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# **STUDIES**

## **IN THE**

# **SCRIPTURES**

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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<i>1. Introduction</i>	

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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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## SEVEN HUMAN LOOKS

We continue to write upon “Looking,” for, said the prophet, “Mine eye affecteth mine heart” (Lam 3:51). John Bunyan (1620-1677) wrote impressively on “Eyegate” and showed what a large part it played in admitting enemies into the city of Mansoul.<sup>1</sup> The heart has no more influential gate than the eyes; and if we are wise, we shall do as the patriarch and make “a covenant” with them (Job 31:1). Guard your eye and thereby safeguard your heart. Blessed are they who use their eyes to noble purpose, but better to have been born blind than pervert such a gift. Observation exerts a considerable influence upon the inner man, and therefore is no small factor in moulding the life. But alas, observation is not always rightly used: instead of evoking reflectiveness, drawing out sympathy, and leading to kindly deeds, only too often it excites our corruptions and issues in evil works. Whether observation affects us for good or evil depends not only upon the objects contemplated, but also upon our reflections on and reactions to the same.

1. The look *of faith*. “And the LORD said unto Abram...Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it” (Gen 13:14-15). That was in sharp contrast with the greed of his nephew, Lot, who “lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan” (verse 10), which was the look of covetousness. God here made a great promise and donation to His servant, and bade Abraham view his fair heritage, for it was a land flowing with milk and honey. As he gazed upon such an attractive portion, his heart would indeed be affected by a sense of the LORD’s goodness and magnanimity. And so should it ever be with us. As we behold the wondrous handiwork of God all around us in the realm of creation, we should admire His wisdom, be awed by His power, and adore the grace of Him who “giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1Ti 6:17)—to evoke thoughtfulness, regale our senses, and minister so freely to our needs. God’s workmanship in nature should fill us with wonderment and gratitude.

2. The look *of disobedience*. “But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt” (Gen 19:26). Solemn indeed is that, and chronicled for our admonition. God had given express command, “Look not behind thee” (verse 17), but Lot’s partner disregarded His injunction. In unbelief and love to Sodom, she looked back and probably attempted to return there, for in Luke 17:31-32, we find that our Lord pointed His prohibition, “Let him likewise not *return back*” with the warning, “Remember Lot’s wife.” This incident is recorded to show us the peril of hankering after forbidden and forsaken objects, and to make us fear and tremble, lest after having escaped the corruption which is in the world through the knowledge of Christ, we are again entangled therein, and overcome, only to find our latter end is worse than the beginning (2Pe 2:20). Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt as a lasting monument of God’s displeasure against apostates. True conversion is the renouncing of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and it is at our peril that we lust after the things we have abandoned. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) says, “Drawing back is *to perdition*, and looking back is *towards it*.”

3. The look *of curiosity*. “And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land” (Gen 34:1). So far as Scripture informs us, she was the only daughter he had, and with so many brothers, was probably petted and spoiled. Born just before Joseph (Gen 30:21-24), she could not have been more than fifteen or sixteen; and therefore, her mother was more to blame than she was. The Hebrew for “went out to see the daughters of the land” implies “to look about with them.” Probably it was some occasion of public festivity, and unrest and discontent with the tent possessed her; and a spirit of inquisitiveness moved her to mix with the ungodly and to look at the customs and fashions of the heathen. The sequel was disastrous, for not only did she lose her honour, but her conduct led to her brothers committing murder. For young girls to get away from the eyes of their mothers and go out unchaperoned is highly dangerous, because of their inexperience of the world, their ignorance of the artifices of unscrupulous men, and their proneness to be easily deceived by flatterers. Let young women bear in mind that God has inseparably linked together “discreet, chaste, keepers at home” (Ti 2:5)!

4. The look *of contempt*. “And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth” (1Sa 17:42). Goliath could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw this stripling advancing toward him, and “looked about” for one whom he deemed more “worthy of his steel.” He was expecting to be confronted with the champion of Israel’s army; and thus, when he perceived that an unac-

<sup>1</sup> **Mansoul** – the city attacked by Diaboles and freed by Immanuel in Bunyan’s allegory, *The Holy War*.

courtred shepherd-boy had entered the lists against him, the Philistine utterly despised him. Therein he made the fatal mistake of underestimating his enemy. David indeed had no coat of mail upon him, but, what was infinitely preferable, he was clothed with “the whole armour of God” (Eph 6:11, 13). He might be totally unacquainted with the arts of warfare, but he knew from personal experience that JEHOVAH fails no one who really trusts Him. Said he, “Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied” (1Sa 17:45); and the giant fell before him. Learn, then, that might cannot prevail over weakness, when that weakness leans upon the Almighty!

5. The look *of discontent*. “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought...and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit” (Ecc 2:11). That was the disappointing discovery made by the one man whom God permitted to obtain everything which the carnal heart craves. The force of his honest acknowledgement is the better perceived by observing what he tells us in the nine verses preceding, and then listening to his summing up: “And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour” (Ecc 2:10). But having realized his ambitions and gratified every desire, he found that so far from their affording him any real and lasting satisfaction, they still left an aching void within. Mere *things*—however costly or lovely in themselves—cannot meet the real needs of the soul. The heart was made for God, and He alone can fill it. Self’s enjoyment of the joys of this earth leaves naught but emptiness behind. The thirst of the soul cannot be quenched by the cisterns of this world. Gold can purchase nothing but what proves to be vanity. Christ alone “satisfieth the longing soul” (Psa 107:9).

6. The look *of humiliation*. “Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD...and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged” (Isa 51:1). That is very necessary if a lowly spirit is to be preserved in the child of God. It is a most salutary exercise to look back and view our origin, and behold what we were when the hand of divine mercy was first laid upon us. “Wherefore remember,” says the apostle, “that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh...That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:11-12). Remember it to your shame. Look to the “horrible pit [and] the miry clay” (Psa 40:2), out of which the God of all grace brought you, that you may be confounded and never more open your mouth boastfully (Eze 16:63). Daily ponder the question, “Who maketh thee to differ from another?” (1Co 4:7)—not only from those who are hastening to destruction, but from what you were *yourself* only a short time since! Let such a look humble you into the dust.

7. The look *of hope*. “Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple” (Jon 2:4). That is, though because of my reprehensible conduct, Thou no longer viewest me with approbation and delight; nevertheless, I will not give way to despair, but cast myself upon Thy mercy. Those words, “I will look again toward thy holy temple,” show that his faith laid hold of that statement: “If thy people...shall pray unto the LORD *toward* the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house that I have built for thy name: Then hear thou in heaven...If they sin against thee...and pray unto thee toward their land...and the house which I have built for thy name: Then hear thou their prayer” (1Ki 8:44-49 and compare 2Ch 20:9). When a captive in Babylon, Daniel had acted on the same (Dan 6:10), and now the chastened prophet made it *his* confidence. Though in the whale’s belly, he refused to abandon hope. He “remembered the LORD: and [his] prayer came in unto [Him], into [His] holy temple” (Jon 2:7). He remembered His grace, His faithfulness, His power, His past mercies, and turned unto Him the eyes of expectation; and he was miraculously delivered! Oh, what encouragement is there here for every failing saint who is tempted to despond.



# THE EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

## 1. Introduction

When we completed our 1,500-page exposition of John's Gospel<sup>2</sup> more than twenty years ago, we were urged to take up the first epistle of John,<sup>3</sup> but felt quite incompetent to engage therein. The closing books of the New Testament, as their position indicates, require their expositor to possess a fuller knowledge of God's Word and a more mature spiritual experience than do the earlier ones. The style of John's epistle is quite different from that of the other apostles, being more abstract, and for that reason, more difficult of apprehension and elucidation. We still feel very unfit for the task upon which we are now entering, but if we wait until we deem ourselves spiritually qualified, it will never be essayed. During the past quarter of a century, we have given no little prayerful thought to its contents, and have studied carefully all the writings of others thereon which divine providence has brought our way: the benefits of and the gleanings from which we shall now share with our Christian friends.

Not only is John's epistle much more difficult than his Gospel (which is manifestly designed for babes in Christ, though even the "fathers" never outgrow it) and the other apostolic writings, but it does not lend itself so readily to expositions of equal length, for some of its contents afford much more scope to a sermonizer than do others; and thus, while a whole article may be profitably devoted to certain single verses, others require to be grouped together; and because of this, the reader is likely to be disappointed at the varying lengths of their treatment. It is perhaps for these reasons that comparatively little has been written upon this epistle—scarcely anything during the past fifty years. So far as we know, none of the Puritans attempted a systematic exposition of the same, for N. Hardy (1665) scarcely comes under that category. Yet this portion of God's Word is equally necessary, important, and valuable for His children, as are all the others—though what they are likely to get out of it will largely depend upon their acquaintance with all the preceding books, and with the constancy and intimacy of their communion with the Triune God.

A brief word concerning *its writer*. So far as we are aware, no evangelical of any weight has ever denied that this epistle was written by the same person of blessed memory as the one to whom the fourth Gospel is unanimously attributed. There is clear and conclusive evidence of this—both external and internal. As Albert Barnes (1798-1870) stated of the epistle: "It is referred to by Polycarp at the beginning of the second century, it is quoted by Papias and also by Ireneus." It is found in the old Syriac version, which was probably made very early in the second century. Internally, the evidence is strong that the same hand wrote this epistle as penned the fourth Gospel. The resemblances are many and striking, the modes of expression sufficient to identify the one employing them. The similarity of the opening verse of each is too close, yet the variations too marked, to have been made by an impostor. The reference to the "new commandment" (never mentioned by the other apostles) in 1 John 2:8 (and see 1Jo 3:11) find its source in 13:34 of John's Gospel. The reader may also compare 1 John 3:1, with John 1:12; 1 John 3:2, with John 17:24; 1 John 3:8, with John 8:44; 1 John 3:13, with John 15:20; 1 John 4:9, with John 3:16; etc.

*To whom* it was written. It is correctly designated one of the "General Epistles," for it is not addressed to any particular individual or local assembly. Obviously, it is designed for the whole family of God. Yet, as one reads it through, one gets a clear impression that John was intimately acquainted with those who first read his letter, that the majority of them were the seals of his own ministry, as his repeated "my little children" seems to indicate. As we shall yet have occasion to show (D.V.), it was Jewish Christians who were immediately concerned; 1 John 5:13 makes it evident that John wrote unto believers; and by linking that verse with 1 John 2:3-5, we perceive that it was his design to aid them in the important task of self-examination, that they might be more fully assured of their interest in Christ. From 1 John 2:18-26, we learn that the original recipients of this epistle were being assailed by false teachers, and it was John's object to counteract (not refute *seriatim*!)<sup>4</sup> their error, and confirm the same in their most holy faith.

<sup>2</sup> *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, hardcover, reprinted by Zondervan, 1968.

<sup>3</sup> *First John 1 and 2* is reprinted by and available from Chapel Library, [www.chapellibrary.org](http://www.chapellibrary.org).

<sup>4</sup> *seriatim* - in a series; one after another.

Though there is nothing in the epistle to tell us the specific *date when* it was written, yet we may approximate pretty closely thereunto. That it was penned much later than Paul's epistles appears from the fact that with John, "the world" and "the whole world" (1Jo 5:19) comprise *all* that is outside Christianity. Not so with Paul: in his time, there were *two* distinct camps hostile to Christianity—Judaism and heathendom. But the ancient kingdom of God had now passed away: the temple at Jerusalem was destroyed. After A.D. 70, the Jews had no power to persecute Christians. It was manifestly written after his Gospel, for such statements as 1 John 2:17 and 5:6 are unintelligible, unless the reader has a knowledge of his Gospel—not only in general, but in its detailed expressions. The entire absence of such terms as affliction, suffering, and tribulation, intimates that this letter was composed when external opposition to Christianity had largely subsided, when outward hostility was giving place to the corruption of the truth from *within*. Thus it must have first seen the light very near the close of the first century.

In this epistle, the enemies of the saints are neither Jews nor Gentiles as such, but "antichrists"—counterfeit Christians. Just as Satan himself is presented to us in the Scriptures under two outstanding characters—as the lion and the serpent, as adversary and seducer—so are his emissaries and children. There are two distinct classes by which the truth of God is dishonoured: by those who oppose and corrupt it in doctrine, and by those who misrepresent and malign it in practice—compare the Sadducees (Act 23:8) and the Pharisees (Mat 23:1-36). Heretics, who pervert the Scriptures or openly contradict the fundamentals of the Faith, are the more easily recognized: against them the apostle warns in 1 John 2:18, 26; 3:7; 4:1-3. But numerous formalists and hypocrites shelter behind an empty profession, and are not so readily identified, for *they hold* the letter of the truth, acknowledging it with their lips, though they walk not therein, nor are their lives transformed by it. Concerning these, John has much to say. Right from the beginning, he distinguishes sharply between the real Christian and the nominal one (1Jo 1:6-7), and continues doing so (1Jo 2:3-5, etc.).

The several *aims* of the apostle are easily perceived: in general, it was to make a practical application of his Gospel, as appears from a comparison of 1 John 5:13, with John 20:31; and as 1 John 2:7 confirms. John sought that his beloved children should have just views of their divine Saviour, an intelligent faith in Him, and that they might adorn their profession by a holy and consistent walk—1 John 2:1. It is evident from his "I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it" (1Jo 2:21) that he was not addressing himself to those who were uninstructed, but rather to those who were well indoctrinated—compare also verses 20 and 27. Thus, his purpose was not so much to inform as to edify, not to tell them something new, but to confirm them in what they had already heard. This was the more necessary because some of their original number had apostatized (verse 19) and false teachers were seeking to corrupt them: let not their faith be shaken by the former, and let them heed his warnings, and then they would not be drawn away by the wiles of the latter.

A careful reading of the epistle makes it plain that another important end which the apostle had before him was to confute those who taught that because salvation is by grace, God's people are not "under the law" or required to keep the divine commandments. Antinomianism had raised its hideous head even in his day, and it devolved upon John to counteract the same. This it is which explains his frequent reference to the "commandments" (1Jo 2:4, etc.), which, in its singular or plural form, occurs no less than thirteen times in this epistle. As students of ecclesiastical history are aware, those known as "The Libertines" had attained unto considerable prominence by the end of the first century. Their very name is sufficient to indicate their character. Peter, in his second epistle, described their forerunners as "false prophets" who, "while they promise them [their dupes] liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption" (2Pe 2:1, 19); and Jude had spoken of them as "ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness," thereby "denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude :4). John denounces them as "antichrists" (1Jo 2:18).

There is little indication that John wrote according to a preconceived and definite plan, yet his thoughts are orderly. While the epistle is far from being a systematic doctrinal treatise, nevertheless, for its understanding, a close acquaintance with the distinctively doctrinal epistles preceding it is requisite. One expositor thereon said, "I am deeply convinced, after years of thought about it, that it can be studied aright exegetically only when it is studied theologically...no one is competent to deal in detail with this wonderful book who is not familiar with the evangelical system as a whole, and able therefore to appreciate the bearing of John's line of thought in connection with it"—Robert S. Candlish (1806-1873), 1866. That remark is, in our judgment, borne out by the *position* his epistle occupies in the Sacred Canon. Yet another and higher qualification is needed, namely, that spiritual-mindedness, which is the fruit of mature Christian

experience. But the most difficult part of the expositor's task here is to trace the connection of the apostle's successive lines of thought. Our main endeavour will be to bring out the general scope and tenor of his teaching as simply as we can.

"The true knowledge of Christ is the one only key whereby all the treasures contained in this epistle can be opened, for it contains a spiritual treatise on communion with Christ, and with the Father in Him, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us. We can have no communion with the Three in JEHOVAH, but as we have a distinct scriptural knowledge of the revelation given concerning Them in the sacred record. No man can call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Spirit. This epistle...sets forth the real fellowship which the apostles and saints in that age had with the Holy Trinity, and what all saints in all succeeding ages are to expect and enjoy, in their measure and degree, until the same is consummated with the Eternal Three in the state of everlasting glory. As this epistle begins with this most sublime subject, so it is pursued throughout the whole of it: in showing the fruits and effects which the true knowledge of and communion with the Lord produce in the minds, lives, and conversations of such as know Him, and have free and frequent access to Him"—Samuel E. Pierce (1746–1829), 1817.

What has just been quoted gives much the best summary and coincides most closely with our own concept of anything we have seen on the subject. It intimates that its grand theme is *fellowship* with God in and through Christ. Where that is enjoyed by individual saints, it necessarily leads to fellowship one with another. As usual, the key is hung upon the door, for in 1 John 1:3, the apostle states that the design before him is: "That ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." This fellowship is the quintessence of blessedness, but only the regenerate enter into it. It is "in the light," with the Holy One, and therefore impossible for those who are dead in trespasses and sins (verses 5-7). Yet the Christian's infirmities, be they what they may, are not to be considered as hindrances to his communion with the Lord, since full provision has been made for him in the all-sufficient antidote of Christ's blood (1Jo 1:7) and advocacy (1Jo 2:1). Later, John goes on to show that this fellowship is in righteousness and in love; but we will not further anticipate.

Among the many peculiarities of style which mark John in this epistle, we may mention that, *negatively*, there is almost an entire absence of that logical reasoning that is so prominent in Paul's epistles—which is just what might be expected from a simple fisherman in contradistinction from a scholar. There is no "according as" or "for this cause." "Wherefore" occurs but once (1Jo 3:12); and there, it is a question, "Why?" "Therefore" is found in 1 John 2:24; 3:1, and 4:5; yet in neither instance, as a conclusion drawn from a preceding train of thought. Instead of the argumentative method, John is all for direct and positive assertions. Paul lays down a premise as a foundation on which he builds what follows; John simply affirms the truth in simple form. And so it is in connection with the ministry of the Word. Some of God's servants deal with their subjects principally in a doctrinal way; others, in a solemn method of pointed averment; yet both are used by the Spirit of God, and are best suited to different types of Christians. The Lord is pleased to bestow a variety of gifts on His servants for the good of His people at large.

John indeed has a style all his own, differing noticeably from all other New Testament writers. This epistle contains no salutation, yet it breathes a spirit of warmth unto those addressed. No reference is made to either of the ordinances. No prayer is recorded therein, though definite encouragement and instruction are given to praying souls. There are no predictions in it, no delineations of the future as in the epistles of all his fellow apostles. Instead of describing the conditions which should characterize "the last days," he declares "it is the last time" (1Jo 2:18). Instead of foretelling the appearing of a future Antichrist, John refers to the antichrists who were then upon the stage (1Jo 2:18 and 4:3).

Turning to the *positive* side, one who attentively reads through the epistle at a sitting will at once be struck by the fact that it possesses and combines certain definite qualities, which, at first sight, seem quite opposed to each other. Its style of expression is simple and unadorned. It abounds in words of one syllable and contains few that a child would have difficulty in pronouncing. Its sense is clear and patent. Nevertheless, there is no lack of dignity in its language, and its matter is elevated and sublime. Its tone warms our hearts, yet the truth it expresses causes us to stand in awe. Therein profoundest mysteries are touched upon and depths are sounded which no finite mind can fathom; still, its speech is plain, and the terms used are non-technical. "He writes at once with the most commanding authority and most loving tenderness; with the profoundest wisdom and the most touching simplicity; the most searching knowledge of the heart, its difficulties and facilities, and the most elevating and bracing courage and confidence; the gentlest affection,

and the most pitiless and sternest condemnation of willful departure from the truth in practice or opinion"—Charles J. Ellicott (1819–1905).

Much is said therein about *love*, and nowhere is a spirit of charity more admirably and forcibly inculcated. But there are also a bold outspokenness and sternness which make us shrink. The love enjoined is far from being a stickly sentiment or effeminate weakness, being a holy grace, which—instead of preventing faithful rebuke and severe denunciation—promotes them. In such verses as 1 John 1:6; 2:22; 3:8, 10, 15; 4:20; 5:10, we hear the voice of “the sons of thunder” (Mar 3:17), vehement against every insult to the majesty of the Lord. It is ostensibly written to promote assurance in the saints (1Jo 5:13), yet nowhere else in the Word are we so often called upon to close self-examination and unsparing testing of ourselves. This epistle might well be termed a touchstone by which we may discern between the genuine gold and the counterfeit. It frequently utters the language of confidence, yet as often uses that which is discriminating. As Charles H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) well said, “the apostle mingles caution with caress, and qualifies the most soothing consolations with such stern warning, that in well-nigh every sentence, he constrains us to deep searching of heart.”

In our opening paragraph, we mentioned the *abstract* (and absolute) character of many of John’s statements. It is most important that the reader should understand this and bear it in mind: failure to do so will lead to a serious misapprehension of many verses. In 1 John 1:3, he says, “truly our fellowship *is* with the Father”—not “ought to be”: he speaks characteristically, taking no notice of the things which hinder it. To the “young men” he says, “Ye have overcome the wicked one” (1Jo 2:13–14), and making no mention of their failures. “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light” (verse 10)—nothing is said about the degree of love; it is simply contrasted with “hateth” (verse 11). “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world” (1Jo 5:4)—no account is there taken of the presence of the flesh with its unbelief and self-will. John abounds in brief factual statements. “Ye know all things...ye need not that any man teach you” (1Jo 2:20, 27) is left unqualified. To John, there are only two postures of heart: for or against—the points of transition from the one to the other are ignored. Contrasts are put in their sharpest form: light and darkness—no intermediate twilight; life and death—nothing which answers to mere existence.

Throughout the epistle, there rings loudly the note of *certainty*. The two Greek words used for “know” occur no less than thirty-six times in its five chapters, examples of which are: “We know that we have passed from death unto life...And hereby we know that we are of the truth” (1Jo 3:14, 19). “Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us...And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us” (1Jo 4:13, 16). The epistle closes with another threefold “we know” (1Jo 5:18–20). Again and again, the apostle describes simple, but definite, marks by which the child of God may be identified, and distinguish himself from self-deceivers and hypocrites. Thus, it was not addressed to those who resided in “Doubting Castle,”<sup>5</sup> and any who dwell in its dismal dungeons should find here that which, by the divine blessing, will deliver him therefrom. Nor was it only a small and particularly favoured class which shared the apostle’s own assurance, or only mature Christians, as his “I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father” (1Jo 2:13) shows.

That his epistle is an *intensely practical* one is evinced in many ways. For example, not once is the word “knowledge” found in the form of a noun, but always as a verb. The same is true of *faith*: he almost invariably uses the verbal form. With John, doctrine is not mere dogma, but faith in action. Truth is not merely a theory, but an energy, which lives and moves in the new life. There is scarcely any strictly “doctrinal” teaching, and very few direct exhortations. It is mainly the vital and experiential side of things; and hence, it is that the line of demarcation and separation is so sharply and often drawn between genuine and graceless professors—not to discourage believers, but to inform and safeguard them against being deceived and imposed upon. John did far more than deal with forms of error which were local and ephemeral, refuting those of his day in a manner whereby he enunciated principles of universal importance and of almost illimitable application—equally suited to the exposure of error in every age.

It is remarkable how many different topics are introduced into this brief letter, so that we are almost justified in saying with J. Morgan, “The whole realm of evangelical truth is traversed by the apostle.” Blessed it is to see how *the balance of truth* is preserved therein. No one would regard it as a theological treatise, yet most of the fundamentals of our faith are briefly set forth therein. The divine incarnation (1Jo

<sup>5</sup> **Doubting Castle**—a reference from John Bunyan’s famous book, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, available to order from Chapel Library.



1:1-3), the nature of God (1Jo 1:5; 4:8), the atonement and advocacy of Christ (1Jo 2:1-2), the person and work of the Holy Spirit (1Jo 3:24), regeneration (1Jo 2:29), and the Trinity (1Jo 5:7). The epistle is far from being an appeal to emotionalism, yet it bids believers, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon [them]" (1Jo 3:1), and while affording no encouragement to rest upon feelings (as its repeated dogmatic "we know" shows), yet it is written that our "joy may be full" (1Jo 1:4). While it is not a discourse on humanitarianism, it stresses practical altruism (1Jo 3:17-18). Though not a discussion of eschatology, yet the return of Christ (1Jo 2:28) and "the day of judgment" (1Jo 4:17) are mentioned. Thus this epistle supplies an admirable corrective to one-sided views of the Christian life.



## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

### 53. *His Failure, Part 1*

In our last article (upon the early verses of Joshua 9), we saw how that Israel's supernatural crossing of the Jordan and the victories which the LORD gave them at Jericho and Ai had struck terror into the hearts of the Gibeonites. Consequently, those Canaanites who resided in that part of the land, which Israel must very soon reach, determined—by means of a piece of trickery—to outwit the hosts of God, and thereby preserve their own lives. They decided to pose as those who dwelt in “a far country” (Jos 9:6)—that is, beyond the bounds of Canaan itself—and who wished to enter into a league of peace with the Hebrews. Accordingly, they attired themselves in tattered garments and came to Israel's camp at Gilgal. They told a plausible tale, saying that the fame of JEHOVAH had reached their ears—thereby intimating their desire to come under His protection and become proselytes to His religion. They apologized for their sorry appearance, explaining that it was due to the long and fatiguing journey they had come. It was a subtle appeal to Israel's pride that tidings of the wonder-working power of their God had gone so far abroad that even these remote strangers were acquainted with the same, and therefore sought union with His favoured people. In reality, it was a tempting of Israel to act at direct variance with an injunction from JEHOVAH, which expressly forbade their doing any such thing.

These Gibeonites belonged to the tribe of the Hivites (Jos 9:7), and the renowned Hebraist, John Gill (1697-1771), tells us that “The name Hivites signifies *serpents*”! They certainly acted here in complete accord therewith, conducting themselves “wilily” (verse 4), telling downright lies, and succeeding in thoroughly deceiving Joshua and his princes. Yet Israel ought not to have been imposed upon by them. Even from a natural standpoint, their conduct was excuseless. Only recently they had themselves resorted to a subtle strategy in the taking of Ai; and therefore, it now behoved them to be doubly on the alert, lest they be paid back in their own coin. The men of Israel were indeed suspicious, for they said, “Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you?” (verse 7). Evidently they remembered those words, “And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them” (Deu 7:2). Nor was Joshua himself satisfied with the first account they gave of themselves, as his “Who are ye? and from whence come ye?” (Jos 9:8) evidenced. Yet the suspicions of both the one and the other were soon lulled to sleep.

“And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God” (Jos 9:9). It is to be noted that though Joshua had specifically asked them, “Who are ye? and from whence come ye?” in their reply, they neither declared their nationality, nor named the place of their birth. Thus, typically considered, their credentials were unsatisfactory at the *vital* point, for it is the spiritual birth of those applying for fellowship that the churches need to inquire most closely into. “For we have heard...and all that he did in Egypt...And all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan” (verse 10), intimating that a deep impression had been made upon them thereby. “Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We are your servants: therefore now make ye a league with us” (verse 11). Thus they pretended that their senate had been formally convened and had unanimously appointed their ambassadors to enter into this covenant with Israel—i.e. they were vouched for by reliable authorities, so that Joshua need have no fear of being imposed upon by charlatans.

If the tale told by these Gibeonites was really true, and they *had* come from “a very far country” (Jos 9:9), then the extreme measures which JEHOVAH had commanded His people to take with the inhabitants of the land (Deu 7:1-2) would not have to be executed against *them*. This is clear from Deuteronomy 20:15-17, where a very definite distinction was drawn between the two cases: “Thus shalt thou do [offer ‘peace’ unto it] (verses 10-11)] unto all the cities which are *very far off* from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations. But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites,” etc. Yet these Gibeonites were *not* the inhabitants of another country, but belonged to the tribe of the Hivites (Jos 9:7), and as Genesis 10:15, 17, makes known, “the Hivite” was an immediate descendant of the accursed Canaan (Gen 9:25). “This our bread we took hot for our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy: And these

bottles of wine, which we filled, were new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey" (Jos 9:12-13).

Their repeated "behold" or "see" was an appeal to Israel's *senses*. The present condition of the food and clothing of these Gibeonites was appealed to in corroboration of the account which they had given of themselves. But there was no more reason why Israel should be deceived through their eyes than their ears. Had they walked by faith instead of sight, it would have been impossible. For *faith* always has to do with God and is regulated by His Word. Faith is the expression of a spirit of dependence upon Him, and that, in turn, issues from the realization of our own insufficiency. It was doubly inexcusable that Israel were imposed upon *here*, for they were in "the camp at Gilgal" (Jos 9:6), where the tabernacle of the priesthood resided, and therefore, the place where the mind of the LORD could be obtained if they sought Him in the way of His appointment. That way had been plainly made known unto Joshua, for through Moses, God gave orders to him. "And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation" (Num 27:21). It was the failure of Israel, and especially of Joshua on this occasion, to avail themselves of God's gracious provision that rendered their conduct so blameable.

In like manner, there is no excuse for a Christian's being deceived by appearances, or left in ignorance concerning God's will as to his path of duty. The LORD has made ample provision for his instruction. It is our holy privilege to go unto the antitypical Eleazar and ask counsel of Him; and the great High Priest of the spiritual Israel will—through the Urim and Thummim, which signify "lights and perfections" (Deu 33:8; Eze 2:63; Neh 7:65) of His Word—lead us in a plain path. "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him" are His requirements; and if we meet them—by His grace, which He is ever ready to give unto those who humbly seek it (Jam 4:6)—then His sure promise is, "and he *shall* direct thy paths" (Pro 3:5-6). As another has aptly expressed it, "This is the polar-star of a child of God—faith in his Father's providences, promises, and grace. Let the eye look upward, and all will be light (Mat 6:22—compare Psa 32:8; 34:5). To "trust in the LORD with all [our] heart" is to make Him our entire and exclusive confidence. To "lean not unto [our] own understanding" is to renounce our own wit and wisdom and refuse to rely upon the proud dictates of reason. To "acknowledge" God "in all [our] ways" (Pro 3:6) is to own His proprietorship and supremacy, to ask counsel of Him, to seek His glory, and to be conformed unto His will. Comply with those conditions and divine guidance is guaranteed—His Spirit will bring to our mind the verse which is exactly suited to our case, and cause us to be regulated by the same.

But alas, instead of trusting in the Lord with all our hearts, we are prone to put our confidence in anyone or anything else. How lamentably we fail in looking alone unto God in each fresh trial and emergency, and counting upon His supplying our every need. It is just because we are so slow in "casting all [our] care upon him" (1Pe 5:7), and so reluctant to draw strength from Him day by day, and hour by hour, that we stand in need of this very exhortation. Equally so with the one which immediately follows. The understanding has indeed been given us by God, and it is our duty not only to exercise the same, but diligently to cultivate it. Nor will anything else so sharpen and refine it as will the study of and meditation upon the Scriptures. Nevertheless, it must not be *dependent upon*, for the mind has been degraded by the Fall and darkened by indwelling sin, and therefore is, at best, an unsafe guide. Even in a regenerated man, a prophet of God, it proved a mistaken counselor (2Sa 7:2-5). As a fallen creature, it is still the tendency of a believer to lean unto his own understanding—to his foolish notions and false fancies; to make a god of reason. Just in proportion as we yield to that tendency are we remiss in acknowledging God in all our ways. If we be regulated by natural prudence, much trouble shall we make for ourselves, for God will justly suffer us to reap the consequences of our folly. It was at these very points Israel failed in the incident we are now considering.

"And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD" (Jos 9:14). Here was the crux of the whole matter. Israel failed sadly: failed to give the LORD His proper place; failed to avail themselves of His gracious provision to make known His will via the high priest. And the cause of their failure is here plainly revealed, for the two halves of this verse are inseparably connected. By "the men took of their victuals," we are not to understand that they sampled the same by eating thereof, for obviously there was no need to do that with *mouldy* bread. No, it signifies that they took it into their hands for a closer inspection in order to confirm what the Gibeonites had told them. In other words, they walked by

sight and relied upon the testimony of their senses. They acted naturally and not spiritually. Instead of seeking guidance from the LORD through His servant, as they were in duty bound to do by His Word, they confided in their own wisdom, relied upon their own judgment, and thus, a looking unto God was precluded. They “asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD” (verse 14): had they done so, there had been no need for them to test the food of these Gibeonites! Had they done so, they had not been deceived by them! The whole blame rested upon themselves.

This was Israel’s *second* failure after their entrance into Canaan, and in neither of them was Joshua guiltless. The previous one occurred in connection with their first assault on Ai. Those who had reconnoitred the place had said unto Joshua, “Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few” (Jos 7:3). Flushed by their victory at Jericho, possessed by a spirit of self-confidence, they too much lost sight of the fact that the capture of Jericho was due not to the brilliance of their strategy or the valour of their arms, but to the miracle-working power of JEHOVAH. They now deemed themselves to be invincible and were assured that the taking of the remainder of Canaan would be a simple task. They, therefore, felt that a single battalion of *their* soldiers would be sufficient to capture that town—even though there were “twelve thousand” men in it (Jos 8:25). And their leader, instead of seeking counsel from the LORD, foolishly adopted their suggestion. As may well be anticipated, God blew upon their carnal policy and suffered their proud hearts to be humiliated. They were put to shame before their enemies, fled in panic, and the whole congregation of Israel was thoroughly dismayed (Jos 7:4-6).

We would naturally think that if there were another failure on the part of Joshua and Israel, it would be quite dissimilar from the former one, arising from a different cause. Surely, after having had their eyes opened to see the reason for their first defeat, they would now be doubly on their guard against a repetition of the same. Alas, human nature is slow to learn and profit from its failures. Even the father of the faithful *repeated* his initial fault, for though he did wrong, in going down into Egypt to sojourn there, and committed a yet worse offence in denying his relationship to Sarah; and though he was there put to shame by Pharaoh for his deception (Gen 12:10-20), yet he was guilty of the selfsame thing when he went and sojourned in Gerar (Gen 20:1-2)! The same was true of poor Peter: as it was a spirit of cowardice which led to his denial of Christ, so he yielded to the same weakness at Antioch, separating from the Gentile believers when certain ones came from Jerusalem, “*fearing* them which were of the circumcision” (Gal 2:12). In each case, it was “the fear of man” that ensnared him (Pro 29:25); and as that verse clearly intimates, such ensnaring is the consequence of our not “trusting in the LORD” (Psa 112:7; Psa 118:8-9; etc.). Thus it was, too, in the incident we are now pondering: Joshua relapsed into his former fault.

In the very next *test* presented to Israel and their leader, they failed in the same way as they did in connection with Ai. Instead of consulting the LORD, they used their “common sense.” As the result, Israel and Joshua too were deceived by the plausible story told by the Gibeonites, and misled by their appearance and the condition of their victuals. And this too has been recorded for *our* instruction: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning” (Rom 15:4). Yet it is not the mere reading of them that is required: if we are really to profit therefrom, we must examine each incident closely, pondering each detail carefully, and taking it home unto ourselves. The failures of eminent saints have not been chronicled either to encourage slackness on our part or to discourage us, but rather to illustrate and demonstrate that though “the spirit indeed is willing, [yet] the flesh is weak,” and especially to give point to that exhortation, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1Co 10:12). If, after some painful disillusionment, we say, “I believe I have learned my lesson this time,” it is a sure sign we have *not* done so if we now proudly assure ourselves, “I shall not be deceived again in *that* way.”

That which supplies such solemn warning to us in the cases alluded to above is that in each instance, the failure was not committed by a young and inexperienced disciple, but was the lapse of a mature saint: for Abraham, Peter, and Joshua had long walked with God. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear—heed! But, more particularly, that which is now engaging our attention is to be viewed in the light of the book in which it is found and the special theme which is developed therein. As we have so often stated, the book of Joshua sets forth in both a typical and practical manner the spiritual warfare of the saints, and their present entrance into and enjoyment of their spiritual heritage. And in it, the Holy Spirit has described not only Israel’s victories, but their defeats also; and a prayerful study of the same makes known to us both the secrets of success and the causes of failure in “fight[ing] the good fight of faith” (1Ti 6:12). It is only as we keep these facts steadily in mind as we pass from chapter to chapter, and from one episode to another, and

faithfully make a personal application of the same unto our own hearts and lives, that we shall really be advantaged by the same. Let us then observe carefully the *nature* of Joshua's failure on this occasion.

It was more a negative than a positive one. In nowise was it an act of deliberate disobedience or defiant pitting of his own will against the LORD's. Where *those* elements exist, the offence is very much graver, and the resulting chastisement from God will be much sorer. What Joshua did here was not by studied premeditation, but was more of a case of being "overtaken in a fault" (Gal 6:1). That in nowise excused him, yet we must not regard him as being guilty of something worse than what he actually did. Both in Joshua 7:3-4, and here (Jos 9:14-15), he acted too impulsively and precipitately. Instead of waiting upon the LORD and seeking direction from Him, in each instance, he acted "on the spur of the moment," and on the ground of mere nature, walking by sight instead of by faith (2Co 5:7). What point this gives to the divine injunction, "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa 28:16)! If we act in too big a hurry to pray over anything and work in the energy of the flesh, we displease the Lord, hinder His cause, and bring trouble upon ourselves. The principal lesson taught us in this incident is that, in order to "fight the good fight of faith" (2Co 5:7) successfully, we must maintain the place of dependence upon God and be constantly seeking wisdom from above.

"And asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD" (Jos 9:14), and therefore, acted in independence of Him—possibly because he regarded this as too trivial a matter to take unto God. But there also we must not lean unto our own understanding: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phi 4:6)—big as well as little; the least matters, as well as the greatest. What a holy privilege! But "prayer and supplication" is very much more than perfunctorily offering up a petition unto heaven: it is a definite waiting upon God, a diligent seeking from Him. It involved time and trouble for Joshua to ask counsel of the LORD, for it required him to go unto the high priest and inquire His mind through him. As we read in Judges 20:27-28, "And the children of Israel enquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand"—and compare 1 Samuel 23:9, 12. Observe how frequently the "man after [God's] own heart" (1Sa 13:14) inquired of Him: 1 Samuel 22:10; 23:2, 4; 30:8; 2Sa 2:1; 5:19, 23. Beautiful too is the picture set forth in Ezra 8:21.

"And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them" (Jos 9:15). This is not recorded to Joshua's honour, but it manifests the inflexible fidelity of the divine historian. Scripture is impartial in relating the blemishes of its most famous characters. Joshua ought to have said to these Gibeonites what a loyal servant of God said to the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin: "Ye have nothing to do with us" (Ezr 4:3). In order to maintain a testimony unto the holiness of God, His people are required to walk in separation from the world; but here we behold Joshua entering into an alliance with those who were under the divine curse. That is the grand aim of Satan: to destroy the witness of the saints as those who are called to walk apart from the ungodly. Alas, that they so often permit him to succeed! What communion has light with darkness? What concord is there between a people in covenant relation with the Holy One and those who are idolaters? None whatever. Therefore let the former be much on their guard at this point, conduct themselves accordingly, strenuously resist every temptation from Satan to compromise. Finally, let us remember that the Christian is never to "make peace" with his inward enemies, but must ceaselessly fight against them.



## DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

### 2. *Its Extent, Part 2*

Since these articles are being read carefully by so many preachers and theological students, we desire to give all the help which is in our power to supply, and therefore make them thoroughly complete, covering each aspect of the subject. They form the complement to those which appeared under the sixth division of our recent series on "The Doctrine of Revelation" (now out of print), wherein we presented no less than thirty independent lines of evidence to demonstrate that the Bible is a revelation from God. Following thereon we dealt, first, with the *nature* of inspiration, and showed it was a supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit, whereby He communicated the mind and will of God through human media, yet in such a way that all error on their part was precluded; and emphasized the fact that divine Inspiration had to do with what is written, and not with the writers themselves. Second, we dealt with the *scope* of such inspiration, and evidenced that it extended to the very words employed, that it reached to every jot and tittle of Holy Writ.

The position we took—and which we are thoroughly convinced the Word of God *requires* us to take—was well expressed by the late Bishop J.C. Ryle (1816-1900): "The view which I maintain is that every book, and chapter, and verse, and syllable of the Bible was originally given by inspiration of God...I believe the narratives and statements of Genesis and the catalogues in Chronicles were just as truly written by inspiration as the Acts of the Apostles. I believe Ezra's account of the nine and twenty kings and St. Paul's message about the cloak and parchments were as much written under divine inspiration as the twelfth of Exodus, the seventeenth of John, or the eighth of Romans. I do not say, be it remembered, that those parts of the Bible are of equal importance to our souls. Nothing of the kind! But I do say that they were all equally given by inspiration" (*Old Paths*). As we showed in our last, such was the attitude of Christ and His apostles to the Scriptures: they uniformly regarded and used each part of the Old Testament as being of divine authority and authorship, often basing an argument or drawing a proof from single expressions employed therein.

Such expressions as "The mouth of the LORD hath spoken it" (Isa 1:20) and "*Thy words* were found, and I did eat them" (Jer 15:16) would be really meaningless if the prophets had been free to select their own language. True, God has given us His Word through human instruments, yet they were not left free to write as they pleased, but rather were they His notaries, who transmitted to us the divine oracles. Though men were the organs of the Holy Spirit, *He* is the sole responsible Author of the Scriptures. Unless we had the very words of God, we could never be sure we had His exact thoughts. Moreover, as François Samuel Robert Louis Gaussen (1790-1863) pointed out, "There exists so necessary a dependence between thoughts and words, that it is impossible to conceive a complete inspiration of the former, without a full inspiration of the latter." Those who affirm that the concepts of Scripture are divinely inspired—but deny that its very words are so—are utterly illogical and inconsistent, for we are only able to *think* through the medium of language, and therefore, an inspiration which concerns the former *must* concern the latter also.

In our recent reading (upon a different subject), we came across a striking demonstration of the verbal inspiration of the Bible as exemplified by its minute accuracy. The writer compared and contrasted Micah 5:2, and Zechariah 9:9, and pointed out that the difference between "*out of thee* [Bethlehem] shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel" and "Behold, thy King cometh *unto thee*" is, in the Hebrew, the difference of just one letter! Had Micah used the one which Zechariah employed, he had been wrong; or had Zechariah used the same letter as Micah, he had erred. In colloquial language, we ask, "Where do you come from?"—meaning, Where were you born? Micah names the place of our Saviour's nativity; Zechariah, that of His temporary "triumph." Both were correct, as the New Testament shows. Many pages might be written supplying illustrations of the superhuman precision and accuracy with which terms are consistently used throughout the Scriptures, and where slight shades of distinction are uniformly preserved from Genesis to Revelation; thereby making it unmistakably evident that one superintending Mind directed each writer in the selection of his very words.

In our articles upon evidences of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, we appealed unto the most significant fact of the *concordance* as a proof of their uniqueness, for there is nothing in the least resem-

bling it in connection with the writings of human authors—an exhaustive compilation of all the words they used, and the multitudinous occurrences of the same. The same applies with equal force to *verbal* inspiration, for a painstaking use of the concordance will quickly discover innumerable examples thereof. During the past forty years, we have personally tested literally hundreds of words and have found each one to be used with divine discrimination and precision. For example, the divine titles “God” and “Lord” are never employed haphazardly, but always with uniform significance and selection. The same is true of “soul” and “spirit,” “Jacob” and “Israel,” “Satan” and “the devil”: each has its own distinctive shade of meaning, and it is *preserved in every passage*! “Son of man” occurs over eighty times in the Gospels; and thus, we should naturally expect to find His apostles referring to Him under that title in the epistles—yet they never once do so! Why? We are not expressly informed, but the searcher will soon discover the answer. That was His title during the days of His humiliation (Mat 8:20), and would therefore have been quite incongruous after His exaltation.

Said our Lord to His disciples, “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Mat 10:19-20). Let those who reject the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and disparagingly term it “mechanical” weigh well that passage and ask themselves the question, Since it pleased God so thoroughly to furnish His servant when only appearing before local magistrates, why should it be deemed incredible that He should perform a similar miracle of grace when employing men to write for the benefit of mankind in all future ages? Christ further promised His apostles that when they should be healed before kings and rulers for His name’s sake, “I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist” (Luk 21:15)—not only the inward faculty of thought, but the outward power of utterance too. If the Old Testament prophets spoke only as they were “moved by the Holy Ghost” (2Pe 1:21), they no more selected their own language than did the apostles when appearing before their judges.

While we must insist that all Scripture is God-breathed, yet that fact does not oblige us to draw the conclusion that the channels He used were mere ciphers in its communication. Though the Holy Spirit moved them to write precisely as they did, He neither prevented nor wholly set aside the use of their natural faculties. That is evident from the obvious variety of styles which is seen in the different books they penned—styles which can sometimes be clearly identified by the education and spiritual maturity of their writers. Nevertheless, the Spirit so operated in and through their faculties that every sentence which they wrote was an exact transmission of His mind. A very beautiful expression is used in the margin of Judges 6:34, which we believe casts light on the point now before us, namely, “The Spirit of the LORD clothed [Himself] with Gideon.” It must also be borne in mind that, though it pleased God that neither the mental calibers, nor the individual characters of the men He used should be hidden, yet both their natural endowments and spiritual capacities were given to them by Himself—given to serve this very end: that each instrument was fitted by Him and made suitable for the task in view. As the LORD used those whom He had specially qualified to make the garments of Israel’s high priest (Exo 28:3), and those whom He filled with wisdom and understanding to fashion the holy vessels of the tabernacle (Exo 35:30-35), so He equipped Paul to be a fit instrument to write the epistle to the Romans, and John to compose epistles on brotherly love.

We will now consider the principal objections brought against what we have been advancing. Not that it is our design to enter the lists against those who deny the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, but rather to help those who believe therein, yet may have been disturbed by these attacks of the enemy. We will examine first that which is deemed the most decisive one, namely, the evident marks which many books of Scripture bear of the personalities of their scribes. Nor is that to be denied, for if a dozen verses were read aloud from Isaiah or Jeremiah, or from a Pauline or Johannine epistle, to one familiar with the Bible, he would have no difficulty in identifying the penman. Certain peculiarities of style and apparent fondness for particular expressions distinguish one writer from another. But what of that? Ten men might transcribe correctly the twenty-third Psalm, and though their productions tallied, word for word, yet there would be a marked difference in chirography. “He who could use their *hands* to write, could first inform their *minds* so as to employ them altogether in the authorship of Scripture”—Samuel P. Tregelles (1813-1875).

If God is able to work in His children “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13) without reducing them to mere robots, could He not also fully control and direct the penmen of Scripture without setting aside their personalities? “There, all the words are man’s; as there, too, all the words are God’s. In a

certain sense, the epistle to the Romans is altogether a letter of Paul's; and in a still higher sense, the epistle to the Romans is altogether a letter of God"—F. Gaussen. Instead of stumbling us, that very feature should draw forth our admiration, since it serves to make more evident the *miracle* of inspiration. There is indeed a mystery here, and one which finite reason cannot fully fathom; yet the elements entering into it are patent. The natural faculties of the human instruments were not suspended, nor their personalities denied free play, yet they only acted as they were acted upon (like the different strings of a harp giving forth their distinctive tones as the musician's fingers run over them)—"moved by the Holy Ghost" (2Pe 1:21). Such then is the Word of Truth: it is God speaking in men, God speaking through men, God speaking to men in their own language.

Against the full inspiration of the Bible, it is demurred that God Himself informed the three disputants of Job that "ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath" (Job 42:7), yet their several speeches are recorded at length in that book! But that is simply to confuse and confound things which are quite distinct and different. As F. Gaussen succinctly expressed it, "the Holy Spirit is not always the Author of what He reports, but He is always the Historian"! Inspiration relates only to what is written, guaranteeing its absolute accuracy and integrity, but it in nowise vouches for the veracity of each human utterance that is chronicled. The sacred writers were so controlled by God as to transmit to us an inerrant registration of what different ones actually said, yet without endorsing the same. Thus we have as certain a record in Isaiah 36 of the blatant language used by Rabshaketh, as we have of the pious breathings of Mary and Zacharias in Luke 1. But for the pen of inspiration, we could know nothing of either the lies uttered by Satan in Eden or the sublime songs sung by the saints in heaven.

Again, the fallibility of the penmen is appealed to as an argument against the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. Thus, we are reminded that when Paul was admonished for reviling Ananias, he acknowledged, "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest" (Act 23:4-5), and that in Galatians 2:11, he informs us that "when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." But this objection is so puerile that, unless it had been urged by some who wanted to discredit the Word of God, it would be too trifling for us to notice. Here again there is a confounding of things which are totally different, namely their spiritual enlightenment and conduct as *Christians*, and their inspiration as God's penmen. Inspiration was not a gift entrusted *to* them, but a supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit *upon* them on certain occasions only. But let it be duly noted that in neither of the above instances was any error of doctrine involved. Paul at once acknowledged he had acted contrary to what Scripture required (Act 23:5), while Peter "*walked not* uprightly according to the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:14). We must then distinguish sharply between Peter as a man imperfectly sanctified, and Peter as the perfectly controlled scribe of the Spirit.

Appeal is made to 1 Corinthians, where, in some passages, it is alleged that the apostle himself was uncertain whether or not he was moved by the Holy Spirit; and in others, actually disclaimed divine inspiration for what he wrote. Many regard this one as the most formidable of the objections, and, since young preachers are likely to have difficulty with it, we propose to give these passages a close examination. But before doing so, let us remind our readers that the penman of 1 Corinthians had not only declared elsewhere that the Spirit expressly spoke through him (1Ti 4:1), and that it was *his* pen which asserted, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2Ti 3:16), but that in this very epistle, he declared, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (1Co 2:13), and that he was addressing them "in the name of [the] Lord" (1Co 5:4). Even from the human side of things, it is inconceivable that such a writer as this apostle would flatly contradict himself in the same letter; and therefore, the verses appealed to by his detractors must bear a very different meaning from what they imagine.

"But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment" (1Co 7:6): from which it has been erroneously concluded that the apostle was merely expressing his own ideas, and not what God required him to write. But such an inference is obviously untenable, for if what he now stated was contrary to the mind of the Spirit, he had not been allowed to record it. In this chapter, the apostle was replying to certain questions sent him by the Corinthian saints, who were exercised over the matter of marriage, and particularly, whether it was right for a Christian to maintain that relationship if his partner was an unconverted heathen. The question he first answered was, Should a young Christian remain single or marry? The apostle's line of thought will be more apparent if we place 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 in parentheses, for it is clear that verses 7-9 are a continuation of verse 2; and thus, the "this" of verse 6 refers to what had been said in verse



2—confirmed by the opening “For” of verse 7. Thus, the contrast between “permission and commandment” in verse 6 is not between Paul’s writing as a private individual and as an inspired apostle, but rather, that marriage is a thing allowable, yet *not ordered* by God—as the extreme Jewish element taught. Marriage is something entirely optional for God’s children.

“But to the rest speak I, not the Lord” (1Co 7:12). Here, the contrast is between what the Lord Jesus had taught while He was here upon earth and what His apostle was now “moved by the Holy Ghost” (2Pe 1:21) to give out. “The Lord” here is not equivalent to “God,” but to the God-man Mediator (1Co 8:6)—compare 7:22; 10:21; and 11:23; where in each instance, the reference is clearly unto *Christ*. The question of which the apostle is here legislating was whether a Christian ought to divorce a heathen partner. On the *general* subject of divorce, the Lord Jesus had given express commandment (1Co 7:10; Mat 19:6-9), but concerning this particular aspect of the subject, Christ had said nothing; therefore, His servant was now authorized by Him to give His people the necessary instructions—which he does in 1 Corinthians 7:12-17. The same explanation applies to verse 25: God had neither commanded nor forbidden virgins to marry, but caused the apostle to proffer counsel which should not be lightly dismissed. In verses 39-40, he likewise gives his advice to Christian widows: not as a binding law, but as the judgment of a spiritually minded counsellor—his “I think also that I have the Spirit of God” (1Co 7:40) had in mind his traducers.

“I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love” (2Co 8:8). The apostle was now treating of Christian benevolence, and desired that this should be as liberal as saints in other places. As there is no binding law to regulate the amount contributed, Christian giving is not to be determined by obedience to commandments, but rather, is to be a free and spontaneous expression of love and gratitude. “That which I speak, I speak it not *after* the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting” (2Co 11:17). As Charles Hodge (1797-1878) well said, “The simple purpose of inspiration was to secure infallibility in the communication of truth. It does not preclude the natural play of the intellect or the feelings.” In this instance, his enemies had compelled Paul to “boast,” and that was not what characterized the style or example of his Master. Self-praise is not the mark of a Christian, yet there are exceptional occasions when the vindication of truth or the honour of Christ requires and demands it. Such was clearly the case here, though it went against Paul’s spiritual instincts and sensibilities—verse 21 is the language of irony.

It should scarcely be necessary to point out that verbal inspiration cannot be claimed for any version—ancient or modern—but only for the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Nevertheless, those who believe the Bible to be the very Word of God—and that He has made good His promise, “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever” (1Pe 1:25)—have no doubt whatever that His providence has preserved it intact; and that His Spirit so directed in the principal translations that we possess His Word today in its substantial purity in our own mother tongue. That has been secured, under God, by the deep veneration in which His Word has been held by its custodians both Jewish and Christian, by the opposition of the conflicting sects who—despite their different beliefs and practices—one and all take the Scriptures as the foundation of their faith, and have jealously watched and checked any tampering therewith. One translation may be checked by another, and whatever minor variations exist, it will be found that there is substantial agreement between them.

The same may be said of the variations in thousands of manuscripts: they are trivial in character and comparatively few in number. None better qualified to speak thereon than Professor F. Gaussen, and he declared, “What distance separates Christians from Jews in their worship! And yet, walk into their synagogues, ask their rabbis to show you their sacred scrolls, and you will find there the same books without the difference of a letter! What distances separate in their worship the Reformed Christians from the members of the Roman sect! Yet pursue your search, and you will find in our respective schools the same Greek Testament!...Not only was the Scripture inspired on the day when God caused it to be written, but *we* possess this Word and—while holding our sacred text in one hand, and in the other, all the readings collected by the learned in seven hundred manuscripts—exclaim with thankfulness, I hold in my hand my Father’s Testament, the eternal Word of God.”

N.B.—Though *you* may have received little edification from this article, please pray that God will graciously make it a real help and blessing unto many preachers.



# THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

## 1. Introduction

The articles which this one is designed to introduce are likely to meet with a decidedly mixed reception. Some of our readers will probably be very disappointed when they see the title of this new series, deeming the subject quite unattractive and unedifying. If so, they are to be pitied, and we would fain cherish the hope that God may bless their contents unto them. Medicine is proverbially unpleasant, but there are times when all of us find it necessary and beneficial. Others will be thankful that, by divine grace, we seek to glorify God rather than please the flesh. And surely that which most glorifies God is to declare “*all* [His] counsel” (Psa 20:4), to insist on that which puts man in his proper place before Him, and to emphasize those portions and aspects of the truth which our generation is most in need of. As we shall endeavour to show, our theme is one of immense doctrinal importance and of great practical value. Since it is a subject which occupies so prominent a place in God’s Word, no apology is needed for our engaging in such a task.

It is our deep conviction that the vital question most requiring to be raised today is this: Is man a totally and thoroughly depraved creature by nature? Does he now enter the world completely ruined and helpless, spiritually blind and dead in trespasses and sins? According as is our answer to *that* question, so will be our views on many others. It is upon the basis of this dark background that the whole Bible proceeds. Any attempt to modify or abate, repudiate or tone down, the teaching of Scripture thereon is fatal. Put the question in another form: Is man now in such a condition that he cannot be saved without the special and direct intervention of the Triune God on his behalf? In other words, is there any hope for him apart from his personal election by the Father, his particular redemption by the Son, and the supernatural operations of the Spirit within him? Or, putting it in still another way: If man be a totally depraved being, can he possibly take the first step in the matter of his return unto God?

The scriptural answer to that question makes evident the utter futility of the schemes of social reformers for “the moral elevation of the masses,” the plans of politicians for the peace of the nations, and the ideologies of dreamers to usher in a “golden age” for this world. It is both pathetic and tragic to see many of our “greatest men” putting their faith in such chimeras. Divisions and discords, hatred and bloodshed, cannot be banished while human nature is what it is. But during the past century, the steady trend of a deteriorating Christendom has been to underrate the evil of sin and overrate the moral capabilities of men. Instead of proclaiming the heinousness of sin, there has been a dwelling more upon its inconveniences, and the abasing portrayal of the lost condition of man as set forth in Holy Writ has been obscured—if not obliterated—by flattering disquisitions upon human advancement. If the popular religion of “the churches”—including nine-tenths of what is termed “Evangelical Christianity”—be tested at this point, it will be found that it clashes directly with man’s fallen, ruined, and spiritually dead condition.

There is therefore a crying need today for sin to be viewed in the light of God’s Law and Gospel, so that its exceeding sinfulness may be demonstrated, and the dark depths of human depravity exposed by the teaching of Holy Writ, that we may learn what is connoted by those fearful words, “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). The grand object of the Bible is to make God known unto us, to portray man as he appears in the eyes of his Maker, and to show the relation of one to the other. It is therefore the business of His servants not only to declare the divine character and perfections, but also to delineate the original condition and apostasy of man, as well as the divine remedy for his ruin. Until we really behold the hole of the pit in which by nature we lie, we can never properly appreciate Christ’s so-great salvation. In man’s fallen condition, we have the awful disease for which divine redemption is the only cure; and our estimation and valuation of the provisions of divine grace will necessarily be modified in proportion, as we modify the need it was meant to meet.

It was truly pointed out by one of the Puritans that, “The end of the ministry of the Gospel is to bring sinners unto Christ. Their way to this end lies through the sense of their misery without Christ. The ingredients of this misery are our sinfulness, original and actual; the wrath of God, whereto sin has exposed us; and our impotency to free ourselves, either from sin or wrath. That we may therefore promote this great end, we shall endeavour, as the Lord will assist, to lead you in this way, by the sense of misery, to Him who alone can deliver from it. Now the original of our misery being the corruption of our nature, or original sin, we thought fit to begin here, and therefore, have pitched upon these words as very proper for our purpose:

‘Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me’—from the introduction of David Clarkson’s (1622-1686) sermon on Psalm 51:5 (around 1660).

This subject is indeed a most *solemn* one, and none can fitly write or preach thereon unless his own heart be deeply awed thereby. It is not something from which any man can detach himself and expatiate thereon as though *he* were not directly involved in it, still less as from a higher level looking down upon those whom he denounces. Nothing is more incongruous and ill-becoming than for a young preacher glibly to rattle off passages of Scripture which portray his own vileness by nature. Rather should they be read or quoted with the utmost gravity. “As no heart can sufficiently conceive, so no tongue can adequately express, the state of wretchedness and ruin into which sin has cast guilty, miserable man. In separating him from God, it severed him from the only source of all happiness and holiness. It has ruined him body and soul: in the one, it has filled with sickness and disease; in the other, it has defaced and destroyed the image of God in which it was created. It has made him love sin and hate God”—J. C. Philpot (1802-1869).

The doctrine of total depravity is a very *humbling* one. It is not that man leans to one side and needs propping up, nor that he is merely ignorant and requires instructing, nor that he is run down and calls for a tonic; but rather, that he is undone, lost, and spiritually dead. Consequently, he is “without strength,” thoroughly incapable of bettering himself—exposed to the wrath of God, and unable to perform a single work which can find acceptance with Him. Almost every page of the Bible bears witness to this truth. The whole scheme of redemption takes it for granted. The plan of salvation taught in the Scriptures could have no place on any other supposition. The impossibility of any man’s gaining the approbation of God by works of his own appears plainly in the case of the rich young ruler who came to Christ. Judged by human standards, he was a model of virtue and religious attainments; yet, like all others who trust in self-efforts, he was ignorant of the spirituality and strictness of God’s Law; and when Christ put him to the test, his fair expectations were blown to the winds, and “he went away sorrowful” (Mat 19:22).

It is therefore a most *unpalatable* doctrine. It cannot be otherwise, for the unregenerate love to hear of “the greatness, the dignity, the nobility of man.” The natural man thinks highly of himself and appreciates only that which is flattering. Nothing pleases him more than to listen to that which extols human nature and lauds the state of mankind, even though it be in terms which not only repudiate the teaching of God’s Word, but which are flatly contradicted by common observation and universal experience. And many there are who pander to him by their lavish praises of the excellency of civilization and the steady progress of the race. Hence, to have the lie given to the popular error of “Evolution” is highly displeasing to its deluded votaries. Nevertheless, the first office of God’s servants is to stain the pride of all that man glories in, to strip him of his stolen plumes, to lay him low in the dust before God. However repugnant such teaching be, he must faithfully discharge his duty, “whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear” (Eze 3:11).

This is no dismal dogma invented by the Church in “the dark ages,” but a *truth of Holy Writ*. Said the much-used George Whitefield (1714-1770), “I look upon it not merely as a doctrine of Scripture—the great Fountain of truth—but a very fundamental one, from which I hope God will suffer none of you to be enticed.” It is a subject to which great prominence is given in the Bible. Every part of the Scriptures has much to say upon the awful state of degradation and slavery into which the Fall has brought man. The corruption, the blindness, the hostility of all Adam’s descendants unto everything of a spiritual nature are constantly insisted upon. Not only is man’s utter ruin fully described, but his powerlessness to save himself from the same. In the declarations and denunciations of the prophets, of Christ, and His apostles, the bondage of all men unto Satan and their complete impotence to turn unto God for deliverance are repeatedly set forth—not indirectly and vaguely, but emphatically and in great detail. This is one of a hundred proofs that the Bible is no human invention, but a communication from the Thrice holy One.

It is a *sadly neglected* subject. Notwithstanding the clear and uniform teaching of Scripture thereon, man’s ruined condition and alienation from God are but feebly apprehended and seldom heard in the modern pulpit, and are given little place even in what are regarded as the centres of orthodoxy. Rather is the whole trend of present-day thought and teaching in the opposite direction, and even where the Darwinian<sup>6</sup> hypothesis has not been accepted, its pernicious influences are often seen. In consequence of the guilty silence of the modern pulpit, a generation of church-goers has arisen which is deplorably ignorant of the

<sup>6</sup> **Darwinian** – Darwinism is the theory of biological evolution developed by Charles Darwin and others, stating that all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual’s ability to compete, survive, and reproduce. The theory is opposed to Creationism as presented in the Scriptures, where God created all things (Gen 1-2).

basic truths of the Bible, so that perhaps not more than one in a thousand has even a mental knowledge of the chains of hardness and unbelief which bind the natural heart, or of the dungeon of darkness in which they lie. Instead of faithfully telling their hearers of their woeful state by nature, thousands of preachers are wasting their time by relating the latest news of the Kremlin<sup>7</sup> or development of the atom bomb.

It is therefore a *testing* doctrine, especially of the preacher's soundness in the Faith. A man's orthodoxy on this subject determines his viewpoint of many other doctrines of great importance. If his belief *here* be a scriptural one, then he will clearly perceive how impossible it is for men to improve themselves—that Christ is their only hope. He will know that unless the sinner be born again (Joh 3:7), there can be no entrance for him into the kingdom of God. Nor will he entertain the idea of the fallen creature's free will unto good. He will be preserved from many errors. "I never knew a person verge toward the Arminian, the Arian, the Socinian, the Antimonian schemes, without first entertaining diminutive notions of human depravity or blameworthiness"—Andrew Fuller (1754-1815). Said the well-equipped theological instructor, James M. Stifler, "It cannot be said too often that a false theology finds its source in inadequate views of depravity."

It is a doctrine of great *practical* value, as well as doctrinal importance. The foundation of all true piety lies in a correct view of ourselves and our vileness and a scriptural belief of God and His grace. There can be no genuine self-abhorrence or repentance, no real appreciation of the saving mercy of God, no faith in Christ, without it. There is nothing like a knowledge of this doctrine so well calculated to undeceive vain man and convict him of the worthlessness and rottenness of his own righteousness. Yet the preacher who is sensible of the plague of his own heart knows full well that *he* cannot present this truth in such a way as to make his hearers actually realize and feel the same, so as to make them out of love with themselves and cause them to renounce for ever all hope in themselves. Therefore, instead of relying upon his faithfulness in presenting the truth, he will be cast upon God to apply it graciously in power to those who hear him, and bless his feeble efforts.

It is an exceedingly *illuminating* doctrine. It may be a melancholy and humiliating one, nevertheless, it throws a flood of light upon mysteries which are otherwise insoluble. It supplies the key to the course of human history, and shows why so much of it has been written in blood and tears. It supplies an explanation of many problems which sorely perplex and puzzle the thoughtful. It reveals why the child is prone to evil and has to be taught and disciplined unto anything that is good. It explains why every improvement in man's environment, every attempt to educate him, all the efforts of social reformers, are unavailing to effect any radical betterment in his nature and character. It accounts for the horrible treatment which Christ met with when He wrought so graciously in this world, and why He is still despised and rejected of men. It enables the Christian himself better to understand the painful conflict which is ever at work within him, and which causes him so often to cry, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom 7:24).

It is therefore a most *necessary* doctrine, for the vast majority of our fellows are ignorant of the same. God's servants are sometimes thought to speak too strongly and dolefully of the dreadful state of man through his apostasy from God, but the fact is that it is impossible to exaggerate in human language the darkness and pollution of man's heart or to describe the misery and utter helplessness of a condition such as the Word of Truth describes in these solemn passages: "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, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2Co 4:3-4). "Therefore they *could not believe*, because...He hath [judicially] blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them" (Joh 12:39-40). This is yet more evident when we contrast the state of the soul of those in whom a miracle of grace is wrought—see Luke 1:78-79.

It is a *salutary* doctrine—one which God often uses to bring men to their senses. While we imagine that our wills have power to do what is pleasing to God, we never abandon dependence on self. Not that a mere intellectual knowledge of man's fall and ruin is sufficient to deliver from pride. Only the Spirit's powerful operations can effect that: yet He is pleased to use the faithful preaching of the Word unto that end. Nothing but a felt sense of our lost condition lays us in the dust before God.



<sup>7</sup> **Kremlin** – the fortified complex of the Russian central government in Moscow.