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STUDIES
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SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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

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OUR LOVE TO GOD

Identification of the Godly

That there is such a thing as a human creature exercising love to God is clear from Scripture, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom 8:28). And they are identified in the remainder of that verse, “to them who are the called according to his purpose”—they who are effectually called from death unto life in consequence of God’s eternal decree. So too we read of “the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1Co 2:9). Divine love is reciprocal. In due time, God sheds abroad His love in the hearts of those whom He has loved from everlasting, so that they in return love Him. As another has said, “When love hath descended from heaven to earth, it hath finished half its course; but when it ascends from earth to heaven again, then the circle is completed.” Our love to Him is but a small stream that flows from and runs back to the ocean of God’s love. This love is not of natural kindling, but from the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit. Then the understanding is made to perceive, the judgment to esteem, the will to choose, and the whole soul to delight in God. The renewed person now sees there to be nothing in heaven or earth to be desired in comparison with Him.

This is one of the essential characteristic features of all the regenerate. They differ considerably in gifts and attainments, but one thing they have in common—they are all lovers of God. Never has a single individual been born into the kingdom of God which was destitute of affection for Him, “every one that loveth is born of God” (1Jo 4:7). Some are but “babes,” weak in faith; some are “young men,” strong in the Lord; others are “fathers,” of long experience and spiritual maturity. But one and all love God. Once they were as their fellow sinners, at enmity with God, but now they bear Him good will. The spirit of adoption has taken captive their hearts, and they love God with a little child’s fervent, adoring, confident affection. They love Him for His infinite perfections, His wisdom, grace, faithfulness, holiness. They love Him as He is revealed in Christ—the Image of the invisible God. They love Him for His merciful overtures to them through the Gospel. They love Him for what He has done for them, and for what He has promised yet to do. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1Jo 4:19). Gratitude is not a mean virtue, but a noble endowment, and supplies the most powerful of all spiritual motives unto a godly walk.

Love to God is a sure evidence of grace in the soul. As saving faith is a fruit of effectual calling, so also is affection for God—the two cannot be separated, for faith “worketh by love” (Gal 5:6). Nevertheless, no Christian, when in his right mind, will ever *boast of his love*. Rather will he be strongly inclined to doubt if he has any, and certainly he will be *ashamed* of the degree of it. This writer truly is. As he thinks how feeble, how fickle, is his affection for God, and how little genuine obedience it produces, he is confounded. Yet, by grace, he can say with poor Peter, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee” (Joh 21:17)—though my conduct, through the weakness of the flesh, appeared to give the lie thereto—*Thou* perceivest that the beating of my heart *is* toward Thee. Since

there be the recognition and realization in His people that they love God because He first loved them, that His love was spontaneous, of mere grace, unattracted by anything amiable in them, there will necessarily be a sense of utter unworthiness in their love to Him. And thus the Christian's love to God is a very lowly and humble affection.

Love is as needful for the spiritual life as blood is for the natural. In neither case can the one exist without the other. Yet, though all the regenerate have love to God, not all of them are equally aware of the fact, nor are all Christians sensible of it in the same way at all times. But a personal persuasion of our love to God is most desirable. Those things which the more deeply concern us ought the more seriously to affect us. None should deny its existence simply because they are dissatisfied with the degree or intensity of their love. God is indeed to be loved above everyone and everything else, and loved with all our being and strength, yet the best of His people sadly fail to render unto Him that which is His due. To find the heart going out more to a near relative than to God, or to grieve more over some temporal loss than for an offence against the Lord, must occasion great concern to a conscientious soul. Nevertheless, such an experience is not, of itself, a proof that we have *no love* to God, especially if devotedness to our kith and kin does not cause us to neglect Him.

Love to God is not to be determined by its elevation. Some writers have insisted that naught but disinterested love is worthy of the name—that God must be loved for what He is, and our neighbour as His creature. But there is a love of gratitude as well as of complacency, which makes a thankful return unto Him for His great love in Christ. This is expressly stated in 1 John 4:19, "We love him, because he first loved us." Not only did God's love precede ours, being set upon us when we were entirely loveless, but it is the cause of ours. Not only as the divine power created it in us, but as the *motive* which we are conscious of in our love. If our hearts had never been deeply affected by that transcendent love which moved God to give His own Son to die for such hell-deserving wretches as we know ourselves to be, should we have ever had any affection unto Him? No, indeed. Nor is there anything "legalistic" in this, if David hesitated not to leave it on record, "I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications" (Psa 96:1). I need not be ashamed to own that I love Him because He heard my cry for mercy and washed my sins away by the blood of the Lamb.

Love to God is not to be measured so much by its sensible stirrings or lively acts as by its solid esteem and settled constitution. Some Christians are naturally more emotional and lively, and therefore more easily stirred. Nor is love to be gauged by our feelings, but determined by our purpose of heart and sincere endeavours to please God. Partly because the act may be more lively where the affection be less firm in the heart. The passions of suitors are greater than the love of husbands, yet not so deeply rooted, nor do they so intimately affect the heart. Straw is soon enkindled, and its heat quickly spent, but coals burn longer and more constantly. And partly because the objects of sense do more affect and urge us in the present state. While the flesh remains in the believer, he will be more sensibly stirred by the things which agree with his carnal nature.

We very much doubt if any regenerated person ever loved God for His essential goodness before he loved Him for His beneficial goodness. The first thing which consciously awakens our love to God is a sense of favours received from Him—because the Father

gave His Son for me, because the Son shed His blood for me, because the Holy Spirit quickened me. Later, as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, there comes the realization that He is to be loved for what He is in Himself. Love to God consists in a well-pleasement in having Him as the soul's all-sufficient portion, of a delight in Him, of satisfaction in Him. Sometimes it is expressed in longings after and yearnings for Him. "With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early" (Isa 26:9). Sometimes it is declared in speaking well of Him to others (Psa 34:1-3; Mal 3:16). Often it is breathed forth in prayer (Psa 84:2), and in praise (Song 5:10). Occasionally it is revealed in exclamations of wonderment (1Jo 3:1). It is manifested in sincere efforts to please Him, making His glory the purpose and end of our actions, and therefore in detestation of all sin. It appears at its best when, in a time of sore trial and temporal straitness, its possessor "rejoices in the LORD" (Hab 3:17-18).

Here are a few *tests*. Have you been convicted of and made to mourn over your natural enmity against God, that not only was your heart dead as a stone toward Him, but filled with antagonism to and disrelish of Him? Do you love God for His *holiness* as well as His grace? Has it wrought in you a filial fear of displeasing Him, so that you jealously watch your heart lest it lead you away from Him and His ways (Heb 12:28)? Does it regulate your life, influence your walk, and move you to obedience? Is it weaning you from the creature, separating you from the world, delivering from the things opposed to sincere good love for God? Do you love His *truth*? Some pretend to love all preachers and preaching alike—incapable of distinguishing error from truth. Does it cause you to entertain good thoughts of God when His dispensations cross your will, moving you to place the best construction on the same and attributing them to His wisdom? For "love thinketh no evil" (1Co 13:5)!

God is truly loved above all others when no affection for the creature can draw us deliberately to sin against Him (Job 2:9-10). God is truly loved when we gladly incur and endure the displeasure and frowns of our fellows rather than offend against Him (Luk 14:26). God is truly loved when we make it our *principal concern* to please Him, rather than gratify the flesh or promote our worldly interests. God is truly loved when the heart is wounded and grieved at the dishonour done to Him all around us (Psa 119:53). If your love has waned and you long for it to be revived, doubt not God's love for you (for that will further weaken it), but look again at Christ on the cross. The best food for our love is to feed on His love.

EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

16. Obediential Assurance (2:4-5)

*“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments,
is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth
his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected:
hereby know we that we are in him.”*

Our title suggests that there is more than one kind of assurance, and such is indeed the case; nor do we refer to the difference between a genuine and a false one, but to those that are real and true. Like so many other subjects treated of in Scripture, Christian assurance has more than one side to it, though many are unaware of the fact. Broadly speaking they may be reduced to two: an objective and a subjective. The one is a firm persuasion resting on something without us, namely, the Word of God; the other upon something within us—the work of God's Spirit. Each is obtained by faith, and both are equally sure, though the latter be not attended with the same degree of certainty. The former is foundational, the other evidential.¹ “Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and state of salvation—which hope of theirs shall perish—yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God; which hope shall never make them ashamed.

“This certainly is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirit that we are the children of God: which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*).² It will be seen that that statement relates not to a simple assurance, but to a complex one, which rests on several grounds. There is an assurance conveyed by the direct action of faith, when it receives and rests upon Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel, and His promise that He will never cast out such a one is relied upon. There is also an assurance which springs from the reflex action of faith, when the believer sees himself in the mirror of God's Word and perceives in himself “the inward evidences of those graces” which are the scriptural marks of a saving change

¹ **foundational...evidential** – The objective assurance we have from God's promises in His Word is foundational. It is the basis of our faith. The subjective assurance is that which we gather from the evidence of change that we see in our lives.

² **Westminster Confession of Faith** – one of the great confessions of the Christian faith, produced in 1645-1646 by an assembly of 121 theologians appointed by the “Puritan” Long Parliament to make proposals for reforming the Church of England.

wrought in his soul by the Holy Spirit. The latter cannot exist without the former, nor will the former be without the latter, except in those rare cases where regenerated souls are taken at once to heaven.

Whereas the unsaved are to be plainly informed that there is a sure ground in the Gospel for the chief of sinners to rest his faith and hope upon, and that there can be no spiritual experience or inward evidence to confirm his hope until he looks away unto Christ as his Saviour; on the other hand, those who profess to have done so are to be exhorted to make their calling and election sure (2Pe 1:10) unto themselves and their fellow saints, by bringing forth those fruits which manifest them to be trees of the Lord's planting. Now in this epistle John enters into some detail in showing what those fruits consist of, the presence of which attests the saving nature of their possessor's faith, and the absence of which demonstrates the emptiness of such a one's profession. In other words, the fact of regeneration may be certainly inferred from the presence of those marks which according to God's Word pertain unto those who have been born again. Conversely, of those who affirm themselves to be regenerate but tread not the highway of holiness, but instead "have corrupted themselves," it has to be said "their spot is not the spot of His children: they are a perverse and crooked generation" (Deu 32:5).

Now it is this evidential assurance of which John treats in the passage before us. First he declares, "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." In this way do we obtain sure confirmation that our acquaintance with Christ is a saving one. Christians may be convinced that a new nature has been imparted to them if they clearly perceive themselves to have new thoughts, tastes, impulses, desires, and acts. "As light proves the shining of the sun, as movement proves the existence of life, so this new experience assures us that our faith is not in vain. It is not without works, and therefore it is not dead" (Levi Palmer). David could say, "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts" (Psa 119:100)—not because he lived in a later and "more enlightened" age, nor by mental industry and extensive reading, but by entire submission to the supreme authority of the divine will. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" (Joh 7:17)—obedience is the grand means for removing doubts. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in [or "by"] God" (Joh 3:21): he who acts uprightly and conscientiously fears not for God to scrutinize him and knows that divine grace must be operating within him. So intimately connected are spiritual knowledge and obedience that it is most difficult to define that exact relation and interrelation between them. It has been remarked that the one is both the cause and the effect of the other, the root and fruit alike; but it would be more accurate to say they are completely interdependent. Thus we find David testifying, "Through thy precepts I get understanding," and then asking, "give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies" (Psa 119:104, 125), yet there is not the least inconsistency between the two things. Paul prayed that the saints might be filled with spiritual understanding, in order that they should walk worthily of the Lord, thereby "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:9-10). "Let me give you an illustration of this point. When our Lord met the disciples at Emmaus and talked with them, they did not know Him while He talked with them. But when think you did they know that they knew Him? Why, not until they performed an act of obedience by offering hospitality to a stranger. Then He was known to them in the

breaking of bread" (Charles H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892). The lack of practical obedience to Christ lies at the root of the majority of doubts and fears!

Well did Thomas Scott (1747-1821) remark upon this verse, "What then shall we say to the unguarded language of some persons who have argued or asserted that sanctification is not the proper ground of assurance and evidence of our justification, and that it is legalistic for men to look to their works as the proof of their being true believers? We can only say that they directly contradict the apostle, and that they are most certainly mistaken." There is a vast difference between saying that the ground of assurance for acceptance with God is my obedience to His commandments, and declaring that the genuineness of my profession is to be tested thereby. As John Calvin (1509-1564) pointed out, "But we are not hence to conclude that faith recumbs on works, for though every one receives a testimony to his faith from his works, yet it does not follow that it is founded on them, since they are added as an evidence. Then the certainty of faith depends on the grace of Christ alone; but piety and holiness of life distinguish true faith from that knowledge of God which is fictitious and dead: for the truth is that those who are in Christ, as Paul says, 'have put off the old man' (Col 3:9)." The soundness of our knowledge is to be gauged by the obedience which it produces.

"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (verse 4). In those words the apostle declares that any knowledge of God which issues not in obedience to Him is worthless, and that the lawless one affirming a saving acquaintance with God is a deceiver. John's immediate design was to expose the vain pretences of the Gnostics, who claimed to know God in a very profound and intimate way. They imagined that they understood the very essence of God's being and the mysterious manner of His subsistence, and therefore acquired or appropriated the name of Gnostics, or "knowing ones." But they kept not the divine commandments, affecting themselves to be occupied with higher things, which raised them above God's precepts; and therefore they disdained His ordinances. John was also refuting the error of Antinomians, who, under the guise of magnifying divine grace, set aside the Law as the believer's rule of conduct. Peter refers to them in his second epistle and declares that the "liberty" they preached was naught but "bondage" (verse 19); while Jude branded them as deniers of our Lord Jesus Christ (verse 4). But in its wider scope, our text is an exposure of all graceless professors.

It is an easy matter for anyone to say "I know God," but whether or not such be the case must be put to the trial. It raises the question, What kind of knowledge is mine? Is it merely a natural and notional one, or a spiritual and influential? Do I know Him with a filial fear and holy love, or just intellectually, as the demons do (Mar 1:24)? This calls to the duty of self-examination, and shows the importance of making sure that I really have a saving interest in Christ. It requires me to ascertain if that great change has been wrought in me which regeneration ever effects. The defects and deficiencies of the Christian's life are indeed many, nevertheless the one who has been born again evidences it by habitually walking with God. Nor will the real children of God resent the challenging of their faith or the testing of their knowledge. Rather are they deeply concerned, and willing to go to considerable pains in order to be scripturally assured that their knowledge is radically different from that of empty professors or conscienceless hypocrites, that their faith is a divinely

communicated one, that their experience is sound and genuine and not delusive and counterfeit, evidenced by a conscientious compliance with God's will.

Whether our knowledge of God be a saving one is not to be determined by the soundness of our creed nor by the depth and liveliness of our feelings, but by a radical change of heart which has produced a new disposition (2Co 5:17), which moves us to a willing, steady, and diligent compliance with and conformity to God's preceptive will. It is in this way that we may confirm the sincerity of our profession and the reality of our state. Contrariwise, anyone who avows himself to have passed from death unto life, yet makes no conscience of the divine authority, but is a self-pleaser, supplies evidence that he is a liar. Thus it is that the Lord's people are both to identify themselves and to be known unto others. See this principle illustrated in the case of Saul of Tarsus, when, in response to his inquiry, "Who art thou, Lord?" Christ was revealed to him, he at once asked, "What wilt thou have me to do?" (Act 9:5-6). As soon as he knew Christ, he desired to obey Him, and unmistakably and lastingly was that desire exemplified to the end of his course. Nor was his in any wise an exceptional case, rather was it in this respect "a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1Ti 1:16).

Unto all who are in Christ is that promise made good, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb 8:10), so that they understand, love and obey them. It is in this way that we are renewed in knowledge after the image of God (Col 3:10). That knowledge is a practical and persuasive one, which powerfully influences its subject and produces a walking in the light. When God writes His laws upon our hearts, our affections and wills answer to every tittle in them, with a genuine desire and determination to perform the same. There is a complete harmony between the renewed soul and God and a correspondency of will. That correspondency was expressed by David thus: "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek" (Psa 27:8); and by Paul: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom 7:22). And though he was harassed with another and contrary law warring against the same and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members, causing him to cry for deliverance, yet he not only thanked God that he would yet be fully delivered, but could say "with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." The particular design of these verses is to take forth the precious from the vile. In them the apostle describes one of the vital differences which there is between the sheep and the goats. Of the latter it is said, "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him" (Ti 1:16). They adopt the same language as the saints, believe the same doctrines, claim to be resting on the finished work of Christ, and are quite sure of their salvation; yet evince little or no concern for His precepts. They talk glibly, but walk carelessly. This is exceedingly solemn, for those who tread not in the way of God's precepts are strangers to Him. A man spiritually knows no more than he practices, for spiritual knowledge is radical and influential. It exerts both a restraining and a constraining power, causing its subject to loathe and shun evil and to love and pursue that which is good. Therefore they who keep not God's commandments have no experiential acquaintance with Him. "We cannot know Him as Lord and Father, without being dutiful children and obedient servants" (Calvin).

While John describes quite a number of distinct marks whereby God's children may surely recognize themselves and also identify those who have a form of godliness but know nothing of its living and transforming power (2Ti 3:5), it is both highly significant and deeply important to note that he has given the precedence unto obedience, for without it any other apparent features of spirituality are but spurious. Though this be by no means the only evidence of a saving knowledge of God, it is the first and foremost, and where it be absent it is useless to look for others. As Christ asked those whom He addressed, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luk 6:46). Habitual disregard of His commandments is utterly incompatible with the owning of Him as our Lord. A disobedient life is a blank repudiation of a Christian profession. To avow that I know God savingly while self-will orders my life is a blatant assumption, for it is thoroughly lacking in reality. If I disregard that which Christ has appointed to be observed and done by His disciples, then that is absent which marks me as one.

He "*is a liar, and the truth is not in him,*" As John proceeds to develop his subject his language becomes increasingly emphatic. In 1:7, he had affirmed that those who walk in the light have fellowship with God in Christ, but in 2:3, he used a stronger expression of those who keep His commandments—thereby they "do know that they know Him." So, contrastedly, in 1:6, it was asserted that if we profess to have fellowship with God and yet walk in darkness "we lie, and do not the truth," whereas here the apostle roundly and positively declares of the one who claims to know God and yet "keeps not [observe the tense!] his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." It should be pointed out that the final clause is much more than a bare repetition in a negative form of the preceding one, being explanatory not only of his being a liar but of his being disobedient: he kept not His commandments because he lacked the "impulsive power of a new affection," which impels to holy action. And here we would answer the final question in the opening paragraph in our last chapter: "His" refers to God in Christ, and therefore the "commandments" include those of both the Law and the Gospel—amplification and verification of this statement will be given (D.V.) under our exposition of 2:7-8.

"*He is a liar,*" for he professes that which his life refutes. He may know much about Christ and have many ideas of Him floating in his brain, but it is a glaring falsehood for one who makes no conscience of His Law to say he has a saving knowledge of Him. As Spurgeon pointed out, it is more than a verbal lie, namely, a doctrinal one, for it is horrible heresy to aver³ a personal acquaintance with the Saviour and live a life of self-pleasing—the two things are utterly incompatible. It is a practical lie, for he completely falsifies such a profession. One who poses as a Christian when he is not "hangs out false colours on Sunday and all through the week plays the liar's part." It is a corrosive lie, eating into the soul of its utterer and corrupting it, for he who has no compunction in testifying falsely of his relation unto God soon becomes inured to deceiving his fellows. Some of the most shameless trickeries and robberies have been committed by those posing as ardent Christians. It is a damning lie, for the one who is guilty of this God-dishonouring falsehood is signing and sealing her own death warrant, challenging the dread sentence of eternal perdition (Rev 21:8).

³ aver – claim.

“But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (verse 5). Here the apostle returns to the thought of verse 3, and describes those who know the grace of God in truth (Col 1:6 and cf. Eph 4:21), though the careful reader will observe the change from “his commandments” to “his word.” That was not simply for the avoidance of tautology,⁴ but because the latter is a more comprehensive expression, taking in the entire communication which God has made us. It is first and foremost a commanding Word, which demands the subordination of our reason and judgment to it, the submission of our affections and wills, the subjugation of our likes and dislikes. But it is also a Word of doctrine to be believed and held fast. We are required to be as jealous of God’s truth as we are responsive to His will, to be as sound in our faith as holy in our conduct, to hate false teaching as we do the garment spotted by the flesh. It is also a Word of threatening, to be respected and treated with fear and trembling—as Joseph did (Gen 39:9), and not trifled with as was the case with Adam and Eve. It is a Word of promise and consolation, to be embraced or appropriated (Heb 11:13) and rejoiced in (Jer 15:16). As such that Word is to be kept as a whole, and in all its parts.

The *“love of God”* is an ambiguous phrase, for it may be understood either objectively or subjectively, as the love which God Himself bears and manifests unto His people or as that which they exercise toward Him; but whichever it is it comes to much the same thing, since theirs is but the reflex of His—the outflowing of that which He has shed abroad in their hearts. As the expression comes before us again in chapter 4, we will reserve till then (D.V.) a fuller consideration of its precise significance, as well as what is intended by its being “perfected”: suffice it now to say that by God’s love being “perfected” we understand its having accomplished its design or reached its end in producing obedience. The aim of God’s love in choosing His people is to make them holy (Eph 1:4). The purpose of Christ’s love in redeeming His people is that they may be “zealous of good works” (Ti 2:14).

As Calvin pointed out with his usual perspicuity⁵—greatly excelling that of most who have followed him—“this misunderstood clause intimates what a true keeping of God’s Word consists of, even love to Him.” “What doth the LORD thy God require of thee...to love him...to keep the commandments of the LORD” (Deu 10:12-13); “therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10), for love is dynamical, the most effectual of all influences and motives. Love is intensely practical—seeking to promote the interests of its object—or it is an empty name. Where there be love in the heart it will soon appear in the life; of all the affections it is the hardest to conceal. Love for God and obedience to Him are inseparable. Love reaches its objective when we please God—as a grafted tree has when laden with fruit. Consequently the Word is precious unto those who love God because it is His Word, and therefore they treasure it in their affections and memories and give proof thereof in their daily walk.

In verses 3 and 5 the Christian is shown how he may test the nature of his knowledge of God and the reality of his love for Him, namely, by the effects they produce. If my knowledge of Him be something more than a self-acquired and notional one, namely, that

⁴ **tautology** – repeating oneself.

⁵ **perspicuity** – clarity.

which the Spirit has wrought in me, then it has subdued my pride, humbled my heart, and brought me into subjection to God's revealed will. It will produce in me that spirit which was manifested by Cornelius when he said to Peter, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" (Act 10:33). Our own wisdom and whims will be so subordinated to God's authority that we shall be willing to be weighed in the balances of His Word, to bring everything to its touchstone, ready to be corrected and reprov'd by it; and that not spasmodically or only for a season, but constantly: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (Joh 8:31). God's Word becomes everything to such a soul: his delight, his food, his rule, his chart. In like manner, if the love of God be in my heart it will operate powerfully, so that sin is hated and holiness panted after, and therefore my greatest burden and grief is to sin against Him, as my supreme delight is to commune with and enjoy Him. "Hereby know we that we are in him"—belong to Him.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

68. *Challengers Vanquished (11:7-9)*

Our design in these articles has been to supply something more than a bare exposition of the book of Joshua, namely, to point out some of the bearings which its contents have upon us today. A true understanding of God's Word is indeed of first importance, for unless its meaning be rightly apprehended, of what service will it be unto us? Yet it is *the use* to which we put it, the measure in which we appropriate its principles and precepts to the regulating of our daily walk, that is equally important. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (Joh 13:17), that is the test. Thus, to spare no pains in endeavouring to arrive at the meaning of God's Word, that he may give a sound interpretation of the same, is only a part of the duty resting upon the minister of the Gospel, and especially *the teacher* of God's people. Another part of his work, equally necessary and exacting, is for him to make practical application unto his hearers of each passage he takes up, to point out the various lessons it inculcates, to accommodate it unto the present condition and circumstances of those to whom he ministers. Only so will he emulate the example left him by the divine Teacher of the Church. Only so will he pursue the same course that was followed by His apostles. Only so will he be of the greatest service unto His needy, tried and often sorely perplexed people. It is not the elucidation of mysteries or light upon prophecy that they most need, but that which will comfort, strengthen, and stimulate them.

Such a policy as just intimated will indeed slow down the speed of one who undertakes to go systematically through a whole book of Scripture, or even a single chapter thereof. But so far from speed being a virtue, it is more often a vice, as much in modern life tragically shows. "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa 28:16) holds good of the "opening up" of God's Word, as it does of everything else, and must be heeded if souls are to be really edified. But though such a method will not make for swiftness, yet by God's blessing (on much prayerful meditation), it will produce something far more substantial and sat-

isfying than the superficial generalizations which now so widely obtain, both in the pulpit and in the religious press. As the old adage says, "Slow but sure is sure to do well." Instead of seeing how quickly we could race through the book of Joshua, we have endeavoured to ascertain and then point out the practical application of its contents unto ourselves and our readers. Particularly have we dwelt at length upon the many things in it which illustrate the various aspects of the Christian's spiritual warfare, the snares he must avoid, the rules he must observe, the means he must employ, in order to success therein. We have sought to call attention to the grand incentives and the real encouragements furnished by this book to "fight the good fight of faith" (1Ti 6:12), and to show how strength for the same is to be obtained.

In addition, we have endeavoured to remove those "stumblingblocks" (Isa 57:14) which various types of error lay in the path of the Christian warrior. Let us now add a few words to what was said at the close of our last concerning the misleading teaching of certain sections of what is known as "the victorious life" movement. While on the one hand, we heartily concur with their deploring of the carnal and worldly walk of the rank and file of professing Christians, and agree that many of God's own people are living far below their privileges in Christ; yet on the other hand, we neither endorse their language nor believe the remedy they prescribe is the true one. All of their leaders are decidedly Arminianistic, which at once evinces that they are unsafe guides to follow. It is scripturally warrantable to say that some believers are living Christ-dishonouring lives and acting contrary to God's revealed will, but that is very far from justifying the oft-made assertion that He desires to do this or that in and for them, but they will not let Him. That would connote a thwarted Redeemer, and obviously, a *defeated* Christ could not be the Leader of any "victorious" followers! Such a "Christ" is very different from Him who is no less than "the mighty God" (Isa 9:6). Verily, "the legs of the lame are not equal" (Pro 26:7), and they who are proudest of their consistency are often the most inconsistent in their beliefs and conduct.

To contend for holiness of life is indeed praiseworthy, and to urge God's people to "possess their possessions" and enjoy now the rich heritage which is theirs in Christ is also a thing most needful. Yet zeal requires to be tempered with knowledge, and if a spirit of fanaticism is to be avoided, all must be tested by Holy Writ (1Th 5:21). Satan is never more dangerous than when he appears as an angel of light (2Co 11:14). To carnal reason, it seems that Christ's acceptance of the devil's challenge to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple had been an outstanding act of faith in God to preserve Him from all injury. Nevertheless, His reply shows that such had been an act of presumption and contrary to Scripture (Mat 4:5-7). Likewise, it may strike us as most honouring to Christ to say that He is ready to do all for us if we surrender wholly to His control—but the fact is that He will no more relieve us of personally contending with our foes than He would repent and believe for us in order to our being saved. Strengthen us He will, if we seek His grace aright, yet that strength will be given for the purpose of equipping us to fight the good fight of faith. As the apostle declared, "I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily" (Col 1:29). Nor is there anything in that statement the least derogatory to His glory; but very much to the contrary.

Resuming our remarks upon Joshua 11. In view of the great preponderance of Jabin's forces over Israel's, and the weighty advantage he had in being possessed of so many horses and chariots, while they were on foot, there can be no doubt that he was not only fully confident of victory, but that he considered the initiative lay entirely in his own hands, and that there was not the least likelihood of their launching any attack upon him. Yet that was the very thing that happened. "So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly: and they fell upon them" (verse 7). Therein we behold the confidence, the obedience, the daring and the promptness of faith. Joshua's confidence lay not in his own military skill, nor in the valour of his men, but in the sure promise of the One whom he served. The assault which he now made upon the Canaanites was not dictated by caprice,⁶ feelings, or carnal reason, but was in compliance with the orders which he had received from the Lord. His falling suddenly upon Jabin and his army was not due to any impatience or anxiety for the issue to be immediately determined, but was the result of laying hold of the Lord's "tomorrow" in the preceding verse. His action was not a venturesome or foolhardy one, but a daring to rely upon his God when faced with what to sight appeared a hopeless situation—as the Hebrews, and later Daniel, feared not to defy the edicts of the king of Babylon (Dan 3:16-18; 6:10).

"And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephoth-maim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining" (verse 8). Thus did Israel's God make good His word through Moses (Deu 20:1), fulfil the promise made to His servant, and vindicate the faith of Joshua. Thus was provided yet another proof of how firm is the foundation on which has rested the faith of God's people in all generations. And thus too did He demonstrate His acceptance of the impious challenge of Jabin and his fellows, and make it clear that, "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD" (Pro 21:30)—another verse, by the way, whose language is not to be taken absolutely and where an interpreter is needed to bring out its sense. As a matter of fact, all the wisdom of Satan and all the policy of the unregenerate is directed, immediately and actively, against the Lord, yet *all in vain*. He that sitteth in the heavens laughs at the most determined and concerted projects of men against Himself and His Anointed, and fulfills His pleasure despite them (Psa 2:1-6). As well attempt to stop the sun from shining or the ocean from moving as seek to nullify the decrees of the Almighty. All who make war with the Lamb shall most certainly be vanquished by Him (Rev 17:14).

The total failure of Jabin's long-planned project demonstrated clearly that there is "no counsel against the Lord" which has the remotest possibility of succeeding. The best-contrived policy against Him comes to foolishness. "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness [not "ignorance"!]; and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong" (Job 5:13). Pharaoh's counsel to depress the Hebrews issued in their being increased (Exo 1:8-12), Ahithophel's counsel was befooled at the very time when "it was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God" (2Sa 16:23; 17:7, 14, 23, with 15:31), Ahab's attempt to falsify God's word by seeking to ward off the threatened stroke against his life (1Ki 22:30-34), Athaliah's deep-laid plot to exterminate the family of David and thereby frustrate the di-

⁶ **caprice** – whim; a sudden change of mood or behavior.

vine promise (2Ki 11:1), the blatant boast and wicked design of Sennacherib against Judah (2Ch 32:21; Isa 30:31), the strong and repeated efforts of the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin to prevent their building of the temple (Ezr 4:6), and later the craft of Sanballat to oppose the erecting of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2, 4, 6), the determination of Haman to slay all the Jews (Est 3), Herod's seeking to kill the infant Saviour (Mat 2)—all came to nought, as inevitably they should do when opposing the decrees of heaven.

“And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel” (Jos 11:8), thereby fulfilling the promise which He had given unto Joshua the day previously (verse 6). Blessed is it to learn from this, and many other passages, that the wicked, equally with the righteous, are in the hands of Him who made them and are entirely at His sovereign disposal. One of the chief designs of Scripture is to reveal unto us the several relations which God sustains unto His creatures. He is not only their Creator, but their Lawgiver and Ruler, their King and Governor, and, ultimately, their Judge, to whom they must yet render an account of their deeds. Since the reprobate as well as the elect are represented as clay in the hand of the divine Potter determining their eternal destiny (Rom 9:21-24), then certainly He has full control of them and their actions while they be in a time state. This is a very real and substantial part of the believer's consolation, that his God “doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35), and therefore that neither Satan nor any of his children can make the least move against one of the Lord's people without His express permission and the removing of His providential hindrances.

“And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel.” What a commentary was that upon “The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect” (Psa 33:10)! Not only are the wicked the subjects of God's government, but their every action is controlled by Him and made subservient to His eternal purpose, yet *without* His having any part in their wickedness. Was it not so in the cases of Pharaoh and Judas (Rom 9:17-18; Luk 22:22)? And is it possible to select more extreme ones? If then the greatest of all rebels fulfilled the purpose of the Almighty (though quite unwittingly so far as they were concerned), then think it not strange that it is so with all lesser rebels. Nimrod and his fellows thought to erect a tower whose top should reach unto heaven, but God frustrated them (Gen 10). Abimelech king of Gerah sent and took Sarah unto himself, but God suffered him not to touch her (Gen 20:6). Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness and hired himself out unto Balak to go and curse Israel, but the Lord so interposed that that prophet had to confess to his chagrin, “Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed: and I cannot reverse it” (Num 23:20). “Surely the wrath of man shall [be made to] praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (Psa 76:10).

“The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all” (Psa 103:19)—over the evil and the good, over the demons and those they indwell as truly as over His Church. God rules in the decisions of the senate, the tumults of the people, the fury of battle, as really as in the ragings and tides of the sea. The plotting of kings, the ambitions of aggressors, the avarice of conquerors, are fully controlled by the Most High. He presides in their councils, determines their decisions, decides which nations they shall attack, bending their minds to comply with His eternal decrees. Unmistakably, repeatedly,

uniformly, is that the teaching of Holy Writ. Note well what the Lord said of that heathen monarch who was so filled with the lust of conquest, "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so...but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few" (Isa 10:5, 7). The Assyrian had other designs of a more ambitious scope, but God changed the direction of his thoughts, and caused him to be His instrument of retribution in inflicting judgment upon a people who had sorely provoked Him. God employed him, unknown to himself, as "the rod of his anger." Thus, he was in *God's hand* and his actions determined by Him.

"And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel...and they smote them, until they left them none remaining" (verse 8). See here the utter futility and madness of fighting against the Almighty! When He "delivered them up" unto their justly deserved death, what could they do? Nothing, they were helpless, unable to escape the due reward of their iniquity. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished; but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered" (Pro 11:21). Thus it was with Jabin and his hosts. Their confederacy in evil came to naught. Their number, strength, and unanimity availed them nothing now that God's hour of vengeance had arrived.

Therein we have a solemn anticipation and adumbration of the judgment awaiting the world of the ungodly. The Lord has solemnly declared that He "repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them" (Deu 7:10); and again, "Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them" (Psa 21:8-9). Out of Christ, there is no protection from God's justice. When He appears to judge the world, the stoutest heart will melt in terror and the most obdurate⁷ will cry to the rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come: and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev 6:16-17).

"And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burned their chariots with fire" (verse 9). In the flush and excitement of victory, Israel's leader failed not to comply with the orders he had received from his Master, and it is blessed to see how the Holy Spirit has taken notice of and recorded the same, thereby showing us the value which God places upon obedience. Not only so, but the chronicling of these details here is for our spiritual instruction, intimating as they do once more that *further victories* are not to be expected by us unless we remain in complete subjection to the divine will.

The continued blessing of God on our efforts to overcome our foes is dependent upon the maintenance of lowliness and submission unto Him, for if pride or self-will is allowed, then the Holy Spirit is grieved. Humility ever expresses itself in obedience to God. What is recorded here in verse 9 explains what follows to the end of the chapter, where we are shown how Joshua's progress remained unretarded. In what particular way this "houghing" was done, we are not informed, so we cannot be sure whether the horses were only ren-

⁷ **obdurate** – obstinate.

dered powerless for warfare or completely destroyed. In view of burning the chariots, it seems more likely that they would be killed, so as to prevent other Canaanites from using them, the more so since they would be of no value to Israel.

“And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burned their chariots with fire.” What proof was this that “There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety” (Psa 31:16-17)! As God can save those who are without armies, so those with them are helpless if He be against them—as was clearly demonstrated at the Red Sea. It is a striking fact that the most glorious days of military victory for Israel were when the veto of Deuteronomy 17:16 was strictly regarded by them. In addition to their remarkable exploits in the time of Joshua, we may recall their victories over Sihon and Og (Num 21:23-26, 33-35), their overcoming of Sisera and his nine hundred chariots of iron (Jdg 4:3-16), and David’s victory over the king of Zobah, with his thousand chariots (2Sa 8).

On the other hand, it is equally noticeable that Israel’s declension dates from their transgression of Deuteronomy 17:16 (1Ki 4:26; 10:26), and that defeat came from the very quarter in which they foolishly placed their confidence (2Ch 12:2-9 and compare Isa 31:1). All of which goes to show, “The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety [or “victory”] is of the LORD” (Pro 21:31). It may also be pointed out that later, when Israel renounced this vain confidence, God healed their backsliding (Hos 14:3-4).

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

6. *Its Nature, Part 4*

Third, the fall has resulted in *man’s mind being enveloped in darkness*. As physical blindness is one of the greatest natural calamities, spiritual blindness is much more so. It consists not of universal ignorance, but a total incapacity to take in a real knowledge of divine things. As it is said of the Jews, “blindness in part is happened to Israel” (Rom 11:25). Men may become very learned in many things, and by exercising their minds upon the Scriptures, they may acquire a considerable letter-knowledge of its contents; but they are quite unable to obtain a vital and effectual knowledge thereof. “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), and spiritual perception he has none. This darkness which is upon the mind renders the natural man incapable of perceiving the excellence of God, the perfection of His Law, the real nature of sin, or his dire need of a Saviour. Should the Lord draw nigh and ask him, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” his answer ought to be, “Lord, that I might receive my sight” (Mar 10:51).

This darkness is upon the noblest part of man’s being, his soul; and upon the highest faculty of it, the mind, which performs the same office for it as does the eye to the body. By means of our visive⁸ organ, we cognize⁹ material objects, distinguish between them,

⁸ visive – seeing.

recognize their beauty or repulsiveness. By the mind, we think, reason, understand, and are enabled to weigh and discern between the true and the false. Since the mind occupies so high a place in the scale of our beings, and since it be the most active of our inward faculties, ever working, then what a fearful state the soul must be in for its very eye to be *blind*! It is “like a fiery, high-metalled horse whose eyes cannot see, furiously carrying his rider upon rocks, pits, and dangerous precipices” (John Flavel, 1630-1691). Or, as the Son of God declared, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Mat 6:22-23).

Much is said in the Scriptures about this terrible affliction. Men are represented as groping at noonday (Deu 28:29), yea, “they meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night” (Job 5:14). “They know not, neither will they understand.” And why? “They walk on in darkness” (Psa 82:5). It cannot be otherwise—alienated from Him who is light, they must be in total spiritual darkness. “The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble” (Pro 4:19)—insensible of the very things which are leading to everlasting woe. Moral depravity inevitably results in moral darkness. As a physically blind eye shuts out all natural light, so the blinded eye of the soul excludes all spiritual light. It renders the Scriptures profitless to them, for in this respect the case of the Gentiles is identical with that of the Jews, “But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament” (2Co 3:14). Consequently, the highest wisdom they count folly, and objects which are in themselves the most glorious and attractive are despised and rejected.

It is a great mistake to suppose that depravity is confined to the heart or to any one of the faculties which is more immediately conversant with the distinctions of right and wrong. As a radical disease extends its influence to all the functions of the body, so depravity extends to all the powers of the soul. Sin is as really blindness to the mind as it is hardness to the heart, and therefore has it departed from its original tendencies. Its actions, however intense, are only in the wrong direction. This it is which alone affords a satisfactory explanation of the mental aberrations of men and the immoral conceptions they have formed of deity. As we attempt to contemplate the manifold forms of religious error, both ancient and modern, the various superstitions, the disgusting rites of worship, the monstrous and hideous symbols of the Godhead, the cruel flagellations and obscenities which prevail in heathen lands—when we consider all the abominations which have long passed and still pass under the sacred name of divine worship, and ask *how* such delusions originated and have been propagated, it is not sufficient to trace them to sin in general—rather must they be attributed to a deranged mind. Only a debased and darkened understanding adequately accounts for the horrible lies which have taken the name of truth, and the fearful blasphemies which have been styled worship.

This moral darkness which is upon the mind appears in the speculations about deity by philosophers and metaphysicians, for they are ever erroneous, defective, and degrading, when not corrected by divine revelation. All such speculations are necessarily vain when they attempt to deal with things which transcend the scope of our faculties—which under-

⁹ **cognize** – perceive.

take to carry knowledge beyond its first principles, and essay to comprehend the incomprehensible. The creature being dependent and finite can never hope to compass an absolute knowledge of anything. "Intelligence begins with principles that must be accepted and not explained; and in applying those principles to the phenomena of existence, apparent contradictions constantly emerge that require patience and further knowledge to resolve them. But the mind, anxious to know all and restless under doubts and uncertainty, is tempted to renounce the first principles of reason and to contradict the facts which it daily observes. It seeks consistency of thought, and rather than any gaps should be left unfilled, it plunges everything into hopeless confusion. Instead of accepting the laws of intelligence and patiently following the light of reason, and submitting to ignorance where ignorance is the lot of his nature as limited and finite, and joyfully receiving the partial knowledge which is his earthly inheritance, man, under the impulse of curiosity, had rather make a world that he does understand than admit one which he cannot comprehend. When he cannot stretch himself to the infinite dimensions of truth, he contracts truth to his own little measure. This is what the apostle means by *vanity of mind*" (J. H. Thornwell, 1812-1862).

The only way of escape for fallen man from such vanity of mind is for him to reject the serpent's poison. "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5), and submit unreservedly to divine revelation, according to our Lord's word in Matthew 11:25, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes"—to renounce all such self-acquired knowledge, forsake all our own erroneous conclusions and fancies, and take the place of a little child before Him. But that is just what the pride of the depraved creature refuses to do. Sin has not only counteracted the normal development of reason; it has so thoroughly deranged the mind that, as Christ declared, "men loved darkness rather than light" (Joh 3:19). They are so infatuated with their delusions that they prefer error to the truth. That which may be known of God is clearly manifested on every hand, but man refuses to see (Rom 1:19-21). But though they be carried away with the darkness of their corruptions, the light still shines all around them. As created, all men may and ought to know God; but, as fallen, practical atheism is their sad heritage.

But if the acutest intellects of men, in their fallen and degenerate condition, could not of themselves form any accurate or just speculative knowledge of God and His government, there is yet a profounder ignorance which requires to be noticed, namely, that theoretical knowledge of God which there is in those countries that have been favoured with the Gospel. By the light of the Christian revelation, many a humble peasant has been made familiar with truths of which Plato and Aristotle knew nothing. Thousands are notionally sound upon questions which perplexed and confounded the understandings of presumptuous sophists. They believe that God is spirit, personal, eternal, and independent; that He made the heavens and the earth, and controls all His creatures and all their actions. They are persuaded that He is as infinitely good as He is infinitely great. Yet despite this knowledge they glorify Him not as God. They *lack* that loving light which warms as well as convinces. They have no communion with Him. They neither love nor adore Him. In order to a spiritual, vital, and transforming knowledge of God, their dead hearts must be quickened and their blind eyes opened, and in order to *that* there must be an atonement,

redemption, reconciliation with God. The cross is the only place where men can truly find God, and the incarnate Son the only One in whom God can be adequately known.

If man's mind were not enveloped by darkness, he would not be deceived by Satan's lies or allured by his baits. If man were not in total spiritual darkness, he would never cherish the delusion that the filthy rags of his own righteousness could render him acceptable to the Holy One (Isa 64:6). If he were not blind, he would perceive that his very prayers are an abomination unto the Lord (Pro 15:8). Though this incapability of understanding heavenly things be common to all the unregenerate, it is more heightened in some than in others. As all are equally under the dominion of sin, yet some forge themselves additional fetters of evil habits by drinking in iniquity like water (Job 15:16). So many of the sons of men immerse themselves in greater darkness by the strong prejudices of their own contracting, through pride and self-will. Others are still further incapacitated to take in spiritual things, even theoretically, by a judicial act of God, giving them over wholly to follow the dictates of their own minds. "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted" (Joh 12:40, and cf. 2Th 2:10-12).

Fourth, the fall has issued in man's becoming *the bondslave of Satan*. That is another mysterious but very real thing, about which we can know nothing except what is revealed thereon in Holy Writ; but its teaching leaves us in no doubt upon the fact. It reveals that men are, morally, the devil's children (Act 13:10; 1Jo 3:10); that they are his captives (2Ti 2:26), under his power (Act 26:18; Col 1:13); that his lusts they are determined to do (Joh 8:44). He is described as the strong man armed, who holds undisputed possession of the sinner's soul, until a stronger than he dispossesses him (Luk 11:21-22). It speaks of men being "oppressed of the devil" (Act 10:38), and declares, "The god of this world [the inspirer and director of its false religions] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image [Revealer] of God, should shine unto them" (2Co 4:4). The heart of fallen man is the throne on which he reigns, and all the sons of Adam are naturally inclined to yield themselves slaves to him. The awful reality of his indwelling men was authenticated beyond the possibility of doubt by the cases of demoniacal possession of Christ's day.

Their corrupt nature gives Satan the greatest advantage against men, for they are as ready to comply as he is to tempt. No age or condition of life is exempted from his assaults, and, suiting his evil solicitations according to their varied temperaments and tempers, they are easily overcome. The longer he rules over men, the more guilt they contract, and the more do they come under his dominion. To be his bondslave is a state of abject misery, for he purposes naught but the eternal ruin of his victims, and every step they take in that direction furthers his evil designs and increases their wretchedness. He is as ready to laugh at and mock them for the pangs and pains which their folly brings upon them as he was to tempt and solicit their service. Yet he has *no right* to their subjection. Though God permits him to rule over the children of disobedience, He has given him no grant or warrant which renders it *lawful* for him to do so. Thus, he is an usurper, the declared enemy of God, and though sinners are suffered by Him to yield themselves up to the devil's control, that is far from being by divine approbation.

Ephesians 2:2-3 contains the clearest and concisest description of this awful subject, and to it we now turn. "Wherein [a status and state of being dead in trespasses and sins] in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." The first thing we would observe about this verse is that the world and the prince of the power of the air are definitely linked together. For the dead in sin are said to "walk according to" the one equally as the other. The only difference being that the second statement is amplified by the clauses which follow, wherein we are shown *why* they so walked. The identifying of the world with Satan is easily understood. Three times our Lord denominated him "the prince of this world," and 1 John 5:19 declares, "The whole world lieth in wickedness." The world is distinguished from the Church of Christ—the children of God. The two opposing companies and the radical difference between them was intimated at the beginning, in the word of Jehovah unto the serpent, when He made mention of "thy seed" and "her seed" (Gen 3:15). Those two seeds were referred to by Christ in His parable of the tares, and designated by Him "the children of the kingdom" and "the children of the wicked one" (Mat 13:38).

Our Lord also spoke of the "kingdom" of Satan (Mat 12:26), by which He referred not only to his power and dominion, but to his subjects and officers being an *organized company*—in opposition to "the kingdom of God's dear Son" (Col 1:13). Thus, by the world, "the world of the ungodly" (2Pe 2:5) is meant, not only the sum total of the children of the devil, in contradistinction from the children of God, but more especially the *joining together* of all the unregenerate, which greatly augments their strength and malignity. "As in coals, though each coal hath fire in it, yet lay all those coals together and the fire is strengthened; so there is an intensification from this union of all the parts, from the *connecting* of this world. The collection of all carnal men in one and the same principles, practices, and ways, are meant by 'the world'" (Thomas Goodwin, 1600-1680). By its "course" is connoted, first, its "age" or time, each generation having a more or less distinct dress or character, but ever essentially the same "evil world" (Gal 1:4). Second, its mould or manner, its custom or way of life—its "spirit" (1Co 2:12) and "fashion" (1Co 7:31). The unregenerate walk according to the same maxims and morals, and do as the generality of their fellows do, because in each is the same depraved nature.

"According to the prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2). The world is what it is because under the dominion of Satan. The mass of the unregenerate are likened unto the sea (Isa 57:20), for being bound by a common nature, they all move together as the waters of the sea follow the tide. But as Goodwin said, "If the wind comes and blows upon the sea, how it rageth, how strong are the streams then! There is a breath, a spirit, the spirit of the power of the air, namely, the devil sendeth forth an influence whereby, as the wind that bloweth upon the trees which way it bloweth, so he bloweth and swayeth the hearts of the multitude one way...when all the coals lie together, they make a great fire, but if the bellows be used, they make the fire more intense." Thus, the Holy Spirit has here given us a double explanation of *why* the unregenerate follow the course which they do. As each one enters and grows up in the world, being a social creature, he naturally goes with the drove of his fellows, and being possessed of the same evil lusts, he finds their ways agreeable to

him. The world, then, is the *exemplary* cause according to which men shape their lives, but the devil is the *impelling* cause.

Since the fall, this malignant spirit has entered into human nature in a manner somewhat analogous to that in which the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of believers. He has an intimate access to our faculties, and though he cannot, like God's Spirit, work at the roots so as to change and transform their tendencies, yet he can ply them with representations and delusions which effectually incline them to fulfil his behests.¹⁰ He can cheat the understanding with appearances of truth, fascinate the fancy with pretences of beauty, and deceive the heart with semblances of good. By a whisper, a touch, a secret suggestion, he can give an impulse to our thoughts and turn them into channels which exactly subserve his evil designs. Men not only do what he desires, but he has a *commanding power* over them, as his being termed a prince plainly implies, and, therefore, are they said to be "taken captive...at his will" (2Ti 2:26), and when converted, they are delivered from his power (Col 1:13). Yet he does not work *immediately in all hearts*, as the Spirit in the regenerate, for he is not omnipresent, but employs a host of demons as his agents therein.

One man can influence another only from without by external means, but Satan can also affect from within. He is able not only to take thoughts out of men's minds (Luk 8:12), but to place thoughts in them, as we are told he "put into the heart of Judas" to betray Christ (Joh 13:2), and he works thus *indiscernibly* as a spirit—as he sowed his tares secretly in the night. As men yield to and comply with the devil's insinuations, he gains increasing control over them, and God permits him to enter and indwell them, as Matthew 12:29 shows. So too when Satan would move anyone unto some particularly awful sin, he takes possession of him, as we read that after Judas had consented to the vile insinuation which the devil had put into his heart, he "entered into" him (Luk 22:3) in order to ensure the carrying out of his design by strengthening the traitor to do his will. For the word for "entered" there is the same as in Mark 5:13, where the unclean spirits entered into the herd of swine, which brought about their destruction. He is able to "fill the heart" (Act 5:3), giving an additional impulse to evil as a person filled with wine is abnormally fired. But let it be pointed out, there is *no* record in Scripture of either the devil or a demon ever taking possession of a *regenerate* person.

But though the devil works thus in men, and works effectually, yet all their sins are *their own*, for the Spirit is careful to add, "worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph 2:2). Man consents first, and then the devil strengthens his resolution. That appears again in Peter's reproaching of Ananias for yielding to temptation. "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (Act 5:3). He does no violence either to the liberty or the faculties of men, disturbing neither the spontaneity of the understanding nor the freedom of the will. As the work of God's Spirit in His elect is by no means inconsistent with their full responsibility and their entire moral agency, so the work of the devil in the reprobate makes it none the less *their* work, and, therefore, the dupes of his craft are without excuse for their sins. Unlike the Holy Spirit, the devil has no creative power. He can impart no new nature, but can only avail himself of what is already there for him to work upon. He avails himself of the constitution of man's nature, especially of his depravity as a fallen

¹⁰ **behests** – commands.

being. He gives an impetus and direction to his free but evil tendencies. Rightly did Goodwin point out that “as no man doth sin because God decrees him to sin, and therefore none can excuse himself with that: so no man can excuse himself with this, that Satan worketh in him.”

Here then, my reader, is the nature of human depravity as seen from the positive side. The fall has brought man into subjection to the power of death, into hopeless bondage to sin, has completely enveloped his mind in darkness, and has issued in his being the bondsman of Satan. From that dreadful state, he possesses not a particle of power to deliver himself or even to mitigate his wretchedness. In addition, it has filled him with enmity against God (Rom 8:7), but that aspect we reserve for our next division, when (D.V.) we shall consider the *vileness* of human depravity.

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 9

10. *The simple negative often implies, conversely, the positive.* This is a very simple canon of exegesis, yet one to which the attention of the young student needs to be called. A negative statement is, of course, one where something is denied or where the absence of its opposite is supposed. In common speech, the reverse of a negative usually holds good, as when we declare, “I hope it will not rain today,” it is the same as saying, “I trust it will remain fine.” That this rule obtains in Scripture is clear from the numerous instances where the antithesis is stated, “Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” is explained in “Thou wilt show me the path of life” (Psa 16:10-11). “I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart,” and then the positive side at once follows: “I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation” (Psa 40:9-10). “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour... Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour,” etc. (Eph 4:25, 28). Many other examples might be given, but these are sufficient to establish the rule we are here treating of.

Now the Holy Spirit has by no means always formally drawn the antithesis, but rather has in many instances—that we might exercise our minds upon His Word—left *us* to do so. Thus, “A bruised reed shall he not break and smoking flax shall he not quench” (Mat 12:20) signifies that He will tenderly care for and nourish the same. “The scripture cannot be broken” (Joh 10:35) is the equivalent of, “It must be, it most certainly will be, fulfilled.” “Without me ye can do nothing” (Joh 15:5) implies that in union and communion with Him we “can do all things” (Phi 4:13). Incidentally, note how the former serves to define the latter: it is not that I shall then be able to perform miracles, but fitted to bring forth *fruit*! “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2Co 6:14) has the force of “Come out from among them and be ye separate,” as verse 17 shows. “Let us not be desirous of vain glory” (Gal 5:26) imports “Be lowly in mind and esteem others better than yourself” (Phi 2:3). “These things write I unto you, that ye sin not” (1Jo 2:1) equals “My

design is to inculcate and promote the practice of holiness, as all that follows clearly shows."

Negative commandments enjoin the opposite good. "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain" (Exo 20:7) implies that we are to hold His name in the utmost reverence and hallow it in our hearts. Negative threatenings are tacit affirmations, "The LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain"—rather will He condemn and punish him. Negative promises contain positive assurances. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psa 51:17) means that such a heart is acceptable unto Him. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psa 84:11) is tantamount to saying that everything which is truly good for such will certainly be bestowed upon them. Negative conclusions involve their opposites, "The father of the fool hath no joy" (Pro 17:21) purports that he will suffer much sorrow and anguish because of him—oh, that wayward children would make conscience of the grief which they occasion their parents. "To have respect of persons is not good" (Pro 28:21), but evil. Negative statements carry with them strong assertives, "Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment" (Job 34:12), rather will He act holily and govern righteously.

11. In sharp contrast with the above, it should be pointed out that in many cases *statements put in the interrogative form have the force of an emphatic negative*. This is another simple rule which all expositors should keep in mind. "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (Job 11:7)—indeed no. "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" (Mat 6:27)—none can do so by any such means. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mat 16:26)—nothing whatever, nay, he is immeasurably worse off. "Ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Mat 23:33)—they cannot. "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (Joh 5:44)—such is morally impossible. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom 10:14)—they will not. On the other hand, the question of Matthew 6:30 is a strong affirmation, while that of Matthew 6:28 is a prohibition.

12. *The right use of reason* in connection with the things of God. This is another rule of exegesis which is of considerable importance, yet one that requires to be used with holy care and caution, and by one of mature judgment and thorough acquaintance with the Word. For that reason, it is not to be employed by the novice or inexperienced. The Christian, like the non-Christian, is endowed with rationality, and the sanctified exercise thereof certainly has its most fitting sphere in the realm of spiritual things. Before considering the application of reason to the expounding of the truth, let us point out its more general province. Two examples thereof may be selected from the teaching of our Lord. "Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" (Mat 6:30). Here we find Christ demonstrating, by a simple process of logic, the utter unreasonableness of distrustful anxiety in connection with the supply of temporal necessities. His argument is drawn from the consideration of divine providence. If God cares for the field, much more will He for His dear people. He *evidences* His care for the field by clothing it with grass, *therefore*, much more will He provide clothing for us.

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Mat 7:11). Here again the Lord shows us how this faculty is to be employed by a process of holy reasoning. He was speaking on the subject of prayer, and presented an argument for assuring His disciples of their being heard at the throne of grace. The argument is based on a comparison of inequalities and the reason drawn from the less to the greater. It may be framed thus—If earthly parents, though sinful, are inclined to listen to the appeals of their little ones, most certainly our heavenly Father will not close His ears to the cries of His children. Natural parents *do*, in fact, respond to and grant the requests of their little ones, *therefore*, much more will our Father deal graciously and generously with His. It is said of Abraham that he accounted or reckoned that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:19), i.e. he reasoned thus within himself—There is nothing impossible with God. Likewise the apostle, “For I reckon [convince myself by logical reasoning] that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). Other illustrations of Paul’s inspired reasoning are found in Romans 5:9-10 and 8:31-32. In all of these instances, we are taught the legitimacy and right use of reasoning.

The Lord Jesus often argued, both with His disciples and with His adversaries, as with rational men, according to the principles of sound reasoning. He did so from prophecy and the conformity of the event to the prediction (Luk 24:25-26; Joh 5:39, 46). He did so from the miracles which He performed (Joh 10:25, 37-38; 14:10-11) as being incontrovertible evidence that He was sent of God, and reproved His despisers for failing to identify Him as the Messiah. His “Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?” (Luk 12:56-57) was a direct and scathing rebuke, because on its lowest ground they had failed to use properly their reasoning powers, as Nicodemus *did*: “We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him” (Joh 3:2). So, too, the apostle when exhorting believers to flee from idolatry added, “I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say” (1Co 10:15).

In his masterly exposition of Hebrews 4:3, John Owen (1616-1683) pointed out that the apostle’s argument there rested upon the logical rule that “unto immediate contraries, contrary attributes may certainly be ascribed, so that he who affirms the one, at the same time denies the other; and on the contrary, he that denies the one, affirms the other. He that saith it is day, doth as really say it is not night, as if he had used those formal words.” Only by that principle of logic is the force of Paul’s reasoning apparent. His whole design in Hebrews 4:1-11 was to demonstrate by various testimonies and examples that unbelief cuts from the rest of God, whereas faith gives an entrance thereinto. In verse 3 he affirms, “For we which have believed do enter into rest,” in substantiation of which he adds, “as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest.” There the apostle again quoted from Psalm 95 (see Heb 3:7, 11, 15, 18). From the sad experience of Israel’s failure to enter into God’s rest because of their unbelief and disobedience, Paul drew the obvious and inescapable conclusion that *believers* “do enter” therein.

We repeat, it is only by that principle of logic that the apostle’s argument in Hebrews 4:3 can be understood. If any of our readers be inclined to take issue with that statement,

then we would respectfully urge them to turn unto and carefully ponder that verse, and see if they can perceive *how* the proof-text cited supplies any confirmation of the proposition laid down in its opening clause. From that exposition, Owen pointed out, “And here by the way we may take notice of the *use of reason*, on logical deductions, in the proposing, handling and confirming of sacred supernatural truths and articles of faith. For the validity of the apostle’s proof in this place depends upon the certainty of the logical maxim before mentioned, the consideration of which removes the whole difficulty. And to deny this liberty of deducing consequences, or one thing from another, according to the just rules of ratiocination,¹¹ is quite to take away the use of the Scripture, and to banish reason from those things wherein it ought to be principally employed.”

In Hebrews 8:13 is found another and yet much simpler example of reasoning upon Scripture. “In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.” The apostle’s design in this epistle was to exhibit the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and exhort Hebrew believers to cleave steadfastly unto Christ, the true light and substance, and not to return unto the shadows and symbols of a system which had then served its purpose. Among other reasons, he had appealed to the promise of a “new covenant” made by Jehovah in Jeremiah 31:31-34. This he had cited in Hebrews 8:8-12, and then he *drew a logical inference* from the word “new”—God’s calling this better economy a new one clearly implied that the previous one had become obsolete—just as the Psalmist (102:25-26), when affirming that the present earth and heavens would perish, added as proof that they should “wax old like a garment.” Thus the declaration made in Hebrews 8:13 is (by way of logical deduction) adduced as a proof of the proposition stated in 8:7, “For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.”

In Ephesians 4:8, Paul quotes from Psalm 68:18, and then shows us how we are to make a right use of reason or to exercise the intellectual and moral faculties. “Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended?” The exaltation of Christ *presupposed* a previous humiliation. Again, “Do you think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?” (Jam 4:5). But as Thomas Manton (1620-1677) pointed out in his exposition of that verse, such a statement is nowhere found in the Bible in those particular terms, adding “The Scripture ‘saith’ that which may be *inferred* from the scope of it by just consequence. Immediate inferences are as valid as express words. Christ proved the resurrection not by direct testimony, but by argument (Mat 22:32). What the Scripture doth *import* therefore by good consequence should be received as if it were expressed.” Still another of the apostles had recourse to reasoning when he said, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater” (1Jo 5:9), and infinitely more dependable; hence, the excuselessness of those who reject it.

Those who are familiar with the writings of Augustine (354-430) and John Calvin will have observed how frequently they drew the inference that whatever be freely *bestowed* by God is something of which fallen man, considered in himself, *is destitute*. It is an obvious deduction of reason, and a sure canon of exegesis, which is of simple and universal application, that everything which is graciously supplied in and by Christ is wanting in our nat-

¹¹ **ratiocination** – methodical reasoning.

ural condition. Thus, every verse which speaks of eternal life as a divine gift, or which makes promise of it to those who believe, necessarily presupposes that we are without it, and therefore spiritually dead. So too the Christian's receiving of the Holy Spirit (Act 2:38; Gal 3:2; 4:6) takes it for granted that in their unregenerate condition, they were without Him, having forfeited His indwelling presence by sin; the same being graciously restored to us by the mediation of Christ (Joh 7:39; Gal 3:14). As the result of the fall, the Holy Spirit was—in the exercise of divine justice—withdrawn from the human heart, and in consequence, it was left not only without a divine inhabitant, but a prey of all those influences—natural, worldly, satanic—which, in the absence of the Holy Spirit, inevitably draw the affections away from God, but at regeneration the Spirit is again given (Eze 34:27).

While the faculty of reason is vastly superior to our bodily senses (distinguishing man from and elevating him above the animals), it is greatly inferior unto faith (the gift of God unto His people), and that, in turn, unto the Holy Spirit—upon whom we are dependent for the directing of the one and the strengthening of the other. There is much confusion of mind and not a little wrong thinking on the part of the saints concerning the place and extent which reason may and should have in connection with the Scripture. Assuredly, God has not subordinated His word to our reason for us to accept only what commends itself to our judgment. Nevertheless, He has furnished His people with this faculty, and though insufficient of itself, it is a valuable aid in the understanding of truth. While reason is not to be made the measurer of our belief, yet it is to be used as the handmaid of faith, by comparing passage with passage, deducing inferences and drawing consequences according to the legitimate laws of logic. Never is the faculty of reason so worthily employed as in endeavouring to understand Holy Writ. If on the one hand, we are forbidden to lean unto our own understanding (Pro 3:5), on the other, we are exhorted to apply our hearts to understanding (Pro 2:2).

God has supplied us with an unerring standard by which we may *test* every exercise of our reason upon His Word, namely, the Analogy of Faith.¹² And it is *there* that we have a sure safeguard against the wrong use of this faculty. Though it be true that very often more is implied by the words of Scripture than is actually expressed, yet reason is not a law unto itself to make any supplement it pleases. Any deduction we make, however logical it seems, any consequence we draw, no matter how plausible it be, *is erroneous* if it be *repugnant*¹³ to other passages. For example, when we read, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mat 5:48), we may conclude that sinless perfection is attainable in this life, but if we do so we err, as Philippians 3:12 and 1 John 1:8 show. Again, should I draw the inference from Christ's words, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44), that therefore I am in no wise responsible *to come* unto Him, that my inability excuses me. Then I certainly err, as John 5:40 and other passages make clear. ❧

¹² **Analogy of Faith** – method of biblical interpretation where clearer, related Scriptures are used to interpret a particular passage.

¹³ **repugnant** – incompatible.

