

Vol. XXX

September, 1951

No. 9

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow in their influence upon God's people around the world, through their clarity, careful exposition, and Christ-centeredness.

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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 uncomplainingly 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 incon-

testable 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 an-

tagonize 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 perfidy¹ 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 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

¹ **perfidy** – deliberate betrayal of trust.

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.,² 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, "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

² **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.

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 condi-

tion—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 decla-

ration 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 unrenewed 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 defiled; 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 expectation. 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 corporeal 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 en-

tered 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.” ❧