

Vol. XXX

February, 1951

No. 2

STUDIES  
IN THE  
SCRIPTURES

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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

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## DIVINE CURSINGS

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

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

“Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD” (Jer 17:5). A thorough acquaintance with ourselves ought to render the warning of the solemn execration unnecessary, yet sad experience proves otherwise. Have you not sufficient knowledge of yourself—your changeableness and utter unreliability—to discover that “he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Pro 28:26)? Then why should you suppose that any of your fellows are more stable and dependable? The best of Adam’s race, when left to themselves, are mournful spectacles of fickleness and frailty, “Surely men of low degree are vanity and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity” (Psa 62:9). To seek either the patronage or protection of man is an affront to the Most High, for it is putting that confidence in the creature which the Creator alone is entitled to. The folly of such wickedness is emphasized in “and maketh *flesh* his arm”—leaning upon that which is frail and helpless (2Ch 32:8; Mat 26:41; Rom 8:3). How the Christian needs to turn this awful malediction into prayer for deliverance from temptation to look unto man for help or relief! Indirectly, yet more powerfully, this verse supplies proof that Christ is far more than man, for if he calls down a divine curse for one to put his trust in man for any temporary advantage, how much more so if he trusts in a mere creature for eternal salvation!

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

is blessed with its light. Who with any spiritual discernment can fail to perceive that Britain, so highly favoured of God in the past both spiritually and temporally, is now being visited with this very curse?

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

“For as many as are of the works of the laws are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10). The first part of this verse means: all who count on being saved by their own performances, or rely upon their own obedience for acceptance by God, are under the curse of His Law, exposed to His wrath. Justification by Law-keeping is an utter impossibility for any fallen creature. Why so? Because God’s Law requires flawless and perpetual conformity, sinless perfection in thought and word and deed, and because it makes no provision for failure to comply with its holy and righteous terms. It is not sufficient to hear about or know the requirements of God’s Law—they must be met. Thus it is obvious that a law which already condemns cannot justify, and that any who hope to merit God’s favour, by their fickle and faulty attempts to obey it, are woefully deceived. “To expect to be warmed by the keen northern blast, or to have our thirst quenched by a draught of liquid fire, were not more, were not so, incongruous” (John Brown, 1722-1787). This statement was made by the apostle to show that every man is under divine condemnation until he flees to Christ for refuge.

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

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



## EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

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

"Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness" (1Ti 3:16). Not only so in connection with the two natures united in the person of the God-man Mediator, but also in regard to the two opposing natures which at present exist in all those on earth who are members of His mystical body. This it is which alone casts light upon the strange conflict which is being ceaselessly waged within them, and which explains many a paradox in Holy Writ. A forceful example of the latter is found in the first chapter of our epistle. In it "The apostle seems to have said both that believers are free from sin and also that they have sin (verses 7 and 8); that they cannot sin and yet that they do sin (verses 6, 10). The explanation is that these verses contain the antithesis of Christian experience. In all realms there are apparent contradictions. Night is a contradiction of day, winter a contradiction of summer, and infancy is at the antipodes of old age" (Levi Palmer). The same antithesis of Christian experience, or contradictory elements, is brought forward into 2:1, where the apostle declares:

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

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

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

*"These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father."* Observe well how cautious and discriminating was John in the selection of his language here. First, so far from regarding the commission of sin as something which is to be expected as the common experience of all God's children, he changes the number from "that ye sin not" to "if any man sin." Second, even then such a fall is not contemplated as inevitable, but only as possible, and therefore, instead of saying "when," he uses the hypothetical "if." Third, the antithesis between the two sentences had been made even plainer and more direct had our translators rendered the opening word of the second member "But if any man sin"—as *kai* is translated in John 1:21; Acts 16:7; 1 John 2:27, which in each instance more suitably

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<sup>1</sup> **John Owen** (1616-1683) – called "The Prince of the Puritans," a chaplain in the army of Oliver Cromwell and vice-chancellor of Oxford University. Most of his life he served as a minister in congregational churches. His written works span forty years and run to twenty-four volumes representing among the best resources for theology in the English language. Born to Puritan parents in the Oxfordshire.

points a contrast. Finally, the tense of the verb which the apostle here employs is to be carefully noted: he did not say “But if any man sinneth,” but “sin.” It is not a continuous repetition which is in view, but a single and past act—as his use of the aorist connotes.

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

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

In a most striking and blessed manner our present verse contains both exhortation and consolation. “But if any man sin” despite God’s prohibition, while he must not be unconcerned, neither should he yield to despondency. For on the one hand it was not their affections which clove to sin, but sin which did cleave to their affections. And on the other, while God makes no allowance for sin, He has made provision for it. Therefore, “We must not sin that grace may abound, but when we have sinned, we must make use of abounding grace” (Matthew Henry).<sup>2</sup> From the inspired example left us here by the apostle, it is clearly as much the preacher’s duty to comfort as to admonish; it is as necessary for him to make known the divinely provided relief for sin as to warn against it. “The valiant soldier will be most furiously attacked by the enemy, and may sometimes be foiled, and despondency is as inimical to watchfulness, diligence, and holy obedience, as even carnal security itself. No man, on scriptural principles, can conclude himself to be any better than a hypocrite who habitually commits sin because God is ready to pardon the penitent; but the fallen, who desire to arise and renew the combat, have encouragement so to do” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

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

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<sup>2</sup> **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) – Presbyterian preacher, author, and commentator. His *Exposition of the Old and New Testament* (1710) easily holds first place among devotional commentaries for its blending of good sense, quaintness, original and felicitous remark, and genuine insight into the meaning of the sacred writers.

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

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

An advocate presupposes an adversary, and that He appears to defend our cause. This is indeed a great mystery about which we can know nothing whatever save what God has been pleased to reveal. In Revelation 12:10, the devil is termed "the accuser of our brethren...which accused them before our God day and night." From this it appears that when the saints fall into sin the adversary charges them with the same before God, demanding sentence of judgment upon them—as he did Job of that of which he was not guilty. In Zechariah 3 we see the high priest in filthy garments and Satan resisting him. But Christ calls on the Father to rebuke him, saying, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Orders were given for his filthy garments to be taken away, his iniquity was caused to pass from him and he was clothed with change of raiment, and a "fair mitre" set on his head! The Advocate admitted the iniquity of His client, but defied Satan on the ground that his sin was pardoned and a righteousness had been procured for him. This is recorded to assure us that no charge preferred against any whom Christ represents will succeed.

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

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

high, the Holy Spirit within the believer convicts him of his sins, moves him to confess them before God, and thereby our broken communion is restored.

*“And he is the propitiation for our sins”* (verse 2). Those words are in part an explanation of the ground on which Christ’s advocacy rests, and in part an amplification of “the righteous” of the preceding verse. Christ’s advocacy is based upon the fact that He has taken away our unrighteousness. The word “propitiation” means precisely the same thing as the Old Testament term “atonement” (the same Greek word being found in the Septuagint<sup>3</sup> version of Leviticus 23:27; Numbers 5:8, rendered by “atonement”), providing it is understood in its scriptural signification, namely as a penal and sacrificial satisfaction unto divine holiness and justice, for the expiation of sin and the averting of vengeance. That is what atonement is—“at-one-ment,” or reconciliation, is what it effected. The force of the Hebrew word appears plainly in such a passage as Numbers 16:46, namely as that which pacifies God’s wrath (compare 2Sa 24:15, 18). Thus to atone or propitiate is to placate (it is rendered “appease” in Genesis 32:20) by means of an adequate compensation—“kaphar” is translated “satisfaction” in Numbers 35:31-32.

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

*“And not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”* Universalists and Arminians<sup>4</sup> have misunderstood the sound of those words through failure to ascertain their sense. They cannot mean that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of all mankind, or every Scripture which teaches the eternal punishment of the lost would be falsified; or, on the other hand, the oblation of Christ is largely a failure and He will not “see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied” with the fruits. Those propositions ought to be so self-evident as to require no argument. Justice—divine justice least of all—does not demand a double payment for the same debt, and if Christ rendered full satisfaction unto God for the sins of the entire human race, then not a single member of it can possibly perish. Our verse is not announcing a possibility, but an actuality: it is not Christ’s willingness to be a propitiation for “the whole world” if they threw down their weapons and trusted in Him, but that He is so, and therefore if the whole world here is to be understood without restriction, then the verse teaches universal salvation and Scripture contradicts itself. But it does not: as here we have a “world” saved, so in 1 Corinthians 11:32, a “world” lost!

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

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

<sup>4</sup> **Arminians** – followers of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), Dutch theologian, born in Oudewater, the Netherlands. He rejected the Reformers’ understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God’s predestination of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will.



But why did John say “and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world”? To stain the pride of the Jews, and to comfort the despised Gentiles. Throughout the Mosaic economy the sacrifices were available for none but Israelites and proselytes who were circumcised and permitted to enjoy some of their privileges. During the days of His public ministry Christ forbade His disciples to go into the way of the Gentiles (Mat 10:5-7), but after His resurrection He commissioned them to preach the Gospel to every creature and make disciples of all nations, for at the cross “the middle wall of partition” (Eph 2:14) was broken down; therefore did He die outside Jerusalem (Heb 13:12) to intimate that His sacrifice had been offered for the whole election of grace, and not for believing Israelites only. John was one of the three apostles “unto the circumcision” (Gal 2:9) and that his epistle was addressed principally to saved Jews is evident: they alone had the old commandment from the beginning (2:7), had known Christ “from the beginning” (2:13), and only from Jewish Christian assemblies would “antichrists” have gone out (2:18-19).

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



## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

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

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

"When Jabin...had *heard* those things" (11:1). Once more we meet with this important word—compare 2:10; 5:1; 9:1; 10:1, and note the various reactions of those who received such tidings. It is true that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17), yet it is also a fact that "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them" (Pro 20:12). True alike both naturally and spiritually, for morally man is both deaf and blind to the things of God (Mat 13:13-14), and therefore the voice of mercy is disregarded and the sinner perceives no beauty in Christ that he should desire Him. To his need and to the remedy he is alike insensible. Until a miracle of grace is wrought within him, his imagination is darkened and his heart closed against God. That is why multitudes that hear the Gospel with the outward ear profit not, and those who *are* saved under it and receive it into their hearts do so solely because *God* has made them to differ from their unbelieving fellows. Jabin "had heard" of the destruction of Jericho and Ai, but instead of trembling thereat, he hardened his heart. Thus do sinners rush madly to destruction notwithstanding the repeated warnings they received from the deaths of their godless fellows.

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

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

As a protest against the slavish literalism which now exists in certain circles, and as a demurrer against those who insist that the words of Revelation 7:9, "a great multitude, which no man could number," mean

exactly what they affirm, a few words require to be said upon our being told that the assembled hosts of the Canaanites were “even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude.” One had supposed that any person of average intelligence and education would at once perceive that such language is hyperbolic, and therefore not to be understood according to the strict letter of it. Such a rhetorical figure is frequently used in Scripture for the purpose of producing a vivid impression. Thus, in the days of Moses, the Lord declared He had multiplied Israel “as the stars of heaven for multitude” (Deu 1:10). When the Midianites assailed Israel, it is said, “They came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number” (Jdg 6:5) and “as the sand by the sea side for multitude” (7:12). The Philistines who gathered themselves together against Saul are described as “the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude” (1Sa 8:5). When God’s judgments were on Israel, He declared, “Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas” (Jer 15:8). Nineveh is said to have multiplied its merchants “above the stars of heaven” (Nah 3:16).

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

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

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

The greater the dangers menacing God’s people, the greater support may they ask for and expect from Him. The more entirely their hearts be fixed on Him as their strength and deliverer, the more certainly shall their spiritual enemies be subdued by them. See this most strikingly exemplified here in Joshua 11. “And when all these kings were met together, they came and pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. And the LORD said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them; for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel” (verses 5-6). First, let us observe that JEHOVAH here

made good the word that He had given through Moses; “When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest *horses, and chariots*, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them; for the LORD thy God is with thee...to fight for you against your enemies, to save you” (Deu 20:1, 4). How this reminds us of the declaration, “He is faithful that promised” (Heb 10:23)! One of the titles which Deity has taken unto Himself is “The faithful God” (Deu 7:9). How safely then may He be relied upon! None ever yet really trusted Him in vain.

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

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

Though the circumstances were different, the same principle was really involved here in Joshua 11—the devil’s enmity against and opposition to God. For it was the Lord who had given Canaan unto Abraham and his seed, and He it was who had brought them into it. Palestine was Israel’s by right of divine donation. But now the occupancy of their inheritance was hotly challenged. All those kings with their armies were determined to destroy them. The gauntlet was thrown down; let it be put to the issue was the language of their actions. The Lord promptly accepted the challenge, and let it be known unto Israel that “he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye” (Zec 2:8). Blessed figure of speech was that; telling not only of the inherent weakness and tenderness of the Lord’s people, but intimating their nearness and dearness unto Himself. God strongly resents any affront done to them, and will severely punish those who seek to harm them. Therefore did the Lord immediately assure Joshua that there was no reason for him to be dismayed by this imposing force of the enemy; they were but flinging themselves upon “the thick bosses of *his* bucklers” (Job 15:26), rushing headlong to their destruction, as would be made to appear on the morrow. So likewise, in the end, will all the words of the devil be destroyed.

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

fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”—not only, and not principally, *theirs*, but primarily and pre-eminently *God's*.

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

But further. It is the believer’s privilege to realize, especially when fiercely assaulted and sorely pressed by the foe, that the outcome of the fight in which he is engaged rests not with him but with the Captain of his salvation, and therefore to Him he may turn at all times for succor and for victory. What the Lord said here unto Joshua, the Christian should regard as being said unto himself: “Be not afraid because of them.” Those who are now arrayed against the Christian and who seek his destruction shall soon themselves be destroyed. “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom 16:20), and meanwhile, as the apostle immediately added, “The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. Amen.” But just as that assuring word spoken to Joshua was addressed unto his *faith* and could be enjoyed only by the exercise of that grace in the interval before its fulfillment, so serenity of mind, while menaced by his foes, can only be the believer’s as he by faith appropriates that promise unto himself. Then let his triumphant language be, “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid” (Isa 12:2). In proportion as he does so will he be warranted in resting on that declaration, “Surely he *shall deliver thee* from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers” (Psa 41:3-4).



## THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

### 6. *Its Nature, Part 2*

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

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

By “righteousness,” we are to understand, as everywhere in Scripture, conformity to the divine Law. Before the fall, there was an entire harmony between the whole moral nature of man and all the requirements of that Law which is “holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12). This was very much more than a merely negative “innocence” or freedom from everything sinful, or even bias or tendency toward it, which is all that Socinians allow; namely something nobler, higher and more spiritual. There was perfect agreement and concord between the constitution of our first parents and the rule of conduct set before them, not only in their external actions, but also in the very springs of those actions, in the innermost parts of their beings—in their desires and motives, in all the tendencies and inclinations of their hearts and minds. As Ecclesiastes 7:29 declares, God “made man *upright*,” which refers not to the carriage of his body, except so far as that shadowed forth his moral excellence. That righteousness was lost at the fall, but is, in principle, restored at regeneration, when God writes His laws in our hearts and puts them in our minds—imparts to us a love for and relish of them, makes us willingly subject to their authority.

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

By “knowledge,” we are to understand the cognition of God Himself. As Adam’s holiness or purity of heart capacitated him to “see God” in the spiritual sense of the word, so also was he enabled thereto by the Holy Spirit’s indwelling of him. As Goodwin pointed out, “Where holiness was, we may be sure the Spirit was too...the same Spirit [as in the regenerate] was in Adam’s heart to assist his graces and to cause them

to flow and bring forth, and to move him to live according to those principles of life given to him" (Vol. 6, p. 54). It is clear from the nature of the case that, since Adam was created in maturity of body, he must have been created in maturity of mind, that there was then resident in him what we acquire only by slow experience. Adam was able to apprehend and appreciate God for what He is in Himself; he had a true and intuitive knowledge of the perfections of Deity, the heartfelt realization of their excellence. That knowledge of God was lost at the fall, by Adam and to his offspring, but it is restored to the elect at regeneration, when He shines "in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Co 4:6).

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

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

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

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

Again, that life which His children receive from God consists not only in being the objects of His benign approbation, in the experiential enjoyment of His lovingkindness, but also in the reception of a principle of righteousness and holiness by which they are fitted to appreciate Him, and for want of which

the unregenerate cannot enjoy Him, for they are “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18). It is clear, both from the immediate context and from the remainder of the verse, that the “life of God” there has a particular reference to holiness, for the contrary thereto appears in “that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in *the vanity* of their mind.” The contrast is further pointed in “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” The unconverted are wholly dominated by their depraved nature. Their minds are in a state of moral fatuity, engaged only with vain things, their understandings are devoid of spiritual intelligence, lacking any power to apprehend truth or appreciate the beauties of virtue; their souls estranged from God, with an inveterate aversion from Him; their hearts calloused, steeled against Him. Thus the corruption and depravity of the natural man are seen over against the grace and holiness communicated at the new birth, here termed “the life of God.”

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

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

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

As the principle of obedience, love takes the precedence, for faith works by love (Gal 5:6); hence the order in that injunction, “Let us consider one another to provoke [1] unto love and [2] to good works” (Heb 10:24)—stir up the affections and good works will follow, as a stirring up of the coals causes the flames to arise. It is love which makes all the divine commandments to be “not grievous” (Joh 5:3). We heartily agree with Charnock’s dictum, “In that one word *love*, God hath wrapped up all the devotion He requires of us,” and certainly our souls ought to be ravished with Him, for He is infinitely worthy of our choicest affections and strongest desires. Love is a thing acceptable in itself, but nothing can be acceptable to God without it. “They that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (Joh 4:24)—the most decorous



and punctilious forms of devotion are worthless if they lack vitality and sincerity. True worship proceeds from love, for it is the exercise of heavenly affections, the pouring out of its homage to Him who is “altogether lovely.” Love is the best thing we can render God, and it is His right in every service. Without it we are an abomination unto Him, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha” (1Co 16:22).

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

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



## INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

### *Part 7*

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

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

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

"He could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them" (Mar 6:5). So determined are some Arminians to deny the almightiness of God and the invincibility of His will that they have appealed to this passage in proof that the power of His incarnate Son was limited, and that there were occasions when His merciful designs were thwarted by man. But a comparison of the parallel passage in Matthew 13:54-58, at once gives the lie to such a blasphemous assertion, for we are there told "He did not many mighty works *there* because of *their unbelief*." Thus it was not any limitation in Himself, but something in them, which restrained Him. In other words, He was actuated by a sense of propriety. The

emphasis both in Mark 6:5 and Matthew 13:58 is on the word "there," for, as the context shows, this occurred at Nazareth where He was lightly esteemed. To have performed prodigies of power before those who regarded Him with contempt had, in principle, been casting pearls before swine; as it had been unfitting to have wrought miracles to gratify the curiosity of Herod (Luk 23:8)—elsewhere He did many supernatural works. In Genesis 19:22, the Lord could not destroy Sodom until Lot had escaped from it, while in Jeremiah 44:22, He "could no longer bear" the evil doings of Israel—it was moral propriety, not physical inability.

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

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

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

The third, or thorny-ground, hearer is the most difficult to identify, but the Lord has graciously supplied fuller help on this point by entering into more detail in His explanations of what the "thorns" signify. All three accounts tell us that they "grew up," which implies that no effort was made to check them; and all three accounts show that they "choked" the seed or hindered the Word. Matthew's record defines the thorns as "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches." Mark adds "and the lust of other things entering in," while Luke mentions also "the pleasures of this life." Thus we are taught that there is quite a variety of things which hinder any fruit being brought to perfection—against each of which we need to be much on

our prayerful guard. The good-ground hearer is the one who “understandeth” the Word (Mat 8:23), for unless its sense be perceived, it profits us nothing—probably an experiential acquaintance therewith is also included. Mark 4 mentions the “receiving” of it (cf. James 1:21), while Luke 8 describes this hearer as receiving the Word “in an honest and good heart,” which is one that hates all pretence and loves the truth for itself, making application of the Word to his own case and judging himself by it; “keeps it,” cherishes and meditates upon it, heeds and obeys it; and “brings forth fruit with patience.”

In a preceding article, we called attention to Matthew 7:24-27, as an example of the importance of ascertaining the scope of a passage. Let us now point out the need for *comparing it* with the parallel passage in Luke 6:47-49. In it the hearers of the Word are likened unto wise and foolish builders. The former built his house on the foundation of God’s Word. The building is the character developed thereby and the hope cherished. The storm which beat upon the house is the trial or testing to which it is subjected. Luke alone begins his account by saying the wise man came to Christ—to learn of Him. His wisdom appeared in the trouble he took and the pains he went to in order to find a secure base on the rock. Luke’s account adds that he “dugged deep,” which tells of his earnestness and care, and signifies spiritually that he searched the Scriptures closely and diligently examined his heart and profession—that digging deep is in designed contrast with the “no depth of earth” (Mark 4:5) of the stony-ground hearer. Luke alone uses the word “vehemently” to describe the violence of the storm by which it was tested—his possession survived the assaults of the world, the flesh and the devil, and the scrutiny of God at the moment of death; which proves he was a *doer* of the Word and not a hearer only (Jam 1:22). Useless is the confession of the lips unless it be confirmed by the life.

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

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

7. *Briefer statements are to be interpreted by fuller ones.* It is an invariable rule of exegesis that when anything is set out more fully or clearly by one writer than another, the latter is always to be expounded by the former, and the same applies unto two statements by the same speaker or writer. Particularly is this the case with the first three Gospels—parallel passages should be consulted, and the shorter one interpreted in the light of the longer one. Thus, when Peter asked Christ, “How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?” and our Lord answered, “Unto seventy times seven” (Mat 18:21-22). It must not be taken to signify that a Christian is to condone wrongs and exercise grace at the expense of righteousness; for He had just previously said, “If thy brother shall trespass against thee go and tell him his

fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear [heed] thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (verse 15). No, rather must Christ’s language in Matthew 18:22 be explained by His amplified declaration in Luke 17:3-4—“If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him: and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, *I repent*; thou shalt forgive him.” God Himself does not forgive us until we repent (Act 2:38; 3:19). If a brother repents not, no malice is to be harboured against him, yet he is not to be treated as though no offence had been committed.

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

