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**STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES**

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Late | 1 |
| Exposition of John's First Epistle | 4 |
| <i>38. Abiding in Christ (2:28)</i> | |
| The Life and Times of Joshua..... | 10 |
| <i>90. Levitical Cities, Part 2</i> | |
| Cast Down | 16 |
| Profiting from the Word..... | 19 |
| <i>2. The Scriptures and God</i> | |
| Extracts from Letters | 25 |

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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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LATE

In this companion article to the January one (“Early”), we do not propose to confine ourselves unto the few passages where the actual word “Late” occurs, but, instead, include those which treat of procrastination, tardiness, and lateness. As we began the former with an appeal unto the impenitent and unbelieving, so here we will first address ourselves unto those who have not yet closed with the free offer of the Gospel. Let all such who read this piece seriously ponder those solemn words, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved” (Jer 8:20). That was the pathetic lament of Israel during a critical emergency. They were besieged by the Chaldeans, surrounded by powerful forces of fierce foes through which they were unable to break. They had expected that the Egyptians would come to their relief, but their hopes had been dashed. They must have been nearing the point of starvation, and, with winter imminent, destruction stared them in the face, and they were filled with a spirit of despair. That doleful cry of the ancient Jews may well be accommodated unto the case of those who are destitute of any well-grounded hope and “without God in the world.”

“The harvest is past, the summer is ended.” Those words announce the sequel to the fields of golden grain which a faithful Creator (Gen 8:22; 1Pe 4:19) supplies for His ungrateful creatures. The sickle had done its work and cut down the corn. The genial sunshine of summer was over, and the icy blasts of winter were approaching. Such is a parable of our mundane existence, though, alas, the parallel fails in one important respect where the unsaved are concerned. You have been the recipients of God’s temporal mercies and have been privileged to enjoy the spiritual means of grace, but instead of bringing forth fruit to the glory of God, you have produced naught but weeds to your own dishonor. Why then should not the sickle of death remove you from this scene as a cumberer of the ground? As summer gives place to winter, so life is followed by death, and *you* are unprepared for it. Or to change the figure, your lot is like unto those who gave utterance to

this text. Your soul is besieged, besieged by sin and Satan, which are determined to bring about your eternal destruction. Perhaps you too have leaned upon an Egyptian arm of flesh to extricate you—in your case, self-efforts—only to be disappointed and mocked for your pains.

“And we are not saved” was their bitter cry. Perhaps you differ from them in this respect also. *They* were painfully conscious of their dismal plight, whereas *you* are indifferent to your perilous situation, insensible of your wretchedness. Oh, that it may please God to awaken and convict you before it be too late. To be not saved means that you are in a perishing condition. It means that the accumulated guilt of all your sins lies to your account. It means that the curse of the divine Law clamours for your damnation. Whether you know it or not, it means that you are the slave of your lusts and the captive of the devil. It means that, even now, the wrath of God abides on you. It means that you are hastening to the endless fire of hell as swiftly as the passage of time can take you thither. And *why is it* that you are “not saved”? It is because you have not sought the Lord with all your heart (Jer 29:13). And why have you not done so? Because you have been too indifferent about your eternal interests, concerned over the health of your body, heedless of the welfare of your soul, anxious to succeed in business and make good in this world, uninterested in the unsearchable riches of Christ and heedless of the world to come.

As Esau preferred the gratification of his belly to spiritual blessings, so it is greatly to be feared that some who will read these lines are far too deeply absorbed with the things of time and sense to seek seriously after eternal treasures. Little as you may realize it, that is only another way of saying that Christ is rejected because you are *in love with sin*. You are not too busy to eat, and the One, who has given you time to minister unto your body, has given time for you to care for your soul. Whatever excuses you may offer for postponing this all-important matter, you are trifling with God. You are devoid of any sense of urgency. Why is the same thought repeated, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended,” but to impress you with the fact that all earthly things have an end? Salvation is only obtainable in this life—after death, the judgment. Then, how eagerly should you seize your immediate opportunity. “Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Pro 27:1). Felix trembled at the preaching of Paul, but decided to wait for “a more convenient season.” Yet, as far as the record of Scripture goes, it never came! The foolish virgins sought oil for their lamps at the last moment, but they had left it until it was *too late*.

And now, a few words unto the believer. As in our January article, we stressed the importance of beginning the day with God, let us point out the need of *closing the day* with Him. First, that we *review* it in His presence, that we may perceive the duties we have neglected, the temptations to which we have yielded, the things we have done amiss, so that we may confess our sins and clear our consciences ere we lie down—perhaps never to rise again in this world! Not only is it indispensable to keep short accounts with God if we are to have His smile upon us, but the forming of this habit of searching our ways and taking stock of our actions *late in the day*—comparing them with the rule of God’s Word—will make us better acquainted with ourselves and promote the grace of humility. The more we look at ourselves in the glass of God’s Word, the less cause shall we have for

complacency. Nothing contributes more unto soul prosperity than the deepening of a spirit of self-judgment and self-abasement.

Second, review God's *mercies* unto you during the day which is now ended. Mark their variety, their timelines, their uninterrupted continuity. Ponder His preserving care, the particular instances wherein He has shown Himself strong in your behalf, the dangers and calamities from which He has delivered you. Think of the comforts which God has lavished upon you, how deeply you are indebted to the bounties of His providence, and say with the Psalmist, "Blessed be the LORD, who daily loadeth us with his benefits" (Psa 68:19). Though the day may have had its trials, disappointments and afflictions, yet, they too were ordered by divine wisdom and designed for your good. And though sense perceives it not, *faith* is to recognize the same and "in every thing give thanks" (1Th 5:18). Be thankful that a merciful Creator has appointed the night as well as the day, that He grants a respite from toil, that the burden and heat of the day are not perpetual. When God "divided the light from the darkness" (Gen 1:4) and allotted to both of them their seasons successively, He saw "that it was good" (Gen 1). How grateful we should be for His drawing of the curtains of the night about us in favour to our repose!

Third, as the bird flies to its nest for shelter for the night, so *retire to your divine refuge*, and say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul" (Psa 116:7). Whatever has disturbed your tranquility during the day, commit it now unto God. Cast thy burden on Him and repose yourself in the arms of your eternal Lover. Take not your troubles to bed with you, but resolve with the Psalmist (not in your own strength, but counting upon the sufficiency of divine grace), "I will both lay me down in peace, *and sleep*; for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety" (Psa 4:8). Place your outward man in His safe custody. Commit your inward man to the influences of the Holy Spirit, that you may be instructed in the night seasons (Psa 16:7). Lie down in peace with all men, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Eph 4:26). For if you do so, then, you are not at peace with God.

A final word to those of the Lord's children who have reached that stage where it is *late in life* with them. What an assuring word is that, "And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Isa 46:4). The unchanging JEHOVAH will not only never leave or forsake you, but will have the same care and sympathy for you now as He had in the days of your infancy, when you were unable to minister unto yourself. However infirmities press upon you, He will support and sustain, and carry you in His everlasting arms. If then (by grace) we have learned to trust Him, we need not be anxious about the few days there may still be left for us to spend in this scene. Instead, let us lay hold of that promise, "They shall bring forth fruit in old age" (Psa 92:14). And why not? Are you not in your own person a miracle of grace? Has not divine power wrought in you from the day that you first believed? Is *old age* "too hard for the LORD" (Gen 18:14)? Perish the thought. Count upon a supernatural enablement to bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness—patience, meekness, contentment with your lot, rejoicing in the Lord. Fear not your passage into the next world. He, who has given grace to live by, will give grace to die by. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for *the end of that man is peace*" (Ps 37:37). Of the Prince of peace it is said, "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved

them unto the end" (Joh 13:1), and that love will be evidenced by filling your soul with that peace which passes all understanding.

EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

38. Abiding in Christ (2:28)

"And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

"Abiding in Christ" means remaining steadfast

The apostle was engaged in warning professing Christians against false teachers who desired to corrupt them, yea, who had already prevailed with many of their company (verses 18-19). He had shown them up in their true colours, denouncing them as antichrists and liars (verse 22). He had exhorted the saints to hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast to the end (verse 24). He had reminded them of the grand promise given for their encouragement (verse 25). Then he assured the regenerate that the anointing which they had received from Christ was no mere temporary benefit, but one which would remain in them as an incorruptible principle of life and light, supplying them with such spiritual discernment as no human teaching could impart. That "anointing" consisted, as we have seen, of the gift of the Holy Spirit and His saving grace. It is the Spirit as an illuminator and instructor that is here singled out for particular mention. He teaches nothing but infallible truth, without the slightest mixture of error. He teaches "of all things," that is, all things essential unto our ingrafting into and continuation in Christ—the essential and fundamental things of the Gospel, whatever be requisite for our obedience to Christ and communion with Him. *That* all believers are taught, however ignorant they be in matters of lesser importance.

Paraphrasing the excellent John Owen (1616-1683), we would say that, *first*, all divine truth that is necessary to be known and believed that we may live unto God, abide in Christ, and be preserved from seducers, is revealed in the Scriptures (Act 20:32). *Second*, but of ourselves we cannot understand the Scriptures unto the ends just specified (1Co 2:14); if we could there would be no need that we should be taught them by the Spirit (1Co 2:12). *Third*, by the anointing of the Spirit believers are taught all those things, so that they are enabled to discern, understand, and acknowledge them (1Jo 2:27). The Spirit is given to Christ's redeemed for this very purpose: that He may graciously and savingly instruct them in the truth of the Gospel by the supernatural enlightening of their minds, causing the soul to cling firmly unto it with love and delight, transforming them in the whole inner man into the image of the same. Thereby it answers to the anointing of the Lord Jesus with the same Spirit, which made Him "of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD" (Isa 11:3). "The secret of the LORD *is* with them that fear him; and he will show them his

covenant" (Psa 25:14). God will not conceal from them the knowledge of His will so far as their salvation is concerned in it, but will teach them the way wherein they should walk if they are to be acceptable to Him.

The general end or design of God in the gift and teaching of the Spirit is to provide for believers remaining steadfast in Christ, and thus verse 27 closes with the emphatic statement, "and even as it [the anointing] hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." Whatever be required in order to maintain communion with Christ all believers are taught. The especial end in view that is here singled out is preservation and deliverance from all antichrists and seducers, with the lies and false doctrines which they propagate against Christ and His Gospel. The only means whereby we may be kept from such pernicious opinions and ways is by an assured knowledge and inward acquaintance with what is revealed in Holy Writ. Truth is the only antidote against error, and none but the Holy Spirit can lead anyone into the life-giving meaning of the truth and quicken him into real fellowship with the Lord thereby. Those who lack this spiritual, sure, and establishing knowledge, possessing but a bare conjectural and theoretical acquaintance with it, are Christians only in name, receiving the Gospel from men in the letter rather than in the substance of it; and, not being rooted and grounded in the faith, are subject to any wind of false doctrine.

Nothing else ensures stability and fidelity. Man's knowledge, skill, or disputing ability is insufficient to preserve from being inveigled with fair pretences or enticed with the cunning sleights of Satan, where he lies in wait to deceive. Yea, as Owen pointed out, "Temptations may come as a storm or tempest, which quickly drives men from their greatest fleshly confidences. Hence oftentimes those who are forwardest to say, Though all men should forsake the truth yet would not they do so, are the forwardest upon trial so to do."

But this sacred anointing fails none who receive it, and because of it they never fail. *First*, because His teaching is not merely an external and doctrinal instruction, but an internal and effectual operation. Whereas He makes use indeed of the written Word and teaches nothing but what is revealed therein, He bestows an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and open our eyes so that we may see clearly the wondrous things that are in God's Law. The degree of this knowledge varies considerably, both in the clearness with which divine things are perceived and in the scope or extent of the same, the Spirit acting according to the sovereignty of His will (1Co 12:11); but none who receives His anointing comes short of whatever be necessary to ensure his abiding in Christ.

Second, the Spirit so teaches as to give a love unto and delight in the things that are taught. This is the next principal cause of action and practice, being that which binds together the different means and instruments of our security, rendering them firm and stable. Even though the mind be informed and perceives a duty, if the will and the affections be not wrought upon and won over unto a hearty approbation of the same, we shall never conform ourselves unto them in the diligent performance of that duty. That which is done merely from convictions of conscience, without any gladness of heart, will neither be acceptable unto God nor shall we be constant therein. No matter how well instructed we be by God's ministers, or what light we personally acquire by study, unless

there be genuine love of the truth and the personal practice thereof, it will prove insufficient unto our preservation and the saving profession of it. This is the outstanding characteristic feature of this divine unction: it communicates a delight in the truth wherein it instructs and promotes a glad obedience to what it requires. When the blessed Spirit by His teaching breathes into the soul a holy and spiritual complacence in the things that are taught, then we taste how gracious the Lord is in them; His Word is rendered sweeter to us than the honeycomb, and we run in the way of His commandments.

This anointing imparts a secret and infallible assurance unto that which is communicated, for “it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth...He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself” (1Jo 5:6, 10). Then, in such a connection, the “and ye need not that any man teach you” should be quite plain to all. They were not ignoramuses, who were unacquainted with the truth. They were not dependent upon Gnostics or any other “great” and wise men to indoctrinate them. No so-called “infallible church” or “pope” was required to authenticate God’s Word and persuade of its verity. As divinely enlightened, they already knew the things John was setting before them. Similarly, Paul wrote, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another” (1Th 4:9). So here, yet as the well-balanced Calvin remarked, “There is another use to be made of this doctrine: that when men really understand what is needful for them, we are yet to warn and rouse them, that they may be more confirmed.” As every believer has faith, yet there is need for a further increase of it, so there is ever room for an enlarging and deepening of spiritual knowledge.

“*And ye need not that any man teach you*” is also mentioned to counteract and put down that carnal tendency of idolizing the human instrument. There is a very great danger of this. Young believers especially are apt to think too highly of those who are made a blessing to their souls. Where the affections be fixed upon the messenger rather than upon the message itself, there the teacher comes between the heart and Christ. Nor must we esteem the most gifted as though his interpretation be an oracle of God, but rather test what he says by the Word. It is so easy to fix the eye on the servant who is seen, instead of on his unseen Master. How many go to church hoping to receive something from the preacher, instead of looking to the Lord for a blessing! Though teachers be needed, they must not be relied upon. “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?...So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1Co 3:5, 7). What a corrective for preacher-worship is that! Even an apostle could not open their minds to apprehend a single truth unless the Spirit was pleased to bless his efforts.

Another effect of “abiding”: stability from error

“*Even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.*” That is the seventh thing¹ predicated of our divine anointing: it produces a permanent stabilizing effect, preserving from dangerous error. It so instructs and establishes in the faith, imparts such a spirit of discernment of truth from falsehood, that it is now impossible for Satan to deceive them

¹ **seventh thing** – for the first six things, see the last part of the prior chapter.

with his lies (Mat 24:24). It not only illumines the mind, but sanctifies the heart and turns the will Godward. Such impressions are made upon the soul of the holiness, sovereignty, and goodness of God, that they are instinctively repelled by any teaching that repudiates the same. They have a spiritual palate that is acute in distinguishing between what is wholesome and that which is poisonous. They have such a love of the truth that nothing can induce them to sell it. God has given them the spirit “of a sound mind” (2Ti 1:7), which enables them to perceive the sophistries of would-be seducers. It conveys to them a wisdom that makes wise the simple (Psa 19:7), which none of the schools of this world can impart. And therefore many an unlettered peasant is often far sounder in the faith than preachers with their classical and theological degrees. Nor is their knowledge confined to merely a few simple truths: they have a deeper acquaintance with the entire doctrine of Christ, being taught in their own experience, and in such a way that none can shake them.

“*Ye shall abide in him.*” The careful reader will observe that the margin gives as an alternative rendering, “or it”—that is, the truth. The Greek allows either. To abide in Christ and to abide in the truth are here equivalent. In the whole of this passage, the contrast is between those who turn from Christ to antichrists, and those who remain loyal to Him and steadfast in the faith. The apostle is comforting the distressed believers by assuring them of his confidence in them: that having received from Christ an anointing that had taught them of all things necessary to their salvation and preservation they would endure to the end. He is saying what another apostle declared of the Hebrew saints, “But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb 10:39). “To ‘abide in Christ’ is to continue in the true faith and confession of Him, and of all which concerns Him—His truth, His ordinances, His worship. To abide in Christ is to persevere in the truth of His everlasting Gospel” (S.E. Pierce, 1746-1829). To abide in Christ is to have Him for our supreme Object, to centre our affections upon Him, to make Him our center and circumference—our all in all.

What does it mean “to abide” in Christ?

“*And now, little children, abide in him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*” (verse 28)

Having completed his distinct instructions and exhortations to the fathers, young men and babes (verses 13-17), John returns to and again addresses the whole family collectively under the same name of endearment (*teknon*) as in verse 12. With paternal affection the apostle now exhorts them to abide in Christ. That term “little children” was the one His beloved Master had employed that never-to-be-forgotten night when He so graciously instructed the eleven in the upper room on the eve of His crucifixion: “Little children, yet a little while I am with you” (Joh 13:33). Doubtless that tender word made a particularly deep impression upon the one who was wont to recline on His bosom, and was tenderly cherished in his memory—so much so that he in turn made use of it when addressing his dear converts. As his mind reverted to the great “paschal discourse,” he would recall how that the Saviour had used the word “abide” no less than eight times in John 15:4-11, for “continue ye in my love” (verse 9) and “that my joy might remain in you” (verse 11) are the same in the original as the “abide in me” of verse 4. Now this exhortation “abide in

him" is so blessed, so important, and so comprehensive, as to call for a fuller opening by the expositor.

To abide, in the language of Scripture, means more than merely to remain in one place. It has a moral force, and signifies to adhere unto. Thus it implies a previous union or connection with a person or thing. To be in Christ, and to abide in Him, are distinct thoughts. In order to abide in Christ, one must first be in Him. The former respects a union that is effected by the gracious power of God, and cannot be dissolved or suspended. Accordingly, believers are never enjoined to "be in Christ," for that could not be the subject of exhortation, since it already exists as an accomplished fact by new creation. But to "abide in Christ" is the subject of injunction, because the exercise of the believer's responsibility is involved therein. Union with Christ has made possible a life of communion with Him, and that life may be suitably addressed, and is required to respond to His call.

Unlike the *being* in Christ, the *abiding* is capable of interruption. When assured that "we are in him that is true" (1Jo 5:20), the reference is to a union that cannot be disannulled, to a standing that cannot be shaken. But when we hear the Lord saying "abide in me" (or an apostle repeating His word), it implies that we are exposed to failure at this point, or have already failed therein. It is therefore a word which calls us to vigilance.

In calling upon believers to abide in Christ, John was bidding them to adhere steadfastly to His Gospel, to live in constant dependence upon Him in faith and hope, to render loving obedience to His commandments, to enter into fellowship with Him. Thereby they would have the assurance of being approved disciples, and in the day to come would not be ashamed before Him, as will all hypocrites and apostates. Some may consider it needless, if not meaningless, to press the duty of perseverance when the exercise of it is certain. Having stated so emphatically, "Ye shall abide in him," why, in the very next breath, enjoin them to do that very thing?—Because privileges do not cancel obligations, but rather increase them. While our abiding in Christ is ensured by the grace of the Spirit, that releases us not from the discharge of our accountability. The Spirit is not given to exempt us from the performance of duty, but to enable us to discharge it. It is just *because* He indwells us that we ought to be the more diligent and faithful. Talents are given us to use, and not to bury in the ground. It is the Spirit's presence and power that makes failure on our part inexcusable.

The Lord Jesus informed Peter, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," nevertheless, shortly after, He bade him "Pray that ye enter not into temptation" (Luk 22:32, 40). He who regards those things as being "inconsistent," knows nothing yet as he ought to know. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, another apostle definitely assured the saints, "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Then might they not remain passive and be carried down the stream of temptation? No indeed: very different is the use that he makes of that encouraging assurance, namely "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry" (verse 14). He drew an argument from that very promise for the performance of duty. Promises are given for the purpose of quickening industry, and animating us in the use of means. God does not preserve His people by physical force, and

compel them to retain their standing in Christ—as He establishes the earth and the heavens by the forth putting of His might. Instead, He is pleased to use rational means which are suited to moral agents. The inward workings of His grace do not set aside or render nugatory² external warnings, expositions, and admonitions.

In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul employed the same spiritual logic that he had used when addressing the Corinthians: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.” There he argues that we ought to be active and diligent because God is working in us! Both the willing and the doing are freely ascribed unto God, and yet for that very reason we are to do. He will assist in the performing of it. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God leaves you not alone. Though the task be far beyond your puny strength, He gives assurance, “My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in your weakness” (2Co 12:9). Grace is a dynamic, an operating, principle, and, where it dwells, radically affects our thoughts, influences our desires, produces good works. Divine grace cannot tabernacle in a human heart without breaking forth to act in the life. It is evidenced by its fruits. Just because you have received a divine anointing that assures your spiritual preservation from all seducers of souls, *see to it* that you abide in Christ—remain loyal to Him at all costs.

We must now consider the reason or the motive by which the exhortation is enforced: “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.” Christ is now hid from the eyes of the world, for He has gone into heaven itself “to appear in the presence of God” (Heb 9:24) as the great High Priest of those for whom He died. But the Scriptures plainly and repeatedly testify that Christ will appear again—personally, publicly (Act 1:11), when He shall sit upon the throne of His glory (Mat 25:31), when “every eye shall see him” (Rev 1:7).

In view of this blessed and solemn fact the questions may well be asked, “But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?” (Mal 3:2). God’s Word makes answer. On the one hand, it assures the saints, “he that dwelleth [abideth] in love dwelleth in God, and God in him: Herein is our love made perfect [i.e. reaches its designed end], that we may have boldness [confidence] in the day of judgment” (1Jo 4:16-17). On the other hand, “the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,” but will be “like the chaff which the wind driveth away” (Psa 1:5, 4).

In the great day to come, the searchlight of divine holiness will be turned upon two radically different classes of persons, clearly revealing them for what they are, and each will, righteously, be dealt with accordingly. Those that have done good will come forth unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation (Joh 5:29); or, to cite an Old Testament passage whose language approximates more closely unto that of our present text, Daniel 12:2, speaking of the same event, declares that “many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” The two classes will be

² **nugatory** – invalid; inoperative.

separated one from another, “as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats” (Mat 25:32). On the one hand, Christ will take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the Gospel; on the other, He will be glorified in His saints (2Th 1:8, 10). That same clear-cut and searching distinction is preserved in our text: those who abide in Christ will have confidence before Him at His appearing, but those who were disloyal and followed the antichrists will “be ashamed before him at his coming.” As the Saviour announced, “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” (Mar 8:38).

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

90. Levitical Cities, Part 2

“Then came near the heads of the fathers of the Levites unto Eleazar the priest, and unto Joshua the son of Nun, and unto the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel” (Jos 21:1). There are one or two details here which call for a brief word of explanation. First, each of the tribes was divided into or was grouped under its leading families, they being the descendants of the original sons—the heads, or chiefs, being designated “fathers.” Second, Eleazar is mentioned here because this transaction involved the use of “the lot,” and he was the one who bore the sacred bag containing the Urim and the Thummim, by which the divine will was made known. Joshua was also present as Israel’s commander, to see that all was done in an orderly manner. Third, the additional reference to “the heads of the fathers of the tribes” clearly intimates that they were now formally assembled as a court, to examine the petitions of claimants and determine their cases.

The careful reader will observe that the chapter opens with the word “Then.” That time mark is more than a historical reference, pointing an important practical lesson which we do well to heed. Historically, the incident recorded here occurred “When they had made an end of dividing the land for inheritance by their coasts,” and when “the children of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun” (Jos 19:49). Then, Joshua was bidden by the Lord, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses” (Jos 20:2). Now, the Lord had previously given orders that those cities of refuge (six in number) were to be “among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites...and to them ye shall add forty and two cities. So all the cities which ye shall give to the Levites shall be forty and eight cities: them shall ye give with their suburbs” (Num 35:6-7). Those cities of refuge had now been specified (Jos 21:7-8), but as yet, the remaining forty-two had not been assigned them.

“And they spake unto them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan’ (Jos 21:2), for that was where the tabernacle was now situated, and therefore, the place where the mind of the Lord could be authoritatively ascertained. It is blessed to see that the Levites deferred their

appeal until all the other tribes had been provided for, thereby setting an admirable pattern before all the official servants of God, to suppress everything in themselves which has even the appearance of covetousness. How incongruous and reprehensible it is for those who profess to be the ministers of grace and truth to exhibit a mercenary or greedy demeanour! It was “an instance of their humility, modesty, and patience (and Levites should be examples of these and other virtues) that they were willing to be served last, and they fared never the worse for it. Let not God’s ministers complain, if at any time, they find themselves postponed in men’s thoughts and cares, but let them make sure of the favour of God and the honour that comes from Him, and then they may well enough afford to bear the slights and neglects of men” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

It should also be carefully noted that these God-honouring Levites made known their claim openly and publicly, instead of secretly and privately. They did not engage in a “whispering campaign,” going around sowing the seeds of dissension among their brethren, or of criticism of Joshua, complaining at their being neglected—for as yet no provision had been made where they should reside with their families and flocks. No, they applied in an orderly and frank manner before the divinely appointed court, saying, “The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with the suburbs thereof for our cattle” (Jos 21:2). Their petition was brief and to the point, their language firm but reverent. They came not as beggars, and asked for no favours. Their appeal was neither to charity nor to equity—as being due them on the ground of fairness. They used no claim of worthiness or fidelity to duty. Instead, their appeal was made to *the word of God*, that which He had commanded by Moses, and thus, they acted on the basis of a, “Thus saith the LORD.”

It is quite evident, then, that on this occasion the Levites were far from being actuated by a spirit of either discontent or covetousness. Had they been moved by avarice, they had not waited until now, but had either taken matters into their own hands or had put in their claim much earlier. No, it was an orderly request that they should now receive that to which they were entitled by divine grant. Most commendable was their meekness and patience. How different the character and conduct of so many ecclesiastics during the Christian era, whose love of money and lust for power knew no bounds, scrupling not to employ the most tyrannous measures and heartless methods to impoverish their members while they lived in luxury and resided in their “palaces”! And the same spirit is by nature in every preacher, and against its least indulgence he needs to be on his guard. Unspeakably solemn is it to note that the oft-quoted words, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1Ti 6:10), occur in one of the *pastoral epistles*! They are succeeded by, “But thou, O man of God [i.e. servant of Christ], flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (1Ti 6:10-11).

Nor is it without reason that the injunction, “Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content” is found in *the same epistle* (1Ti 6:8), immediately preceding the above warning and exhortation. Few realize the sinfulness of discontent, which is nothing but a species of self-will, a secret murmuring against Providence, a being dissatisfied with the portion God has given us. Contrariwise, contentment is a holy composure of mind, a resting in the Lord, a thankful enjoyment of what He *has* graciously bestowed. Hence,

contentment is the spiritual antidote to covetousness, “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have” (Heb 13:5)—the former vice can be avoided only by assiduously cultivating the opposite virtue. If the preacher is to magnify his office and glorify his Master, he needs to mortify his fleshly lusts and carnal ambitions, abstaining from all extravagance, and living frugally, evidencing that his affections are set upon things above and not on things below. When Socrates, the pagan philosopher, beheld a display of costly and elegant articles for sale, he exclaimed, “How many things are here that I need not!” Such ought to be the attitude and language of every child of God as he passes through this “Vanity Fair,” pre-eminently so in the case of His servants.

“Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: but in all things approving [commending] ourselves as the ministers of God” (2Co 6:3-4). What an exalted standard of piety is that! Yet nothing less is what the Holy One requires of His representatives. The unbelieving are ever ready to charge the Gospel itself with having a strong tendency to encourage the carnalities which disgrace the character of so many professors, and especially if the same appear in the lives of those who preach it. Nor is that a thing to be wondered at. What can be expected from those who have no experiential acquaintance with the things of God than to conclude that those who preach salvation by grace through Jesus Christ are the products of the same? In their judgment, the daily life of the preacher either commends or condemns his message. Hence it is that, among other reasons, the minister of Christ is bidden, “In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech [and not the slang of the world], that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you” (Ti 2:7-8).

Returning more directly to the Levites in Joshua 21, in their, “The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in,” they were, in reality, *pleading a divine promise!* It was recorded in Numbers 35:1-8, that JEHOVAH issued definite orders to that end, and therefore, they were asking only for that to which they had a right by divine authority. Here too they have left an example, which needs to be followed, not only by God’s servants, but by all of His people, for it is *the use* which we make of His promises that, to a considerable extent, regulates our spiritual prosperity, as well as the peace and joy of our hearts. First, we should labour to become well acquainted with the same, for while we remain in ignorance, no benefit can be derived from them. Those Levites were informed upon that which concerned their interests. So should we be. We should daily search the Scriptures for them, and make an inventory of our spiritual wealth. The divine promises are the peculiar treasure of the saints, for the substance of faith’s inheritance is wrapped up in them. Second, they should be carefully stored in our minds, constantly meditated upon, and every effort of Satan’s to rob us of the same, steadfastly resisted.

Third, God’s promises are to be personally appropriated and pleaded before His throne of grace. This is one reason why He has given them to us. Not only to manifest His lovingkindness in making known His gracious intentions, but also for the comfort of our hearts. Had He so pleased, our Father could have bestowed His blessings without giving us notice of His benign purposes, but He has ordained that we should enjoy them twice over—first by faith, and then by fruition. By this means, He weans our hearts away from

things seen and temporal, and draws them onward and upward to things which are spiritual and eternal. Thus are we to make His promises the support and stay of our souls. Not only are they to be the food of faith, but the regulators of our petitions. Real prayer is the making request for those things which God is pledged to bestow, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us" (1Jo 5:14). That is, according as His will is made known to us in His Word—anything other than that is self-will on our part (Jam 4:3).

While on the one hand, God has promised to bestow, on the other hand, we are required to make request—that He may be duly owned and honoured, that we express our dependence upon Him. "Ask, and ye shall receive" (Mat 7:7-8; 21:22) is the divinely appointed way. In Ezekiel 36:36, God makes most definite promise to His people, adding, "I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it." Yet immediately after, He declares, "Thus saith the LORD God; I will yet [nevertheless] for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them" (Eze 36:37). Such inquiry is designed for the strengthening of our faith, the quickening of our hope, the development of our patience. Cities had been divinely assured unto the Levites, yet, they received them not until they appealed for them by pleading God's word to them through Moses! And that has been recorded for our instruction. One wonders how often it is the case that "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (Jam 4:2)—always so, when faith be not in exercise (Jam 1:6-7). Observe well how Jacob pleaded the divine promise in Genesis 32:9-12, Moses in Exodus 32:13, David in Psalm 119:58, Solomon in 1 Kings 8:25, and go thou and do likewise.

"And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their suburbs" (Jos 21:3). Thus was the priestly tribe fully provided for through its brethren by divine ordinance, and it is blessed to mark how particularly the Holy Spirit has placed it upon record that they discharged this obligation as an act of obedience unto God. They might have demurred at being called upon to relinquish some of the places which they had fought hard to obtain, but they raised no objection, and duly performed their duty when reminded of the divine will. In like manner, Christians are bidden to communicate unto those who care for their spiritual interests, and to do so at God's commandment. Equally striking is it to observe how that the portion received by the Levites was a *gift*—so referred to in both verses 2 and 3. This act of giving was designed by the Lord to counteract that selfish spirit and attachment to a present world which is common to all of us. The same principle is illustrated again in Romans 15:27, "their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their [Israel's] spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things."

The principle which was to regulate the allocating of the Levitical cities by their brethren was clearly defined in Numbers 35:8, "And the cities which ye shall give shall be of the possession of the children of Israel: from them that have many ye shall give many: but from them that have few ye shall give few; every one shall give of his cities unto the Levites according to his inheritance which he inheriteth." Thus was each tribe accorded the opportunity of making grateful acknowledgment unto the Lord of what He had so graciously bestowed upon them, for what they gave unto the Levites was accepted as given to Him, and thereby were their possessions sanctified to them—some of the best and largest of the cities being freely donated. The several tribes were not assessed uniformly,

but according to the extent of their possessions. The equity of such an arrangement is at once apparent. The same was duly executed, for out of Judah's and Simeon's lots (the most extensive) nine cities were given, whereas, out of the other tribes only four cities were taken from each (Jos 21). In like manner, New Testament saints are exhorted, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (1Co 16:2), i.e. a definite proportion of his income.

If it be true on the one side that a mercenary priesthood has been notorious for its greedy grasping of wealth and temporal power, on the other side, only too frequently, many of the most devoted and self-sacrificing of Christ's servants have received the scantiest acknowledgment. As Albert Barnes (1798-1870) remarked, "The poor beast that has served the man and his family in the days of his vigour is often turned out in old age to die, and something like this sometimes occurs in the treatment of ministers of the Gospel. The conduct of a people, generous in many other respects, is often unaccountable in their treatment of their pastors, and one of the lessons which ministers often have to learn, like their Master, by bitter experience, is the ingratitude of those in whose welfare they have toiled and prayed and wept." Yet that is far from being always the case, as this writer can thankfully testify. For upwards of forty years, the Lord has moved His stewards to minister freely and liberally to his temporal needs, so that we too can reply to His question, "Lacked ye anything? Nothing." (Luk 22:35). No good thing has He withheld from us.

The method followed by Israel in selecting the Levitical cities appears to have been something like this. First, the court, after duly considering the size of its inheritance, appointed how many cities should be taken out of each tribe. Then, the "fathers of the tribes" agreed among themselves which cities were most suitable. After that had been settled, the forty-eight cities were divided into four groups, for the four branches of the Levitical tribe. Lots were cast to determine the distribution of them. The sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath, Merari. From Kohath descended Moses, Aaron and Miriam (1Ch 6:1-3). The "children of Aaron" (Jos 21:4) were not only Levites, but priests too, whose more immediate work was to serve at the altar. It should be duly noted that though this was the least numerous of the four branches, yet, in keeping with the prominence of the priesthood throughout the book of Joshua, "the first lot" (Jos 21:10) was for the children of Aaron, and thus was honour placed again upon this divine institution. It is further to be observed that more cities were assigned unto them than to any other branch of Levi.

It should perhaps be pointed out that the term "city" in Scripture does not signify (as it does with us today) a large town having a corporation, but simply "an inclosed space"—see Genesis 4:17 for the first mention. The "suburbs," as pastures for the cattle, extended for nearly a mile in every direction (Num 35:5). In appointing the larger number of cities for the children of Aaron, we see a proof of the divine foreknowledge, for those who have made a thorough study of this detail, judge that they increased more than any of the other three families, therefore, larger accommodation would be required for their descendants in the future. That their cities were taken from that part of Canaan which had been given to the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin (Jos 21:4) was also profoundly significant, illustrating as it did the wise disposings of Providence, for that was the territory which lay nearest to *Jerusalem*, which centuries later was to be the site of the temple, and the headquarters of Judaism. That was the place which had been chosen in the divine counsels

where God should put His name. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Act 15:18)!

In Joshua 21:8, the statement is repeated, "And the children of Israel gave by lot unto the Levites these cities with their suburbs, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses." This is to intimate that all was done by divine appointment and in obedience unto God's will. There is a touching detail recorded in Joshua 21:11, which we must not overlook, for there we are told that the city of Hebron became the possession of the children of Aaron. It will be remembered that this was the city which had been given to Caleb by the commandment of the Lord (Jos 15:13). It seems, then, that he had personally made it a voluntary present unto the priests, thereby setting an example before his fellows of noble generosity and devotion to the cause of JEHOVAH. How he puts to shame many church members of today who are so neglectful of the maintenance of Christ's servants! Those who are indifferent to the temporal welfare of His ministers cannot be in communion with Him who notices the fall of every sparrow (Mat 10:29), or recognize the holy privileges of being "fellow helpers to the truth" (3Jo 1:8). May writer and reader ever act in this manner "according to the commandment of the LORD."

CAST DOWN

Those two words may be regarded both actively and passively, according as they refer to a deed or to a state into which we have fallen. There is quite a variety of passages in which they occur. For instance, we are told, "Great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed...and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them" (Mat 15:30). On the other hand, they "rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill...that they might cast him down headlong" (Luk 4:29). "And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees" (1Ki 18:42), when he prayed for rain. "God hath power to help, and to cast down" (2Ch 25:8). "Thou castedst them down into destruction" (Psa 73:18). "The accuser of our brethren is cast down" (Rev 12:10).

The first time the words occur is in Exodus 7:10, "Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent." That was preliminary to the ten plagues which were sent on Egypt. Though it made not that haughty monarch to feel, it should have made him fear, since it was a demonstration of the might possessed by the One whom Aaron served. But instead of being awed and humbled, the king called for his magicians, and we read that they "did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod [not a snake which they had substituted by sleight of hand], and they became serpents" (Exo 7:11). That there is something mysterious here is admitted, though we see no reason for bringing in the power of the devil. Personally, we consider the latter was as much a miracle as the former, and by the power of God. That it was as truly a case of the wise being taken in their own craftiness as that of Saul in 1 Samuel 28:8-20, and of Ahab in 1 Kings 22:20-23—God's causing the rods of Pharaoh's magicians to become serpents intimated that he and his people were under the dominion of Satan. Aaron's rod swallowing theirs foreshadowed, from the beginning, the end of the conflict between Pharaoh and JEHOVAH, as of every other, where powers terrestrial or infernal contend with the Almighty.

But let us turn now to the moral and practical side of things. When providence appears to frown, most of us are apt to be depressed. It is true that some possess a more mercurial temperament than others, their feelings undergoing a change as frequently as the barometer does in fluctuating weather, one day in the mountain top, the next in the slough of despond. Yet, even those more stable and equitable are liable to be cast down in spirit when faced by a trying situation and everything seems to be against them. If it be human to err, it is equally human to be dejected when our circumstances are distressing and our experience be a painful one. We shall, therefore, raise the inquiry, "Is it wrong to be cast down?" That is a question which does not admit of an unqualified yes or no in reply. It depends upon the cause and occasion of such despondency, upon the duration thereof, upon the accompaniments and effects of the same.

If lowness of spirits were something sinful *per se*, then it would necessarily follow that God requires us to live as stoics in this world, uninfluenced, unaffected by whatever goes on either within or without us. It certainly is not wrong to be deeply concerned over our sins, nor to be affected thereby, for our Lord declared, "Blessed are they that mourn" (Mat 5:4). It certainly is not unlawful for us to take to heart the low state of Christ's cause in this world. Nor should we be callously indifferent as we behold this pleasure-loving generation rushing madly unto a hopeless eternity. The Saviour Himself wept over Jerusalem (Luk 19:41) as He contemplated its rejection of Himself and foresaw the fearful judgments shortly to fall upon it. But if I be gloomy and glum simply because my will has been crossed and my cherished plans thwarted, that is reprehensible. If I so mourn over my sins as to give way to a spirit of despair (instead of availing myself of 1 John 1:9), or if I so take to heart the sad state of Christendom as to become incapacitated for the performance of duty, that is blameworthy. It is wrong to allow any grief to mar my communion with God or prevent my rejoicing in Him.

Thus, it is the part of wisdom to investigate the cause of my despondency and inquire with the Psalmist, "*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? why art thou disquieted within me?*" (Psa 42:5, 11). He desired to know the reason for his being dispirited. Often that is the first step toward recovery from such a state. As C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) said, "To search out the cause of our sorrow is the best surgery for grief." When thoroughly disheartened, we need to take ourselves to task, and carefully examine and cross-examine ourselves. If it be only your pride or your self-confidence that be cast down, well and good. But if it be a delighting yourself in the Lord and enjoying fellowship in Him, then, unbelief lies at the root of your complaint. Even though the divine rod be upon you, the exhortation is, "*My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him*" (Heb 12:5). Neither harden yourself against it nor be crushed by it. Suffer not a haughty spirit, which refuses to be humbled under the hand of God, nor give way to a despairing heart, which sinks beneath it.

It should be carefully noted that David did more than make inquiry. He preached to himself—"Hope thou in God" (Psa 42:5, 11; 43:5). Ah, that is what the despondent soul needs to do. Nothing else will bring relief to the heart. The immediate outlook may be dark, but the divine promises are bright. The world may be at its wits' end, but the Christian need not be so. The creature may fail you, but the Creator will not, if you truly put your trust in Him—as this writer has proved times without number. There is One who is "*a very present help in trouble*" (Psa 46:1) and He never deserts those who really make Him their refuge. Though faith and hope be distinct graces, the latter is never exercised when the former is inactive. That is clear from such passages as Romans 5:2 and 15:13. Faith looks upward, hope looks onward. Faith lays hold of the divine promises. Hope sustains the heart during the interval, enabling us to wait patiently for the fulfilment. "*Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning*" (Psa 30:5).

"Hope thou in God." Repining and murmuring will get you nowhere. Fretting and wringing the hands bring no relief either temporally or spiritually. The more pressing your situation or acute your circumstances, the better the opportunity for proving the sufficiency of God. Faith cannot be exercised when everything needful is at hand to sight. If it be for past follies that God is now chastening you, then hope in His *mercy*. If you penitently

confess your sins, there is abundant mercy with Him to blot them all out (Isa 55:7). If it be over financial straitness and the drying up of accustomed supplies that you be cast down, hope in God's *power*. If every door seems shut against you, and every channel of help fast closed, yet, nothing is too hard for the Almighty (Jer 32:17, 27), as Elijah proved in time of famine (1Ki 17 & 18). Hope in His *faithfulness*. Men may have deceived you, failed to fulfill their engagements, friends turned their backs upon you in the hour of need, but He, who cannot lie (Ti 1:2), is to be depended upon. Doubt neither His promises nor His lovingkindness.

"For I shall yet praise him, who is the *health* of my countenance" (Psa 42:11). That peculiar term suggests that David's soul being cast down was to be attributed partly to his physical condition—as is so often the case with God's people, for suffering of the body reacts upon the spirit. Spurgeon was evidently of the same mind, for one of his comments was, "My God will clear away the furrows from my brow, and the tear-marks from my cheeks, and therefore will I lift up my head and smile in the face of the strait." Such is ever the blessed assurance of those who truly hope in God. They know that "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all" (Psa 34:19). When the fiery trial has done its work and your bonds are burned off (Dan 3:25), you will then thank God for the trials which are now so unpleasant. Then, confidently anticipate the future. Whatever be the cause, heed that word, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1Pe 5:7).

"Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand" (Psa 37:24). Blessed assurance is that, and one which should be regarded in its widest scope. A good man may fall, as David did, in a most deplorable manner, yet, he was not cast down to rise no more, as are those abandoned by God, but was recovered by repentance. He may fall into various errors, but he shall not be suffered to make shipwreck of the Faith. He may, through trying circumstances, fall into a state of gloom, yet God will not cast him off. Sooner or later, he shall prove that God "comforteth those that are cast down" (2Co 7:6). The time of our distress is commonly that of God's gracious intervention, and it is then we should strongly endeavour to *expect it*. The objects of His tenderest solicitude are those in desperate situations, "Thou wilt save the afflicted people" (Psa 18:27). He who dwells in the high and holy place, dwells also in his children, "to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa 57:15).

PROFITING FROM THE WORD

2. *The Scriptures and God*

The Holy Scriptures are wholly supernatural. They are a divine revelation. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2Ti 3:16). It is not merely that God elevated men's minds, but that He directed their thoughts. It is not simply that He communicated concepts to them, but that He dictated the very words they used. "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2Pe 1:21). Any human "theory" which denies their verbal inspiration is a device of Satan's, an attack upon God's truth. The divine image is stamped upon every page. Writings so holy, so heavenly, so awe-producing, could not have been created by man.

The Scriptures make known a *supernatural* God. That may be a very trite remark, yet today, it needs making. The "god" which is believed in by many professing Christians is becoming more and more paganized. The prominent place which "sport" now has in the nation's life, the excessive love of pleasure, the abolition of home-life, the brazen immodesty of women, are so many symptoms of the same disease which brought about the downfall and death of the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. And the twentieth-century idea of God, which is entertained by the majority of people in lands nominally "Christian," is rapidly approximating to the character ascribed to the gods of the ancients. In sharp contrast therewith, the God of Holy Writ is clothed with such perfections and vested with such attributes that no nominal intellect could possibly have invented them.

God can only be known by means of a *supernatural revelation* of Himself. Apart from the Scriptures, even a theoretical acquaintance with Him is impossible. It still holds true that "The world by wisdom knew not God" (1Co 1:21). Where the Scriptures are ignored, God is "the unknown God" (Act 17:23). But something more than the Scriptures is required before the soul can *know* God, know Him in a real, personal, vital way. This seems to be recognized by few today. The prevailing practice assumes that a knowledge of God can be obtained through studying the Word, in the same way as a knowledge of chemistry may be secured by mastering its textbooks. An intellectual knowledge of God maybe, not so a spiritual one! A supernatural God can only be known supernaturally (i.e. known in a manner *above* that which mere nature can acquire), by a supernatural revelation of Himself to the heart. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, *to* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Co 4:6). The one who has been favoured with this supernatural experience has learned that only "in thy light shall we see light" (Psa 36:9).

God can only be known through a *supernatural faculty*. Christ made this clear when He said, "Except a man be born again, *he cannot* see the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:3). The unregenerate have no *spiritual knowledge* of God. "The natural man receiveth not the

things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are *spiritually discerned*" (1Co 2:14). Water, of itself, never rises above its own level. So the natural man is incapable of perceiving that which transcends mere nature. "This is life eternal, that they might *know thee* the only true God" (Joh 17:3). Eternal life must be imparted before the "true God" can be known. Plainly is this affirmed in 1 John 5:20, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, *that we may know him* that is true." Yes, an "understanding," a spiritual understanding, by new creation, must be given *before* God can be known in a spiritual way.

A supernatural knowledge of God produces *a supernatural experience*, and this is something to which the multitudes of church members are total strangers. Most of the "religion" of the day is but a touching up of "old Adam." It is merely a garnishing of sepulchers full of corruption. It is an outward "form." Even where there is a sound creed, only too often, it is a dead orthodoxy. Nor should this be wondered at. It has ever been thus. It was so when Christ was here upon earth. The Jews were very orthodox. At that time, they were free from idolatry. The temple stood at Jerusalem, the Law was expounded, JEHOVAH was worshipped. And yet Christ said to them, "He that sent me is true, whom ye *know not*" (Joh 7:28). "Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also" (Joh 8:19). "It is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God. Yet *ye have not known him*" (Joh 8:54-55). And mark it well, this is said to a people who had the Scriptures, searched them diligently, and venerated them as God's Word! They were well acquainted with God theoretically, but a spiritual knowledge of Him, they had not.

As it was in Judaism, so it is in Christendom. Multitudes who "believe" in the Holy Trinity are completely devoid of a supernatural or spiritual knowledge of God. How are we so sure of this? In this way—the character of the fruit reveals the character of the tree that bears it. The nature of the waters makes known the nature of the fountain from which they flow. A supernatural knowledge of God produces a supernatural experience, and a supernatural experience results in *supernatural fruit*. That is to say, God actually dwelling in the heart revolutionizes, transforms the life. There is that brought forth which mere nature cannot produce, yea, that which is directly contrary thereto. And this is noticeably absent from the lives of perhaps ninety-five out of every hundred now professing to be God's children. There is nothing in the life of the average professing Christian except what *can be* accounted for on natural grounds. But in the genuine child of God, it is far otherwise. He is, in truth, a *miracle* of grace; he is a "*new creature in Christ Jesus*" (2Co 5:17). His experience, his life, is supernatural.

The supernatural experience of the Christian is seen in his *attitude toward God*. Having within him the life of God, having been made a "partaker of the divine nature" (2Pe 1:4), he, necessarily, loves God, loves the things of God, loves what God loves, and, contrariwise, he hates what God hates. This supernatural experience is wrought in him by the Spirit of God, and that by means of the Word of God. The Spirit never works apart from the Word. By that Word, He quickens. By that Word, He produces conviction of sin. By that word, He sanctifies. By that Word, He gives assurance. By that Word, He makes the saint to grow. Thus, each one of us may ascertain the extent to which we are profiting

from our reading and studying of the Scriptures by the *effects* which they are, through the Spirit's application of them, *producing in us*. Let us enter now into details. He who is truly and spiritually profiting from the Scriptures has:

1. *A clearer recognition of God's claims*

The great controversy between the Creator and the creature has been whether He or they should be God, whether His wisdom or theirs should be the guiding principle of their actions, whether His will or theirs should be supreme. That which brought about the fall of Lucifer was his resentment at being in subjection to his Maker, "Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God...I will be like the most High" (Isa 14:13-14). The lie of the serpent which lured our first parents to their destruction was, "Ye shall be *as gods*" (Gen 3:5). And ever since then, the heart-sentiment of the natural man has been, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?" (Job 21:14-15). "Our lips are our own, who is LORD over us?" (Psa 12:4).

Sin has alienated man from God (Eph 4:18). His heart is averse to Him, his will is opposed to His, his mind is at enmity against Him. Contrariwise, *salvation* is being restored to God, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might *bring us to God*" (1Pe 3:18). Legally, that has already been done. Experimentally, it is in process of accomplishment. Salvation means being reconciled to God, and that involves and includes sin's dominion over us being broken, enmity within us being slain, the heart being won to God. This is what true conversion is. It is a tearing down of every idol, a renouncing of the empty vanities of a cheating world, and taking God for our Portion, our Ruler, our All in all. Of the Corinthians, we read that they "first gave their own hearts unto the Lord" (2Co 8:5). The desire and determination of those truly converted is that they "should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2Co 5:15).

God's claims are now recognized, His rightful dominion over us is acknowledged. He is owned *as God*. The converted yield themselves "unto God, as those that are alive from the dead," and their members as "instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom 6:13). This is the demand which He makes upon us—To *be our God*, to be served as such by us, for us to be and do, absolutely and without reserve, whatsoever He demands, surrendering ourselves fully to Him (see Luk 14:26-27, 33). It belongs to God as God to legislate, prescribe, determine for us. It belongs to us as a bounden duty to be ruled, governed, disposed of by Him at His pleasure.

2. *A greater fear of God's majesty*

"Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him" (Psa 33:8). God is so high above us that the thought of His majesty should make us

tremble. His power is so great that the realization of it ought to terrify us. He is so ineffably holy, and His abhorrence of sin is so infinite, that the very thought of wrongdoing ought to fill us with horror. “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him” (Psa 89:7).

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Pro 9:10), and “Wisdom” is a right use of “knowledge.” Just so far as God is *truly* known will He be duly feared. Of the wicked, it is written, “There is *no* fear of God before their eyes” (Rom 3:18). They have no realization of His majesty, no concern for His authority, no respect for His commandments, no alarm that He shall judge them. But concerning His covenant people, God has promised, “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jer 32:40). Therefore do they tremble at His Word (Isa 66:5), and walk softly before Him.

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil” (Pro 8:13). And again, “By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil” (Pro 16:6). The man who lives in the fear of God is conscious that “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Pro 15:3), therefore is he conscientious about his private conduct as well as his public. The one who is deterred from committing certain sins because the eyes of men are upon him, and who hesitates not to commit them when alone, is destitute of the fear of God. So too, the man who moderates his language when Christians are about him, but does not so at other times, is devoid of God’s fear. He has no awe-inspiring consciousness that God sees and hears them at *all* times. The truly regenerate soul is *afraid* of disobeying and defying God. Nor does he want to. No, his real and deepest desire is to *please Him* in all things, at all times, and in all places. His earnest prayer is “Unite my heart to fear thy name” (Psa 86:11).

Now, even the saint has to be *taught* the fear of God (Psa 34:11). And here, as ever, it is through the Scriptures that this teaching is given us (Pro 2:5). It is through them we learn that God’s eye is ever upon us, marking our actions, weighing our motives. As the Holy Spirit *applies* the Scriptures to our hearts, we give increasing heed to that command, “Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long” (Pro 23:17). Thus, just so far as we are awed by God’s awful majesty, are made conscious that “Thou God seest me” (Gen 16:13), and work out our salvation with “fear and trembling” (Phi 2:12), are we truly profited from our reading and study of the Bible.

3. *A deeper reverence of God’s commandments*

Sin entered this world by Adam’s breaking of God’s Law, and all his fallen children are begotten in his depraved likeness (Gen 5:3). “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1Jo 3:4). Sin is a species of high treason, spiritual anarchy. It is the repudiation of God’s dominion, the setting aside of His authority, rebellion against His will. Sin is having our own way. Now, salvation is deliverance from sin, from its guilt, from its power as well as its penalty. The same Spirit who convicts of the need of God’s grace also convicts of the need of God’s government to rule us. God’s promise to His covenant people is, “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God” (Heb 8:10).

A spirit of obedience is communicated to every regenerated soul. Said Christ, “If a man love me, he *will* keep my words” (Joh 14:23). There is the test, “Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1Jo 2:3). None of us keeps them perfectly, yet every real Christian both desires and strives to do so. He says with Paul, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22). He says with the Psalmist, “I have chosen the way of truth,” “Thy testimonies have I *taken* as an heritage for ever” (Psa 119:30, 111). And teaching which lowers God’s authority, which ignores His commands, which affirms that the Christian is, in *no* sense, under the Law, is of the devil, no matter how oily-mouthing his human instrument may be. Christ has redeemed His people from the curse of the law and not from the command of it. He has saved them from the wrath of God, but not from His government. “Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart” (Luk 10:27) never has been and never will be repealed.

I Corinthians 9:21 expressly affirms that we *are* “under the law to Christ.” “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself so to walk, even as he walked” (1Jo 2:6). And *how* did Christ “walk”? In perfect obedience to God, in complete subjection to His law, honouring and obeying it in thought and word and deed. He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Mat 5:17). And our love for Him is expressed not in pleasing emotions or beautiful words, but in keeping His commandments (Joh 14:15), and the commandments of Christ are the commandments of God (cf. Exo 20:6). The earnest prayer of the real Christian is, “*Make me to go* in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight” (Psa 119:35). Just so far as our reading and study of Scripture is, by the Spirit’s application, begetting within us a greater love and a deeper respect for and a more punctual keeping of God’s commandments are we really profiting thereby.

4. *A firmer trust in God’s sufficiency*

Whatsoever or whomsoever a man most trusts in is his “god.” Some trust in health, others in wealth, some in self, others in their friends. That which characterizes all the unregenerate is that they lean upon an arm of flesh. But the election of grace have their hearts drawn from all creature supports, to rest upon the living God. God’s people are the children of faith. The language of their hearts is, “O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed” (Psa 25:2). And again, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). They rely upon God to provide, protect, and bless them. They look to an unseen Resource, count upon an invisible God, lean upon a hidden Arm.

True, there are times when their faith wavers, but though they fall, they are not utterly cast down. Though it be not their uniform experience, yet Psalm 56:11 expresses the general state of their souls, “In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.” Their earnest prayer is, “Lord, increase our faith” (Luk 17:5). “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). Thus, as the Scriptures are pondered, their promises received in the mind, faith is strengthened, confidence in God increased, assurance deepened. By this, we may discover whether or not we are profiting from our study of the Bible.

5. *A fuller delight in God's perfections*

That in which a man most delights is his "god." The poor worldling seeks satisfaction in his pursuits, pleasures, and possessions. Ignoring the Substance, he vainly pursues the shadows. But the Christian delights in the wondrous perfections of God. Really, to own God as *our* God is not only to submit to His scepter, but is to love Him more than the world, to value Him above everything and everyone else. It is to have, with the Psalmist, an experiential realization that "*All my springs are in thee*" (Psa 87:7). The redeemed have not only received a joy from God, such as this poor world cannot impart, but they "*Rejoice in God*" (Rom 5:11), such as the poor worldling knows nothing about. The language of such is, "*The LORD is my portion*" (Lam 3:24).

Spiritual exercises are irksome to the flesh. But the real Christian says, "It is *good* for me to draw near to God" (Psa 73:28). The carnal man has many cravings and ambitions. The regenerate soul declares, "*One* thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD" (Psa 27:4). And why? Because the true sentiment of his heart is, "*Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee*" (Psa 73:25). Ah, my reader, if your heart has not been drawn out to love and *delight in God*, then it is still dead toward Him.

The language of the saints is, "*Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation*" (Hab 3:17-18). Ah, that is a supernatural experience indeed! Yes, the Christian can rejoice when all his worldly possessions are taken from him (see Heb 10:34). When he lies in a dungeon with back bleeding, he can still sing praises to God (see Act 16:25). Thus, to the extent that you are being weaned from the empty pleasures of this world, are learning that there is no blessing outside of God, are discovering He is the Source and Sum of all excellency, and your heart is being drawn out to Him, your mind stayed on Him, your soul finding its joy and satisfaction in Him, are you really profiting from the Scriptures.

6. *A larger submission to God's providences*

It is natural to murmur when things go wrong, it is supernatural to hold our peace (Lev 10:3). It is natural to be disappointed when our plans miscarry, it is supernatural to bow to *His* appointments. It is natural to want our own way, it is supernatural to say, "*Not my will, but thine be done*" (Luk 22:42). It is natural to rebel when a loved one is taken from us by death, it is supernatural to say from the heart, "*The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*" (Job 1:21). As God is truly made our Portion, we learn to admire His wisdom, and to know that He does all things well. Thus, the heart is kept in "*perfect peace*" as the mind is stayed on Him (Isa 26:3). Here, then, is another sure

test. If your Bible study is teaching you that *God's* way is best, it is causing you to submit unrepiningly to all His dispensations, if you are enabled to give thanks for *all* things (Eph 5:20), then are you profiting indeed.

7. A more fervent praise for God's goodness

Praise is the outflow of a heart which finds its satisfaction in God. The language of such a one is, "I will bless the LORD at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Psa 34:1). What abundant cause have God's people for praising Him! Loved with an everlasting love, made sons and heirs, all things working together for their good, their every need supplied, an eternity of bliss assured them. Their harps of gladness ought never to be silent. Nor will they be while they enjoy fellowship with Him who is "altogether lovely" (Song 5:16). The more we are "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:10), the more shall we adore Him. But, it is only as the Word dwells in us richly that we are filled with spiritual songs (Col 3:16) and make melody in our hearts to the Lord. The more our souls are drawn out in true worship, the more we are found thanking and praising our great God, the clearer evidence we give that our study of His Word is profiting us.

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS

"Though his pen is stilled by his home-going, yet his articles will ever go on as a testimony unto his and our blessed Lord."

"Mr. Pink has gone to be with the Lord he loved and served, and what an abundant entrance he had."

"And now, he has gone from us to be 'with Christ, which is far better,' who is there to minister the Word as faithfully as he sought to do? It would seem his ministry was too much needed to be able to spare him."

"Truly a 'great man in Israel has fallen.' His removal has occasioned a great loss...to the Church of God in general."

"Your good husband's home call is a great loss to us all who have benefited by his keen brain and his Spirit-guided and able pen."

"It is the loss of a friend whom having not seen we loved...his work will live long in those whose appetites for the deep spiritual things of the Word were made keener and whose witness will continue to glorify our Lord whom he loved."

"We count it a blessing that we were introduced to the Studies, and though we are sorry that the hand that wrote to us will write no more, we have the joy of knowing our loss is his gain."

"We have lost a father in Israel. We have and will have great cause for thankfulness to the Head of the Church for His gift, and we bow to His sovereign will in taking back His gift....We cannot help but mourn with many who have been blessed of the Lord through his ministry."

"The Church of God on earth lost a great witness—one of its greatest in this day of apostasy—when your husband was called home."

"In these days, when so little spiritual food is given, Mr. Pink's written ministry has been a blessing to many of the Lord's people."

"His going is a great loss, and such a magnificent champion of the faith will be sorely missed. There seem so few like him today who have the intellectual attainment and great spiritual depth to serve our Lord as wonderfully as he did in his written ministry."

"How many, many times I have marveled at his amazing knowledge of the Bible, and how, by comparing Scripture with Scripture, he showed so clearly what was truth."

"Truly the God of all grace gave to him in an unusual measure the gifts of knowledge, wisdom, untiring devotion, and earnest zeal for the cause of Christ, His Gospel, and His people."

"We feel there is not anyone with such spiritual insight into the Word as our brother Pink, and none which has labored so untiringly to bring the message needed for the times as he did. This has left in our hearts an aching void which will be hard to fill after such a long period of sweet fellowship around God's Word."

"The Christian Church has lost one of its finest Bible expositors and hundreds of young men like myself have lost the benefit of his wise and deeply spiritual exegesis."

"I look back with great pleasure upon the hours I have spent in reading in the Studies, and remember that your husband was a master in Israel in writing those volumes."

"We thank God that we had the privilege of sitting at his feet these six and a half years, and we thank God for the spiritual illumination He gave him to bring out of His treasures things new and old for the sustenance of the flock."

"The death of your beloved husband is a great loss to the whole Christian Church—but the Lord knows best when His servant's work is done in this earthly sphere."

"It is your loss and the loss of the multitude whose spiritual lives he has enriched by his consecration and knowledge that I mourn."

"What a calamitous loss for the Church of God in these degenerate days!...We feel like orphans with our spiritual father and best earthly friend taken from us."

"Humanly we could cry out against it and wonder why such a one was taken when he was so evidently used of the Lord. But God, in His infinite wisdom, has done the right and good thing."

"I cannot express to you what a help Mr. Pink was to me. I have STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES in bound volumes and read them now in preference to anything else I have or get. His way of putting things seemed to suit my way of thinking."

"I am one of those who have been helped by your husband's written ministry. God has now provided some better work for him, but there are few able to replace him. 'His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face.'"

"The privilege and talent and light given him through his studies of the Bible, which he lived only to pass on to others, were a great blessing. He found the true light. Being dead to his work, his writings will live on. Praise the Lord!"

"The long, wonderful work of your dear husband is ended. I for one shall miss the wonderful, unique Studies which I have read with profit, edification and enjoyment."

