Lord who had provided for the former was equally solicitous about the welfare of the latter. Fourth, that the portion given to the two and a half tribes years before, now being specified in detail, signified a ratification of the original grant, thus obviating any disputes about the boundaries. Joshua was not free to make any alterations.

The account given of the portions allocated unto the two and a half tribes closes with the ominous statement, “Nevertheless the children of Israel expelled not the Geshuites, nor the Maachathites: but the Geshuites and Maachathites dwell among the Israelites until this day” (verse 13). This is the first time that anything of this nature is recorded of them, though if we are permitted to go through the book of Judges, we shall see that other of the tribes were equally remiss at a later date. It reminds us of a similar and most regrettable failure on the part of Queen Elizabeth and those who succeeded her. Under the Reformation in the days of Luther and Calvin, the Protestant sections of Europe were delivered from the idolatries of the mass, Mariolatry and the worship of idols; but those who followed were found sadly wanting in purging themselves from other popish evils and superstitions. It is worthy of note that as the two and a half tribes were placed in their

inheritance before their fellows, so (centuries later) they were displaced before the other tribes were, being carried captive to Assyria, and that because they “went a whoring after the gods of the people of the land” (1Ch 5:25-26). Such a proportion does Providence often observe in the dispensations of prosperity and adversity, setting the one over against the other.

“Balaam also the son of Besor, the soothsayer, did the children of Israel slay with the sword among them that were slain by them” (13:23). Nothing definite is known about the early life of this mysterious person. He is introduced abruptly in the Scriptures, being mentioned first in Numbers 22:5. A “soothsayer” was one who essayed to foretell the future and possessed strange powers by means of the occult forces of evil. Balaam was a magician of renown and had, apparently, acquired some knowledge of the true God—probably by hearing of what He had wrought in Egypt and at the Red Sea (see Jos 2:10). Israel had then crossed the wilderness, and had arrived at the country of the Moabites, in the vicinity of the Jordan. Balak, its king, was afraid that Israel would destroy his people, and sent for Balaam to use his enchantments against them. Accordingly, his servants visited the prophet “with the rewards of divination in their hand,” and invited him to return with them to their master, and pronounce such a curse on the Israelites that the Moabites might smite them (Num 22:5-7). Balaam’s character was at once revealed by his response to this temptation. He neither accepted nor refused. Instead of reprimanding them, he bade them lodge with him, and he would return his answer next morning.

During the night, God appeared to him, and said, “Thou shalt *not* go with them: thou shalt not curse the people.” Next morning, Balaam informed his visitors, “The LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you,” and they departed without him, though he dishonestly failed to tell them *why* he must not accept their commission. Refusing to be discouraged by Balaam’s repulse, Balak sent again to him, promising to promote him with very great honour if he would come and curse Israel. Though he knew the mind of the Lord, he temporized and invited the princes to stay with him that night. Prompted by the love of gain, he now mocked God by pretending to ask His permission—as though He might change His mind; and God now mocked him, giving him leave to go, but commanding him to utter only the word He gave him. This is evident from “And God’s anger was kindled because he went,” and from “The angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him” (Num 22:22).

Rebuked by the dumb ass and told by the angel, “I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me,” Balaam acknowledged his sin. Yet when the word, “Go with the men” was given to test him further, he was carried forward against all checks by the violent impulse of his lusts. When he arrived at his destination, so powerfully did the Spirit of God restrain, that Balaam blessed Israel instead of cursing them. Nevertheless, so strongly did he love “the wages of unrighteousness” (2Pe 2:15), and so determined was he to earn the same, that he now devised a method which promised to ensure the ruin of Israel (Num 31:16 and cf. Rev 2:14), and which had been completely successful had not God intervened (Psa 106:28-29). Thus did he definitely range himself against Israel and defy the Lord. Soon after he reaped what he had sown. Linking his interests with the Moabites and Midianites, he died with them (Num 22:7; 31:8). Such is the doom of the double-hearted, and those who are in bondage to covetousness. None can serve God and mammon.

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

8. Its Extent, Part 2

Let us now define our terms more closely, and thus prevent anyone arguing with us at cross purposes. Our English word “depraved” is taken from *depravatus*, which means twisted, wrenched from the straight line, and thus moral disturbance—its root being *pravus*, “crooked,” “bad.” Total depravity connotes that this distortedness has affected the whole of man’s being to such an extent that he has no inherent power of recovery left to restore himself to harmony with God, and that this is the case with *every* member of the human race. Yet “total depravity” does not import that sin has reached its highest intensity in a person, so that it is incapable of augmentation, for men add unto their sins (1Sa 12:19); and over and above their native spiritual blindness, God judicially blinds some (Joh 12:40), and then their doom is irrevocably sealed. No, fallen man does not enter this world as bad as he can be, but he has “*no* good thing” in him (Rom 7:18); instead, he is wholly corrupt, entirely vitiated throughout his constitution.

The children of Adam are possessed of no degree of moral rectitude, but have hearts that are desperately wicked. In so affirming, we are but saying that the effect corresponds to the cause—as the apostasy of the first man was total, so his descendants are wholly sinful. That this *is* the case with all mankind was clearly and abundantly proved from Scripture in the preceding article. The entire corruption of the whole human race could not be stated more strongly and decisively than in the passages there cited. The natural man has not one iota of holiness in him, rather is he born with the seeds of every form of evil, radically inclined to sin. In our nature, we are vileness itself, black as hell, and unless a miracle of grace be wrought upon us, we must inevitably be damned for all eternity. It is not that man has a few imperfections, but that he is altogether polluted—“an unclean thing,” with “*no* soundness” in him (Isa 1:6). Not only has man no holiness, but his heart is inveterately averse thereto.

The solemn doctrine of total depravity does *not* mean that there are no parents with a genuine love for their children, and no children who respectfully obey their parents; that there are none imbued with a spirit of benevolence to the poor and kindly sympathy unto the suffering; that there are no conscientious employers or honest employees. But it *does* mean that, where the unregenerate are concerned, those duties are discharged *without* any love for God, any subjection to His authority, or any concern for His glory. Parents are required to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and children to obey their parents in the Lord (Eph 6:1, 4), while servants are bidden to serve their masters “in singleness of heart, as unto Christ” (Eph 6:5). Do the unconverted so act and render compliance with those injunctions? They do not, and therefore their performances not only possess no spiritual value, but are polluted. Every act performed by the natural man is faulty, “The plowing of the wicked is sin” (Pro 21:4)—because done for selfish ends. Then better not plough at all? Wrong, for slothfulness is equally sinful! There are different degrees of enormity, but *every* act of man is sinful.

The condition of the natural man is such that in the discharge of his first responsibility unto his Maker, he is utterly recreant. His chief obligation is to live unto the glory of God and to love Him with all his heart, but while he remains unrenewed, he has not the least spiritual, holy, true love unto Him. Whatever there may be in his domestic and social conduct which is admirable in the eyes of his fellows, it is not prompted by any respect for the divine will. So far as man's self-recovery and self-recuperation be concerned, his depravity is total, in the sense of being decisive and final. "Man is fallen. Every part and passion of his nature is perverted. He has gone astray altogether, is sick from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet; yea, is dead in trespasses and sins and corrupt before God. O pride of human nature, we plough right over thee! The hemlock standing in thy field must be cut up by the roots. Thy weeds seem like fair flowers, but the ploughshare must go right through them, till all thy beauty is shown to be a painted Jezebel, and all human glorying a bursting bubble" (C. H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892).

What makes this awful view of man's total depravity yet more solemn is the fact that there is no exception to it, for it is *universal*. Corrupt nature is the same in all. The hand that writes these lines is as capable of perpetrating the foulest crime on the calendar, and the heart of the reader of devising the worst deed committed by the vilest wretch who ever lived. The only distinction of character between man and man is that which the sovereign power and grace of God effects. "We are *all* as an unclean thing" (Isa 64:6), our original purity gone. "There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." In his comments on Romans 3:10-18, John Calvin said, "In this terrible manner, the apostle inveighs not against particular individuals, but against all the posterity of Adam. He does not declaim against the depraved manners of one or another age, but accuses the perpetual corruption of our nature. For his design in that passage is not simply to rebuke men in order that they may repent, but rather to teach us that all men are overwhelmed with an inevitable calamity, from which they can never emerge unless they are extricated by the mercy of God."

When the Lord Jesus called Paul, He informed him that He was about to send him to the Gentiles "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Act 26:18). In those words Christ indicated what was the character of the whole Gentile world. They were all as ignorant of God, and of the way of acceptance with Him, as blind men are of the true objects of sight. True, there were then, as now, devout religionists, esteemed poets and boastful philosophers who gloried in their wisdom, professing to teach what was the true happiness of man. There were renowned sages, with innumerable disciples, whose schools were engaged solely with the study of virtue, knowledge and felicity. Nevertheless, "The world by wisdom knew not God," and He declared, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1Co 1), for it deceived and deluded them. The schools themselves were darkness, and the minds of their authors—men like Pythagoras and Plato, Socrates and Aristotle—"blinded by the god of this world," completely under the control of the devil.

"The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God" (Psa 14:2). "Behold the eyes of Omniscience ransacking the globe, and prying among every people and nation. He who is looking down knows the good, is quick to discern it, would be delighted to find it; but as He views all the unregenerate children of men, His search is fruitless, for of all the race of Adam no unrenewed soul is other than an enemy to God and goodness. 'They are all gone out of the way' (Rom 3:12). Without exception, all men have apostatized from the Lord their Maker, from His laws, and from the eternal principles of right. Like stubborn heifers, they have sturdily refused to receive the yoke. The original speaks of the

race as a totality, humanity as a whole has become depraved in heart and life. ‘They have altogether become filthy’ (Psa 14:3). As a whole, they are spoiled and soured like corrupt leaven, or, as some put it, they have become putrid and even stinking. The only reason why we do not more clearly see this foulness is because we are accustomed to it, just as those who work daily among offensive odours at last cease to smell them” (Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*).

That terrible indictment, “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7), is not restricted to particularly reprobate persons, but is an unqualified statement which applies to every individual. It is “*the* carnal mind”—whatever mind may properly be designated “carnal,” i.e. natural, unspiritual. The undeveloped mind of the infant is “enmity against God.” Moreover, that description is true at all times, though it is not equally so evident. But though the wolf may sleep, he *is* a wolf still. The snake which lurks amid the flowers is just as deadly as when it lies among noxious weeds. Furthermore, that solemn declaration holds good of the whole mind, of all its faculties. It is true of the memory. Nursery rhymes, silly jokes, and foolish songs are retained without effort, whereas passages of Scripture and spiritual sermons are quickly forgotten. It is so with the affections. The creature is idolized and the Creator slighted. So of the judgment. What erroneous conceptions it forms of the deity and how fearfully it wrests His Word! It is true even of the conscience, for there have been those who, while killing the saints, thought they did God a service (Joh 16:2)—witness Saul of Tarsus.

As might well be expected, fierce opposition has been made against this flesh-withering truth of the total depravity of man, and ever will be where it is faithfully preached. When men are informed that they are suffering from something far more serious than a defect in their characters or an unhappy bias of disposition, namely that their very *nature* is rotten to the core, it is more than human pride can endure. When told that the centre of their moral being is corrupt, that their heart—the potent fountain from which issue their desires and thoughts—is desperately wicked, that it is inherently and radically evil from the first moment of their existence, hot resentment is at once aroused. It is indeed awful to contemplate that not only is sin the element in which the natural man lives, but the whole of his life is one unmixed course of evil; and it is scarcely surprising that those who are not subject to the Word of truth should revolt at such a concept, especially as it is contrary to what appears in not a few characters who must be respected for many amiable qualities. Nevertheless, since all sin be a coming short of the glory of God, then every act of fallen man has in it the nature of sin.

Even with Christendom, this doctrine has been strongly and steadily resisted. The great controversy between Augustine and Pelagius in the fifth century turned upon whether that moral corruption which pertains to all mankind be total or partial. If the latter, then of course it follows that man still has within him something which is good, something which is accordant to the divine Law, something which enables him at least partly to discharge the obligations lying upon him as a creature of God. Ever since the days of Augustine, there have been those posing as Christians who, while acknowledging that man is a fallen and depraved creature, have flatly denied that he is *totally* depraved. Those who repudiate the inward and invincible call of the Spirit realize not the actual state of man’s soul, nor perceive that a miracle of grace is necessary before he is made willing to comply with the demands of the Gospel. Arminians acknowledge the *aid* of the Spirit, but at once negative their admission by affirming that He can be successfully resisted after He has put forth all His efforts to woo the sinner unto Christ.

It is important to recognize that the principles of faith and love are not produced by mere moral suasion, by the external presentation of Christ to a person. Rather are they wrought by a mira-

cle of divine power and grace in the soul. Such a glorious work must be done by an efficient cause, and not be an allicient one. The natural man is blind, yea, dead, to spiritual things, and what suasion can make the blind to see or the dead to act? Suasion is so far from giving a faculty that it presupposes one. The use of it is not to confer a power, but to stir and move it to act. God is far more than an Orator beseeching men, namely a mighty Operator quickening. His word of power is a commanding one. As He said, "Let light be," and there was light, so He calls for a new heart and brings it into existence. God is no mere Helper, but a Creator. "We are his workmanship" (Eph 2:10), and not our own. It is God who makes us new creatures, and not we ourselves, "born not...of the will of man, but of God" (Joh 1:13). To say that we are in part born of our own wills is to blaspheme the Author of our spiritual being, and to place the crown on nature instead of grace.

Likewise does the evolutionist emphatically deny the total depravity of man, for the only fall he believes in is an upward one. He is loud in insisting that there is a divine spark of life in the soul of every human being, burning very feebly it may be in some, yet capable of being fanned into a flame if the right influences be brought to bear upon it. A divine "seed" of goodness others term it, a seed which only needs cultivating in order to the ultimate development of a noble and virtuous character—a blank repudiation of the teaching of Christ that the human tree is essentially "corrupt." Now, since the whole system of redemption rests upon this basic fact of man's total depravity, and since every false system of religion originates in the repudiation thereof, it is incumbent upon us to expose the fallacy of those objections which are commonly made against it, the principal ones of which we will now consider.

The first is an attempt to show that we do not enter this world in a defiled condition. The engaging simplicity, dependence, and harmlessness of little ones is dwelt upon, and reference is even made unto Scripture in support of the contention that they are born in a state of innocence. But this need not detain us very long, for it scarcely presents even an apparent force. Appeal is made to, "And shed *innocent* blood, even the blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan" (Psa 106:38). Which simply means they sacrificed their little ones, who had *not* been active participants in their idolatry. "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil," (Rom 9:11) is nothing to the point, for those words refer not to their nature, but to a time before they committed any deeds. While in contrast with adults, infants possess a relative innocence, in that they are guiltless of personal transgressions, yet that they partake of original sin is clear from Psalms 51:5; 58:3; Proverbs 22:15. Scripture never contradicts itself.

In rebuttal of this doctrine, it is insisted that there is some good in the very worst, that even the most confirmed villains, though it be but momentarily, turn away shudderingly from certain deeds of wickedness when temptation unto the same is first presented to them. From that the conclusion is drawn that, deeply buried under the ashes of a life of unbridled crime, the sparks of some power of goodness still remain. But that is to confound the faint motions of man's moral nature with potential spirituality. Moreover, it is nothing but confusion of thought which leads people to infer that because there are degrees of wickedness there must still be a modicum of good. Because one stage of depravity is lower than another, this does not warrant us to deny that the first stage is degraded. The development of wickedness is one thing, the presence of any measure of holiness or virtue is another. The absence of certain forms of sins does not imply any innate purity. It might as well be affirmed that a recent corpse, which is less loathsome, is thereof *less dead* than one which is far gone in decay and putrefaction.

Not a few have argued that the *strivings of conscience* in the unregenerate demonstrate that they are not totally depraved. It is pointed out that every man is possessed of that faculty which bears witness within him in countless instances of what is right and wrong. That this inward monitor exerts considerable influence even on wicked men, so as to impel them to the performance of actions which are relatively good, and to deter them from others which are evil. That is freely admitted, but it makes nothing whatever against the truth we are here contending for. In the first place, while conscience be necessary to the performance of both good and evil, it does not itself partake of either the one or the other, for it is that part of the mind which takes cognizance of the virtue or vice of our actions, but is itself quite distinct from both. It is that ethical instinct which passes judgment upon the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our desires and deeds. The conscience itself needs instructing, for its dictates go no farther than the knowledge it possesses. It does not *reveal* anything, but simply declares the character of what is presented to the mind's eye, and that according to the light it has.

It is important that we should be quite clear upon this point. The conscience is not in itself a standard of duty, for that of the heathen speaks very differently from that of a Christian who is taught by the Holy Spirit. It is an ear to hear, and the character of *what* it hears—whether true or false—is the measure of its intelligence. In proportion as this inward eye is tutored will be the truthfulness of its perceptions. The term defines itself: *con-science*, with knowledge—to know with oneself—informing and impressing us with the difference between good and evil. But since all duty consists of and is contained in *love* (unto God and our neighbour), then good and evil must consist entirely in the *disposition of the heart*. And the mere dictates of conscience including no such dispositions, then neither good nor evil can, strictly speaking, be predicated of those dictates. Both men and demons will for ever possess consciences witnessing to them what is good and evil, even in hell itself—being “the worm that dieth not”—when, as all must allow, they will be utterly destitute of any virtue or goodness. We do indeed read in God's Word of a good conscience and an evil one, and so too we read of “an evil eye.” Yet there is neither good nor evil in the sight of the eye, only as it is under the influence of a holy or unholy disposition of the soul. So it is with the dictates of the conscience.

The conscience, then, bears solemn witness unto the loss of man's purity and the presence of depravity. But to regard the resistance which conscience makes to each successive stage of sin as an evidence of innate goodness asserting itself is to ignore the very real distinction there is between the authority of conscience and a soul's love for God. The conscience certainly remonstrates and enforces the right in the form of an unconditional and absolute imposition. It also threatens man with the destruction of his peace if he persists in his course of wrongdoing. But that remonstrance and threatening comes to him as a *restraint*, as a force, as something against which the current of his soul is set. There is no love for God in it, no respect to His will as declared by it, no regard for His honour. The struggle is not between good and evil (as *is* the case in a saint), but between sinful inclination and positive prohibition. To know duty and yet be reluctant to perform it is no evidence of any goodness of heart. Even to find satisfaction in the performing of duty at the dictate of conscience argues no complacency whatever in God Himself.

Let it be clearly understood that the conflicts which the natural man experiences are most certainly not between any love he has for God, and the inordinate desires of his fallen nature, but rather between his conscience and his lusts; and that any remorse which he may suffer is not sorrow for having offended his Maker, but a vexation under the sense of his degradation, which is naught but the injury done to his pride. There is no grief before God for having been a reproach unto Him. Nor does the wretchedness which dissipation produces in any wise dispose its subject unto a

more favourable reception of the Gospel. The groaning under the chains which sinful habits forge, and the sighing for deliverance therefrom, are not longings to be freed from sin, but rather desires to escape from its painful consequences, both to the conscience and to the body. It is mental tranquility and physical health that are coveted, and not the approbation of the Lord. Any misery suffered by the natural man is not from having offended God, but because he cannot defy Him with impunity and immunity. None but the Holy Spirit can produce a hatred of sin *as sin*, for that is something the conscience never does.

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 13

19. *The Holy Spirit's use of words.* The correct interpretation of many passages can be satisfactorily established only by a careful investigation of how their terms are employed by the sacred writers, for not a few of them possess an entirely different force from their dictionary meanings. The signification of the words of Holy Writ is to be determined neither by their etymology nor by the sense which they bear in classical writings, but rather by their actual *use* in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures—with the collateral help of the Septuagint version. Each term must be defined in strict harmony with the sense given to it in the Word itself.

It is because the average reader of the Bible interprets much of its language in accord with how the same is employed in the common speech of his fellows that he has an inadequate, and often degrading, concept of its expressions. The concordance will stand him in far better stead than the best dictionary. Take the word “chasten.” Upon human lips, it means to punish, but such is far from the thought when we read of God’s using the rod upon His children—even “for correction” falls far short. *Paideia* is only another form of *paidon*, which signifies “young children” (Joh 21:5). One can see at a glance the direct connection which exists between “disciple” and “discipline”. Equally clear in the Greek is the relation between “chasten” and “child”—*son-training* expresses it more accurately (Heb 12:7).

Consider the grand truth and glorious privilege of *adoption*. Probably it is not going too far to say that only a very small percentage of Christians entertain any scriptural concept thereof. In human affairs, it has reference to a procedure whereby a boy or girl, who bears no relation to a man and woman, becomes legally their child. From that, the conclusion is drawn that on the ground of Christ’s atoning sacrifice and by the Spirit’s work of regeneration, those who previously bore no intimate relation to God then become His children. Such an idea is not only crude, but utterly erroneous. John 11:52 makes it quite clear that Christ died for His people under the consideration of their *being* the children of God, and not in order to make them so—as both the Hebrews in Egypt (Exo 5) and the heathen in Corinth (Act 18:10) were owned by God as His *before* the one was redeemed and the other had the Gospel preached unto them. “And because ye *are sons* [and not to make them such], God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, cry-

ing, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6). The Spirit is given to quicken, communicate the nature of sons, and reveal to us our union with Christ.

The inestimable blessing of adoption was bestowed upon the elect by predestination, it being God’s design therein to make them His sons by a mere act of His sovereign will, “Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph 1:5). Thus, it is neither what Christ has done for them nor what the Spirit works in them which makes them the children of God. Adoption refers to that state of grace into which the elect are brought by virtue of their union with Christ. It is a *sonship-in-law*, in and through the Son, God appointing them unto union and communion with Him. Adoption conveys the legal right to every blessing we enjoy both here and hereafter. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:16-17). As holiness is that which fits us for heaven, so adoption or sonship conveys *the right* thereto. “Adoption does not so much design the blessing itself prepared in the divine predestination, or the grace received in effectual calling, as the inheritance to which the saints are adopted, even the heavenly glory; see Romans 8:23” (John Gill).

The elect were bestowed upon Christ before the foundation of the world in the relation of *children*, “Behold I and the children which God hath given me” (Heb 2:13) will be His own triumphant exclamation at the last day—not one of them lost. It is quite true that by the fall they became alienated from God, and thus in need of His being reconciled to them and they to Him; that they became dead in trespasses and sins, and therefore required to be quickened into newness of life. But observe closely how Galatians 4:4-5 states it, “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them [previously His] that were under the law, that we might *receive* the adoption of sons,” and because we were such, the Spirit was given to us. The declaration of adoption was made first in predestination (Eph 1:5), afterwards in Christ, and then in the believer.

As the Puritan Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) so succinctly stated it, “Adoption gives us the *privilege* of sons, regeneration the *nature* of sons. Adoption *relates* unto God as a Father, regeneration *engraves* upon us the lineaments of a Father. That makes us *relatively* His sons by conferring a power or right (Joh 1:12); this makes us *formally* His sons by conveying a principle (1Pe 1:23). By that we are enstated in the divine affection; by this we are partakers of the same.”

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Mat 5:17). A momentous statement was that, and a right understanding thereof is essential, particularly of the exact meaning of its final word. Determined to deny at all costs the evangelical truth that Christ rendered to the Law a vicarious obedience on behalf of His people, Socinians insist that in this passage “fulfil” signifies to fill out or fill full. But such a definition is entirely arbitrary, and is refuted by the canon of interpretation we are now illustrating. As the scholarly George Smeaton (1814-1889) pointed out, “No example of such a usage can be adduced when the verb is applied to a law or to an express demand contained in the spirit of the law: in which case it uniformly means ‘to fulfil.’ Thus it is said, ‘he that loveth another hath fulfilled [i.e. kept] the law’ (Rom 13:8). The inflexible usage of language rules the sense in such a phrase, to the effect that Christ must be understood to say that He came not to fill out or to supplement the law by additional elements, but to fulfil it by being made under it.

“Second, ‘fill out’ is inadmissible as applied to the second term or object of the verb: Christ did not come to fill out or expound the prophets, but simply to fulfil their predictions. Whenever the word here used is applied to anything prophetic, it is always found in such a connection that it can only mean ‘to fulfil,’ and hence we must not deviate from its uniform signification. Third,

the eighteenth verse must be regarded as giving a reason for the statement made in the seventeenth. But what sort of a reason would be given if we were to render the connected verses thus, ‘I am come to fill out or supplement the law, for verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled’?”

Moreover, it is to be carefully noted that the term fulfil was here placed by Christ in direct antithesis to “destroy,” which further determines its scope and meaning, for to destroy the law is not to empty it of its meaning, but to rescind or abrogate it. Thus to “fulfil” is to be taken in its plain and natural sense, as meaning to perform what the Law and the prophets required—to substantiate them, to make good what they demanded and announced. Law can only be fulfilled by a perfect obedience being rendered unto it.

What has just been before us leads us to point out that the only sure and satisfactory way of settling the old controversy between the Protestant and popish theologians as to whether the word “justify” means to *make* just or to *pronounce* just is to ascertain *how* the term is used by the sacred writers, for an appeal unto Holy Writ does not leave the issue in the slightest doubt.

In the first place, when we are said to “glorify God,” we do not render Him glorious, but announce that He is so. When we are bidden to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts (1Pe 3:15), we do not make Him holy, but assert that He is so. Equally, when it is said, “That thou mightiest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest” (Psa 51:4), the force of it is that Thou mightiest be pronounced righteous in Thy judicial verdicts. In none of these instances is there the least ambiguity or uncertainty. In none is there any transformation wrought in the Object of the verb—to suggest so would be horrible blasphemy. When wisdom is said to be “justified of her children” (Mat 11:19), it obviously signifies that she is vindicated by them. Nor does the word have any different force when it is applied to the sinner’s acceptance with God.

In the second place, it is to be noted that in many passages justification is placed over against *condemnation*. The meaning of a term is often perceived by weighing the one that is placed in opposition to it—as “destroy” is over against “fulfil” in Matthew 5:17. “If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked” (Deu 25:1). “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD” (Pro 17:15). “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Mat 12:37).

Thus, the forensic sense of the term is definitely established, for in those and similar passages two judicial sentences are mentioned which are exactly the reverse of each other. As to condemn a man is *not to make him* unrighteous, but is simply the pronouncing of an adverse sentence against him. So to justify is to not to effect any moral improvement in his character, but is simply declaring him *to be righteous*. The word is still further explained by Romans 3:19-20, “That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become [be brought in] guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight,” where guilt and non-justification are synonymous.

But in all generations, Satan and his agents have labored to make men believe that when Scripture speaks of God’s justifying sinners, it signifies the making of men righteous by means of something which is infused into them, or else produced by them; thereby dishonouring Christ. The early chapters of Romans are devoted to an exposition of this all-important truth.

First, it is shown that “there is none righteous” (3:10), none who measures up to the Law’s requirements. *Second*, that God has provided a perfect righteousness in and by Christ, and that this is revealed in the Gospel (1:16-17; 3:21-22). *Third*, that this righteousness, or vicarious obedience, of Christ is *imputed* or reckoned to the account of those who believe (4:11, 24). *Fourth*, that

since God has placed to the credit of the believing sinner the fulfilment of the Law by his Substitute, he is justified (5:1, 18). *Fifth*, therefore none can lay anything to his charge (8:33).

Thus may the believing sinner exultantly exclaim, “In the LORD have I righteousness and strength” (Isa 45:24), “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation. He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10. “I will go in the strength of the LORD God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only” (Psa 71:16).

Many suppose when they read of the “foreknowledge” of God (Act 2:23; 1Pe 1:2) that the expression simply means His cognizing beforehand. It imports very much more, expressing infallible certainty because based upon His eternal decree, God foreknows what will be because He has purposed what shall be. In its verbal form, the word is actually rendered “foreordained” rather than “foreknown” in 1 Peter 1:20.

Some Arminians, in their inveterate opposition to the truth, have insisted that the word “elect” means a choice or excellent person, rather than a selected one, appealing to Christ’s being termed God’s “elect” in Isaiah 42:1. But the Holy Spirit has anticipated and refuted that wretched shift by defining the term in Matthew 12:18 (where He cites Isaiah 42:1), “Behold my servant, whom I have chosen.” Mark 13:20 settles the meaning of “elect” once for all, “the elect’s sake, *whom he hath chosen.*”

In common speech “prince” signifies one who is inferior to the king, but not when Christ is called “the Prince of peace” and “the Prince of life,” as is clear from His being “Prince of the kings of the earth” (Rev 1:5). Many have been puzzled over mustard being called “the greatest among herbs” (Mat 13:32), and love being greater than faith (1Co 13:13), when in fact faith is its root—but “greatest” does not mean largest in the former, or superior in the latter, but *the most useful*—the “best gifts” of 1 Corinthians 12:31, and “greater” in 1 Corinthians 14:5, signify more useful.

20. *Distinguish between things that differ*, for if we do not, the Bible will at once appear to contradict itself, and our minds will be in a state of hopeless confusion. If we carelessly generalize and confound things apart, not only shall we form a vague conception of them, but in many instances a thoroughly erroneous one. Most necessary is it that the expositor attend diligently to this rule. Only so will he be able to give the true explanation of many a verse. Not only is it important to discriminate between two diverse things, but often to draw distinctions between various aspects of the same subject.

Take, first, the word “care.” In Luke 10:41, we find our Lord rebuking Martha because she was “careful and troubled about many things,” and His servant wrote, “I would have you *without carefulness*” (1Co 7:32); while in Philippians 4:6, Christians are exhorted to “be careful for nothing.” On the other hand, we are exhorted that there should be no division in the local church, “but that the members should have the same care one for another” (1Co 12:25), and the apostle commended penitent saints for the “carefulness” it wrought in them and expressed his own concern for their welfare by referring to “our care” for them (2Co 7:11-12). Thus, there is a “care” which is forbidden and a care that is required. The one is a godly and moderate solicitude, which moves unto watchfulness and the taking of pains in the performing of duty; the other is a distrustive and inordinate one that produces distraction and worry.

In like manner, we must distinguish sharply between two totally different kinds of *fear*—the one which is becoming, spiritual, and helpful; the other carnal, worthless, hurtful. Believers are bidden to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phi 2:12), that is, with a conscientious horror of displeasing the One who has been so gracious to them. Conversely, “perfect

love casteth out fear” (Joh 4:18), namely that slavish dread which causes torment, those terrifying thoughts which make us look forward to the day of judgment with dismay. “God is greatly to be feared” (Psa 89:7), that is, held in the highest esteem and reverence, the heart deeply impressed with His majesty, awed by His ineffable holiness.

When we read of those who “feared the LORD, and served their own gods” (2Ki 17:33), it means that, out of a dread of His vengeance, they went through the outward form of worshipping Him, but that the love of their wicked hearts was set upon their idols. Thus a filial fear inspires with a grateful desire to please and honour God, but a servile fear produces terror in the mind because of a guilty conscience, as was the case with Adam (Gen 3:9-10), and is so now with the demons (Jam 2:19). The one draws to God, the other drives from Him; the one genders to bondage and leads to despair; the other works humility and promotes the spirit of adoration.

In order to understand certain passages, it is absolutely needful to recognize that there is a *twofold* “will” of God spoken of in the Scriptures, by which we do not mean His decretive will and His permissive will, for in the final analysis that is a distinction without a difference, for God never permits anything which is contrary to His eternal purpose. No, we refer to the very real distinction which there is between His *secret* and His *revealed* will, or, as we much prefer to express it, between His predestinating and His perceptive will.

God’s secret will is His own counsels which He has divulged unto none. His revealed will is made known in His Word, and is the definer of our duty and the standard of our responsibility. The grand reason why I should follow a certain course or do a certain thing is because it is God’s will that I should do so—made known to me in the rule I am to walk by. But suppose I go contrary to His Word and disobey, have I not crossed His will? Assuredly. Then does that mean that I have thwarted His purpose? Certainly not, for that is always accomplished, notwithstanding the perversity of His creatures. God’s revealed will is never performed perfectly by any of us, but His secret or foreordinating will is never prevented by any—Psalm 135:6; Proverbs 21:30; Isaiah 46:10.

What has just been referred to above is admittedly a great deep, which no finite mind can fully fathom. Nevertheless, the distinction drawn *must* be made if we are not to be guilty of making the Scriptures contradict themselves. For example, such passages as the following evince the universality and invincibility of God’s will being accomplished. “But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth” (Job 23:13). “But our God [not so the Arminians] is in the heavens. He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Psa 115:3). “He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35). “For *who* hath resisted *his* will?” (Rom 9:19).

On the other hand, such passages as the following have reference to the revealed or *perceptive* will of God which may be withstood by the creature. “And that servant, which knew his Lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will” (Luk 12:47). “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1Th 4:3). “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1Th 5:18).

God’s secret will is His eternal and unchanging purpose concerning all things which He has made, and is brought about by means and through agencies which He has appointed to that end, and which can no more be hindered by men or devils than they can prevent the sun from shining.



SEPTEMBER

SILENCE

There is “a time to keep silent, and a time to speak” (Ecc 3:7), and often as much wisdom and grace is needed for the one as for the other. When little ones, some of us were taught, “Speech is silvern, silence is golden”—would that the children of this day were so instructed, not in order unto what our ill-advised generation designates self-suppression, but as a necessary lesson in the all-important art of self-control. Like all other proverbs, that one is to be understood relatively, and not absolutely, for the power of speech has been given us by God to use, yet the “time to keep silent” *precedes* the “time to speak” in our opening text! There can be no room for doubt that if we learned to keep a much tighter rein upon our tongues, all of us would have far less to answer for in the Day to come, when even “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof” (Mat 12:36). What a remarkable and mysterious word is that in Revelation 8:1, “There was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour”—so mysterious that we refuse to speculate thereon and therefore make no comments upon it. But on other passages, we shall seek to offer some remarks.

1. *A guilty silence.* “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long” (Psa 32:3). The writer was David, making reference to his experience during those months which followed his fearful fall and before the prophet rebuked him for the same. No mention is made of that experience in the historical narratives, but what has just been quoted intimates that, before the appearing of Nathan unto him, David had long been exceedingly tortured in his conscience. Through reluctance to humble himself before God or to be known as a criminal before men, he had refused the only effectual relief by not confessing his sins unto the Lord. By such failure, he obtained proof that “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper” (Pro 28:13). David’s secret remorse not only preyed upon his spirit, but impaired his health. When the guilt of sin lies upon the conscience, not only is it an intolerable burden to the inward man, but the outward is affected too. As nothing so injuriously affects our animal spirits and enervates the body as grief, so nothing has a worse effect on the soul of a saint than to offend the Holy One and refuse contritely to own the same. Such was David’s sad case, and, in consequence, he suffered what no tongue can express. The displeasure of the Lord was manifested, “Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me.” Not till then did he acknowledge his transgression and receive forgiveness. That is recorded for our instruction!

2. *A submissive silence.* “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it” (Psa 39:9). Realizing that it was the chastening hand of God upon him, he refrained from murmuring.

It was not the silence of sullenness, but of meekly acquiescing to the rod. When we are in our right minds, we shall have nothing to object against God's dealings with us or dispute with them. God is sovereign in the acts of His providence as well as in His laws, and therefore an important branch of our obedience unto Him lies in suffering His will, as well as in doing His will. That obedience is evidenced by refusing to repine against Him by the utterance of any impatient words. Shall vile dust and ashes censure the dispositions of the Most High or impugn His goodness? Let all God's treatment of us be both wondrous and righteous in our eyes. "If our hope be in God for a happiness in the other world, we can well afford to reconcile ourselves to all the dispensations of providence concerning this world" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). The consideration that our afflictions are appointed by our Father should silence all complaints. It did so with David. He knew they came not by chance, but according to divine appointment. After months of acute suffering, and still in agony of body, the last words of John Calvin (1509-1564) were, "Lord, Thou grindest me to powder, but it sufficeth me because it is *Thy* hand."

3. *A dignified silence.* "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth" (Isa 53:7). Most blessedly did Christ exemplify in His conduct and carriage what had been predicted of Him, putting up with unspeakable insults and indignities without resistance or complaint against either the justice of God or the injustice of men. Solomon says, "Oppression maketh a wise man mad" (Ecc 7:7), causing him who has the greatest command over himself to rage when meeting with unexpected and undeserved hard usage. But when Christ was reviled, "He reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not." He was meekness personified in its uttermost perfection. When they spat in His face and mocked Him as the Messiah, He uttered not a word. When false witnesses deposed against Him, He refuted them not. When the high priest impertinently asked, "Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?" He held His peace. He refused to speak in self-defence because He knew that He stood at His Father's bar and was bearing the shame due unto the sins of His people. When they charged Him with blasphemy, He opened not His mouth. Not only did He display perfect patience under suffering, but cheerful compliance with the Father's will.

4. *A forbidden silence.* "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence" (Isa 62:6). Ministers of the Gospel are here likened to "watchmen" (cf. 2Ti 4:5; Heb 13:17), or sentinels upon the Church's walls, which is as a city besieged. It was the duty of sentinels to observe the motions of the enemy and give warning of a threatened attack, and in order thereto they were to be vigilant. In like manner, it is the business of Christ's servants to be wakeful and watchful, faithful unto those whose souls are committed to their trust and ever menaced by foes. They must not hold their peace, but, as Henry said, "Take all opportunities to give warning to sinners, in season and out of season, and must never betray the cause of Christ by a treacherous or cowardly silence. Nor must they hold their peace at the throne of grace, but importunately supplicate God's blessing on His cause." The closing sentence is addressed to God's people at large, who are not to rest lazily upon the intercession of their pastors, but are themselves to be active and zealous in the discharge of that duty. Such are, in the margin, beautifully designated "the LORD's remembrancers"—those who humbly but trustfully put Him in mind of His promises.

5. *A discreet silence.* "Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time" (Amo 5:13). The day in which that prophet's lot was cast was an exceedingly evil one—one in which they had left off righteousness in the earth (verse 7), when the magistrate who faithfully rebuked was hated, and those who spoke uprightly were abhorred (verse 10), when the poor were mercilessly oppressed (verse 11), and political corruption abounded (verse 12). When, in short,

God charged them with “manifold transgressions and ...mighty sins.” In such a time, a still tongue marked a wise head. Great caution was required with their speech lest it should be misinterpreted and misrepresented, and so bad matters made worse for them. This precept pertained not to the prophets themselves, for it was ever *their* duty to “cry aloud, spare not...show my people their transgression” (Isa 58:1). Let the consequences be what they may. But for the private people to open their mouths in such a day is likely to stir up against them ill-will and hatred and cause the name of God to be blasphemed. In perilous times, the old adage holds good, “The least said, the soonest amended.”

6. *A commanded silence.* “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak” (1Co 14:34). “Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1Ti 2:11-12). Those are the only passages in the New Testament where any silence is specifically enjoined, and it is striking to observe that this prohibition is *repeated*. Those verses are far more than the opinions of Paul, being given by inspiration of God, and therefore of divine and binding authority. They are too plain to be misunderstood. What they require is obedient submission—not a reluctant or chagrined one, but a loving response from a desire to please Him who loved them and gave Himself for them. To say that many good people are in favour of women making public addresses and praying audibly where men are present evokes the rejoinder. More’s the pity, for when good people do wrong, it makes the wrong worse rather than better. To plead the prompting of the Spirit, in view of these verses, is most impious, for He never leads anyone to act contrary to the Word. No matter what the inducement of circumstances, it is never right to do wrong.

7. *A shamed silence.* “For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1Pe 2:15). Strict Christians who refuse to join unbelievers in their carnal pleasures and excesses are regarded as dissemblers and their conduct as peevish obstinacy. Baseless charges are to be expected, for they called the Master “Beelzebub.” But it is our responsibility to take every possible care that there be nothing in our lives to afford just ground for censure, “Give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (1Ti 5:14). Nay, more, it is our duty so to act that we silence the slanders of the ungodly by holy and benevolent lives, so that they are thereby refuted and confounded. A consistent walk is the most effectual confutation. See to it then that your conduct gives the lie to every false charge made by worldlings, and thereby shame them into silence.

EXPOSITION OF JOHN’S FIRST EPISTLE

21. Hatred and Darkness (2:11)

“But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.”

In 2:9-11, the apostle continues to draw the line of demarcation and to differentiate sharply between the genuine and the spurious, for his obvious design in those verses was to make further manifest the radical contrast there is between a merely formal professor and a real and practical possessor of Christ. Equally so it must have been his intention to strike conviction into the former. Open rebuke is better than secret love, and for one who made the claim—and most probably sincerely so—to be informed on apostolic authority that “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now” ought most solemnly to affect him. To really believe and then to positively affirm that he was in the light of truth and grace, and to be walking in the same, and at the same time to make clear proof that he was wholly and altogether a stranger unto what he declared, was a most fearful and fatal delusion. That ninth verse contains the pith of the passage, the tenth presenting the opposite character, and the eleventh amplifying the original statement.

It is the testing of profession which is in view, the distinguishing of the true and living Christian from the nominal and lifeless one, the former being identified by that which makes clear the reality of what lies behind all surface appearances. When the truth is applied in power to the heart by the Holy Spirit, it produces its own effects and bears fruit after its own kind. For one to hate a member of the body of Christ, to regard him with contempt, to have as little to do with him as possible, to speak ill of him, to desire his injury, is to demonstrate that he has no love to him, and that he is yet in a state of nature. Conversely, “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light,” his profession and practice accord, his claim is made good, his heart is made evident by his life, his relation to Christ is seen from his affection for His disciples. A saving knowledge of Christ is known by His Word dwelling in the heart, directing its actions, drawing out its affections both unto Him and unto those who are His. Love for the brethren is a proof of his being in the light, for the light is the cause of his love, as love is the effect and fruit of the light.

“And there is none occasion of stumbling in him.” Personally, we much prefer the rendering of the annotator of Calvin, “To him there is no stumblingblock,” for while the “him” probably refers primarily to the lover, yet the beloved is not to be excluded. The Greek preposition “en” clearly has the force of “to” in the last clause of Colossians 1:23—“preached to every creature;” and is so rendered again in 1 Thessalonians 4:7, “unto holiness.” “No occasion of stumbling to him” widens the scope of the statement. “Stumblingblock” is, of course, used here in a moral sense. Literally the word means impediment, something against which one strikes one’s feet; but when employed figuratively it imports nothing which will occasion a fall into sin, as in “But if thy right eye offend thee” (Mat 5:29, margin “do cause thee to offend”), and “that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way” (Rom 14:13). Thus, first, there is nothing in him-self which will cause him to act uncharitably; and, second, nothing in his brother from which he will take offence.

The link between the two halves of our verse is a moral and practical one: “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and [consequently] there is none occasion of stumbling in him.” To walk in the light and to exercise love unto the brethren are among the chief means of preserving the believer from those stumblingblocks which cause so many godless professors to forsake the way of holiness; for by the one he is enabled to perceive the snares of Satan, and by the other he is moved to avoid and shun them. The extent to which the Christian is practically in the light will determine the measure in which his old nature is held in check and the new one dominates his soul and regulates his conduct. The one who abides in the light will not act injuriously toward his brethren, and while love be cultivated he will not be readily stumbled at anything in or from them; for, as previously pointed out, “Charity [love] suffereth long, and is kind...doth not behave itself

unseemly...and is not easily provoked...beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1Co 13:4-5, 7).

It is to be carefully noted that it is not light alone which keeps us from stumbling. The knowledge of God’s Word is indeed of great value and importance, for it provides us with a sure rule to walk by, and also makes known those great and precious promises of God which we are to appropriate and build upon. Nevertheless, as 2 Peter 2:20 shows, something more is needed, for it is possible to escape the pollutions of the world through a bare knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and then be again entangled therein, as the cases of Demas and thousands since then have sadly demonstrated. Love must be joined with the light if we are to escape those snares which occasion the fall of so many: it is because “they received not the love of the truth” (2Th 2:10) that so many are fatally deceived by Satan. As one of the old writers expressed it, “A man is better held by the heart than by the head.” That is true Godward as well as manward, for as love is the living principle from which all acceptable obedience proceeds, so also that which receives un murmuringly God’s most trying dealings.

Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and sword are unable to separate the saints from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35), where “love” is not only to be taken passively, for that love wherewith they are loved, but actively, for the love with which they love Him; for afflictions assail our love to Him and His to us. Where love is healthy and vigorous, trials cause us to cleave more closely to the Lord—“though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). Love will take nothing ill at His hand, causing us to submit meekly to His rod. So it is in connection with our brethren. The more we love them, the less likely are we to be offended with their infirmities. Love envies not their prosperity, and preserves from many sins, for it “worketh no ill” (Rom 13:10). Love not only prevents my treating a brother wrongly, but it delivers me from dwelling upon what is wrong in him, for “love covereth all sins” (Pro 10:12). As we shall see later (D.V.), John returns to this subject again and again, explaining and enforcing the divine commandment which requires brotherly love.

Since “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light,” it inevitably follows that “he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness” (verse 11). There is the incontestable evidence against him, for hatred is the mark and badge of darkness. He is not a regenerate person at all: he knows nothing of practical Christianity. Let him no longer deceive himself. “The fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal 5:22), and where the one be absent so is the other. To be destitute of the Spirit is to be dead in sin; and where that be the case such a one will conduct himself accordingly, for the walk manifests the heart. No matter what specious excellency he may appear to possess, or how loud his claim, if he hates a saint he is not a child of God, but a stranger to Him. If he loved Christ, he would love His disciples too. To really hate a brother in Christ is altogether against nature, for if I be born of God there must be something in each of His people that I shall find to love; if therefore I hate such, that is entirely inconsistent with a holy profession, and is a sure proof that I am not in a state of grace.

Hatred issues from enmity, and is in all men by nature, being one of the fearful effects of the fall. “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Ti 3:3). Note well the apostle’s use of the past tense, for he would by no means allow that such a horrible state of affairs could consist with those in whom a miracle of grace had been wrought. No, he was describing what the elect were while yet in a state of nature. That root of bitterness was in all, though it was not drawn out and made equally evident in all. It is at once drawn out when the unregenerate contact the regenerate, by the very contrariety of their natures, the latter being odious to the former,

for the holiness that is in them irritates and condemns their sinfulness. Since “every one that doeth evil hateth the light” (Joh 3:20), it necessarily follows that they hate the children of light. Conversely, “he that doeth truth cometh to the light”—welcomes and loves it.

This hatred is a settled, deeply rooted and thorough ill-will unto another. It consists of envy, which cannot bear for another to exceed him, or be more highly esteemed for gifts and graces than himself. The one who hates will seek by all means to establish his own reputation and ruin that of his brother. He goes to one and another who will grant him a hearing, reporting and giving an account of every infirmity which the one who hates is the subject of. Such a malignant spirit at once identifies him as a child of the devil, fulfilling his evil desires (Joh 8:44). That hatred manifests itself by rejoicing when adversity overtakes a child of God, for instead of sympathizing with him it callously exclaims, “Serves him right.” It breaks forth in more evil speakings and actions. Alas, there are many such in the churches and assemblies: those with a considerable head knowledge of Scripture, orthodox in their beliefs, regular attenders at services, able to make long and beautiful prayers, but possessed of a spirit of malice. Theirs is merely a natural religion, for their hearts are unaffected by the truth, uninfluenced by the principles of the Gospel, and therefore their profession is a vain pretence. No amount of theological lore is of any value if it slays not enmity both against God and against His people.

It is to be duly observed that John knows no middle ground between love and hatred: as his Master declared, “He that is not with me is against me” (Mat 12:30). As there is no third alternative between right and wrong, so there is no third quality between love and hatred. We therefore emphatically reject that miserable shift of human invention that hatred means to “love less,” though some men whose writings we highly respect adopted it. Through a misapprehension of our Lord’s words in Luke 14:26, they suppose that there was at least one passage which obliged them so to define the term. But whatever difficulty that verse might present, the force of the term in many others is unmistakable. Fancy rendering “the fear of the Lord is to love evil less,” or “they loved me less without a cause” (Joh 15:25)! There is not the slightest need to resort unto such sophistry in explaining, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luk 14:26).

It is indeed true that the Gospel does not set aside natural affections, rather does it elevate and direct them. It is also a fact that Christ demands the first place in our hearts and must be loved supremely. Yet there is nothing whatever in Luke 14:26 to indicate that our Lord was there drawing a comparison between a superior and an inferior love. Nor was there anything in His words that contradicted the fifth commandment. Rather was Christ there insisting that He would brook no rival, that His claims were paramount, and therefore when those of subordinates clashed with His they must yield and be denied. Under certain circumstances, so far from “loving less” those who are nearest and dearest to us in the flesh, we must act as though we did not love them at all. If loyalty unto the Saviour requires it, we should cross their wills and antagonize their wishes. Thus, if godless parents should forbid their converted child to read his Bible or engage in prayer, his duty would be to disobey them. In thus acting, it might grieve him deeply to displease those who were kind to him in every other way, yet his actions would be hateful ones.

It is not long before each Christian learns by painful experience that the calls of nature are unfavourable to the pursuits of grace, that the longing to please those who are near and dear to us by blood often leads us to the confines of sin, if not to the actual commission of it. Therefore to hate whatever opposes the rights of God or our own spiritual interests is among the clearest evidences of regeneration. A striking example of this is found in Exodus 32, where the Levites’ love and

zeal for Jehovah triumphed over the ties of nature. When Moses perceived that Aaron had made the worshippers of the golden calf naked to their shame, he bade those who were on the Lord's side to come to him, and when the Levites did so he commanded them in the name of his Master: "Put every man his sword by his side...and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion" and they did so (verses 25-28). Later the Holy Spirit declared of Levi: "Who said unto his father [i.e. by his actions] and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know [love] his own children" (Deu 33:9), thereby signifying God's approbation of their fidelity to His honour.

Surely the last clause in our Lord's declaration serves to explain the whole: "yea, and his own life also." Life is precious, and the instinct of self-preservation is the endowment of every creature. Yet if the issue be drawn between prolonging my life at the cost of repudiating the Gospel and being burned at the stake, then loyalty to Christ makes my duty quite clear. Self-loathing is ever a mark of a real Christian character. And why does he loathe himself but because the flesh in him rises up against the Spirit? If then I am to hate or spurn the desires of my body when they are hostile to the welfare of my soul, then I must also hate the opposers of the divine life, whoever or whatever they may be; yet without cherishing the least animosity against them. As in the case of Levi, regard to God's glory must prevent our regard to any and every creature. Thus this hatred is not absolute but relative, not in my heart, but in my actions. In a word, the Christian is required to antagonize every tie of nature when it be found to run counter to the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the most grievous trials which a believer has to endure is when one whom he had good reason to regard as a fellow saint turns against him and treats him maliciously. He expects the profane world to oppose and persecute him, but when those in the professing world do so it is much harder to bear. It is indeed a bitter cup which the child of God is called upon to drink when one wearing the name of Christ acts spitefully unto him; yet it is no unprecedented experience, and with the Word of God in his hands should come as no surprise. David made sad complaint at Ahithophel's conduct toward him: "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (Psa 41:9). In the context he had drawn up a list of his woes, recounting the unkindnesses of his enemies, but he reserved for the climax the abominable behaviour of that one whose only return for kindness was ingratitude, and who basely perverted his offices of hospitality.

A still more touching reference is made thereto in Psalm 55:12-14: "For *it was* not an enemy *that* reproached me; then I could have borne *it*: neither *was it* he that [openly] hated me *that* did magnify *himself* against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but *it was* thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, walked into the house of God in company."

For apparent friends to become the open enemies of those who truly fear God is a great grief. For those who pretend to love us to insinuate themselves into our confidence and affections on purpose to injure us is to touch us in our tenderest spot. Yet thus was our blessed Lord treated by one who had been privileged to enjoy the closest intimacy with Him. The perfidy⁵⁷ of Judas pierced Christ more deeply than did the unconcealed enmity of the priests and elders: His "yea" in Psalm 41:9—which He quoted as a prediction concerning Himself (Joh 13:18)—shows that He regarded the treachery of the son of perdition as the acme of His woes at the hands of men, as

⁵⁷ **perfidy** – deliberate betrayal of trust.

something almost inconceivable. The faithlessness of that favoured apostle cut Him to the very quick.

Job lamented, “All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me” (19:19). Those who should have concerned themselves about him, visited him in his sore afflictions, and performed whatever kindly offices lay in their power, evidenced no more solicitude than though he were a complete stranger unto them. Nay, they not only neglected, but abhorred him and turned against him, adding to his distress by maligning him. Human nature is fearfully fickle. “All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee even to the border: the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee...they that eat thy bread have laid a wound under thee” (Oba 7)—the Chaldeans, who were joined to the Edomites, became their enemies; so that it is no new thing for former allies to become bitter antagonists. Among the hardships endured by the apostle Paul was “in perils among false brethren” (2Co 11:26)—an experience more or less shared by most of God’s servants. Religious hatred is the most cruel and venomous of all, as Acts 7:52 and Rev. 17:6, show. With such examples recorded in Scripture let every Christian be forewarned, and put not his trust in any creature. Expect no mercy from traitors, for they will stick at nothing unless God restrains them.

“But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.”

He who so far from loving his brother cherishes a bitter and malignant spirit against him, who instead of seeking to promote his welfare desires to injure and ruin him, proves that darkness is his element, for it rules all his actions. He walks according to the course of this world, and, though distress and misery are in his ways, so thoroughly is he deluded by Satan and blinded by sin and pride that he knows not whither he is going, being quite unaware of the fatal path he is treading. Not only is he in the darkness, but the darkness is in him: it has blinded his eyes, sin has complete dominion over him, dominating all the faculties of his soul. Enmity in the heart blinds the judgment, causing its subject to be ignorant of himself, to know not the way of peace, and also to be utterly unable to perceive that he is making direct for “the blackness of darkness for ever” (Jude 1:13).

In concluding this chapter, let it be pointed out that the history of the Jewish people supplies a graphic commentary upon our present verse. Solemnly indeed has each clause of it been exemplified in the case of that unhappy nation. Not only had they no love for Christ, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, but they murderously hated Him—proof that they were in spiritual darkness. And in what awful moral darkness have they walked since with respect to the Gospel, and the darkness of God’s afflictive providences! He has judicially blinded them. “Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate” (Psa 34:21) has literally been their case for the past two thousand years.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

73. Caleb

The particular book upon which we are here commenting would lack completeness if there were no reference in its pages to that eminent, though little-pondered, character whose name we have placed at the head of this article; not only because of his memorable association with Joshua at a critical juncture in their lives, but also because of the typical teaching of this blessed section of the Scriptures. As we have so often pointed out in this series, the book of Joshua treats of the inheritance of the saints, the rich gift of God's sovereign grace—the earthly Canaan adumbrating that glorious portion which God has provided for His people on high. That heritage is reserved for the children *of faith* (1Pe 1:5), for what is said of the Hebrews concerning Palestine (“They could not enter in because of unbelief”—Heb 3:19) holds good equally of all men concerning heaven itself (Mar 16:16). As we shall see, both Caleb and Joshua made it clearly manifest that they were endowed with that divine grace. The heavenly inheritance is to be occupied by the mystical body of Christ, and its members are made up of redeemed and regenerated *Jews and Gentiles* (Eph 2:14-22). Is it not then most striking to discover that, of the only two men who were delivered from Egypt and given an inheritance in Canaan, one of them was a Jew, or lineal descendant of Abraham, and the other a Gentile?

Caleb appears for the first time on the pages of Holy Writ in Numbers 13, and in order for us to appreciate the excellent spirit that was found in him, and to enable us the better to understand what is recorded of him in Joshua 14:6-15, it will be necessary to consider carefully the whole of the solemn and striking incident there recorded. After their supernatural deliverance at the Red Sea, the children of Israel had been safely conducted across the wilderness, and in less than a year had reached Kadesh-barnea, which lay on the border of the promised land. But, as pointed out in our last, from a careful comparison of several passages, it appears that, so far from being thankful, and eager to enter and possess the same, they were fearful and reluctant to do so. Believing not the description of the land which the Lord supplied, they preferred to walk by sight rather than by faith, and urged Moses to appoint a number of spies to make an investigation, thereby discouraging the hearts of the children of Israel from going over into the land which JEHOVAH had given them (Num 32:7-8), and jeopardizing the lives of those who should be sent on such a venture. Thus, we see that unbelief is not only highly dishonouring to God, but horribly selfish, and callously indifferent to the good of others.

Yielding to the evil request of the people, Moses proceeded to select those who should go forth and reconnoiter the land. One was chosen from each of the tribes, namely “a ruler among them...heads of the children of Israel” (Num 13:2-3), so that this hazardous undertaking was assigned to those who were the responsible leaders of the tribes, which makes the subsequent rebellion so much more the serious. Of the twelve, ten proved to be faithless, only two of them being

true to the Lord. One of those two was Caleb. Thus in middle life, he had attained unto a position of honour—the prince of his tribe. It will be observed by the attentive reader, that he is given the *third* place in the list of the twelve men (Num 13:4-5), which is not without significance. For in Scripture, three is ever the number which speaks of resurrection, so that possibly we have here an inspired hint that he was a regenerated man, one who by a miracle of grace had passed from death unto life. As Numbers 13:6 informs us, Caleb belonged to the tribe of Judah, concerning which Jacob had predicted, “Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies” (Gen 49:8), and which afterwards became the royal tribe, of which was David, and from which our Lord according to the flesh sprang.

We are told that his father’s name was Jephunneh, which is a detail of particular interest, for in Numbers 32:12, we are informed that he was a Kenezite and therefore a *Gentile*. Thus Jephunneh was not a Hebrew by birth, but the son of one who was friendly disposed unto Israel, and doubtless he had been circumcised and “naturalized,” and married to a woman of the tribe of Judah, who bore him the renowned hero of this article. The deep importance of this fact is indicated by an account of his genealogy being given us in 1 Chronicles 4:13, 15. It is very remarkable to find that competent Hebraists give a *twofold* derivation and meaning to his name: some tracing it to *keleb*, which means “dog,” and others regarding it as an intensified form of *leb*, which is the usual word for “heart,” rendering it “all heart” or, as we would say today, “whole-hearted”—a hearty, courageous man. Thus, the one derivation looks back to his lowly origin—a Gentile “dog”—while the other tells us of what he became by grace—wholly yielded unto the Lord, and therefore “as bold as a lion,” thoroughly intrepid.

It is to be observed that when Moses sent forth the twelve men to spy out the land, the chief thing which he pressed upon them was to “be of good courage” (Num 13:20). Probably that injunction contained a twofold import. In the first place, it was needed by them personally, for the task in which they were to engage was one that called for no ordinary valour, venturing as they would be into a territory occupied by a hostile people, from whom they could expect no mercy should they be discovered and apprehended. They were about to embark on an undertaking which endangered their very lives. Second, Moses therein intimated that he hoped that upon their return they would give an inspiring report, which would encourage and strengthen the resolution of the timid congregation. Yet it was something far more than a merely natural boldness from them which he enjoined, namely that fearlessness which is the product of a strong faith, for it is only as the heart is engaged with the living God and the mind stayed on Him, and there is a laying hold of His promises, that we are no longer depressed by opposition and are delivered from disquietude and alarm, “I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength” (Isa 12:2).

It is probable that, the better to escape detection, the twelve spies separated into pairs, and went forth to make an independent examination. Entering Canaan from the southern border, they made a complete survey of the land even to its northern extremity, spending almost six weeks over the same. How thorough a job they made of it is intimated in verse 21, “So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob.” Returning by way of Hebron, they discovered it to be inhabited by “the children of Anak,” which were men of giant stature—whether these were confined to that single locality, or whether there were a considerable number more in other parts of the country, is uncertain, for the “*all* the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature” (verse 32), was probably the language of exaggeration. Then follows a parenthetical remark, “Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt” (verse 22), upon which Thomas Scott (1747-1821) remarked, “The decided and explicit manner in which Moses declares exactly how long Hebron was built before Zoan (though probably no other author gives the least account

when either of them was founded) shows a consciousness of authentic information, and a freedom from all fear of being contradicted, even by the Egyptians, who were proud of their antiquity; and may well be considered as an internal evidence that the history is genuine.”

In addition to bidding the spies be of good courage, Moses told them to “bring of the fruit of the land,” and therefore ere leaving it, they cut down from thence a branch with a cluster of grapes and bore it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates and of the figs. In view of what follows, it seems to be quite likely that the two who brought these evidences of the fruitfulness of Canaan were Caleb and Joshua. As the author of *The Companion Bible* (virtually unobtainable today) so beautifully remarked, it was “no mere accident that *these* three were brought. They were the symbols of the ‘fruit’ of our Land. First, of Him who is the true Vine—*He* comes first! Second, ‘pomegranates’—His *worship* comes next, they being frequently used symbolically in the tabernacle and temple, see Exodus 28; 11 Chronicles 3, 4. Third, ‘figs’—the common support of life in the East, next to bread.” In their more general typical significance, they were emblems of those earnestness of heaven’s joys which the Holy Spirit imparts to believers here upon earth. As those grapes, pomegranates and figs were *samples* of the fertility of their heritage, and what awaited them there, so the Lord’s people are graciously favoured in this life with blessed foretastes of their eternal portion.

A period of “forty days” elapsed between the sending forth and the return of the spies. A most pertinent interval was that, for in Scripture, forty is ever the number of probation and testing—four being the number of the creature, and ten of responsibility. Thus, Moses was in the mount forty days to receive the Law (Exo 24:18). Israel was tried in the wilderness for forty years (Deu 8:2; Psa 95:10). A space of forty days was granted unto Nineveh to repent under the preaching of the prophet (Jon 3:4). Profoundly significant was the fact that Christ was born in the year 4000 A.M.,⁵⁸ ending the world’s probation (Joh 12:31) after its forty centuries of testing. For forty days, our Lord was tempted of the devil (Mat 4:2). As pointed out in an earlier paragraph, Israel were reluctant to go up and possess the promised land, and evidently their proposal of sending out the twelve men to reconnoiter it was merely a temporizing device to gain time, in the hope that so unfavourable a report of it would be given that the project would be abandoned. And now, after an interval of forty days, *trial was made* of their hearts, the real state of the same became unmistakably manifest, and their doom was sealed by the awful pronouncement of JEHOVAH’s lips. Thus the incident we are here considering marked a vital crisis in the history of the nation.

The spies made their report “to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel...and showed them the fruit of the land” (Num 13:26). Their account of it was a mixed one, partly favourable and partly unfavourable. They freely acknowledged the fruitfulness of Canaan, and by so doing ratified the description given of it by the Lord Himself, who declared that it was a good and a large one, a land flowing with milk and honey (Exo 3:8; 13:5). But they also emphasized what they considered were formidable difficulties in the way of their occupying of the same, calling attention to the great strength of the walls which surrounded and protected its cities, the giants who inhabited them, and the multitude of people who dwelt in Canaan. Such a description was like pouring cold water on the congregation. Whatever ardour they had was immediately dampened, their spirits fell, and the people gave way to murmuring and repining. It was at this point that our hero appeared to particular advantage, conspicuously displaying those noble qualities with which divine grace had so richly endowed him, strikingly illustrating those words,

⁵⁸ **Anno Mundi** – (Latin: “in the year of the world”) Year after Creation, refers to a chronology based on the biblical creation of the world. This was calculated from the genealogies in the Bible, based on the Hebrew Jewish Masoretic text.

“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 Caleb stilled the people before Moses.” It is evident from those words that at least a considerable part of the congregation were on the point of open revolt, not only murmuring but mutinying. Nobly did Caleb now answer to his name, stepping into the breach and acting with great intrepidity. Behold him facing that discontented, angry and rebellious multitude, restraining them. Hear him as he seeks to animate them to a performance of duty. “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (verse 30). In those words the admirable character of the man was plainly revealed. He was indeed “all heart”—of undaunted courage, fearless in the face of danger, undismayed by the strength of the opposition. He regarded the numerous Canaanites and their giants in the light of the sure promise of JEHOVAH, and in full dependence upon His sufficiency. His urging of the people to “go up *at once*” was not the language of impatience, but the urgency of holy zeal. Most probably he felt they had already wasted too much time in the forty days which had been spent in searching the land, and that there should therefore be no further delay in occupying the goodly heritage which the Lord had given them. The strength of his assurance appeared in his “possess it” *before* “well able to overcome it.”

But the goodly and God-honouring counsel of Caleb prevailed not. His fellow spies were engaged with the difficulties confronting them, instead of relying upon Him with whom all things are possible. They exclaimed, “We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight” (verses 31-33). As the language of Caleb was the conclusion of faith, so theirs was the conclusion of unbelief—as their “in our own *sight*” evidences. The ten deliberately opposed and directly contradicted the two, for Joshua of course seconded Caleb—a solemn warning that “the majority” are by no means always in the right. Observe well how utterly inconsistent was their language. First, they had acknowledged that it was a land which “floweth with milk and honey” (verse 27), but now they speak of its “eating up the inhabitants thereof.” When distrust possesses the heart, logical reasoning upon spiritual things departs.

Pathetic indeed was the sequel. A spirit of despondency and despair now filled the people. “And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night” (14:1), conducting themselves like a lot of spoiled children. What a lamentable spectacle they presented! These were the very people who had been the subjects of God’s gracious interposition on their behalf in the land of Egypt, visiting those who so sorely oppressed them with His heavy judgments, and then had delivered them from the house of bondage. They were the people who had witnessed the marvels which the Lord had wrought for them at the Red Sea, when in their helplessness He had miraculously made a way for them through its waters, and then drowned all who were pursuing them. These were the people who had been so wondrously cared for in their journey across the wilderness, being supernaturally led by the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, and fed with bread from heaven. And now they acted as though there were no living and mighty God to look to. Such unbelief was utterly inexcusable. So is *ours*, my reader! They credited the evil report of the skeptical spies rather than the sure word of God. And what was the consequence? Distress of heart and bitter lamentation—a night spent in weeping. As Matthew Henry pointed out, “Distrust is a sin that is its own punishment. Those who do not trust God are continually vexing themselves.”

What a horrible contrast is here presented from the opening verses of Exodus 15! There we read, “Then *sang* Moses and the children of Israel this song...I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously,” etc. Here “all the congregation lifted up their voice, and...*wept*.” So fickle and unstable is poor human nature in its present fallen condition—one week exclaiming “Hosannah to the Son of David. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the LORD,” (Mat 21:9) the next crying, “Away with him, crucify him” (Joh 19:15). It is evident from Deuteronomy 1 that Moses himself expostulated with the people, for there we are told that he said unto them, “Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes. And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place” (verses 29-31). But to no avail, for as he later reminded them, “Yet in this thing ye did not believe the LORD your God” (Deu 1:32). The truth is that they were in a thoroughly backslidden condition, their hearts had departed from their gracious Benefactor, a spirit of unbelief and rebellion possessed them, and they were deaf to the most moving entreaties.

But something worse was to follow. The next morning petulant weeping gave way to the language of open revolt. “And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness” was their wicked reply to what he had said to them on the previous evening. “And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt” (14:3-4). Thus, they dared to murmur against the divinely appointed heads of the congregation, and blamed them for what their jaundiced eyes regarded as a hopeless situation. Ah, that leadership which so many covet often proves to be a most thankless and unenviable position. But, still further, they charged the Lord Himself with harbouring cruel designs against them. Base ingratitude was that, viewing God’s wondrous favours to them as deceitful injuries. “Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel” (Num 14:5), thoroughly appalled at such an outburst, quite overcome by the sad situation confronting them.

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

8. Its Extent, Part 3

While we do not wish to labour unduly any particular point in these pages, there are some aspects of the truth which call for a greater emphasis and fuller treatment than do others. That is not because of any ambiguity in them, for our failure to apprehend the teaching of Holy Writ is not due to its indistinctness, but because of our unwillingness to receive God’s Word at its face value, or the obscuring of the same by the clouds of dust raised by the opposition of men against the same. Noticeably is that the case with the one now before us, for though the evolutionists and

even openly avowed infidels cannot get away from the fact that man, as yet, is a very imperfect creature, they are far from allowing that he is *totally* depraved—averse to all that is good, prone to all that is evil. Such a declaration is much too humbling and humiliating for any natural heart honestly to accept and be duly affected by it. Plain and insistent as is God’s Word upon the subject, not a few professing Christians find it so distasteful that, if they do not repudiate it *in toto*, they go to a great many shifts in order to blunt its sharp edge and remove its most cutting features. The language of Hazael well expresses their resentment against the dark picture which the divine Artist has drawn of them.

When the Syrian beheld Elijah weeping, and inquired what was the occasion of his distress, God’s servant replied, “Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child” (2Ki 8:12). So little was Hazael aware of the vileness of his nature that he became highly indignant, and answered, “But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” He fondly imagined himself to be incapable of such foul deeds. Nevertheless, the sad sequel fully vindicated the prophet, for albeit Hazael supposed himself to be as gentle as a lamb, when he came into power he proved himself to be as fierce as a savage dog and as cruel as a tiger. For he not only murdered his royal master, usurped the throne of Syria, burnt the cities of Israel and slew their inhabitants with the sword, but barbarously conducted himself toward the women and children, until, as 11 Kings 13:7 states, he went on destroying Israel till he “had made them like the dust by threshing.”

Every passage in the Word of truth which declares the impossibility of the natural man doing anything acceptable to God (such as Jer 13:23; Mat 7:18; Rom 8:8; Heb 11:6) demonstrates man’s total depravity. If men performed any part of their duty toward God, it would be pleasing to Him, for He is not a capricious or hard Master, but delights in righteousness wherever He sees it. But as the Lord Jesus pointed out, men will gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles before unrenowned nature will yield any fruit unto God. Every passage in the Bible which insists upon the necessity of the new birth imports the total depravity of man, for if there were any degree of virtue in the human heart, it could be cultivated and increased, and in that case, regeneration would be obviated, since the development and improvement of what is already in man would suffice. But our Lord informed a devout religionist, a master in Israel, that except he were born again he could not enter the kingdom of God. Likewise, every passage which calls on men to repent and believe the Gospel presupposes their present sinful and lost condition, for they that are whole need not a physician. “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luk 13:5) was the decisive verdict of Christ.

We will now resume our notice of the different forms taken by the repudiation of this truth. They are varied and numerous, for unbelief is very fertile. That is but another way of saying that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and at no one point is that enmity more active and evident than in its antipathy to God’s Word in general, and the opposition it makes more particularly unto those aspects of it which expose and condemn mankind. Thus, when we are told that all the actions of the unregenerate are not only mixed with sin, but are in their own nature sinful, many sneeringly reply that such is a palpable absurdity. They argue that there be many actions performed by men, such as eating and drinking in moderation, which, being merely *natural* actions, can have in them neither moral good nor moral evil. But that is a bare assertion rather than a logical argument, and is easily refuted.

When we affirm that all the actions of the unregenerate are sinful, we refer only to those which are performed voluntarily, and which are capable of being exercised unto a good end.

Whatever falls into that category is not a merely natural but a moral action. That eating and drinking, and all other voluntary exercises, *are* moral actions is evident, for Scripture expressly exhorts us, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1Co 10:31). In an irrational being, such actions would be merely natural ones, but in a moral agent, it is otherwise—the manner in which he attends to them rendering the same good or evil. It is the motive which, largely, determines the quality of the act. Eating and drinking are virtuous when, from a gracious principle, the agent thankfully acknowledges God as the Giver, prayerfully seeks His blessing upon the food, and purposes to use the strength therefrom to His praise. But the unregenerate lack that gracious principle, eating and drinking out of no respect to God’s authority, without any love to Him in their hearts, and with no concern for His glory—merely to satisfy their appetites and to provide fuel for the further gratification of their lusts.

If every act of the unregenerate be sinful, then, asks the objector, how is the fact to be accounted for that God Himself regards favourably and even rewards some of the performances of the wicked—such as the case of Ahab and the repentance of the Ninevites at the preaching of Jonah? The first answer is, We must distinguish between God’s governmental ways in connection with this world, and that which He requires in order to admittance into heaven. Though the Most High knows the secrets of all hearts, He does not always proceed accordingly in His administration of the affairs of earth. When God approves of any of the deeds of the wicked, it is not because He regards the same as *theirs*, but because those deeds tend to further His own wise counsels. “God rewarded Nebuchadnezzar for his long siege against Tyre, in giving him the land of Egypt, yet Nebuchadnezzar did nothing in that undertaking which in its own nature could approve itself unto God. The only reason why he was thus rewarded was, that what he had done subserved the divine purpose in punishing Tyre for her insulting treatment toward His people (Eze 26:1-7; 29:17-20). God rewarded Cyrus with the treasures of Babylon (Isa 14:3), not because he did anything that was pleasing in His sight, for his motive was the lust of dominion; but because what he did effected the deliverance of Judah, and fulfilled the divine predictions upon Babylon” (Andrew Fuller, 1754-1815, to whom we are indebted for part of what follows).

In God’s governmental dealings with men, actions which possess no appearance of having any intrinsic goodness in them may well be rewarded without any compromise of holiness and righteousness, yea, even those which *have* such an appearance, though it be nothing but appearance. God does not always deal with men according to His omniscience, but rather does He generally treat with them in this life according to what they profess and appear to be. Thus, the Lord’s design in punishing the wicked person and house of Ahab was to *make manifest His displeasure* against their idolatries. If, then, when Ahab humbled himself and rent his garments, God had proceeded toward him on the ground of His omniscience, knowing him to be destitute of godly sorrow, and made no difference in His treatment of him, that design would not have been answered. Whatever might be Ahab’s motives, they were unknown to men, and had no difference appeared in the divine treatment, they would have concluded it was vain to repent and serve Him. It therefore seemed good unto JEHOVAH to deal with him in this life as though his reformation were sincere, leaving his insincerity to be called to account in the day to come.

As Fuller pointed out, there is a case much resembling that of Ahab in the history of Abijah, the son of Rehoboam. In 11 Chronicles 13, we read of his wars with Jeroboam, king of Israel, and how he addressed the apostate Israelites previous to the battle. Having reproached them for forsaking the God of their fathers and turning to idolatry, he added, “But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken him; and the priests, which minister unto the LORD, are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business: and they burn unto the LORD every morning

and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense: the showbread also set they in order upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of the LORD our God; but ye have forsaken him.” To all appearance, this prince was very zealous for the Lord, and one might conclude that the signal victory given him over Jeroboam was an expression of divine approbation. But if we consult the account given of his reign in 1 Kings 15 (where he is called Abijam), we learn that he was a wicked king, and that he walked in all the sins of his father; and although God granted success to his arms, it was not out of regard to him, but *for David’s sake*, and for the establishment of Jerusalem.

Much of what was said above about Ahab holds good of the Ninevites, and of Pharaoh too. Concerning the former, there might have been sincere and spiritual penitents among them for all we know, but whether godly sorrow or slavish fear actuated them, they professed and appeared to be humbled before God, displaying the external marks of contrition; and for God to treat with them on the ground of their repentance being apparently sincere was obviously an exemplification of the divine wisdom, for it magnified His righteous and merciful government in the sight of the surrounding nations. In like manner, the acknowledgments of Pharaoh’s sins, and his requests for Moses to entreat the Lord on his behalf, were repeatedly followed by the removal of those judgments which so appalled his proud spirit; yet who would insist that there was any good or spirituality in Egypt’s king? Not only God, but Moses himself, perceived his evident insincerity. Nevertheless, it became the Most High to remove His rod when that guilty tyrant made confession, even though he might laugh to himself for having imposed upon Moses so far as to gain his point.

In their strictures upon the doctrine of man’s total depravity, some have appealed to Christ’s words in Mark 12:28-34, where He assured the scribe who answered Him “discreetly” that “thou art not far from the kingdom of God”; arguing therefrom that though he was unsaved, yet our Lord found in his character something which was praiseworthy. But if the passage be read attentively, it will be found that Christ was not approving of his spirit or his conduct, but instead was simply commending his confession of faith. When this Jew acknowledged that the love of God and man was of more importance and value than whole burnt offerings—that the moral Law was more excellent than the ceremonial, which was soon to be abolished—he gave utterance to sound doctrine, and approximated so closely to the spirit of the Gospel dispensation that Christ very properly informed him he was not far from the kingdom of God, i.e. the principles which he had avowed, if truly embraced and duly pursued, would lead him into the very heart of Christianity, for it is by the Law that a knowledge of sin is obtained, and thereby our need of mercy is discovered. The things to which the scribe assented were the very ones Christ insisted upon in His teaching.

Dissentients against the truth ask, “If all men alike be totally depraved, then how is it that some lead less and others more vicious lives?” This objection was briefly noticed by us at the end of the December 1950 article, but since it be the one most likely to occasion difficulty to our readers, we will offer a few more remarks thereon. In examining the same, it is necessary to revert unto our definition of terms, and bear in mind that total depravity consists not, in the first place, of what a man *does*, but what he *is* in himself; and second, what is his relation and attitude *unto God*. Because particular persons are not swearers, morally unclean, drunkards or thieves, they are very apt to imagine that they are far from being wholly corrupt, yea, that they are good and respectable people. Such are included among those described in Proverbs 30:12, “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.” However irreproachable be the walk of the natural man, his nature is polluted and his heart thoroughly de-

filed; and the very fact that he is quite unaware of his vileness is sad proof of the blinding power of indwelling sin.

The total depravity of human nature does not mean that it actually breaks forth into open acts of all kinds of evil in any man. It is freely granted that there are marked differences among the unregenerate in the eruption of sin in their conduct—some being more honest, sober and benevolent than their fellows, running into less excess of riot than do others. Nevertheless, the seeds of all evil are present in every human breast. “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Pro 27:19). It has been truly said of all that, “If they were in Cain’s circumstances, and God should suffer them, they would do as he did. If they were in Pharaoh’s circumstances, and left of God, they would be as cruel, false, and hard-hearted as he. If they were in the like circumstances with Doeg, though they condemn him for his hypocrisy, flattery, and cruelty, they would do every whit as bad as he. If they were in like circumstances as Judas was, whatever indignation they feel against him, they would be as false and impudent, and as very traitors as he. If they were under the circumstances that the fallen angels are, they would be as very devils as they” (Mr. T. Stoddard, *The Nature of Conversion*, 1710).

It is indeed true that their fearful enmity against God and the hatred which is in their hearts against their fellows (Ti 3:3) are less openly displayed by some than others, yet that is not because they are any better in themselves than those who are flagrantly irreligious and who cast off all pretences of decency. Not at all. Their moderation in wickedness must be attributed unto the greater restraints which the Governor of this world places upon them: either by the secret workings of His Spirit upon their hopes and fears, or by His external providences, such as a godly home, early education, the subduing influence of pious companions. But none is born into this world with the smallest spark of love to God in him. Instead, “their poison is like the poison of a serpent” (Psa 58:4), and the poison of a serpent is radically the same in all its species. God estimates us by what we are internally, though we shall yet be called to an account for all that we have done externally. It is ever to be borne in mind—for our humbling—that there is very much evil within each of us that God does not suffer to break forth into particular actings of sin, sovereignly preventing temptations and opportunities unto the same.

All men are equally depraved, but that depravity discovers itself in many different forms and ways; and it is a fatal delusion to suppose that, because divine power and mercy keep me from certain crimes, I am less corrupt than my fellows, and less a criminal in His sight. God judges not as man. Capernaum was more obnoxious to Him than Sodom! Many who do not act a brutish part, act a diabolical one. There is a filthiness of the spirit, as well as of the flesh (2Co 7:1), and though some give not free rein to their sensual lusts, yet they are under the dominion of mental lusts—pride, covetousness, envy, contempt of others, malice, revenge. God restrains both the internal and external workings of sin as best serves the outworking of His eternal purpose, permitting different degrees of iniquity in different individuals, though all be “clay of the same lump.” None by nature possesses the slightest degree of holiness. Different measures of wickedness issue from the same individual at different times. That I have been kept from certain sins in the past is no guarantee that I shall not be guilty of them in the future.

Finally, the demurrer is made, “If man be so totally depraved as to be entirely incapable of doing anything that is pleasing to God, then there can be no ground for a ministerial address, no motives by which to exhort the unregenerate to cease from evil and do good, and certainly no encouragement left for them to comply.” Our first reply is that no minister of the Gospel is warranted to entertain the slightest degree of hope of success from his endeavours on the ground of the pliability of the hearts of his hearers. Rather must their corrupt state exclude any such expect-

tation. Unless the preacher's confidence be based alone on the power and promise of God, his hopes are certain to be disappointed. But, second, if the objector means that in view of their total depravity, it is *unreasonable* to exhort men to do good, this can by no means be admitted, for it would then follow that if a total depravity removes all ground for a rational address, then a *partial* one would take it away in part, and thus, in proportion as we perceive men to be disinclined unto good, we are to cease warning and expostulating with them—a self-evident absurdity!

While men be rational creatures, they are justly accountable for all that they do, whatever be the disposition of their hearts. And, so long as they be not yet consigned to a hopeless perdition, their responsibility is to be enforced, and they are to be regarded as fit subjects of a Gospel address. Nor can it be truly asserted that there are no motives by which they may properly be exhorted to cease to do evil and learn to do well. The proper motives unto these things remain in all their original force, independently of the inclination or disinclination of men's hearts to comply. God's rights, His authority, His Law, abide unchanged, no matter what change has taken place in the creature. The example of Christ and His apostles is too plain to be misunderstood. Neither the one nor the other toned down their demands upon fallen sinners. Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ were the grand duties upon which they ever insisted, and so far from hesitating to exhort their unregenerate hearers unto what was *spiritually good*, it may be safely affirmed that they never exhorted unto anything else. Nothing less than the heart is what God ever requires. Throw down the weapons of your rebellion and yield to Christ's sceptre must be the call of His servants.

The violent antagonism of men against this truth is precisely what might well be expected, so that instead of causing us to doubt it, we should rather regard the same as a strong confirmation. Indeed, it would be surprising if a doctrine so humbling and distasteful were not resisted. Nor need we be dismayed by its widespread repudiation by preachers and professing Christians. When the Lord Jesus averred, "I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which [pretend to] see might be made blind" (Joh 9:39), the Pharisees haughtily asked, "Are we blind also?" (Joh 9:40). When He declared that human nature is so in love with sin and possessed of such enmity against God, and insisted that, "No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father," we are told that, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (Joh 6:65-66). The rejection which this doctrine meets with demonstrates how dense is that darkness which is not dispelled by so clear a light, and how great is the power of Satan when the testimony of divine revelation does not carry conviction. Every effort to tone it down verifies the fact that, "The heart" *is* deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 14

In view of certain passages in the Old Testament, not a few have been perplexed by that word, “No man hath seen God at any time” (Joh 1:18)—words once used as a stock argument by infidels to “prove that the Bible is full of contradictions.” Such verses call for the interpreter to explain their sense, and thereby distinguish between things that differ. Some of those statements which speak of the Lord’s “appearing” to one and another of the ancient celebrities refer to His doing so as the Angel of the covenant; others were theophanic manifestations, wherein He assumed the human form (cf. Eze 1:26; Dan 3:25), presaging the divine incarnation; others mean that He was seen by faith (Heb 11:26). When Isaiah declared, “I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple” (6:1), it signifies that he did so with the eyes of his understanding, in prophetic vision, and not with his bodily sight. God, essentially considered, is “invisible” (1Ti 1:17), for His essence or nature cannot be seen (1Ti 6:16), no, not by the holy angels nor by the glorified saints in heaven. When it is said we shall see “face to face” (1Co 13:12), it imports “plainly and distinctly,” in contrast with “through a glass, darkly” (obscurely) in the former part of the verse—though the Lord Jesus will be actually seen face to face.

A careful examination of the different passages in which our Lord is referred to as “coming” reveals the fact that by no means all of them allude to His personal and public return, when He shall “appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb 9:28). Thus, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (Joh 14:18), which had reference, first, to His corporeate coming unto His disciples after His resurrection and, second, to His coming spiritually at Pentecost, when He gave them another Comforter. “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him” (Joh 14:23)—come in the powerful influences of divine grace and consolation. “And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and *came* and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh” (Eph 2:16-17), which was accomplished mediately, in the ministry of His servants, for he who receives them receives Him (Mat 10:40). “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place” (Rev 2:5 and cf. 2:16)—that is a judicial visitation. “He shall come unto us as the rain” (Hos 6:3)—every spiritual revival and bestowment of grace is a coming of the Lord unto the soul.

Another example where it is necessary to distinguish between things that differ is to observe carefully the various shades of meaning given to the word *hope*. In some passages, the reference is to *the grace* of hope, the faculty by which we expect some future good, as in “faith, hope, charity” (1Co 13:13), of which God is the Author—“the God of hope” (Rom 15:13). In some verses, it is the *ground* of expectation, that on which it rests, as it is said of Abraham, “Who

against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations,” which is explained in what follows, “according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be” (Rom 4:18)—his hope reposing upon the sure promise of God. In other places, it is the *object* of hope that is in view, the thing expected, or the One in whom our confidence is placed, as in “the hope which is laid up for you in heaven” (Col 1:5), “looking for that blessed hope” (Ti 2:13), “O LORD, the hope of Israel” (Jer 17:13). Occasionally, the term signifies the *assurance* which is produced, as in “my flesh also shall rest in hope” (Psa 16:9) and “rejoice in hope...hope maketh not ashamed” (Rom 5:2, 5).

For clearness of thought and soundness of doctrine, it is most necessary to distinguish between the *three tenses* and the various aspects of God’s *salvation*. Familiar as we are with that word, it is used with unpardonable looseness (even by the majority of preachers), through failure to recognize that it is the most comprehensive term to be found in the Scriptures, and to take the trouble of ascertaining how it is used therein. Only too often a most inadequate concept is formed of the scope and contents of that word, and through ignoring the distinctions which the Holy Spirit has drawn, nothing but a blurred and jumbled idea is obtained. How few, for example, would be able to give a simple exposition of the following statements, “Who hath saved us” (2Ti 1:9 and Ti 3:5); “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phi 2:12); “Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Rom 13:11 and cf. 1Pe 1:5). Now these verses do not refer to three different salvations, but rather to three *aspects of* one salvation. The first, as an accomplished fact—from the pleasure and penalty of sin. The second, as a present process—from the power and ragings of sin. The third, as a future prospect—from the very presence of sin.

If the balance of truth is to be preserved and the evil practice of pitting one aspect against another, or of over-emphasizing one and ignoring another, is to be avoided, a careful study needs to be made of the different *causes and means* of salvation. There are no less than seven things which concur in this great work, for all of them are said, in one passage or another, to “save” us. Salvation is ascribed to the Father, “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling” (2Ti 1:9)—because of His electing love in Christ. To the Lord Jesus, “He shall save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21)—because of His merits and satisfaction. To the Holy Spirit, “He saved us, by the...renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Ti 3:5)—because of His almighty and efficacious operation. To the instrumentality of the Word, “The engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jam 1:21)—because it discovers to us our need and reveals the grace whereby we may be saved. To the labours of the Lord’s servants, “In doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1Ti 4:16)—because of their fidelity to the truth. To the conversion of the sinner, in which both repentance and faith are exercised by him, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Act 2:40)—by the repentance spoken of in verse 38, “by grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph 2:8). To the ordinances, “Baptism doth also now save us” (1Pe 3:21)—sealing the grace of God to a believing heart.

Now those seven concurring causes of salvation need to be considered in their order and kept in their proper places, otherwise incalculable harm will be done. For instance, if we elevate a subordinate cause above a primary one, then all sense of real proportion is lost. The love and wisdom of God are the root cause, the first mover of all else. Next are the merits and satisfaction of Christ, which are also the foundation of all else that follows. The effectual operations of the Holy Spirit produce in sinners those things which are necessary for their participation in the benefits purposed by the Father and purchased by Christ. The Word is the chief means employed by God in conviction and conversion. As the result of the Spirit’s operation and the application of the Word in power to our hearts, we are brought to repent and believe. In this, it is the Spirit’s usual custom to

employ the ministers of Christ as His subordinate agents. Baptism and the Lord's supper are means whereby we express our repentance and faith, and have them confirmed to us. Nor must those concurring causes be confounded, so that we attribute to a later one what pertains to an earlier one. We must not ascribe to the ordinances that which belongs to the Word, nor to conversion what originates through the Spirit, nor give to Him the honour which is peculiar to Christ. Each is to be carefully distinguished, defined, and kept in its proper place.

The need of distinguishing between things that differ is further evidenced by the following. The walking in darkness of Isaiah 50:10 is not occasioned by the Lord's withdrawing the light of His countenance, but is due to the absence of *ministerial instruction*, and therefore is to be explained by Amos 8:11. Whereas the walking in darkness of 1 John 1:6 consists of an open revolt from God. The word "dead" in John 6:49 signifies physically; "not die" in the next verse means spiritually; "shall never see death" in John 8:51 has reference to the second death. The passing "from death unto life" of John 5:24 is legal, the reward of the Law—justification; but the passing "from death unto life" of 1 John 3:14 is experiential—regeneration. The "one new man" of Ephesians 2:15 is that mystical body which is composed of saved Jews and Gentiles, whereof Christ is the Head. Whereas "the new man" of Ephesians 4:24 is the new state and standing secured by regeneration, and which the recipient is required to make manifest in his daily deportment. Christ's being "without sin" at His first advent (Heb 4:15) means that He was personally and experientially so, being the Holy One of God. But His being "without sin" at His second advent (Heb 9:28) imports imputatively so, no longer charged with the guilt of His people. In such passages as Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:8, etc., "faith" signifies the act and grace of faith, but in 1 Timothy 3:9, 4:1, Jude 1:3, "the faith" refers to the body of doctrine revealed in Scripture.

21. *The spiritual meaning* of Scripture—not simply in the application which may fairly be made of a passage, but its actual content. We have in mind those passages where a material object or historical transaction adumbrated or contemplated spiritual objects and experiences. Great care needs to be exercised here. Lest on the one hand, we be such slaves to "literalism" that we miss the deeper significance and higher import of many things in God's Word; or lest on the other hand, we give free rein to our imagination and "read into" a verse what is not there or "carnalize" what should be taken in its plain and natural sense. Against both of those evils the expositor needs to be constantly on his guard. Let it also be pointed out that in not a few instances the Scriptures possess both a literal and a mystical force, and one of the tasks devolving upon the interpreter is to bring out each of them clearly. A few examples will make our meaning simpler.

The first six verses of Psalm 19 contain a sublime description of the perfections of God as they are displayed in the material creation, especially in the heavenly bodies. Yet it is quite evident that the apostle Paul also regarded what is there said of the sun and stars as their being divinely designed emblems of the kingdom of grace. For in Romans 10:4-17, we find that he had before him the universal publication of the Gospel, and that in verse 18 he quoted from Psalm 19, "But I say, Have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world." Ministers of Christ are designated "stars" (Dan 12:3; Rev 1:20), for as the stars illumine all parts of the earth, so evangelical messengers scatter the rays of light and truth upon the darkness of an ungodly world. And as there is no speech or language where the voice of the celestial stars is not heard, for they are so many tongues proclaiming the glory of their Maker, so the ministers of Christ have, at different periods of history, heralded God's good news in every human tongue. On the day of Pentecost, men of many nations heard God's servants speak in their own tongues the wonderful works of God, so that even then the line of the apostles' testimony "went through all the earth" (Act 2:9-11 and cf. Col 1:5-6, 23).

The propriety of the apostle's spiritual interpretation of Psalm 19:4 is at once apparent, and it supplies us with an invaluable key for the opening of what immediately follows. In the light of Messianic predictions, it is quite clear that what is said in verses 5 and 6 is to be understood, ultimately, of Christ Himself, for in Malachi 4:2, He is expressly called "the Sun of righteousness," who should "arise with healing in his wings." As the sun is a celestial body, so the Saviour is not a product of the earth (Joh 8:23), but is "the Lord from heaven" (1Co 15:47). Thus the Psalmist went on to say, "In them [the heavens] hath he set a tabernacle for the sun." Attention is focused upon the central luminary in the firmament, all the lesser ones being as it were lost sight of. So it is in the Gospel—one central Object alone is set forth and magnified therein. As the heavens, particularly the sun, exhibit the natural glory of God, so the Gospel, in its revelation of the Son, makes manifest the moral glory of God. Most appropriately is the Gospel likened to a "tabernacle" or tent (rather than a fixed temple), for as Israel's of old, so it both contains and yet veils Christ's glory, and is designed to move freely from place to place, rather than be stationary.

"Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber." Just as the sun in the early morning throws back the curtains of his pavilion, issuing forth to disperse the sombreness of night, so in the Gospel, Christ appears as a Bridegroom, removing the darkness of unregeneracy from His people, to be loved and admired by all who believe. "And rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race," fully assured of his triumph (Rev 6:2). "His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it." In Micah 5:2, we are told that Christ's "*going forth* have been from of old, from the days of eternity" (margin). Those goings forth were, first, in that everlasting covenant which is ordered in all things and sure, wherein He promised "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." Second, in the announcements of prophecy, when, from Genesis 3:15 onwards, the curtains were thrown back wider and wider, for the person of the Messiah to appear in increasing distinctness, until in Isaiah 53, He stood forth fully revealed. Third, in the travels of the Gospel from one side of the earth to the other, which will continue until His yet grander appearing. When He shines into a soul "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." This interpretation is confirmed by verse 7, "The law of the LORD is perfect, *converting* the soul."

The eighth Psalm supplies us with another example of a passage of Scripture having a *double* purport—a natural and also a spiritual. The principal scope of that Psalm, as its opening and closing verses show, is to magnify the Creator—by extolling the wondrous works of His hands. As David beheld the beauties and marvels of the heavens, he had such a sense of his own nothingness that he exclaimed, "What is man [*enosh*—frail, puny man], that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man [a diminution of "man"], that thou visitest him?" Then his wonderment deepened as he went on to say, "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things under his feet." Therein we behold both the sovereignty and the abounding grace of God, in so highly elevating one so lowly. This filled the Psalmist with amazement and awe, that God should have placed all mundane creatures in subjection unto man rather than unto angels, Genesis 1:28. Therein we behold the goodness of God unto mankind, and the high favour conferred upon them. But that by no means exhausts the scope and sense of those verses.

Psalm 8:4-6 is quoted by the apostle in Hebrews 2:6-8, where he was proving from Scripture the immeasurable superiority of Christ over angels. He was indeed for a little while (during the season of His humiliation) made lower than they, but after He had triumphantly concluded the work given Him to do, God exalted Him far above them. Thus, what was spoken indefinitely of "man" by David, Paul makes a definite and spiritual application of unto Christ. For after saying, "We see not yet all things put under him," he at once added, "but we see Jesus," which signifies

that we see accomplished in Him the terms of that ancient oracle. All room for doubt on that score is removed by Paul's next words, "Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour." That Psalm 8 *is* a Messianic one is further seen by the passages cited from it in Matthew 21:16, 1 Corinthians 15:27, which unquestionably applied to the Lord Jesus. The language used by David, then, was far more than a natural outburst of admiration of God's works in creation, namely a spiritual ecstasy as he was granted an insight into the mystery of grace, the kingdom of Christ, and the love of the Father unto the person of the Mediator.

But the ravishment of David's spirit was excited by something more than what has just been pointed out. The "man" whom he contemplated was the "new man," the "perfect man" of Ephesians 2:15 and 4:13—that *spiritual* Man of which Christ is the Head. David's utterance had respect, ultimately, not only unto Christ personal, but unto Christ mystical, for the Redeemer shares with His redeemed the spoils of His victory and admits them to a participation in His reward. They are His "joint-heirs" (Rom 8:17), and it is *their glorification* which Psalm 8:5-6 had in final view. Even now the angels are in a position of subordination to them (Heb 1:14) and in a coming day, the redeemed shall be "crowned with glory and honour." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne" (Rev 3:21 and cf. 21:7). The exaltation of Christ is the guarantee of the Christian's, for He entered heaven as the firstfruits—the earnest of the coming harvest. Oh, what a prospect is there here for faith to lay hold of and for hope to enjoy now! If it were more real to us, if we were more engaged in looking away from the present to the future, we should be filled with wonderment and praise, and the petty trials and troubles of this life would affect us much less than they do.

Psalm 89 supplies a further illustration of the principle we are here treating of, and a very striking and important one it is. Historically, it looks back to what is recorded in 11 Samuel 7:4-17, namely, the covenant which the Lord made with David. Yet none with anointed eyes can read that Psalm without quickly perceiving that a greater than the son of Jesse is there in view, namely his Saviour. In the light of Isaiah 42:1, "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant" (Psa 89:3), it is quite clear that the *spiritual reference* is to that covenant of grace which God made with the Mediator before the foundation of the world. Compare, "Then thou spakest *in vision* to thy holy one" (verse 19). This is further confirmed in what immediately follows, "Thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations" (verse 4), which is not true of the historical David. As Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) remarked, "David must always have a seed, and truly this is fulfilled in Jesus beyond his hopes. What a seed David has in the multitude which have sprung from Him who was both his Son and his Lord! The Son of David is the great Progenitor, the last Adam, the everlasting Father—He sees His seed, and in them beholds of the travail of His soul. David's dynasty never decays, but on the contrary, is evermore consolidated by the great Architect of heaven and earth. Jesus is a King as well as a Progenitor, and His throne is ever being built up." As we read through this Psalm, verse after verse obliges us to look beyond the literal *to the spiritual*, until the climax is reached in verse 27, where God says of the antitypical David, "I will make him My Firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." ❧

OCTOBER

SHOUTING

Upon first consideration, one would scarcely expect to find much upon this subject in Holy Writ, for shouting seems to conflict with that decorum which becomes sacred things. Certainly we would not have concluded from any *a priori* reasoning that the Most High would call upon His people to engage in any such noisy exercise. Yet again and again, we find Him *bidding them* to shout for joy. It is what may be termed one of the surprises of Scripture when we read “O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph” (Psa 47:1), which surprise is increased when we are told in that same Psalm that “God is gone up with a shout” (verse 5)! Yet further reflection should at least modify our surprise, for after all, shouting is but an expression of intensity and earnestness, and *that* cannot be out of place even in connection with spiritual things, so long as it be decorous and orderly. As it is with speech and song, so there are different kinds of shouting—a carnal and vulgar one, a spiritual and God-glorifying one. Obviously, displays of animal excitement, hysterical outbursts, and disorderly emotionalism should not be permitted in the house of prayer; anything that savours of the flesh or is irreverent is to be suppressed.

1. The shouting *of delirium*. “When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp”; but Moses answered that it was “the noise of them that do sing” (Exo 32:17-18). That was an evil shouting, connected with one of the most dreadful events recorded in the Word. During the absence of Moses and his minister in the mount, the people said unto Aaron, “Up, make us gods, which shall go before us” (verse 1). Instead of faithfully rebuking them for their wickedness, he tamely yielded and complied with their demand. Bidding them break off their golden ear-rings, he fashioned a molten calf, saying, “These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt,” and proclaimed a feast unto the Lord on the morrow. Next morning, the very ones who had only recently worshipped before the manifested majesty of JEHOVAH presented their offerings before the golden calf, and then “rose up to play”—obscenely sporting themselves before their idol (verse 25). A most appalling scene was presented, as they gave free rein to the lusts of the flesh. Pandemonium broke loose, and horrible yelling filled the air. Joshua, with his military mind, construed the distant sound of the tumult as due to tidings of war; but Moses, with his keener perception, recognized the noise as that of frenzied merriment.

2. The shouting *of faith*. “So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets...with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city” (Jos 6:20). How vastly different was *this* shouting from that briefly noted above! It was a God-

appointed, God-inspired, God-honouring shout. That it was a trustful one is clear from Hebrews 11:30, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.” In Joshua 6:3-6, we find the Lord giving minute instructions unto His servant of the procedure to be followed, and assurance that upon compliance complete success should crown their efforts. Thus the faith of Israel included both obedience to God’s precept and confidence in His promise. Both the one and the other would appear senseless to carnal reason, for how could the mere marching around the city for seven days, and then the blowing of trumpets and the united shout of the people, bring down the powerful walls of this fortress? But He who cannot lie had declared that it *should* (verse 5), and, in full accord with God’s directions and with implicit confidence in His word, Israel acted. After completing their thirteenth circuit of Jericho in absolute silence, as God had enjoined, they were to give proof of their reliance upon Him by uttering a great shout while the mighty walls still stood intact; and immediately they toppled over. Therein we are shown the wonderful power of faith when it lays hold of God’s promises—that nothing can stand before it, that the most formidable obstacles give way to it.

3. The shout of *decision*. “When he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire” (Jdg 15:14). This too is quite a different shout from the others. That strange character Samson had been a very painful thorn in the side of the Philistines, whom the Lord had used to chasten His wayward people, and now they were overjoyed as they beheld their formidable defier a prisoner in their hands. Securely bound as they supposed, for not only had they tied his hands tightly together, but also pinioned his arms close to his body, the Philistines proceeded to make a laughingstock of him, regarding him as a fit object for their sport. Elated at their capture, they contemptuously mocked him. Thinking they had nothing further to fear at his hands, they jeered at and ridiculed him. But their jeering was of very short duration, for they had reckoned without Samson’s *God*. Suddenly he was endowed with supernatural strength, possibly in answer to his believing prayer. For though there be no mention of such in the historical narrative, it is to be remembered that Samson’s name is included in the men of faith of Hebrews 11. The tables were at once turned, and Samson slew a great number of His enemies, so that their shouting soon gave place to shrieking.

4. The shout of *anticipation*. “Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass, that God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah” (2Ch 13:15). The incident with which this shouting is connected is deserving of much fuller consideration than we can now give it. With an army twice the size of Abijah’s, Jeroboam came up against him. In vain did the king of Judah remonstrate, plead the justice of his cause, and say, “Behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you, O children of Israel, fight ye not against the LORD God of your fathers: for ye shall not prosper.” But Jeroboam disregarded the earnest plea and warning, preferring to rely upon the arm of flesh. Counting upon an ambush to surround and destroy Abijah and his men, Jeroboam was assured that he would overwhelm them by superior forces and strategy. In their extremity, menaced before and behind, the men of Judah cried unto the Lord, and so great was their confidence of His succour that before striking a blow they made a united shout of anticipated victory. Nor were they confounded: so wondrously did the Lord deliver the enemy into their hands that they slew half a million of them that day.

5. The shout of *worship*. “Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy” (Psa 5:11). Holiness and happiness go together, and loud hosannas unto the Son of David well become His jubilant subjects. While worship should ever be decorous and reverent, it should

also be gladsome and fervent from those who are partakers of God's great salvation and are enraptured by His excellency. We are not to suppress our joy, but to let it overflow, expressing it with our voices, that our fellows may hear it too. Since *we* be affected by the glad tidings, let us seek to affect others. Said Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892), "Well-bred whispers are disreputable here...our joy may be demonstrative, yet He will not censure it." Thrice blessed is that religion which makes it a duty to be jubilant: "Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise" (Psa 98:4).

6. The shout *of welcome*. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation" (Zec 9:9). In fulfilment of that prophecy, the royal claims of Christ were presented in the Jewish capital, and a large number with a temporary faith broke forth in acclamations of gladness. This was the "triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem," when for a brief moment He shone forth in the rays of His Messianic glory. Yet the form it took clearly showed that His kingdom is "not of this world" and comes not with observation or pomp. Instead of appearing before Caesar in Rome, He presented Himself before the daughter of Zion, not riding in a golden chariot, but seated on the back of an ass. He rode not at the head of armed battalions, but appeared in meekness. He came not as Judge to sentence the guilty, but as the Prince of peace. Joyously was He hailed as King. It was God who put it into their hearts to evince that Christ was entitled to the homage of His creatures. It was the Father causing a public testimony to be borne to the glory of His Son, that before wicked hands should be laid upon Him, the dignity of His person should be openly acknowledged.

7. The shout *of triumph*. "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout...with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1Th 4:16). His apostles were assured, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner" (Act 1:11). Among the analogies between what marked His departure and return is this one: "God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a *trumpet*" (Psa 47:5), and thus shall He come down. He went up with a shout of victory over all His enemies. Though His disciples on earth heard it not, we cannot conceive of His returning to heaven in silence. Nor will He descend in silence, but "with the shout of a king" (Num 23:21), namely, "the King of glory" (Psa 24:7). He will come with a shout of identification, of triumph, of joy, of authority, which will awaken the dead (Joh 5:28); with a shout of welcome unto His redeemed, crying, "Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away" (Song 2:10).

EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

22. Forgiven Children (2:12)

*"I write unto you, little children, because your sins
are forgiven you for his name's sake."*

The title of this article raises the question, Are there any unforgiven children? To which we reply, certainly there are—the whole company of God's elect remaining so while in their natural

condition. “But surely such could hardly be denominated ‘children’—children of God.” Wrong, they are children of God when they enter this world, though they possess not then the divine nature, and therefore are as yet unmanifested as such, and unknown either to themselves or to others until they be born again. They are God’s children by eternal predestination (Eph 1:5). It was as such that Christ died for them (Joh 11:52). It is because they are such that, in due time, the Holy Spirit is sent into their hearts (Gal 4:6). But their sins are not forgiven them before they savingly believe in Christ, and that is not until the Holy Spirit is given them and they are quickened into newness of life, for it is impossible that anyone who is dead in trespasses and sins should really feel his dire need of a Saviour and come to Him for pardon. Thus our text speaks of the regenerated children of God whose sins are forgiven.

What a truly amazing thing it is that there should be such a thing as divine forgiveness of sins—transgressions of God’s Law, affronts to His holiness, rebellions against His exalted majesty. What a marvel that God does not deal with all mankind as He did with the angels when they fell—“delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2Pe 2:4)! Next to the gift of Christ Himself and the grace we receive from His fullness (Joh 1:16), forgiveness of sin is the greatest blessing God bestows, and therefore does it head the list of benefits for which the Psalmist blessed the Lord with all his soul (103:2-3). Forgiveness may be defined as that judicial act of God whereby the penitent believer is released from the guilt of his transgressions against the Law, without receiving any satisfaction at his hands or inflicting any punishment upon him. It is the remitting of the penalty, which he had incurred. It is a revoking of the sentence of justice, an acquittal of his person before the bar of God. It is described in Scripture by a variety of expressions, which serve to open unto us the nature of the thing itself. Several of them are brought together in Psalm 32:1-2.

Before proceeding any further to develop the principal subject of our verse, let us outline its contents. “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.” Five things call for consideration.

- The connection between that statement and what precedes as well as follows.
- The significance of “I write unto.”
- The appellation which is here given to those addressed—“little children.”
- The reason why the apostle sent this epistle unto them—“because your sins are forgiven.”
- The ground of this blessing—“for His name’s sake.”

First, *the relation between 2:12-14, and its context*. Hitherto we have had before us the fellowship of the Father with His children: the nature of that fellowship, the means⁵⁹ appointed for its maintenance, and the obligations and privileges which the same entails. Now we are introduced, as it were, to the different members of God’s family, notice being taken of their several ages or stages of growth, with their corresponding spiritual attainments. But before John begins to divide the family into its component parts he addresses himself to the whole thereof, comprehending them all under the endearing expression of “little children,” announcing their sins to be forgiven. That was in strict accord with his central design in this epistle: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life,” (v. 13), for a saving faith in Christ which issues in forgiveness is a sure sign that the one exercising the same is already in possession of eternal life.

⁵⁹ **means** – the instruments through which God works to communicate to the hearts of men.

“These verses (12-14) form a break or interruption in the apostle’s line of argument. There is, as it were, a pause. John calls upon those to whom he writes to consider, not only what he is writing to them, but what they themselves were to whom he is writing: what is their character and standing: what he is entitled to assume in and about them as likely to ensure a fair reception of his message. That was the common apostolic method. It is a courteous and complaisant way of insinuating advice; taking for granted the attainments to be enforced. But it is far more than that, and it is so emphatically here. It is a trumpet call summoning all the faithful to a recognition of their real and true position before God; and that with a view to their receiving aright what His servant is now writing to them” (Robert S. Candlish, 1806-1873).

In other words, verses 12-14 pave the way for what follows.

While stressing the necessity of a godly walk and a fruitful life, the foundation on which they rest must ever be insisted upon. “Holiness of life ought indeed to be urged, the fear of God to be carefully enjoined; men ought to be sharply goaded to repentance, newness of life, together with its fruits. But still we ought ever to take heed lest the doctrine of faith be smothered—that doctrine which teaches that Christ is the only Author of salvation and all its blessings. On the contrary, such moderation ought to be presented that faith may ever retain its primacy. This is the rule that is presented to us by John: having faithfully spoken of good works, lest he should seem to give them more importance than he ought to have done, he carefully calls us back to contemplate the grace of Christ” (Calvin).⁶⁰ In other words, duly to observe the order and balance of truth. Doubtless there is, too, a designed link with verse 10: real faith, saving faith, “worketh by love” (Gal 5:6), and where it exists and is exercised, we may be assured that this results from God’s having pardoned our sins.

“*I write unto you.*” Three things were intimated by that language. First, a holy privilege. It was the conferring of a great favour upon them. If the reader were to receive a letter from the official secretary of the king of England, he would feel himself highly honoured: how much more so to be addressed by one of the ambassadors of the King of kings! Second, a call to duty. As 2:1, shows, “I write unto you” is a hortatory expression. I John am telling you what to do, and what not to do: sin not (verse 1), keep God’s commandments (verses 3-5), follow the example Christ has left us (verse 6), love the brethren (verses 7-11), love not the world (verse 15). Give heed then to my injunctions for they are invested with divine authority. Third, a permanent record: writing conveys the idea of fixedness. The message delivered by the apostle was no mere transient one, allowing a subsequent revision, either of subtraction or addition. It was the imperial and imperishable Word of God for all generations, and a solemn curse is pronounced upon anyone who adds to or takes from the same (Rev 22:18-19). Thereby God’s children are graciously provided for against all the attacks of Satan and his agents, who are ever to be met with “It is written”!

“*Little children.*” The word used here is quite another from the one found in the next verse, and from “newborn babes” in 1 Peter 2:2. In the Greek there are two different words which are both translated “little children” in our English version without distinguishing between them. The one in our text is *teknion*, which occurs seven times in this epistle, and in each instance is applied to the whole company addressed: 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21. The one in verse 13 is *paidion*, which occurs again only in 2:18, and is restricted to spiritual infants. The former is a term of affection, and is given to the entire believing family; whereas the latter is a discriminating word,

⁶⁰ **John Calvin** (1509-1564) – the father of Reformed and Presbyterian theology. During the course of his ministry in Geneva, lasting nearly twenty-five years, Calvin lectured to theological students and preached an average of five sermons a week in addition to writing a commentary on nearly every book of the Bible as well as numerous treatises on theological topics. His correspondence fills eleven volumes. Born in Noyon, Picardie, France.

which signifies those who are very young, and in verse 13 is limited unto a particular class in God's family—the spiritual babes, in contradistinction from the “young men” and the “fathers.” *Teknion*, then, is used of believers of all ages and degrees of growth. This is clear from its first occurrence, for in both halves of 2:1, the whole household of faith is obviously in view: “*My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any one sin, we have an advocate with the Father.*”

The blessing which is predicated in our text of those written unto is not one that is peculiar to any special grade of Christians—as are the attainments of the several classes referred to separately in verse 13, but is true of all alike, for the forgiveness of sins pertains to every one of them. There is a community of life, and pardon is the portion of all saints. By the new life received at regeneration, they are related to God as Father and to each other as brethren; by forgiveness a title is conveyed which makes them heirs of heaven. In verse 12 the apostle postulates that which pertains to every believing child of God; but in verse 13 he describes that which characterizes their respective grades according to their measures of growth. In styling all “little children,” John expressed both his authority and his affection: it stamped his address with weight and dignity, and at the same time revealed the warmth of his heart unto them. From the remainder of the sentence he would have them know that it was out of love to Christ and to them that he penned this letter: not to distress, but to promote their spiritual happiness and mutual affection one to another.

“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you.”

“As this epistle is what we style a catholic epistle, so the address is suited to this, and a universal blessing which belongs unto and is actually bestowed on all the members of the true Church of Christ is expressed. This is the reason he assigns for writing to them, and why he so lovingly addressed them. He had before declared that the blood of Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth them now, in the present tense, from all sin. He then proceeded to declare if any of them should sin, they had in Christ an all-prevailing Advocate. He was with the Father. He was their righteousness and their atonement. Then he showed what the true and spiritual knowledge of this, and communion with Christ in the blessings and benefits of the same, would consequently and evidentially produce. And now he addressed them because they were the pardoned ones of God. Thus here is consolation, abounding consolation, increasing consolation for them. They were brought to the knowledge of the Father and the Son; they were admitted into fellowship with Them; they were in Christ, pure and righteous. He was their High Priest before the Majesty in the heavens. Their sins were completely taken away, and they were in their individual persons pardoned” (S.E. Pierce, 1746-1829).

“For thou, LORD, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee” (Psa 86:5). What a word is that in Nehemiah 9:17, “Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness”! It was on the basis of that blessed fact that Daniel prayed, “To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him” (Dan 9:9). In Psalm 32:1, forgiveness of sins is likened, first, to a removal of them: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven” is literally “whose transgression is lifted up”—taken off him because laid on Christ. Second, to a covering of them—by the blood of Christ. Sin is nauseous and abhorrent to the eye of the Holy One. Third, to a non-imputation of them: they are not reckoned to his account, because charged to his Surety. In Isaiah 43:25, to a blotting out of sins; in Luke 7:41-42 and Matthew 6:12, to the cancellation of debts; in Hebrews 8:12, to God's no more remembering them—thinking no further about them, His justice having been satisfied; and in Isaiah 1:18, to a washing of them “as white as snow.”

It is therefore very clear that one grand design of a Gospel ministry is the assuring and comforting of the saints, for unbelief is ever at work within them, and Satan constantly engaged in efforts to destroy or at least disturb their peace. No small part of the work assigned to the Lord's servants is so to set the person and work of the Saviour before His redeemed that, by occupying their hearts with the same, they will be lifted out of themselves and delivered from their fears. The forgiveness of sins of those who believe is one of the first blessings announced by the Gospel: in fact there is no true proclamation of God's good news where that is not plainly set forth. When the Lord Jesus gave the great commission to His apostles, He declared, "that repentance and remission [forgiveness] of sins should be preached in his name among all nations" (Luk 24:47), and accordingly we find that when Peter was sent to Cornelius and his friends he asserted of Christ, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Act 10:43). Paul, too, bore witness at Antioch, "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things" (Act 13:38-39).

The object of divine pardon is a penitent believer, and the fruit thereof is a longing and determination to please the Bestower of it. "And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven...Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luk 7:48, 50). Faith is as necessary in an instrumental way as Christ's satisfaction in a meritorious way: "that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Act 26:18). Christ purchased remission of sins, faith puts us in possession of it. It is fitting that those who are indebted to Christ for this benefit should give up themselves to Him, both in a way of dependence and of submission, putting their case into His hands as the Advocate with the Father, and devoting themselves in subjection to Him, for He is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb 5:9). Evangelical repentance issues from the renewed heart's sorrow and horror of sin—which cost the Saviour so dearly. Saving faith is that which clings to Christ as our only refuge and hope. Gratitude flows forth in affection to Him: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven [in their own apprehension], the same loveth little" (Luk 7:47).

This divine pardon of sins is free, no charge being exacted of its subject: "the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph 1:7). Our redemption and recovery cost us nothing, and since it be by grace, then without our deserving. "Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money" (Isa 52:3). It is bestowed without respect to anything in us or from us: "and when they had nothing [wherewith] to pay, he frankly forgave them both" (Luk 7:42). Thus it is wholly gratuitous.⁶¹ "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake" (Isa 43:25)—whatever God does in our salvation it is to glorify His mercy, and out of compassion for our misery. "For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great" (Psa 25:11): the penitent believer has no other plea but the honour of God's name engaged by gracious covenant. Well may we exclaim, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" (Mic 7:18).

Divine forgiveness is full: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa 55:7). And since He does so "according to the riches of his grace," we may be sure it is neither niggard⁶² nor grudging. Possibly the reader has acknowledged a fault unto a fellow Christian, and he has said, "I forgive you," but in such a tone of voice and

⁶¹ **gratuitous** – free; without cost or condition.

⁶² **niggard** – stingy or ungenerous.

expression of countenance that you felt you had been just as well without such a pardon. But when God forgives, there is—as Luke 15:20 reveals—just as much joy in His heart as there is in the recipient’s. God does things not by halves, but perfectly: “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities” (Psa 103:3), canceling the whole, so that not one is left on record in His book. A partial forgiveness would not shed sufficient glory on the blood of the Lamb. As John Gill⁶³ said of His atoning sacrifice, “It reaches to all sins: original and actual, secret and open, past, present, and to come.”

Divine forgiveness is final. When God pardons it is not merely for a season, but forever. His sentence is irrevocable, releasing the believer from the whole guilt of his transgressions, so that the triumphant challenge goes forth, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?” (Rom 8:33-34). His sentence is never repealed; the saint is fully discharged from all punishment, for the Law can demand no penalty from him. “Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic 7:19), and the ocean, my reader, never casts up anything which has sunk into its depths. When God pardons sin it is never charged again to the culprit: “their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 10:17). Divine forgiveness is permanent and continuous because of the everlasting value and validity of Christ’s atonement. It is the standing office of Christ to act as the great High Priest of His people, and His blood has not only cleansed, but “cleanseth from all sin.”

The great assize is indeed at the last day, but God is exercising His judicial office even now. “Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth” (Psa 58:11) weighing every action, passing verdict on each person, forgiving or not forgiving. The final judgment is but a public proclamation and execution of the same. As Manton⁶⁴ so aptly pointed out, there is a threefold distinction between God’s forgiving us now and then. First, during this life the sentence of the Law may be revoked, but then it is definitive and peremptory. One who is now condemned by the Law may be absolved. Every son of Adam is “condemned already” (Joh 3:18), and he binds that condemnation upon himself if he dies in his unbelief and impenitence, in contempt of the gracious offer of the Gospel. That his state is now capable of alteration is clear from John 5:24, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is [judicially] passed from death unto life.” But at the last great day the sentence is inexorable and irrevocable, and as the tree fell so will it forever lie.

Second, the divine sentence is now given in private; then it shall be proclaimed publicly. At conversion the verdict is passed in the awakened conscience according to the Word of God, the Holy Spirit sealing upon the renewed and believing heart some sure promise of God. But when the dread tribunal is set up the sentence will be pronounced by the Judge’s own mouth before an assembled universe, saying either “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat 5:34) or “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat 5:41). As the believer now has the Spirit’s witness within him, then it will be ratified in open court, the Judge of all the earth publicly exonerating him. Third, then there will be an actual execution of the sentence. Now we have our ever-

⁶³ **John Gill** (1697-1771) – Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar. Author of *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* and his nine-volume *Expositions of the Old and New Testaments*. Born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, England.

⁶⁴ **Thomas Manton** (1620-1677) – nonconformist Puritan preacher. Graduated from Oxford and preached until forbidden by the Act of Uniformity of 1662. Preached in his own house, was imprisoned, then preached in London. James Ussher called him “one of the best preachers in England.” Appointed as one of three clerks at the Westminster Assembly. Born in Lawrence-Lydiat, county of Somerset, England.

lasting portion either by promise or threat; but then both the promise and the threat will be fully made good.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

74. Caleb (14:6-15), Part 2

In our last, we left Moses and Aaron on their faces, not before the Lord in supplication, but before Israel in consternation. Then it was that Caleb, supported by Joshua, once more faithfully remonstrated with the people. First, we are informed that they “rent their clothes” in token of their deep distress and as an expression of their horror at the unbelief and wicked words that had issued from the lips of the congregation—their tongues “set on fire of hell” (Jam 3:6), for the people had slandered JEHOVAH, charging Him with malice and cruelty and basest hypocrisy, declaring that all His previous goodness and promises were but means to decoy them and encompass their destruction. Next, they “spake unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.” In the Hebrew, the word “exceeding” is repeated, and Matthew Henry (1662-1714) rendered it, “It is a very, very, very good land.” Then they added, “If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land...a land which floweth with milk and honey.” Bold and God-honouring language was that! If the Lord continues to delight in us, it is impossible that the Canaanites can prevent our possession of the land, nothing but defiance of Him will forfeit His favours—hence his exhortation. “Only rebel not ye against the LORD” (Num 14:9).

The glorious outshining of Caleb’s faith in one of the darkest hours in all the chequered history of Israel is most noteworthy, and the appeal he then made unto them deserving of our closest consideration. In rebutting their doleful contention that the difficulties and dangers ahead were much too formidable for them to overcome, he stressed the goodliness of the heritage which would be theirs, teaching us that if we were more convinced of the inestimable benefits of serving God and the gains and rewards of spirituality, we should not shrink so much from the sacrifices and denying of self which are required from us. Then he reminded them, “If the LORD *delight in us*, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us.” The Lord’s delight, be it of a people or an individual, is the secret of all blessing. “Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people” (Deu 10:15). “He delivered me, because he delighted in me” (2Sa 22:20). “Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel” (1Ki 10:9). “The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy” (Psa 147:11). “Thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee” (Isa 62:4). “When a man’s ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Pro 16:7).

Next, Caleb addressed a solemn word of warning, “Only rebel not ye against the LORD”—to revolt against Him is highly provoking, for “rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1Sa 15:23). The renunciation of God’s authority is certain to result in

the loss of His good will. As another of His faithful witnesses told the people at a later date, “If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God: But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be *against you*, as it was against your fathers” (1Sa 12:14-15). Thus, everything turned on that “If the LORD delight in us”. If our conduct continues to be pleasing unto Him, if we be not distrustful of His promises and slight not His precepts, then no enemy can stand before us. If the Lord be our Friend, there is nothing whatever to fear. The only danger was *in themselves*—yielding to unbelief, and a spirit of self-will. It is that alone which ruins sinners and ensures their damnation. “None are excluded the heavenly Canaan but those that exclude themselves” (Henry).

Finally, Caleb added, “Neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.” If we forfeit the Lord’s favour and He turn against us, then woe indeed be unto us. But if we are submissive to His sceptre and rely upon His power, then God will be for us, and who can stand against us? When we have scriptural warrant to say, “The Lord is on my side,” then we may add with confidence, “I will not fear: what can man do unto me?” (Psa 118:6). If the Lord be “the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psa 27:1). Verily, “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God” (Psa 146:5). In declaring of the inhabitants of Canaan “they are bread for us,” Caleb was doing very much more than making a play upon the words of the unbelieving spies (who had said, “It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof”), to wit, affirming that their armies should, under God, be cut in pieces by Israel and devoured by them. In support of which, he reminded the congregation, “Their defence is departed from them”—the providence of God shall no longer secure them. They are abandoned by Him to destruction. When such be the case with any nation, its defence is gone and its doom is sure.

But alas, all was of no avail. Not only were the people deaf to that God-honouring and most reasonable appeal, but they were exasperated by it, and became still more outrageous in their conduct. “But all the congregation bade stone them with stones” (verse 10). Thus did they persist in their revolt and madness. Their menacing attitude and murderous language only made the more evident the great courage of Caleb and Joshua in daring to stand forth and remonstrate with the discontented and mutinous people, before whom Moses and Aaron had fallen on their faces. Note the plural number, “Stone *them*,” which agrees with verse 30, where Joshua is coupled with Caleb. Those under the power and dominion of sin are no respecters of persons. Nay, it is ever the way of those whose hearts are fully set on doing evil to rage against those who give them good counsel. Since they be determined to have their own way at any cost, they hate those who oppose them and tell them the truth, and, unless restrained by God, will do violence unto them. Thus, at a very early date did Israel begin to ill-treat their prophets and determine to stone those whom God sent unto them (Mat 23:37).

Very striking and solemn, yet blessed, was the immediate sequel: “And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.” In threatening Caleb and Joshua, they had touched the apple of JEHOVAH’s eye, and He interposed on their behalf. The dread *Shekinah*, or fiery emblem of the Lord’s presence, descended, and there was an awe-inspiring manifestation made of His majesty, similar to that which had been seen on the summit of Sinai a year previous. How often have those who faithfully and fearlessly exposed themselves for the cause of God been taken under His special protection and delivered from the fury of those who menaced them! Addressing Himself unto Moses, the Lord said, “How long will

this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.” Blessed indeed was the response of Moses, who pleaded with God on Israel’s behalf, urging Him to do nothing that would cause the surrounding nations to despise His name, and begging Him to act graciously and mercifully. In answer to that appeal, the Lord pardoned the nation, but made it evident that they had missed His best, declaring that that evil generation should not enter the land which He had given unto their fathers. Terrible indeed were the effects of the evil account given of Canaan by the ten unbelieving spies—alas, how many are prejudiced against godliness by the gloomy reports of graceless professors.

The awful gravity and magnitude of Israel’s sin on this occasion is evident from the frequent mention of it in the later Scriptures. The Psalmist had it in mind when he said, “They despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word....Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness” (106:24, 26). Though assured in full detail of what a goodly land it was (Deu 8:7-9), they did not deem it worth the trouble of entering and conquering, and even referred to Egypt, where they had suffered such severe bondage, as though they preferred it. It was a high offence to despise such a fair heritage as God had so graciously chosen for the descendants of Abraham, and therefore did He cause them to be consumed by divers sicknesses and diseases, and sundry kinds of death, so that the entire company of adult Israelites who came out of Egypt died in the wilderness, Caleb and Joshua alone being spared. Paul alludes thereto in 1 Corinthians 10:5, and devoted most of Hebrews 3 and part of 4 unto the same, emphasizing the fact that “They could not enter in because of unbelief”—they who believe not God’s Word, think lightly of His promises, and where *they* be not rested on, we soon murmur against His providences. Jude also mentions this sad incident (verse 5).

“Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice: Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it.” Here we behold what a terrible thing it is to sin against divine light, favours and privileges, and that their sin consisted in not hearkening to—heeding, complying with—the Lord’s voice. It is our response to God’s Word which determines how far we enjoy His blessing, and if we disregard it, He will not be slighted and mocked with impunity, but, sooner or later, causes His rebellious subjects to reap as they have sown. In barring their entrance into Canaan, God in no wise falsified His promises, for what He had sworn unto the patriarchs was that “their seed” should inherit the same, and they *did so*—not this evil generation, but the one that immediately succeeded it. Thus, whereas human beings may miss God’s best, the divine purpose is not and cannot be thwarted. In like manner, there are some now who come near to the borders of the kingdom of God, but never enter the same—stumbled by the inconsistencies of graceless preachers and professing Christians (Mat 23:13; Heb 4:1). Nevertheless, all that the Father has given the Son shall come to Him (Joh 6:37), for “the foundation of God [His eternal decree] standeth sure” (2Ti 2:19).

“So I swear in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest” (Heb 3:11). But it is most blessed to find that, “In wrath he remembered mercy,” for immediately after pronouncing sentence on the unbelieving nation, we find JEHOVAH saying, “But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereunto he went; and his seed shall possess it” (Num 14:24). Caleb had proved himself the faithful servant of the Lord, walking in His fear. He had acted in courage and zeal, in trustfulness and perseverance, with full

purpose of heart, relying on the veracity of the divine promises. A very different “spirit” actuated him from that which governed the ten skeptical spies, namely, a filial, dutiful and obedient one, which issued in faith and holiness, which was ready for the most self-sacrificing and perilous tasks. And He who cannot lie has declared, “Them that honour me, I will honour” (1Sa 2:30), and He did so here, not only assuring Caleb that he would personally enter Canaan, but that his descendants also should possess a valuable portion in it. Yet mark it well, my reader, that one’s being highly in favour with God does not ensure his being immune from the contempt and contumacy of men. Nevertheless, that also is part of the “honour” which God bestows upon him—to have fellowship with the sufferings of Christ!

Then said the Lord of Israel, “Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun” (verse 30). Those words make it clear that Joshua took his stand by Caleb’s side and supported him in his expostulating with the people. Probably Caleb is mentioned alone throughout the preceding verses because he seems to have been the one who took the most active part in witnessing for the Lord and rebuking his unbelieving fellows. And the Lord said, “I will surely do it unto all this evil generation that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness shall they be consumed, and there they shall die. And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD. But Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were the men that went to search the land, lived still” (14:35-38). Thus does the Lord distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, and “knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations” or “trials” (2Pe 2:9). It is to be noted that in verse 30, Caleb is mentioned first, as the one who took the most prominent part on that occasion; but in verse 38, the order is reversed, to show they were equal in dignity and honour.

From Numbers 34:19, we learn that still another honour was conferred by the Lord upon Caleb. When it was divinely revealed unto Moses *who* should take part in the important task of the yet future dividing of the land by inheritance to the children of Israel, he was told that Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun should have charge thereof. But in addition the Lord named “one prince of each tribe” to fill a subordinate place therein, and from the tribe of Judah, Caleb was appointed, and he is accorded the first place in the list (verses 16-28). In selecting one representative from every tribe, all partiality was precluded thereby and any ground for dissatisfaction of the others prevented. Whereas Eleazar the priest and Joshua were to preside in the actual casting of the lots, the twelve princes were evidently designed to serve as overseers, and thus be able to certify unto their brethren that all had been done “decently and in order.” Important principles are those for us to bear in mind today in connection with the government of the local church, and particularly in the disbursement of its funds. No room should be left for suspicion of dishonesty or complaint of unfairness. Mark the solemn warning of Acts 6:1-6. How much discontent and wrangling would be avoided if the affairs of God’s house were conducted along the lines laid down by Him for His people of old.

Numbers 14:26-29 is much too important a passage to be hurriedly slurred over, so therefore we offer a few further remarks on the same. Very striking indeed was the communication given through Moses on that occasion. In the first place, infallible assurance was here given that, despite the forfeiture of their inheritance by the first generation of Israel, and the exclusion of Moses himself, there would be no failure on the part of JEHOVAH and no revoking of His promise to give the land of Canaan unto the descendants of Abraham. In the second place, by the actual nam-

ing of the priest, Joshua and the twelve princes so long in advance, divine intimation was made that the lives of all those men would be preserved from mortality—not only from natural death, but from all the hazards of warfare in Canaan. What a proof was this that our lives are in God's hands (Psa 31:15), and that until His ordained hour arrives, nothing can possibly terminate our existence! Third, in the appointing of a prince from each of the tribes to guard their interests, we are taught that every separate congregation should be a well-organized body, that responsible overseers should be selected, so as to prevent any one individual acting from impulse, bias or favouritism without regard to others, and so as to give satisfaction unto all. Finally, by His placing Caleb at the head of the list in verses 19-28, we see how graciously God confirmed his testimony and put to confusion those who had spoken of stoning him.

And now we turn to the 14th chapter of Joshua, which records another striking incident in the life of our hero—one that occurred forty years after those which we have been reviewing. It is narrated in verses 6-15, to which we ask the reader to turn, as the passage is rather too lengthy for us to quote here. While Eleazar and Joshua were about to distribute the land, Caleb, accompanied by men of Judah, came and presented his claim, telling Joshua of what the Lord had said unto Moses concerning him. First, he reminded Joshua that Moses had sent him to espy out the land, and that he made report “as it was in mine heart,” where he had hidden God's word, treasuring up His promises; and therefore was he fully persuaded that neither the giants nor the iron chariots of Canaan could withstand Israel while they enjoyed the favour of JEHOVAH. Next, he mentioned the infidelity of his fellow spies, and added, “But I wholly followed the LORD my God.” That was not the language of proud boasting, but a plain statement of fact, made also by the Lord Himself (Num 14:24). It did not import that he had attained unto sinless perfection, for no fallen creature, though regenerated, ever does so in this life. Rather did it signify that he had acquitted himself faithfully on that memorable occasion, that he completely discharged his duty—resting on God's veracity, boldly witnessing for Him, displaying undaunted courage and perseverance in the face of strong opposition and personal danger.

Then Caleb quoted the words which Moses had uttered when he had acted so valiantly, “Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's forever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD.” That was the divine reward for his fidelity—an assurance not only that his life should be preserved, so that subsequently he should enter Canaan, but that a particular portion thereof, namely, Horeb, should be his and his descendants'. After acknowledging that it was the Lord who had kept him alive during the intervening years, “as he said,” and declaring that he was now four score and five years old, he added, “As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said.” Very blessed and striking is it to hear this aged pilgrim using such language. Though eighty-five years old, he feared not the hardest task of all, that of entering into possession of that part of Canaan inhabited by the giants. His, “if so be the LORD will be with me,” was not the language of doubt, but the disowning of his own strength and sufficiency. Joshua readily admitted Caleb's claim and granted his request.

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

9. Its Ramifications, Part 1

While endeavouring to present a complete picture of fallen man as he is depicted by the divine pencil in the Scriptures, it is very difficult to avoid a measure of overlapping as we turn from one aspect or feature of the same to another, or to prevent a certain amount of repetition when devoting a separate portrayal of each. Yet, seeing that this is the method which the Holy Spirit has largely taken, an apology is scarcely required from those who seek to follow His plan. In the preceding articles, we have shown, in a more or less general way, the terrible havoc which sin has wrought in the human constitution; now we shall consider the same more specifically. Having presented the broad outline, it remains for us to fill in the details. In other words, our immediate task is to ponder and describe *the several parts of* human depravity, according as it has vitiated the several sections of our inner man. Though the soul, like the body, is a unit, it also has a number of distinct members or faculties, and none of them has been exempted from the debasing effects of man's apostasy from his Maker.

This, we consider, was strikingly exemplified in the miracles of Christ. The various bodily disorders which the divine Physician healed during His sojourn on earth were not only so many prefigurations of the marvels of grace that He performs in the spiritual realm in connection with the redeemed, but they were also so many emblematical representations of the moral diseases which affect and afflict the soul of fallen man. The poor leper, covered with noisome sores, solemnly portrayed the horrible pollutions of the human heart. The man born blind, incapable of beholding the wonders and beauties of God's external works, expressed the benighted state of the human mind, which, because of the darkness that is upon it, is unable to discover or receive the things of the Spirit, no matter how simply and plainly they be explained to him. The paralytic's enervated limbs shadowed forth the impotency of the will Godwards, its being totally devoid of any power to turn us unto Christ. The woman lying sick of the fever, producing unnatural craving, delirium, etc., depicted the disordered state of our affections. The demon-possessed man, dwelling amid the tombs, incapable of being securely bound, crying, and cutting himself, adumbrated the various activities of the conscience in the unregenerate.

Corruption has invaded every part of our nature, overspreading the whole of man's complex being. As physical disorders spare no members of the body, so man's very spirit has not escaped the ravages of depravity. Yet who is capable of comprehending the same in its awful breadth and depth, length and height? It is not simply the inferior powers of the soul which the plague of sin has seized, but the contagion has ascended into the higher regions of our persons, polluting the sublimest faculties. This is a part of God's punishment. It is a great mistake to suppose that the divine judgment on man's defection is reserved for the next life. Mankind are heavily penalized in this world, both outwardly and inwardly, as they are subject to many adverse dispensations of

providence therein. Outwardly, in their bodies, names, estates, relations, and employments; finally, by physical death and dissolution. Inwardly, by blindness of mind, hardness of heart, turbulent passions, the gnawing of conscience. However little regarded, by reason of their stupidity and insensibility, yet the inward visitations of God's curse are far more dreadful than the outward ones, and are regarded as such by those who truly fear the Lord and see things in His light.

1. *Blindness of mind.* The mind is that faculty of the soul by which objects and things are first cognized and apprehended. In distinguishing the understanding from it, the latter is that which weighs, discriminates, and determines, judging between the concepts formed in the former, being the guide of the soul, the selector and rejector of those notions the mind has received. Both alike are deranged by sin, for if we are told that "their minds were blinded" (2Co 3:14), we also read of "having the understanding darkened" (Eph 4:18). As a derelict from God, the fall has completely shuttered the windows of man's soul, yet he perceives it not; yea, emphatically denies it. Heathen philosophers and the schoolmen of medievalism both allowed that the affections, in the lower part of the soul, were somewhat defiled, but insisted that the intellectual faculty was pure, saying that reason still directed and advised us to the best things. When our Lord declared, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind," some of the Pharisees who heard Him indignantly asked, "Are we blind also?" (Joh 9:39-40).

Now it is not strange that blind reason should think it sees, for while it judges everything else, it is least capable of estimating itself because of its very nearness to itself. Though a man's eye can see the deformity of his hands or feet, it cannot see the bloodshot that is in itself, unless it has a glass by which to discern the same. In like manner, even corrupt nature, by its own light, recognizes the disorder in the sensual part of man, yet it cannot discern the defilement that is in the spirit itself. The glass of God's Word is required to discover *that*, and even that mirror is not sufficient—the light of divine grace has to shine within, in order to expose and discover the imbecility of the reasoning faculty. And hence it is that Holy Writ throws the main emphasis on the depravity of this highest part of man's being. When the apostle would show how impure are unbelievers, who nevertheless profess that they know God, he averred "*even* their mind and conscience is defiled" (Ti 1:15). They least of all suspected that those parts were tainted, especially since they were illumined with some rays of the knowledge of God. Thus, in opposition to this, their conceit, the superior faculties alone are mentioned, and they stressed with an "*even*."

How weighty and full the testimony of Scripture is upon this solemn feature appears from the following. "When they knew God [traditionally], they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom 1:21-22)—the reference is to the Gentiles after the flood. One of the fearful curses executed upon Israel, because they hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord their God and refused to do His commandments, was "The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: and thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness" (Deu 28:28-29). Of all mankind, it is said, "There is none that understandeth...the way of peace have they not known" (Rom 3:11, 17)—so far from it that, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Pro 14:12). "The world by wisdom knew not God" (1Co 1:21)—despite all their schools, they were ignorant of Him. "Desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1Ti 1:7). "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2Ti 3:7).

The natural darkness which blinds them from those regular operations that are directed by their outward senses is twofold—either external or internal. When night falls, unless there be the aid of artificial light, they can no longer perform their work. If they be blind, then it is one perpetual night to them. Such too is spiritual darkness—objective and subjective. A darkness that is both *on* men and *in* men. The first consists in a lack of those means whereby alone they may be enlightened in the knowledge of God and heavenly things. What the sun is to the earth unto natural things, that is the Word and the preaching of it as to things spiritual (Psa 19:1-4; cf. Rom 10:10-11). This darkness is upon all unto whom the Gospel is not declared or by whom it is despised and rejected. Now it is the mission and work of the Holy Spirit to take away this objective darkness, and, until it be done, none can see or enter the kingdom of God. This He does by sending the Gospel into a country, nation, or town. It does not obtain entrance there, nor is it restrained anywhere, by accident or by human effort; but it is dispensed according to the sovereign will of the Spirit of God. He it is who gifts, calls, and sends men forth to preach, determining the places where they shall minister, either by His secret impulses or by the operations of His providence (Act 16:6-10).

But it is the *subjective* darkness upon the minds of the unregenerate, with the influences and consequents thereof, which is here more immediately to be considered. This is not a mere privative thing, but a positive, consisting not simply of ignorance, but of a foul disease, with a habitual evil disposition. “He is proud, knowing nothing; but *sick* about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of *corrupt minds*, and destitute of the truth” (1Ti 6:4-5). Not only are their minds such as assent not to wholesome doctrine, but they are diseased and corrupt—“sick about questions”—longing for them as a diseased stomach does for any trash. This distemper of mind is also called an itch after fables (2Ti 4:3-4). Still more solemnly, Scripture calls that contentious wisdom of which the learned of this world are so proud “earthly, sensual, devilish” (Jam 3:15). Both the verse before and the one following show that all the envy, malice, lying and dissembling, though in both the affections and the will, is rooted in the understanding. Hence, it is that God must give “repentance” or a change of mind before there is an acknowledgment of the truth and a recovery from the snare of the devil (2Ti 2:25-26).

This darkness of the understanding is the cause of that rebellion which is in the affections and will, for why do men seek so inordinately the pleasure of sin, but because their minds know not God, and are strangers to Him and can have no fellowship with Him. For all friendship and fellowship is grounded upon knowledge. To have communion with God, the knowledge of Him is necessary, and accordingly the principal thing which God does when He gives admittance into the covenant of grace is to teach men to know Him (Jer 31:33-34). Contrariwise, men are estranged from Him through ignorance (Eph 4:17-19). The darkness of the mind is not only the root of all sin, but is the cause of most of the corruptions in men’s lives. Hence we find that Paul mentions “fleshly wisdom” as the antithesis of the principle of grace (2Co 1:12). For the same reason, men are said to be “sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge” (Jer 4:22). That this *is* the cause of the greatest part of wickedness which is in the world is clear from Isaiah 47:10, “Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee.” Corrupt reasonings and false judgments of things are the chief movers in all our sinnings. Pride has its chief place in the mind, as Colossians 2:18 shows.

That this darkness is forceful and influential—yea, dynamical—appears from that expression in Colossians 1:13, “delivered us from the *power* of darkness”—the word signifying that which sways or bears rule. It fills the mind with enmity against God and all His ways, and turns the will

in a contrary direction, so that, instead of the affections being set upon things above, the unregenerate “mind earthly things” (Phi 3:19). Such is its habitual inclination. It minds the things of the flesh (Rom 8:5), setting itself to provide sensual objects for the gratification of the body. It fills the mind with strong prejudices against the spiritual things proposed in the Gospel. Those prejudices are called “strongholds” and “imaginings” [or “reasonings”], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (2Co 10:4-5), which are pulled down and cast down in the day of God’s power, when souls are brought into willing subjection to Him. The sins of the mind are of longest continuance, for when the body decays and its lusts wither, those of the mind are as vigorous and active in old age as in youth. As the understanding is the most excellent part of man, so its corruption is worse than that of the other faculties, “If...the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Mat 6:23).

Fearful indeed are the effects of this darkness. Its subjects are rendered incapable of discerning or receiving spiritual things, so that there is a total inability with respect unto God and the ways of pleasing Him. No matter how well-endowed intellectually the unregenerate man may be, what the extent of his education and learning, how skillful in connection with natural things, in spiritual matters he is devoid of intelligence until he is renewed in the spirit of his mind. As a person who lacks the power of seeing is incapable of being impressed by the strongest rays of light reflected upon him, and cannot form any real ideas of the appearance of things, so the natural man, by reason of this blindness of mind, is unable to discern the nature of heavenly things. Said Christ to the Jews of His day, “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are *hid* from thine eyes” (Luk 19:42)—concealed from thy perception as effectually as things which are purposely hidden from prying eyes. Even though a man had the desire to discover them, he would search in vain for all eternity unless God was pleased to *reveal* them, as He did to Peter (Mat 16:17).

The spiritual blindness which is upon the mind of the natural man not only disables him to make the first discovery of the things of God, but even when they are published and set before his eyes, as in the Word of truth they plainly are, he cannot discern them. Whatever notions he may form of them, they are dissonant to their nature, and the thoughts he has of them are the very reverse of what in fact they are—the highest wisdom they regard as folly, and objects most glorious in themselves are despised and rejected. “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you” (Act 13:41). The preceding verses show that Paul had clearly preached to them Christ and His Gospel, and then closed with a caution that they beware lest that came upon them which was spoken by the prophet. Thus, it is not the bare presentation of the truth which will convince men. Though clearly propounded, it may still be obscure to them, “It is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not” (2Co 4:3-4). Their understandings need to be divinely opened in order to understand the Scriptures (Luk 24:45)!

The subjects of this darkness are spiritually insensible and stupid. This it is which prevents them from making a true inspection of their hearts. They see only the outward man, and feel not the deadly wound within. There is a sea of corruption, but it is unperceived. The holiness, beauty and rectitude of their nature have departed, but they are quite unconcerned. They are miserable and poor, blind and naked, yet totally unaware of it. This it is which causes the unregenerate to go on in a course of rebellion against the Lord, and at the same time conclude that all things are well with them. Thus they live securely and happily. As the goodness of God melts them not, neither do His sorest judgments move them to amend their ways. So far from it, they are like unto that wicked king Ahaz, of whom it is recorded, “And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet

more against the LORD” (2Ch 28:22)—how madly and defiantly did the masses conduct themselves throughout the battle of Britain! So now, while the peace of the whole world is so seriously menaced, “LORD, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see” (Isa 26:11).

Space will allow us to mention only one other effect, and that is what Ephesians 4:17 terms “the vanity of their mind.” Things in Scripture are said to be *vain* which are useless and fruitless. In Matthew 15:9, it signifies “to no purpose.” Hence, the idols of the heathen and the rites used in their worship are called vain things (Act 14:15). In 1 Samuel 12:21, vain things are said to be those “which cannot profit nor deliver.” It is also synonymous with folly, for in Proverbs 12:11, vain men are all one with “persons void of understanding.” In Jeremiah 4:14, vain things are yoked with “wickedness,” thus, they are sinful ones—vain men and sons of Belial are synonymous (2Ch 13:7). This vanity of the mind induces the natural man to pursue shadows and miss the substance, to be engaged with figments instead of realities, to prefer lies to the truth. This it is which leads men to follow the fashions and revel in the pleasures of a vain world. This sinful vanity of mind is in all sorts of persons and ages, acting itself in foolish imaginations, whereby it makes provision for the flesh and its lusts. It appears in a loathness to think upon holy things, so that when under the preaching of the Word, the mind wanders like a butterfly in the garden. It “feedeth on foolishness” (Pro 15:14), and has an itching curiosity about the affairs of others.

2. *Hardness of heart.* The heart is the centre of our moral being, out of which flow the issues of life (Pro 4:23; cf. Mat 12:35). The nature of it is at once indicated by its being designated a “*stony* heart” (Eze 11:19). The figure is a very apt one. As a stone is nothing but a product of the earth, so it has the property of the earth—heaviness, a tendency to fall. Thus it is with the natural mind. Men’s affections are wholly set upon the world, and though God made man upright with his head erect, yet the soul is bowed down to the ground. The physical curse pronounced upon the serpent is also fulfilled in his seed, for the things upon which they feed turn to ashes, so that dust is their meat (Isa 65:25). Sin has so calloused man’s heart that, Godwards, it is loveless and lifeless, cold and insensible. That is one reason why the moral Law was written upon tables of stone: to represent emblematically the kind of hearts which men had, as is clearly implied by the contrast presented in 1 Corinthians 3:3—stupid, unyielding.

The heart of the unregenerate is also likened to “the rock” (Jer 23:29), and to an “adamant stone” (Zec 7:12), which is harder than a flint. The same thing is termed being “stout-hearted” (Isa 46:12), and in Isaiah 48:4, God says, “Thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass.” This hardness is often ascribed to the neck (“stiffnecked”), being a figure of man’s obstinacy taken from refractory oxen which will not endure the yoke. This hardness evidences itself by a complete absence of spiritual sensibility, so that it is unmoved by God’s goodness, has no awe of His authority and majesty, and no fear of His anger and vengeance; a presentation of the joys of heaven or the horrors of hell makes no impression upon it. As the prophet of old lamented, they “put far away the evil day” (Amo 6:3), dismissing it from their thoughts as an unwelcome subject to dwell upon. They have no sense of guilt, no consciousness of having offended their Maker, no alarming realization of His wrath abiding on them, but are secure and at ease in their sins. So far from sin being a burden to them, it is their element and delight to enjoy its pleasures for a season.

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 15

1 Corinthians 10:1-4 furnishes another illustration of what we are here treating of—to wit, *the spiritual content* of many passages in God's Word. "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them: and that rock was Christ." As a matter of fact, historically, divinely recorded, they partook of material food and drank of water which flowed from a literal rock; yet three times over the apostle declared that the same were *spiritual*. In so doing, Paul was not merely intimating that there was a close analogy between God's dealings with the Hebrews of old and with His saints today, rather was he insisting that the wilderness experiences of Israel after the flesh adumbrated the soul experiences of Israel after the spirit. It is not only that the divine institutions under Judaism possessed a symbolical and typical significance, but that Christians enter into the spiritual substance of which they were but the shadows. Christ is our altar (Heb 13:10), our Passover (1Co 5:7), our High Priest (Heb 4:14). In Him, we are spiritually circumcised (Col 2:11).

"But ye are come unto mount Sion" (Heb 12:22) is also to be understood spiritually, and not literally. That should be quite obvious, yet, because of the gross and carnal ideas of modern dispensationalists, there is need for us to labour the point. That is one of the many passages where the blessings and privileges of the new covenant are expressed in language taken from the old, the antitype being presented under the phraseology of the type. Thus, when Christ announced the free intercourse which now exists between heaven and earth, and which His redemptive work was to produce, He described it in words taken from Jacob's vision, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (Joh 1:51). Very remarkable and full was that statement, containing much more within it than has been discerned by the majority of expositors. It not only declared that there was to be restored a blessed intercourse between the holy spirits of the upper world and the saints while here in the lower one, but it also revealed the foundation on which that intercourse rests, furnishing the key to such passages as Acts 12:7 and Hebrews 1:4. It is to be carefully noted that Christ here referred to Himself as "the Son of man," a title which uniformly alludes to His self-abasement as the last Adam, or to some of the consequences of His obedience unto death.

As the result of Christ's atoning death, a new and living way has been opened into the very presence of God, blood-washed sinners having the title to draw near unto Him in full assurance of faith. But John 1:51 teaches something more than that the Redeemer is the uniting link between heaven and earth, the alone Mediator between God and men, namely, that one of the precious fruits of His atoning work is the restoration of that long-forfeited intercourse between men and angels. As Christ broke down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles by His

death upon the cross, having thereby slain the enmity which was between them (Eph 2:14-16), so He has also made an end of the estrangement which sin had caused between holy angels and men. They are brought together as the two branches of one family, gathered and united under one Head (Eph 1:10). By the blood of His cross, Christ has reconciled all things in heaven and in earth (Col 1:20), uniting them together in one happy fellowship, and for that reason did an angel say unto John, "I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 19:10). Thus John 1:51 teaches us that Christ is the Medium of a spiritual communion between the inhabitants of earth and heaven, the Maintainer of their fellowship.

Now as Christ announced the oneness which He would produce between the angels and His people by an allusion to Jacob's vision, so He referred to paradise as "Abraham's bosom" (Luk 16:22), and His apostle spoke of the new covenant (prefigured by Sarah) as "Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal 4:26) and the New Testament saints as "the circumcision" (Phi 3:3). In like manner (to return to Hebrews 12:22), when he said, "But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God," he referred to the *spiritual* "Zion," or that blessed and glorious state into which believers have been called by the Gospel. That language looks back, of course, to the Old Testament, where (according to the different spellings in the Hebrew and Greek) it is called "Zion," and which represented or exemplified the highest revelation of divine *grace* in Old Testament times. It was the place of God's habitation (Psa 76:2). It was the object of God's special love, and the birthplace of His elect, "The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God...And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her" (Psa 87:2-3, 5). Salvation and all blessings proceed therefrom (Psa 128:5; 134:3).

Zion was not only the site of the temple, but the seat from which David reigned and ruled over the kingdom of Israel, issuing his laws and extending the power of his government over the whole of the holy land. As such, it adumbrated the Messiah's kingdom. It is (in fulfilment of the Father's promise) to the *celestial* Zion that the Lord Jesus has been exalted (Psa 2:6 and cf. Heb 2:9), and there He sways His sceptre over the hearts of His people. Zion is where the spiritual David is enthroned, and whence "the rod of his strength" goes out, not only in bringing His redeemed into willing subjection, but by ruling "in the midst of his enemies" (Psa 110:2; Isa 2:3). Thus, in saying to believers of the Gospel, "Ye are come unto mount *Sion*, and unto the city of the living God," the Holy Spirit assures them that they have been given a personal interest in all the goodly things said of Zion anywhere in the Scriptures—that the spiritual content of those good things belongs to the New Testament saints, particularly, that they have access to the spiritual throne of the antitypical David—the throne of grace. Since "all the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen" (2Co 1:20), then those in Christ have a right and title to all the glorious things spoken of Zion in the Old Testament. Compare Joshua 1:5 and Hebrews 13:5-6 for an illustration of this principle.

There is another class of passages, somewhat different from those noticed above, which needs to be considered under this head of the spiritual import of verses in the Word. These may be suitably introduced by a statement in Revelation 11:8, "And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, *which spiritually is called* Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." As might well be expected, even by those who have only a comparatively slight acquaintance with the numerous works upon the Apocalypse, with their manifold interpretations, commentators differ widely in their explanations of this verse. We do not propose to add to their number by attempting to identify the "two witnesses" or to determine if the "great city" where they are slain is to be understood literally or symbolically, nor whether the reference be to some place or some

thing in the past, the present, or the future, for such speculations possess no practical value, offering not the slightest aid in fighting the good fight of faith. It is sufficient for our present purpose simply to call the reader's attention to the words we have italicized, and to point out how that clause establishes once more the principle of exegesis which we are here illustrating.

By saying that the "great city" of Revelation 11:8 is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, the Holy Spirit intimates that it is characterized by the same evils which Scripture teaches us to associate with those places, that the filthiness of Sodom and the harshness of Egypt, in embittering the lives of God's people of old, marked the scene where the two witnesses testified for God and were slain for their fidelity. It is probable that the language of Revelation 11:8 contains a designed allusion to Ezekiel 16:44-59, where repeated mention is made of a mystical Sodom. "Mystical" we say, for when the Lord declared, "When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters" (verse 53), and the question be asked whether there will yet be a restoring of the historical Sodom and the other cities of the plain, that is but to carnalize what is to be understood spiritually (by literalizing what is figurative), and would be to transfer the subject there spoken of from the moral government of God toward men, for the merely natural reign of the divine providential arrangements respecting the material world.

When the Lord said unto the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "Thou art thy mother's daughter, that loatheth her husband and her children...your mother was an Hittite, and your father an Amorite" (Eze 16:45), He was charging them with being guilty of the same abominations that marked the original dwellers in Palestine, who at a very early date apostatized from God, being among the first idolators after the great deluge. "As I live, saith the LORD God, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness" (16:48-49). God spoke thus unto the backslidden and corrupt Jewish nation because she trod the polluted way and imitated the sins of that ancient city of ill fame. To designate the covenant people "Sodom," because the state and manners of the one were identical with the other's, was one of the most solemn and impressive ways that could be taken to describe their inveterate depravity and vile character. Clear, then, it is that "Hittite," "Amorite" and "Sodom" in those verses are no more to be taken literally than is "David" in Ezekiel 34:23, or "Balaam" and "Jezebel" in Revelation 2:14, 20.

One more illustration of this kind must suffice. When His disciples asked Christ, "Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?" He answered them, "Elias is come already," and we are told, "Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist" (Mat 17:10-13). That is one of the passages which Theosophists appeal to in support of their belief in reincarnation, and if our Lord's words are to be taken at their face value, then we should have to admit that they lend some colour at least to that theory. Like the dispensationalists of our day, the scribes were great sticklers for the letter of Scripture, and insisted that the divine promise, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Mal 4:5) meant just what it said. Here is certainly another case in point where the interpreter is needed, carefully to compare Scripture with Scripture and bring out the spiritual purport of them. That John the Baptist was *not* the actual person of the Tishbite is quite clear from his own blank denial, for when he was asked, "Art thou Elias?" he expressly declared, "I am not" (Joh 1:21). The question therefore remains, What did our Lord signify when He said of His forerunner, "*Elias is come already*"?

That Christ was uttering a profound truth, one which could be apprehended only by spiritual and divinely enlightened souls, when He declared that John the Baptist was Elijah, is very evident

from His words unto the apostles in Matthew 11:13-14, “For all the prophets and the law were prophesied until John. And *if ye will receive it* [or “him”], this is Elias, which was for to come.” Those words also contained an indirect rebuke of their carnal beliefs and sentiments respecting the expected kingdom of the Messiah. His added, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (verse 15) confirms what we have just pointed out, for that call was never made except when something difficult for the natural man to understand was in view. John the Baptist was rejected by Israel’s leaders, Herod had beheaded him, and Christ declared that He too should “suffer” (Mat 17:12), and that was something which ill accorded with their views. A suffering Messiah, whose herald had been murdered, was difficult to harmonize with the teaching of the scribes concerning Malachi 4:5. Yet there is nothing in that verse which should stumble us today, for our Lord has made its meaning quite clear.

In addition to the elucidation of Malachi 4:5 furnished above, it should be pointed out that the key passage which opens the mystery is Luke 1:17, where it was announced that John should go before Christ “in the spirit and power of Elias”—language which manifestly signifies that he was not a reincarnation of the Tishbite. The essential oneness of the two men in their character and work rendered the history of the earlier one a prophecy of the other. The latter appeared at a time when conditions were much the same as those which characterized the state of Israel in the days of Ahab. The resemblances between the two men are many and marked. John was essentially a preacher of repentance. He was a man of great austerity, garbed similarly to the prophet of Gilead. Real trial was made of his fidelity also by the hatred and persecution of the ungodly, but he was zealous for the Lord, both in reproving sin in high places, and in seeking to bring about a reformation of his nation. Both his mission and his disposition were Elijah-like in character.

Ere leaving this branch of our many-sided subject, a much more numerous class of passages, which also differ considerably from those already noticed, require our attention, namely, those which delineate the ups and downs of the Christian life. Many of them are set forth in plain and literal terms, others in highly figurative or typical language. Still others are concealed behind historical transactions which were divinely designed to shadow forth the trials and temptations, the backslidings and falls, the conflicts and chastenings, the hopes and disappointments, the revivings and recoverings of saints in this era. We have left these until the last, not because they are of lesser importance, but because they require a divinely taught and mature expositor to deal with them. They call for one who is well acquainted with his own heart, both with the workings of corruption and the operations of grace therein, as well as one with a considerable knowledge of God’s “ways,” if he is to trace out the different experiences of His people as they are reflected in the Scriptures. It is comparatively easy to bring out the spiritual meaning of, say, Exodus 15:23-25, or of Psalm 23; but it is harder (though necessary) to do so with Psalm 38:9-10; 63:1-2; 107:17-20; Proverbs 24:30-34; Isaiah 17:10-11; and Hosea 2:14-15.

Let us now illustrate from the history of Jonah as it spiritually portrays the experience of many a backslidden saint. The Lord gave that prophet a commandment, but it was contrary to his natural inclinations. He disobeyed, seeking to flee “from the presence of the LORD”—yielding to self-will saps the spirit of prayer and relish for the Word. Jonah went down into a ship, seeking the things of the world. God began to chasten him, by sending out “a great wind into the sea” because of his disobedience. That ought to have spoken loudly to his conscience, but, alas, he was sound asleep. Jonah perceived not the first manifestation of the divine displeasure, and therefore was not troubled over the same. So it is with a backslidden saint—conscience slumbers when God afflicts—he is too stupefied to “hear the rod.” But God would not allow Jonah to remain indifferent. He was rudely aroused from his slumbers by the shipmaster, lots were cast, and it fell upon

Jonah himself. His “cast me forth into the sea” (1:12) was the language of that despondency which comes upon one when he is made to reap the whirlwind. Yet God did not desert His wayward and despairing child. He “prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah,” supernaturally preserving him. The sequel is blessed—said the erring one, “I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me” (2:2); yes, and delivered him.

Such are, in their essential features, the usual experiences of a carnal believer who is determined to have his own way. In His lovingkindness, the Lord disciplines such a one for his self-will and carnality. When he acts like “a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke” (Jer 31:18), and follows a course of disobedience, God makes his self-pleasing plans to miscarry and prevents him reaching some Tarshish on which he set his heart. The Lord will not long suffer any of His own to do as they please. By the workings of His providence, a “great wind” comes and thwarts their desires and designs. If they fail to see God’s hand therein and do not penitently humble themselves beneath it, then His rod falls still more heavily upon them. Then it is that they cry unto Him in their affliction. Note how Jonah looked beyond all instruments and acknowledged, “*Thou* hast cast me into the deep” (2:3) and owned his folly (2:8). In his “I will pay that that I have vowed,” (2:9) we behold him restored to a spirit of submission; while his “salvation is of the LORD” freely ascribes his recovery unto His goodness. Thus Jonah 1 and 2 contain a spiritual picture both of the trials of a forward saint and of the faithfulness and mercy of God in His dealings with him.

DEATH PREFERABLE TO RAPTURE

I hear some brethren rejoicing that perhaps the Lord will come, and that therefore they will not die. I would sooner die, had I my choice. I see no comfort in the hope of not dying. “They that are alive and remain shall not prevent them that are asleep”; they shall not have preference over them that die. And indeed it is written, “The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” So that kind of priority is even allotted to the dead in Christ. If I die not, I shall have lost what thousands will have who die, namely, actual fellowship with Christ in the grave. Let me have it, let me have it my Lord. Let me wear the clay cold shape of death that once was Thine, and sleep within the sepulchre as Thou didst. To die and rise again, and be with Thee forever, is to complete the circle of the perfect. Those who think that to be alive when He cometh will be so great a glory, will perhaps find it no such great thing compared with death and resurrection, in the likeness of the Lord Jesus (Spurgeon). ❧

NOVEMBER

BITTER THINGS

“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil...that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa 5:20). Deplorable indeed is the case of those who are incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, who confound objects so radically dissimilar. Yet such by nature is the sad case with all of us. Our understanding is darkened, so that we are unable to perceive the real nature of things. Our wicked hearts deceive us into imagining that profitable exercises are a waste of time, and that pursuits which end in misery are pleasant. Instead of calling the Sabbath a delight (Isa 58:13), it is a weariness to the ungodly (Amo 8:5). They spend their strength for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfies not (Isa 55:2). They mistake licentiousness for liberty, and the light yoke of Christ for a heavy burden. True wisdom is regarded as folly, and her ways (which are peaceful) as paths to be shunned. Thus do they befool and cheat their own souls. Instead of making God their chief good, He is abhorred, and Satan, their worst enemy, is served.

“And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage” (Exo 1:13-14). The curse which the fall has called down upon man is a multiple one. It has not only alienated him from God, slain his spiritual life, and polluted his entire being, but it has also brought him into abject subjection to sin and Satan. Solemnly and graphically is this aspect of his misery depicted in Exodus 1. Pharaoh, who adumbrated the devil, was a most cruel tyrant over those who were in his power. He loaded them with intolerable burdens and treated them in a barbarous manner. He heaped one job upon another, and set over them taskmasters, who beat them mercilessly when they relaxed. Thus, the Hebrews had no ease of body and no comfort of mind. And such, my reader, is how Satan treats *his* captives, forcing them to employ their strength and talents in his hard service. For the most part, they realize it not, for sin so completely infatuates its victims as to make them in love with their bonds and unconscious of their burdens. Nevertheless, they have been taken captive by the devil at his will (2Ti 2:26) and are “serving divers lusts” (Ti 3:3).

“With better herbs shall they eat it” (Exo 12:8). The reference is to the paschal lamb, the blood of which provided shelter from the angel of death and issued in their deliverance from their serfdom under Pharaoh. Thus, that lamb was a notable type of Christ and His glorious redemption. It is not sufficiently realized that “redemption” presupposes *bondage*, that it is the freeing of sin’s captives, the delivering of the devil’s bound prisoners (Isa 61:1; Zec 9:11). “If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (Joh 8:36). Redemption, then, is the emancipating of Satan’s serfs, by the mighty power of God, on the ground of atoning blood. Ever after, the children of Is-

rael were annually to celebrate that deliverance from Egyptian slavery by eating a lamb with bitter herbs—the bitter herbs being designed to be a perpetual reminder of their former bitter bondage. In their spiritual application unto Christians, those bitter herbs are an emblem of that godly sorrow and mortification of the flesh which are ever to accompany the exercise of a living faith in the Lord Jesus. We cannot have real fellowship with the sufferings of Christ (Phi 3:10) except as we bring to mind what it was that made those sufferings necessary, and the recollection of our past wickedness will produce a broken heart and contrite spirit. “This will give an admirable relish to the paschal lamb: Christ will be as sweet to us as sin be bitter” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

“When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry” (Est 4:1). This was because the king had issued an edict that on a certain day all the Jews in his provinces were to be slain. “Public calamities, especially those which oppress the Church of God, should more affect our hearts than any private afflictions” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821). If we be concerned for the glory of God, we cannot behold with stoical indifference the dishonour now being done to His name throughout Christendom. Moses refused to eat and drink for forty days and nights because Israel had sinned so grievously against the Lord (Deu 19:18-19). Samuel, in anticipation of the divine judgments on Saul, grieved himself, and “cried unto the LORD all night” (1Sa 15:11). On a similar occasion, Ezra was prostrated in the deepest sorrow (9:3-4). David declared, “Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law” (Psa 119:136). Christ wept over Jerusalem (Luk 19:41), and in this feature, too, we are to be conformed unto Him. When rebuking wayward saints, Paul could only write to them “out of much affliction and anguish of heart” (2Co 2:4), and in speaking of others, he said, “of whom I...tell you even weeping” (Phi 3:18).

“Even to day is my complaint [not “complaining”] bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning” (Job 23:2). We do not at all agree with those expositors who regard Job as here referring to what they term a “divine desertion,” that the Lord had so withdrawn the light of His countenance from the patriarch that he was unable to obtain conscious access to Him. Rather do we think that Job’s distress was occasioned by his inability to understand the Lord’s dealings with him. His afflictions were so severe, so long-protracted, so inexplicably mysterious to him, that his case was well-nigh unendurable. He was at a complete loss to understand the divine providence. As he sought to forecast the future, no light was shed on his path. As he reviewed the past (verse 8), he was unable to put his finger on any sin which had provoked God to deal so severely with him. No matter from which angle he sought to view his case (verse 9), the divine dispensations appeared to proceed neither from justice nor from grace. Such a bewildering situation is indeed bitter. If such be yours, comfort yourself with the assurance, “But he knoweth [if I do not] the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (verse 10).

“Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words” (Psa 64:3). There are some sensitive dispositions which find this experience harder to endure than bodily pains or temporal losses. While it be true that “hard words never broke any bones,” yet some are cut to the very quick when sharp words are spoken against or even to them. Sly insinuations and false accusations are like arrows shot from a bow. Spiteful reproaches and evil slanders are grievous trials to many. As the viper fastened on the hand of Paul, so the venomous tongues of the wicked make the godly their mark, seeking to ruin their reputations and distress their minds. They unscrupulously invent falsehoods which are calculated to cause anguish. If such be the reader’s case, let him remember the Lord Jesus—they laid grievous things to His

charge which they could not prove. Vile indeed were their words against Him. They charged Him with being a glutton and a winebibber, said He was a Samaritan, imputed His miracles to diabolical influence, branded His teaching as blasphemous. But “when he was reviled, he reviled not again.”

“Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God” (Jer 2:19). Backsliding implies a relationship to Him, whether it be in profession or reality. Every sin committed by a Christian is not a backsliding, any more than every spot is leprosy. He may sin through ignorance, be overtaken in a fault, or find sin cleaving to him when it is loathed and resisted. Backsliding imports a willful step, though it ever begins in the heart ere it is manifested in the outward life. God no longer has His rightful place in the soul, and the creature is preferred before Him. Bitter indeed are the consequences, for he is made to reap the sour fruits of his evil sowings. “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways” (Pro 14:14). He no longer delights in the Lord or seeks His glory, but is occupied with his own wretchedness. The joy of the Lord is no longer his strength, nor does His peace rule in his heart. A coldness in prayer seizes upon him, relish of the Word is lost, a burdened conscience is now his portion. “The way of the transgressor is hard” (Pro 13:15), whether it be trod by the converted or by the unconverted—double so to the former.

“But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth” (Jam 3:14). Sad indeed is it that the Lord’s own people require such an exhortation as this; yet both the history of the past and the conditions now obtaining in the churches evince the need for it. In it, we are shown the acrid fruit which issues from that extreme austerity which is contrary to “the meekness of wisdom” of the preceding verse, namely, an unreadiness to forgive one another and live at peace with all men. There may be envy without contention, yet it is usually contention which makes the envying bitter; and, as John Calvin (1509-1564) pointed out, “That prevails not except when minds are so infatuated with the poison of malignity that they turn all things into bitterness.” Where there be such pride and animosity against any differing from you, boast not of it as though you were endowed with greater wisdom, wiser discernment or more zeal for the truth than others. Glory not in your shame. “Holy zeal and bitter envyings are as different as the flames of seraphim and the fire of hell” (Henry). That which produces breaches between Christians rarely proceeds from love to God, but is generally the overflow of gall and anger.

EXPOSITION OF JOHN’S FIRST EPISTLE

23. The Family Graded (2:13-14)

*“I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known
him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men,
because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little
children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto*

you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."

All of God's regenerated people are not of the same spiritual stature. Though all of them are quickened into newness of life, made partakers of the divine nature, and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, yet they vary from one another in several respects. Talents are not bestowed upon them uniformly, there are distinct stages in their growth in grace, and their actual attainments differ considerably. In the passage at which we have now arrived, the apostle divides believers into three classes: fathers, young men, and babes. But before he describes their respective characteristics he first addresses himself to the entire family under the endearing appellation of "little children," and predicates a basic blessing which pertains unto them all alike: "your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." In our last, we dwelt upon the subject of forgiveness, but had to conclude before reaching the final clause of verse 12, which announces the ground on which God pardons the penitent believer. We shall therefore turn to it now, and consider first the force of "his"; second, explain the "for his name's sake"; and third, show how He is conjoined with the Father Himself.

Whom are we to understand by "*for his name's sake*"—God or Christ? For the praise of the glory of the grace of the former, or because of the redemption that is found in the latter? A careful reading of the whole context supplies a clear answer. In verse 1 it is Christ who is the Advocate with the Father. In verse 2 He is mentioned as our Propitiation. In verse 6 He is presented as our Exemplar. In verses 4, 7, and 8 He is viewed as our Legislator. The new commandment of verses 7 and 8 is definitely from Christ, and so too believers receive the forgiveness of sins for His sake. "Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake" (Psa 106:8). "O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake" (Jer 14:7): it is never for the sake of any good thing found in us or done by us. "His name" is here to be taken for His person, for that was what gave infinite value to His work. Our sins are forgiven because they were atoned for by Christ, pardon being purchased and procured by the shedding of His blood (Heb 1:3). Our sins were imputed to Christ, laid upon Him. He bore them in His own body on the tree: there He was paid their wages: the debt was discharged, and therefore they are eternally banished from the eyes of the Law.

But though the believer's sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, yet not to the exclusion of the Father. No indeed, for though Christ be mentioned in many such passages without the Father, it is never but as conjoined with Him. Our salvation is a covenant one in which the eternal Three are equally engaged and concerned. Pardon comes from God the Father, but it flows down to us through Christ the blessed Mediator,⁶⁵ being the effect and fruit of His mediation. When it is said that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," the reference is unto the Father, who is faithful to His covenant engagements and just to the claims of Christ's sacrifice. So too our glorified Saviour is an Advocate with the Father. And thus here: while the forgiveness of our sins is due immediately to the offering of Christ, being sure proof of the everlasting efficacy thereof, it is equally an evidence of God's grace and the exercise of His righteousness. "Then

⁶⁵ **Mediator** — a go-between; "It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus his only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom He did from all eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. (*Second London Baptist Confession*, 8.1)

he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom” (Job 33:24); “God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph 4:32). Every spiritual blessing we receive comes to us from the Father’s bounty, but through the channel of Christ’s glorious and prevalent mediation. The salvation of the triune God shines forth in the person of Christ.

Divine forgiveness can be known only by faith resting on the bare word of God. Reason cannot reach unto it, and often the dictates of conscience are dead against it. Yet a knowledge thereof does not always come to the saint the hour he believes in Christ, though the fact itself does.

*“The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at once he receives,
Redemption in full through Christ’s blood.”*

Yet it is the bounden duty of every Christian to labour after a clear realization of the same: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith [i.e. with a firm trust in Christ and entire dependence upon Him], having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Heb 10:22). Here are some of the marks of a forgiven soul:

- A spirit without guile (Psa 32:2), honest with self and in our dealings with God: hence, “Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity” (Eph 6:24).
- Mourning for sin and displeasing of God, “there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared” (Psa 130:4).
- Deliverance from the dominion of sin (Mic 7:8).
- The forgiveness of others (Mat 6:14).

We turn now to verses 13 and 14. In this world nothing is brought to maturity immediately: instead, everything develops by orderly progress and gradual growth—“first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear” (Mar 4:28). The child of God is no exception, for at regeneration he is not fully developed spiritually, as the first Adam was naturally; but, in conformity to his Head, he is born like the last Adam—a babe, who “increased in wisdom and stature” (Luk 2:52) until He attained to manhood. All the parts and faculties of the new man indeed come into being at the new birth, but time is needed for their increase and manifestation. The apostle here makes mention of little children, young men, and fathers, and in so doing he grades them not according to their natural ages, nor by the length of time they had been believers, but according to the progress they had made in the Christian life. John himself was well qualified to deal therewith, for in his own case he knew what it once was to be a babe in Christ. Later, he had also known what it was, under the grace and teaching of the Spirit, to advance to the stage of being a young man in Christ. Ultimately, through the good hand of God, he had arrived at being a “father.”

While it be true that the apostle does not here grade the children of God by their natural ages, but rather according to their spiritual attainments, nevertheless he describes the latter in terms which are characteristic of the former, for the different excellences ascribed to each group accord with those which are found in nature. Affection marks the regenerate infant, as it does the physical one; vigorous exploits distinguish the young men, and wisdom the fathers. Little children love to be carried in their parents’ bosoms, to be dandled on their knees, to be taken by the arms as they are taught to walk; and here the spiritual babes are said to know the Father. We are told that “the glory of young men is their strength” (Pro 20:29), and the same thing is predicated of the

second class in 1 John 2:14; while “with the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding” (Job 12:12)—exemplified in the case of the “fathers.” Thus the several qualities assigned to the three groups harmonize with the natural properties, which pertain to those of corresponding ages.

There are real and marked differences among the people of God: not all of them are of one uniform stature, strength, or growth in godliness. Some are sheep, others are lambs, and are to be dealt with accordingly (Joh 21:15-16). Some are strong; others are weak (Rom 15:1). Some are “babes,” others of “full age” (Heb 5:13-14). All are fertile, yet not all in the same measure: “and brought forth, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred” (Mar 4:8); similarly we read in John 15 of “fruit” (verse 2), “more fruit” (verse 2), and “much fruit” (verse 5). Yet though there be different degrees of grace, knowledge and attainments among the sons and daughters of the Lord, they are all alike dear unto Him. Then let us not despise the least degree of grace in others. There was a time when the father in Christ was but a babe, and the time may come when the babe shall grow into a father. If by grace we have been enabled to go “from strength to strength” (Psa 84:7) and “from glory to glory” (2Co 3:18) let us bless God, for we have nothing to boast of. “Who maketh thee to differ from another [not only from the unregenerate, but also from thy feebleness and more ignorant fellow Christians]? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?” (1Co 4:7).

Though the distinctions made by the apostle in our text respect not their natural ages, but rather their different measures of grace, still it is to be observed that God has always had His people of all sorts and sizes. Of “little children” we may cite Samuel, who was called at a very early age (1Sa 2:18); Timothy, whom Paul reminded “from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2Ti 3:15). Little children also raised their hosannahs to the Son of David (Mat 21:15-16), and He did not despise them, but defended them. Among young men, we think of Joseph, David (1Sa 17:33, 37), and Josiah, who “while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father” (2Ch 34:3). Among the “fathers” we read of “Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple” (Act 21:16), and of “Paul the aged” (Phi 9). And thus it is still: some are plucked as brands from the burning while of tender years, others in the vigour of youth, and others when nearing the close of life. Here too God displays the sovereignty of His grace.

It requires to be pointed out that all babes in Christ do not grow up into spiritual young men, nor do all Christian young men attain the status of fathers. In some instances they are taken home soon after their conversion, but in the majority of cases their development is checked through failing to make a proper use of the means of grace, and hindered by a number of other things. There are many who make a promising start, but later their zeal abates, they backslide, and become a grief to their brethren. To the Corinthians Paul had to say, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ” (1Co 3:1); while to the Hebrews he complained, “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (5:12). On the other hand, there are those who progress steadily and make such proficiency in the school of Christ that, long before their heads are hoary, they can say with David, “I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts” (Psa 119:100).

That the believer ought to make constant advance in the Christian life is obvious, for we are expressly exhorted to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 3:18). To the Ephesians Paul wrote, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine...but speaking the truth in love, may grow up

into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (4:14-15); and to the Corinthians, “Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children; but in understanding be men” (1Co 14:20). Nevertheless, the fact remains that it is with individual Christians as it was (and still is) with corporate companies of the saints. To those at Rome Paul could say, “your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (1:8), but of the Galatians he had to say, “Ye did run well; who did hinder you?” (5:7). To the Thessalonians he declared, “your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth” (2Th 1:3); whereas of the Ephesians it is recorded, “thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works” (Rev 2:4-5).

In many instances growth in grace is far from corresponding with the increase of age. There are many professing Christians, and not a few real ones too, who are old in years and of long standing in the Church, yet are they but little children in knowledge and experience: they neither attain unto an apprehension of the deeper things of God, nor are they competent to counsel those who are much younger than themselves. How often we behold a verification of those words of Job 32:9: “Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment.” How few really spiritual Christians there are, qualified to restore a brother who has been overtaken in a fault (Gal 6:1). Mortified young believers are far more spiritual than older ones who indulge their fleshly appetites and inordinately seek the things of this world. The youthful Elihu used milder language and better arguments when reasoning with the afflicted patriarch than did the three friends who were greatly his seniors. Gracious abilities come not from age, but from the Spirit. Those whose thoughts are formed and whose ways are regulated by the Word of truth are wiser than they who confer much with flesh and blood.

While the differences between the three classes in the school of Christ are more or less clearly marked (probably much more so in the apostle’s day than in ours), yet we need to be upon our guard against so partitioning off believers in our mind that we attribute all the knowledge to the fathers, or all the strength to the young men. That would be contrary to Scripture and experience alike: as the fathers have strength, so the young men possess knowledge, though not to the same extent. So too if the young men in Christ overcome the wicked one, so do the babes in their measure and degree—and the fathers also. It is also to be borne in mind that Christian experience is not always uniform or unvarying even in the same individual. The mature saint may in some respects be as weak as the most recent convert, and in certain regards be tempted as fiercely as the young men. In general, we may say that God so orders His providences with the different members of His family that each of them is given opportunity to exercise and make manifest these Christian characteristics in due course, so that in their season those graces shine forth with greater clearness.

It will be noted that the apostle addresses the several classes according to the order of their dignity and responsibility; whereas in Ephesians 5 and 6 it is the order of grace, for in each instance of the reciprocal relations it is the inferior party who is first exhorted, the wives before the husbands, children before their fathers, and servants before their masters. To notice first the weaker vessel, or the one occupying the lower place, is according to that wondrous grace which led the Lord of glory to take upon Him the form of a servant. Nothing in the Scriptures is without significance and importance, for they are the Word of Him who is a God of order. A further example of what we are here calling attention to is found in the contrast presented between the parable of the labourers (Mat 20) and that of the talents (Mat 25:14-30). In the former, where the Lord was acting in sovereign grace (verse 15), He began by rewarding the one who had done the

least, who had wrought only one hour; but in the latter, where responsibility was in view, the one who had received the five talents was dealt with before those who had received only two and one.

In accord with the different grades of intelligence and attainments among His people, the Lord graciously calls a variety of servants, whom He equips to minister unto them. The ministers of Christ are not all of the same spiritual stature, nor are they alike qualified to be of most help to the several classes in Christ's school. Thus we are told that "He gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12). The first two of those offices have become obsolete, but the last three mentioned still obtain, and they correspond closely with the three groups mentioned in our text: the evangelist being best suited to the babes in Christ, the pastor to the young men, and the teacher to the fathers, who are capable of receiving profounder instruction than either of the others. Our Lord Himself, the perfect Servant, was divinely fitted for and actually discharged all three functions, for not only did He go about evangelizing, but He went forth to "teach and preach in their cities" (Mat 11:1, and cf. 4:23); as did also the most gifted one of His ambassadors—thus the two things are quite distinct.

There are many who mistakenly suppose that all God-sent preachers are the same. In one sense they are, all being commissioned by Him and clothed with His authority; but they are not alike furnished to meet the peculiar needs of the several classes of the saints. There are ministerial "young men" and "fathers," as well as among the rank and file of believers. Since there are always far more spiritual babes than fathers in the churches, the Lord appoints a greater number of His servants to minister "the milk of the word" unto those, and endows fewer of them with the ability to give forth "strong meat." As Paul informed the Corinthians, "But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you" (2Co 10:13). His traducers were accusing him of ego-tism and blaming him for ranking himself with such wise and eminent men as they deemed themselves to be. He refuted their charge, insisting that he had not gone beyond either the capacity or the territory which God had assigned him. The "rule" is the determiner of both the gifts and the sphere of each servant of God, and the "which God hath distributed" shows that He bestows them in varying measures.

Still more to the point was his statement in the first Corinthian epistle, "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers" (4:15). Upon which S.E. Pierce (1746-1829) said: "None ever respected such as the Lord sent more than did Paul; yet he did not think alike of all them as it respected their station, qualities, and usefulness to the souls of men. Some of them were in instructors in Christ, and they could go no further: the Lord Himself had neither fitted nor designed them for anything beyond this. It was a great honour conferred upon them to be such; yet they should be content and not exalt themselves above their brethren by thinking they were the only ministers who are useful in the Church of Christ. Most assuredly fathers in Christ are superior to them, and their usefulness must be of more service and importance. As amongst such are real saints the Lord will have the threefold division kept up, of fathers, young men, and babes in Christ, so He will have ministers suited to each of these. And whilst they shall all be useful in their respective situations, yet they cannot be so in the same way. The ministerial fathers will ever be distinguished from others. Their use will be of another kind from that of the brother who is to encourage the young men in Christ, and quite distinct again from those who feed the babes." As there are always many fewer fathers among the saints, so far fewer men capable of ministering to them.

The links between what is said in verse 12 to be the common portion of all the believing children of God and what is predicated of them in verses 13 and 14, where they are divided into three classes, are more or less apparent. First, “I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning”; however lengthy or full be their acquaintance with Christ, their experiential knowledge of Him began by proving the sufficiency of His atoning blood to cleanse them from all the guilt of sin. Second, “I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one:” such victory was not possible unless there was the assurance of sins forgiven, for, as Revelation 12:11, declares: “they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb”: that is by faith in that blood. Third, “I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father:” but such a privilege and blessing cannot be apart from the Saviour, for, as He said, “no one cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Joh 14:6). It is blessed to see that the sins of the weakest babe are as truly forgiven him as are those of the maturest father. It is also to be noted that the forgiveness of sins is accompanied not only by the knowledge of the Father, but by conflict with the wicked one too.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

75. The Levites (13:14), Part 1

We have now completed our examination of the first two main divisions of the book of Joshua, which treat of Israel’s supernatural entrance into the land of Canaan and (under the sword of the Lord) their conquest and occupation thereof. Before turning to the next section, which describes the apportioning of Israel’s inheritance among the tribes, we feel it advisable to notice a statement which occurs several times in our present book, namely, that “unto the tribe of Levi he gave none inheritance” (13:14 and see 13:33; 14:3). Such repetition is the more noteworthy since the same thing, substantially, is found again in Numbers 18:20-23; 26:62; Deuteronomy 10:9; 12:12; 14:27-29; 18:1-2; Ezekiel 44:28. Thus, this tribal peculiarity is mentioned no less than twelve times. Such frequency implies something of considerable importance, and therefore is worthy of our careful attention. While a full consideration of the subject will require us to turn unto a number of passages outside the book of Joshua, yet we make no apology for what some may regard as a digression, for, judging from our conversations with professing Christians generally, there seems to be as real a need to write an article on the Levites as there was upon Caleb, and it is only by comparing the principal references thereto that we can obtain a complete picture of them.

The first reference to Levi is the brief account which is given of his birth, “And she [Leah] conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have borne him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi”—*joined* (Gen 29:34). As we pointed out many years ago, the meanings of the names of Jacob’s sons most strikingly foreshadowed the early history of national Israel, and, we may add, of spiritual Israel too. Her first-born Leah called Reuben, saying: “Surely the LORD hath *looked* upon my affliction”; and her second, Simeon, giving as the reason, “Because the LORD hath *heard* that I was hated” (Gen 29:32-33). The parallel between those utterances and the suffering of Israel in Egypt is apparent.

First, we read that “God *looked* upon the children of Israel.” Then He said, “I have surely seen the *affliction* of my people which are in Egypt”; and then, exactly corresponding with Leah’s words when Simeon was born, and “have *heard* their cry” (Exo 2:25; 3:7). In choosing such language on that occasion, God surely had in mind the words which Leah used (under prophetic impulse) long before. Such too are the beginnings of the experiential history of spiritual Israelites—under conviction of sin and a feeling sense of their lost condition, they are sorely afflicted, and the Lord looks compassionately upon them and hears their cry.

In like manner, the words of Levi’s mother at the time of his birth—“My husband will be joined unto me”—looked forward to the beginning of the Hebrews’ national history. When was it that JEHOVAH was “joined to” Israel and became their “husband”? It was just after their deliverance from the house of bondage on the night of the Passover, when the lamb was slain and its blood sprinkled—just as God is joined to the repenting and believing sinner and becomes one with him in Christ. It is in the Lamb slain, now glorified, that God and the redeemed meet together. That was the “time” when JEHOVAH entered into a covenant with the chosen nation and became their Husband. Observe well how that very word is used in Jeremiah 31:31-32, and that what is there said looks back to the Passover night, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an *husband* unto them.”

Turning back to the historical and literal, the second mention of Levi is in Genesis 34:25-26. “And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males.” There we see what Levi was by nature—thoroughly unscrupulous, savage, void of pity, merciless. Joining with his brother Simeon, Levi took treacherous advantage of the partly incapacitated Shechemites and, while they were physically handicapped, fell upon and brutally butchered all their males. Few deeds more dastardly than theirs are recorded in God’s Word. It provides a solemn and graphic picture of what fallen man is by nature—totally depraved, without love either to God or to his neighbour; self-willed, ferocious, with feet that are “swift to shed blood” (Rom 3:15). What made the crime much worse was that they made a holy ordinance of God subordinate to their wicked design (verses 13-17), and thereby not only shamed themselves and their family, but also brought reproach upon that honourable badge of their religion.

It was to that horrible offence that Jacob had reference when, in his prophetic forecast of the future of his sons and their descendants, he said, “Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united...*Cursed* be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel” (Gen 49:5-7). In passing, let it be pointed out that those verses supply a striking proof of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, for had not Moses been moved by the Holy Spirit, he surely had left out that part of the patriarch’s prediction, seeing that Moses himself was a descendant of Levi! After denouncing their atrocious crime, that which is most prominent in Jacob’s prophecy was that those two tribes were to be divided and scattered in Israel. Literally was that fulfilled, for the Simeonites received no separate territory in Canaan, but obtained their portion within the allotment of Judah (Jos 19:1-8), and were dispersed among their cities. While the Levites were given the use of forty-eight cities, which were scattered throughout the inheritance of the other tribes (Num 35:8; Jos 14:4).

But now we turn to the brighter side of the picture, and look upon some of the blessed fruits which divine grace produces in the most unpromising soils. In Exodus 32, Levi is seen to ad-

vantage under the most doleful circumstances. As Moses witnessed the frenzied Israelites worshipping the golden calf, he cried, "Who is on the LORD'S side?" And we are told that "all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him." Severely were they now tested, for Moses declared unto them, "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour." What a dreadful ordeal was that! One which cut right across natural inclinations and sentiments. Yet nobly did they respond to the exacting call, "And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses, and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day" (verses 26-29).

That was the day of *Levi's conversion*, for his response to "Who is on the LORD'S side?" and "Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD" demonstrated the great and grand change which had taken place in his heart. The children of Levi were obedient to the divine call at all costs, crucifying, as it were, the flesh, with its affections and lusts. The claims of JEHOVAH's honour and the purity of His worship overriding all other considerations, so that they entirely subordinated their own feelings thereto. How different was the use made of Levi's sword on this occasion from that which is recorded in Genesis 34! How radically unlike were the motives which actuated him then and now! A greater contrast could scarcely be imagined. There his sword was drawn against those who were friendlily disposed. Here, against the open enemies of JEHOVAH. There, he was acting in the energy of the flesh, moved by carnal anger and base treachery. Here, he wrought in the power of the Spirit, in holy jealousy and concern for the glory of the Lord. There, he was joined with bloodthirsty Simeon in committing murder. Here, he was joined with Moses in executing righteous judgment upon idolators.

Moses had said, "Consecrate yourselves to day to the LORD...that he may bestow a blessing," and fully was that word made good. Richly were they rewarded for their self-denying fidelity. In Deuteronomy 33:8-11, we are informed that Moses said of Levi, "Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one...who said unto his father and to his mother [by his actions], I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his [guilty] brethren, nor knew [spared] his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. *Bless*, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands." It was because they ignored natural ties, knowing no man after the flesh, and forebore dealing tenderly with their own kith and kin when it came to maintaining the honour of God, that these high favours were bestowed upon them. It was because the spirit triumphed over the flesh, so that they observed God's word and covenant, that there were committed unto them the Thummim and Urim, the gift of teaching and the privilege of ministering before the Lord. Thus did God honour those who honoured Him; and thus He still does.

Beautiful is it to see, also, how that Levi's devotion unto the Lord in acting for Him revoked Jacob's curse in Genesis 49:7, and secured the divine blessing (Exo 32:29; Deu 33:11). It is further to be noted that, at a later date, a member of the tribe of Levi, Phinehas (the grandson of Aaron) was equally jealous for the honour of his Master, acting in unsparing judgment upon transgressors when the occasion demanded it. Though the flagrant offenders were of princely stock, Phinehas had no respect of persons, but, fired with holy indignation, spared them not, and, by so doing, he turned away the wrath of the Lord from Israel. In return thereof, JEHOVAH said, "Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even

the covenant of an everlasting priesthood: because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel” (Num 25:6-13). His deed was so pleasing unto God, and the motives which actuated him were so pure in His sight, that He gave to him the covenant of an everlasting priesthood. Thus the descendants of the one who was joined with Simeon in cruelty were joined to the Lord in grace. Notice is taken of this both in Psalm 106:29-31 and in Malachi 2:5.

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him” (Num 3:5-6). Here we behold a most illustrious display of the amazing and sovereign *grace of God*, as much so as in the case of the conversion and calling of Saul of Tarsus. Saul was “a blasphemer, and persecutor, and injurious,” nevertheless the Lord declared, “He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles” (Act 9:15); and as he himself affirmed, “Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a *pattern* to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (1Ti 1:16). And the divine favour was no less signally exhibited in the calling of Levi and the signal honours bestowed upon him. It was an unmistakable demonstration of God’s sovereignty that, out of all the tribes of Israel, Levi should be chosen for the place of special nearness to Himself; as it was also a most blessed manifestation of the riches of God’s grace which were lavished upon him.

As we have seen, Levi was by nature and conduct far from God, and His holy abhorrence of his moral evil was clearly expressed through the lips of his father. Two things are to be observed regarding the contents of Genesis 49. First, that those utterances of dying Jacob were very much more than the language of a mere man, namely, expressions of the mind of God—though of Jacob also, as being through grace in sympathy with Him. Thus, the language of Genesis 49:5-7 shows that Levi, naturally, was an object of abhorrence to God. Second, according to the principles of Bible teaching, God’s estimate of a man’s nature is also His estimate of his descendants. Those principles are “that which is born of the flesh is flesh,” and that of headship and representation. Accordingly, Jacob’s prophecy contemplated his sons not simply as individuals, but as tribal heads, so that what was said of each one is essentially true of his tribe.

Now it was of this Levi who was, as to his moral condition, in the “far country,” that the divine edict went forth, “Bring the tribe of Levi *near*” (Num 3:5). Thus, even while “far off” he was ordained to be “a chosen vessel unto the LORD.” Let us pause now and make application of this blessed type unto ourselves. That can best be done by asking, What and where *were* we? What and where *are* we? The Bible furnishes definite answers. On the one hand, our moral distance from God, our nature and practice when we were children of wrath, and, on the other hand, our regeneration and reconciliation through the blood of Christ, have both been depicted and declared by the Holy Spirit. Our original condition is described in such passages as Romans 3:10-18; Ephesians 2:1-3; Titus 3:3. There is our portrait drawn by the divine hand, and it is exceeding like that of Levi. We were “alienated and enemies in our minds by wicked works” (Col 1:21), “living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another” (Ti 3:3). Such were writer and Christian reader before divine grace laid hold of us—capable of the most atrocious crimes, the seeds of all iniquity within our hearts.

Such we *were*. But *now*, being justified by grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, we “who sometimes were far off are *made nigh* by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). We who were guilty are now “justified from *all* things” (Act 13:39). We who were polluted are now “washed and sanctified” (1Co 6:11). We who were “cursed children” (2Pe 2:14), condemned by the Law, are now “dear children” (Eph 5:1), blessed “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly plac-

es in Christ” (Eph 1:3). Formerly “having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12), but now given free access unto Him. And more than all of this, “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us...hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:4-6)—such being our exalted status and position before God in the person of our Head. Brought nigh to Him by atoning blood that we might be presented “holy and unblameable and unreprouched in his sight” (Col 1:22). Such *was* our infinite distance and degradation; such *is* the wondrous nearness and exaltation to which we are brought.

And *how do you esteem* your position, fellow believer? Does your heart rejoice in your oneness with Christ, and your perfect cleansing and acceptance in Him? Are you acting in the assurance of being “made nigh” to God? Or is it in your estimate presumption to exercise your privilege with all boldness? As surely as the early history of Levi portrayed ours, so does the “Bring the tribe of Levi near” of Numbers 3:5 find its antitypical fulfilment in the “brought nigh” of Ephesians 2:13. Since Paul is our “pattern” (1Ti 1:16), let us not only be encouraged by it to come unto Christ as lost sinners, but also emulate the holy boldness of his simple faith, knowing that “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Rom 5:1-2).

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

9. Its Ramifications, Part 2

That hardness of heart to which reference was made at the close of our last, is the perverseness and obstinacy of fallen man’s nature, which makes him resolve to continue in sin no matter what be the consequences thereof. It renders him unwilling to be rebuked for his folly, and makes him refuse to be reclaimed from it, whatever methods are used in order thereunto. The prophet made mention of this in his day, for referring to those who had been forewarned by sore judgments, and were at that very time under the most solemn rebukes of Providence, God had to say of them, “They will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted” (Eze 3:7). So too the Lord Jesus complained, “We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced: we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented” (Mat 11:17). The most pathetic entreaties and winsome expostulations will not move the unregenerate to close with what is absolutely necessary for their present peace and final felicity. “They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely” (Psa 58:4-5 and cf. Act 7:57).

The hearts of the regenerate are ductile and pliable, easily bent to God’s will, but the hearts of the wicked are so wedded to their lusts as to be impervious to all appeal. There is such an unyielding disposition against heavenly things that they respond not to the most alarming threatenings and thunderings. They will neither be convinced by the most cogent arguments nor won by the most tempting inducements. They are so addicted to self-pleasing that they cannot be persuaded to take Christ’s yoke upon them. In Zechariah 7:11-12, it is said, “But they refused to hearken,

and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent.” They are less susceptible to be wrought upon by the preacher to receive any impressions of holiness than granite is to be engraved by the tool of the artificer. They scorn to be controlled and refuse to be admonished. They are “a stubborn and rebellious generation” (Psa 78:8), being subject to neither the Law nor the Gospel. The doctrines of repentance, denying of self, walking with God, can find no entrance into their hearts.

3. *Disordered affections.* Some writers take in more and others less in the scope of the term “affections,” and perhaps it is a moot point both theologically and psychologically whether the desire nature is to be included therein or to be considered separately. In the broadest meaning, the affections may be said to be the sensitive faculty of the soul. As the understanding is that power which discerns and judges things, so the affections allure and dispose the soul unto or against the objects contemplated. It is by the affections that the soul becomes pleased or displeased with what is cognized by the bodily senses or contemplated by the mind, and thus moved to approve or reject. As distinguished from both, the *will* is that faculty which executes the final decision of the mind or the strongest desire of the affections, carrying out the same into action. Since the affections pertain to the sensitive side of the soul, we are more conscious of *their stirrings* than we are of the actings of our minds or wills. In this article, we shall employ the term in its widest latitude, including the desires, for what the appetites are to the body the affections are to the soul.

Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) likened the desire nature unto the stomach in the body. It is an empty void, fitted to receive from without, longing for a satisfying object. Its universal language is, “Who will show us any good?” (Psa 4:6). Now God Himself is man’s chief good, the only One who can afford him real, lasting, and full satisfaction. At the beginning, He created him in His own likeness; that as the needle touched by the landstone ever moves northward, so the soul being touched with the divine image should carry the understanding, affections, and will unto Himself. He also placed the soul in a material body, and that in this world, fitting each for the other, providing everything necessary for and suited to each part of man’s complex being. The desire nature carried the soul unto the creature, but only as a means of enjoying God in and by them. The wonders of God’s handiwork were meant to be admired, but chiefly as displaying His wisdom. Food was to be eaten and enjoyed, but in order to deepen gratitude unto the goodness of the Giver and to supply strength to serve Him. But alas, when man apostatized, his understanding, affections, and will were divorced from God, and the exercise of them became directed only by self-love.

Originally the Lord sustained and directed the action of human affections unto Himself. Then He withheld that power, and left our first parents on their own creature footing, and, in consequence, their desires wandered after forbidden joys. They sought their happiness not in communion with their Maker, but in intercourse with the creature. Like their children ever since, they loved and served the creature more than the Creator. The result was disastrous to the last degree—they became separated from the Holy One. That was at once evidenced by their attempt to hide from Him. Had their delight been in God as their chief good, the desire for concealment could not have possessed their minds. And as it was with Adam and Eve, so it has been with all their descendants. Many a proverb expresses that general truth. “The stream cannot rise higher than the fountain.” “Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles.” “Like begets like.” The parent stock of the human family must send forth scions of its own nature. “Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways” (Job 21:14) is what the hearts and lives of all the unregenerate say unto the Almighty.

The natural centre of unfallen man's soul, both for its rest and delight, was the One who gave him being, and therefore did David say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul" (Psa 116:7). But sin has caused men to "draw back" from Him, and to "depart from the living God" (Heb 10:38; 3:12). God was not only to be the delightful portion of the one whom He had made in His image, but also the ultimate end of all his motions and actions, aiming to glorify and please Him in all things. But he forsook "the fountain of living waters" (Jer 2:13)—the infinite and perpetual spring of comfort and joy. And now the inclinations and lustings of man's nature are wholly taken off from God, anything and everything being more agreeable to him than He who is the sum of all excellency. Making the things of time and sense his chief good, and the pleasing of himself his supreme end. That is why their affections are termed "ungodly lusts" (Jude 1:18)—they are all turned *away from Him*. They have no relish for His holiness, no desire for fellowship with Him, no wish to retain Him in their thoughts.

But what has just been pointed out (the aversion of our affections from God) is only the privative part. The positive is their conversion to other things. Thus it was that God charged Israel, "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water"—betaking themselves to poor trifles which afford them no satisfaction. The creature is preferred before the Creator, for all the concern of the natural man is how to live at ease in the world, and not to honour and enjoy God. Thus do they observe "lying vanities" and "forsake their own mercy" (Jon 2:8), for as to their emptiness they are vanities, and in regard to disappointing their expectations, "lying vanities." They are deceived by a vain show, and the outcome is vexation of spirit, because of a frustrating of their hopes. As the love of God shed abroad in the hearts of the redeemed seeks not its own (1Co 13:5), so self-love does nothing else but that very thing, "They all look to their own way, every one for his gain" (Isa 56:11).

Not only are the lusts of the unregenerate carried away from God to the creature, but they are so greedily, excessively. Thus, we read of "inordinate affections" (Col 3:5), which signifies both immoderate and irregular, both a spirit of gluttony and a craving after things which are contrary to God—"lusting after evil things" (1Co 10:6). The former is the sin of intemperance, the latter having "pleasure in unrighteousness" (2Th 2:12). The body is esteemed above the soul, for all the efforts of the natural man are directed to making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, while his immortal spirit is little thought of and still less cared for. When providence smiles upon his labours, his language is, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luk 12:19). Their thoughts rise not to a higher and future life. They are far more concerned with the clothing and adorning of the outward man than with the cultivation of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price (1Pe 3:4). Earth is preferred before heaven, things of time before eternity. Though death and the grave may put an end to all they had here much sooner than they imagine, yet their hearts are so set upon those things as their happiness that they will not be diverted from them.

Thus, it is that the affections, which at the beginning were the servants of reason, now occupy the throne. That which is the glory of human nature—elevating it above the beasts of the field—is turned hither and thither by the rude rabble of our passions. God placed in man an instinct of happiness, to find the same in Himself, but now it creeps in the dust and pours itself out to every vanity. The counsels and contrivances of the mind are engaged in the accomplishment of man's carnal desires. Not only have his affections no relish for spiritual things, they are strongly prejudiced against them, for they run directly counter to the gratifying of his corrupt nature. His desires are set upon more wealth, more worldly honour and power, more fleshly merriment, and because

the Gospel contains no promise of such things, it is despised. Because it inculcates holiness, the mortifying of the flesh, separation from the world, resisting the devil, the Gospel is most unwelcome to him. To turn the affections away from those material and temporal things which they have made their chief good, and to turn them unto unseen spiritual and eternal things, alienates the carnal mind against the Gospel, for it offers nothing attractive to the natural man in the place of those idols on which his heart centres. To renounce his own righteousness and be dependent upon that of Another is equally distasteful to his pride.

Not only are the affections alienated from and opposed to the holy *requirements* of the Gospel, but equally so unto its *mystery*. That mystery is what the Scriptures term the hidden wisdom of God, and the natural man not only fails to admire and adore, but regards it with contempt and contumacy. He looks upon all the parts of its declaration as empty and unintelligible notions. This prejudice has prevailed over the wise and learned of this world in all ages, and in none more effectually than in our evil day. The highest wisdom of God seems foolishness unto all who are puffed up by pride in their own intelligence, and what is foolishness unto them is despised and scorned. That which is addressed to faith rather than reason is unpalatable. To lean not unto their own understanding, but trust in the Lord with all their hearts (Pro 3:5), is a “hard saying” to those considered of towering intellect. To set aside their own ideas, forsake their thoughts (Isa 55:7) and become as “little children,” and be told they shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven unless they do so (Mat 18:3), is most abhorrent unto them. No small part of man’s depravity consists in its readiness to embrace those prejudices, to adhere pertinaciously unto them, with total lack of power to extricate themselves from them.

The disordered state of our affections is seen in the fact that the actions of the natural man are regulated far more by his senses than by his reason. His conduct consists principally in responding to the clamouring of his lusts rather than to the dictates of reason. The desires of children are swift to any corrupting diversion, but slow to any improving exercise. From the one, they can scarcely be restrained, unto the other, they have to be compelled. That the affections are turned away from God is made manifest every time His will crosses our desires. This disease appears too in the objects on which the several affections are placed. Instead of love being set upon God, it is centred on the world, and dotes upon idols. Instead of hatred being directed against sin, it is opposed to holiness. Instead of joy finding its delight in spiritual things, it wastes itself on those which soon pall. Instead of fear being actuated by displeasing the Lord, it dreads more the frowns of our fellows. If there be grief, it is for the thwarting of our pleasures and hopes, rather than because of our waywardness. If there be pity, it is exercised upon self, rather than upon the sufferings of others.

It now remains for us to point out that the very first stirring of our lusts is itself *evil*. The passions or lusts are those natural and unrestrained motions of the creature unto the advancement of its nature, by an inclination unto those objects which promote its good, and an aversion from those which are noxious. And thus they are to the soul what wings are to the bird and sails are to the ship. Desire is ever in pursuit of satisfaction, and if it is to be met, must be regulated by right reason. But, alas, reason has been dethroned and man’s passions and inclinations are lawless, and therefore their earliest risings after forbidden objects essentially evil. This was, as Matthew 5 shows, denied by the rabbins, who restricted sin to an open and outward transgression. But our Lord declared that unwarrantable anger against another was incipient murder, and that to look upon a woman so as to lust after her was a breach of the seventh commandment, that impure thoughts and wanton imaginations were nothing less than adultery (Mat 5:22, 28). Hence it is that Scripture speaks of “deceitful lusts” (Eph 4:22), “foolish and hurtful lusts” (1Ti 6:9), “worldly

lusts” (Ti 2:12), “fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1Pe 2:11), “ungodly lusts” (Jude 1:18).

The very first stirring of desire after anything evil, the slightest irregularity in the motions of the soul, is *sin*. This is clear from the universal command “Thou shalt not covet,” or hanker after anything which God has prohibited. This irregular and evil longing is termed “concupiscence” in Romans 7:8, “by which the apostle included mental as well as sensual desire” (John Calvin). The Greek word is usually rendered “lust”. In 1 Thessalonians 4:5, it is found in an intensified form, “the lust of concupiscence.” These lustings of the soul are its initial motions, often unsuspected by ourselves, which precede the consent of the mind, and are designated “evil concupiscence” (Col 3:5). They are the seeds from which spring our evil works, the original stirrings of our indwelling corruption. They are condemned by the law of God, for the tenth commandment forbids the first outgoings of the affections after what belongs to another, so that the incipient longing, *before* the approbation of the mind be obtained, is sinful, and needs to be confessed unto God. Genesis 6:5 declares of fallen man that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart” is evil, for sins while in their embryonic stage defile the soul, being contrary to that purity which the holiness of God requires.

What has been pointed out above is repudiated by Romanists, for while they allow that the lusts of the flesh are the matter of sin or that in which sin originates, they will not admit the same to be essentially evil. The Council of Trent denied that the original movement of the soul tending to evil is itself sinful, stating that it only becomes so when the same is consented or yielded to. In like manner, the majority of Arminians (who in so many of their beliefs are one with papists) confine sin to an act of the will. Now, it is freely confessed by all sound Calvinists that the mind’s entertaining of the first evil desire is a further degree of sin, and that actual assenting thereto is yet more heinous; but they emphatically contend that *the original impulse* is also evil in the sight of God. If the original impulse be innocent (*per se*), how could its gratification be sinful? Motives and excitements do not undergo any change in their essential nature in consequence of their being humoured or encouraged. It cannot be wrong to heed innocent impulses. The Lord Jesus teaches us to judge the tree by its fruits; if the fruit be corrupt, so too is the tree which bears it (Mat 7:16-20).

In Romans 7:7, the term is actually rendered sin, “I had not known *sin*, but by the law: for I had not known *lust*, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet”—or “lust,” for the Greek uses the same word. Here, then, sin and lust are used interchangeably—any inward nonconformity to the Law being sinful, Paul was made aware of that fact when the commandment was applied to him in power—as the sun shining on a dung-heap draws forth its stench. Men may deny that the very *desire after* forbidden objects is culpable, but Scripture affirms that even imaginations are evil or the buds of wickedness, for they are contrary to that rectitude of heart which the Law requires. Note how that terrible list of things which Christ enumerated as issuing from the heart of fallen man is headed with “evil thoughts” (Mat 15:19). We cannot conceive of any inclination or proneness unto sin in an absolutely holy being. Certainly there was none in the Lord Jesus, “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (Joh 14:30)—nothing that was capable of responding to his vile solicitations, no movement of His appetites or affections of which he could take advantage. Christ was inclined only unto what is good.

“For when we were in the flesh [i.e. while Christians were in their unregenerate state], the motions of sins [literally, the affections of sin, or the beginnings of our passions], which were [aggravated] by the law, did work in our members [the faculties of the soul as well as of the body] to bring forth fruit unto death” (Rom 7:5). Those “affections of sin” are the filthy streams which is-

sue from the polluted fountain of our hearts. They are the first stirrings of our fallen nature, which precede the overt acts of transgression. They are the unlawful movements of our lusts prior to the studied and deliberate thoughts of the mind after sin. “But sin [indwelling corruption], taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence” or “evil lustings” (Rom 7:8). Note well that word “*wrought* in me”. There was a polluted disposition or evil propensity at work, distinct from and the spring of the deeds which it produced. Indwelling sin is a powerful principle, constantly exercising a bad influence, stimulating unholy affections, stirring unto avarice, enmity, malice, etc.

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 16

Lack of space prevented us from uttering a few words of caution at the close of our last. There are certain types of mind, particularly the mystical and fanatical, which are prone to substitute fanciful concepts for spiritual interpretations. God’s Word requires to be handled with reverential fear, and with much prayer for discernment and guidance, lest we tread on holy ground with the shoes of carnal wisdom; or the novice, striving after originality, give rein to his imagination, instead of disciplining himself to adhere strictly to the Analogy of Faith. Every preacher needs to be constantly on his guard against substituting human ingenuity for the teaching of the Spirit. Satan has ever mimicked the operations of the Spirit, and counterfeited a spiritual opening up of the Scriptures by wild perversions thereof. An early instance of this is the *Kabbala*, which, though of great esteem among the Jews, abounds in the most absurd explanations of Holy Writ. The rash allegorizing of Origen is another example to be studiously avoided, for he twisted the plainest and simplest texts into the most grotesque shapes or meanings. The strange system of exegesis adopted by Swedenborg is yet another case in point. The imagination needs to be bridled by both a tender conscience and the spirit of a sound mind.

Just so far as we really value a spiritual interpretation of God’s Word will we abominate all counterfeits. Two extremes are to be guarded against, both by those who advance and those who receive some new explanation of a passage—a love of the fantastic and a prejudice against what is novel. There is a middle ground between hastily condemning or accepting, namely, to weigh carefully and prayerfully what is presented, testing it by other passages and by our own experience. Doubtless most of us can recall some interpretations which were new, and which at first struck us as being “far-fetched,” but which we now regard as sound and helpful. If the Holy Spirit had not informed us that Abraham’s two wives were figures of the two covenants (Gal 4:24), and that the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 30:11-14 were to be understood spiritually of the righteousness of faith (Rom 10:6-9), we had considered such interpretations ridiculous. Remember that God grants light to one minister which He does not to another. Even though his explanation commend not itself to you at the moment, beware of rashly calling it “a perversion of the Scriptures,” lest the same is being blessed to some poor child of God whose heart is feeding on what your head rejects.

22. *Double reference and meaning.* It is ever to be borne in mind that there is a fullness, as well as a depth, in the words of God which pertains not unto those of men, so that rarely will a single and brief definition adequately explain a scriptural term. For that reason, we must constantly be on our guard against limiting the scope of any divinely inspired statement, and saying that it means only so and so. Thus, when we are told that God made man in His own image and likeness, those words probably have a least a fourfold allusion. First, to the incarnation of the Son, for He is distinctly designated the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). Second, to man’s being a tripartite creature, for “God said, Let us make man in our image” (Gen 1:26)—a trinity in unity, consisting of “spirit and soul and body” (1Th 5:23). Third, in His moral likeness, which man lost at the fall, but which is restored at regeneration (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). Fourth, to the position assigned man and the authority with which he was invested, “Let them have dominion over” (Gen 1:26). Adam was a “god” or ruler, under the Lord, of all mundane creatures.

In view of what has been pointed out, it is evident that the favourite dictum of dispensationalists—“Application is manifold, interpretation but one”—is erroneous, for the above are not four interpretations of the “image of God” from which we may choose, but the actual fourfold meaning of the term itself. To say that “Interpretation is but one” is also flatly contradicted by our Lord’s explanation of the parable of the sower, for when He defined its terms, He gave three or four different significations to the “thorns”—compare Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:18-19; Luke 8:14. We are in hearty accord with paragraph nine in the opening chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith, when it says, “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly,” except that we dissent from the limitation mentioned in the parentheses. We much prefer to side with Joseph Caryl (1602-1673, one of the framers of the Westminster Confession), who, when commenting on a verse, the words of which were susceptible of various meanings, and which had been diversely explained by expositors, said, “In a Scripture which may, without the impeachment of any truth, admit divers sense, I would not be so positive in one as to reject all others.”

Even if it were true that the grammatical meaning of a verse be only one, nevertheless it may have a double reference, as is certainly the case with some of the *prophecies* in Holy Writ, which possess a major and a minor fulfilment. In his introduction to the book of Revelation, in Charles J. Ellicott’s (1819-1905) commentary, when writing upon prophecy, its annotator said, “The words of God mean more than one man or one school of thought can compass. There are depths of truth unexplored which lie beneath the simplest sentences. Just as we are wont to say that history repeats itself, so the predictions of the Bible are not exhausted in one or even many fulfillments. Each prophecy is a single key which unlocks many doors, and the grand and stately drama of the Apocalypse has been played out perchance in one age to be repeated in the next.” We greatly fear that it is nothing but narrow-minded partisanship which has caused so many to disdain such a concept, and made them reject all other interpretations which accord not with their own particular system. David said, “Thy commandment is exceeding broad” (Psa 119:96). Let us see to it that we do not contract or limit the same.

The Father’s declaration concerning His Son, “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many” (Isa 53:11) certainly has a double force—the “knowledge” He possesses and the knowledge which He imparts. As Thomas Manton (1620-1677) pointed out, “It may be taken either way: actively, for the knowledge which He shall give out; passively, for our apprehension of Christ,” for the former without the latter cannot justify us. “By His knowledge” can be regarded both subjectively and objectively. First, by His own personal knowledge of the Father (Joh

17:25), which was the ground of what He imparted unto men (Joh 3:11) for their salvation. Second, for our saving knowledge of Him—received from Him. Instead of quibbling as to whether or not Isaiah intended to include each of those meanings, let us be thankful that he was guided to use language which included *both* senses. Again, our Lord's figurative expression when He declared that "the gates of hell" should not prevail against His Church" (Mat 16:19) admits of a *double* reference—death (Isa 38:10) and the powers of evil. Death and the grave *have prevailed* over every human institution, but not so over Christ (Act 2:27), or His Church (Psa 72:17; Mat 28:20), nor shall any weapon formed against her prosper (Isa 54:17)—meanings so dissimilar are no more surprising than the symbolical application of the word "lion" to Satan (1Pe 5:8) and to Christ (Rev 5:5).

"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions" (Gal 3:19). That answer admits of two different significations. First, the immediate purpose in the Law's being formerly proclaimed and enforced subsequently to the promised inheritance to Abraham and his seed was to place a bridle upon the carnality of the Hebrews and check their sinning—by making known to them God's will and the fearful penalty of flouting His authority. Second, its ultimate design was to prepare the way for Christ, by demonstrating their need of Him because of their awful guilt. The "because of transgressions" is intentionally general enough to include both—to suppress transgressions, to make manifest transgressors. So too the next verse has a dual meaning, "Now a mediator is not a mediator of one [party], but God is one." In view of the context (verse 10 onwards, especially 16-19), "God is one" signifies, first, that *His purpose is immutable*. His design was the same in both the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants—the Law being given with a gracious end in view, to pave the way for the Saviour, hence the question and answer in verse 21. Yet in view of the whole context, it is equally clear, second, that "God is one" means that *His method of salvation* remains unaltered through all dispensations. "Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: seeing it is *one God*, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith" (Rom 3:29-30).

What has just been noticed leads us to point out that the terms "Israel," "Jew," and "seed of Abraham" all have a twofold allusion. The expression "Israel after the flesh" (1Co 10:18) is obviously a discriminating one, and would be meaningless were there no Israel after the spirit, that is regenerated Israel, "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16). The "Israel after the flesh" were the natural descendants of Abraham, whereas the spiritual Israel, whether Jews or Gentiles, are those who are born again and worship God in spirit and in truth. When the Psalmist declared, "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart" (Psa 73:1), he certainly did not refer to the fleshly descendants of Jacob, for the greater part of them *lacked* "a clean heart"! When our Lord said of Nathanael, "Behold an Israelite *indeed*, in whom is no guile" (Joh 1:47), He obviously meant very much more than one who proceeded naturally from Jacob. His language was as distinguishing as when He said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples *indeed*" (Joh 8:31). "An Israelite indeed" connoted a genuine son of the spiritual Israel, a man of faith and prayer, holy and honest. "In whom is no guile" supplies further confirmation that a saved character was there in view—compare Psalm 32:1.

When Christ said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mat 15:24), He could not intend the fleshly descendants of Jacob, for, as many Scriptures plainly show (Isa 42:6; Rom 15:8-9), He was sent unto the Gentiles also. No, the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" there imported the whole election of grace. "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16) could not possibly refer to the nation, for God's *wrath* was on *that*—it is on the Israel chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and

regenerated by the Spirit that divine peace and mercy rest. “Not as though the word of God had taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom 9:6). The Jews erroneously imagined that the promises which God had made to Abraham and his seed pertained only to his natural descendants, hence their claim, “We have Abraham to our father” (Mat 3:9). But those promises were not made to men after the flesh, but to men after the spirit, the regenerate, they alone being the “children of the promise” (Rom 9:8). God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were given to them *as believers*, and they are the spiritual property and food of believers, and none else (Rom 4:13, 16). Until that fact be grasped, we shall be all at sea with the Old Testament promises—cf. 11 Corinthians 1:20 and 7:1; 11 Peter 1:4.

“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. To be ‘the children of God’ is to be like God, and also, as the apostle states, it is to be ‘heirs of God.’ To be ‘the children of Abraham’ is to resemble Abraham, to imitate his conduct and to share his blessedness” (John Brown, 1722-1787). So to be “the children of the wicked one” (Mat 13:38) is to be conformed to his vile image, both in character and in conduct (Joh 8:44), and to share his doom (Mat 25:41). Christ said to the carnal Jews of His day, “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (Joh 8:39). It is his spiritual children who “walk in the steps of that faith which he had” (Rom 4:12) and who are “blessed with faithful Abraham” (Gal 3:9). We must be united to Christ, who is “*the Son of Abraham*” (Mat 1:1), in order to enter into the blessings which God covenanted unto the patriarch. The double significance of the expression “children” or “seed of Abraham” was plainly intimated at the beginning, when God likened his seed to the stars of the heavens and the sand which is upon the sea shore (Gen 22:17).

In like manner, the word “Jews” is applied to two very different classes of people, though few today would think so if they confined themselves to the ministry of a class who pride themselves on having more light than the majority of professing Christians. Nevertheless, such is unequivocally established by the declaration of Romans 2:28-29, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly: neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly: and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” Surely nothing could be plainer than that, and in the light of such a statement, it seems passing strange that there are those—boasting loudly of their orthodoxy, and bitterly condemning all who differ from them—who insist that the term “Jew” pertains only unto the natural descendants of Jacob, and ridicule the idea that there is any such thing as a spiritual Jew. But when God tells us, “He is a Jew, which is one *inwardly*,” He manifestly means that the true “Jew,” the antitypical one, is a regenerated person, who enjoys the “praise” or approbation of God.

It is not only childish, but misleading, to affirm that “Israel” means *Israel*, and “Jew” means *Jew*, and that when God’s Word makes mention of Jerusalem or Zion nothing else is referred to than those actual places. Those who make such assertions are but deceiving themselves (and others who are gullible enough to heed them) by the mere *sound* of words. As well aver that “flesh” signifies nothing more than the physical body, that “water” (Joh 4:14) refers only to that material element, or that “death” (Joh 5:24) signifies nothing but physical dissolution. There is an end of all *interpretation*—bringing out the *sense* of Scripture—when such a foolish attitude be adopted. Each verse calls for careful and prayerful study, so that it may be fairly ascertained *which* the Spirit has in view—the carnal Israel or the spiritual, the literal seed of Abraham or the mystical,

the natural Jew or the regenerate, the earthly Jerusalem or the heavenly, the typical Zion or the antitypical. God has not written His Word in such a way that the average reader is made independent of that help which He has designed to give through His accredited teachers.

We can well imagine those of our readers who have sat under the errors of dispensationalism saying, "All of this seems very confusing, for we have been taught to distinguish sharply between Israel and the Church, the one being an earthly people and the other a heavenly." Of course Israel was an "earthly people," so too were the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and all the other inhabitants of this world. This writer and his Christian readers are also an "earthly people," for neither their bodies nor their souls have yet been removed to heaven. In reply, the objector will say that it was Israel's *inheritance* which was an earthly one. But we ask, was it? Was the inheritance of the patriarchs an earthly one? Hebrews 11:14-16 plainly shows otherwise, for there we are told, "They seek a country," that after they had entered the land of Canaan, "Now they [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob] desire a better country, that is, an heavenly." Was the inheritance of Moses an earthly one? Let Hebrews 11:26 make answer, "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward," namely, the eternal one—cf. Colossians 3:24! Was David's inheritance a mundane one? If so, how could he speak of himself as "a stranger in the earth" (Psa 39:12; 119:119)? Psalm 73:25 shows what his heart was set upon.

It is not sufficient to affirm that Israel's inheritance was an earthly one—which "Israel" must be definitely stated, and also what the inheritance adumbrated. As the portion which JEHOVAH appointed, promised, and gave unto Abraham and his descendants, that land of Canaan has, throughout this Christian era, been rightly regarded as figuring the heavenly inheritance, unto which the members of Christ are journeying as they pass through this scene of sin and trial. In order to obtain the complete typical picture of the varied spiritual experiences and exercises of God's elect as they were so vividly foreshadowed of old, we have to take into account not only the history of the Hebrews in Egypt and their wilderness journeyings, but also what was demanded of them in order to their entrance into and occupation of the land of Canaan. As we have so frequently pointed out in our articles on the life and times of Joshua, Canaan also is to be contemplated from *two standpoints*, natural and spiritual. Spiritually, as portraying the heritage of regenerated Israelites, which heritage is to be appropriated and enjoyed now by faith and obedience, but which will not be fully entered into until the Jordan of death has been crossed. Admittedly, great care has to be taken with the Analogy of Faith.

Though Canaan was a divine gift unto the natural Israel, nevertheless their occupation thereof was the result of their own prowess. It was indeed bestowed upon them by free gift from God, yet it had to be conquered by them. Therein was accurately shadowed forth what is necessary in order to an entrance into the heavenly Canaan. The book of Joshua not only displays the sovereign grace of God, exhibits His covenant faithfulness, and the mighty power which He puts forth on behalf of His people, but it also makes known what He required from them in the discharge of their responsibility, and shows that the Lord only fought for the people while they maintained entire dependence on and were in complete subjection to Him. There were formidable obstacles to be surmounted, fierce and powerful foes to be vanquished, a hard and protracted warfare to be waged, and only while they *actively concurred* did the Lord show Himself strong on their behalf. "For *if* ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to cleave unto him; Then will the LORD drive out all these nations....Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours" (Deu

11:22-24). That was not the “if” of uncertainty, but had to do with their accountability—as the “if” of John 8:31, 51, Colossians 1:23 and Hebrews 3:6, 14 has with ours.

The Church’s inheritance is wholly of divine grace and mediatorial purchase, yet it is not entered into by the heirs of promise without arduous efforts on their part. There is a strait gate to be entered and a narrow way to be trodden (Mat 7:13-14). There is a race to be run which calls for temperance in all things (1Co 9:24-26). There is a fight to be fought (1Ti 6:12; 2Ti 4:7), and in order to be successful therein we have to take unto us “the whole armour of God” (Eph 6:13) and make daily use of the same. There is a ceaseless conflict with the flesh to be engaged in (Gal 5:17), a devil to be steadfastly resisted in the faith (1Pe 5:8-9), an alluring and opposing world to be overcome (Jam 4:4; 1Jo 5:4). While it is blessedly true that “we which have believed *do enter* into rest” (Heb 4:3) when Christ’s yoke is taken upon us, nevertheless, the divine injunction remains, “Let us *labour* therefore to *enter* into that rest” (Heb 4:11) which awaits us on high, and of which the land flowing with milk and honey was the emblem. ✎

DECEMBER

SWEET THINGS

New Year Message: to be read January 1, and...

One of the accompaniments of the new birth is a spiritual palate, which enables one to savour the things that be of God. At regeneration, its favoured subjects receive not only eyes which are capable of seeing objects imperceptible to the natural man, and ears which hear the voice of God as He speaks to the soul, but also a new sense of taste, whereby things which were formerly insipid are now relished, and what before was agreeable is now loathed. An illustration of this is found in connection with the manna. The bread from heaven which God so graciously provided for His people during their wilderness journeyings was unto the children of Israel “like wafers made with honey” (Exo 16:31), but unto the “mixed multitude” which accompanied them from Egypt, it was very different (Num 11:4-6). It is because the unregenerate *lack* a spiritual palate that they enjoy not that which is so desirable unto the children of God. Hence, it is not surprising that they regard the testimonies borne by Christians unto the sweetness of God’s Word as a species of fanaticism. “The full soul loatheth an honeycomb” (Pro 27:7): they who are full of self and the world find the honeycomb of the Gospel nauseating unto them.

“And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a sweet savour” (Gen 8:20-21). This is the first time the word “sweet” occurs in the Bible, and as might well be expected, it speaks loudly to us of Christ, for that which Noah had offered unto God upon the altar was a prefiguration of Him. As Thomas Scott (1747-1821) pointed out, “The smell of burning flesh could in itself be no more pleasing to God than the blood of bulls or of calves; but as it typified the sacrifice of Christ and expressed Noah’s faith and grateful love, the Lord accepted it.” As a figure of His Son’s death, Noah’s offering was a fragrant odour and perfume unto God. Proof of that is found in “Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour” (Eph 5:2). As fragrant scents regale and refresh our senses, so did the sacrifice of Christ content God and give Him infinite pleasure. He was well pleased with Christ’s sacrifice because of the dignity of the Offerer, because of the spotless purity of His offering, because of the graces exercised by Him therein—His obedience to God (Phi 2:8), faith in God (Heb 2:13), love to God (Joh 14:31); and because it brought more glory unto Him than sin has dishonoured Him.

“And the LORD showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet” (Exo 15:25). Shortly after crossing the Red Sea, Israel met with a very disappointing and painful experience. They went for three days “and found no water”—adumbrating the fact that this scene affords nothing which can refresh the souls of God’s children. Like the Psalmist, he says, “my soul thirsteth for thee...in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is” (63:1). Presently the Israelites reached a place where there *was* a stream, but only to discover that they “could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter” (verse 23). A sore trial, a real test, was that! Three days’ journeying in the hot and sandy desert without finding water, and now that water was reached, it was undrinkable. How that shadows forth the inexperienced believer seeking some satisfaction from the things of this life, only to find them “bitter”! Alas, like we so often do when our carnal hopes are dashed, Israel murmured. Whereupon Moses cried unto the Lord, and He graciously “showed him a tree” which when cut down and cast into the bitter waters made them sweet. It was an emblem of the Tree of Life—the person (Psa 1:3; Song 2:3) and work (1Pe 2:24) of Christ. Just in proportion as the saint regards his bitter trials and afflictions as so many opportunities for him to enter into “the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phi 3:10) will they be made sweet to him.

“My meditation of him shall be sweet” (Psa 104:34). Holy meditation is a most important means for promoting growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. God has so constituted us that, in the ordinary way of operation, the heart is affected as objects are set before the mind and subjects pondered: as thought is set in motion, the affections are stimulated—“While I was musing the fire burned”! The more the believer thinks upon the love of God, the more is the holy spark within him fanned into a flame. Some of our readers are unable, through ill health and age, to attend the preaching of the Word, and others have no access to any place where they could hear the unsearchable riches of Christ extolled; but they may in private have the most blessed communion, by engaging their hearts with Him. He is the One in whom all our joys centre, and if we would become better acquainted with “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord,” then we must be more frequent in devout contemplations of Him. Ponder the perfections of His person, the glory of His mediatorial office, His finished work, His intercession, and your heart will be warmed, gratitude deepened, assurance increased, closer conformity to Him desired; and *He* will be honoured.

“How sweet are thy words unto my taste” (Psa 119:103): not only pleasant to the ear, but delicious to the palate. Note how comprehensive is this eulogy: “David loved them each one individually, and the whole of them as a whole...he makes no distinction between promises and precepts, doctrines and threatenings: they are all included in God’s words, and all are precious in his esteem” (Charles H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892) None but a child of God could use such language, because none but he has a spiritual taste. But we may be yet more discriminating: only the Christian when in communion with God can truthfully make such an assertion. Thus that testimony supplies a criterion by which the believer may ascertain his spiritual condition. If this be our case, it indicates that the soul is in a healthy state. When it be otherwise with us, it is because our palate has been vitiated by the world and the flesh; and when such be the case, though the Word be read, it will be done formally and indolently, without mixing faith with it, with no personal appropriation, and therefore without joy. Where the Word be truly precious unto the heart, there is an inward experience, a spiritual relishing of it, which cannot be conveyed unto others by words.

“I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste” (Song 2:3). That is the testimony borne to Christ by the Church collectively, and by each saint individually who is enjoying communion with Him. In comparison with the lofty palm and the majestic

cedar, the apple tree is of small dimensions and mean appearance. As such, it is a figure of Him who laid aside His glory and assumed a lowly place in this world. But the fruits of His abasement and sufferings are inexpressibly precious to the believer. As the sin-burdened soul comes to Christ for rest, he finds Him to be the Man that is “as the shadow of a rock in a weary land,” and declares: “Thou hast been...a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat” (Isa 32:2; 25:4), for He interposed between him and the fiery wrath of God. Christ has not only shadow to shelter, but also fruit to refresh. The fruit of His work: reconciliation to God, the gift of His Spirit, etc. The fruit of His lips: words of counsel, intimate communications. The fruit of His personal perfections. These are highly prized by the believer, and as he feeds and feasts thereon, he finds them most delectable. They are sweet to him because a miracle of grace has prepared his appetite to receive and welcome them.

“Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely” (Song 2:14). That is Christ’s commendation of and invitation to His spouse. Most blessed is it to observe not only that this is a term of endearment, but that the form assumed by the Spirit when He came on Christ (Mat 3:16) is the emblem here chosen by Christ to represent those whom the Spirit indwells—“My dove.” First, He says, “Let me see thy countenance”: whether it be wet with the tears of godly sorrow or shining with joy. Second, “Let me hear thy voice,” in confession, prayer and praise. Third, He declares that her voice is sweet and her countenance comely unto Him. Christ takes great delight in His blood-bought people and will have them make very free with Him. What marvellous condescension on His part! What encouragement for us to lift up our heads, come boldly to His throne, pour out our hearts before Him. Christian reader, your voice is not only pleasing to Him when you are singing His praises, but it is also music as you pour out the grief of a contrite heart. Fear not to tell Him your secrets. Let Him also hear you commending Him to others.

Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are *unto God* a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, *and* in them that perish” (2Co 2:14-15). Those words ought to be of great cheer unto many a despondent servant of His who is cast down because his preaching appears to be fruitless. Whether men listen or not, the proclamation of that name which is above every name is a continual incense before God! However unacceptable his ministry be unto a dead church, if the minister faithfully preach the person and work of Christ, it is “a sweet savour unto God.” Let the realization of this comfort and nerve afresh. If you be setting forth the glories of His Son, it is sweet to the Father.

If the Christian reader is spared, and spends more time than previously in feeding on God’s Word, meditating on Christ, feasting on His perfections, then 1952 will be a *sweeter* year unto him.

EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

24. The Family Delineated (2:13-14)

“I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.”

In the verses before us the saints are viewed according to their several levels in the school of Christ, and the excellences ascribed to them correspond with and are proper to their stages of growth. In addressing the “fathers,” they are viewed not according to their age, but to their spiritual development. That which is here predicated of them is “ye have known him that is from the beginning.” We think “that is” should be deleted, for this supplement inserted by the translators is quite unnecessary, the reference being to the One spoken of in the opening verse of our epistle. They had known Him from the beginning of their spiritual history, from the day when Christ had first been graciously revealed in them (Gal 1:16). Doubtless some of them had personally seen and heard Christ in His incarnate state at the commencement of the Christian era. That which distinguished them from the young men and babes was that they had acquired a deeper, fuller, and richer acquaintance with Him. In their earlier days they were occupied with His work, what He had done and obtained for them. Later, they were more taken with their exploits and achievements, what His grace and strength had enabled them to accomplish. But now it was Himself that engaged their hearts and minds: the wonders and perfections of His blessed person which enthralled them.

“I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phi 3:8) is the language and longing of a “father.” That which characterizes such is a clearer insight into the marvels and mysteries of His ineffable⁶⁶ person, of His manifold glories, of His distinctive offices. They know Him as the God-man Mediator. They apprehend something of His covenant engagements, and of His prophetic, priestly and kingly functions. They discern Him to be the Centre of all the divine counsels (Eph 3:11), the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of every creature (Col 1:15). They know Him as “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1Co 1:24), and as the One in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen (2Co 1:20). They know Him as the Head of the Body the Church (Col 1:18), yea, as “the head over all things to the church” (Eph

⁶⁶ **ineffable** – indescribable; incapable of being expressed.

1:22), angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him (1Pe 3:22). They not only know Him as a personal and all-sufficient Saviour, but they have gone on to apprehend what He did for God and what He finds in His Son, as the One who magnified His law and made it honourable, glorifying Him in this very scene where He has been so grievously dishonoured: the One of whom the Father says, “Mine elect, in *whom* my soul delighteth” (Isa 42:1).

“*I write unto you, fathers*”: the reference is to all that he says in this epistle. Though they had known Christ from the beginning and had so grown in grace and in the knowledge of Him, yet what he wrote was as much needed by them as by their younger and more immature brethren. No child of God ever gets beyond the need of instruction, exhortation and comfort in this life. The very fact that the fathers are so well acquainted with Christ should make them the more amenable and receptive to the apostle’s message. They had proved what a good master the Lord Jesus is to serve: how patiently He had borne with their dullness, how graciously He had pardoned their sins, how faithfully He had supplied their every need; and therefore they ought the more readily to attend unto the words of His servants. The proved goodness of Christ should engage them to lively gratitude, fervent love, and devoted obedience. They should be examples unto and the guides of their juniors. They must not abate in their zeal or entertain the idea that it was permissible to be less diligent and earnest than formerly, still less be puffed up with their attainments, but rather pray and strive to continue “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10).

“*I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.*” This second class comprised those who had emerged from their spiritual infancy, though they had not arrived at that maturity of growth the fathers had attained unto. What is here predicated of them has sorely puzzled not a few, yet if it be regarded in the light of the general analogy of faith, and more particularly with respect to John’s style of making abstract and absolute statements, it should present no serious obstacle. Whatever difficulty is here presented, let us be careful to avoid increasing the same by reading into it what is not there. The apostle did not say the young men had overcome the flesh. It is a most significant fact, and one which needs to be kept in mind that while this epistle speaks of overcoming “the wicked one,” and of overcoming “the world” (5:4), it makes no mention of believers overcoming their evil nature. They are indeed bidden to mortify their corruptions (Col 3:5), and in varying measures all the regenerate do so, for the grace of God effectually teaches its recipients to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Ti 2:12); but nowhere does Scripture affirm that any saint “overcame the flesh.”

Thus, “ye have overcome the wicked one” is not to be understood absolutely and unqualifiedly, but relatively and within certain limits. These “young men” had successfully encountered the first temptations and trials, which attended enlistment under the banner of Christ and their consequent separation from the world, so that Satan had been unable either to drag them down into his evil ways or to shut them up in the dungeon of despair. As they had continued following on to know the Lord, they had received many setbacks and been sorely wounded in their conflict with the powers of evil, yet Satan had been foiled in his efforts to induce them to give up the fight. That leads us to point out that the Lord’s people are far more aware of their defeats than they are of their frequent overcomings. Nor is the reason of that hard to discover. As we are naturally far more conscious of a painful illness than of our good health, so the Christian’s falls are more evident to him than are his victories—the more so since the latter be gained while his eyes are fixed on Christ rather than on himself.

Satan never succeeds in prevailing finally or totally over any child of God. He is bent on the destruction of all the saints, but in no case can he accomplish his full desire—the intercession of

Christ prevents him from so doing. In every instance those words of His hold good, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.” Nevertheless, that does not release us from the necessity of taking unto us the whole armour of God, or from the duty of unremitting watchfulness. Our very striving against the devil is one degree of conquest. God does indeed postpone the full and ultimate victory, yet if we continue to resist the devil we are not overcome by him. When he gains a temporary advantage over us, causing us to disgrace our profession and dishonour the name of Christ, he strives his utmost to drive us to abject despair, or to persuade us that we have committed the unpardonable sin; but if a sense of our failure drives us to our knees in humble and sincere confession to God, then we defeat his hellish designs. Poor Peter failed sadly in the high priest’s palace, and experienced an awful fall; nevertheless, when he went out and wept bitterly he overcame the wicked one.

This overcoming of the wicked one by the saints—for the experience is by no means restricted unto the “young men” class—is in fulfillment of the terms of Genesis 3:15, for it is to be carefully observed that that remarkable prophecy is concerned not only with the serpent and the Saviour, but also with their respective seeds. The members of Christ have fellowship, in their measure, with the Head, both in His sufferings and in His victories. As it was not the serpent alone (though chiefly, and as the instigator of others) who bruised Christ’s heel, for both Jews and Gentiles were gathered together against Him (Act 4:27), so it is not Christ alone (though He pre-eminently and His seed subordinately) who obtains conquest over the devil. Thus the triumph of the Captain of our salvation over the archenemy of God and His people is twofold: personal and immediate, mediate and instrumental—in and by His soldiers, for He loves to have them share with Him in all things. Believers overcome the wicked one not only representatively in their Head, but personally through His strength, and therefore the glory is still His. In this respect also they are “predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29).

Far too little thought has been devoted to the terms of Genesis 3:15, in their application unto the children of God. While the Redeemer Himself be its prime subject, His redeemed are by no means to be excluded. They certainly have part in the conflict and are bruised in the heel by the serpent, and to them also extends the promise of bruising his head. This is confirmed by the fact that the “enmity” exists not only between Satan and Christ, but also between their respective seeds. This is according to the promise of “if we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2Ti 2:12). Their victory is set forth in the New Testament in very language drawn from Genesis 3:15. When the seventy, as representatives of all Christ’s ministers, said, “Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name,” He replied, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luk 10:17-19). To the saints Paul wrote, “The God of peace shall bruise Satan [more completely] under your feet shortly” (Rom 16:20): it is indeed God who treads him down, but it is under their feet he is trodden.

“I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.” This accords with and is the fulfillment of the covenant promise: “all shall know me, from the least to the greatest” (Heb 8:11). It is at this point that experiential Christianity begins: an apprehension of the Father’s love in Christ, the realization that He so loved them as to give His only begotten Son for them. It is their privilege, wisdom, and comfort to know God as “Father.” It was His grace that chose them in Christ, His Spirit who was sent to seek them, His power that begat them. In natural life the very first thing which babes and little children discover is an acknowledgment—in their infantile way—of their parents, owning them by their names (“papa and mama”) in distinguishing them from others. And thus it is spiritually: the spirit of adoption is given them “whereby they cry, Ab-

ba, Father” (Rom 8:15). The distinguishing act of babes in Christ is to own God as their Father, expressing in their way their attachment to Him, their delight in Him, their dependence upon Him, lisping out His name in their praises and petitions before the throne of grace. None can approach Him with any confidence or freedom until they know God in this relation—their Father, because the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 14 the apostle changes from his threefold “I write” of verse 13 and twice uses “I have written.” Why such repetition? For the purpose of emphasis: to make clear his warm affection for them, his deep concern for their spiritual welfare, and to emphasize the privilege and honour conferred upon them. At least six different explanations have been given of the change of tense, only two of which strike us as being feasible. The first is that John here contemplated his epistle from two different mental standpoints. Originally, his mind dwelt upon what he was engaged in penning (1:4); later, he contemplated his completed production (5:13). It was as though he said, I am telling you this and that; afterwards, remember what I told you. Second, that John was pondering a changed situation. He was then in the body, though very aged, and could not be here much longer. Soon his what “I wrote” would become what “I have written.” Considered thus, there is a pathos in it which is quite affecting: I write to you as a dying man; treasure what I wrote as my last charge to you.

“I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him from the beginning” (verse 14). They knew Him so as to approve of Him, trust in Him, and make Him their All in all. Theirs was not a bare theoretical and historical knowledge, but a spiritual and saving one, an experiential and heart-affecting knowledge, which receives the truth not only in the light of it but in the love of it (2Th 2:10). Their knowledge is more deeply rooted (Col 1:23) than is that of the babes or young men. It is more influential (Phi 1:9): their love is more stable (Eph 3:18): they are more settled in the truth against error (Eph 4:14). They are more prudent, having learned to moderate their affections and activities within the bounds of sobriety (Ti 2:2). Nevertheless, despite their maturity of knowledge and experience, they require to be written unto, needing the same counsels, admonitions and encouragements as did their juniors. As one quaintly said, “The oldest Christian needs to go to heaven with the Bible in his hand.” They are not yet out of the reach of temptations, and need to beware lest a sense of security begets carelessness. Their responsibility is greater too: to see that the purity of the Gospel is preserved and discipline in the churches maintained.

“I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one” (verse 14). In making that statement the apostle was certainly far from seeking to flatter them, for he did not say “ye have made yourselves strong.” No, he was simply making a sober statement of fact. In so doing he first gave honour unto the Holy Spirit, for their state and achievements were the results of His operations in them. Second, he was giving expression unto his own personal joy: it was a matter of delight to him that they had, by the grace of God, emerged from a state of infantile weakness, and had reached this state of health and vigour. Third, it was said by way of encouragement to them. If on the other hand it be our duty to rebuke and reprove what is evil in fellow Christians, it equally becomes us to recognize and own whatever good is in them. A word of cheer and stimulus is often a real help. If there be a time to “break down,” there is also a time to “build up” (Ecc 3:3). Paul did not hesitate to tell the Thessalonians “your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth” (2Th 1:3).

But what are we to understand by “ye are strong”? Relatively. Through using the means of grace, by increased spiritual knowledge, by appropriating the strength which is in Christ Jesus (2Ti 2:1), through exercising the graces of the new man, by improving (profiting from) the varied

experiences through which they had passed, and by the assisting operations of the Spirit, they had developed from babes into a higher spiritual stature and were better able to use their spiritual muscles. It is written, “They that wait upon the LORD [which refers not so much to an act, but is descriptive of an attitude taken by all the regenerate who are in a healthy condition] shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa 40:31). It is indeed true that the believer’s strength, like his righteousness, is in the Lord, yet as there is an imparted righteousness (1Jo 2:29), so also a communicated strength. David acknowledged, Thou “strengthenedst me *with* strength in my soul” (Psa 138:3), so that he was no longer feeble in himself. There is such a thing as outgrowing spiritual babyhood and weakness, though not continued dependence upon the Lord. There is such an experience as going on “from strength to strength” (Psa 84:7) and being able to do all things through Christ strengthening us (Phi 4:13). But as increasing holiness is accompanied by increased realization of our filthiness, so increased strength makes us more conscious of our weakness.

“*And the word of God abideth in you.*” Though we would not exclude a reference here to the personal Word Himself (Joh 1:1; Rev 19:13), yet we consider that it was the written Word, which John had primarily in view. It was by Christ living in them, putting forth His life and light in their souls, that they were strengthened. Nevertheless, it is by means of the written Word, by faith and meditation thereon as it abides in our renewed minds and hearts, that Christ lives and dwells in us. Hence that designation of the Scriptures when Paul exhorted the Colossians, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” (Col 3:16). The two cannot be separated: it is by the written Word that Christ indwells the believer, as it is Christ who teaches how to use the Word. Thus this second clause is first of all explanatory of the preceding one, making known to us the principal means and source of the strength of these young men; as it also serves to define the nature of their strength, as inherent, something within themselves. It is by means of the pure milk of the Word that the babe in Christ grows (1Pe 2:2). It is by that Word—through faith’s exercise, and meditating thereon, and the Spirit’s blessing—that the believer is quickened (Psa 119:25, 28, etc.). And it is by that Word abiding in him that he becomes strong, that the faculties or graces of the new man are developed and energized.

“*And the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*” Thus the second clause is linked with both the former and the final ones, casting light upon each. It was by means of the Word of God dwelling in them that they were strengthened, and equally so was it the means of their overcoming the wicked one. The question “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” receives answer “by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psa 119:9). So, too, David declared, “By the words of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer” (Psa 17:4)—so blessedly exemplified by his greater Son in His conflict with the devil (Mat 4). The Word of God is expressly designated “the sword of the Spirit,” for it is the one offensive weapon given us to be used against the enemy (Eph 6:16-17).

“*And the word of God abideth in you*” may also be regarded as being itself the grand proof that they had “overcome the wicked one,” for he had not been able to take away the good Seed sown in their hearts—as in the case of the wayside hearer (Mar 4:15; Joh 5:38), nor had he succeeded in inducing them to sell the truth. In view of what follows in 1 John 2:18-26, we consider that the principal meaning of “ye have overcome the wicked one” in verse 14 is that they had withstood his attempts to poison their minds with fatal error.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

76. The Levites, Part 2

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle. And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel” (Num 3:5-9). Those verses are exceedingly rich in their spiritual and typical teaching. First, we note that the Levites are viewed as God’s property, for He it is who here appoints them to their privileged position. Second, that they are given to Aaron. As the high priest of Israel, Aaron is manifestly a figure of our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, unto whom God has bestowed his elect. Thus we find the Redeemer declaring, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me” (Joh 6:37); and saying to the Father Himself, “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me” (Joh 17:6) as an expression of His love unto the Son: gave them to be His bride. Then how deep must be Christ’s interest in them, for they are His peculiar portion and inheritance for ever. This is recorded for our comfort.

“Present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him.” Very wonderful and blessed is that. Levi, who was previously “joined” to Satan, and serving his own lawless passions, is now joined to the high priest and called upon to minister unto him. Now that is precisely how the case stands between the High Priest of our profession and the Church collectively, and every believer individually. That is clear from the words of 1 Corinthians 6:17, “But he that is *joined to* the Lord is one spirit.” From that amazing and glorious fact, the Holy Spirit insists upon two things. First, entire separation from the evil lusts and ways in which we formerly walked; second, devotion of our entire beings unto Him to whom we are joined. Holy separation from evil and devotion unto the person and cause of Christ go together, and both of them are the result of our oneness with Him. Immediately after that statement, “he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,” follows the exhortation “Flee fornication....What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” And again, “For he that is called in the Lord...is Christ’s servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men” (1Co 6:17-20; 7:22-23).

How solemnly heart-searching is that! How it demonstrates that high privileges involve deep obligations! We have been joined to Christ and presented to Him that we may minister unto Him; and His unalterable requirement is “be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD” (Isa 52:11). “Who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart” (Psa 24:3-4). The

same too is the teaching of the New Testament: “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity....If a man therefore purge himself from these [vessels of earth and dishonour], he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use” (2Ti 2:19, 21). It is only by walking in the light as He is in the light that we can have fellowship with Him who is light. Yet, as the next verse reveals, that does not signify a state of sinless perfection, for none has ever attained that in this life. But it does mean that none can have fellowship with the Holy One while sin is cherished, allowed, and unconfessed. It is only in the constant exercise of self-judgment and acknowledgment of our iniquities that real communion with the Lord can be maintained and enjoyed.

“Present them before Aaron the priest, that they may *minister unto him*.” How little is that apprehended by the Lord’s people today. They are living on so low a plane that their thoughts rarely rise above the level of *their* being ministered unto *by Him*. They realize little of their priestly standing, and enter still less into its holy privileges. It is to no separate class, but to all who come unto Christ, that it is said, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an *holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” It is not merely to ministers of the Gospel, but to all who believe, that it is said, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood” (1Pe 2:5, 9) Now it is as *priests* that believers have “liberty to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus” (Heb 10:19), for none else in Israel were permitted to pass beyond the outer court, and only the high priest into the holy of holies. But Christ opened a new and living way for His redeemed into the very presence of God Himself, the antitypical Aaron being over the house of God, and therefore are we invited and bidden to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith”: that is in complete confidence in the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning sacrifice and entire dependence upon His merits.

But, alas, far too little do any of us “enter into the holiest of all,” and it is to be feared that not a few of the Lord’s people rarely if ever *consciously* enter into it, because they realize neither their priestly standing in Him who entered by His own blood nor their privilege as blood-sprinkled worshippers. Certain it is that we have no right esteem of God, of Christ, of ourselves, or of anything else, unless we are habitually coming to Christ, offering up spiritual sacrifices to Him. It is true that our bodies are still “without,” on earth: but *in spirit* all true worship is “within.” It is the glorious right as well as the precious privilege of believers to “enter into the holiest” now, into heaven itself; and that not at certain favoured seasons only, but always, because our High Priest “continueth to make intercession for us” (Heb 7:24-25). His unfailing merits secure our uninterrupted acceptance, and that demands perpetual prayer and praise: hence we are bidden to “pray without ceasing” and to “give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:20).

We dwell the longer on this most important and exquisitely lovely type because so few of the saints enter into the substance of it in their spiritual experience. The Levites may be regarded from two separate viewpoints: personal and official, according as they represented believers and as they adumbrated the ministers of God. In this article, we confine ourselves to the former. First, the divine command was “Bring the tribe of Levi near.” Second, “and present them before Aaron.” Third, “that they may minister unto him.” Each of those is to be pondered separately, and the order of them duly noted, for we cannot minister acceptably unto God in Christ until faith has firmly and intelligently grasped the fact that we *have been* “made nigh” by the atoning blood of Christ and presented in all His acceptableness unto God. One of the chief hindrances against priestly and joyful ministry unto Him is the lack of personal assurance of our reconciliation to God and acceptance in His Beloved. None can enter the holiest with any liberty of spirit while

uncertain of their standing and state before God. Until we apprehend the blessed reality that we are “dead indeed unto sin” (Rom 6:11) and have “risen with Christ” (Col 3:1), the spirit of bondage will fetter our hearts and stifle the voice of praise.

What are the “spiritual sacrifices” which believers are to offer? The Scriptures leave us in no doubt. During the Old Testament, they were of two kinds: sin offerings and thank offerings. Now the former are no longer required, for the all-sufficient antitypical one has been made by Christ; nevertheless, the *evangelical elements* which pertained to the sin offerings are required in us to-day. The kind of sacrifices offered then and now correspond to the nature of the two priesthoods. Since Christians are not “under the law of a carnal commandment,” nor made priests by external consecration, but by the inward anointing of the Spirit, their sacrifices are not material ones, but spiritual, of the heart. They are called “the freewill [voluntary] offerings of my mouth” (Psa 119:108), and those may all be summed up under prayer and praise. That the former *is such* is clear from, “Let my prayer be set before thee as incense: and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Psa 141:2).

Thomas Manton (1620-1677) pointed out that there are three things of an evangelical character in those who of old offered the sin offerings which were acceptable to God, and these things are required of Christians now. First, brokenness of heart, for when a Jew brought a beast to be slain and burnt with fire, he was to consider, This is *my* case: I deserve to be consumed by the wrath of God. That sense of ill-desert ought to have place in our consciousness whenever we bow our knees: the realization that our sins have forfeited all blessing, that we might justly be damned to all eternity. Hence we are told, “The sacrifices of God [those He accepts] are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa 51:17).

Second, the presentation of a beast for sacrifice implied an eyeing of the Redeemer, by virtue of whose oblation we are accepted with God, for every one who came with his sacrifice was to lay his hand upon its head, identifying himself with the same and putting his sins thereon (Lev 16:21), to shadow forth the fact that Christ bore the iniquity of all His people. Thus, in prayer, we should turn the eye of faith unto Him who “hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2).

Third, in bringing an offering, there was implied a renewing of the covenant: “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” (Psa 50:5). As the beast offered was dedicated to God, so the offerer was to dedicate himself. And *we* are exhorted, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1). Those three things should mark our daily prayers: penitent confession, pleading Christ’s merits, devoting ourselves to God.

Thank offerings are expressions of appreciation unto our Benefactor for His benefits, for the undeserved favours we receive from Him—all given for Christ’s sake. We pray out of a sense of need; but we praise out of loving hearts, from a sense of gratitude. In prayer, we come as beggars, to *receive* something; but in praise, we *bestow* something, giving God the glory due unto His name. “By him [Christ] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually” (Heb 13:15). In the context, it is said, “we have an altar” (verse 10): what use are we to make of Him? The answer is, offer sacrifices thereon. Jesus has sanctified His people with His own blood (verse 12): what is to be our response? To separate ourselves from all opposed to Him, and to draw nigh unto God as joyous worshipers. The worship which Christians present to God is the sacrifice of praise, for nothing is more pleasing to Him than the adoration of a grateful heart: “whoso offereth

praise glorifieth me” (Psa 50:23). And have we not abundant cause to praise Him, especially for Christ?

“Let us [not “render” but] *offer* the sacrifice of praise.” Christ has made His people “kings and priests unto God” (Rev 1:6), and here they are called upon to exercise their priestly functions. Here we are instructed how to make a right use of our “Altar”: that we are not only made partakers of its blessings, but are to discharge its obligations by bringing sacrifices thereto. When the worshiping Israelite of old approached the tabernacle, he came not empty-handed. Nor should we approach God in Christ empty-hearted. As the Jew was required to bring an offering free of any physical defect, so we should bring to God of our very best: “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and *all* that is within me, bless his holy name.” We should resolve with David, “Therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy: I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD” (Psa 27:6). Nor is that to be done on the Sabbath only, but as Hebrews 13:15 tells us, “continually”—on all occasions. We should be more in praising God than in petitioning Him, for we have more cause to do so.

Returning to our type, very blessed but very searching are those words concerning the Levites and the high priest: “that they may minister unto him. And they shall keep his charge.” Utterly worthless are all our devotions unless they be rendered unto Christ; valueless our most zealous service if it be not performed unto Him. “Ye have done it unto me...ye did it not to me” (Mat 25:40, 45) is the *test* of all our service value. And yet how much of our apparent Christian service is nothing more than self-service or man-service! Oh, what an evil nature still clings to us, and how much of the flesh mingles itself with our “holy things”! How prone is the best of us (*if* there be any best among us) to exalt self and please men in the very act of apparently serving Christ! And if, for a moment, there be single-hearted devotion unto Him, how soon we give place to the thought of how *we* appear and what our fellows think! Nothing is owned of God in service save that which is done unto Christ: “whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17).

“And they shall keep his charge, *and* the charge of the whole congregation.” That added sentence gives further force to what has just been pointed out, for it leads us in the same direction—away from self and mere man-pleasing, ministering unto the Lord’s people. The ministry of Christ and of His Church constitutes but one service, and that because of the vital union of believers to their Head. “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom 12:4-5). “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is *Christ*” (1Co 12:12): that is, the Head and the members constitute one (mystical) Christ. And the gifts which He has bestowed on His servants are “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). Thus Christ’s gifts are not bestowed for self-exaltation, but for the common good of His saints—for “the whole congregation.”

“Before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle.” That is equally searching, for “*before* the tabernacle” is equivalent to saying that the service of the Levites must be performed as in the presence of JEHOVAH Himself and under the eye of the high priest. Not only is all service to be done unto Christ, because we are His, but we are ever to keep in mind that the eye of Him “whose we are, and whom we serve” is constantly upon us. He notes every act of service as to the matter and manner and motive of it. He discerns *the kind* of service: He is looking on, and saying, “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience.” He perceives the *manner and motive* of service, and says, I know how “thou...hast borne, and hast patience, and *for my*

name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted” (Rev 2:2-3). He sees whether there is flagging in labour because the “first love” has been left. He graciously owns even a “little strength” and tenderly cares not to put “any other burden” than we can bear. Oh to be able to say with Paul, “we speak before God in Christ; but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying” (2Co 12:19).

Equally blessed, but still more searching, is the final word of Numbers 3:5-9, concerning the relation of the Levites unto Aaron: “they are *wholly* given unto him.” Such is also the case with all believers in regard to Christ. They are wholly His by the Father’s donation (Joh 17:6). They are wholly His by redemptive purchase: “ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price” (1Co 6:19-20). They are wholly His by the Spirit’s regenerating power: for “he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1Co 6:17). They are wholly His by their own act of surrender to Him: they “gave their own selves to the Lord” (2Co 8:5). What claims He has then to our entire devotion! And how the recognition thereof should regulate our lives, our worship, our service! The love of Christ constraining all our actions: the pleasing of Christ actuating all we do: the glorifying of Christ being our constant aim. Just so far as we truly apprehend His claims will each of us say with His forerunner, “He must increase, but I decrease” (Joh 3:30).

DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

9. Its Ramifications, Part 3

So important do we deem what was touched upon at the close of our last, and so little is the same apprehended and understood today, that we are here adding a few words thereon. The popular idea which now prevails is that nothing is sinful save an open and outward transgression, but such a concept falls far short of the searching and humbling teaching of Holy Writ. It affirms that the source of all temptation lies within fallen man himself. It is the depravity of his own heart which induces him to listen to the devil or be influenced by the profligacy of others. If this were not so, then no external solicitations unto wrongdoing would have any force, for there would be nothing within him for them to excite, nothing to which those solicitations correspond or over which they could exert any power. An evil example would be rejected with abhorrence if we were pure within. There must be an unsatisfied lust to which temptation from without appeals. Where there is no desire for food, a well-spread table allures not. If there be no love of acquisition, gold cannot attract the heart. In every instance, the force of temptation lies in some propensity of our fallen nature.

Herein lies the uniqueness of the Bible; to wit, its exalted spirituality, insisting that any inward bias, the least gravitation of the soul from God and His will, is sinful and culpable, whether or not it be carried out into action. It reveals that the first stirring of sin itself is to draw away the soul from what it ought to be fixed upon, by an irregular craving for some foreign object which appears delightful. When our native corruptions are invited by something external which promises pleasure or profit, and the passions are attracted by the same, then temptation begins, and the heart is drawn out after it. Since fallen man is influenced most by his lusts, they sway both his

mind and his will. So powerful are they that they rule his whole soul: hence it was that the apostle said, “I see another *law* in my members” (Rom 7:23), for it is imperious, dominating the entire man. It is because their lusts are so violent that men are so mad upon sinning: “they weary themselves to commit iniquity” (Jer 9:5). James 1:14-15 traces out the origin of all our sinnings, and to it we now turn.

“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Those words show that sin encroaches upon the spirit by degrees, and describe the several stages before it be consummated in the outward act. They reveal that the procreating cause of all sin lies in every man’s soul, namely his lusts; that he has within himself both the food and fuel of it. Rightly did Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) declare, “You can never come to see how deeply and how abominably corrupt creatures you are until God opens your eyes to see your lusts.” The old man is “corrupt *according to* the deceitful lusts” (Eph 4:22). Lust is both the womb and the root of all wickedness which there is upon earth. Says the apostle to God’s people, “having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2Pe 1:4). “The corruption”: that wasting and destroying blight which is upon all mankind. “Which is in the world”: like poison in the cup, like dry rot in wood, like a pestilence in the air—inherent, ineradicable. It taints every part of man’s being, physical, mental and moral; and all his relations of life, whether in the family, society, or the State.

“Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust.” when men are tempted, they usually seek to cast the onus upon God, the devil, or their fellows; whereas the blame rests entirely upon themselves. First, their affections are removed from what is good and they are incited unto wrongful conduct by their corrupt inclinations, being attracted to a bait which Satan or the world dangles before them. “Lust” here signifies a yearning for or longing to obtain something, and it is so strong as to draw the soul after a forbidden object. The Greek word for “drawn away” means forcibly impelled: the impetuous violence of the desire which covets some sensual or worldly thing demands gratification. This is nothing but a species of self-will, a hankering after what God has not bestowed, arising from discontent with our present condition or portion. Even though that longing be a fleeting and involuntary one, yea, against our best judgment, nevertheless it is sinful, and when allowed produces yet deeper guilt.

“And enticed.” The drawing away is by the irregularity and vehemence of the craving, the enticement is from the object contemplated. But that very allurement is something for which we are to blame. It is because we fail to resist, abominate and reject the first rising of unlawful desire, and instead entertain and encourage it, that the bait appears so attractive. The temptation promises pleasure or profit, which is “the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13) at work, which beguiles us. Then wickedness is sweet in our mouth, and we hide it under our tongue (Job 20:12). “Then when lust hath conceived”: anticipated delight is cherished, and in view thereof, the mind fully consents. The sinful deed is now present in embryo, and the thoughts are engaged in contriving ways and means of gratification. “It bringeth forth sin” by a decree of the will: what was previously contemplated is now actually perpetrated. Rightly did Manton say, “Sin knows no mother but our own heart.” “And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death”: it is paid its wages and made to reap what was sown, damnation being the ultimate outcome. Such is the progress of sin within us, and such its several degrees of enormity.

4. *Corrupted conscience.* If there be one faculty of man’s soul more than any other which may be thought to have retained the original image of God upon it, it is surely the conscience. Such a view has indeed been widely held. So decidedly were they of this opinion that not a few of the

most renowned philosophers and moralists have contended that conscience is nothing less than the divine voice itself speaking in the innermost chamber of our being. But without in any wise minimizing the great importance and value of this internal monitor, either in its office or in its operations, it must be emphatically declared that such theorists err, that even this faculty has not escaped from the common ruin of our entire beings. This is evident from the plain teaching of God's Word thereon. Scripture speaks of a "weak conscience" (1Co 8:12), of men "having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1Ti 4:2), and says that their "conscience is defiled" (Ti 1:15), that they have "an evil conscience" (Heb 10:22). Demonstration thereof is made in what follows.

They who affirm that there is something essentially good in the natural man, insist that his conscience is an enemy to evil and a friend to holiness. They point out and stress the fact that the conscience produces an inward conviction against wrongdoing, a strife in the heart over sin, with a reluctance to it. They call attention to Pharaoh's acknowledgment of sin (Exo 10:16), and that Darius was "sorely displeased with himself" for his unjust act in condemning Daniel to be cast into the lions' den (Dan 6:14). Some have even gone so far as to affirm that the opposition to greater and grosser crimes which is found at first in all men differs little or nothing from that conflict between the flesh and the spirit described in Romans 7:21-23. But such a sophistry is easily refuted. In the first place, while it be true that fallen man possesses a general notion of right and wrong, and is able in some instances to distinguish between good and evil, yet while he remains unregenerate that moral instinct never causes him to delight cordially in the former or really to abhor the latter; and in whatever measure he may approve of good or disapprove of evil, it is from no consideration for *God* therein.

Conscience is only able to work according to the light it has, and since the natural man cannot discern spiritual things (1Co 2:14), it is useless in respect to them. How feeble is its light! It is more like that of a glimmering candle than the rays of the sun—merely sufficient to make the darkness visible. Owing to the benighted condition of the understanding, the conscience is fearfully ignorant. When it does discover that which is inimical, it does so feebly and ineffectually. Instead of directing, it mostly confuses. How manifest is this in the case of the heathen! Conscience gives them a sense of guilt and then puts them upon practicing the most abominable and often inhuman rites. It has induced them to invent and propagate the most impious misrepresentations of deity. As a salve to their conscience, they often make the very objects of their worship the precedents and patrons of their favourite vices. The fact is that conscience is so sadly defective that it is unable to perform its duty until God enlightens, awakens, and renews it.

Its *operations* are equally faulty. Not only is conscience defective in vision, but its voice is very weak. How strongly it ought to upbraid us for our shocking ingratitude unto our great Benefactor! How loudly it should inveigh against the stupid neglect of our spiritual interests and eternal welfare. Yet it does neither the one nor the other. Though it offers some checks upon outward and gross sins, it makes no resistance to the subtler and secret workings of indwelling corruption. If it prompts to the performance of duty, it ignores the most important and spiritual part of the same. It may be uneasy if we fail to spend the usual amount of time each day in private prayer, but it is little concerned about our reverence, humility, faith and fervour therein. Those in the prophet's day were guilty of offering unto God defective sacrifices, yet conscience never troubled them over the same (Mal 1:7-8). Conscience may be very scrupulous in carrying out the precepts of men or our personal predilections, and yet utterly neglect those things which the Lord has commanded: as the Pharisees would not eat food while their hands remained ceremonially unwashed, yet disregarded what God had enjoined (Mar 7:6-9).

Conscience is woefully *partial*: disregarding favourite sins and excusing those which most easily beset us. All such attempts to extenuate our faults are founded upon ignorance of God, of ourselves, of our duty; otherwise, conscience would bring in the verdict of guilty. Conscience often joins with our lusts to encourage a wicked deed. Saul's told him that he ought not to offer sacrifice till Samuel came, yet to please the people and prevent them from deserting him, he did so. And when that servant of God reproved him, the king sought to justify his offence by saying that the Philistines were gathered together against Israel, and that he dared not assail them before making supplication to God, and added: "I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering" (1Sa 13:8-12). Conscience will strain to find some consideration which will appease itself and then approve of the evil act. Even when rebuking certain sins, it will find motives and discover inducements thereunto. Thus, when Herod was about to commit the dastardly murder of John the Baptist, which was *against* his convictions, his very conscience came to his aid, and urged him forward by impressing on him that he must not violate the oath which he had taken before others (Mar 6:26).

Conscience often ignores great sins while condoning lesser ones, as Saul was hard upon the Israelites for a breach of the ceremonial law (1Sa 14:33) but made no scruple of slaying eighty-five of the Lord's priests. Conscience will even devise arguments which favour—yea, which warrant—the most outrageous acts, and thus it is not only a corrupt lawyer pleading an ill cause, but a corrupt judge which justifies the wicked. Thus those who clamoured for the crucifixion of Christ did so under the pretext of its being orderly and necessary: "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God" (Joh 19:7). Little wonder that the Lord says of men that they "call evil good, and good evil;...put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (Isa 5:20). Conscience never moves the natural man to perform duties out of gratitude and thankfulness to God. It never convicts him of the heavy guilt of Adam's offence which is lying upon his soul, nor of lack of faith in Christ: suffering sinners to sleep in peace in the midst of their awful unbelief. But theirs is not a sound and solid peace, for there is no reason or ground for it; rather is it the false security of stupidity. Says God of them, "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness" (Hos 7:2).

Its accusations are ineffectual, for they produce no good fruit, yielding neither meekness, humility, nor genuine repentance, but rather a sensible dread of God as a harsh Judge or hatred of Him as an inexorable Enemy. Not only are its accusations ineffectual, but often they are quite erroneous. Because of the darkness which is upon the understanding, the moral perception of the natural man greatly errs. As Thomas Boston (1671-1732) said of the corrupt conscience, "So it is often found like a mad and furious horse, which violently runs down himself, his rider, and all that come in his way." A fearful example of that appears in our Lord's prediction in John 16:2, which received repeated fulfilment in the Acts: "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service." In like manner, Saul of Tarsus, after his conversion, acknowledged: "I verily thought within myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Act 26:9). What a putting of "bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" were those cases! A most unreliable guide is the unregenerate conscience. Strict Romanists deem it a greater sin to eat meat on a Friday than to commit a breach of the moral law.

Even when the conscience of the unregenerate is awakened by the immediate hand of God and is smitten with deep and painful convictions of sin, so far from its moving the soul to seek the mercy of God through the Mediator, it fills him with shuddering and dismay. As Job 6:4 declares, when the arrows of the Almighty are within him, the poison thereof drinks up his spirit, and the

terrors of God set themselves in array against him. Hitherto such a one had gone to great pains to stifle the accusations of his inward judge, and now he would fain do so, but cannot. Instead, conscience rages and roars, putting the whole man in a dreadful consternation, as he is terrified by a sense of the wrath of a holy God and is fearful of the fiery indignation which shall devour His adversaries. This fills him with such horror and despair that instead of turning to the Lord, he endeavours to flee from Him. Thus it was in the case of Judas, who, when he was made to realize the awful gravity of his vile deed, went out and hanged himself. That the chargings of sin within the natural man cause him to turn from rather than unto Christ was demonstrated by the Pharisees in John 8:9, who, “being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one”!

5. *Disabled will.* We have left this until the last because the will is not the lord but the servant of the other faculties, executing the strongest conviction of the mind or the most imperious behest of our lusts, for there can be but one dominating influence in the will at one and the same time. The excellency of man’s will consisted, originally, in following the guidance of right reason and submitting to the influence of proper authority. But in Eden, man’s will rejected the former, and rebelled against the latter, and in consequence of the fall, his will has ever since been under the control of an understanding which prefers darkness to light and of affections which crave evil rather than good. And thus it is that the fleeting pleasures of sense and the puny interests of time excite our wishes, while the lasting delights of godliness and the riches of immortality receive little or no attention. The will of the natural man is biased by his corruptions, for his inclinations gravitate in the opposite direction to his duty, and therefore he is in complete bondage to sin, impelled by his lusts. It is not merely that the unregenerate are unwilling to seek after holiness; they inveterately hate the same.

Since the will turned traitor to God and entered the service of Satan, it has been completely paralysed unto good. Said the Saviour, “No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44). And why is it that he cannot come to Christ by his own natural powers? Because not only has he no inclination to do so, but the Saviour is an object that repels him: His yoke is unwelcome, His sceptre repulsive. In connection with spiritual things, the condition of the will is like that of the woman in Luke 13:11—she “was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.” If such be the case, then how can man be said to act voluntarily? Because he freely chooses the evil, and that because “the soul of the wicked *desireth* evil” (Pro 21:10), ever carrying out that desire except when prevented by the divine government. Man is the slave of his corruptions, born like a wild ass’s colt: from earliest childhood he is averse to restraint. The will of man is uniformly rebellious Godward: when Providence thwarts his endeavours, instead of bowing in humble resignation, he frets with disquietude and acts like a wild bull in a net. Only the Son can make him “free” (Joh 8:36), and there is “liberty” only where His Spirit is (2Co 3:17).

Here, then, are the ramifications of human depravity. The fall has blinded man’s mind, hardened his heart, disordered his affections, corrupted his conscience, disabled his will, so that there is “*no* soundness” in him (Isa 1:6), “no good thing” dwelling in his flesh (Rom 7:18).

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 17

23. *The law of order.* God's Word is like His works: designed disposition and minute precision characterizing it throughout. If "to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven" (Ecc 3:1) in the natural world, assuredly the same holds good in connection with the spiritual realm and all that pertains thereto. Even those who make no claim to being Christians recognize and acknowledge that "order is heaven's first law." God is a God of order, and most unmistakably is that fact displayed all through Holy Writ. Everything therein is methodically arranged and in its proper place: change that arrangement and confusion and error at once ensue. Thus it is of deep importance that we pay close attention to *the order* in which truth has been set forth by the omniscient Spirit. The key to many a verse is to be found in noting the position it occupies, its coherence with what precedes, its relation to what follows.

Whether its contents be considered historically, doctrinally, or typically, Genesis must open the Word, for it is the book of *beginnings*. It has been aptly called "the seed-plot of the Bible," for in it is to be found in germ form almost everything which is afterwards more fully developed in the books which follow. Doctrinally, its theme is that of divine election, which is the *first* act of God's grace unto His people. Then comes Exodus, which treats of redemption by purchase and power (Exo 6:6; 15:13). The third book, as might be expected, views God's people as on resurrection ground, being not so much doctrinal as experiential in its character. Leviticus shows what we are redeemed unto, having for its theme fellowship and worship: its key is hung on the door—the Lord speaking out of the tabernacle (1:1). The fourth book deals with the practical side of the spiritual life, tracing out the history of the believer in this world—for four is the number of the earth. "The wilderness" (1:1) is a symbol of the world in its fallen condition, the place of testing and trial. Its subject is the walk and warfare of the saints.

The positioning of those four books clearly manifests *design* in the divine workmanship, and teaches us the order in which the truth should be presented. An equally striking illustration is seen in the juxtaposition and order of the last two books of Solomon, for the theme of Ecclesiastes is unquestionably: "No satisfaction to be found under the sun," while that of the Canticles tells of "full satisfaction in the Son": over the one may be inscribed: "Whosoever drinketh of this water [the cisterns of the world] shall thirst again"; over the other: "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst" (Joh 4:14). In 11 Timothy 3:16, Paul informs us that the Scriptures are profitable "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," and that is the very *order* which he has followed in his epistles. For Romans is a doctrinal treatise, the Corinthian epistles a reproof of disorders in the assembly, Galatians a correcting of erroneous teaching, and Ephesians describes that walk which alone is worthy of a child of God.

Not only are the books in the Bible unerringly positioned, but the contents of each are arranged in logical and necessary sequence. Thus it is intensely interesting to mark how that each of the patriarchs in Genesis shadowed forth some distinct and fundamental truth concerning the believer. In Abraham, we have illustrated that of divine election and effectual calling. In Isaac, we have portrayed divine sonship (by a supernatural birth) and the life of submission to God's will. In Jacob, we have pictured the conflict between the flesh and the spirit: the two natures in the believer, intimated by his dual name. Jacob—Israel. In Joseph, we have exemplified the grand truth of heirship: following a season of trial, made ruler of Egypt. Thus the historical order is also the doctrinal and experiential, progressive and climacteric. The five great offerings of Leviticus 1-5 typify as many distinct aspects of the person and work of the Lord Jesus, and invaluable instruction is to be obtained by pondering the sequence of them.

Psalms 22, 23, and 24 present us with a significant and blessed triad, especially as Christ is seen in them. In the first, we behold Him suffering for His people; in the last we see Him as the King of glory receiving a royal welcome into heaven, and are furnished with a delineation of the characteristics possessed by those whom He fits to dwell with Him there; while in the central one, we are shown how graciously He ministers to and provides for His sheep (whom He is leading to the celestial fold) during the interval they are left on earth. In Psalm 22, we behold the “good Shepherd” (Joh 10:11), in 23, the “great Shepherd” (Heb 13:20), in 24, the “chief Shepherd” (1Pe 5:4). Again, if it be essential to the believer's comfort that, finding Romans 7 accurately describes his spiritual experience, his faith should lay hold of the divine assurances of Romans 8. It is equally necessary that preachers not only hold fast to the absolute sovereignty of God in election and reprobation, as set forth in Romans 9; but that they also proclaim the free offer of the Gospel to all men and enforce their responsibility to accept that offer, as presented in Romans 10.

What has been exemplified in the above paragraphs applies not only in the general, but is equally true in detail. For example, *the arrangement* of the ten commandments of the moral law (which comprehend the sum of righteousness) is profoundly significant. They were written on two tables of stone, to intimate that they fall into two distinct groups. The first four concern our responsibility *Godward*, the last six of our obligations *manward*. Vain is it to pretend that we are sincere worshipers of God if the duties of love unto our neighbours be neglected; equally worthless is that profession of piety which, while abstaining from crimes against our fellows, withholds from the Majesty of heaven the honour and glory which are His due. Again, the five exhortations contained in Psalm 37:1-7 are arranged in logical and inevitable order. We must cease from fretfulness and envy if we would trust in the Lord, and we must trust in Him before we can delight in Him, and that is necessary in order to a confident committing of our way unto Him, and a resting in and waiting patiently for Him.

The *order* of the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-11 is full of valuable instruction, and we miss much by failing to attend closely thereto. In the first four, we are shown the heart-exercises of those who have been awakened by the Spirit. First, there is a sense of need, a realization of their nothingness and emptiness. Second, there is a judging of self, a consciousness of guilt and sorrowing over their lost condition. Third, an end of attempting to justify themselves, an abandonment of all pretences to personal merit, a taking of their place in the dust before God. Fourth, the eye of the soul is turned away from self to Another: they are conscious of their dire need of salvation. The next four describe the fruits found in the regenerate. Thus, in those beatitudes, Christ gives the distinguishing birthmarks of those who are the subjects of His kingdom, and makes known the ones on whom God's benediction rests.

What anointed eye can fail to see the perfect order of the model prayer Christ has given His disciples? In it, He has supplied a simple but comprehensive directory: revealing how God is to be approached by His children, the order in which their requests are to be presented, the things they most need to ask for, and the homage due unto Him. Every aspect of prayer is included: adoration, supplication, argumentation. Every clause in it occurs in the Old Testament, denoting that our prayers must be scriptural if they are to be acceptable (1Jo 5:14). Its petitions are seven in number, showing the completeness of the outline here furnished. All its pronouns are in the plural, teaching the Christian that the needs of his brethren and sisters, and not merely his own, should be before him when he bows at the throne of grace.

Let the student pay close attention to the order followed in these additional examples, which we leave him to work out for himself. The miracles of Christ in Matthew 7 and 9. The seven parables in Matthew 13. The sevenfold result of justification as set forth in Romans 5:1-11. The seven graces of 11 Peter 1:5-7, the presence and cultivation of which enables the saint to make his calling and election sure both to himself and his fellows, for the “these things” of verse 10 are those mentioned in verses 5-7. Everything in Scripture is according to definite design.

The special design of Luke was to set forth the perfections of our Lord’s humanity, and it is very blessed to trace out the different passages in his Gospel where Christ is seen as *a Man of prayer*. “It came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened” (3:21). Luke is the only one who supplies this significant detail, and a most precious one it is. The Saviour’s baptism marked the end of His private life, and the beginning of His official mission. And here we learn that He was in the act of devotion at the very outset of His public ministry. He was engaged in dedicating Himself unto God, seeking grace for the stupendous work that lay before Him. Thus the first sight which the multitude had of Him was in prayer! “And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed” (verse 16). This occurred just after His miracles of mercy, when there went “a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him.” His response to this show of popularity was striking, and full of instruction for His servants. He retired from the acclaims of the masses, and got alone with God. Again, “He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luk 6:12). This followed immediately after the scribes and Pharisees were “filled with madness” against Him, and right before He selected the twelve. Our Redeemer made no attempt to fight His enemies, but retired to commune with the Father. Before calling the apostles, He spent the night petitioning God.

“And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am?” (Luk 9:18). This was just following His feeding of the multitude: after engaging in public duty, He withdrew in order to private devotion. We may infer from the question which He asked His disciples that the unbelief of men was beginning to cast a shadow upon His soul, and that He now sought relief and strength from above. “And went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening” (Luk 9:28-29). It was while engaged in prayer that Christ was transfigured—how significant, and instructive! “And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray” (Luk 11:1). This is one of the passages (see also the Messianic Psalms) which gives us some insight into the nature of His supplications. As they heard *Him*, the disciples felt they knew nothing about prayer! “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon...I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” (Luk 22:31-32). There we behold Him as the great High Priest making intercession for one of His own. And He “kneeled down and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me:

nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done” (Luk 22:41-42). There is the climax of prayer: complete surrender to and acquiescence in the divine will.

In the seven miracles recorded in John’s Gospel, we may discern a striking order of thought as they portray Christ communicating *life* to His people. In His turning of the water into wine at the Cana marriage feast (Joh 2:6-11), we are shown, symbolically, our *need of life*—Christ supplying what was lacking. In the healing of the nobleman’s son (Joh 4:47-54), who was “at the point of death,” we have pictured the *bestowment* of life. In the healing of the impotent man (Joh 5:3-9), we behold the *power* of life, enabling a helpless cripple to rise up and walk. In the feeding of the multitude (Joh 6:11), we see how graciously Christ *sustains* our life. In His going to the fearful disciples on the storm-swept sea, we witness Him *defending* their lives, delivering them from danger. In the response made by the blind man whose eyes Christ opened (Joh 9:7, 38), we learn what is to be *the occupation* of life—he worshipped Him: in this way, supremely, we are to employ the new nature. In the raising of Lazarus from the sepulchre (Joh 11:44), we have *the consummation* of life, for the resurrection of the saints is the prelude to their eternal felicity.

The teaching of our Lord concerning the Holy Spirit’s operations within and toward the saints follows an instructive and a climacteric order. First, He made mention of being “born of the Spirit” (Joh 3:6, 8), for *quickening* is His initial operation upon the elect. Second, by means of figurative language (cf. Joh 3:5), He spoke of the Spirit’s *indwelling*: “the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Joh 4:14). Third, He declared that there should be a *breaking forth* of the same, and a refreshing of others: “out of his belly [or innermost part] shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit” (Joh 7:38-39). Fourth, He promised that the blessed Spirit should be theirs *permanently*: “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (Joh 14:16). Fifth, He announced that the Spirit would fully *instruct them*: “He shall teach you all things” (Joh 14:26). Sixth, He declared that the Spirit should both testify of Him and equip them to *testify unto Him*: “But when the comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness” (Joh 15:26-27). Seventh, Christ asserted that the Spirit should *magnify Him*: “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” (Joh 14:14), making Me altogether lovely in your eyes.

OUR ANNUAL LETTER

“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1Co 1:31). That is a proposition which ought to be perfectly obvious, for we have nothing good, either natural or spiritual, but what we have received from Him; therefore the praise is due entirely unto Him. But how humbling to realize that such a self-evident statement occurs each time in the form of an exhortation, and that addressed not to men at large but to the people of God! How it indicates what a vile nature still clings to the saint, since he needs to be warned against self-gratulation! That vanity of which all of us are so full needs to be beaten down. God has done that very thing, as the context of our opening verse plainly demonstrates. He has singled out the most unlikely and unlovely objects to be His saints and servants—“that no flesh should glory in his presence” (verses 26-29)—that there might be no pretence for boasting. He has further willed and worked to that end by causing the whole of our salvation to be in and from Christ, making Him to be our “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (verse 30).

Oh, the horrible workings of pride, which is ever ready to ascribe unto the creature that which is due to the Creator alone. Boasting ill becomes a beggar who is entirely dependent upon the divine charity. In 11 Corinthians 10:17, our exhortation occurs again, and here it has a particular application to preachers. Paul had occasion to make reference to his own experiences and labours: he not only did so reluctantly and with reserve, but kept before him this injunction, “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” This shows that ministers of the Gospel need to be especially careful not to glory in their performances, but instead to give thanks to God for their success: all must be credited to His enablement and blessing. They must not glory in their abilities, attainments or achievements, but only in the Author and Giver of the same. yet how difficult it is for any of them to recount what the Lord has been pleased to work by and through them without the flesh rising up and claiming part of the honours. Everything must be traced back to God’s sovereign goodness: to His special favour, His all-sufficient grace, His unceasing faithfulness, His longsuffering to usward. Even when our duty has been performed, we are but “unprofitable servants” (Luk 17:10)!

“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” are the words that ring in our ears, and it is with them before us that we now desire to write. This issue of the “Studies” completes not only another year, but another decade—the third in its history. Thirty years is quite a slice out of the average span of life, and it is no easy task to continue writing day by day, month by month and year by year for many of the same readers. Very few realize the vast amount of time and labour which is involved in composing a monthly magazine of this size and character. Every article has hours of hard work in it, for we do not just scribble down the first things that enter our mind. Moreover, writing sixty articles each year for several hundreds who have had at least half, and probably fifty who possess the whole, of the previous volumes, and to prepare fresh articles for *them*, would be impossible unless the Word of God were inexhaustible. Yet to do so requires *increasing* thought

and study in order to bring out of the divine treasury things new and old. To maintain the standard we have set before us keeps us busy the year round, night as well as day.

As we review this somewhat lengthy ministry, we cannot but marvel at the sovereign and abounding grace of God which has supported and sustained, which has directed and enabled us to compose no less than *two thousand* different articles of varying lengths, averaging four pages each. But those bare figures can convey only a faint idea of the immense amount of toil involved in their preparation, or the strain on our devoted wife as she has typed out the same amid her domestic duties. Truly we serve a great God, and He is greatly to be praised, for during the whole of these thirty years, the Editor has not had to spend a single day in bed, nor has his wife either for over twenty years past. We have looked definitely to the Lord for the needed health and strength, and He has never failed us. Though we both had the flu early this year, by the divine mercy, we were enabled to fight it on our feet, and perform our daily duties.

It should be quite obvious from what has been said above, that we have no time available for visiting friends or receiving callers, nor is it possible for us to send private letters every month or so to our readers. We try to write at least once a year to all, and devote several hours a week endeavouring to aid quite a number of young preachers. But we have only one pair of hands and eyes, and are quite unable to meet the desires of some who appear to imagine that we have as much leisure for correspondence as they have. When any require spiritual counsel, or would like us to elucidate anything not clear in our articles, we welcome the opportunity to write to such—though we have no time to spare for controversy. One reason for our remaining in this “out-of-the-way” (but delightful) place is that we may prosecute our study and work *in quietness* without interruption. We trust that friends will understand our position and realize that the hour we might spend in entertaining, or in writing them an extra letter, is used in preparing a message for over a thousand readers.

We desire neither to be unsociable nor to live the life of a hermit, but we are “not our own,” and are resolved by grace to devote the whole of our energy in an endeavour to feed Christ’s lambs and sheep. We highly value such a privilege and honour, and are jealous of anything which tends to encroach upon the same. We are deeply thankful that the Lord has brought us apart from “the strife of tongues,” and has so graciously provided us with a “peaceable habitation” (Isa 32:18). Not that we urge anyone else to follow our example. Others must take their place on the firing line, and each soul should seek to perform his or her duty in whatever position Providence has assigned them. Ours is to seek to send forth messages which, under God, will strengthen the hands of the same, and to pray for those who are bearing the heat and burden of the day. Let God’s people be much in supplication for His servants in these perilous times, for many of them are encountering strong opposition and subtle temptations to compromise, while others are greatly discouraged by the coldness and indifference of their hearers.

During the past ten years, spiritual conditions in Christendom have not shown any improvement: rather have they markedly deteriorated. Nevertheless, our circulation, though still a very small one when compared with that of more popular religious magazines, *has increased fifty per cent!* Considering the nature of the articles which appear in these pages, that is surely *the Lord’s doing*, and it is marvellous in our eyes. It might well be thought that the Depravity articles—so unpalatable to the flesh—would have retarded the gradual enlargement of our coast during the last few years, but, instead, that enlargement has steadily accelerated during the past twenty-four months of their insertion. Is not this another demonstration that God honours those who honour Him by withholding nothing that is profitable (Act 20:20) from their hearers or readers? Let young preachers note this, and take courage.

During the whole of these thirty years, we have never been in debt a penny, and have paid every bill within forty-eight hours of its reception. Nor have we ever made any appeal, directly or indirectly, for funds. There was not the slightest need to do so. As Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) rightly said, "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supplies." We have no denomination or organization behind us, no "sustentation fund" to draw upon. But what is infinitely better, we have the living God to look to, and He has promised to supply all our need. He does more: once again (despite increased costs of publishing), we have a surplus, which we shall use this year in sending to the Trinitarian Bible Society, the Scripture Gift Mission, for the circulation of God's Word, and to the *Gospel Magazine* (69 Fleet Street, London, E.C.4). Will kind friends note that by the goodness of God, our personal needs are fully provided for, so please *refrain* from sending money for our own use.

Once more we would heartily thank our prayer-helpers for their support, and ask for a continuance of their petitions while it pleases the Lord to keep us in this service. "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory" (Psa 115:1).

With Christian love, yours by divine mercy,

A. W. and V. E. Pink

PS.—"Studies" will cost us 1/- more next year, but through the generosity of a few friends the 1951 bound volume will be available for regular readers at a price below cost: 7/6 (\$2) post paid.



APPENDICES

About Studies in the Scriptures

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952) wrote and published his monthly 28 page expository digest, *Studies in the Scriptures*, from 1922 to 1953. He mailed it worldwide by paid subscription to whomsoever desired the deeper truths of God. Each issue contained continuing serialized articles on six to eight subjects. When one subject was “completed” to the author’s satisfaction, another subject series began in its place in the next issue. In total, the 380 issues comprise a treasure of immense proportions.

By God’s grace, Chapel Library republishes the *Studies* beginning with the year 1934, available for download worldwide, and mailing three issues each quarter by free subscription in North America. We also print many books and booklets gleaned from articles in the *Studies*. These may be ordered in print in North America, or downloaded from our website worldwide without charge:

Studies: www.chapellibrary.org/studies

Other literature: www.chapellibrary.org/literature/title-catalog

Today the various subjects are being gathered together by topic, and republished in paperbacks by several sources. *Chapel Library* offers the following at the time of this printing:

- The Sovereignty of God 176 pages
- Comfort for Christians 79 pages
- Profiting from the Word 96 pages
- Seven Sayings of the Savior 94 pages
- Spiritual Union and Communion 175 pages
- The Attributes of God 84 pages
- The Doctrine of Human Depravity 238 pages
- The Doctrine of Revelation 214 pages
- 1 John – An Exposition, Part 1 190 pages
- 1 John – An Exposition, Part 2 173 pages
- The Holy Spirit 196 pages

Biography of A.W. Pink

by Erroll Hulse

Concerning Calvinism⁶⁷ and Arminianism⁶⁸ during the first half of the Twentieth Century, a most interesting case study is the experience of Arthur W. Pink. He was a preacher and writer of outstanding talent who ministered in Britain, America, and Australia. When he died in 1952 in isolation on the Island of Lewis in north eastern Scotland, he was hardly known outside a small list of subscribers to his magazine, *Studies in the Scriptures*. Yet, by the 1970s, his books were in wide demand and his name was widely known among publishers and ministers. In fact, for that period it would be difficult to find a reformed author whose books were more widely read.

The preaching ministry of A. W. Pink had been remarkably blessed in the USA, but it was in Australia that he seemed to reach the apex of his public ministry, and there in particular that his preaching ministry reached great heights. He was then faced with accreditation by the Baptist Union and was rejected on account of his Calvinistic views. He then ministered in a Baptist church of Strict Baptist pedigree. There he came unstuck since they esteemed him an Arminian! A considerable group, however, appreciated Pink, recognised his worth, and seceded from that Strict Baptist Church to form a new church of 27 members. Then suddenly, in 1934, Pink resigned and returned to Britain. It is widely held that one rejection is enough to cripple a minister for life, but two in quick succession can destroy a pastor completely. So it proved for Arthur Pink. He never again found meaningful entrance into the ministry, though he tried his utmost. He sought openings in both the UK and the USA without success. He became increasingly isolated. He ended his days as an evangelical recluse in the Island of Stornoway off the coast of Scotland. It was rumoured that not more than ten souls attended his funeral.

There is much that we can learn from the life of A. W. Pink. Firstly, we will trace out his early life in broad outline. Secondly, we will describe his experience in Australia, and trace out the adverse effects of this on his life. Thirdly, we will the impact of his writing ministry.

⁶⁷ **Calvinism** – the doctrinal system developed from the teachings of the French-born Swiss Reformer John Calvin (1509-1664), holding that the Bible teaches the supreme authority of the Scriptures, the sovereignty of God, predestination, and the “doctrines of grace”; these doctrines were the response of the Synod of Dort (1618-19) to the Arminians’ remonstrance (protest) and are commonly known by the acronym TULIP.

⁶⁸ **Arminianism** – (from Jacobus Arminius, 1560-1609, Dutch theologian) the doctrinal system that rejects the Reformers’ understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God’s predestination of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will.

1. Early Life

Arthur Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886. His parents were godly. They lived by the Bible and kept the Lord's Day holy. Arthur was the first of three children brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. To the grief of their parents, all three children drifted into lives of unbelief. Worse was to come: Arthur embraced *Theosophy*, an esoteric cult that claimed powers of the occult! "Lucifer" was the name of the leading theosophy magazine. A natural feature of Arthur's character was wholeheartedness, and he entered theosophy with zeal. A leadership role was offered him, which meant that he would visit India. At the same time a friend who was an opera singer, noted that Arthur possessed a fine baritone voice; he urged him to study for a career in opera. Then suddenly on a night during 1908, Arthur was converted. His first action was to preach the Gospel to the theosophist group.

Simultaneous with Pink's conversion was a call to the Christian ministry. But the colleges were in the hands of liberals bent on the destruction of the Scriptures. Arthur, however, heard of the Moody Bible Institute, which had been founded by D. L. Moody⁶⁹ in 1889. In 1910, aged 24, Pink left for Chicago to begin a two-year course. His time at Moody lasted only six weeks, however. He decided that he was wasting his time, and that he should enter directly into a pastorate—and his professors agreed! He was not disgruntled, but rather frustrated, that the teaching was pitched at such a primary level that it did nothing for him.

During 1910, he began in his first pastorate in Silverton, Colorado, a mining camp in the San Juan Mountains. We possess little detail of this period, but we know that from Silverton, Pink moved to Los Angeles. He was always a hard worker, and this is illustrated by the fact that at one point in Oakland he was engaged in tent evangelism six nights a week for eighteen weeks!

From Los Angeles, he moved to Kentucky. It was here that he met and married Vera E. Russell. There could not have been a better gift from heaven. Vera was entirely committed to the Lord. She was hard working, gifted, intelligent, and persevering. She died just ten years after Arthur's decease on the island of Stornoway.

The next move was to Spartanburg, South Carolina, from 1917 to 1920. This church building consisted of a small and frail wooden structure, while he and Vera lived in a small wooden house standing on wooden columns. Heating was inadequate, and in the freezing winter it was like an ice box.

It was during this time Pink began writing books. There were two of significance: one with the title *Divine Inspiration of the Bible*, and the second *The Sovereignty of God*, the foreword of which is dated June 1918. It was this book that was later taken up by The Banner of Truth publishers. The first edition, according to I. C. Herendeen, his first publisher at that time, was only 500 copies, and it was a struggle to sell that number. When the book came to Banner, it was edited by Iain Murray and vastly improved. It became one of the most popular of The Banner of Truth paperbacks. By 1980, 92,000 copies had sold.

After about a year at Spartanburg, Pink almost came to grief. He felt a strong conviction to give up the ministry and devote himself to writing only, and at one point was disconsolate. Vera

⁶⁹ **D. L. Moody** (1837-1899) – American evangelist and publisher who founded the Moody Church, Northfield School and Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts (now the Northfield Mount Hermon School), the Moody Bible Institute, and Moody Publishers.

wrote to a friend saying that her husband was even thinking of leaving the ministry and going into business, to make money for the Kingdom as a better way of serving God. In 1920, Arthur resigned the pastorate at Spartanburg. He and Vera moved and settled at Swengel, Pennsylvania, in order to be near the publisher I. C. Herendeen.

In the middle of July, 1920, he left to take a series of meetings in California. Large crowds gathered and numbers were saved. At one point 1,200 gathered to hear the Gospel. Other crusades and conferences followed; it was evident that Pink was eminently suited to this kind of ministry. Looking back over his life, it is apparent that he experienced more blessing in the itinerant ministry than he did in a total of twelve years in pastoring churches. This had to do with his temperament; he preferred being in his study to visiting.

In 1921, Arthur and Vera were back in Pennsylvania. The monthly digest, the *Studies in the Scriptures*, first appeared in 1922. It ran continuously without interruption for 32 years, until Arthur's death in 1952. Initially, this was a 24 page magazine, with four to six articles as instalments in a series. To write expository material at a high standard at this rate every month is a tremendous testimony to his insight into the Scriptures, and to the Lord's blessing and enabling. All his articles had to be written by hand and finished for the printer at least two months before the date of publication. *Studies in the Scriptures* had about 1,000 circulation at the beginning, but for most of its existence the subscription level hovered at about 500. The financial side was always precarious, with only just enough to cover printing costs from one month to the next. Pink corresponded with some of his subscribers; eventually this formed his pastoral work. Throughout he was assisted by his very hard working wife, who acted as secretary. They never had a family, always lived very humbly, and managed always to make ends meet. This was made possible through a modest inheritance left to him by his parents and through gifts that he received from his readers.

During 1923, Arthur fell into a deep depression, which turned out to be a nervous breakdown. At this juncture a young couple that had been greatly blessed by Pink's ministry came to the rescue, and Arthur was nursed through a period of several months enforced rest, which brought him back to normal health.

In 1924, a major new direction came by way of letters of invitation from a publisher in Sydney, Australia. Before departing for Australia, no less than four months preparation had to be made for the *Studies*. On his way to Australia, Pink engaged in more Bible conference preaching in Colorado, then in Oakland, California, and also San Francisco—from where he and Vera took ship across the Pacific to Sydney.

2. Pink's Experience in Australia

The Pinks spent a total of three and half years in Australia. These times were for them the best, but also turned out to be the worst. Upon arrival Arthur had more invitations than he possibly fill. Initially his ministry in Australia was a great success. Crowds gathered; churches were filled; believers were revived; and souls were brought to the Saviour.

Attendance swelled in every place he preached. In the first year in Australia Arthur preached 250 times. He would often work until 2:00 in the morning to keep *Studies in the Scriptures* going. The Pinks truly must have felt that at last they had found the place of permanent fulfilment. There was an evident power in his ministry. One mature believer declared that he drew people "like a magnet," and that he preached the "whole counsel of God's Word," and was capable of preaching a sermon "from every word of the text."

This period proved to be one of great joy. Pink was now 40 years old. He was preaching almost daily for well over an hour. He would get home at 10:00 PM and then work until 2:00 AM. He wrote, “never before during our 16 years in the ministry, have we experienced such blessing and joy in our souls, such liberty of utterance, and such an encouraging response as we have done in this highly favoured portion of Christ’s vineyard.”⁷⁰

We can be sure that a thrilling and powerful soul-saving ministry will arouse the fury of Satan. And so it proved to be in this case when that old serpent, the devil, mounted a cunning counterattack. The Baptist Union leaders were fundamentally opposed to Calvinism. These leaders invited Arthur Pink to read a paper on “Human Responsibility.” Sadly, Pink did not realise that this was a plot to demote him in the eyes of the public—and in his sincere earnestness he fell into the trap. Instead of declining this invitation, he presented the paper and then answered questions for over an hour. The result of this was that the BU of New South Wales published a statement that they agreed unanimously *not* to endorse his ministry. What they really meant (for they did not themselves clarify any doctrine) is that they did not agree with Pink’s Reformed doctrine. They were fundamentally Arminian. The effect of all this was that invitations dried up, and Pink’s wider effective ministry in Australia was drastically reduced.

It was at this juncture that one of three Strict and Particular Baptist Churches invited Pink to become its pastor. This church was known as the Belvoir Street Church. Here Pink was as busy as he had ever been in his life. He had preached 300 times in the year ending 1926. In addition to preaching three times a week at Belvoir Street, he preached in three different places in Sydney each week to an average of 200 at each meeting. He still managed to maintain *Studies in the Scriptures* by burning midnight oil.

Trouble however was in store. The early part of the Twentieth Century was a time of lack of clarity in doctrine. One of the evidences of this was confusion over Calvinism, Arminianism, and hyper-Calvinism.⁷¹ Many churches polarized. The Baptist Union was Arminian, and the Strict and Particular Baptists tended to be hyper-Calvinist. This proved to be the case at Belvoir Street. Until about May 1927, the Pinks believed that they had found a permanent church home.

3. Impact of Pink’s Writing Ministry

If history had progressed normally, Arthur Pink would have been forgotten. There are several leaders in each generation who are well known, but it is unlikely that their names will be remembered for very long. When Arthur Pink died, he was known to a small circle of readers—about 500—who read his monthly periodical *Studies in the Scriptures*, which he had faithfully produced with the help of his wife Vera for 31 years. Yet, after his decease, as his writings were collected and published as books, his name became very well known in the English-speaking evangelical world. During the 1960s and ’70s, there was a dearth of reliable expository writing; Pink’s writings filled an important need. His expositions are God-centred, theologically compelling, and reliable—as well as practical and experimental. That was precisely what was needed during a period of spiritual drought. Publishers discovered the value of his writings. The outcome was dramatic.

⁷⁰ *The Life of Arthur W. Pink*, by Iain H. Murray, The Banner of Truth Trust, p 49.

⁷¹ **hyper-Calvinism** – the doctrinal error that holds men need not evangelize, since God will save His elect children with or without the means of preaching the Word. This represents only one side of biblical truth; the other is that God is pleased to use human instruments as means to His work, and the preaching of the Word is uniquely marked out for this purpose (2Ti 4:2; 2Ti 3:16; Mat 28:19).

For instance, Baker Book House published twenty-two different titles by Pink, with a combined total sales by 1980 of 350,000. By the same date just three books (*Sovereignty of God*, *Life of Elijah*, and *Profiting from the Word*) totaled 211,000. Yet as contemporary reformed authors have multiplied, so the demand for Pink's books has lessened.

We must remember that with the dawning of the twentieth century, the mainline denominations had already suffered extensive losses to higher criticism and modernism. Such was the advance of modernism in the late nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century, most Bible colleges and seminaries were lost to an agenda of unbelief and anti-Christianity. Instead of producing preacher/pastors for the churches, men were sent out who emptied the churches. The most striking example is Methodism. The aggregate membership in Methodism grew to be the highest of the non-conformist churches. Yet this denomination has been virtually annihilated by modernism.

The writings of Pink provided not only food for the spiritually hungry, but as Iain Murray asserts, "Pink has been immensely important in reviving and stimulating doctrinal reading at the popular level. The same can be said of few other authors of the twentieth century."⁷²

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⁷² *ibid.*

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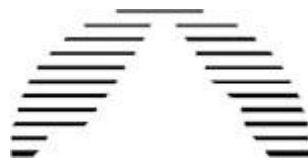
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