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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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Arthur W. Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886, and born again by God's Spirit in 1908. He studied briefly at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago before his pastoral work in Colorado, California, Kentucky, and South Carolina, USA, and in Sydney, Australia. In 1934, he returned to his native England, taking his final residence on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, in 1940, where he remained until his death in 1952.

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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IDENTIFICATION OF THE GODLY

It is a great mistake to suppose that it is only in the Scriptures of the New Testament that we shall find the features of a Christian described: the same is equally true of the Old Testament. It would indeed be passing strange were it otherwise, for God's work of grace within His people is essentially one in all generations. As human nature and human needs have known no change since our first parents were driven out of Eden, neither has God varied His method or means in ministering unto His children. The supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit in Abel, Enoch, and Noah did not differ from those which He put forth in Peter, Paul, and Timothy, and the spiritual fruits which He produced through them were one and the same in each instance. Thus, the marks or characteristics of the godly have been uniform in every age and clime. Antediluvian or post-diluvian,¹ Jew or Gentile, first century or twentieth A.D., the soul experiences of God's elect have been similar. There has been a like realization of their sinnership and lost condition, a like longing for God's salvation and panting after holiness, a like realization of their own helplessness to improve themselves or do anything to win God's acceptance, a like looking off unto Christ for redemption, and a like peace and joy when assured of their pardon. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Pro 27:19)—true both naturally and spiritually.

A striking and blessed illustration of what has been pointed out above is found in Psalm 119, which was aptly called by a writer of two hundred years ago, "The anatomy of a regenerate soul," for therein we have delineated the most secret dispositions of a godly heart. Its condition and pulsations are there fully opened to our view. The whole psalm supplies us with a complete portrait of a saint: his aspirations, his meditations, the exercises of his inner man, and his conduct. Though the circumstances through which David passed may be, in their accidental and incidental details, different from God's providential dealings with the reader, yet if he be regenerate, his inward history corresponds closely with that of the sweet Psalmist of Israel. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (Joh 3:6), and as Charles Bridges (1794-1869) said in the introduction to his excellent exposition of Psalm 119, "The modern believer, therefore, when employed in tracing the record of Patriarchal or Mosaical experience, will mark in the infirmities of the ancient people of God a picture of his own heart; and in comparing their gracious exercises with his own, he will be ready to acknowledge, 'All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will' (1Co 12:11).

"In this view, it is the object of this work to exhibit an Old Testament believer in a New Testament garb as one 'walking in the same spirit and in the same steps' with ourselves. 'Faith which worketh by love' (Gal 5:6)—the fundamental distinction of the Gospel—pervading the whole man....In all the variety of Christian feelings and holy conduct, we observe its operations leading the soul into communion with God, and moulding every part into a progressive conformity to His image. When we view the 'man after [God's] own heart' taking God for his portion (Psa 119:57), assembling with His people (verses 63, 79), feeding upon His Word (verses 47, 97, 111); when we mark his zeal for his Master's glory (verse 139), his devotedness (verse 38), and self-denial (verse 62) in his Master's work; when we see him ever ready to confess His name (verses 46, 115, 172), to bear His reproach (verses 23, 69, 87), and caring only to answer it by a steady adherence to Him (verses 51, 78, 157)—do we not in those lineaments of character recognize the picture of one who in after times could turn to the churches of Christ and say, 'Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me' (1Co 4:16)? Happy are they who are conformed to this holy man."

We may well use Psalm 119 (among other purposes) as a *standard* by which to determine the state of our souls. Let each reader of this article bring his inner man to this touchstone, comparing its workings and aspirations with the display there given of David's affections. If your desires correspond with His, if you find your heart has His holy longings, then you may well conclude that God has "renew[ed] a right spirit within [you]" (Psa 51:10). On the other hand, if you are unacquainted with such spiritual breathings as are here discovered and are a stranger unto such holy exercises, if its language be in your ears as an unknown tongue, then be assured that you are *not* a new creature in Christ. Each lineament of this heaven-born soul should be separately and thoughtfully examined. Here we will confine ourselves unto a single one: "I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight" (Psa 119:174). "Salvation" is here to be taken in its widest sense, and not limited to the pardon of sins or cancellation of guilt. In its fullness, "salvation" includes all the mercies of the everlasting covenant. It is viewed here not from the judicial but

¹ Antediluvian or postdiluvian – before or after the Noahic flood.

the experiential side, and therefore, as an object of longing—unto a soul which is sensible of its deep wants and sees in God's salvation a complete supply for them.

"I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD" was said by David not as one who had not yet tasted that He is gracious, but who yearned for a fuller acquaintance with Him. David now sat upon the throne of Israel, yet that contented him not. Have *you* found every earthly possession and pleasure to be vanity? Have your eyes been opened to see your wretchedness, your heart been made to feel its deep needs? Is there a hungering and thirsting in your soul after righteousness? Then do you not exclaim, "I have *longed* for thy salvation, O LORD"? That longing has several degrees. At first, it may be like a smoking flax, where one can hardly discern a spark of fire, because it is choked by the prevalence of unbelief. But if it be inspired by the Holy Spirit, it will become more lively and vivid, and break forth into ardent prayers. Yea, it will eventually obtain such strength as to make its possessor say, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Psa 42:1), and He has promised "the desire of the righteous shall be granted" (Pro 10:24).

Such longing marks the character of *all* quickened souls. It is an evidence of a work of grace, for it springs from love to its Author. But the thoughtful and discriminating reader may ask, "Do not some of the unregenerate have a longing for God's salvation that they may be delivered from the wrath to come?" At times they think so, and perhaps say so, but their actions prove the contrary. Even so, how am I to distinguish *my* "longing" from theirs? By its very nature. Is your longing actuated only by a sense of dread of the everlasting burnings, or mainly by a desire to be delivered from the power and pollution of sin? Is your desire constant and persistent, something more than a passing fancy? Is it serious and earnest, and not just a superficial and fickle notion? Is it an influential one which leads to action, to diligent seeking, and not merely an idle whim? Is it a predominant one, so that all other interests are subordinated to its realization, and not one which is overcome by the opposition of the flesh and allurements of the world? If so, there is good reason to believe God is its Author.

But let the inquiry be pressed still more closely. David not only declared, "I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD," but he added, "and thy law is my delight." If your longing be for holiness, then it is necessarily accompanied by an approbation of God's scepter, for subjection thereto is the way unto its realization. A spiritual desire for God's salvation issues in a delight of His precepts, and such delight is the very pulse of the spiritual life. Complacency of God's commandments is not found in the unregenerate, for "the carnal mind is enmity against God," and is "not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). But the language of one who is born of God is "I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved" (Psa 119:47). The two things cannot be separated: "LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments" (Psa 119:166)—not perfectly so, but with a sincere and real endeavour to conform unto them. The hearts of all God's children are in the same mould: they love what He loves, and hate what He hates. Though when they "would do good, evil is present" with them; nevertheless, each one can truthfully aver, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom 7:21-22).

"I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD"—*not* "I have not fully attained unto it." Such a longing arises from a sense of insufficiency in ourselves. At the close of his eventful life, Jacob declared, "I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD" (Gen 49:18). A like submissive expectation becomes us. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD" (Lam 3:26). "Ourselves also, which have received the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves do groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption" (Rom 8:23). So long as we are in this scene, our longings are unsatisfied; necessarily so, for we yearn for and press unto perfection. If you can truthfully say, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Psa 42:2), then you need not have the slightest hesitation in declaring, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psa 17:15).



THE EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

4. Fellowship (1Jo 1:3)

In the opening verses, we have intimated the basic and vast importance of the doctrine of the divine Incarnation. The Word's becoming flesh and His birth at Bethlehem was the most wonderful event in the world's history. Not only so, but the Son's being made like unto His brethren most deeply concerned the welfare of God's people, and is a matter of profound veneration and delight to them. The principal reason why John here began his letter by stressing so much the humanity of Christ, rather than His deity, lay in the particular design before him. That design was quite different from the one which guided him when penning his former and larger communication. The grand aim of his Gospel was to set forth the peerless glories of God's *Son*, but the object of his epistle is to delineate the character and distinguishing marks of God's regenerate *sons*. Therefore, it is that he opens by showing us the Beloved of the Father descending to the place where those sons were by nature and in their fallen estate, in order that He might conduct them to His place on high. Thus, the beautiful progressive order of his two productions at once appears: first, the personal incarnation of the divine Redeemer, and then His inhabitation of the redeemed, with the blessed consequences and fruits of the same.

The connection between the first two verses of the epistle and the one now to be before us is equally evident. John commences by setting before his readers the adorable person of Christ, who is the only medium of communication with the Three in God; and then he states, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1Jo 1:3). The "we" is that of the apostolate, and John's was the last of their voices now heard speaking on earth. Beautifully did Samuel E. Pierce (1746-1829) show how well equipped *this one* was to write on such a subject. "This apostle was in the New Testament Church what the prophet Daniel was in the Old. He was addressed by the angel as 'O man greatly beloved' (Dan 10:19), and John was known by the title of 'that disciple whom Jesus loved' (Joh 21:7). He was a high favourite with our Lord Jesus Christ. He was admitted to lie in His bosom; and—like as Christ lay in the bosom of His Father before all time, and drew out all the love of the Father's heart into His own, and shines in the full splendour of it, and reflects the glorious shine of it on His Church—so this apostle, being admitted to such familiar intercourse with our Lord, drew out the very heart of Christ into his own. And hereby, he was most eminently qualified to write concerning one of the greatest of all subjects—communion with the divine Persons."

Throughout 1 John 1:1-3, the "we" and the "our" have reference to the apostolate, and John speaks in their name as well as his own. There were indeed many other of the saints who had both seen and heard the Lord in His incarnate state, yet they were not called to be public witnesses of the same as were the twelve. Nor did all of *them* alike see and hear as much of Christ. There were but two of them present with John when the Saviour restored to life the daughter of Jairus. The same two were with him upon the holy mount. His brother James and Peter only were with him when they gazed upon Christ's agony and bloody sweat in Gethsemane. Those in the innermost circle of privilege were in such immediate proximity to the Lord and enjoyed such intimate contact with Him as afforded the fullest satisfaction, both to their minds and senses of the reality of His person. It may be pointed out that as all of the apostles were not equally favoured with the same views of Christ during the days of His flesh, so it is now with the spiritual views which Christians have of Him. As only three of them beheld His marred visage in the Garden and His radiant countenance on the Mount, so a few believers are privileged to enter experientially more deeply into both Christ's sufferings and glories than are many of their fellows.

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." John's reiteration of this intimates the deep importance we are to attach to the experience and testimony of the apostles. Their position and privileges were unique. The evidences which they had of Christ's person and incarnation were different from ours. We receive ours from them, and that in a way of *believing*—taking into our minds from their divinely inspired writings such a knowledge of the Lord Jesus as, by the effectual power of the Holy Spirit, brings us to commit ourselves and our interests unto Him for time and eternity. But the apostles had something more than that. Not only was the deity of Christ supernaturally revealed to their hearts (Mat 16:17), but they had

too the evidence of sense—an ocular² and palpable demonstration of the Messiah was made to them. Christians today hear His voice in the Word; and in hearing, they live. With the eyes of their understanding, they see Him shining in the glass of the Gospel. They handle Him mystically at His holy table. But all of this is quite different from what John is speaking of in the opening verses of his epistle. While our knowledge of Christ is effectual to our soul's benefit as was theirs, yet the different ends served by the one and the other must be distinguished. They beheld what we never shall: they were with Him during the days of His *humiliation*, and that is for ever past. We shall yet see Him with our bodily eyes, but it will be a *glorified* Christ that we behold.

The practical application of the above pertains principally unto ministers of the Gospel, showing us that the first qualification for that holy calling is their own personal and saving acquaintance with Christ. The servants of the Lord Jesus are to declare unto others what they have themselves known and felt of the divine Son's grace and power. They are to communicate unto others what they have first received of the Lord (Mat 14:19). "The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips" (Pro 16:23). The discerning hearer will readily perceive the difference between the preacher who merely repeats what he has read or heard from men, and the one who tells forth from a burdened or burning heart that which he has tasted and found satisfying. The ministry of the one will be sapless and spiritless; that of the other, fresh and invigorating. If the heart be taught of God, then out of its fullness, the mouth will speak unto edification. It is those who can truly aver, "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen" (Joh 3:11), who express themselves with that assurance which carries conviction to others. The retailer of other men's thoughts lacks not only warmth and savour, but unction and the note of authority.

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." Here is a noble example of spiritual generosity (compare Romans 1:11-12). Instead of keeping their knowledge secret, the apostles longed to share with God's children at large (so far as that was possible) the signal advantages which they had enjoyed during the time when the Word of life had tabernacled in their midst. Having found the honey, they would not eat it alone; having tasted that the Lord was gracious, they desired that others should prove it for themselves. The beloved John and his fellows did not live unto themselves, but realized that the privilege of hearing and seeing involved the duty of testifying. They deemed themselves to be not so much garners for the storing of truth, as sowers for the scattering of it. That is ever the effect of a saving apprehension of the Gospel—expanding the heart with a Christ-like benevolence. As it is the law of God's being to *give*, so is it of the new nature received from Him. The apostles longed that others should participate with them in an inestimable good. "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Act 4:20) was the spirit which actuated them.

"That ye also may have fellowship with us" is very blessed, and worthy of our closest attention. The apostles had been eminently privileged, not only in being the immediate attendants of the Saviour for three years, sitting at His feet and drinking direct from the Fountain of living waters, but also in sharing something of His trials and humiliation (Luk 22:28). But all of that was peculiar unto themselves, and they could not make their converts sharers of the same. Not only so; strange to say, it had not fully satisfied either the one or the other if they could. They had themselves experienced a great and profitable change after the ascension of their Master, when the sensible means of knowledge and external opportunities for contact with Him had been withdrawn. They had to say, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him [so] no more" (2Co 5:16)—rather did they know Him after a *higher manner*. As Christ promised them, the Comforter "shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (Joh 14:26). Then they understood much in Christ's conduct and teaching, which hitherto had been dark to them, and with such spiritual apprehension, they entered into a new and grander fellowship with Him.

"And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Wondrous and blessed is such an unspeakable privilege. Wonderful it verily is, something entirely peculiar to Christianity, for there is nothing which in the least resembles it in any of the religions of heathendom. Their "gods" are one and all regarded as remote, hostile, unrelated to their worshippers—viewed with horror, rather than with veneration and delight. Almost the sole idea in the minds of their devotees is to placate their wrath and endeavour to win their favour. The idea of their *loving* their subjects, and taking them into intimate union and communion, never enters their thoughts. Nor is that to be wondered at. Such an inestimable favour had

² **ocular** – seen by the eye.

never entered ours, had not the Scriptures clearly revealed this astonishing truth. What an amazing thing it is that the ineffably Holy One should take into fellowship with Himself those who are by nature fallen and depraved creatures, and in practice rebels against Himself. Oh, my soul, bow in adoration before such a marvel. But most wonderful of all is it that the great God not only desires the company of such, but fits them for, and will have them with Him, in His immediate presence for all eternity.

Even now as this glorious fact *is revealed*, many of God's dear children find it difficult to apprehend; and still more so, to avail themselves of the privilege, and actually enter into the enjoyment of the same. Probably that is one reason why John expressed himself so emphatically here, for his "*truly our fellowship is with the Father,*" etc., seems to be inserted, because there were some who doubted it—as altogether too good to be true. It was as though he said, "I make this positive assertion for the benefit of the whole Church to the end of time; therefore, let no believer in Christ entertain the thought that such an inexpressible favour was one which God designed for the apostles only; not so, rather is it the birthright of *every* member of His family." Let no saint be persuaded that this is a privilege so high above him as to be unattainable in this life. Every born-again soul has, through the mediation and merits of Christ, a right and title thereto; and through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, possesses the necessary qualification and meetness for it. If any such enjoy it not, the fault is entirely their own. The grand design and end of God in salvation and the communication of His grace to us is that we may have fellowship with Himself.

The term "fellowship," which occurs twice in our present verse and again in verses 6 and 7, is the second great word of the epistle. The first is "life," which is found three times in the two preceding verses. The *order* of them is divinely accurate and doctrinally significant, for there can be no fellowship with God on the part of fallen creatures, until His life or "nature" has been imparted to them. But before we seek to outline the blessed theme comprehended in this important term, let us suggest a further reason why the apostle was so express in saying, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." It is to be borne in mind that the earthly lot of Christians was very different in the early days of this era from what is now ours. At that time, the saints were despised and hated; nevertheless, a most honourable, desirable, and blessed spiritual portion was theirs. It was as though the apostle said, "Though you be looked upon and treated as the filth of the world, be assured *that* is by no means all you have through believing in Christ and following us His apostles. A really astonishing and glorious heritage is yours: you have been made heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. As sharers of the divine riches, you are amply compensated for any temporal privations which your Christian profession may involve."

That grand fact needs to be kept steadily in mind by the Lord's people in the present hour, and nothing allowed to shake their confidence in the same, or deprive them of the full enjoyment of it. For some of them are assailed by those who would fain make them believe that there is no Christian fellowship for any who do not accept *their* peculiar views and become followers of them. There are some who proudly imagine themselves to be the only ones who gather together on scriptural ground, and if they no longer openly assert it, they still convey the impression that none outside their circle can enjoy the fullest fellowship with Christ. There is also a species of high doctrinalists who will not regard any as regenerated who are not prepared to pronounce their shibboleths. Likewise, there are experientialists who attach such importance to a certain type and order of experience that all who are strangers to the same are regarded as being entirely "out of the secret" and fatally deceived, if they think they have fellowship with God. These are but variations of the arrogant claims of the Papacy that there is salvation for none outside of "holy mother church." Let your reply to one and all be, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," which is infinitely better than fellowship with any body of professing Christians.

Those words are addressed to all saints whatever be their age or spiritual attainments, or whatever their denominational affiliation or lack thereof. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Gal 5:1), and enter into and enjoy the wondrous privilege which He has purchased for you. "Fellowship" is an old Saxon word; "communion," a Latin one, which signifies more than to be a recipient of His grace, or even a partaker of His love, and rises higher than the concept of companionship. Literally, it means sharers together, a community of interests, having things in common. In its simple form, the Greek word here rendered "fellowship" is translated "partners" in Luke 5:10 and 2 Corinthians 8:23: "James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were *partners* with Simon"—they were co-owners of the ship; "Titus...my partner and fellowhelper." The Father and the Son desired not to enjoy one another alone for all eternity, but graciously purposed that a company should be brought into being not only fitted to enjoy Them, but also in whom They would everlastingly delight. Therefore did the Son declare unto the Father,

“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one” (Joh 17:22).

Thus, the basic idea of “fellowship” is *sharing together*. Yet we must be careful to interpret and understand the same in the light of the general “Analogy of Faith.” It does not mean that we have been taken into an equality with God, but that according to our finite measure, we are made partakers of His life, His holiness, His ineffable blessedness; that as “the LORD’s portion is his people” (Deu 32:9), so “the LORD is my portion, saith my soul” (Lam 3:24); that as He declares “the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight” (Psa 16:3), so each of them avers, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25). The LORD Himself is ours, and we are His: a joint participation—what an amazing dispensation! No wonder the apostle pressed the fact so emphatically: “*Truly* our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ”; I solemnly set my seal to it that such is the case. Not (we repeat) that this signifies an equality, but rather the dutiful, but cheerful, drawing near of an inferior to a superior; yet so as there is a holy intimacy and freedom in the same, because we both love God and are beloved of Him.

“Fellowship” with God necessarily presupposes that we have been taken into a near and dear relation to Him, so that not only do we view Him as One who befriends us, but He condescends to regard and treat us as His friends. Abraham, the father or prototype of all believers, “was called *the Friend* of God” (Jam 2:23)—admitted to share His company and converse with Him. But not only does “fellowship” presuppose our reconciliation with God, but also the reception of a nature and disposition which fits us to be with Him, for “can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amo 3:3). There cannot be friendship unless there is congeniality. Fellowship is not a one-sided thing, but *mutual*. It is the law of friendship to answer it with friendship. None is warranted in regarding himself as the friend of God, unless he has the heart and carriage of one—delighting in Him, seeking to be conformed to His image, endeavouring to promote his interests. Hence, we find the Lord Jesus saying to His disciples, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Joh 15:14)—if you make it your sincere aim to please Me in all things. A “friend” is one who conducts himself in a friendly manner unto another, avoiding whatever would injure or grieve him.

So long as we do not carnalize it, probably the figure of friendship best enables us to grasp what is meant by “fellowship.” One has a high regard for a friend, esteeming him above mere acquaintances. Thus it is between the LORD and His people: they highly esteem and value one another. What a word is that of David’s: “He delivered me, because he delighted in me” (2Sa 22:20); while the saint confesses, “all my springs are in thee” (Psa 87:7). Real friends find genuine pleasure in each other’s company, being happiest when together: does not the spouse say, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages” (Song 7:10-11), while she exclaims, “Make haste, my beloved” (Song 8:14)? Intimate converse and close communications characterize the dealings of one warm friend with another. Things I would not discuss with a stranger, personal matters about which I would be silent to a mere acquaintance, I freely open to one whose worth I have proved and in whom I delight. It is thus between God and His dear children. Did not “the LORD [spake] unto Moses face to face [without reserve or restraint], as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Exo 33:11); and did not he, in return, express himself with great freedom unto the LORD—“shew me now thy way, that I may *know* thee” (verse 13) more intimately?

Fellowship is *reciprocal*. “When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek” (Psa 27:8). Thus, there is an interchange of confidence. “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant” (Psa 25:14), while they freely open their hearts unto Him. God sends forth gracious influences into the soul, and we (by the assistance of His Spirit) make suitable responses unto Him. They pour out their souls unto Him, and He opens His ear unto them: “In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul” (Psa 138:3). He makes known to them His will, and they seek to walk according to the same. They seek His glory as their highest end (1Co 10:31), and He makes “all things work together for [their] good” (Rom 8:28). The saints generally are most taken with and speak the oftenest about their communion with God, yet it is His with us which must take place before ours can be perceived even by ourselves. It is wholly a spiritual and supernatural exercise, and doubtless is often carried on when we have no consciousness of the same.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

56. Making Peace

As its opening verse shows, the tenth of Joshua is closely connected with chapters 6, 8, and 9; and this needs to be duly heeded by us if we are to discover and appropriate the spiritual lessons which it has for the LORD's people today—which should ever be one of our principal quests when reading God's Word. In chapters 6 and 8, we have an account of Israel's conquest of the cities of Jericho and Ai, but in the ninth, something quite different is presented. Following the fighting at Ai, there came a lull, and the capitulation of the Gibeonites unto Israel without any strenuous efforts on the part of the latter. It is often thus in the experience of Christians. When they have been particularly active in engaging the enemy and a notable victory has been obtained, the LORD grants a brief season of rest and comparative quietness. Yet they are not to conclude therefrom that the hardest part of their conflict is now over, so that it is safe for them to relax a little. What we are about to ponder indicates the contrary, and warns us that Satan does not readily admit defeat. Not only was Israel's warfare far from being ended, but a more determined and concerted resistance was to be encountered. Instead of having to meet the force of a single king, the massed armies of five of them had now to be defeated. The same thing appears in the history of our Saviour: the farther His gracious ministry proceeded, the greater and fiercer the opposition met with. Sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master.

Proceeding from the general to the particular, we observe that the opening verses of Joshua 10 *confirm* the typical application which we made of the concluding portion of the preceding chapter. At the close of our last, we pointed out that what is there recorded of the Gibeonites adumbrated³ sinners surrendering themselves unto Christ, or, to use an expression which was freely employed by the Puritans, their "making peace with God." More recently, some have taken decided exception to that expression. It is affirmed that the sinner can do nothing whatever *to* make peace with God, and that it is quite unnecessary for him to essay doing so, seeing that Christ has "made peace" through the blood of His Cross. But that is to confound things which differ, confusing what Christ purchased, when the same is actually applied unto us. The question—and a most important one too—is, "What does God require from the sinner in order for him to become a personal partaker of the benefits of that legal "peace" which Christ made with God?" To which some make answer, "Nothing but faith—simply believing that Christ has fully atoned for all our sins and relying upon the sufficiency of His sacrifice." But that is only half the answer. The second half leaves out an essential requirement which must precede believing.

"Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mar 1:15); "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Act 20:21). It is very clear from these passages that repentance is as necessary as faith. Nay, we go farther, and declare that an *impenitent* heart is incapable of exercising a saving faith. Christ complained to Israel's leaders, "Ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, *that* ye might believe him" (Mat 21:32)—they responded not to the ministry of His forerunner, because they had no realization of their sinful and lost condition. Those "dispensationalists" who state that repentance is required only of the Jews, evince their ignorance of the most elementary truths of Scripture, for in "the great commission," Christ ordered His servants "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among *all* nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luk 24:47); and His apostle announced that God "now [in this Christian era!] commandeth all men *every where* to repent" (Act 17:30). Of course He does, for such a call is the pressing of His holy claims upon those who have ignored the same—who have disregarded His authority, slighted His law, and lived entirely to please themselves. It is because so little repentance has been preached that Christendom is now crowded with empty professors.

Repentance is a taking sides with God against myself. It is the laying aside of my awful enmity against Him. It is the privative side of conversion, for there must be a turning from something before there can be a turning unto God. Repentance consists of a holy horror and hatred of sin, a complete heart-forsaking of it, a sincere confessing of it unto God. True repentance is always accompanied by a deep longing and a genuine determination to abandon that course which is displeasing to God. It is impossible, in the very nature of the case, that a soul could seek God's pardon with any *honesty*, while he continued to defy Him and persist in what He forbids. Thus, repentance is the sinner's making his peace with God—the throwing down of the

³ *adumbrated* – depicts.

weapons of his rebellion, ceasing his warfare against Him. Nor is there anything in the least degree “legalistic” or meritorious about this, for repentance or making peace with God neither atones for our vile misconduct of the past, nor moves God to be gracious unto us. Repentance no more *purchases* salvation than does faith, yet the one is as indispensable as the other. The wicked is required to “forsake his way...and let him return unto the LORD” before He “will have mercy upon him” and “abundantly pardon” (Isa 55:7, and compare 1Ki 8:47-50; Act 3:19).

“Now it came to pass, when Adonizedek king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it; as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had *made peace* with Israel, and were among them; That they feared greatly” (Jos 10:1-2). Once more, we would note the very varied effects upon different ones of what they had “heard” of Israel’s exploits, and how some of them attributed their successes unto JEHOVAH, while others did not so. Rahab (Jos 2:9-11) and the Gibeonites (Jos 9:9) were examples of the former; and the kings of Joshua 9:1, and this Adonizedek, of the latter. The king of Jerusalem, despite his high-sounding name, gave God no place in his thoughts; yet he was thoroughly alarmed at Israel’s progress. His fear was cumulative. He was rendered uneasy at the tidings of Jericho’s overthrow, still more so at the news of the destruction of Ai; but when he and his subjects learned of the Gibeonites having concluded a league of peace with Joshua, “they feared greatly” (Jos 10:2)—most probably because he had counted on *their* considerable support in resisting these aggressors.

We would also attentively heed the Spirit’s emphasis here on the time-mark: “Now it came to pass, when Adonizedek...heard” (Jos 10:1). There is nothing meaningless or superfluous in the Scriptures, and it is by noting such a detail as this that we often obtain the key which opens to us the spiritual significance of what follows. In this instance, the immediate sequel was the banding together of four others with the king of Jerusalem against Gibeon, and in the light of the closing verses of chapter 9, the typical force of this is not difficult to perceive. It is when sinners renounce the service of their former master, and the friendship of the world, in order to make their peace with God and join interests with His people that they must be prepared to encounter persecution from the ungodly. That is why the Saviour bade all would-be disciples of His to sit down first and “count the cost” (Luk 14:28-33); and His servant warned believers, “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1Jo 3:13). In Adonizedek’s determination to slay the Gibeonites, we have adumbrated the inveterate enmity of the serpent against the Redeemer’s “seed.” Previously, while Satan keepeth his palace, “his goods are in peace” (Luk 11:21), but when he *loses* any of his captives, his rage against them knows no bounds.

Ere passing on, let us ponder one other detail in our opening verse, namely Israel’s *utter* destruction (Jos 10:1) of Jericho and Ai, for a most important lesson is inculcated by that adjective. In its application to the spiritual warfare of the Christian, it tells us that we must be ruthlessly thorough in the work of mortification. No half measures are to be taken against the things which hinder the present possession of our heritage. There must be no compromising with our lusts, no trifling with temptation, no flirting with the world. True, inward corruptions will strongly resist our onslaughts upon them, as the men of Ai did when Israel came against it. For a time, the king of Ai had the better of the contest, so that Israel were dismayed; but they did not abandon the fight; instead, they humbled themselves before the LORD, and He graciously undertook for them. Not that they were released from the discharge of their responsibilities, so that they could *passively witness* His operations on their behalf. No, indeed. They were required to perform their duty and employ different tactics. Accordingly, as they implicitly followed His instruction, the LORD prospered them, and Ai was “utterly destroyed”: in other words, complete victory was theirs.

But the overthrowing and destroying of Ai proved to be neither an easy nor a pleasant task to Israel, for in the course thereof, they passed through both a humiliating and distressing experience. So it is in that work of unsparing mortification to which the Christian is called. Our Lord likened it unto the plucking out of a right eye and the cutting off of a right hand (Mat 5:29-30). By such language, He intimated the difficulty and severity of the work He has assigned us. The “eye” represents that which is dearest to the natural man; and the “hand,” what is the most useful to him. The plucking out of the one and the cutting off of the other signify that we are to exercise the most rigorous denying of self, that however precious an idol or profitable any unrighteous course may be unto the carnal nature, they must be sacrificed for Christ’s sake. No matter how unwelcome it proves to the flesh, its lusts are not to be spared; for unless they be brought into subjection to God, the soul is gravely imperiled. By divine grace, this difficult task is not impossible. The “utter destruction” of Ai, then, is recorded both for our emulation and for our encouragement. Yet re-

member that, though a brief lull may follow such a victory, the surrender of our remaining enemies is not to be looked for; rather, must we expect a yet more determined resistance from them, seeking to prevent any further spiritual advance by us.

“That they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty” (Jos 10:2). We believe the Holy Spirit’s design in giving us these particulars about the Gibeonites was at least threefold: to magnify the grace of God in subduing them unto Himself, to account for the subsequent actions of Adonizedek, and to cast light upon the typical significance of the sequel. In view of what we are here told about the Gibeonites, it is the more remarkable that they had not only made peaceful overtures unto Joshua, but had offered no demur at taking upon them the yoke of servitude and becoming hewers of wood and drawers of water unto Israel. Therein, we should discern a people hostile to Him by nature, “made willing” in the day of God’s power, and the might of His grace in bringing them to submit readily to the most exacting and pride-abasing terms. Such is the nature of the miracle of conversion in every case: the slaying of man’s awful enmity against God, the humbling of his haughty heart, the bending of his stubborn will, the bringing of him to a complete surrender unto the lordship of Christ, making him an “obedient” child (1Pe 1:14).

“That they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty.” Gibeon was not only a formidable frontier town, but also the capital of that section; and such a city and territory yielding so tamely to Israel much alarmed the king of Jerusalem. Not only had he lost what he probably counted upon as being a powerful ally, but he feared that other cities would follow suit, so that he now began to tremble for his own skin. If so powerful a people had capitulated without striking a blow, who could be expected to take a resolute stand against Joshua and his men? Not only was he much alarmed, but greatly chagrined and incensed against the Gibeonites, and so resolved upon their destruction (Jos 10:4-5), which indicates the third design of the Spirit here. The “greater” the trophy which grace secures for Christ, the more “royal” his status, the fiercer will be the opposition which he meets with from his enemies. That is why those whom the Lord makes the ministers of His Gospel are the chief marks of Satan’s malice. But let them not be dismayed thereby. Not only is it a high honour to suffer for Christ’s sake, but the opposition a faithful preacher encounters is a good sign that God is using him to make inroads into the devil’s kingdom.

“Wherefore Adonizedek king of Jerusalem sent unto Hoham king of Hebron, and unto Piram king of Jarmuth, and unto Japhia king of Lachish, and unto Debir king of Eglon, saying, Come up unto me, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon: *for* it hath made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel” (Jos 10:3-4). It will be remembered that the Canaanitish kings whose territories lay farther to the north and the west had previously decided to federate themselves against Israel (Jos 9:2), and by this time would probably be engaged in mustering their forces for a combined assault upon them. But the tidings of Gibeon’s alliance with Joshua so intimidated and enraged these five kings, whose cities were nearer the point which Israel had then reached, that they decided to anticipate the plan of their remoter fellows by falling upon Gibeon. It is likely that the king of Jerusalem reckoned upon Joshua having his hands so full—in making his arrangements and deploying his forces to meet the impending attack of the northern and western armies of the Canaanite—that he would be unable to come to the relief of the Gibeonites. It therefore appeared to be a favourable opportunity and a safe venture for these five kings to fall upon those whom they regarded as their renegade countrymen; yet in so doing, they but accelerated their own destruction.

Verse 2 opens by saying, “That *they* feared greatly”; yet the preceding verse mentions no one, save the king of Jerusalem; and so we would expect it to read that “*he* feared greatly.” While it is likely that the plural number is designed to include his subjects, it is also highly probable that the “they” looks forward to the four kings mentioned in the next verse; and it intimates *why* they were willing to respond to Adonizedek’s call. Thus, we behold again how widespread was the terror inspired by the news of Israel’s victories. Not only was this a further fulfillment of what the LORD had announced in Exodus 23:27, and Deuteronomy 11:25, but we may perceive therein a shadowing forth of what takes place under the proclamation of the Gospel. As we pointed out above, the hearing of what the mighty arm of JEHOVAH had wrought reacted very differently in them than in others. There was the same opportunity for those kings to make their peace with Joshua as the Gibeonites had; and their fatal refusal to do so supplies a solemn illustration of the fact that the Gospel is “the savour of life unto life” to those who believe and are saved, but “the savour of death unto death” to those who reject it and are lost (2Co 2:15-16). Nor is *fear* sufficient to move a sinner to throw down the weapons of his warfare against God, as appears not only from the case before us, but also

from that of Pharaoh and of Felix who “trembled” as he listened to Paul speaking on “judgment to come” (Act 24:25).

Not only was Adonizedek unwilling to humble himself and make peace with Joshua, but he was determined that none of his near neighbours should do so, and in his persuading them to follow his policy, we have a sad instance of a strong character being able to influence others to evil. To be a personal transgressor is bad enough, but to be a ringleader in wickedness evinces a high degree of depravity and is doubly damnable. Adonizedek’s “Come up unto me, and help *me*” is to be understood in the light of “that *we* may smite Gibeon” (Jos 10:4), thereby signifying that it was a duty devolving equally upon all of them. At first, one wonders what they thought would be gained by such a course: would it not be more prudent to husband their forces for self-defence when the army of Joshua should invade their section? Probably their purpose was to make an object lesson of Gibeon and thereby intimidate other cities from following their example. But the inspiring motive which prompted the prime mover is clearly seen in *the ground* of his appeal unto his fellows: “For it [Gibeon] hath made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel” (verse 4), and as the closing words of verse 1 add, “and were among them.” Thus, it was something more than an instinct of self-preservation which moved them to act, namely a malignant spirit against those who had united themselves with the people of God. Thereby, they had alienated themselves from their original associates and evoked their wrath.



DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

3. *Its Corollaries, Part 3*

8. *Their sufficiency.* Since God Himself [is] the Author of the Scriptures, they must themselves be perfect and competent for those ends for which He has given them. God's wisdom was able, and His love for His people made Him willing to furnish them with such a sure and adequate guide, that naught else is required by them in the way to everlasting bliss and glory. Such was the confidence of the apostle, for when taking leave of his beloved converts at Ephesus, he declared: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Act 20:32)—he knew full well that everything necessary was therein provided for them. Nor must anything else whatever be placed on a par with the Word of God. "The Bible, and the Bible only, our rule of faith" was the grand watchword of the Reformation. "Scripture *and tradition* taken together are the joint rule of faith" is what Rome insists upon. But the moment we turn from the King's highway, we lose ourselves in a trackless desert. The Popish contention, as history demonstrates, opens a door wide enough to admit any error or superstition.

The written Word of God must be the final court of appeal in all matters pertaining to doctrine, duty, and deportment. "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deu 12:32) was the binding injunction laid upon Israel. That was the unswerving position taken by the Lord Jesus: He made God's Word the sole rule of His actions. When tempted by Satan, He declined to argue with or overwhelm him by His superior wisdom; He refused to crush him with His almighty power, relying only upon, "It is written." That was the position taken by the greatest of His servants: "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). And again, "that [from the examples furnished by Paul and Apollos] ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written" (1Co 4:6). Here then is the sure and all-sufficient criterion to test every religious teaching. Man's words must never be put on a level with a "Thus saith the LORD." We may indeed quote what is helpful from the Reformers and Puritans, yet not as authorities, but merely as *witnesses to the truth*.

By this divine rule shall we be tried in the great assize: "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (Joh 12:48); "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (Rom 2:16). Therefore, it is our bounden duty to bring everything to that unerring test here and now. We are satisfied that, for the most part, the thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, and the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechism, were drawn up by godly and scholarly men; nevertheless, they were finite and erring men, and therefore, if we value our souls, we shall test everything *in them* by the Word of Truth. Each definition, each custom, must be tried by it. Other writings may be ancient, learned, interesting, and even edifying, yet none of them was "given by inspiration of God" (2Ti 3:16)! The Holy Scriptures are the only perfect standard. It is not a question of what commends itself to our inclination or reason, nor what this church or that church believes and practises, nor what "the vast majority of Christians" hold, but "What saith the Scriptures?" The teaching and experience of the very best of God's servants *must*, if we would have an impregnable rock under our feet, give place to the final authority of the divine record.

This at once refutes the heresy of Popery, which boasts that "the voice of the Church" is the highest authority. Likewise, it exposes the worthlessness of the pretensions of the spiritualists, who claim to furnish the most convincing evidence of the soul's survival after death: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luk 16:31). Here too we are provided with a conclusive solution to a problem which has exercised not a few. In Romans 13:1, we are commanded, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers." *To what extent?* inquires the conscientious Christian. Absolutely and unqualifiedly, says the "State"—and the more "totalitarian" it be, the larger its demands and the more stringent its enforcing of them. Now while every Christian should be a respecter of law and order, and conformed to the laws of his country, yet *not* to any infraction of the Law of the LORD. Human legislation may grant divorces for other causes than the only one Scripture specifies (Mat 19:9), but that does not make wrong to be right. If the Government demanded that I should do manual work, attend a political meeting, or engage in sport on the Sabbath Day, Exodus 20:8-11 would require me to disregard their ruling.

When human statutes clash with the divine, then I must do as the three Hebrews (Dan 3:18) and as Daniel did (Dan 6:10-13)—fear God and not man.

The sufficiency of the Scriptures at once demonstrates the emptiness of the claims made by one and another, to having received an extraordinary communication from heaven: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:20). No child of God should for a moment be taken in by these impostors: so far from their being favoured with new light from God, they are deceivers, the emissaries of the power of darkness. Personally, this writer would not take the trouble to walk into the next room to listen to any man (or woman) relate or deliver what he alleged to be a special message inspired by the Spirit of God. With the *complete* Scriptures in his hands, he needs nothing more, save a teachable spirit, looking to God Himself to apply and interpret the Word unto him. It is recorded of Martin Luther (1483-1546) that, when he had fasted and prayed a whole day and then had a vision of Christ, he cried out, “Avaunt, avaunt,⁴ thou confounded devil: I have no picture of Christ but the Scriptures.” He refused to be beguiled by the enemy when posing as “an angel of light” (2Co 11:14). Shame upon any who are thus deluded by him.

Under a previous section, we have shown the inadequacy of human reason, the insufficiency of intuitional light and inward impressions, the uncertainty of dreams and what some take to be “the promptings of the Spirit,” as the determiner of our actions. Let us now add that Holy Writ is a much surer guide than divine *providence*. We must not now amplify this point at any length, and though our very brevity is liable to cause some to draw a wrong inference therefrom, yet we believe that spiritually minded readers will have no difficulty in perceiving the force of our remarks. If we have a teachable heart, there is indeed much that we may learn from God’s providential dealings with us, especially discovering therein His approbation of or displeasure at our conduct; yet even here, unless we examine both our conduct and God’s seeming response to the same by the Word of Truth, we are certain to err. The providence of God extends to *all* our acts: not only to those which are good, but those which are evil too (Act 2:23), and therefore, no certain rule or judgment can be made from them. God may sometimes lead a man by unusual ways and work by extraordinary means, but for me to count upon His doing so regularly would be to tempt Him, and for my heart to be drawn off from the ordinary means He has appointed and provided is sinful.

God *does* sometimes direct us by His providence, or as expressed by the Psalmist, “I will guide thee with mine eye” (Psa 32:8)—as He did the heathen king who could not sleep, and who called for the state records; and while reading them, found that Mordecai had been faithful to him, and accordingly, was moved (by God) to do something for his good. In a case where two courses are open to me and both of them are *legitimate*, providence, by opening a door to one and shutting the door upon the other, directs me to the former, and not to the latter. But if one of those alternative courses be illegitimate, then it would be very wrong for me to wait for providence to indicate which of *them* I should select. Let this be clear: the providence of God must never be allowed to persuade me that anything is lawful which is manifestly unlawful in itself. Providence directs us in the doing of things lawful by providing opportunities and supplying the necessary means, as, say, relieving the poverty of another; but it does not make any action good or praiseworthy, nor is it the rule for determining between good and evil. If I would ascertain whether any course or act be legitimate or illegitimate, then I must turn to the written Word, for that is the *only* standard by which I am to form a judgment of what is lawful and unlawful, as it is that which alone stamps lawfulness upon any action.

Finally, let it be pointed out that, while God does *direct* by His providences, He also *tests* us by the same. He sometimes orders them to try us and see how we will conduct ourselves: as He kept the children of Israel in the wilderness to prove them, and make it evident whether or not they would keep His commandment (Deu 8:2); permitted false prophets to prove whether they loved Him (Deu 13:1-3); and as He withdrew from Hezekiah, to let him know what was in his heart (2Ch 32:31). If I rely wholly upon the leadings of providence as the determiner of my actions, I expose myself to the utmost hazards. Providence opened a way for his brethren to sell Joseph into Egypt (Gen 37:25), yet that did not warrant their so doing. Providence ordered a ship to be bound for Tarshish when the prophet forsook the prescribed path of duty (Jon 1:3), yet that did not justify his embarking therein. Providence caused “the south wind [to blow] softly” (Act 27:13), so that the captain of the ship concluded it was safe to fly in the face of Paul’s warning to the contrary—and disastrous was the consequence. But we are never in the slightest danger by taking heed

⁴ **avaunt** – go away; depart.

to the light and directions of Scripture; and therefore, we have no hesitation in affirming that the Word is a surer guide than God's providence. "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jer 6:16)—that "good way" is the one marked out for us in the Word, and it is the only one wherein certainty and peace of mind are to be found.

9. *Their worth.* Since the Scriptures are a celestial communication, no elaborate argument is required to prove this predicate. The very fact that they are an inerrant, trustworthy, lucid and all-sufficient revelation to God's will at once attests their inestimable value. Their very claim to be divinely inspired is a clear averment of their supreme importance and incalculable worth. They are a priceless boon because they make known a Christ whose riches are unsearchable and who is esteemed above all earthly possessions by those granted a personal acquaintance with Him: "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious" (1Pe 2:7). Its contents are not to be exchanged for rubies, for they announce unto sinners the efficacy and sufficiency of an atoning sacrifice: "the precious blood of Christ" (1Pe 1:19). Its pages are to be highly treasured, because they are studded with the most costly gems, even the "exceeding great and precious promises" (2Pe 1:4) of Him who cannot lie. Its precepts are beloved (Psa 119:159) because obedience to them preserves from what would be our certain ruin. The one who feeds upon its teachings proves them to be "sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb" (Psa 19:10), and exclaims, "Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer 15:16).

Listen to David's testimony: "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver" (Psa 119:72). Nor was that the utterance of one who was poor in this world's goods, but rather that of an immensely wealthy king, and therefore, one who was well qualified by experience to estimate the relative values of money and of truth. They were the words of an enlightened soul who was well able to judge things at their true worth. Because this Law or Word is "of *thy* mouth," it is not only comparable to, but, infinitely preferable above the fabled material wealth of Croesus. It yielded David better delight and pointed him to a richer inheritance. Gold is of the earth earthy, but the Word is from heaven and stamps its hallmark upon the heart of each one who receives it in love and is ordered by its statutes. At best, our possession of gold is an uncertain one: it often takes to itself wings and flies away, or is stolen from its owner by robbers; but he who has the Word of God in his heart possesses a treasure which no thief can take from him. The wealth of this world may give me favour in the eyes of men, but only the riches of grace can make me acceptable unto God: "Rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom."

"More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold" (Psa 19:10) is the verdict of every regenerate heart in favour of God's Word. As Thomas Manton (1620-1677) pointed out, he knows it to be so *intrinsically* considered. Gold can provide the comforts and pleasures of the senses, but it cannot minister to the needs of the spirit. Money may claim to "speak all languages," but it cannot purchase real happiness, still less, buy a passport to the better land. The Christian knows that the Word of God is more desirable than much fine gold in its *use*. Gold can indeed obtain for me those things which are needful for the body and support of temporal life, but it cannot heal a broken heart nor afford relief to a stricken conscience. The believer knows the Word of God is infinitely preferable to gold in its *duration*. Material wealth can provide an elaborate funeral, but it is of no service beyond. Nay, it can supply no comfort to one who is dying; whereas Psalm 23 has afforded cheer and imparted peace to many a soul as he waded through the cold waters of Jordan. With a far higher delight than has the millionaire when calculating his earthly possessions, the saint rejoices in the riches of the Word, for therein God opens *His* treasure and imparts to him what the world cannot bestow.

10. *Their requirements.* What is my attitude and response to the Bible? The knowledge that it is given by inspiration of God adds greatly to my responsibility. Every privilege involves a corresponding obligation. A unique Book calls for unique attention. To treat the Scriptures lightly is to dishonour their Author. To prefer the writings of men is to insult the LORD. The writings of the best man are only of spiritual value, as they afford me a better understanding of God's Word and press its holy claims upon me. It avails us little to be persuaded that the Bible is a gift from God, unless we treat it accordingly. The Israelites were not content to inquire, "What is this?" when they first saw the manna in the wilderness: upon perceiving it was bread from heaven, they went out, gathered it each one for himself, and made it their daily food. Such a Book is entitled to the first place in my affections and to be regulator of my conduct. Has it that place with you? Of old, God complained of Israel, "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they

were counted as a strange thing” (Hos 8:12). Are any of us guiltless in this respect? Nay, has not every one of us cause to hang his head in shame and confess to God his sinful slighting of His Word.

First, such a Book requires from us the utmost *reverence*. Rightly did John Calvin (1509-1564) point out in his comments upon 2 Timothy 3:16, “We owe to them [the Scriptures] the same reverence that we owe to God Himself, since they have proceeded from Him, and there is nothing human mixed with them.” It is an unspeakably solemn thing for us to be addressed by the Almighty: each word coming from *His* lips must be received with the profoundest respect. Every verse in the Bible is to be regarded and held by us as a sacred thing, and not to be handled lightly, nor even quoted glibly. It is horrible profanity to make anything therein the subject of a joke or jest, and it is most unbecoming to allow their contents to be the subject of carnal wrangling. The only attitude which becomes us before this divine revelation is that of David: “My heart standeth *in awe* of thy word” (Psa 119:161): not a legal or slavish dread, but a holy fear. “Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded” (Pro 13:13). Our conscience must be swayed by its authority, and be very tender of cherishing anything contrary thereto.

Second, such a Book calls for *prayer*. The prime design of that holy ordinance is to humble us before God and show us our place at His feet. It is an acknowledgment of our insufficiency, a testifying to our dependence upon the LORD. Not only is His Word far above the compass of human reason, but its ineffable purity is directly contrary to the corruptions of our fallen nature. Consequently, each time we are about to take it into our hands, we need earnestly to request God to bring our spirits into a fit frame to hear what He says to us; graciously to subdue the self-love and self-will which are ever at work within us. As one old writer expressed it, “We need to present our hearts unto God as a blank sheet of paper, for Him to write thereon.” We need to cry daily, “That which I see not teach thou me” (Job 34:32): “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psa 119:18). Such a Book is entitled to the first place in my affections and to be the regulator of my [will]; and further, “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies” (verse 36): the will needs to be bent and the affections elevated, as well as the understanding enlightened. This God does by persuasion and power, tempering irresistible might with the sweet constraints of His love.

Third, such a Book requires *faith* from its readers. Faith is to the soul what the eye is to the body: the organ or faculty by which light is admitted and spiritual objects are beheld and known. There is clearly an obligation upon us to believe the Scriptures, for they are the Word of Truth. God’s authority and veracity alike bind us thereto. Every evidence of their heavenly character and supernatural origin renders unbelief the more inexcusable. The very uniqueness of their teaching should convince us of their peerless excellence. The Bible is designated “the word of faith” (Rom 10:8) because it is fully entitled to our credence, requires our unquestioning assent, and claims hearty acceptance. Faith, in its simplest form, is receiving the witness of God (1Jo 5:8), is a setting to our seal that “God is true” (Joh 3:33), an amending of what He says. It is a reliance, a resting upon what God has revealed to us. Only as its reader exercises faith is he really “nourished” by its words (1Ti 4:6).

Fourth, it demands *obedience*. That is why His Word is so frequently denominated “the law of the LORD”: unqualified subjection to whatever it enjoins is insisted upon. When self-interests, or the edicts of men, clash with the divine precepts, we must be afraid of defying God. It is by His Word that we shall be judged in the day to come, and therefore, it is not to be trifled with now. The only question for us to consider is not, “Is this polite?”—but “Has God ordered it?” We must give unto Him the glory of His supremacy. “Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently” (Psa 119:4). Obedience thereto is not optional, but obligatory. It is not left to our arbitrament or discretion whether or not we shall comply. “Thou”—the great God upon whom we are entirely dependent—“hast commanded us,” and *His* will is supreme. Dire are the consequences of disobedience, as our first parents, Pharaoh, and millions of others have found. But if we be fully subject to God’s commandments, not only do we have His approval, but Satan can gain no advantage over us.

Fifth, such a Book claims our love. It is not only our privilege, but our duty, to accord it the highest place in our affections. It must be received “with all readiness of mind” (Act 17:11). The absence of love for it is a sure mark of apostasy: God gives men over to the lying deceits of Satan, “because they received not the love of the truth” (2Th 2:9-10)—it is not ignorance of His Word, but lack of love for it which is charged against them. Love is necessary, for both faith and obedience work by it. Does not its very uniqueness require it to be cherished above all earthly possessions? Every reason have we to say with Job, “I have

esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). It is because our love is so feeble that we delight in and meditate upon it so little. If our affections be warm, we shall turn to God’s Word as a starving man unto food, or a miser to his hoard. A realization of its superlative excellence will cause us to take it for our heritage.



THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

2. *Its Origin, Part 3*

Though created in the image and likeness of God, man was not endowed with infallibility. In body perfectly sound, in soul completely holy, in circumstances blissfully happy, still man was but a mutable creature. Pronounced by God “very good” (Gen 1:31) on the day of his creation, man’s character was not yet *confirmed* in righteousness, and therefore, he was (like the angels) placed on probation and subjected to trial—to show whether or not he would render allegiance to his LORD. Though “made upright,” he was not incapable of falling; nor did it devolve upon God to keep him from so doing. This is clear from the event, for had there been any obligation upon God, His faithfulness and goodness had preserved Adam. Nor would He have upbraided our first parents had their defection been due to any breach of *His* fidelity. As moral agents, Adam and Eve were required to maintain their pristine purity unsullied, to walk before God in unswerving loyalty and loving submission. But a single restriction was put upon their liberty, which was necessary in order to the testing of their fealty and the discharge of their responsibility.

Alas, man in honour did not abide. He valued at a low rate the approbation of his Maker and the inestimable privilege of communion with Him. He chafed against the love-lined yoke that had been laid upon him. Quickly did he supply tragic evidence of his mutability and disrupt the tranquility of Paradise. The beauty of holiness in which the parents of our race were arrayed was soon succeeded by the most revolting depravity. Instead of preserving their integrity, they fell into a state of sin and misery. They were speedily induced to violate that commandment of God’s, obedience to which was the sole condition of their continued felicity. Not for long did they enjoy their fair heritage. Notwithstanding the ideal conditions in which they were placed, they became dissatisfied with their lot, succumbed to their very first testing, and evoked the holy displeasure of their Benefactor. How early did the fine gold become dim! How soon did man forfeit the favour of his Maker, and plunge himself into an ocean of wretchedness and woe! How swiftly was the sun of human happiness eclipsed by man’s own folly!

It has been generally held among devout students of God’s Word that our first parents remained unfallen for but a very brief season. Such a view is in full accord with the general Analogy of Faith, for it is a solemn and humbling fact that whenever God has been pleased to place anything in the hands of human responsibility, man has proved unfaithful to his trust; that when He has bestowed some special favour upon the creature, it has not been long before he has sadly abused the same. Even a considerable part of the angels in heaven “kept not their first estate” (Jude: 6), though how soon they apostatized the Scriptures do not disclose. Noah, when he came forth on to a judgment-swept earth to be the new father of the human race, defiled his escutcheon at a very early date and brought a curse upon his son. Within the space of but a few days after Israel had solemnly entered into a covenant with JEHOVAH at Sinai, they were guilty of the horrible sin of idolatry, so that the LORD complained to Moses, “They have turned aside *quickly* out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it” (Exo 32:8)—how tragically did that portend the whole of their future national history!

No sooner were the “times of the Gentiles” (Luk 21:24) inaugurated by Nebuchadnezzar’s being made “a king of kings” (Dan 2:37), so that his dominion was “to the end of the earth” (Dan 4:22), than pride led to his downfall. While he was boasting, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” a voice from heaven announced, “And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Dan 4:30, 32). Alas, what is man? Even the honour of the primitive Christian Church was speedily tarnished by the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. Thus, it has been all through the piece, and there is no evidence to show that at the commencement of human history, Adam and Eve were any exception. Rather are there clear indications to the contrary, so that God had reason to say of them also, “They have turned aside quickly out of the way” (Exo 32:8).

Personally, we doubt if our first parents preserved their integrity for forty-eight hours, or even for twenty-four. In the first place, they were bidden to “be fruitful, and multiply” (Gen 1:28); and had they complied with that injunction and the blessing of God had attended the same, then a *sinless child* had been begotten and conceived, which, following the Fall of Adam and Eve, would be born into a depraved family—a terrible anomaly, involving the utmost confusion! Second, if those words concerning Christ are to be

taken without qualification, that in “*all things*” He might have the pre-eminence (Col 1:18), then He is the only One who kept the Sabbath perfectly on this earth, and consequently, Adam fell before the seventh day ended! Third, in Psalm 49:12, the Hebrew word for “man” is *Adam*—the same as in Genesis 2 and 3 and Job 31:33, while that for “abideth” signifies “to stay or lodge for a night.” Thomas Manton (1620-1677) rendered it, “Adam being in honour abideth not for a night”; and Thomas Watson (1620-1686), in his *Body of Divinity*, said, “Adam, then, it seems, did not take up one night’s lodging in Paradise”—quoted by Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) in his *Treasury of David*. Fourth, the devil “was a manslayer from the beginning” (Joh 8:44)—not from the beginning of time, for there was no man *to* slay during the first five days, but “from the beginning” of *human history*. In the morning, holy; by night, a sinner!

It is the melancholy and disastrous episode of the Fall itself we are now to consider. The event is described in Genesis 3, upon which George Whitefield (1714-1770) rightly said, “Moses unfolds more in that chapter than all mankind would have been capable of finding out of themselves, though they had studied it to all eternity.” It is indeed one of the most important chapters in all the Bible, and it should be pondered by us frequently with prayerful hearts. Here commences the great drama which is now being enacted on the stage of human history, and which well-nigh six thousand years have not yet completed. Here is given us the divine explanation of the present debased and ruined condition of the world. Here we are shown how sin entered it, together with its present effects and dire consequences. Here we have discovered to us the subtle devices of our great enemy the devil, and are shown how we permit him to gain an advantage over us. On the other hand, it is a most blessed chapter, for it reveals the grace and mercy of God, and assures us that the head of the serpent will yet be crushed by the victorious Seed of the woman—Romans 16:20, telling us that His redeemed will also participate in Christ’s glorious triumph. Thus we see, from the commencement, that in wrath, our God “remembered mercy”!

A careful reading of Genesis 3 indicates that much is there compacted into an exceedingly small space. The historical account of this momentous incident is given with the utmost conciseness—so very different from how an uninspired pen had dealt with it! Its extreme brevity calls for the careful weighting of every word and the implications of each clause. That there is not a little contained “between the lines” is plainly intimated in the LORD’s words to Adam, “Because thou hast hearkened unto the *voice* of thy wife” (verse 17), yet the preceding verses nowhere tell us that she even spoke to him! Again, from the judgment pronounced upon the serpent, “upon thy belly shalt thou go” (verse 14), we may warrantably infer that previously, it had stood erect. Again, from that part of the divine sentence passed upon the woman, “thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (verse 16), it is to be concluded that Eve had acted unbecomingly and exerted an undue influence and authority in inducing Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit. Thus, if we fail to ponder thoroughly every detail and meditate thereon, we are certain to miss not a little of interest and importance.

“Now the serpent was more subtil [wiser] than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made” (Gen 3:1). Great care needs to be taken in the interpreting of this sentence. On the one hand, we must not give free rein to our imagination; on the other, it is not to be hurriedly and thoughtlessly skimmed over. Other passages require to be compared in order for their light to be thrown thereon, if a fuller understanding is to be obtained of it. Personally, we believe that the statement refers to a *literal* “serpent,” yet as being the instrument of a superior being. We consider that the terms of verse 14 make it clear that an actual serpent is here in view, for the LORD’s words there are only applicable to that beast itself: “Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle...upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.” Nevertheless, what immediately follows in verse 15 makes it equally plain that *more* than a beast of the field was involved, namely Satan. Putting the two statements together, we gather that Satan made use of a literal serpent as his mouthpiece in the beguiling of Eve—as the LORD spoke through the mouth of Balaam’s ass (Num 22:30-31).

Confirmation of what has just been said is found in John 8:44, where our Lord declared that “*the devil*...[is] a murderer [or more literally, ‘manslayer’] from the beginning”—designating him such because by his wiles, he brought death upon our first parents. Moreover, in Revelation 12:9 and 20:2, Satan is called “that old serpent,” in manifest allusion to the transaction of Genesis 3. “And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Gen 3:1). The thoughtful reader is at once struck by the abruptness of this remark, and is almost forced to conclude that the serpent was replying to what Eve had said previously, for his opening, “Yea” plainly implies something going before and with which it was connected. This leads us to raise the question, *Where was Eve* when she was thus addressed

and assailed? With many others, we believe the answer is, Standing before the very tree whose fruit had been forbidden them to eat! It is apparent from the immediate sequel that she was at least within sight of the tree, and it was from her beholding of it that the serpent took occasion to speak about and commend it unto her.

We also agree with those who have concluded that Adam was *not with Eve* when the serpent first engaged her in conversation, though we know that soon after, he had rejoined her. Thomas Ridgley (1667-1734), G. Whitefield (1714-1770), John Gill (1697-1771), and many others held that Eve was *alone* when she confronted the serpent. For ourselves, we base that belief upon what we are told in 1 Timothy 2:13-14, where the Holy Spirit has emphasized the fact that the woman was *first* in the transgression, and then became the seducer of the man. That could hardly be said had Adam been present from the beginning, for in such a case, he had been *partaker* of her evil doing—by suffering her to yield to the temptation, instead of making every effort in causing her to reject it. Furthermore, it is to be carefully noted that when the guilty couple were arraigned before their Maker, Eve passed no blame upon her husband for making no attempt to dissuade her, but instead, sought to throw the onus on the serpent. Nor did the LORD Himself charge Adam with any complicity in his wife's crime, as He surely would have done had Adam been a passive spectator. The serpent, then, tempted Eve in the absence of her husband.

We consider that Eve's being alone, and more especially her near approach unto the fatal tree, casts considerable light on what then occurred. "Had she kept close to the side out of which she was lately taken, she had not been so exposed"—Matthew Henry (1662-1714); and had she kept away from that which threatened certain death, she had been upon safer ground. Satan cannot injure any of us while we are walking with God and are treading the paths of righteousness. We are expressly told that there is no lion in "the way of holiness"; "nor any ravenous beast...be found *there*" (Isa 35:8-9). No, we have to step out of that way and trespass on the devil's territory before he can "get an advantage of us" (2Co 2:11). That is why we are so emphatically enjoined, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. *Avoid it*, pass not by it, turn from it" (Pro 4:14-15). We certainly do not regard Eve as being guilty of any sin at this initial stage, but the sequel shows plainly that she incurred great danger and exposed herself to temptation by approaching so near unto that tree whose fruit had been divinely prohibited; and we need not be surprised to discover, as she also did, that that ground was already occupied by the serpent! Such has been recorded for our learning and warning.

"And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen 3:1). The serpent must have looked a very different object then from the repulsive reptile it now is, not only standing erect, but—in keeping with his pre-eminence above all other beasts, and as the Hebrew word intimates—of a striking and beautiful appearance. Apparently, he then stood before the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and it seems more than likely that he personally took and ate of its fruit in Eve's presence. His so doing evoked from her some ejaculation of surprise or look of horror, which explains why he then said what he did. As Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803) long ago pointed out, "It is probable that the serpent told the woman that by eating of the fruit of that tree, he had obtained the use of reason and the faculty of speech which she now saw in exercise; and therefore said that, from his own experience, he could assure her that if she would eat of this fruit, she would be so far from dying that she would reach to a higher degree of perfection and knowledge." While such an inference must not be pressed dogmatically, we have long felt it possesses much probability, and that it is an illuminating one.

Quite recently, we discovered that in his "Family Bible," that devout and renowned scholar, John Brown of Haddington (1722-1787), wrote concerning the serpent's words to Eve, "Perhaps he pretended that himself had acquired what knowledge he had above other beasts by eating of this forbidden fruit. It is certain that he attempted to confirm his contradiction of the threatening by a solemn appeal to God." This requires us to examine closely the tempter's words. It is to be noted that the margin of our Bibles gives an alternative rendering: "Yea, *because* God hath said," which regards his language as a declaration rather than a query—Genesis 13:9; Psalm 35:10; Matthew 26:53; Luke 22:35, are other examples where a strong affirmation and appeal is put (for the sake of emphasis) in the form of an interrogation. Considering it thus, here, we may regard the serpent's opening words to Eve as answering her previous expression of surprise: "Is it because 'God hath said' that you are so startled at seeing me eating the fruit?" Thomas Scott (1747-1821) also pointed out, "Indeed, we cannot satisfactorily account for the woman's entering into conversation with the serpent, and showing no marks of surprise or suspicion, unless we admit a supposition of this

kind.” It is one of the first duties of an expositor to show the *connection*, explicit or implicit, of each statement of Holy Writ.

“And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” Therein we perceive the guile and enmity of the enemy. His allusion to the divine restriction made it appear much greater and more severe than it actually was. The LORD had in fact made a free grant for them to eat *freely* of “every tree of the garden” with but a single exception (Gen 2:16-17). Thus, Satan sought to bring reproach upon the divine Law by misrepresenting it! It was as though he said, “Can it be that your Maker has given you appetites and also placed before you the means of gratifying them, only to mock you? You surely must have misunderstood His meaning!” We therefore regard this opening utterance of the serpent’s as an attempt not only to make Eve doubt God’s veracity, but also to cause her to suspect the divine beneficence. *That* is the poison Satan is ever seeking to inject into our hearts: to distrust God’s goodness—especially in connection with His prohibitions and precepts. That is really what lies behind all evil lusting and disobedience: a discontent with our position and portion, a craving for something which God has wisely withheld from us. The more clearly we perceive the precise *nature* of the serpent’s poison, the better enabled are we to *judge* its workings within ourselves. Hearken not to any suggestion that God is unduly severe with you! Put from you with the utmost abhorrence anything which causes you to doubt God’s lovingkindness. Allow nothing to make you call in to question His love.

