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“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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SEVEN DIVINE LOOKS

Much is said in Scripture about the eyes of the LORD and His looking upon one and another: much that is solemn and searching; much that is encouraging and comforting. What a contrast is there between “I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good” (Amo 9:4) and “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect [upright, which beats true] toward him” (2Ch 16:9). That is the difference between God’s avenging eye (1Ch 12:17; 2Ch 24:22) and His gracious eye. “For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings” (Pro 5:21): what a restraining influence should our apprehension of that fact exert upon us! On the other hand, assured of the mercy and compassion of the LORD, believers will often desire that He should look upon them, knowing that their very needs and unexpressed longings will plead for them (2Sa 16:12), and give him or her cause to say, “For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaid—en” (Luk 1:48).

1. The look of *covenant faithfulness*. “And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth” (Gen 9:16). There is no doubt whatever in our mind that the rainbow appeared then in the lower heavens for the first time: had it existed previously, it would have possessed no new meaning and message after the flood—compare Genesis 2:6. It was given as an assurance to allay men’s fears, as a divine pledge that the world would never again be destroyed by a universal deluge. It was a ratification of the promise which God had given for the temporal preservation of His creatures. God calls it “my bow,” which He sets in the cloud (Gen 9:13), and upon it, He looks in remembrance of His oath (Isa 54:9)—as we also should. “How blessed to know that the cloud that comes across our sky is one of *His* bringing; and if so, how sure that, in some way, He will reveal His glory in it”—Frederick W. Grant (1834-1902). Still more blessed is it to know that the canopy of God’s Throne in heaven is a rainbow (Rev 4:3)—a token and pledge that He is ruling this world according to his covenant engagements.

2. The look of *grace*. “And God looked upon the children of Israel” (Exo 2:25). This, too, was analogous with the former, for as the content informs us, they “cried by reason of their bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” And well for them that He did so. They had sinned grievously while in Egypt (Jos 24:14; Eze 20:7-8), and were sorely chastised for the same. But now, notwithstanding their provoking transgressions, as their groanings came into His ears, the LORD remembered His covenant and looked upon them. Moses had beheld them with pity, but he was powerless to effect their release. But as JEHOVAH saw their abject condition and hard service, He had a favourable regard to them (Exo 3:7-8). His eyes were now fixed upon them to show Himself strong in their behalf and deliver them. It is a typical picture of God contemplating the wretchedness of His elect by nature when He saves them from their sins: His everlasting covenant of grace is the sure foundation of mercy, and the ground of all His dealings with His people, He is blessed to find that when Israel learned that the LORD “had looked upon their affliction,” then they bowed their heads and worshipped (Exo 4:31). Let each Christian reader do likewise.

3. The look of *encouragement*. “And the LORD looked [literally ‘turned His face’] upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” (Jdg 6:14). Such language as that from God to a worm of the earth is startling, for what “might” had poor Gideon? None—and what is more, he was *conscious* of this fact. Therein is revealed to us an invaluable secret: “Before honour is humility” (Pro 15:33). Gideon confessed his weakness: “Wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (Jdg 6:15). True, but set over against that the Almighty’s “Surely I will be with thee” (verse 16). Ah, my reader, the face of the LORD is always turned unto those who acknowledge their poverty and powerlessness. It is the empty vessel which He fills, the one owning himself to be “the least” who He commissions and uses (see Isa 6:5-8; Eph 3:8)! That look of the LORD was designed to dispel Gideon’s fears, to revive his drooping spirits and send him forth in the strength of JEHOVAH. God used Gideon to effect a mighty deliverance for Israel.

4. The look of *revelation and discovery*. “My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself” (Song 2:9). Taken in conjunction with the foregoing verse, we have here a blessed figure of Christ desiring fellowship with “his own” and the increasingly clear discoveries—which He graciously makes of Himself, both to the local church collective-

ly and to the saint individually—He is likened to a “roe” because of His pleasantness and lovingness (Pro 5:19), He being most winsome to His people and gentle in His carriage towards them. In the spiritual visits with which Christ favours His people, He is pleased to make clearer and fuller manifestations of Himself to them. First, He appears as it were “behind *our* wall”—for *we* are ever the ones who interpose barriers!—near, but not yet visible. Then, “he looketh forth at the windows”—a sight, though not yet a full one, being obtained of Him through the ordinances. Finally, He shows “himself through the lattice” of our longings, and we enjoy His manifested presence, and He sups with us and, with Him (Rev 3:20).

5. The look *of approbation*. “But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isa 66:2). Pride God abominates, but humility and submission He appreciates. Poverty of spirit consists of a realization that I have nothing, am nothing, and can do nothing, but have need of all things. It is the Spirit’s emptying the heart of self that Christ may fill it. Contrition is a feeling sense of the heinousness and loathsomeness of sin, causing one to mourn over it with godly sorrow. It is the Spirit’s discovering to us the plague of our hearts, making sin to be bitter and hateful to us, our sorest grief and heaviest burden. To tremble at God’s Word is to be sensible of its searching purity, to be awed by its authority, to be conscious of its requirements, to hold its Author in the utmost reverence. Each soul possessing these qualities is an object of complacency to the Holy One. He views them not only with favour, but with pleasure: it is God delighting in His own handiwork, setting His seal of approval thereon.

6. The look *of welcome*. “But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luk 15:20). The context gives us a picture of what an elect soul is by nature and practice: a wanderer from God, a dissipater of His mercies, a forlorn creature finding nothing in this world which can meet his spiritual and eternal needs. At length convicted of his wretchedness and sinfulness, his heart and feet turn unto the LORD. The verse now before us reveals the attitude of God unto such an one and the reception awaiting the repentant and seeking sinner. The father is viewed as on the lookout, ready to welcome the returning prodigal. Love’s eyes are keen, and he sees him while he is yet “a great way off”—which tells of the awful distance that sin removes the soul from God. It was love’s anticipation and readiness to receive the erring one. He “saw him” with the eyes of favour, yea, eagerness. What a word is this for any repenting and seeking reader: a hearty welcome is assured such if he comes unto God by Christ.

7. The look *of recovery*. “And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter” (Luk 22:61). Surely this is one of the most remarkable, blessed, and affecting statements recorded in Holy Writ! Note, first, this is said not simply of “Jesus,” but of “the Lord”: to emphasize the fact that He acted here with divine understanding, authority, and mercy. Second, that He “turned.” It was in the high priest’s house, and the Saviour had been facing the motley gang who had apprehended Him in the Garden. One of “his own” had been overtaken in a grievous fault, but He did not contemptuously ignore him, but turned His face toward him! He did not call to him, lest He should endanger His sheep! He “looked upon Peter”—not scowled or frowned! With sad, hiding, yet compassionate expression. It was a look of conviction, for Peter at once remembered His warning word. It was a look of power, for it brought repentance. It was a look of love, for it melted Peter’s heart. Christ was about to die and put away Peter’s sins, and here He gave him a pledge of it by turning *toward* and “look[ing] upon” him! May He so look today upon backsliders.



THE EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

2. The Humanity of Christ (1:1)

This epistle bears no superscription as do all others (save Hebrews), including his own second and third ones, and makes no reference to any particular class of persons by which we may ascertain to whom it was first addressed. We know from Galatians 2:9 that John was one of the apostles who ministered to the circumcision, and such expressions as “from the beginning” in 1 John 2:7, “ye have known him” in verses 13-14, and “ye have heard [i.e. from Christ] that antichrist shall come, even now are there many anti-christs...They went out *from us*” (verses 18-19) intimate that it was primarily *Jewish* Christians to whom John wrote. Yet mention of “the world” in 1 John 4:14, and the “whole world” in 1 John 2:2, and the admonition, “keep yourselves from idols” in 1 John 5:21 are more than hints that it was designed for Gentile believers too. The epistle is remarkable for the absence of any local colouring or personal references. While enunciating vital truths and combating fundamental errors, the names of no places or persons are mentioned. Thus, it contains nothing which is merely ephemeral or provincial, but that only which is suited to all God's children till the end of time.

It is, then, a general epistle: not to any particular assembly, but for the whole family of God. In accordance with that fact, we find no reference here is made to elders or deacons. The privileges described and the duties enjoined pertain alike to the entire Household of Faith. John deals with vital and basic principles, and does not (like the other apostles) point out how they are to be applied to the various relationships of life. Though he treats in some detail of both righteousness and love, he gives no specific instances of how they are to be exercised between husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, subjects and kings. He even avoids the term, “saints,” preferring to address his readers by the more familiar, “brethren” (1Jo 2:7) and “my brethren” (1Jo 3:13), though more frequently employing the endearing expression, “little children” and “my little children”—which no other apostle did (unless Galatians 4:19, be the sole exception). This has led the thoughtful to conclude that John must have been of a great age—certainly there would be no propriety in one of fewer years so addressing even the “fathers” (1Jo 2:12-13).

Since the apostle was about to write upon *fellowship*, his design and scope in the opening verses appear to be twofold. First, he intimates that the initial requirement for communion with God is the possession of divine life in the soul, and that this life is found in the incarnate Son, here designated “the Word of life” and “that Eternal Life.” John Calvin (1509-1564) came very near the mark when he opened his commentary on this epistle by saying, “He shows first that life has been exhibited to us in Christ; which, as it is an incomparable good, ought to rouse and inflame all our powers with a marvellous desire for it and with the love of it. It is said, indeed, in a few plain words, that life is manifested: but if we consider how miserable and horrible a condition *death* is, and what is the kingdom of glory and immortality, we shall perceive that there is something here more magnificent than can be expressed in any words.” It is ever the Spirit's object to magnify that blessed One who is despised and rejected of men, and here He does so by presenting Him as the Source and Fount of life.

The second obvious aim of the apostle in his introductory sentence was to confirm the assurance of God's children, and show what a firm foundation has been laid for their fellowship with the Father and with His Son. “These words ‘which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes,’ etc., serve to strengthen our faith in the Gospel. Nor does he, indeed, without reason, make so many asseverations; for since our salvation depends upon the Gospel, its *certainty* is in the highest degree necessary. And how difficult it is to believe, every one of us knows too well by his own experience. To believe is not lightly to form an opinion, or to assent only to what is said, but is a firm, undoubting conviction, so that we may dare to subscribe to the truth as fully proved. It is for this reason that the apostle here heaps together so many things in confirmation of the Gospel”—J. Calvin. The Gospel is no spurious invention of men, but is the annunciation of reliable witnesses who personally consorted with Christ Himself (Luk 1:1-4).

The absence of John's name from the opening verses of this epistle is in full harmony with the fact that in his Gospel, he never referred unto himself except when the occasion required him to do so; and then only by such a circumlocution as “that other disciple” (Joh 20:3-4) or “that disciple whom Jesus loved” (Joh 21:7, 20)—not, be it observed, the boastful “that disciple who loved Jesus”! As there, so here, the writer

retires into the background, unwilling to speak of himself, resembling in this his namesake, who, when asked, "What sayest thou of thyself?" answered, "I am the *voice* of one crying in the wilderness" (Joh 1:22-23)—heard, but not seen. It may also be noted that John's silence here about himself is in beautiful accord with his *theme*, for real fellowship so engages the heart with its Object as to lose sight of self. Yet, because his task required it, he gives plain indication that he stood in the nearest possible relation to the One he adored, just as in his Gospel he was wont to do so under similar circumstances.

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard...of the Word of life" (1Jo 1:1). A superficial reading of this verse has led many to conclude that John begins his epistle in the same way as he had his Gospel—by affirming that eternity of the Son—but a more careful examination of its language should correct that impression. There are indeed several resemblances between the two verses, yet there are notable differences. Each opens at once by presenting the person of Christ: without any preliminaries, the Lord Jesus is immediately set before the reader. Both Gospel and epistle commence by referring to Him under the title of "the Logos." In each, mention is made of "the beginning." The contrasts are equally marked. In John 1:1, Christ is viewed absolutely, in His Godhead; here, relatively, as incarnate: in the former, His deity is contemplated; in the latter, His humanity. There, it is "in the beginning"; here, "from the beginning"—which express entirely distinct concepts. Quite another "beginning" is treated of: in the former, ere time and creation began; in the latter, the opening of this Christian era.

Two different interpretations have been given to the clause, "that which was from the beginning." First, that it refers to Christ's pre-incarnate and eternal existence, declaring what He was before He appeared on earth. Second, that it described what characterized Christ from the time of His incarnation after He became "manifest" on earth. That all things were created by our Lord, we firmly believe; of His eternal pre-existence, we have not a shadow of doubt; but we do not think *that* is in view *here*. Before anyone assumes that "in the beginning" and "from the beginning" are identical expressions, he should go to the trouble of very carefully examining every instance in the New Testament where the latter is found, and ascertain *how it is used*. As he does so, he will discover it occurs in widely different connections and is employed in various senses. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 (and probably there alone), it certainly has the force of eternity. In Matthew 19:8, "from the beginning" signifies the commencement of human history. But in John 8:25; 15:27; 16:4, it clearly means from the start of our Lord's public ministry.

The words "from the beginning" in our opening verse are found six times more in this epistle, and in none of them do they import *eternity*! "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have *heard* from the beginning" (1Jo 2:7)—from the lips of Christ. "Ye have known him that is from the beginning" (1Jo 2:13)—when He was first made manifest to you. The same is meant in 1 John 2:24 and 3:11. "The devil sinneth from the beginning" (1Jo 3:8) of human history—for "murderer" in John 8:44 is literally "manslayer." In the opening verse of John's Gospel, Christ is depicted in His eternal relation to the Godhead, but here in a time state, as incarnate as the clauses which follow make clearly evident, for their obvious design is to demonstrate the reality of His *manhood*. The Son's assumption of flesh and blood opened a new era, changing as it did the world's calendar from A.M. to A.D. Christ's descent to this earth inaugurated a fresh "beginning," when there was to be a "new covenant." Now began to be brought in the substance of all the Levitical shadows; now began the Messianic prophecies to receive their fulfilment.

Quotations from several orthodox expositors of the highest repute could be given to show that in what we have said above, no "strange doctrine" has been advanced. Let the following one suffice. The translator and annotator upon J. Calvin's commentary on this epistle said in his footnote to verse one, "It is more consistent with the passage to take 'from the beginning' here as from the beginning of the Gospel, from the beginning of the ministry of our Saviour, because what had been from the beginning was what the apostles had *heard* and *seen*. That another view has been taken of those words has been owing to an over-anxiety on the part of many, especially of the fathers, to establish the deity of our Saviour; but that is what is sufficiently evident from the second verse." It is the human nature of our Lord that verse one treats of, and most assuredly, that had an historical "beginning."

Most of the commentators have had considerable difficulty with the prefatory, "*That which* was from the beginning" (1Jo 1:1) and varied have been the speculations as to why the neuter gender was used rather than "he who was." Obviously, the words are to be explained by the clauses which immediately follow: yet some deem even them to be too indefinite to enable us to strive at any certainty. On the face of it, it appears incongruous to refer to a divine Person as "that which": on the other side, one can scarcely speak of seeing

and handling with our *hands* a "Message." But no difficulty remains if we take the whole verse to be treating of our Lord's manhood. The humanity of Christ was not a person, but a thing which He condescended to assume and take into union with His person. Proof of this is found in the words of the Angel to Mary, "that *holy thing* which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luk 1:35)—just as a woman is given the name of her husband as soon as she is wed to him. The Word's becoming flesh and tabernacling among men marked a new beginning in the world's history.

"That which was from the beginning." Those words, when taken by themselves, are admittedly indefinite and mysterious; yet men have greatly *added* to their difficulty by making "from the beginning" synonymous with "in the beginning"—i.e. *without* beginning. If "from the beginning" has the force of from *eternity*, then no satisfactory explanation can be given of the neuter and abstract "that which," for the allusion could not be to anything created, since matter is not from everlasting; and so far as we have observed, none who take that view have made any real attempt to grapple with the difficulty. If "from the beginning" signifies from eternity, then it must be a divine person that is in view; and in such case, "he who was" would be required. On the other hand, if the reference be to the divine incarnation—and more specifically, still to *the human nature*, which the Son of God took unto Himself—all difficulty vanishes.

In our introductory remarks, reference was made to the fact that those whom John immediately addressed were being assailed by heretical teachers (see 1Jo 2:26). Many conjectures have been made as to the precise nature of their errors, and the names of those who propagated them. Most probably, they were a branch of the Gnostics, Ebion, and Cerentheus being the leaders; but this cannot be determined for sure. What we may be certain about them is (1) that those who were then seeking to seduce John's converts had themselves once been professing Christians, but later apostatized (1Jo 2:19); and (2) that they denied the reality of our Lord's humanity (1Jo 4:3). It is, then, with the design of counteracting that error that John here lays so much emphasis upon the evidences which the incarnate Word had presented to the very senses of His apostles. The "Christian[?] Gnostics" taught that Christ's body was but a phantasm, a mere temporary appearance assumed for the benefit of the world.

"That . . . which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life" (1Jo 1:1)—he "*that which* was from the beginning" is repeated (identically in the Greek) in each of the three clauses, thereby *explaining* it! In those words, John intimates (as the following verse more explicitly states) his intention of describing an experience and knowledge of Christ with which he and his fellow apostles had been favoured. It was far more than a message about life which had been delivered by word of mouth; more than a perfect, but abstract, ideal of life which he would treat of; but namely that Life which had appeared in personal and human form in Jesus of Nazareth—the promised Messiah, the incarnate Son—who had exhibited a life which was eternal and indestructible, even the very life of God. John's adding of one clause to another, in progressive and climacteric order, was designed not simply to show that he was speaking about Jesus Christ and none other, but rather, to declare that *that which* was to be announced concerning Him was an absolute certainty and *exhibited* truth—not only the truth *about* Him, but what John himself had actually heard, seen, and handled of Him.

Immediately after his opening clause, John proceeded to give proofs that Christ was really and verily man, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh: that "in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren" (Heb 2:17). His body was a palpable one—visible, audible, tangible. By it, the Saviour made full demonstration to each sense of their bodies that *His* was as real as were those of His apostles. The genuineness of Christ's humanity—denied by the Gnostics and by those now calling themselves "Christian Scientists"—is a cardinal doctrine of the faith once delivered to the saints, and for which we are bidden to "earnestly contend" (Jude 1:3). In that body which God prepared Him (Heb 10:5)—which the Holy Spirit supernaturally produced from the substance of His mother—He lived, died, rose again, ascended to heaven, where He is now beheld in its glorified state; and in which He will yet come again (Act 1:11). At the divine incarnation, the Son of God became what He was not before—"And being found in fashion as a man" (Phi 2:8). Our nature was taken into union with His divine person. Thus, the first verse of our epistle is parallel with John 1:14, rather than with the opening verse of his Gospel.

John commences his epistle by setting before us God manifest in flesh, because He is the grand Subject of the Gospel, the Object of our faith, the Foundation of our hope, the One who brings us to and unites us in fellowship with the Father. The Gospel is no mere abstraction, but is inseparably connected with the Lord Jesus. As Levi Palmer so beautifully expressed it, "As the ray of the light depends upon the sun, and a wave of the sea upon the ocean, so Gospel truth is but the acts, and words, and glory of Christ." As it is impossi-

ble to know and receive Christ apart from the Gospel, so we cannot receive the Gospel except from Him. It was John's design to make known what sure and firm ground our faith in the Gospel rests upon. He relates not that which he had received second-hand, nor even what he had beheld in a vision, but rather that of which he had first-hand and ocular acquaintance. What he was advancing was real and true, in contrast with all that is merely imaginary, speculative, or dreamed about. His four verbs in verse one not only mark a progress from the more general to the more particular, but breathe a greater intensity as he proceeds.

"That...which we have heard" (1Jo 1:1). John was with Christ throughout the whole of His ministry, and chronicled more of what He *said* than did any of his fellows. This is given the first place because the utterances of Christ are of more importance than His miracles: so in his Gospel, John recorded a greater number of His discourses than did the other evangelists. This indicates the reverential esteem in which he held the Lord's teaching, as well as supplies guarantee of the accuracy of his report. "Heard" includes more than the actual sound of His voice—namely all the gracious words which issued from His mouth, and also possibly having a special allusion to John 13-16. "We have heard" goes deeper than the words of Christ falling upon their ears: it signifies that their souls had *felt* the power of what He said—"Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luk 24:32). If the enemies of Christ acknowledged, "Never man spake like this man" (Joh 7:46), what must the regenerated apostles have felt? The Lord Jesus wrote nothing, but He spoke much; and we have great cause for thankfulness that God moved the apostles to record so much of what He said, that we too may hear Him (via the printed page) for ourselves.

"That which we have seen" (1Jo 1:3). This is by no means to be restricted to His miracles of healing and other supernatural works, but understood as including the perfections displayed by His character and conduct as He, untiringly, "went about doing good" (Act 10:38). Seen "with our eyes" (1Jo 1:1) is added for the purpose of emphasis, to show the verity and corporeality of Christ, that it is an historical entity which is here in view. Here too the reference is not limited to the mere sight of their bodily eyes, but implies also their spiritual perception of His peerless excellency. "That...which we have looked upon" (1Jo 1:1). This is no tautology, but expresses a closer and more deliberate inspection, for which John (as one of the three in the innermost circle) had peculiar opportunities. "Looked upon" is the same Greek word as "we beheld his glory" in John 1:14, and means to gaze at with desire and delight. "And our hands have handled" (1Jo 1:1) probably has both a special reference to His resurrection body, and a more general one to the closeness of their contact with Him during the days of His flesh—such precluding all possibility of any optical illusion.

The physical experience of the favoured apostles, as set forth by the four verbs in verse 1, is duplicated in the spiritual history of each Christian, and in the same progressive order. At first, his knowledge of Christ is limited to what he hears of Him in the Gospel. Then, when the miracle of grace has been wrought within him, he sees Christ with the eyes of faith—loving and giving Himself for him. Later, as he grows in grace, and becomes more and more enamoured of Him, he looks upon Him more steadfastly and closely with the eyes of love and adoration; the result of all being that, in a spiritual way, he *handles* Christ. He has become a bright, living experiential reality to him. The matchless charms and superlative glories of the Saviour make everything else appear mean and contemptible to him. The soul now has before it a heavenly Object, infinitely excelling all the perishing things of earth. It is an inestimable privilege if reader and writer be among those who can say "*we see Jesus*" (Heb 2:9). Happy day, blessed hour, when our eyes were first opened to behold Him as the Redeemer of our souls. Oh, to behold Him more distinctly and devotedly. The more we contemplate His peerless person, amazing love, and perfect work, the sooner will sin lose its hold over us, the world its charms, and death be robbed of all terror.

For the young preacher, we would suggest the following outline, "The Divine Incarnation": (1) The new era which it inaugurated—compare Galatians 4:4. (2) Proofs of the reality of His humanity—compare John 20:30-31. (3) The witnesses thereof (the apostles)—compare Luke 1:2, 4. (4) The title here accorded Christ: "The Word of life"—compare Acts 3:15. (5) The bearing of this verse on the theme of the epistle. Under these heads may be arranged most of the material in this article.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

54. His Failure, Part 2

It was said by James Durham (1622-1658), the Puritan, "It is hard to know, in spiritual exercises, whether it be more difficult to attain some gracious frame, or to maintain it when it is attained; whether more seriousness is required for making peace with God, or for keeping it when made." That observation is confirmed both in the teaching of God's Word and the experience of His children: as it is easier in natural things to squander than acquire, so spiritually to retain it is as hard a task as to obtain. In Psalm 85:8, we read, "I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly." Alas that we should need such an injunction as that. Where a child has burned his fingers, he is afraid of the fire; and when a believer has dishonoured the LORD, and brought trouble upon himself by foolish conduct, he ought to be doubly on his guard against a repetition thereof. Yet only too often, instead of decreasing self-confidence and walking softly before the LORD, he relaxes his efforts to mortify pride, becomes careless in the use of God's appointed means for the maintaining fellowship with Himself in the paths of righteousness, and therefore, falls again into the same sin.

The very fact that believers are here dehorted, "Let them not turn again to folly" intimates their proneness to do so. Yet that is so far from making any allowance for the same, it expressly forbids it. Moreover, what immediately precedes renders a repetition of the fault the more excuseless. When the LORD has so graciously "spoken peace to his people"—that is, has pardoned their transgressions and allayed their consciences, a spirit of gratitude should cause them to be more careful in avoiding everything which would displease and grieve Him. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) rightly pointed out: "The remission of sins past is not a permission for sins to come, but a great bridle and restraint to it." Peace is spoken by God unto those who turn from sin, and therefore, we have a clearly implied warning here that if we return thereto, peace will depart from us. Just so far as we really value God's peace, will we diligently endeavour to avoid whatever destroys it. Sin is a breach of the Law (1Jo 3:4); Godward, it is an "offence" (Rom 5:17) or affront; selfward, it is folly of acting contrary to our interests and "forsak[ing] [our] own mercy" (Jon 2:8).

All sin is foolish, but backsliding is doubly so, and it is because of our corrupt tendency unto it that such a caution as the above requires to be taken to heart by all of us. The more so because of sin's insidiousness—ever ready to trip us up if we are the least bit off our guard. As pointed out at the close of our last, sin is by no means always premeditated. Joshua's failure in the making of a covenant with the Gibeonites was no deliberate act of disobedience, but was more a case of being "overtaken in a fault" (Gal 6:1)—through hurried action, instead of seeking counsel from the LORD. To be "overtaken in a fault" is a very different thing from resolving and contriving the same: the one is inadvertent, the other planned. It is ever to be borne in mind that the Christian has no inherent strength of his own: he stands by faith (Rom 11:20), and faith is directly opposed to self-confidence. Therefore, it is that—unless he maintains a constant prayerful vigilance and self-discipline—he is ever in danger of a sudden surprisal from the force of temptation, or being overborne by the heat of his passions.

Joshua had not only failed in a similar way previously, but he had been rebuked for it by the LORD, and convicted of his folly (Jos 7:10-11). The repetition of such failure has been recorded by the Holy Spirit to bring home to us *our* weakness and fickleness. If one so highly favoured of God as he who had so signally honoured Him by the general tenor of his character and conduct was capable of these momentary lapses, then how much do both writer and reader need to heed that exhortation, "Be not highminded, but fear" (Rom 11:20). The sad fact is that a believer may not only fall into sin, but—unless he preserves a spirit of entire dependence upon the LORD—he may, through the infirmity of the flesh, fall into *the same sin*. Samson (who was a believer—Heb 11:32) did so, first by marrying a Philistine woman (Jdg 14), which was expressly forbidden by the divine Law; and later, by consorting with a Philistine harlot (Jdg 16), for which he paid dearly. Jehoshaphat committed a great sin in joining affinity with the wicked Ahab (2Ch 18:1-3) and was reproved for the same (2Ch 19:2): yet in 2 Chronicles 20:35, we find him relapsing into the same sin. When *we* are guilty of similar folly, it should lead us to deeper repentance, though not to despair.

"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. And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbours, and that they dwelt among them" (Jos 9:15-16). As John Gill (1697-1771) pointed out, "The league seems to have been made the same day they

came. The Gibeonites were no doubt in haste to have it confirmed, lest they should be discovered; and Joshua and the princes of Israel took no pains and gave themselves no great trouble to inquire about them, but made peace with them at once." And now the deception of the one and the folly of the hasty action of the other were discovered. With rare exceptions, lies are quickly exposed. Only truth wears and lasts. Impostures are speedily found out, as Jacob's by his father Isaac, Jeroboam's wife's by the prophet (1Ki 14:1-6), and that of Ananias and Sapphira (Act 5). Then how utterly vain must be every attempt to impose upon Him unto whom "all things are naked and opened" (Heb 4:13). It is impossible to deceive Omniscience by masquerading before Him in the garb of a hypocritical profession, nor will His people be deceived thereby if they carefully weigh them in the balances of the Scriptures.

The terrible times in which we are living call for a further word on this practical subject. "The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment" (Pro 12:19). Then how important it is to eye eternity in all our words—doubly so in the case of preachers! The profession of the truth may indeed occasion present inconvenience and trouble from men, but it shall receive an eternal reward from God. On the other hand, the preacher who, for momentary gain and popularity, represses the truth and is a purveyor of lies shall reap a harvest of everlasting shame and woe. But that verse applies to all of us. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) tersely expressed it, "Those that make a lie their refuge, will find it a refuge of lies." Falsehoods and deceits are not only evil in themselves, but a foolish expedient, for they expose the perpetrator to speedy detection, which renders him suspect and distrusted in everything. Even though his fellows should fail to disprove him, unless he sincerely repents, "He that speaketh lies shall perish" (Pro 19:9). Nothing makes us more like the devil than this, for he was a liar from the beginning (Joh 8:44). How earnestly we should pray, "Remove from me the way of lying" (Psa 119:29)

"And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbours, and that they dwelt among them" (Jos 9:16). That may well be viewed from another angle. Not only is it a fact that, as a general rule, deceptions are quickly discovered, but it is equally true that, where the heart beats true to Him, God will not long suffer His people to be imposed upon. They are children of the day and not of the night, and therefore, there is no reason why they should stumble over any obstacles in their path. As their Master declares, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Joh 8:12). But to *follow* Christ means very much more than "believing" in Him: it signifies to commit ourselves unreservedly to His government, to walk in His precepts, to emulate the example which He has left us. And in the main, and with few deviations, that is exactly what Joshua and Israel *had done* since their entrance into Canaan. They had been obedient to JEHOVAH, complying with His revealed will in all things. And though they had temporarily failed to seek counsel from Him—and in consequence, had been beguiled by the Gibeonites—yet because the main course of their lives was pleasing to God, He soon allowed them to learn their mistake. How gently the LORD deals with us!

"And the children of Israel journeyed, and came unto their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon," etc. (Jos 9:17). This is explanatory of the foregoing verse and, by implication, shows us how unnecessary was Israel's precipitate action—had they withheld their judgment and decision but a short time, they would have learned that these Gibeonites had by no means come from a very far country. By "the children of Israel" here, we are not to understand the entire congregation—for the camp still remained at Gilgal (Jos 10:15-17)—but rather their fighting-men with the responsible heads of the tribes. Most probably they had advanced this distance in order to investigate the report they had received. It should be pointed out that this was not the "third day" from setting out on their journey—for it was but a night's march from Gilgal to their cities (Jos 10:9)—but from the time when they first "heard" that the Gibeonites were their neighbours. Definite confirmation of this was now before them, for here were "their cities." The Holy Spirit's emphasis here by the repetition of "the third day" intimates that this is a detail which the reader should duly ponder. A further word thereon.

It should be carefully noted that in John 8:12, Christ did not simply say that the one who followed Him should have light, but "the light of life"; and this is exactly what is typically portrayed here in Joshua 9:16-17, for "at the end of three days" brings us (symbolically speaking) on to resurrection ground. Joshua and his fellows had acted by sight instead of faith, and here the Spirit supplies demonstration of that fact. They had conducted themselves on the ground of mere nature, being regulated by their senses, and not as quickened souls whose privilege it was to enjoy unbroken communion with God and be guided by Him. They had, for the moment, relapsed into carnality, but now "on the third day" they were back on resurrection

ground and given to see things in a true light. So the Christian has—by God’s grace and power—been brought from death unto life, and is henceforth called upon to “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4) and to “put on the new man” (Eph 4:24), which means to act as one who is a new creature in Christ, to be governed by heavenly principles. If he fails to do so, then he will lack discernment and wisdom for his path, and be left to his erring natural judgment. Only so long as his eye be “single” to God’s glory will he be full of light.

“And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel” (Jos 9:18). Here is further evidence that the rulers in Israel were back again on resurrection ground—in communion with the LORD, conducting themselves as regenerated men. The fear of God was upon them, and they acted accordingly! Had they now been walking according to the flesh, they had argued that “circumstances alter cases”—that because the Gibeonites had lied to them, they were now automatically released from keeping their part of the compact. The carnal mind would reason that a covenant was surely not binding when one of the parties entering into it had acted under false pretences. But no such corrupt principles regulated these princes. Their word was their bond. “Though we have been imposed upon, we must not think ourselves at liberty to retaliate: solemn engagements made, even to our own hurt, must be conscientiously adhered to”—Thomas Scott (1747-1821). Two wrongs never make one right, and for a child of God to descend unto the sinful level of worldlings is doubly heinous. The deception practiced by these Canaanites did not excuse Israel’s hasty action: they had been foolish in so rashly committing the nation, and now they must suffer the consequences of the same.

“And all the congregation murmured against the princes” (Jos 9:18). The fault was entirely their own that Israel’s leaders had been ensnared by such a piece of trickery, and though by grace, they had respect unto the LORD’s honour and refused to perjure themselves, yet they were made to feel the evil results of failing to ask “counsel at the mouth of the LORD” (verse 14). There is no previous mention of “murmuring” on the part of any of the Israelites; but now their unity was disturbed! This was no casual incident, but a divine providence, designed to speak loudly unto those who had ears to hear. It was a divine chastisement, an outward mark of the LORD’s displeasure—yet how mild a one! The immediate reason for this “murmuring” is fairly obvious: the soldiers were chagrined at being withheld from seizing and plundering these cities; nevertheless, had not Joshua and the princes offended against the LORD in acting on their own judgment instead of waiting upon Him for directions, His restraining hand had prevented such an exercise of the carnal cupidity of the rank and file of the people, and no spirit of discontent and division would have been shown. Though God judicially pardons our failures, in His governmental ways, He often makes us to eat the fruits of our folly.

“But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them” (Jos 9:19). It is blessed to behold the harmony and unanimity of the princes, that none of them were weakened by the opposition which was encountered. It was not only their own word which was involved, but their word under divine oath, and to violate *that* would both perjure themselves and grossly discredit their God in the estimation of the heathen. It can hardly be doubted that the congregation itself must have known of their oath, but charity requires us to believe that they had temporarily forgotten it. By way of illustration, we may see in this murmuring of the congregation against these princes that, when either religious or political leaders are actuated and regulated by holy and lofty principles, it must not be expected that those under them will appreciate and seek to further their motives, but rather will criticize and oppose. Blessed it is to see how these princes stood their ground, fearing God and not the people. And the LORD honoured them therein, for no further murmurings against them are mentioned—the LORD subduing the people’s lusts!



THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

2. *Its Origin*

That something is radically wrong with the world of mankind requires no laboured argument to demonstrate. That such has been the case in all generations is plain from the annals of history. This is only another way of saying that something is radically wrong with man himself, for the world is but the aggregate of all the individual members of our race. Since the whole of anything cannot be superior to the parts comprising it, it necessarily follows that the course of the world will be determined by the characters of those who comprise it. But when we come to inquire exactly *what* it is that is wrong with man, and *how* he came to be in such a case, unless we turn to God's inspired Word, no convincing answers are forthcoming. Apart from that divine revelation, no sure and satisfactory reply can be made to such questions as: Whence have been derived the unmistakable imperfections of human nature? What will furnish an adequate explanation of all the manifold evils which attend man's present state? Why is it that none is able to keep God's law perfectly, nay, do anything which is acceptable to Him while in a state of nature?

To ascertain how sin, which involves all men in it, came into the world is a matter of no little importance. To discover why it is that all men universally and continually are unrighteous and ailing creatures supplies the key to many a problem. Look at human nature as it now is: depraved, wretched, and subject to death. Ask philosophy to account for this, and it cannot do so. None can deny the fact that men are what they ought not to be, but *how* they became so, human wisdom is unable to tell us. To attribute our troubles to heredity and environment is but an evasion, for it leaves unanswered the questions. How came it that our original ancestors and environment were such as to produce what now exists? Look not only at our prisons, hospitals, and cemeteries, but also upon the antipathy which is ever to be seen between the righteous and the wicked, between those who fear God and those who fear Him not. The antagonism between Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, is repeatedly duplicated in every age and clime; but the Bible alone traces that antagonism to its fountain head.

The more judicious of the ancients recognized and bemoaned the universal tendency of men to be law-breakers, but were entirely unaware of its real source. They were agreed that the practice of virtue was the chief thing necessary for the promotion of man's good, but they had to lament an irregular bent in the wills and corruption in the affections of their disciples, which rendered their precepts of little use; and they were completely at a loss to assign any reason why mankind, who have the noblest faculties of any beings on earth, should yet generally pursue their destruction with as much eagerness as the beasts avoid it. Plato (429-347 B.C.), in the second book of his *Republic*, complained that men by their natures are evil and cannot be brought to good. Tully acknowledged that "man is brought forth into the world, in body and soul, exposed to all miseries and prone to evil, in whom that divine spark of goodness, and wisdom, and morality, is opposed and extinguished." They realized that all men were poisoned, but *how* the poison came to be in the human constitution they knew not. Some ascribed it to fate; others to the hostile influences of the planets; still others, to an evil angel which attends each man.

Most certainly we cannot attribute man's natural inordinancy and defectiveness unto his Creator. To do so would be the rankest blasphemy, as well as giving the lie to His Word, which declares that "God hath made man upright" (Ecc 7:29). Even on a much lower ground, such a conclusion is self-evidently false: it is impossible that darkness should issue from the Father of light, or that sin should come from the ineffably Holy One. It is infinitely better to confess our ignorance than to be guilty of grossest impiety—to say nothing of manifest absurdity—by placing the onus upon God. But there is no excuse for anyone to be ignorant thereon: the Holy Scriptures supply a definite solution to this mystery, and show that the entire blame for his present wretchedness lies at man's own door. And therefore, to say that man is a sinful creature, or even to allow that he is totally depraved, is but to acknowledge half of the truth—and the least humbling half at that. Man is a *fallen* creature. He has departed from his original state and primitive purity. So far from man's having ascended from something inferior to an ape, he has descended from the elevated and honourable position in which God first placed him; and it is all-important to contend for this, since it alone satisfactorily explains *why* man is now depraved.

Man is not now as God made him. He has lost the crown and glory of his creation, and has plunged himself into an awful gulf of sin and misery. By his own perversity, he has wrecked himself and placed an entail of woe upon his posterity. He is a ruined creature as the result of *his apostasy from God*. This re-

quires that we should consider, first, man in his original estate, that we may perceive his folly in so lightly valuing the same and that we may form a better conception of the vastness and vileness of his downward plunge, for that can only be gauged as we learn what he fell *from* as well as *into*. By his wicked defection, man brought himself into a state as black and doleful as his original one was glorious and blessed. Second, we need to consider most attentively what it has pleased the Holy Spirit to record about the Fall itself, pondering each detail described in Genesis 3, and the amplifications of them supplied by the later Scriptures: looking unto God graciously to grant us an understanding of the same. And then, third, we shall be in a better position to view the fearful consequences of the Fall and perceive how the punishment was made to fit the crime.

Instead of canvassing the varied opinions and conflicting conjectures of our fallible and fallen fellows concerning the original condition and estate of our first parents, we shall confine ourselves entirely to the divinely inspired Scriptures, which are the only unerring rule of faith. From them, and them alone, can we ascertain what man was when he first came from the hands of his Creator. First, His Word makes known God's intention *to* bring him into existence: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26). There are two things exceedingly noteworthy in that brief statement: namely the repeated use of the pronoun in the plural number, and the fact that its language suggests the idea of a conference between the divine persons at *this point* of the "six days" work. We say at this point, for there is nothing resembling it in the record of what occurred during the previous days. Thus, the divine conference here conveys the impression that the most important stage of creation had now been reached, that man was to be the masterpiece of the divine workmanship, the crowning glory of the mundane sphere—which is clearly borne out in his being made in the divine image.

It is the usage of the plural number in Genesis 1:26, which, in our judgment, intimates the first signification of the term "image." God is a Trinity in unity, and so also is the man that He made: consisting, in his entirety, of "spirit and soul and body" (1Th 5:23)—while in some passages, "spirit" and "soul" are used as synonyms, in Hebrew 4:12, they are distinguished. The fact that the plural number occurs *three* times in the brief declaration of Genesis 1:26 supplies confirmation that the one made in Their likeness was also a threefold entity. Some scholars consider that we have an allusion to this feature of man's constitution in the apostle's averment, "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Act 17:28), pointing out that each of those three verbs has a philological significance: the first, to our animal life; the second (from which is derived the Greek word used by ethical writers for the passions—such as fear, love, hatred, and the like) not, as our English verb suggests, to man's bodily motions in space, but to his *emotional* nature—the soul; the third, to that which constitutes our essential being the "spirit"—the intelligence and will of man.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen 1:27). This announces the actual accomplishment of the divine purpose and counsels referred to in the preceding verse. The repetition of statement, with the change of the pronoun from the plural to the singular number, imports a second signification to the term "image." Viewing it more generally, it tells of the *excellency* of man's original nature, though it must needs be explained consistently with that infinite distance there is between God and the highest creature. Whatever be this glory which God placed upon Adam, it is not to be understood that he was made to participate in the divine perfections. Nor is the nothingness of the best of finite beings any disparagement when they be compared with God: for whatever likeness there is to Him, either as created, regenerated, or glorified, there is at the same time an infinite disproportion. Further, this excellency of man's original nature must be distinguished from that glory which is peculiar to Christ, who, so far from being said to be "created...in the image of God," "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature" (Col 1:15), and "the express image of his person" (Heb 1:3). There is a oneness and equality between the Father and the Son, which in nowise pertains to any "likeness" between God and the creature.

Examining the term more closely, "the image of God" in which man was made refers to his *moral nature*. John Calvin (1509-1564) defined it as being "spiritual," that it "includes all the excellence in which the nature of man surpasses all the other species of animals," and "denotes the integrity Adam possessed"; that it may be more clearly specified "in *the restoration* which we obtain through Christ." Without an exception, all the Puritans we have consulted say substantially the same thing regarding this "image of God" as moral rectitude, a nature in perfect accord with the divine Law. It could not be otherwise: for the Holy One to make a creature after *His* likeness would be to endow him with holiness. When it is said of the regenerate that he has been "*renewed* in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col 3:10), that

clearly implies the *same* image in which man was originally made, and which sin has defaced. Not only did that “image” consist of knowledge (i.e. of God), but, as Ephesians 4:24 informs us, of “righteousness and true holiness” also. Thus, man’s original state was far more than one of innocence (sinlessness, harmlessness), which is mainly a negative thing.

That man was created in positive holiness is also taught in Ecclesiastes 7:29, “God hath made [not is now ‘making’] man *upright*”: not only without any improper bias, but according to rule—straight with the Law of God conformed to His will. As Thomas Boston (1676-1732), expressed it, “Original righteousness was con-created with him.” The same Hebrew word occurs in “good and upright is the LORD” (Psa 25:8). We have dwelt the longer on this point, because not only do Romanists and Socinians *deny* that man was created a spiritual (and not merely natural) and holy (not simply innocent) being, but some hyper-Calvinists—who prefer logic and “consistency” with *their own* principles to the Word of God—do so too. One error inevitably leads to another: to insist that the unregenerate are under no obligation to perform *spiritual* acts obliges them to infer the same thing of Adam. To conclude that “if Adam fell from a holy and spiritual condition, then we must abandon the doctrine of final perseverance” is to leave out Christ and lose sight of the superiority of the covenant of grace to the original one of works.

“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen 2:7). This supplies us with additional information upon the making of Adam. First, the matter of which his body was formed: to demonstrate the wisdom and power of God in making out of such material so wondrous a thing as the human body, and to teach man his humble origin and dependence upon God. Second, the quickening principle bestowed, which was immediately from God, namely an intelligent spirit, of which the Fall did not deprive him (Ecc 12:7)—that “the breath of life” included reason or the faculty of understanding is clear from “the *life* was the *light* of men” (Joh 1:4). Third, the effect thereof: his body was now animated and made capable of vital acts. Man’s body out of the dust was the workmanship of God, but his soul was an immediate communication from “the Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9), and thereby earth and heaven were united in him.

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him... And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.” It seems that God chose this mode of making the woman—instead of forming her also out of the dust—to express the intimate union which was to take place between the sexes, to denote their mutual relation and dependence, and to show the superiority of man to the woman. Those two were so made that the whole human race, physically considered, were contained in them and to be produced from them, making them all literally “of one blood” (Act 17:26).

“And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen 1:28). Those words intimate that there was yet another meaning to “the image of God,” for the position of headship and authority which He conferred upon Adam shadowed forth the divine *sovereignty*. Psalm 8:5-6, tells us, “For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.” Adam was constituted God’s viceroy on earth, the government of all inferior creatures being conferred upon him. That was further demonstrated when the LORD brought all before Adam for him to give names to them (Gen 2:19-20), which not only evinces that he was a rational creature, endowed with the power of choice, but manifested his superiority over all mundane creatures, a propriety in them, and liberty to use them unto God’s glory and his own good.

But more. God not only endowed Adam with righteousness and holiness, thereby fitting him to fulfil the end of his creation by glorifying the Author of his being; bestowed upon him the gift of reason, which distinguished him from and elevated him above all the other inhabitants of the earth; conferred upon him the charter of dominion over them; but brought him into a pure and *beautiful environment*. “And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed... And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden [which the Septuagint renders ‘the paradise of joy’] to dress it and to keep it” (Gen 2:8, 15)—Genesis 3:24 confirms the fact that “the garden of Eden” was distinct from the earth. The whole world was given him for a possession, but Eden was the special seat of his residence, a place of pre-eminent delight. It presented to his view the whole earth in miniature, so that he might, without traveling long distances, behold the lovely landscape which it afforded. It epitomized all the

beauties of nature, and was, as it were, a conservatory of its fairest vegetation and a storehouse of its choicest fruits.

That the Garden of Eden was a place of surpassing beauty, excelling all other parts of the earth for fertility, is evident from other Scriptures. When prophesying, in a day of wretchedness and barrenness, the bountiful spiritual blessings which would attend the Gospel era, Ezekiel used this figurative but graphic language: "This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden" (Eze 36:35). Still plainer was the promise of Isaiah 51:3: "For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody." From those words, it is clear that nothing was wanting in Eden, in its pristine glory, to give the completest happiness to man. That it was a place of perfect bliss is further evident from the fact that heaven itself—the habitation of the blessed—is called "paradise" in Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:4; and Revelation 2:7—may we not see in that *threefold* allusion (there are no others!) a pledge for the complete satisfaction of the glorified man's spirit and soul and body?

In the statement that the LORD God put the man into the Garden of Eden "to dress it and to keep it" (Gen 2:15), several things are imported and implied. First, and most obviously, that God takes no pleasure in idleness, but in an active industry. That such an appointment was for Adam's good cannot be doubted; and sure it is that regular employment preserves *us* from those temptations which so often attend indolence. Second, that secular employment is by no means inconsistent with perfect holiness, or a person's enjoying intimate communion with God and the blessings arising therefrom; though Adam's would, of course, be performed without any of the fatigue and disappointment which accompany such today. The holy angels are not inert, but "ministering spirits" (Heb 1:14); yea, of the divine persons Themselves our Lord declared, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (Joh 5:17); thus, this employment assigned Adam was also a part of his conformity to God. Third, it implied the duty of keeping his own heart—the garden of his soul—with all diligence (Pro 4:23), tending its faculties and graces so that he might ever be in a condition to pray, "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits" (Song 4:16).

Further, in the "dress it [Hebrew *serve*] till," we are taught that God's gracious bestowments are to be highly treasured and carefully cultivated by us: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee" (1Ti 4:14), "stir up the gift of God, which is in thee" (2Ti 1:6). In the additional "and to *keep it*" (Gen 2:15), we believe there was a tacit warning given by God unto Adam. Not only does the English term convey that thought, but the Hebrew word (*shamar*) here used requires it. Nineteen times, it is rendered "preserve"; twelve times, "take heed"; four times, "watch"; and once, it is actually translated "beware." Thus, it signified a caution against danger, putting Adam on his guard, and bidding him to be on the lookout against the encroaching of an enemy. The Dutch Puritan, Herman Witsus (1636-1708), pointed out that the "keeping of paradise virtually engaged him of all things to be anxiously concerned not to do anything against God, lest as a bad gardener, he should be thrust out of the garden; and in that, discover a melancholy symbol of his own exclusion from heaven." Finally, in that "paradise" is one of the names of heaven, we may conclude that the earthly one in which Adam was placed was a pledge of that celestial blessedness, which, had he survived his probation and preserved his integrity, he had become possessed of.

In addition to the institution of marriage (Gen 2:23-25; 1:28), God appointed the weekly Sabbath. "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made" (Gen 2:2-3)—should any raise the cavil that the term "Sabbath" is not found in those verses, we would remind them that in Exodus 20:11, JEHOVAH Himself expressly terms that first "seventh day" of rest, "the sabbath day." The word "blessed" signifies *to declare blessedness*: thus, on the frontispiece of His Word, God would have every reader know that special divine blessing attends the observance of the Sabbath. The word "sanctified" means that it was a day set apart for sacred use. For Adam, it would be a means for his more intimate communion with God, wherein he would enjoy a recess from his secular employment and have opportunity of expressing his gratitude for all those blessings of which he was the partaker.



DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

3. Its Corollaries, Part 1

It now remains for us to make what the Puritans were accustomed to call an “improvement” of what has been before us in the preceding articles. There we have treated with what was more the technical aspect of the subject; here, we turn to the practical side of the same. There, we dealt with what would be of most interest to students and preachers; here, we shall dwell upon what is of a vital moment to every reader. A clear intellectual apprehension of any biblical doctrine is most desirable, but if it goes no farther than that, it profits us little or nothing: it is the *use* which we make of that doctrine that is the most important consideration. What then is my personal attitude toward the Bible? The assurance that it is the fully inspired Word of God carries with it definite implications. It is an inestimable privilege to have in my hands a revelation and communication from the Lord, but that privilege entails certain definite obligations, and greatly adds to my responsibility. We shall, therefore, make a practical application of our subject by pointing out some of these implications and obligations:

1. *Their inerrancy.* Since the Holy Scriptures are divinely inspired, it necessarily follows that they are free from all error, marred by no human infirmities. Their divine origin vouches for their absolute integrity and insures their flawless accuracy. Because their Author is infallible, His Word is without mistakes. “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psa 12:6)—entirely free of dross. The words of man are yea and nay, but those of God are yea and amen. “In the original, there is an allusion to the most severely purifying process known to the ancients, through which silver was passed when the greatest possible purity was desired. The dross was all consumed, and only the bright and precious metal remained: so clear and free from all alloy of error or unfaithfulness is the book of the words of the Lord”—Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892). As the personal Word was made of a woman without partaking of any defilement, so the written Word has come to us through human instruments without being in any wise sullied by their infirmities.

Since the Scriptures come to us from “the God of truth” (Isa 65:16), they are and must be “the word of truth” (2Ti 2:15). It is not a production of the Church, nor even a composition of the holy but finite angels, but a communication from Him “that cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). What an inestimable boon! It contains no cunningly devised fables, and has nothing in it which will mislead or deceive us. It is the Word of Truth in pointed contrast with all “science falsely so called” (1Ti 6:20), as well as with “philosophy and vain deceit” (Col 2:8). Living as we are in a world of shams and make-believe, of exaggeration and prevarication, of fiction and falsity, how indescribably precious is this “Thus saith the LORD”! As it is the passengers of a ship which has passed through fierce storms who welcome most the safe harbour, so it is those who were long tossed upon a sea of doubt and uncertainty who have the greatest appreciation of the safe anchorage of truth. Man’s teachings are like himself—mutable, contradictory, constantly changing. In contrast therewith, the saint exclaims, “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psa 119:89)—elevated far above all the changes on earth, and remains as the Throne of God, stable, unshaken, and unshakable.

Throughout the ages, there have been endless disputes: What is truth? Where is it to be found? The infallible answer to those questions was supplied by Christ when He said unto the Father, “Thy word is truth” (Joh 17:17). Not only contains the truth, but *is* the truth itself, in its ineffable purity and entirety. It is “the word of truth”: not only in certain parts, but from Genesis to Revelation; not some portion more so, and others less so, but all alike “the word of God.” Consequently, it never needs revising, for there is nothing in it which requires correction or is capable of improvement. As Thomas Manton (1620-1677) pointed out, “It is the *only* truth, the sole revelation of God that you can build upon, and therefore, it is the *rule* of truth. A thing may be true that is not the rule of truth. It is the *pure* truth. In it there is nothing but the truth, without any mixture of falsehood. It is the *whole* truth. It contains all things necessary for the salvation of those that yield up themselves to be instructed by it. It is, therefore, a full as well as perfect rule. Naught else is needed by the spiritual pilgrim to direct him through the mazes of this world to the better land.

2. *Their trustworthiness.* Since the Holy Scriptures are divinely inspired, it necessarily follows that they are absolutely dependable and provide a sure foundation for our faith to rest upon. “Thy testimonies are very sure” (Psa 93:5). They are certain discovery of the divine will, a reliable guide in the way of duty,

an unerring counselor for every perplexity, a safe pillow on which to repose our dying head. If you would ascertain what you are by nature in the sight of the Holy One, you may do so without the least uncertainty, for in His Word, He has delineated your heart with unfailing accuracy and fidelity. The picture will not flatter you, but is true to life. If you have a genuine concern about your soul and its eternal interests—and inquire, “What must I do to be saved?”—the Word of Truth furnishes an answer which is entirely to be counted upon. If the reader has been given spiritual wisdom, then while he feels that he dare not rest on the theorizing of scientists, the reasonings of philosophers, or the rhapsodies of mystics, he knows that he is perfectly safe in making God’s Word the rock of his confidence.

How desirable is such positiveness in a world of doubt! Then what an unspeakable privilege it is to turn from the quicksands of human speculation to the *terra firma* of divine revelation! The soul craves certainty. Guesses and hypotheses are insufficient where eternal issues are at stake. The one who is sensible of that requires something surer than a “perhaps” to rest upon. And in the “sure word of prophecy” (2Pe 1:19) *he has it*. The Bible gives forth no uncertain sound. It speaks with decisiveness and finality. Its testimony is reliable, and never deceives anyone who makes it his trust. He who rests thereon shall never be confounded. God’s truth is inviolable, His faithfulness unchanging, so that no Word of His shall ever fall to the ground. Neither His threatenings, nor His promises can possibly fail. So certain is this that it is the privilege of the believer reverently, but confidently, to hold God to His Word, and say unto Him, “Do as thou hast said” (2Sa 7:25). That is what Jacob did (Gen 32:12), what David did (Psa 119:49), what Solomon did (1Ki 8:25), and what we should do: “Now then, O LORD God of Israel, let thy word be verified” (2Ch 6:17).

The ablest human reasoner errs, but the Bible cannot deceive us. Since the Scriptures are the Word of God, they transcend all natural and human truth as far as heaven is above the earth. They are therefore worthy of our most implicit credence. He who receives them as God’s Word and trusts in the Saviour they reveal is able to aver, “For I *know* that my redeemer liveth” (Job 19:25). They who make His Word the stay of their souls are able to say, “For we *know* that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2Co 5:1). And during the present interval, they are assured that the affairs of this life are not the result of blind chance or fickle fortune, but that the living God is ruling this world and making all things work together for their good (Rom 8:28). That is not merely a pleasant theory which they hold, but a sure fact which holds them. From actual experience, the believer will readily acknowledge, “Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word” (Psa 119:65), that “not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD [promised]” (Jos 23:14).

3. *Their authority*. The Scriptures are not given for our amusement, nor to provide food for idle speculation, still less to serve as a forum for debate. Rather are they provided in order to make us wise unto salvation, and to teach us how to live and please God. And it is very far from being a matter of indifference whether or not we order our lives by the teachings of the Bible: it is our certain undoing and eternal damnation if we do not. God’s Word is not subordinated to our judgment, but peremptorily insists that we must submit to its dominion. It does not plead before the bar of human reason, but insists that human reason must bow to divine wisdom. From beginning to end, it demands acceptance and obedience from every reader. For this reason, the Scriptures are designated, “The law of the LORD...The statutes of the LORD...the commandment of the LORD...The fear of the LORD” (Psa 19:7-9). Like the incarnate Word, the written Word speaks “as one having authority” (Mat 7:29). It does not invite, but demands, unqualified attention and assent to all it says. God’s requirements are made known in dictatorial language beyond which there is no appeal, and woe be to those who despise it.

In the most uncompromising manner and without the least apology, the Bible assumes the absolute right to order men’s conduct, rebuke their misdeeds, and pass sentence upon the evil-doers. Nor does it single out for address only the ignorant and the base, but issues its commands to all alike. The rich, as well as the poor, the civilized as well as the barbarian, the saint as well as the sinner, are all dogmatically told what they must and must not do. Not only does the Bible express itself in imperative language, but as from an infinitely elevated plane. To use the words of another, “It speaks to man not as from the human plane, or even from the standpoint of superior human wisdom and morality, but as from a plane far above the highest human level, and as with a wisdom which admits of no question or dispute from man.” Hear it: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:8-9): “Hear, and your soul shall live” (verse 3). “He that believeth not shall be damned” (Mar 16:16).

Such language is entirely peculiar to the Bible. No sane mind—save an impostor's—would give vent to such expressions, for it would be such unseemly egotism as to merit only contempt and derision. Yet such a tone is by no means incongruous in the Word of God, but is exactly what we should expect to find in it. So far from His addressing us as equals, it is most fitting that the Almighty should speak thus to His own creatures. Though it be rarely acknowledged by them, what we have been calling attention to is *felt* even by the unregenerate. There is a weightiness and solemn impressiveness about the Scriptures which are not to be met with in any other writings. The precepts are more pungent, their requirements more spiritual, their expostulations more convincing, their warnings more alarming, their denunciations more dreadful. There is that in the Bible which searches the conscience, which condemns self-gratification, and which convicts of sin, as does no other book. Its statues are so pure, its language so majestic, that it is well-nigh impossible to dismiss the impression that none other than the voice of God is heard therein.

Since the Scriptures are clothed with authority, it becomes us to approach them with the utmost reverence and docility. Far be it from us to sit in judgment upon anything in that Book by which we are to be judged in the Day to come. Instead of coming to God's Word as proud critics, we must read it as humble disciples. If the Kingdom of heaven cannot be entered except we "become as little children" (Mat 18:3), equally sure it is that we shall not enter into the sacred mysteries of Scripture, unless a similar spirit possesses us as we examine its contents. No matter if some of its teaching seems incredible to us, we are forbidden to ask, How can this be so? The Word of Truth confirms it, and our understanding must assent thereto without question. A "thus saith the LORD" must silence every objection and produce unqualified subjection. Whenever we read the Bible—any part of it—let us remind ourselves, and seek to impress it upon our hearts, that we are about to listen not so much to holy men speaking for God, as to God Himself speaking through them to us. It is a light shining in a dark place, "whereunto ye do well that ye take heed" (2Pe 1:19)—that is, yield up ourselves entirely to its control.

4. *Their supremacy.* Because the Scriptures are the Word of God, nothing must be placed on their level or allowed to compete with them. As Noah and his family had to keep within the ark for safety, and the Israelites in Goshen had to remain inside their houses for preservation, so must we keep within the bounds of Scripture if we would be delivered from error and guided by the Spirit into all truth. The Old and New Testaments have been given us by inspiration of God to be our one rule of faith and practice. We are entirely shut up to the Bible for our knowledge of what God requires us to believe concerning Himself, and what duties He requires us to perform. Nothing is to be believed for salvation, nor anything done by us as Christians, but what is clearly taught and enjoined by the Word of God. It is an infallible and divinely authoritative standard, and therefore must be the final court of appeal on all subjects in debate between Christians. Without the Scriptures, it is impossible for us to attain unto sound doctrine for our conduct to be ordered, so that it will be acceptable unto God, or to secure true consolation for the soul amid the vicissitudes and sorrows of this life. By the Bible, and by it alone, are our thoughts to be formed and our lives regulated; by it, we are to test all that we hear and read.

The philosopher and the scientist would make reason his supreme guide, and when told that it is quite inadequate where spiritual and eternal things are concerned, he contemptuously asks, "Then why have I been endowed with it?" Sufficient to answer, "In order to raise you above the level of the beasts and constitute you a rational creature, so that you may be able to read and ponder the revelation which God has so graciously given us." Moreover, it is the highest and most logical act of reason to submit itself unto the wisdom and will of its Giver. The Papist insists that the Scriptures must be plussed by "tradition," by the alleged oral teaching which Christ and His apostles handed down to the Church. But that manifestly clashes with 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which expressly declares the inspired Scriptures to be *complete*, so that the man of God requires nothing else to be "thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The mystic and fanatic prefer their own intuitional light or inward impressions, which they often term, "the voice of the Spirit in the soul," but none of them have yet succeeded in devising a sure rule or test whereby one may infallibly determine whether or not that impression or voice be from God or the devil deceiving him.

Our Lord and His apostles always referred to the written Word of God as the *sole* standard of conduct and the supreme judge for determining controversy, and never to any other rule of faith whatsoever. "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" (Luk 10:26). "Search the scriptures...they are they which testify of me" (Joh 5:39). "For what saith the scripture?" (Rom 4:3)—*that* settles the matter; there is no appeal beyond it. Christ rebuked the Pharisees for adding to the Scriptures, and charged them with having "made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Mat 15:6), declaring "in vain do they worship

me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Mar 7:7-9). The Bereans were highly commended for bringing all questions, even the apostolic teaching, to the testimony of God’s Word: “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Act 17:11)—whether what they heard agreed with the supreme Standard. Everything must be brought to *that* test: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:20).

Though the inward operations of the Spirit in the saints be indispensable for their sanctification or growth in grace, both for their illumination and empowering, yet they are *not the rule* for the Christian life. The Holy Spirit never teaches us or moves us to do anything which is in the least contrary to the Book of which He is the Author. “These things write I unto thee...that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God” (1Ti 3:14-15). What could be plainer than that? Timothy was indeed indwelt by the Spirit of God; nevertheless, it was not His felt promptings, or the absence of such, but the written Word, by which alone he was to be governed. So again, “I give thee charge in the sight of God...That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Ti 6:13-14). The blessed Spirit is not given to take away the Scriptures from us, nor even to supplement them, but rather to enforce their authority and open their meaning to us. Though enlightened by the Spirit, no Christian has His inspiration like that by which He infallibly guided the writers of the Word. Many have been led into the wild extravagances under the plea that they were “led of the Spirit” (Gal 5:18) or prompted by Him therein.

A little serious thought should surely make it evident to any impartial mind that if I be regulated by my inward impressions or spiritual instinct, then I am *my own rule*, the determiner of what I should do or abstain from. Inward illumination from God is indeed a blessed reality unto regenerate soul, yet that very illumination which I may think that I have received from Him must be *tested* by His Word: “Prove all things” (1Th 5:21); “Try the spirits whether they are of God” (1Jo 4:1). “Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb 13:8), and since He gave commandment during the days of His flesh that men should search the Scriptures, He certainly does not neglect to tell anyone that he is independent of the Scriptures, and may submit himself unto the Spirit’s inward motions. Whatever I may claim as my “Christian experience,” it is of value only so far as it accords strictly with the Word of Truth. “Thy word” said David—and not his inward impressions or the Spirit’s motions—“is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa 119:105). If I put my trust in, or take my orders from, anything whatever save God’s Word, I *sin*.

There are others who are quite sure that God communicates to them in *dreams*, and by that means, reveals to them their duty. Were it not that several of our readers hold this belief, we would not devote a paragraph to such matter. That God occasionally, and not customarily, used this particular medium before the canon of the Scripture was closed is plain, yet those dreams were not ordinary ones, but extraordinary—bordering on the miraculous. God could certainly give such now if He so pleased, but nowhere does His Word contain any warrant for us to wait upon Him to speak by such a means to justify an expectation that He *will* do so. Even if I could be sure the dream was from Him and not from Satan, how could I be certain of its interpretation? Neither Pharaoh’s magicians or Nebuchadnezzar’s wise men could explain their king’s dreams! But no such uncertainty in ascertaining God’s will is mine if I prayerfully search His Word. Stick to it, and such dreams are unnecessary.

