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STUDIES
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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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A GOOD CONTINUING

Our "New Year's" message (which appeared in the December issue) was entitled "A Good Beginning." This and the one in February are designed as sequels thereto. While a good beginning is much to be desired, it is not everything, but rather a means to an end. If the ending is to be satisfactory, then we must continue well. Alas, how very few really do so! How rare it is to find a child of God who has preserved his early freshness and fervour! Of how many does it have to be said, "Thou hast left thy first love" (Rev 2:4)? Mark closely the verb employed there: it is not "thou has *lost* thy first love," as so frequently misquoted, but something much more serious being referred to. One may lose a thing involuntarily, but to *leave* "the love of thine espousals" (Jer 2:2) implies deliberation, and is therefore more culpable. Hence, the one guilty thereof is bidden to "remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent" (Rev 2:5), which serves to explain what is there involved. To "leave" our first love is to depart from that elevation of heart (the affections set upon things above) which formerly characterized us, to forsake the "mountain of myrrh" and "the hill of frankincense" (Song 4:6) previously trodden in fellowship with the eternal Lover of our souls.

Many solemn examples are given in Scripture of those who made a promising start, but later, belied the same. Such was the case with Samson, of whom we read first, "The LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him" (Jdg 13:24-25), but subsequently Delilah "began to afflict him, and his strength went from him...And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him" (Jdg 16:19-20). How fair was the commencement of King Saul's public life, but how terrible its termination! "The Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied" (1Sa 10:10); "But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him" (1Sa 16:14). How frequently do we see exemplified our Lord's description of the stony-ground hearer, who "heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while" (Mat 13:20-21). It was so under His own ministry: "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (Joh 6:66)—little wonder if such prove the case with those converted under our preaching. How soon after Pentecost were the ranks of the early church thinned by the defection and death of Ananias and Sapphira!

Not only are many such individual cases recorded in the Scripture for our warning, but a whole generation of Israel is set before us to tremblingly heed. Behold upwards of half a million of them issuing forth from the house of bondage under the leadership of Moses. Hear them fervently singing the LORD's praises for His deliverance at the Red Sea. See them journeying unto, yea nearing, the promised inheritance. Alas, how tragic was the sequel! Only two of that vast host ever entered Canaan: of all the others God swore "that they should not enter into his rest" (Heb 3:18), and their carcasses fell in the wilderness. Does the reader object, But they were not *regenerate* souls and therefore point no warning to Christians? We answer, Such a point does not have to be determined by us; sufficient to know that they were the people of God, in covenant relation with Him, and that the Holy Spirit declares they were "*our* examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted," and bids us, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest *he* fall" (1Co 10:6, 12). And again, "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after *the same* example of unbelief" (Heb 4:11). Woe be unto those who presumptuously disregard such a danger-signal.

Holy Scripture knows nothing of a "Once saved, always saved" *irrespective* of the subsequent life. The saving of the soul is a miracle of divine grace which produces supernatural effects. The one who has hitherto played the fool with the things of God and the eternal interests of his own soul, is given "the spirit...of a sound mind" (2Ti 1:7), and the same is manifested by his now conducting himself sanely. There is placed within him a principle of holiness, in consequence of which he hates evil and is moved to strive against sin. The love of God is shed abroad in his heart, and that constrains unto an earnest endeavour to please Him in all things, and to glorify His great name. Hence, no one who returns to his wallowing in the mire has any divine warrant to regard himself *as saved*. The saved are "his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10). Therefore, none is to be regarded as *His* "workmanship" who walk not in good works, but who instead lead carnal and worldly lives. Regeneration is but the commencement of the saving operations of the Holy Spirit, and those who are the favoured subjects of them are assured, "he which hath begun a good work in you will perform ['finish'] it" (Phi 1:6), causing them to grow in grace and become fruitful branches of the Vine.

Yet the divine work of grace in a soul is not carried forward mechanically without any concurrence on the part of its subjects. It is a fatal error to conclude that because the work of salvation and sanctification is

a divine one, *we* have no responsibility in connection therewith. Scripture teaches the very opposite: we are exhorted to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling *because* it is God which worketh in us (Phi 2:12-13). Grace is bestowed not to encourage idleness, but to energize unto holy activity. The Spirit of God does not produce apathy, but stirs those He indwells unto a diligent use of means. The one who was loudest in owning, "But by the grace of God I am what I am," hesitated not to add, "but I laboured more abundantly than they all (1Co 15:10). God treats with His people, throughout, as rational and accountable creatures. Unto those who believed on Him, the Lord Jesus said, "If ye *continue* in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (Joh 8:31), and not merely by lip profession. The apostles returned to their converts, "confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them *to continue* in the faith," warning them that they "must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Act 14:22). Walking that "narrow" way, which is the *only one* "which leadeth unto life" (Mat 7:14), is not the easy matter which so many vainly imagine. Rather does it call for self-denial, godly fear, circumspection, and persevering effort.

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk ye in him" (Col 2:6) must be heeded by us if we are to make a good continuance. *How* did we "receive Christ Jesus the Lord"? By ceasing to fight against Him, and throwing down the weapons of our rebellion. By determining to end a life of self-will, giving ourselves up to Him freely and wholly, consenting to be His forever. By penitently confessing our sins and trusting in His redeeming blood. By coming empty-handed to draw upon His fullness. *How* did we "receive" Him? As He is freely offered in the Gospel: "able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb 7:25). As a whole Christ: a Prophet to teach, a Priest to atone, a King to reign over us. As a *complete* Saviour: to deliver from the penalty of sin, cleanse from its pollution, free from its power; to sanctify as well as justify, purify, and ultimately glorify. "*So* walk ye in him": continue as you began—in subjection to, in dependence upon Him. A Gospel faith must issue in Gospel practice. "Walking in Christ means living *out of self*, in conformity to Him. Only thus do we obtain evidence of having *savedly* "received" Him. The genuineness of faith is always seen in what it produces. Alas, the walk of most professing Christians gives the lie to their talk.

A good continuance is only made possible by our regular *use* of those means of grace which God has appointed for His people. If the Word be neglected, the soul will be starved. If meditation be not practised, the heavenly manna will not be digested. If prayer be omitted, or performed formally and mechanically, fresh supplies of grace will not be obtained. Unless the love of God be kept constantly before the heart, the affections will soon cool. Unless we draw daily upon Christ's mediatorial fullness, we shall be feeble and incapable of wrestling with our foes. Unless we tread the path of obedience, Satan will quickly overcome us. There must also be a *right* use of the means, or they will profit us nothing. The Word itself does not nourish unless faith be mixed with it (Heb 4:2). They must be used in a spirit of humble dependence on God, for they avail not apart from His *blessing* upon them. Put them not in the stead of Christ. Trust not in the mere use of them as though your diligence therein ensured success. Yet they must be used patiently and perseveringly: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal 6:9).



THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

61. Hebrews 13:20-21, Part 3

[For the benefit of new readers, we point out that in the preceding expositions of these most important verses we dwelt upon, first, the *Object* of this prayer, namely, “the God of peace” (Heb 13:20), which views Him in His office as Judge, pacified by satisfaction having been made to His justice, now reconciled to His people. Then we considered the particular act here predicated of Him: His restoring of our Lord Jesus from the dead. There we noted, first, the character in which Christ is portrayed: “That great shepherd of the sheep,” which contemplates Him not only as the Antitype of Abel, the patriarchal shepherds, and David, but as the Fulfilment of such Messianic prophecies as Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24; Zechariah 13:7; and also as the One to whom God has entrusted the salvation of His elect. Second, the fact that He is here said to be “*brought* again from the dead” (not “*raised*”): the reference being to His lawful discharge from the prison of the tomb as a thing due Him—because as their Surety, He had paid fully the debt of His people. Christ did not break prison by an act of arbitrary power, but was honourably discharged by the divine Judge (compare Act 16:35-39) in fulfilment of Isaiah 53:8. Third, that it was “through the blood of the everlasting covenant” God became “the God of peace,” that Christ was constituted “that great shepherd of the sheep,” and was the meritorious ground of His being freed from death’s dominion.]

“Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ” (Heb 13:21). As previously intimated, there is a very close connection between this verse and the preceding one. Here we have the *request* which the apostle preferred on behalf of the Hebrew saints; the contents of the former are to be regarded as the *plea* on which he based his request. How appropriate, powerful, and moving that plea was, will readily be seen. The appeal is made to “the God of peace”: as the One reconciled to His people, He is besought to grant this blessing (compare Rom 5:10). Moreover, since God had brought again our Lord Jesus from the dead, that was a most proper ground why He should quicken His dead elect by regeneration, recover them when they wander, and complete His work of grace in them. Especially so, since it was as “that great shepherd of the sheep” He had delivered Him from the prison of the grave, which would move Him to care for the flock. As the Redeemer was “perfected” on the third day (Luk 13:32), so His redeemed must be. Finally, the same everlasting covenant which promised the resurrection of Christ guaranteed the glorification of His people; therefore, says the apostle, “perfect them” according to that engagement.

“Make you perfect in every good work to do his will.” Substantially, that is a request for the practical sanctification and fructification of God’s people. While the everlasting covenant has been suitably denominated, “The Covenant of Redemption,” it needs to be carefully borne in mind that it was designed to secure the holiness of its beneficiaries. It is God’s “holy covenant... That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our [spiritual] enemies might serve him without [servile] fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luk 1:72-75). And while it has also been appropriately designated “the Covenant of Grace,” yet it must ever be remembered that it is said, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men [Gentiles as well as Jews], Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Ti 2:11-13). The grand purpose of the everlasting covenant, as of all the divine works, was the glory of God and the good of His people. It was designed not only as a display of the divine munificence, but also for securing and promoting the claims of divine holiness. God did not enter into that compact with Christ in order to set aside human accountability, nor did the Son fulfil its terms so as to render unnecessary a life of obedience from His redeemed.

Christ agreed not only to propitiate God, but regenerate His elect; not only to meet all the requirements of the Law in their stead, but also to write it on their hearts and enthrone it in their affections. Christ engaged not only to take away sin from before God, but to make it hateful and heinous unto His saints. Christ undertook not only to satisfy the claims of divine justice, but to sanctify His seed, sending forth His spirit into their souls to conform them unto His image and incline them to follow the example which He has left them. It has been far too little insisted upon, in recent times, by those who wrote or preached upon the Covenant of Grace, that He engaged not only for the debt of His people, but for their *duty* too: that He should make a purchase of grace for them, and full provision to give them a new heart and a new spirit, to bring

them to know the Lord, to put His fear into their hearts, and make them obedient to His will. He also engaged for their *safety*: that if they forsook His Law and walked not in His judgments, He would visit their transgressions with the rod (Psa 89:30-34); that if they should backslide and stray from Him, He would assuredly recover them.

“Make you perfect...to do his will.” It was with the contents of the Covenant in his eye that the apostle offered up this petition. In the preceding articles, it was shown that Old Testament prophecy presented the promised Messiah as the Surety of a covenant of peace and as the “Shepherd” of His people: it now remains to point out that He was therein portrayed as *such* a Shepherd as would perfect His sheep in holiness and good works. “And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd”—there is “that great shepherd” (Heb 13:20) even a royal one, without a rival. But more: It was at once added, “They shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them” (Eze 37:24). And therefore, it was that after owning God as “the God of peace” who had delivered from death’s dominion our Lord “through [or ‘by’] the blood of the everlasting covenant,” request was made that He would work in His sheep “that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ” (Heb 13:21). For though God has covenanted the same, He declares, “I will yet for this be enquired of by the [spiritual] house of Israel” (Eze 36:37). Thus this most comprehensive prayer is not only an epitome of the contents of the whole epistle, but also provides a summary of the Messianic prophecies.

“Make you perfect in every good work to do his will.” It must be unto “the God of peace” this prayer is made. Faith must first regard Him as reconciled to us before there will be any true desire to glorify Him. While there be any sensible horror of God—any servile fear produced at the mention of His name—we cannot serve Him nor do that which is well-pleasing in His sight. “Without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb 11:6), and faith is the very reverse of horror. We must first be assured that God is no longer an Enemy but our Friend, ere love’s gratitude will move us to run in the way of His commandments. That assurance can only come to us by realizing that Christ has put a way our sins and satisfied every legal claim of God against us: “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). Christ has made a perfect and eternal “peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20), in consequence of which God has made with those who surrender to Christ’s yoke and trust in His sacrifice “an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure” (2Sa 23:5). That must be apprehended by faith before there can be any serving of God acceptably, and before there will be a confident seeking from Him of the grace necessary thereunto.

From yet another angle, we may perceive the appropriateness of this request being addressed to “the God of peace,” that He would now perfect us in every good work to do His will, for that is most essential unto *our enjoyment* of His peace in a practical way. “Great peace have they which love thy law” (Psa 119:165), for Wisdom’s “ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Pro 3:17). Therefore, it is utterly vain to expect tranquility of heart if we forsake her paths for those of self-pleasing. Certainly there can be no peace of conscience while any known sin is “allowed” by us. The road to peace is the way of holiness: “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them” (Gal 6:16). Unless we genuinely resolve and strive to do those things which are pleasing in God’s sight, there will be a state of turmoil and unrest within us, instead of peace. There is another and deeper meaning in that title, “the Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6), which pertains to the incarnate Son: He could say, “I do always those things that please him” (Joh 8:29), and therefore, an unruffled calm was His portion. What emphasis was there in those words, “Peace I leave with you, *my peace* I give unto you” (Joh 14:27)!

“Make you perfect in every good work to do his will.” This petition sets before us, by clear implication, the human side of things. As we have repeatedly pointed out in this series: those things for which the apostle made request on behalf of the saints concern those duties which *they* were obligated to perform, but for the performing of which divine assistance is imperative. The everlasting covenant anticipated the entrance of sin and made provision not only for the putting away of it, but the bringing in of everlasting righteousness. That righteousness is the perfect obedience of Christ by which the divine Law was honoured and magnified. That perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to all who believe, but none *do* savingly believe in Him until His Spirit has implanted a principle of righteousness in their souls (Eph 4:24), and that new nature or principle of righteousness evidences itself by the performing of good works (Eph 2:10). We have no right to speak of “The Lord *our* righteousness” unless we be personal doers of righteousness (1Jo 2:29). The everlasting covenant by no means sets aside the necessity of obedience on the part of those who

partake of its benefits, but supplies the most affecting and powerful motives to move us thereunto. Saving faith worketh by love, and aims at pleasing its Object.

The more our prayers be regulated by the teaching of Holy Writ, the more will these two things mark them: the divine precepts will be turned into petitions, and the divine promises will be used as our pleas. When the Psalmist realized, "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently," he was at once conscious of his failure and said, "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" (Psa 119:4-5). But He did more than lament the hindrances of indwelling sin: He cried, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes...Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight" (Psa 119:33-35). So also when seeking the establishment of his house before the LORD, David pleaded the divine promise: "And now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and *do as thou hast said*" (2Sa 7:25 and see also 1 Kings 8:25-26; 2 Chronicles 6:17). As we become more familiar with God's Word and discover the details of the exalted standard of conduct there set before us, we should be more definite and diligent in seeking grace to perform our several duties; and as we become better acquainted with "the Father of mercies" (2Co 1:3) and His "exceeding great and precious promises" (2Pe 1:4), we shall count more confidently upon Him for those supplies.

"Make you perfect in every good work." The original for "perfect" is not the one found in Hebrews 2:10; 10:14; 11:40, which signifies "entire" or complete, but is "*katartizo*," which Young defines as "to fit thoroughly, adjust." It is rendered "mend" in Matthew 4:21, and "restore" in Galatians 6:1. It was especially appropriate in connection with the Hebrews, who, after believing the Gospel, had met with such bitter and protracted opposition from the Jews at large, that they had wavered and were in real need of being warned against apostasy (see Heb 4:1; 6:11-12; 10:23). As stated at the beginning of our exposition, this prayer not only gathers up the whole of the doctrinal instruction, but also the exhortations of the previous chapters. The Hebrews had faltered and failed (Heb 12:12), and the apostle here prays for their restoration. The lexicons tell us the Greek word here translated "perfect" literally has reference to the resetting of a dislocated bone. And is it not often so with the Christian: a sad fall breaks his communion with God, and none but the hand of the divine Physician can repair the damage wrought. Thus this prayer is suited to all of us: that God would rectify every faculty of our beings to do His will and right us for His service each time we need it.

Mark how comprehensive is this prayer: "Make you perfect in *every* good work." It includes, as Thomas Gouge (1609-1681) pointed out, "All the fruits of holiness Godwards and of righteousness manwards." No reservation is allowed us by the extensive rule which God has set before us: we are required to love Him with all our hearts, be sanctified in our whole spirit and soul and body, and "grow up into him [Christ] in all things" (Eph 4:15). Nothing less than perfection "in every good work" is the standard at which we must aim. Absolute perfection is not attainable here, but the perfection of sincerity *is* demanded of us—honest endeavour and genuine effort to please God. The mortification of our lusts, submission unto God under trials, the performance of impartial and universal obedience, is ever our bounden duty. Of ourselves, we are quite incapable of discharging our duties, and therefore, we must pray continually for supplies of grace to enable us thereunto. Not only are we dependent upon God for the beginning of every good work, but also for the continuance and progress of the same. Emulate Paul: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after...reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark" (Phi 3:12-14).

"Make you perfect in every good work to do his will": may He who has already fully acquainted you with His mind now effectually incline you unto the performing of it, even a continuance of the same unto the end. It is not enough that we *know* His will, we must *do* it (Luk 6:46; Joh 13:17); and the more we do it, the better shall we understand it (Joh 7:17) and prove the excellency of the same (Rom 12:1). It is His revealed or perceptive will that is here in view and which is to be the alone rule of all our actions—namely those laws and statutes to which God requires our full obedience to what God has commanded. There are many things done by professing Christians which—though admired by them and applauded by their fellows—are nothing but "will worship" and a following of the "doctrines of men" (Col 2:20-23). The Jews added their own traditions to the divine Law and instituted fasts and feasts of their own invention. The deluded Papists, with their bodily austerities, idolatrous devotions, and impoverishing payments—are guilty of the same thing. Nor are some Protestants—with their self-devised deprivations and superstitious exercises—clear of this their evil.

“Working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight.” This confirms what was just said above: only that is acceptable unto God which conforms to the rule He has given us. The words “in his sight” show that our every action comes under His immediate notice and is weighed by Him. By comparing other Scriptures, we find that only those works are “wellpleasing” to Him which He has enjoined us, which are performed in His fear (Heb 12:28), which proceed from love (2Co 5:14), and which are done with an eye single to His glory (1Co 10:31). Nothing short of that must be our constant aim and diligent endeavour: “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto *all* pleasing, being fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:10). Nevertheless, we have to be divinely enabled thereunto. What a blow to self-sufficiency and self-glory is this “working in you”! Even after regeneration, we are wholly dependent upon God. Notwithstanding the life, light, and liberty we have received from Him, we have no strength of our own to do what He requires. Each has to acknowledge “to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Rom 7:18).

That is indeed a humbling truth, yet a fact it is that Christians are, in themselves, incapable of discharging their duty. Though the love of God has been shed abroad in their hearts (Rom 5:5)—a principle of holiness or “new nature” communicated to them—yet they are unable to perform the good they ardently desire to do. Not only are they still very ignorant of many of the requirements of God’s revealed will, but indwelling sin ever opposes and seeks to incline their hearts in a contrary direction. This it is which renders it imperative that they daily seek from God fresh supplies of grace. Though assured that God *will* “complete” His good work in us (Phi 1:6), that does not render needless our crying unto Him “that performeth all things for [us]” (Psa 57:2). Nor does the privilege of prayer release us from the obligation of obedience: rather is it a begging Him to quicken us unto the performance thereof. Prayer is not designed to discharge us from the regular and diligent use of all the means God has appointed for our practical sanctification, but is a seeking of the divine blessing on our use of them. Our duty is to ask God to work in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13), to avoid grieving His Spirit, and to use the grace He has already given us.

“Working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.” There is a double reference here: to God’s working in us, and in His acceptance of our works. It is by virtue of the Saviour’s mediation that God works: there is no communication of grace unto us from the God of peace, but by and through our Redeemer. All that God does for us is for Christ’s sake. Every gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in us is the fruit of Christ’s meritorious work, for He procured and sends the Spirit to us (Joh 15:26). Every spiritual blessing bestowed upon us is in consequence of Christ’s intercession for us. Christ is not only our life (Col 3:4) and our righteousness (Jer 23:6), but also our strength (Isa 45:24). It is “of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (Joh 1:16). The members of His mystical Body are completely dependent upon their Head (Eph 4:15-16). “From me is thy fruit found” (Hos 14:8)—i.e. by fellowship with Him and abiding in Him (Joh 15:5). This is a most important truth to be clear upon if the Lord Jesus is to have that place in our thoughts and affections which is His due. The wisdom of God has so contrived things that each Person is exalted in the esteem of His people: the Father as the fountain of grace, the Son in His mediatorial office as the channel through which all grace flows to us, and the Spirit as the actual bestower of it.

But these words “through Jesus Christ” have also a more immediate connection with the clause, “that which is wellpleasing in his sight.” Even though our works be good and wrought in us by God, yet they are imperfect, because they are marred by the instruments by which they are done—as the purest light is dimmed by the cloudy or dusty globe through which it shines. Yet though our works be defective, they are acceptable to God when done in the name of His Son. Our best performances are faulty and fall short of that excellence which the requirements of God’s holiness demand, but their defects are covered by the merits of Christ. Our prayers are acceptable to God only because our great High Priest adds to them “much incense,” and then offers them on “the golden altar which was before the throne” (Rev 8:3). Our spiritual sacrifices are “acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1Pe 2:5). God can only be “glorified through Jesus Christ” (1Pe 4:11). We owe, then, to the Mediator not only the pardon of our sins and the sanctification of our persons, but God’s acceptance of our imperfect worship and service. As Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) aptly said in his comments on this clause, “What nothings and nobodies we are! Our goodness is none of ours.”

“To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” The glory of God was what the apostle eyed. And how are we to glorify Him? By an obedient walk, doing His will, performing those things which are wellpleas-

ing in His sight. By adoring Him. The construction of the whole sentence permits us to regard this description of praise as being offered to *either* the “God of peace,” to whom the prayer is addressed, or to “that great shepherd of the sheep,” which is the nearest antecedent to the pronoun. Since both grammar and the analogy of Faith allow equally of Each, we include Both. Let God be praised because He is now “the God of peace,” because He brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, because He is faithful to His engagements in the everlasting covenant, because all supplies of grace are from Him, and because He accepts our poor obedience “through Jesus Christ.” Equally let us adore the Mediator: because He is “our Lord Jesus,” who loved us and gave Himself for us; because He is “that great shepherd of the sheep”—caring for and ministering to His flock; because He ratified the covenant with His precious blood, and because by His merits and intercession, our persons and services are rendered “wellpleasing” unto the Most High. “Amen”: so be it; so it shall be.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

41. *Inquisition*

Joshua 7 presents to our notice that which is very different from what is found in the preceding chapters. It opens with the ominous word "But," which solemnly prepares for what follows. First, the heinous sin of Achan, which, though the nation knew it not at that time, caused the LORD to burn in "the fierceness of his anger" against Israel (Jos 7:26). The evil effects of Achan's offence and the consequences of Jehovah's displeasure soon appeared. The spies whom Joshua sent out to reconnoiter Ai were left to the exercise of their carnal reason. The result was that when making their report, they presumptuously took it upon them to advise their leader how to act. Regarding Ai as an easy prey, they intimated there was no need for the whole nation of Israel to journey thither, that a single battalion of *their* men would suffice. Thereby they suggested a departure from the pattern which the LORD had given His people both at the Jordan and at Jericho, and introduced disunity. Instead of seeking counsel from the LORD, Joshua adopted their foolish plan. The ark of the covenant was left behind in the camp, and three thousand only were sent against Ai. The outcome was disastrous. A spirit of cowardice possessed them, and they fled from the Canaanites, thirty-six of them being slain.

The whole congregation was thoroughly dismayed: "the hearts of the people melted, and became as water" (Jos 7:5). Quite unaware of the root cause of Israel's ignominious setback, Joshua and the elders of the nation rent their clothes, put dust upon their heads, and fell to the earth on their faces before the slighted ark of the LORD. There they remained "until the eventide," when the second of the daily sacrifices was presented. At that hour, Joshua addressed himself unto the LORD, pouring out his distressed heart before Him. In view of the circumstances, it is not to be wondered at that the infirmities of this honoured servant of the Lord were made manifest on this occasion. As is usually the case with us at such times, there was a strange mingling of the flesh and spirit, in the supplication of Joshua. While some of his utterances are not to be condoned, still less echoed, yet it should be borne in mind that he was not complaining at any of the LORD's dealings with him personally, but was deeply perturbed at what had befallen God's people. Though his opening expressions were unseemly, his closing ones evidenced that his heart beat true to Jehovah and that it was the honour of *His* name which so greatly concerned him. We shall now consider the response which his prayer met with from God.

"And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" (Jos 7:10). Before considering those somewhat puzzling words, let it be attentively observed that God did not refuse His servant a hearing, even though considerably infirmity had marred it. Blessed be His name, "For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psa 103:14), and in His tender mercy, "a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench" (Mat 12:20). Joshua had exclaimed, "O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?" (Jos 7:8-9). In those words, he had virtually confessed his own failure, used the language of godly sorrow, and had evinced a deep concern for the glory of God. Well for us if such elements be present in our lisps before the Throne of Grace. The holy but gracious One never repulses those in whom such a spirit is found. On the ground of the evening sacrifice (the slain lamb!), Jehovah met with this soul who manifested "a broken and a contrite heart" (Psa 51:17). How that should encourage failing yet penitent believers today!

"And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" Care needs to be taken in the interpreting of this verse. If it be detached from its context, we are almost certain to err and jump to a wrong conclusion, regarding it as an expression of the LORD's displeasure. But if due attention be paid unto its opening "And," and note carefully both what precedes and what immediately follows, we should have no difficulty in arriving at its general tenor. It is not God's way to condemn those who take their place in the dust before Him: rather is His controversy with them who refuse to do so. Nevertheless, though He pardons, He does not gloss over our faults: see Psalm 85:8; John 5:14. As the prayer of Joshua had been a mixed one, so with the divine response. God did not turn a deaf ear to it, nor did He ignore His servant's petulance, but gently reprovved him. It was both a mild rebuke and a word of instruction. "Wherefore liest thou *thus* upon thy face?" Why so distressed and dejected? There is other work for thee to do. But

before performing it, he must be directed by his Master. Up to now, Joshua was in complete ignorance of Achan's offence—the root cause of the disaster.

“Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff” (Jos 7:11). That, too, needs to be pondered, first, in the light of its setting. As we do so, it will be seen that an important and blessed practical truth receives exemplification: “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him” (Psa 25:14). If we really seek God's honour and glory, we shall not be left long in ignorance of the best way to recognize and promote it. So it was here: the LORD now informed Joshua what it was which lay behind Israel's defeat at Ai. In like manner, if our seeking unto Him be sincere and earnest—whether it be an individual or an assembly—God will soon reveal to us what it is that has been withholding His blessing upon our efforts. “Israel hath sinned”: there has been no failure on *My* part. I have not changed, but am just as willing and ready as ever to undertake for *My* people; but *they* have choked the channel of blessing. Thus it ever is. We speak of God's hiding Himself, when in fact we have departed from Him. It is always man that does the turning away, thereby depriving himself of the divine strength, protection, and prosperity.

In the above words of Jehovah unto Joshua, it is most noticeable how He set forth and stressed the enormity of Achan's crime: one detail being added to another, until no less than six items are specified in the terrible indictment. First, the general charge is made, “Israel hath sinned,” followed by the fearful accusation, “they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them,” which greatly aggravated their sin. Observe that the charge is preferred against the whole nation, and not simply against a single individual: “Israel,” “they,” for in the sight of God they were a corporate and federal unit—as the local church of this Christian era is a moral unit before Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:20, 26; 5:6). This feature received additional emphasis in the reference to “the covenant,” for that had been made with and solemnly entered into by the whole congregation (Exo 24). Next, we behold how the divine Law was brought to the fore: “They have taken of the accursed thing,” which was a definite violation of the explicit prohibition of Deuteronomy 13:17—“there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand.” Yet more: “and have also stolen,” thereby adding considerably to the heinousness of the offence, for it was a direct breach of the eighth commandment in the Decalogue.

“And have also *stolen*” emphasized another reprehensible feature of the crime—it had been committed surreptitiously and with previous design. It was not that Achan had been suddenly overcome by an unexpected temptation, but that he acted with deliberation—stealthily and secretly—his deceitful and wicked heart persuading him that he would thereby escape the cognizance of the Most High. Horrible impiety is it when we entertain the idea that we can impose upon Omniscience. The more secret our wickedness be, the more does it evince the heart's depravity and industry therein, planning and scheming how to bring the sin to pass with the least danger and shame to ourselves. It was thus with David when he plotted the death of Uriah (2Sa 11:14-15). So, too, had Ananias and Sapphira arranged in private to impose a fraud upon the Holy Spirit (Act 5:2-7). How we should pray to be preserved from secret sins! They are particularly heinous because of the premeditation and dissimulation which is used in their commission. “And dissembled also,” which made his case that much blacker. When Israel met with shameful defeat at Ai, and the whole nation was plunged into grief, Achan played the part of a hypocrite, pretending to be innocent of causing the same—instead of confessing his iniquity. Finally, “And they have put it even among their own stuff,” instead of bringing it into “the treasury of the LORD” (Jos 6:19).

“Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you” (Jos 7:12). Weigh attentively that statement my reader, for it casts a flood of light upon the reason why the visible cause of Christ is in its present lamentable condition. What took place at Ai has been and is being duplicated in thousands of churches and assemblies the world over. Instead of enjoying the Lord's blessing, His frown is upon them; instead of overcoming the Enemy, they are humiliated before him. How many a minister of the Gospel has, to the best of his ability, faithfully preached the Word, yet to no effect—unless it be to considerably reduce the size of his congregation! How many a one, fearing that he was a “misfit,” has resigned his charge and has accepted a call to another part of the Lord's vineyard, only to discover after a short time there that conditions are just as heartbreaking as those in his previous sphere! A spirit of deadness rests upon his church: the prayer meeting is cold, and thinly attended,

preaching is burdensome. His most earnest appeals seem to hit the wall and return upon him. The power of the Spirit is markedly absent: souls are not converted, nor even convicted.

The above verses make known one of "the ways of the LORD," or one of the principles which regulate His governmental dealings in time. When a company who profess to be in covenant relationship with Him violate its terms and flagrantly transgress His commandments, then His blessing is withheld from them. No matter how zealous and active they may be, God prospers not their efforts. They may go out as of yore against the foe, but the LORD fights not for them. They are left to themselves, and soon, their nakedness and shame is made manifest. God will not be trifled with. To the church in Pergamos, the Son of God declared, "I have a few things against thee"; and after specifying what they were, added, "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (Rev 2:14-16). Likewise did He threaten the church in Thyatira: "And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works" (Rev 2:23).

Alas that the majority of the churches today know nothing of that solemn fact. Alas that they have received so little instruction upon the holiness which must obtain in the assembly if the presence of Christ is to be enjoyed there. Alas that "the accursed thing" has not only been suffered a place, but "they have put it even among their own stuff." Alas that they know not the Holy One has a controversy with them over this very thing. Alas that they are ignorant of the fact that their spiritual poverty and powerlessness, their being humiliated before the world, is due to the divine judgment upon their sins. Alas that they are completely unaware of the divine sentence, "Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you" (Jos 7:12). Paul had to rebuke the Corinthian assembly because they tolerated moral evil in their midst, and bade them, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump" (1Co 5:1-7). "Except ye destroy" was the enforcing of Israel's responsibility.

How unmistakably the defeat at Ai and God's solemn words to Joshua make it evident that such a promise as that given in Deuteronomy 20 was *not* an absolute one. There God had given instruction, "And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people, And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; For the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (Deu 20:2-4). Neither in those words, nor in anything preceding or following, was there any proviso. It has the appearance of an absolute promise, without any qualification. Taken by itself, it was so; but taken in conjunction with other passages in Deuteronomy, it was *not* so—as the event at Ai, and the later experiences of Israel demonstrated. Scripture needs always to be compared with Scripture in order to arrive at the full meaning of any single verse. If we are too lazy to do the necessary searching in order to locate other qualifying or amplifying passages, then the fault is entirely our own if we be left in ignorance of the signification of any statement of Holy Writ. The whole book of Deuteronomy needs to be read through if we are to rightly understand such a passage as the one in the twentieth chapter.

Our purpose in calling attention to Deuteronomy 20:2-4, in connection with our study of Joshua 7, is to show how easy it is to wrest God's Word, and to utter a warning and protest against the careless and dishonest manner in which it is now so often handled. Such passages as Deuteronomy 6:16-18 and 11:8-9 require to be kept steadily in mind when reading Joshua and the books which follow, for they supply the key to much that is recorded in them. And in connection with the promise in Deuteronomy 20:2-4, particularly do we need to set side by side with it such statements as, "For *if* ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; *Then* will the LORD drive out all these nations from before you" (Deu 11:22-23), and "It shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth" (Deu 28:1); but if they obeyed *not*, His curse would certainly fall upon them (Deu 28:15). It is handling God's Word deceitfully to stress its promises and ignore their qualifying conditions: to quote John 8:32, and omit verse 31; to cite John 10:28, and be silent upon verse 27. Hebrews 3:6, 14 are just as necessary for us as 8:10-12. God has indeed promised to show Himself strong in the behalf of those whose hearts are perfect towards Him; but nowhere has He declared that He will fight for the self-willed and disobedient.

“Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you” (Jos 7:13). This was the sequel to the “wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?” (Jos 7:10); this was the duty concerning which the LORD was now instructing His servant. It was not simply “Arise!” but “Up”—bestir thyself now unto the duty which I enjoin thee. “Sanctify the people”: this was ever the order when the nation was about to witness some outstandingly solemn or glorious transaction. Thus it was immediately before God gave the Law at Sinai (Exo 19:10). Thus it was following the murmuring at Taberah, when the LORD “came down” and talked with Moses (Num 11:18-25). Thus it was on the eve of Jehovah’s wondrous intervention for them at the Jordan (Jos 3:5). In each case, the call was for the people to be sanctified—that is, for them to be formally and reverently assembled before the LORD. Joshua was also to bid them “sanctify yourselves against tomorrow,” which signified, duly prepare yourselves for the solemn and searching ordeal, which the LORD has appointed: spare no pains in seeing to it that you are in a meet condition for the approach of the Holy One.



THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

25. *In the Soul, Part 3*

For the benefit of new readers, it must be stated that in the preceding articles of this series that we dwelt upon the revelation which God has made of Himself in the material universe, in the moral nature of man, in the shaping of human history, in His incarnate Son, and in the Holy Scriptures. Then we pointed out that while the evidence which the first three supply for the existence of God is ample to expose the irrationality of scepticism, to show that the infidel is without excuse; and that while the testimony of the last two transmit to us a clear and full communication of the divine will and make plain our path of duty; yet that none of them, nor all combined, are sufficient of themselves to bring any man—fallen and sinful as he now is—to a *saving* knowledge of, and relation to, the thrice Holy One. That while the natural man may be intellectually assured of God's existence—that Christ is His Son, that the Bible is His inspired Word, and that while he may acquire an accurate theoretical understanding of the Scriptures—he cannot either discern, receive, or relish them spiritually and experimentally: that in order thereto, he must *first be made spiritual*, be “born of the Spirit” (Joh 3:6), and become “a new creature” in Christ (2Co 5:17).

The absolute necessity for a supernatural work of grace upon the human heart to fit it for the taking in of a *spiritual knowledge* of spiritual things was shown from its indisposedness unto them because of its native depravity, from the might and enthralling power which sin has over it, as well as from the transcendence of divine things over the scope of human reason, and of the nature of that faith by which alone they can be apprehended. In a word, that an answerableness or correspondency between the object apprehended and the subject apprehending is indispensable. But what accord or concord is there between an infinitely holy God and a totally depraved and defiled sinner? And thus that the work of the Spirit within the sinner is as imperative as was the work of Christ for him. The Word itself does not produce its quickening, searching, convicting, and converting effects except by the blessing and concurrence of Him who of old moved holy men to write it. In short, that before any one can obtain a saving and sanctifying knowledge of God, he must make a personal, supernatural, inward discovery of Himself to the soul. As none but God can change night into day, so He alone can bring a sinner out of darkness into His own marvellous light.

“And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD” (Isa 54:13). There is a teaching of God without which all the teaching of man—even that of His most gifted and faithful servants—is ineffectual and inefficacious. The One by whom the elect are taught is the Holy Spirit, and therefore, is He denominated, “the spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Eph 1:17). Not because He reveals to the soul anything which is not found in the Word itself, but first, because it was by His own wisdom and revelation that the penmen of Scripture were enabled to write what they did; and second, because it is by His operations that what they wrote is now made effectual unto their souls. He begins by regenerating them, imparting to them a principle of spiritual life, without which they are incapacitated to see the things of God (Joh 3:3); and then He makes to their renewed mind a real and spiritual application of the same, so that they are realized in the heart, and are found to be divine realities. By the work of the Spirit, the soul obtains an actual experience of the things contained in the Scriptures, thereby receiving fulfilment of that promise, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts” (Jer 31:33).

All of God's children are taught by Him, yet not in the same degree, nor in the same order of instruction. God exercises His sovereignty here, as everywhere, being tied by no rules or regulations. That there is *variety* in the influences of the Spirit is intimated in that figurative expression, “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live” (Eze 37:9), and is more definitely stated in “there are *diversities* of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (1Co 12:6). Though God ever acts as He pleases, yet always with unerring wisdom, and where His people are concerned, in infinite grace; and usually His operations upon their souls follow more or less a general pattern. But in every instance, such a revelation of God is made to the soul, as none can understand or appreciate, except those who have been made the favoured subjects of the same. It is accompanied by a life and light, power and pungency, such as no preacher can possibly impart. An effectual application of the Truth is then made so that its recipient is enabled to know and feel his own personal case before God: to see himself in His light, to have an actual experience of things which hitherto were only hearsay to him.

Just here we should, perhaps, anticipate an objection. Some may be inclined to think that in the two articles preceding this one and in what follows here, we have wandered somewhat from our present subject.

That we are supposed to be treating of that immediate and inward, that personal and saving revelation which God makes of Himself to the soul: whereas we appear to be bringing in that which is extraneous and irrelevant, by describing the varied experiences through which a soul passes just prior to and in his conversion. But in reality, the objection is pointless. As “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Psa 111:10; Pro 9:10), so an inward knowledge of God Himself is the beginning of spiritual life and the first entrance into vital godliness. “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (Joh 17:3). There cannot be any evangelical conviction and contrition, still less a coming to Christ and resting upon Him, until God Himself is *known*. We never move toward God in Christ until He directly shines in our hearts (2Co 4:6); and thus, the efficacious cause of faith is neither the perspicuity of our minds nor the pliability of our wills, but our effectual call by God from death unto life.

As no artist would undertake to draw a picture which would exactly resemble *every* face in each feature and particular, yet may produce an outline which will readily distinguish a man from any other creature, so we shall not essay to give such a delineation of regeneration and conversion as will precisely answer to every Christian’s experience in its circumstantial; but rather, one which should be sufficient to distinguish between a supernatural work of grace and that which pertains to empty professors. All births are not accompanied by equal travail, either in duration or intensity; yet it is often the case that those who have the easiest entrance into this world are the greatest sufferers in infancy and childhood. So some of God’s children experience their acutest pangs of conviction before conversion and others afterward, but sooner or later each is made to feel and mourn the plague of his own heart. “The first actings of faith are, in most Christians, accompanied with much darkness and confusion of understanding; but yet we must say in the general that wherever faith is, there is so much light as to discover to the soul its own sins, dangers, and wants, and the all-sufficiency, suitableness, and necessity of Christ for the supply and remedy of all; and without this, Christ cannot be received”—John Flavel (1627-1691).

The selfsame light which discovers the holiness of God to a soul necessarily reveals its own vileness. Though the Spirit does not enlighten in the same measure or bring different ones to perceive things in the same order, yet sure it is that he teaches every one certain fundamental lessons; and that, in a manner and to an extent which they never understood before. “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick” (Luk 5:31); and before one will savingly betake himself to the great Physician, he is made conscious of his need of His ministrations. When a soul is quickened and illuminated by the Holy Spirit, his heart is opened to a sight and sense of sin. A work of divine grace is made perceptible first on *the conscience*, so that its subject is given to realize the exceeding sinfulness of sin. He now perceives how offensive it is unto God and how destructive unto his own soul. The malignity of sin in its very nature is seen as a thing contrary to the divine Law. He who had previously felt himself secure, now realizes he is in terrible danger. If he be one who was already a professing Christian, he now knows that he was mistaken, deluded; that what he thought to be peace, was nothing but the torpor of an unawakened conscience.

Conviction of sin is followed by a wounding of the heart, for life is accompanied not only with light but *feeling* also; otherwise, its subject would be a moral paralytic. The sinner is filled with shame, compunction, horror, and fear. He apprehends his own wickedness and pollution to be such as none other was ever guilty of. He sees himself to be utterly undone, and cries “Woe is me.” He no longer laughs at what is recorded in Genesis 3, or any longer has any doubt about Adam’s fall, for he perceives his sinful image in himself—conveyed to him at his very conception, a defiled nature from birth. He has been given an experiential insight into the mystery of iniquity. He now realizes that so far from having lived to the glory of God, self-gratification has been his sole occupation. “Against *thee*, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Psa 51:4) is now his anguished lament. He thinks there was never a case so desperate as his, and fears there is no hope of forgiveness. Now “the heart *knoweth* his own bitterness” (Pro 14:10).

This anguish of heart is something radically different from that sorrow for sin which is sometimes found in graceless souls, which usually consists of being ashamed because of their fellows, or a chagrin at their own folly. Even Judas repented of betraying his Master, but not with a “godly sorrow” (2Co 7:10). It is not the degree but the nature of our sorrow for sin which evidences whether or not it be produced by the grace of God. That grief for sin which issues from a gracious principle is concerned for having flouted God’s authority, abused His mercies, and been indifferent whether his conduct pleased or displeased Him. Whereas the sorrow of the natural man proceeds only from self-love: his grief is that he wrecked *his own* interests and brought misery upon himself. The quickened soul is now thoroughly ashamed and abased. He no longer makes excuses, but takes sides with God and unsparingly condemns himself. The guilt of sin lies

heavily upon him, as an intolerable burden. The sentence of the Law is pronounced in his conscience. He perceives that there is no soundness in him, that his case is desperate to the last degree. How can I escape my merited doom? is now his great concern.

Those who have not sat under a preaching of the Gospel of the grace of God wherein Christ is freely proffered to all who hear it, and have reached the stage described above, are now at their wit's end. The condition and case of such a one is no worse than it was formerly, but the scales have been removed from his eyes, and he sees himself in *God's* light. The soul is now brought to state of utter unrest and disquietude: not only unable to find any satisfaction in the creature, but even to obtain the slightest relief from the things of time and sense. He seeks help and peace here and there, only to find they are "cisterns, that hold no water" (Jer 2:13). He is at a total loss about deliverance, and sees no way of escape from that eternal doom to which he now realizes he is fast hastening. He once thought that a little repentance would save him, or a cry to God for mercy would suffice for pardon, but he now finds "the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it" (Isa 28:20). Neither meet his dire need.

What shall become of me? is now the question which wholly absorbs his thoughts. If, like a drowning man seeking some object that he may grasp to support him, he turns unto professing Christians and inquires in what way the Lord dealt with *their* souls and how they obtained relief—sometimes he will receive a little encouragement, but more often that which dampens his faint hope that God will yet be gracious unto him that he perish not. As he listens to what one and another relates, he realizes that it is not the path which *he* is treading, that he has not experienced the things which they did, and he is brought to the place of self-despair. He wishes that he had never been born, for he fears that, in spite of all his conviction and anguish, he may be lost forever. He feels his utter helplessness and has an experiential realization that he is "without strength" (Rom 5:6). Yet so far from this sense of his impotency producing apathy and inertia, he is increasingly diligent in making use of the means of grace: he now searches the Scriptures as he never did before, and cries from the depths of his soul, "Lord, save me" (Mat 14:30).

"Understandest thou what thou readest?" said Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch. "How can I," he replied, "except some man should guide me?" (Act 8:27-33). Nevertheless, he *read* the Scriptures, and God graciously and savingly met with him therein, using Philip as His instrument to preach Jesus unto him. None but Christ can save a sinner: He alone can remove the burden of guilt, cleanse the conscience, and speak peace to the heart. As sin is loathed and hated, and self-righteousness is renounced, room is made in the soul for Christ. There is no true desire for Him until the utter vanity of this world has been felt—that its most alluring pursuits and pleasures are nothing better than the husks which the swine feed on. Sin must be made bitter as wormwood to us, before Christ can be sweet to the heart. God must wound the conscience by the lashing of His Law, ere the healing balm of Christ's blood is longed for. Like the prodigal in the far country, the soul must be brought to the place where it cries, "I perish with hunger" (Luk 15:11-17), before the rich provisions of the Father's house are really sought unto (Luk 15:18-24).

It is in this way, the blessed Spirit prepares the heart for the receiving of Christ. By giving him to understand his condition and case: his sins, his guilt, his pollution, his emptiness, his personal demerit, and his misery. By giving him such a sense of the same as causes him to die unto himself, to renounce himself, to abhor himself, to acknowledge that the worst that God says of him in His Word *is true*. Thereby the Holy Spirit shows him that he is exactly suited to Christ, who is "mighty to save," and who *does* save "them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb 7:25). He makes him to realize that he is a fit subject for the great Physician to exercise his loving-kindness upon, to heal him of his loathsome leprosy, to pardon his innumerable sins, to supply all his need out of the exceeding riches of His glorious grace. The Holy Spirit is pleased to show the self-condemned soul that Christ has nothing in His heart against him, that He is full of compassion, of infinite power, in every way meet for him; that He came into the world with the express purpose to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luk 19:10). Thus is Christ made desirable unto him.

But it is one thing to perceive our need for and the perfect suitability of Christ and to have longings after Him, and quite another for Him to be made accessible and present to us. There must needs to be an inward discovery of Him to the soul before He is made a reality unto it and laid hold of by him. Said the Saviour, "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life" (Joh 6:40). Note well the *order* of those two verbs: there must be a "seeing" of the Son with the eye of the soul before there can be any saving believing on Him. In other words, the

same One who has removed the scales of pride and prejudice from the sinner's eyes to behold his own abject state must show him the glorious Object on which his trust is to be reposed. The light of the Gospel now shines into his heart, and he is enabled to behold "the king in his beauty" (Isa 33:17). When He is beheld thus, it must be said, "for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee" (Mat 16:17), but that it has been supernaturally communicated by the Spirit.

Christ is now made known as "fairer than the children of men" (Psa 45:2), as wholly suited to and all-sufficient for the stricken sinner. The soul is now assured that "the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true" (1Jo 5:20). The heart is taken with Him, attracted by Him, drawn to Him, and cries, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mar 9:24). A convincing and fully-persuading realization of the truth of the Gospel concerning Christ is his. The Spirit has vouchsafed no new and different revelation of Christ than what was in the written Word, but He has given a supernatural efficacy unto the Gospel to his soul, as truly as the blowing of the ram's horns was made by God to cause the walls of Jericho to fall down. The hour has come when the hitherto-dead soul hears the voice of the Son of God, and hearing, lives (Joh 5:25). His voice has come to him with quickening energy. The saving knowledge of Christ which is thus obtained is a vastly different thing from having a good opinion or orthodox conception of Him: He is now realized to be everything which the justice of an angry God required for satisfaction, and everything which is required by the most necessitous soul.

Christ now dwells in his heart by faith; and the testimony of such a one is, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (Joh 9:25)—and neither man nor devil can make him gainsay it. Before the Holy Spirit—in His sovereign and invincible power—dealt with my soul, I was "blind": blind to the just claims of Christ's holy scepter, blind so that I saw in Him no beauty that I should desire Him, blind to my own folly in spending money for that which was not bread, and by seeking contentment and satisfaction away from Him. But now I "see": see His surpassing loveliness and superlative worth, see that He loved even *me* and gave Himself for me, see that His precious blood cleanses me from all sin, see that He is the only One worth living on and living for. Hear him singing from the heart, "Thou O Christ art all I want, more than all in Thee I find." Hear him as he avers with the apostle, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus *my* Lord" (Phi 3:8). Behold him, as lost in wonder, love, and praise, he bows in adoration and exclaims, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (2Co 9:15).

How different is *such* a coming to Christ, closing with Him, and knowledge of Him, from that of the deluded and empty professors! Rightly did the Puritan J. Flavel declare, "Coming to Christ notes a supernatural and Almighty power, acting the soul quite above its own natural abilities in this motion. It is as possible for the ponderous mountains to start from their bases and centres, mount aloft into the air, and there fly like a wandering atom hither and thither, as for any man of himself—i.e. by a pure natural power of his own, to come to Christ. It was not a stranger thing for Peter to come to Christ walking upon the waves of the sea, than for his or any man's soul to come to Christ in the way of faith." It is *only* as the Spirit quickens the dead soul, makes him sensible of his desperate condition and deep need, reveals Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour, and by a powerful inclining of his will, that he is brought to cast himself on Him, and that he obtains for himself a *saving experience* of the Gospel—in contradistinction from a mere hearsay knowledge of it.



GLORIOUS SINAI

Some of our readers are likely to be rather puzzled, if not actually surprised, by such a title as the above. Those accustomed to weigh words may regard the adjective as a strange or even incongruous one. "Forbidding Sinai," "terrifying Sinai," yes, but scarcely "glorious"! If such be the reader's concept of Sinai, then it is certainly a most inadequate one, if not erroneous. That the solemn transactions of that mount were indeed awe-inspiring—yea, repellent to the natural man—is readily admitted; yet that is by no means all that they were. There was another side to them, a blessed and praise-inducing one, which also needs to be taken into consideration. Referring to the covenant and economy which was there established, the Holy Spirit declares that it "was glorious" (2Co 3:7)—yea, "glory" in the abstract (verse 9), and "was made glorious" (verse 10). True, He likewise tells us in the same passage that it was a "ministration of condemnation and death" unto the guilty, yet that in no wise altered its blessed character. True also *that* "glory" pales before another covenant and economy which exceeded it in glory (verses 9 and 10); nevertheless it *was*—in itself and in its attendants—exceedingly splendid and impressive.

At Sinai, there was vouchsafed a glorious manifestation of the majesty of Jehovah. At Sinai, there was given a glorious revelation of the divine will and moral perfections. At Sinai, there was a glorious inauguration of a most excellent economy—all of which contained a glorious typification of things to come. As another has well said, "No event in our world has been more magnificent in its circumstances of external majesty and splendour than the giving of the Law on mount Sinai." Such a statement is fully warranted by the language of Holy Writ. Take a single specimen from the Psalms: "The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel" (Psa 68:8). When Jehovah descended to deliver the Law, He bowed the heavens, shook the earth, and made Sinai quake to its very foundations. Even more grandiloquent are the strains used by the prophet: "God came from Teman [the south], and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light" (Hab 3:3-4). One of the greatest and grandest displays of the divine majesty was given by the LORD at Sinai, and it is often referred to in the Sacred Volume.

Far too many restrict their thoughts to Exodus *twenty* when asked to contemplate Sinai. Not only is it impossible for us to make a right approach unto or obtain a due perspective of the Decalogue without first keeping before us all that is contained in Exodus 19, but for a true understanding of both, it is also essential to bear closely in mind the contents of the seven preceding chapters. It was no isolated event which occurred there, wholly separate, but rather one that was intimately related to foregoing ones. Yet one influential writer began his remarks on Exodus 19 and 20 by affirming, "A new dispensation is inaugurated in those chapters"; and he has been blindly followed by many, including the Scofield Bible. Far more accurate would it be to say that a new dispensation or order of things commenced at Exodus 12, for it is from the *Passover night* that the national history of Israel is to be dated! Previously, they had no corporate existence, being merely a disorganized company of slaves. But on that notable night, long to be remembered, everything was changed for them. Then for the first time, they were designated the "assembly of the congregation of Israel" (Exo 12:6).

That it *was* the Passover which marked not only the beginning of the national existence of Israel, but of the Mosaic era also, is unequivocally demonstrated by the fact that their *calendar* was then *changed* by divine orders (Exo 12:2). That new dispensation was commenced by the establishment of a new relationship between Jehovah and His people: they then became His *redeemed*—"bought with a price" (1Co 6:20), by the blood of a lamb "without blemish" (Exo 12:5-7, 13, 22). And redemption, my reader, is so far from annulling God's claims upon us as creatures, that it imposes an additional obligation to serve Him; and it supplies a further and most powerful motive for our recognition of God's claims upon us and an earnest endeavour to meet the same. "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God *redeemed* thee: *therefore* I command thee this thing to day" (Deu 15:15). Precisely the same is the teaching of the New Testament: "That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies [the world, the flesh, and the devil] might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (Luk 1:74-75). "Our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Ti 2:13-14).

Redemption effects a change of masters. Israel were delivered from the tyranny of Pharaoh and the bondage of Egypt in order that they might be free to delight themselves in their God, and to worship and obey Him. That was plainly announced unto Moses at the first appearing of the LORD unto him: "When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall *serve God* upon this mountain" (Exo 3:12—see verses 1 and 2). All that transpired between Exodus 3 and 19 was but preparatory and means unto that grand end. Previously, they had seen God's judgments upon Egypt, beheld His mighty power at the Red Sea, witnessed His guiding hand in the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, experienced His mercy in providing food from heaven and water out of the rock, and now they were to receive a manifestation of His exalted sovereignty and a revelation of His ineffable holiness. "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people" (Exo 19:4-5). Having brought them into a relationship so blessed, they must now be instructed how to walk worthily of the same.

Not only has the Decalogue been insufficiently pondered in the light of its historical setting, but the whole transaction of Sinai has been far too often divorced from much that preceded it. In order to apprehend the outworking of the divine plan, it ever requires to be kept in mind that it proceeds along the principle of progressive development. Unless that fact be heeded, we shall not arrive at a correct understanding of either His plan as a whole, or of its characteristic features and special arrangements which have distinguished its manifestations at any one period, as compared with another. What took place on the mount undoubtedly marked a definite stage and advance in the gradual unfolding of the divine purpose, as well as signalized a memorable epoch in the history of His chosen people; nevertheless, it was as intimately related to what preceded as to all that followed. It was by no means an isolated action, but a progressive one. The redemption from Egypt was itself the fulfilment of a promise which Jehovah had made with Abraham; and that redemption had for its direct object the establishing with Israel of that covenant which God had made with their fathers.

An unmistakable linking up of the Mosaic economy with what had gone before appears in the symbol in which Jehovah was revealed to Moses, when he received from Him his call and commission. That symbol most definitely pointed back to the "smoking furnace" and "burning lamp" which passed in vision before the eyes of Abraham when he was informed of the future sufferings of his posterity in a land which was not theirs (Gen 15:13, 17). That "furnace" was now again made visible to Moses (Exo 3:2), yet the little thornbush—emblem of the covenant people, the tree of God's planting—stood uninjured in the midst of the flame, because the covenant God Himself was there. Any doubt as to the correctness of that interpretation should be removed by what is said in the immediate context, for there we are told, "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them" (Exo 2:24-25)—i.e. the covenant (Psa 74:20).

What we have just pointed out opens more intelligently what follows, for when Moses demurred at the mission entrusted to him and asked, "What shall I say unto Israel when I tell them, 'The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you,'" and they shall inquire, "What is his name?"—God answered him, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: *this* is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations" (Exo 3:13-15). That glorious "name" is linked equally to the past and the future. He who affirmed Himself to be the incomprehensible "I AM THAT I AM" (Exo 3:14)—as a description of His distinctive name of Jehovah—did so for the express purpose of enabling Israel to recognize Him as the God of their fathers, as the One who had in the past solemnly covenanted with them, and who now, in the immediate future, was going to make good unto their children what He had promised them.

As Jehovah, the great I AM—explained in the "him which is, and which was, and which is to come" (Rev 1:4, and compare 4:8 and 16:5 for variations)—He would show unto His people that He is the God who changeth not (Mal 3:6). Having made an everlasting covenant with the patriarchs, He continued to abide in the relationship which it established, for He could no more fail to fulfil its engagements than He could cease to be. If the symbol of the burning bush was fitted to turn the thoughts of Moses unto Genesis 15, still more appropriate was the divine revelation vouchsafed unto him there: not only unto the urgencies of Israel's case in their Egyptian bondage, but as a sure pledge of their coming deliverance—ratified by the

significance of His peculiar covenant name. His people were thereby assured that however conditions had changed for the worse—a temporal darkness veiling their fair prospects—nevertheless, the God of their fathers remained without variableness or shadow of turning, being the immutable God of the present and the future, as well as of the past. It was both a pledge of a grander manifestation of His faithfulness and love, and an intimation they might expect a yet fuller revelation of His character. With such encouragement was Moses sent forth to execute in the name of God and commission given to him.

It was then in pursuance of His covenant with Abraham that God delivered his descendants from the tyranny of Pharaoh; and it is *that* which supplies the key to all the subsequent dealings of the LORD with his descendants. As Moses told them plainly at a later date, “The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would *keep the oath* which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen” (Deu 7:7-8). It was in fulfilment of that same oath He opened away through the Red Sea, and that He continued to show Himself strong in their behalf. That nothing whatever occurred at Sinai which in any way annulled or even modified the covenant with Israel’s progenitors is evidenced by the fact that whenever any serious crime was committed by the nation, those who interceded for them sought forgiveness on the ground of the promises made to Abraham: see Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 9:27-29; 2 Kings 13:23.

The glorious transactions of Sinai are prefaced by this statement: “In the *third* month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the *same* day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount” (Exo 19:1-2). Like all the time-marks of Scripture, this one requires to be carefully noted, for it intimates to us the significance of what follows. Three is ever the number of *manifestation*: as God Himself is made known to us in His three Persons, and hence, too, it is the number of resurrection (Christ rising on the third day, etc.), for it is then life is seen emerging from death. Jehovah was now to give unto His people a further and fuller disclosure of Himself: of His majesty, His holiness, and His will concerning them; and most appropriately was that vouchsafed upon *the mount*—the place of eminence and vision. It was a testification of His goodness unto them—as much so as were the awe-inspiring phenomena at Pentecost. As Moses subsequently reminded them, “Behold, the LORD our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire” (Deu 5:24).

“And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself” (Exo 19:3-4). First, mark the *double appellation* here given unto the Hebrews: the former to humble them by a reminder of their lowly origin; the latter to evoke praise for the dignity and blessing which God had conferred upon them. But there was a deeper significance thereto, and something we need to closely observe: that double appellation supplies more than a hint of the twofoldness of what follows. As the “seed” of Abraham included both an earthly and a heavenly one, and was therefore symbolized by a dual figure—“the stars of the heaven” and “the sand which is upon the sea shore” (Gen 22:17); and as the promises made to him received both a “letter” or literal, and a “spirit” or mystical fulfilment—the one in his natural descendants, and the other in his spiritual children (Gal 3:7, 29!); so the transactions of Sinai require to be viewed in their bearing upon both national Israel and the “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16).

What has just been pointed out is very far from being something which *we* desire to “read into” (Exo 20): it is *demand*ed by the clear teaching of the New Testament. The fact that we are told, “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1Co 5:7) *obliges* us to view Israel’s deliverance from Egypt as a type of the Church’s redemption from the dominion of sin and Satan; while their miraculous passage through the Red Sea obviously foreshadowed the Church being brought onto resurrection ground. Equally clear is it that the furnishing of them with the manna was a foreshadowing of Christ, “the true bread from heaven” (Joh 6:32) as the food of His people. The bringing forth of water from the smitten rock was manifestly a figure of the Holy Spirit being given to Christ’s people—the mystical meaning of that incident being expressly defined for us in the “*spiritual* drink” and “that spiritual Rock” of 1 Corinthians 10:4. What anointed eyes then can fail to see in Jehovah’s statement regarding the national Israel, “I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself” (Exo 19:4) a declaration of His amazing grace in Christ unto the spiritual Israel, who “suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might *bring us to God*” (1Pe 3:18).

Next, they were reminded of what the LORD had done for them: “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians” (Exo 19:4), righting and avenging you from their cruel oppression and persecution, accepting the challenge of the haughty Pharaoh (Exo 5:2), and humbling that mighty monarch into the dust. And how I “beareth [you] on [eagles’] wings”—a figure of the gracious tenderness which Jehovah had shown them (Deu 32:11-12): protecting them from His judgment-plagues upon Egypt, sheltering them from the angel of death, and interposing His pillar of cloud and fire between them and their pursuers. “And brought you unto myself”: not only into a state of liberty and honour, but into covenant and communion with the living God, that they might delight themselves in Him and serve Him. “Ye have *seen*” all this, He reminds them, appealing to their own observations and experience. They knew it was entirely of the LORD’s doing, and must be marvellous in their eyes. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out, “It was not they that reached toward God, but it was He that brought them to Himself.” With what *design* we are about to consider: certainly not to impose upon them a harsh and tyrannical regime, but to give them further proofs of His lovingkindness.

“Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Pro 3:17). The Satan-deceived world imagines that godliness is a thing of gloom rather than of gladness, that it is something which the saints endure rather than enjoy. On the contrary, holiness is happiness: it is neither the mirth of the fool, nor the giddy gaiety of the thoughtless, but a peace “which passeth all understanding” (Phi 4:7), and a heart-satisfaction not to be found elsewhere. So far from piety robbing us of freedom, it conducts into true liberty—delivering from the bondage of sin. Christ’s yoke is easy and His burden light (Mat 11:30). Earthly joy is at best evanescent, but the delights of holiness are eternal. Only the One Who made us can content us.

