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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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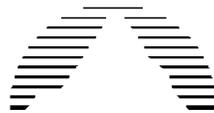
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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DISCOURAGEMENT

We have recently been impressed by the frequency with which God calls upon His people to “be strong and of a good courage” (Deu 31:6-7, 23; Jos 1:6, 9, 18). Time after time, we find the Lord, either actually or substantially, exhorting His people thus. The implications are clear: that they are prone to give way to discouragement, that such a condition is a mark of weakness, and that a dispirited saint is dishonouring to the Lord. In this and the companion article, we propose to examine the character or nature of discouragement, its causes or the roots from which it proceeds, its correctives or how it should be opposed, and its cure or remedy. Much light is thrown upon this subject by a careful pondering of the first passage in holy Writ wherein the term occurs, namely, when we read of the children of Israel in the wilderness that “the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way” (Num 21:4). Alas, how like unto them are many of the saints today!

The Lord had wrought wondrously for Israel in bringing them out of Egypt and by destroying their foes at the Red Sea; and evidently, they expected a much quicker and easier journey into Canaan than what they actually experienced; and because their expectations were not realized, they became despondent. The immediate context informs us that king Arad had opposed their progress and had taken some of them prisoners. Whereupon Israel vowed that if the Lord would deliver that people into their hand, they would utterly destroy their cities. The Lord graciously did so, and they fulfilled their pledge. So far, so good. But then came a further testing: instead of their being led onward to the promised land—which involved their passing through the territory of another hostile people—they were conducted “*from* mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass [i.e. ‘go around’] the land of Edom,” and that greatly disheartened them. It seemed a retrograde course which entailed a return to the desert, where water was scarce, and their reaction thereto was one of dejection.

To become discouraged is natural, yet it is neither glorifying to God, useful to ourselves, nor helpful to our brethren. It was not so in the above instance. The immediate sequel is most solemn, for the very next thing recorded is “*And* [joining together the two statements!] the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread” (Num 21:5). And that, my reader, is written for *our* instruction and warning, for us to take heart and recognize the dangers attending a spirit of discouragement. It is but a very short step from discouragement to open murmuring against God! That one consideration should be sufficient to convince us that so far from a state of discouragement being an innocent infirmity which we may fairly excuse, it is an insidious sin of which we need to make conscience and against which we should pray earnestly. The Lord at once manifested His displeasure against Israel by sending fiery serpents among the people, so that many of them died.

The character of discouragement is indicated in the word itself: the prefix is a privative—to take away. It is a state of being cast down or dispirited. The Hebrew term in Numbers 21:4 means “to be shortened” or “straitened.” It is not a weakness to be excused, but a fault to be confessed. While it be true on the one hand that circumstances alter cases, and therefore sweeping generalizations and condemnations are to be avoided; yet on the other hand, we must never condone anything which is wrong in the sight of God; and if we be guided by the light of His Word thereon, then it is clear that a state of discouragement is *sinful*. When David was dejected, he did not resort to self-pity or regard it as something which was inevitable, but betook himself to task for the same: “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” (Psa 42:5). Why this faithless fainting, this childish fretfulness? He chided himself for the same, and it is striking to note that twice more (Psa 43:5; 42:5,11) he refused to yield to this spirit of gloom, and inquired into the cause of it. If at first he succeeded not in casting it off, he tried and tried again.

Some are likely to object, “It is *natural* to become discouraged: there are occasions when the strongest cannot prevent their hearts from being cast down. There is much in this world which has a depressing influence upon the Christian. There is not a little in his own experience which depresses him; while the response he meets with from others in return for his best-meant efforts often throws a dampener upon him.” But the very fact that such a spirit is “natural” at once exposes its evil character—it is not *spiritual*! It is a thing of the flesh, and not a product of the workings of grace within us; and therefore, it is to be reprobated and not palliated. However melancholy may be our temperament, low our natural spirits, poor our health, or distressing our circumstances, it is wrong to yield to spirit of defeat, for the soul to become cast down, and

unfitted for the cheerful discharge of our duties and the enjoyment of our privileges. Of our sinless Saviour, it was prophesied that, despite all the opposition and trials He would encounter, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged" (Isa 42:4). It is because we *fail* that we become discouraged—a further proof that it is a sin to be mortified and not excused.

What are the more immediate causes of faint-heartedness?

1. *Distrust of God.* Is not that plainly intimated by the words of David when he was chiding himself for his soul being cast down: "Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Psa 42:11). It was because he had allowed the difficulties of the way to take his eyes off the Lord that he had become dispirited. Was it not also the case with Israel in the above incident? When the Lord turned their course from a direct approach unto Canaan and led them back into the borders of the desert, they were "much discouraged." They doubted God's goodness unto them and questioned the wisdom of His guidance. And do not the subtle operations of unbelief lie behind *our* discouragements? Are they not due to a lack of faith that the very objects which dismay us are among the "all things" God has promised He will work together for good! If we concentrate our attention on the things seen, rather than the unseen, we soon weaken and pine.

2. *Discontent with God's provision.* When faith in God's goodness and wisdom ceases to operate, then dissatisfaction takes possession of the heart. Unbelief breeds fretfulness with our lot and circumstances, and prevents our enjoying the portion God *has* given us. Discouragement, when analysed is being displeased with the place or portion God has assigned us. It was so with Israel. They relished not the fare which He had so graciously given them. "Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water" was the language of peevishness: the real reason for their disaffection was expressed in "our soul loatheth this light bread" (Num 21:5). Sad condition of soul was that! They were "much discouraged because of the way," because the day and fare of the wilderness ministered not unto their carnal lusts.

3. *Self will.* That is the root both of our distrust of God and our discontent with His provision. Discouragement is nothing less than a rebelling against the sovereign dispensations of God. It was so with Israel. They were chagrined because things were not going as *they* wanted. They desired to press forward in a direct course unto Canaan; and since the Lord determined otherwise, they were cast down—much like spoilt children who are allowed to have their own way, and murmur and sulk if they be denied any thing. And is it not thus, at times, with many of God's children? Most of our discouragements are due to the dashing of our hopes, disappointments in either things or persons from whom we looked for something better. But disappointment is really a quarrelling with *His* appointment. It is lack of submission unto God. Discouragements issue from our longings remaining unrealized—from our plans being thwarted, our wills being crossed: it is nothing but vexation of spirit and insubordination to the divine will.

4. *Impatience.* That also appears plainly in the above incident. Israel chafed at the delay. They wanted to reach their objective by the short cut, and when a roundabout course was appointed them, their spirits fell, and they gave way to complaining. Unless we prayerfully heed that exhortation, "let patience have her perfect work" (Jam 1:4), we shall often become faint through discouragement. The work which God has appointed patience to do is to wait *His* time. Patience is a contented endurance of trials which enables a Christian to bear up under them; whereas impatience is an ill-humored resentment against anything which checks the attainment of our desires, and a sinking of spirit which saps our energies when the hindrance persists. Like Israel, only too often we are "discouraged because of *the way*." But we ought not to be so, for God has not promised us a smooth and easy passage through this world, but has told us that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Act 14:22).

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

53. 2 Thessalonians 3:5

The attentive reader will observe that there are recorded more of Paul's prayers for the Thessalonians than for any other church or company of saints. There is yet another in verse 16 of our present chapter; though in view of our articles on Romans 15:33 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23, we do not propose to give it a separate consideration. It is also to be noted that reference is made more frequently to the coming of Christ in the Thessalonian epistles than in any of his others. We know of no writer who has attempted to give a reason for these conspicuous features. There is no doubt in our mind that they should be linked together, for a single explanation satisfactorily accounts for them both—namely, the extremely trying situation in which these particular saints were placed. As we have more than once pointed out, they were enduring a great fight of afflictions, meeting with sore opposition from unbelievers. Thus, we are here taught two important lessons regarding the Christian's special duty unto his *afflicted* brethren: the one concerning the rank and file of God's people, the other pertaining more especially unto ministers of the Gospel.

First, that persecuted believers have a peculiar claim upon the sympathies of the whole household of faith, and should therefore be given a special place in their supplications and intercessions. We are expressly bidden to "weep with them that weep" (Rom 12:15). The cultivation and exercise of love one to another is incumbent upon us at all times, but it is especially so in seasons when fellow saints are in distress. Most reprehensible and un-Christ-like is that callous spirit which says, I have troubles enough of my own, without burdening myself with those of others. Far different was the attitude of Nehemiah, who, though in a palace, "wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven" when he heard of his fellow Jews being "in great affliction and reproach" (Neh 1:1-4). It is required of us that we "remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them" (Heb 13:3): taking them to our hearts, having compassion toward them, seeking grace for them. Whenever we read or hear of an earthquake, famine, flood, etc., we should at once approach the Throne of Grace and beg God to undertake for His own dear people in the stricken district—ponder Matthew 25:36, 43!

Second, that the ministry best suited to and most appropriate for those who are suffering for Christ's sake is to direct their thoughts away from the present unto the future, setting before them "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Ti 2:13)—for not until His advent will a period be put to the oppressions of the Church, as it will be then that all shall be richly rewarded who have been steadfast and faithful unto Him. The intensely *practical side* of our "blessed hope" must not be lost sight of amid all the acrimonious and profitless speculations about "the millennium." This grand truth of our Lord's return is used by the Spirit as a most powerful motive unto the discharge of Christian duties, as a quickener of our graces, an incentive to piety, and as consolation to the grief-stricken. Our Lord Himself quietened the troubled hearts of the disciples with it (Joh 14:1-2), and His apostles bade bereaved saints comfort one another with the same (1Th 4:13-18). A spiritual hope of our Lord's appearing produces ministerial fidelity (2Ti 4:1-2; 1Pe 5:3-4), Christian patience (Jam 5), sobriety (1Pe 1:13), and purity (1Jo 3:2-3). They are greatly the losers who are not looking for His appearing.

"And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ" (2Th 3:5). Three things in this prayer call for consideration. First, though briefly, its *connection*. Second, and more specifically, its *Addressee*. Third, and at greater length, its important *petitions*. Its opening word requires attention to its setting. It is blessed to note the link between the verses immediately preceding and the prayer which was last before us. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15, the apostle had thus exhorted the saints: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught [i.e. the oral ministry of the apostles], whether by word, or our epistle." Then had followed the prayer in 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, that they might be comforted and established by an effectual application to them of the glorious contents of the Gospel. Next he had solicited their prayers for himself and fellow ministers (2Th 3:1-2), and then had declared, "But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you" (2Th 3:3-4). Note, the apostle did not say, "We have confidence in you," but "in the Lord touching you," assured that having "begun a good work" in them, He would graciously complete the same (Phi 1:6).

Let us now consider the *Addressee* of this prayer. Who is meant by "the Lord" here? We answer, unhesitatingly, the third Person in the blessed Trinity, the One who is designated "Lord" in 1 Corinthians 12:5,

and “Spirit of the Lord” in 2 Corinthians 3:18. First, this is clear from the fact that in our present verse, He is definitely distinguished from “God” and “Christ,” so that reference is made here to the Eternal Three. Second, it is borne out by what is here asked of Him: “And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ” (2Th 3:5). Now it is the distinguishing work of the Spirit to develop our graces and regulate their exercise. As the love of God is “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom 5:5), so it is by Him that love is called forth into action. Third, since the Spirit be co-essential and co-eternal with the Father and the Son, it is His due that we should render homage to Him. Nowhere in Scripture is there the least hint that one Person in the God-head must be excluded from the praises which we make to the Lord. On the contrary, that the Spirit is to be publicly owned and equally honoured with the Father and the Son is clear from Matthew 28:19: to be baptized in His name is an act of worship. It is evident again from the place accorded Him in the Christian benediction (2Co 13:14).

We are expressly bidden to “worship and bow down...before the LORD our maker” (Psa 95:6), and that the third Person is included therein is plain from, “The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life” (Job 33:4, and compare Job 26:13, with Psa 33:6). Let it also be duly noted that this 95th Psalm (verses 7-11) is quoted in Hebrews 3:7-11, and is there prefaced with the words, “Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith...)” Thus, not only *may* we worship the blessed Spirit, but Psalm 95:6 *commands* us to do so! In Ezekiel 37:9, we find that the prophet was ordered to invoke the Holy Spirit: compare verses 9-10 with verse 14, and see John 3:8. So, too, in Song of Solomon 4:16, we find the Spouse of Christ praying to the Spirit for renewal and revival. Again, instruction is given to pray to “the Lord of the harvest” (Mat 9:38). During the days of His earthly ministry, Christ sustained that office, as appears from His choosing the apostles and sending forth the seventy. But since His ascension, the Holy Spirit became such: see Acts 13:2, 4; 20:28! It is the Spirit who now calls and equips the “labourers,” assigns them their work, and blessed the same.

In Revelation 1:4-5, all the three divine Persons are invoked for blessing. Thus we see that all through Scripture, the Holy Spirit is an Object of prayer; and therefore, it should occasion no surprise to find that He is made the Addressee of the one here before us. It hardly requires to be pointed out that His personality is necessarily implied in being so supplicated, and His Deity in being thus designated. “The Lord direct your hearts”: as the title “Lord” is expressive of His dominion, so the action here mentioned indicates His Godhead, for it is one which none but a divine Person can perform. As “the king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Pro 21:1), equally so are all men’s hearts. “Especially, He must be God that can direct the heart into the ‘love of God,’ which is one of ‘the deep things of God’ (1Co 2:10), which the Spirit of God only can search into and reveal unto us...He not only takes of the things of Christ (His person, blood, and righteousness) and shows them to us, and our interest in them; but He takes also of the things of the Father, and particularly His *love*. He sheds it abroad in our hearts, and directs our hearts into it; and in so doing, acts the part of a Comforter unto us”—From a sermon on the text by John Gill (1697-1771).

“And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God” may be taken either actively or passively: actively, of the love wherewith we love God; or passively, of the love wherewith we are loved by God. Personally, we are satisfied that the reference is to our love of God, rather than His to us, though since the words may be understood either way, we will consider them in both. The reasons why we regard the words in an active sense are: First, because our apprehension and enjoyment of God’s love to us was fully covered in the preceding prayer (2Th 2:16-17). Second, because the immediate context obviously requires us to do so. In 2 Thessalonians 3:4, the apostle expressed his confidence in the Lord that they did and would do the things His servants *commanded* them, and then he at once prayed that the Lord the Spirit would strengthen and direct them therein; so it is that practical love which issues in obedience that is here in view—though perhaps it is not to be restricted absolutely thereto. Third, because the second petition—“and into the patient waiting for Christ”—is to be understood in an active sense, as pertaining to the discharge of their duty, namely, a steady endurance of persecution and a continuance in well doing unto the end of their earthly course.

“Direct you hearts into the love of God.” This petition is of far too vital and vast importance for us to hurriedly and cursorily dismiss it: rather must we give it our best attention. First, we are to constantly bear in mind that love to God and to our neighbour is the sum and substance of the moral Law. “Hear, O Israel, The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deu 6:4-5). That the Lord Jesus enforced the same appears from His an-

swer to the lawyer's question, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Namely, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Mat 22:35-38). "This is no new commandment of the Gospel: only it is *renewed* under the Gospel dispensation and pressed with stronger motives"—J. Gill. Let Mr. Gill's admirers note well that statement: so far was he from affirming that Christians are not under the Moral Law, he said, "Christ and Moses agree in this," and declared it is "renewed"! The apostles also taught the same: Romans 13:8; 1 Corinthians 9:21; and 1 John 2:7-8.

But though all men are required to so love the Lord their God, yet none in his natural condition is able to do so. Not that he lacks the necessary faculties for the same, but because sin is in full possession of every part of his complex being; and therefore, he is "alienated from the life of God" (Eph 4:18) As the result of the Fall, every descendant of Adam is born into this world destitute of the slightest affection for God. To the religious Pharisees, Christ said, "But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you" (Joh 5:42). "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1Jo 2:15); and where is the man or woman who does not love the world until a miracle of grace is wrought within, and the bent and bias of the heart be changed? But not only is the heart of the natural man devoid of any love to God, it has a radical aversion to Him, for "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom 8:7). That was unmistakably demonstrated when the Son of God became incarnate, for so far from being welcomed and adored, He declared, "they *hated* me without a cause" (Joh 15:25)—evidenced by their hounding Him to death.

Where there *is* genuine love to God in anyone, that person has been made the subject of a miracle of grace. At regeneration, the blessed Spirit slays our native enmity against God, and sheds abroad His love in the heart. A principle of life, of grace, of holiness, is communicated to the soul. There is "given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true" (1Jo 5:20). There is a personal revelation of God made to the one born again, so that He "hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Co 4:6). The film of prejudice is removed, the mist of error is dispersed, and the soul perceives the majesty, the excellency, the loveliness of the divine character, and exclaims, "Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exo 15:11). Such a discovery and view of God draws out the heart unto Him, so that He is now its supreme delight. "And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (1Ti 1:14): those two graces of "faith and love" always go together, being implanted at one and the same time, by one and the same hand.

Yet it needs to be clearly recognized and constantly borne in mind that the principle of life and grace imparted to us at regeneration—that "new nature" as many term it—is but a *creature*; and therefore, possesses no self-sufficiency, but is entirely dependent for its continuance, development, and health upon its Author. Further, it is to be remembered that the flesh, the world, and the devil are inveterately opposed to that "new creature"; and hence, our urgent need for God to sustain, nourish, establish, and guard it, as well as regulate all its activities. It was these considerations which prompted the apostle here, when he petitioned the Lord the Spirit to "direct [their] hearts into the love of God," for he knew full well they had not the power to do so. It was the consciousness of his own weakness in this matter which moved David—in view of "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently"—to exclaim, "O that my ways *were directed* to keep thy statutes!" (Psa 119:4-5). And after praying, "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight," added, "*Incline* my heart unto thy testimonies" (Psa 119:35-36).

But let us now consider more closely of *what* our "love to God" consists. Its radical and internal acts are desire after Him and delight in Him. "Love affects union with its beloved, and so love to God implies an earnest seeking after Him, in the highest way of enjoyment that we are capable of in this world"—Thomas Manton (1620-1677), from whose sermon we draw in what follows. "There be many that say, who will show us any good?" They seek satisfaction in the things of time and sense, but their quest is vain. But in contradistinction from them, the regenerate cry, "LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." *That* is their supreme longing, and as it be granted, they exclaim, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that *their* corn and their wine increased" (Psa 4:6-7). Not only is God supremely desired by those who love Him, but He is fervently sought after: "My soul followeth hard after thee" (Psa 63:8). "The whole spiritual life is but a pursuit of the soul towards God; and the more constantly and earnestly we seek Him, to enjoy more of His saving graces and benefits, the more we have of the love of God in us"—T. Manton.

Since God be the supreme object of our desire (Psa 27:4), so too of our *delight*. Since love to God be the complacency of the soul in Him, as apprehended to be the sum of all perfection and our all-sufficient portion, it cannot but follow that we shall find our highest pleasure in Him. "If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up...For then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God" (Job 22:23, 26). Fullness of joy is reserved for heaven, yet even in this vale of tears, "we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:11). It cannot be otherwise: as the soul perceives God's excellency and is admitted to communion with Him, we exult in Him. As the Spouse of Christ testifies, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste" (Song 2:3). The saints look upon God reconciled as their best Friend: "My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD" (Psa 104:34). "Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee...My soul shall be satisfied" (Psa 63:3, 5).

The *external effects* of love to God are all summed up in these two things: doing and suffering His will—"when we are contented to do what God will have us do, and be what God will have us be"—T. Manton. If we really love God, then it will necessarily follow that we shall be loath to offend Him and desirous of pleasing Him; and consciousness of failure in either is the acutest grief experienced by the saint. "If a man love me," said Christ, "he will keep my words" (Joh 14:23). Love to God is the most powerful incentive, motive, and dynamic of all: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1Jo 5:2-3) to His dear children, for they "delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom 7:22). Faith is indeed a wonderful grace, yet only as it "worketh *by love*" (Gal 5:6) does it produce that which is pleasing and glorifying to God. "But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected" (1Jo 2:5): that is, his love to Him has attained its designed end. None can be owned as a sincere lover of God, but he that makes conscience of obeying what He commands.

Love to God is also evidenced by a meek and cheerful *suffering* of His will. "When the apostle prays here that God would direct their hearts to love Him, he means that they should endure anything rather than deny the faith, and confess Christ whatever it costs them. As obedience is virtually contained in love, so also courage and resolution. Solomon represents love as a powerful thing, as an affection that will not be bribed nor quenched. 'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned' (Song 8:7). It is true of love in general, much more of love to God. In divine matters, it is a sovereign antidote against temptations, both on the right hand and on the left. All the riches, pleasures, and honours of the world are contemned: they cannot bribe them over from Christ that really love Him. Nor can all the floods of persecution quench this holy desire. This is the genius and disposition of love, when once the bent of the heart is set toward God and heaven, they are vehemently set against anything that would turn them out of the way and divert them from their purpose"—T. Manton.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

33. Jericho, Part 3

In our last, we considered the instructions which Joshua received from the Lord concerning Jericho; now we are to observe how the same were carried out. "And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said unto them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD. And he said unto the people, Pass on, and compass the city, and let him that is armed pass on before the ark of the LORD" (Jos 6:6-7). It is, therefore, quite evident from these verses that Joshua understood God's promise, "I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour" (Jos 6:2) as meaning that, if His directions were faithfully and exactly executed—but *only* in that case—would the city be supernaturally overthrown. That promise was to assure Joshua that the Canaanites would be unable to successfully defend their city, and that the Lord would make it manifest that *He* had delivered it up to Israel; nevertheless, they must act in full subjection to His revealed will.

This incident of the capture of Jericho is one which should be carefully pondered and taken to heart by all the people of God today, especially so by His servants, for if it be so, it will supply a grand tonic to faith and effectually counteract that spirit of gloom which now so widely obtains. Alas, the majority of professing Christians are far more occupied with what are called "the signs of the times" than they are with the One in whose hand all the "times" and "seasons" are (Act 1:7). They are walking by sight, rather than by faith; engaged with the things seen, rather than with those which are unseen. The consequence is that many of them are cast down and dispirited over present conditions; and only too often, the preacher is apt to regard the situation as hopeless. But *that* is to be of the same temper as the unbelieving spies, who said, "We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we" (Num 13:31), magnifying the difficulties which confronted them and yielding to a spirit of defeatism.

If the minister of the Gospel be occupied with the smallness of his congregation, and their unresponsiveness to his preaching; if he dwell unduly upon the lack of interest on the part of the young people, and listens to the prophets of gloom—who ever give the darkest possible interpretation to things—then he may well be dejected. But if his thoughts be formed by and his own soul fed upon the Word of God, then he will discover that there is no cause whatever for dismay. Scripture nowhere teaches that God is seeking to convert the world; rather does it declare that He is visiting the Gentiles "to take out of them a people for his name" (Act 15:14). When giving instructions to His servants, Christ bade them "Take no thought for your life," for He would have their hearts at rest, trusting in the living God to supply their every need; and also said, "Fear not, *little* flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luk 12:22, 32). He ever sought to strengthen their confidence in the invincibility of God's purpose, declaring "All that the Father giveth me *shall come* to me" (Joh 6:37).

Instead of perplexing his mind with useless speculations about the ten toes of Daniel's colossus, the business of the minister of the Gospel is to faithfully carry out the commission which he has received from his Master (Mat 28:19-20). Instead of wasting time upon the newspapers and listening in to the wireless in order to ascertain the latest threats of the Kremlin or menaces of the Vatican, let him give more earnest heed to that injunction, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2Ti 2:15). Instead of being so absorbed with the activities of Satan's emissaries, let him mix faith with that heartening assurance of the Most High, "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it *shall* accomplish that which *I please*, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa 55:10-11).

The Word of God is not outdated: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mat 24:35). Then preach that Word in its purity, in its fullness, with implicit confidence in its sufficiency. The Gospel of Christ is not obsolete, but is still "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom 1:16). Then proclaim it, realizing that the curse of God rests on all who preach any other (Gal 1:8). Do you reply, I *have*, in my poor way, sought to preach the Gospel as faithfully and earnestly as I know how: but so far as I can see, it has been fruitless, and I am thoroughly discouraged. Then take heed, we beg you, to the incident which is here before us. Get down on your knees right now and beg God to

bless this article unto you. Fervently implore Him to open your heart to receive the same. Ponder afresh those words, “*By faith* the walls of Jericho fell down, *after* they were compassed about seven days” (Heb 11:30). Surely, then, “all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mar 9:23)!

It requires no forced or fanciful effort of ours to show that Israel’s conquest of Jericho adumbrated the victories won by the Gospel, when it is faithfully preached, and the blessing of God attends the same. As was pointed out in our last, Jericho was one of the leading strongholds of the enemy: “the cities are walled, and very great” (Num 13:28). Probably Jericho was the most powerfully fortified of any of them, and as such, it presented a formidable obstacle unto Joshua and his fellows. Nevertheless, it fell before them in response to the punctual observance of the orders which they had received from the Lord. It was in manifest reference to this that the apostle declared, “(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty *through God* to the pulling down of strong holds” (2Co 10:4). How blessedly and unmistakably was that demonstrated under his own ministry! How gloriously was the same made evident in the days of Luther! How frequently has the same truth been made to appear in various parts of the earth since then. And *you*, my brethren in the ministry, have the same glorious Gospel to preach, and the same mighty God to look unto to bless your labours!

Do you reply, But I am no Joshua, no Paul, no Luther? Then we remind you of the apostle’s self-abasing and God-honouring words to those who were glorying in the flesh. “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1Co 3:5-7). The men whom God has most used throughout the ages were those who rated themselves as *nobodies*! But you say, I feel so weak and ill-equipped—God grant that such is your sincere language, for if the contrary were the case, if you deemed yourself an able and well-qualified man, you are no servant of Christ’s. Listen again to Paul, who, with all his gifts and graces, contemplated the tasks before him in this spirit and attitude: “And who is sufficient for these things?” (2Co 2:16).

Writing to those same saints and looking back to the days of his evangelistic labours among them, the apostle declared, “I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in *fear*, and in much trembling (1Co 2:1-3). Self-diffidence is no disqualification for Christ’s service. It was not Paul that was “great,” but rather that the weapons he used when engaging the forces of evil were “mighty through God” (2Co 10:4)! And what were those “weapons”? Prayer, “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:17), and faith in the One who had commissioned him. Note that we put *prayer* first. Does not the example of the supreme Preacher (Mar 1:35; Luk 6:12-13) require us to do so? Did not the Twelve declare, “But we will give ourselves continually to [1] prayer, and [2] to the ministry of the word” (Act 6:4)? Then do thou the same. Concerning *faith*, we refer the reader again to Hebrews 11:30. Now fellow preachers, the same three “weapons” are available *to us*; and we need no others for the glorifying of Christ and the execution of His commission.

Note well, ye preachers, our last sentence. We did not say that no other weapons are needed in order for you to be eminently “successful” in your work, or that your use of the same will ensure prompt “visible results.” *That* must not be made your chief concern nor immediate end: and if you make it such, a jealous God is most likely to blow upon rather than bless your efforts. Your paramount care and principal design must be the *glorifying of God* (1Co 10:31): to make known His excellency, to enforce His just claims upon the creatures of His hands, to bid men throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him, and be reconciled to Him. If you be a real servant of God’s, He has sent you forth to *magnify Christ*: the salvation of sinners is but secondary and subordinate thereto. God would have a universal testimony borne unto the matchless worth of the person and work of Christ—the Gospel is a “witness” (Mat 24:14) to His perfections. God would have proclaimed far and wide the amazing fact that His own beloved Son “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phi 2:8), being wholly devoted unto the will of His Father.

It is of first importance that we should be quite clear upon the nature of the Gospel: it is “the gospel of God...*Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Rom 1:1, 3). In the Gospel is made known the Saviour’s personal dignities: that He is the Lord of glory, the Prince of life, the King of kings, the Creator and Upholder of the universe. In the Gospel is revealed His amazing condescension and humiliation: how that in obedience to the Father’s Word, He voluntarily and gladly took upon Him the form of a servant and was

made in the likeness of sin's flesh, tabernacling for a season in this scene. In the Gospel is exhibited His holy and unique life: performing the work which the Father had given Him to do. In the Gospel is displayed His official glories: as Prophet, Priest, and Potentate. In it is told forth His grace unto sinners: dying the Just for the unjust. In it is declared how that He magnified the divine Law and made it honourable, superlatively glorifying the Father thereby. In it we are informed how that God rewarded His incarnate Son by raising Him from the dead, and seating Him at His own right hand on high. Our business, fellow preachers, is to proclaim that Gospel in its purity and fullness, that God may be glorified, and His Son magnified.

Our commission is crystal clear. It is no other than this: "Speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear" (Eze 3:11). Our business is to declare "all the counsel of God" and keep back nothing that is profitable unto souls (Act 20:20, 27). Our marching orders are the same as Jonah's (Jon 3:2) and of Deuteronomy 4:2: "Preach unto it [the city] the preaching that I bid thee." "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it." Only by so doing will God be glorified and our souls cleared from the awful charge of infidelity. But if we *do so*—and only by divine grace, earnestly and constantly sought, can we—we may safely *leave* "results" with the Lord of the harvest. Nay more, we may rest in full confidence on the promise, "them that honour me I will honour" (1Sa 2:30). But it must be left *with Him* as to when and how He "honours." In the Day to come, He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Mat 25:23). Even now, "we are *unto God* a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, *and* in them that perish" (2Co 2:15)!

But let us now take a more definite look at the instructions given to Israel's priests in Joshua 6:6. Observe carefully a significant omission therein, which, silently but decidedly, confirms what has been said above. Joshua did not announce to them the promise which he had received from the Lord in verses 2 and 5, but simply gave them their marching orders, without any assurance that success would certainly attend their efforts! In this, as in almost all things, Joshua was a type of Christ who—although receiving promise from His Father (in the everlasting covenant) of the sure success of *His* undertaking (compare Isa 53:10-12)—yet when commissioning His servants, gave them specific commandments, but said not a word about their labours being fruitful! (See Mat 28:19-20; Mar 16:15-16; Luk 24:46-49; Joh 20:21-23; Act 1:7-8.) So here: the priests were told what to do, and that was all. Unquestioning and unreserved obedience to their orders was what was required from them: nothing more, nothing less. They were, first, to "take up the ark of the covenant"; second, to "bear seven trumpets of rams' horns"; and third, to go "before the ark of the LORD" (Jos 6:6-7). Let us now point out the typical significance of the same.

The ark of the covenant was the symbol of the Lord's presence with them, as their "leader and commander" (Isa 55:4). In like manner, Christ has assured his servants, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Mat 28:20). That is to be realized by faith, and not by sense. The minister of the Gospel is to go forward to the fight in the blessed consciousness that he is not alone: he is to act with full assurance that the Captain of his salvation is *with him*. What a difference it will make if he steadily bear the same in mind! Let him act accordingly. Let the known presence of Christ serve both as a bridle upon the flesh, and as a spur to his zeal. The priests "bearing the seven trumpets" (Jos 6:8) at once identifies them as adumbrating ministers of the Gospel sounding forth their imperative message. "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression" (Isa 58:1). "Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet" (Jer 6:17). "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain" (Joe 2:1). The apostle made use of this figure when he said, "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1Co 14:8).

The sounding of the trumpets by the priests on this occasion had a two-fold design: to strike terror into the hearts of the Canaanite, and to inspire with courage and confidence the people of God. And that is the twofold work of Christ's servants. First, to solemnly declare the revealed wrath of God "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18): to announce His war against those who continue in sin, and to boldly declare "he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mar 16:16). Thus did the supreme Gospeller: Matthew 11:23-24; John 3:18, 36! Second, to strengthen the hearts of God's people: "And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies" (Num 10:9). "And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people, And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; For the LORD

your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (Deu 20:2-4). Thus is the preacher to encourage the saints in their conflict with the flesh, the world, and the devil.

ENJOYING GOD'S BEST

Part 5

In our last, we considered various cases, both of individuals and corporate companies, who *missed* God's best, and saw how ill it fared with them. We closed by pointing out how that if we judge ourselves for our sins, we shall *escape* God's chastening rod. We now turn to the question, Is it possible for a Christian who has missed God's best to be *recovered* to full communion with Him and restored to His providential smile? Possible, yes; easy, no. Before we show how that possibility may be realized, let us solemnly ponder what brought that poor soul into such a sorry plight—a plight into which both writer and reader will certainly fall, unless we are ever on our prayerful guard. The grand but simple secret of a healthy and prosperous spiritual life is to *continue* as we began (Col 2:6): by daily trusting in the sufficiency of Christ's blood and yielding ourselves to His lordship, seeking to please and honour Him in all things. As the believer walks with Christ in the path of obedience, following the example which He has left him, peace will possess his soul and joy will fill his heart, and the smile of God will be upon him. But unless he, by grace, fulfil those conditions, such will not be his happy portion.

If the believer slackens in maintaining daily fellowship with Christ and drawing from His fullness, if he fails to feed regularly on the Word and becomes less frequent in his approaches to the Throne of Grace, then the pulse of his spiritual life will beat more feebly and irregularly. Unless he meditates oft on the love of God and keeps fresh before his heart the humiliation and sufferings of Christ on his behalf, his affections will soon cool, his relish for spiritual things will wane, and obedience will neither be so easy nor so pleasant. If such a spiritual decline be neglected or excused, it will not be long ere indwelling sin gains the upper hand over his graces, and his heart will more and more glide imperceptibly into carnality and worldliness. Worldly pleasures, which previously repelled and were perceived to be vanities, will begin to attract. Worldly pursuits, which had been only a means, will become his end—absorbing more and more of his attention and having a higher value in his eyes. Or worldly cares, which he had cast upon the Lord, will now oppress and weigh him down. And unless there be a humbling of himself before God (and His providence hinder), he will soon be found in the ways of open transgression. Backsliding begins in the *heart!*

The case of a backslider is much more serious than that of one who has been "overtaken in a fault" (Gal 6:1). For with him, it is not a matter of a sudden surprisal and a single stumble, but rather of a steady deterioration and definite departure from the Lord. Nor is it, in its early stages, manifested openly; and hence, his brethren may be quite unaware of it. A secret canker of unwatchfulness and coldness has infected him: he has yielded to a spirit of laxity and self-indulgence. When first aware of his decline, instead of being alarmed, he ignored it; instead of weeping over it before God, he went on in his carnality, until his graces became inoperative and all power to resist the devil was gone. With such, the Holy Spirit is grieved; His quickening influences are withdrawn; and His comforts are withheld. There are indeed degrees of backsliding: with some, it is partial; with others, total; yet while one remains in that case, it is impossible for the saint to determine which. Nor is there anything in Scripture which gives a warrantable sense of security unto such a one, or which countenances any man to be easy in his sins; but very much the contrary.

Inexpressibly sad is the case of one who continues for a season in a backslidden state. He has displeased God and dishonoured Christ; and in many instances, he has become a stumbling-block to fellow Christians, especially to younger ones. He has made himself miserable. He has sinned and repented not; departed from God, and confessed it not. Formerly, he walked in happy fellowship with God, the light of His countenance shone upon him, and that peace which passeth all understanding possessed his soul. But now the joy of salvation is no more his portion. He has lost his relish for the Word, and prayer has become a burden. He is out of touch with God, for his iniquities have separated him from Him (Isa 59:2), and he can find no rest unto his soul. He has been spoilt for the world and cannot now find even that measure of satisfaction in carnal things which the ungodly do. Wretched indeed is his plight. "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his *own* ways" (Pro 14:14): it cannot be otherwise, for he no longer has any delight in the ways of God. His own backslidings reprove him, so that he is made to know and see what "an evil thing and bitter," that he has "forsaken the LORD thy God" (Jer 2:19), and thereby miss His best.

Yet, pitiful though his case be, it is not hopeless, for the call goes forth, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD" (Jer 3:14). Nevertheless, response thereto is not the simple matter that lookers-on might suppose. It is very much easier to depart from God than to return unto Him. Not that His terms of recovery

are rigorous, but because the soul is straitened. It is difficult for the backslider to perceive the nature and seriousness of his condition, for sin has a blinding and hardening effect, and the more he falls under the power of it, the less does he discern the state he is in. Even when his eyes begin to be opened again, there is an absence of real desire for recovery, for sin has a paralyzing influence, so that its victims are "at ease in Zion" (Amo 6:1). Even David was insensible of his awful plight when Nathan first approached him; and it was not until the prophet pointedly declared, "Thou art the man" (2Sa 12:7), that Satan's spell over him was broken. It is therefore much to be thankful for when such are awakened from their slumber and made to hear that word. "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings" (Jer 3:22).

But even then the soul is reluctant to meet God's terms. If nothing more were required than a lip acknowledgement of his offences and a return to outward duties, no great difficulty would be experienced; but to really fulfill the divine conditions for restoration is a very different matter. As John Owen (1616-1683) affirmed, "Recovery from backsliding is the hardest task in the Christian religion; one which few make either comfortable or honourable work of." There has to be an asking, a seeking, a knocking, if the door of deliverance is to be opened to him. As John Brine (1703-1765), whose works were favourably reviewed in the *Gospel Standard*, wrote to God's people two hundred years ago: "Much labour and diligence are required unto this. It is not complaining of the sickly condition of our souls which will effect this cure: confession of our follies that have brought diseases upon us, though repeated ever so often, will avail nothing toward the removal of them. If we intend the recovery of our former health and vigour, we must *act* as well as complain and groan." Let us now endeavour to point out how God requires such a one to "act."

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Pro 28:13) epitomizes both sides of the case. Sin is a disease of the soul, and (like a bodily one) by concealing it, we make it increase and become desperate. As the Puritan, Joseph Caryl (1602-1673), pointed out: "Sin increases two ways in the concealment of it. First, in its *guilt*. The obligation to punishment takes stronger hold upon the soul, and every man is bound the faster with the chains of darkness by how much more he labours to keep his sins in the dark. The longer a sin remains on the conscience unpardoned, the more does the guilt of it increase. Second, in the filth and *contagion* of it. It grows more master, and masterly, and at last raves and rages, commands and carries all before it." To "cover" our sins is a refusal to bring them out into the light by an honest confession of the same unto God; in the case of our fellows, refusing to acknowledge our offences unto those we have wronged. This is reprehensible hiding of sin-- is an adding of sin unto sin, and is a certain preventative of prosperity; and if persisted in, it will cover the perpetrator with shame and confusion for ever.

To "cover" sin is to hide it within our own bosoms, instead of openly acknowledging it. Thus it was with Achan even when the tribes were solemnly arraigned before Joshua and Eleazar, the high priest: he solemnly maintained silence until his crime was publicly exposed. Some seek to conceal their sins by framing excuses and attempting a self-extenuation: they seek to throw the blame upon their circumstances, their fellows, or Satan—upon anything or anyone except *themselves*! Others proceed to a still worse device, and seek to cloak their sin by a lie, denying their guilt. As did Cain, for when God made inquisition for blood and inquired of him, "Where is Abel thy brother?" he answered, "I know not" (Gen 4:9). So, too, Gehazi blankly denied his wrong when charged by Elisha (2Ki 5:25). In like manner acted Ananias and Sapphira (Act 5:1-11). Three things induce men to make coverings for their sins. First, *pride*. Man has such high thoughts of himself that when guilty of the basest things, he is too self-opinionated to own them. Second, *unbelief*. Those who have not faith to believe that *God* can and will cover confessed sins, vainly attempt to do so themselves. Third, *shame and fear* cause many to hide their sins. Sin is such a hideous monster that they will not own as *theirs*.

"But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Confession of sin is an indispensable part of repentance; and without repentance, there can be no remission (Act 3:19). "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah" (Psa 32:5)—the pardon was upon his confession. Those who are so convicted of their sins as to be humbled and sorrowed by a sight and sense of the same will not hide them out of sight. Nor will their confession be merely a formal one of the lips, but rather the sobbings of a contrite heart. And instead of generalizing, there will be a particularizing; instead of seeking to excuse or gloss over the offence, it will be painted in its true colours and its aggravations frankly owned. There will be an acknowledgement of the fact and of the fault: an unsparing self-condemnation. The language of David in the opening verses of Psalm 51 will be found most suited to his case. The sin or sins will be

confessed sincerely, contritely, fully, with a self-abasement and self-loathing. The cry will be made, "O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is *great*" (Psa 25:11).

"And forsaketh them." To "forsake" our sins is a voluntary and deliberate act. It signifies to hate and abandon them in our affections, to repudiate them by our wills, to refuse to dwell upon them in our minds and imaginations with any pleasure or satisfaction. It necessarily implies that we renounce them, and are resolved by God's grace to make the utmost endeavour to avoid any repetition of the same. "We must keep at a distance from those persons and snares which have drawn us into instances of folly, which have occasioned that disorder which is the matter of our complaint. Without this, we may multiply acknowledgements and expressions of concern for our past miscarriages to no purpose at all. It is very great folly to think of regaining our former strength so long as we embrace and dally with those objects through whose evil influence we have fallen into a spiritual decline. It is not our bewailing the pernicious effects of sin that will prevent its baleful influence upon us for time to come, except we are determined to *forsake* that to which is owing our melancholy disease"—J. Brine.

But suppose the saint *does not* promptly thus confess and forsake his sins, then what? Why, in such a case, he will "not prosper": there will be no further growth in grace, nor will the providential smile of God be upon him. The Holy Spirit is grieved, and will suspend His gracious operations within his soul; and henceforth, his "way" will be made "hard" (Pro 13:15). Such was the experience of David: "When I kept silence, my bones [a figure of the supports of the soul] waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture [or vigour or freshness] is turned into the drought of summer" (Psa 32:3-4). Sin is a pestilential thing which saps our spiritual vitality. Though David was silent as to confession, he was not so as to sorrow. God's hand smote him so that he was made to groan under His chastening rod. Nor did he obtain any relief until he humbled himself before God by confessing and forsaking his sins. Not that there is anything meritorious in such acts which entitles their performer to mercy, but that this is the holy order which God has established. He will not connive at our sins, but withholds His mercy until we take sides with Him in the hatred of them.

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2Ch 7:14). This passage shows us, first, that God sends temporal judgments upon His people because of their sins. Second, it makes known what they are to do when His rod is upon them. Third, it contains a precious promise for faith to lay hold of. Let us carefully note what was required from them. First, "If my people...shall humble themselves," which is similar to the "judge ourselves" in 1 Corinthians 11:31—but here, when chastisement is upon them. Leviticus 26:41 casts light upon it: "If...they then *accept* of the punishment of their iniquity," which is the opposite of asking, what have I done to occasion this? "And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us *less* than our iniquities *deserve*" (Ezr 9:13) illustrates. David "humbled" himself when he owned, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psa 119:75). He took sides with God against himself, and acknowledged his unrighteousness.

Until the stricken one has humbled himself, it is vain to think of proceeding farther, for pride and impenitence bar any approaches unto the Holy One. But "if" we *have* duly "humbled" ourselves; second, "and pray." Only as we take our place in the dust before Him can we truly do so. And for what will such a one make request? Surely for a deeper sense of God's holiness and of his own vileness: for a broken and contrite heart. Accompanying his "humbling" and as an expression thereof, there will be the penitent confession; and that will be followed by a begging for faith in God's mercy and a hope of cleansing and restoration. Third, "and seek my face," which goes farther than "and pray": expressing diligence, definiteness, and fervour. The omniscient One cannot be imposed upon by mere lip-service, but requires the heart. There has to be a face-to-face meeting with the One we have displeased: He will not gloss over our sins; nor must we. Hosea 14:2-3 should be made use of, for the Lord has there made known the very words which we may appropriately use on such occasions. Fourth, "and turn from their wicked ways" (which had brought judgment upon them) has the same force as "forsaketh" our sins in Proverbs 28:13.

"Then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Here is the gracious promise. But mark well its opening, "Then": only when we have fully met its conditions. We have no warrant to look for its fulfilment until its qualifying terms are observed by us. Note, too, its blessed scope: a hearing from God is obtained, His forgiveness is assured, and His healing is available for faith to claim. Say, Lord I have—by Thy grace, and to the best of my poor ability—humbled myself, sought Thy face, and

renounced my wicked ways; now do as Thou hast said: “*heal* my land”—whether it be my body, my loved one, or my estate. Remove Thy rod, and let Thy providential smile come upon me again. Make a believing use of and plead before God the promises of Hosea 14:4-8! “According to your faith be it unto you” (Mat 9:29) is most pertinent at this point. God is pledged to honour faith, and never does He fail those who trust Him fully; no, not when they count upon Him to work a miracle for them, as this writer can humbly but thankfully testify. How many Christians live below their privileges!

“Jehovah-rophi” (“the LORD that healeth thee”: Exo 15:26) is as truly one of the divine titles—as “Jehovah-tsidkneu” (“THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”: Jer 23:6)—yet how very few of His own people count upon Him as such; but instead, act like world-lings in such a crisis and put their confidence in human physicians. Is it possible for one who, through long-continued self-indulgence, has missed God’s best and brought down upon himself and family temporal adversity, to be fully recovered and restored to His favour? Who can doubt it in the light of this precious, but little-known, promise: “And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten” (Joe 2:25)! Is not the One with whom we have to do “the God of *all* grace” (1Pe 5:10); then who is justified in placing any limitation thereon! Yet, let it not be overlooked that divine grace ever works “through righteousness” (Rom 5:21), and never at the expense of it, as it would if God were to make light of sin and condone our transgressions. And let it also be carefully borne in mind that the divine promises are addressed *to faith*; and must be personally appropriated by us in childlike confidence, if we are to enjoy the good of them. “All things are possible to him that believeth” (Mar 9:23).

Let the reader turn to the prophet Joel and ponder the whole of chapter 1 and the first eleven verses of 2. Israel had sinned grievously and repeatedly, and the Lord had smitten them severely. But at Joel 2:12-13, we read, “Therefore [in view of these chastisements, particularly the plague of locusts] also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.” Then, because in this instance the whole nation was involved, the Lord gave orders for them to “Sanctify a fast” and to “call a solemn assembly,” bidding “ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach”; assuring them, “*Then* will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people”; promising, “I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith...I will *remove* far off from you the northern army [His scourge]...Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things” (Joe 2:15-21).

Then follow those blessed words, “Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God...And I will *restore* to you the years that the locust hath eaten” (Joe 2:23-25). Upon their compliance with those aforementioned requirements of God, that promise was left for faith to lay hold of and for hope to count upon. And think you, my reader, that that promise was placed on record only for the benefit of those who lived thousands of years ago? Surely, we have good reason to say, as the apostle did in another connection, “Now it was not written for his sake alone...But *for us also*” (Rom 4:23-24). Yes, nevertheless, it avails us nothing unless faith lays hold of and makes it our own. Once more we quote that declaration, “According to *your faith* be it unto you” (Mat 9:29), reverently reminding the Calvinistic reader that those are not the words of James Arminius (1560-1609), but of God the Son. If ever there is one time more than another when we have need to cry, “Lord, Increase our faith” (Luk 17:5), it is when we are pleading 1 John 1:9; and more especially, when looking to God for a full restoration to His best, and counting upon His fulfilling Joel 2:25 unto us.

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

17. *The Holy Bible, Part 9*

13. *The way of salvation.* The uniqueness of the Bible appears most conspicuously here, as anyone may ascertain for himself by comparing the teaching of the so-called "sacred books" of all human religions. The difference between what is revealed in the Scripture of Truth and the systems of men upon the attainment of holiness and eternal felicity is like unto that between light and darkness. At no other point does the celestial nature of the Bible shine forth more unmistakably than in the plan of redemption which is made known therein. The Good News which it heralds to ruined and lost sinners is such as was undiscoverable by the light of nature, yet is authenticated by its own intrinsic excellency. The Gospel which is published in the Bible attests itself by virtue of its matchless merits. It discovers its divine origin by a proclamation of truth which is self-evident. There is no need for an appeal to any external testimonies, for a true perception of the Gospel demonstrates its divine nature. That which is affirmed in the Gospel is manifested by its own assertion as something far surpassing all the inventions of the human mind.

The Gospel itself is light, for its central Object is "the light of the world" (Joh 8:12). The advent of Jesus Christ to this earth was predicted as the rising of "the Sun of righteousness" (Mal 4:2); and the universal spread of His Gospel is represented under the figure of that grand fountain of natural light diffusing his beams over every part of the earth (Psa 19:1-5, and compare Rom 10:17-18). Now light necessarily *proves itself*, for it is self-evidencing, needing nothing to manifest it. It serves to discover other objects, but requires nothing to discover itself. "Whatsoever doth make manifest *is* light" (Eph 5:13); and the Gospel makes manifest the perfections of God, setting forth an open discovery of them before our minds, beyond any other of His wondrous works. Therefore is this divine revelation, this message of glad tidings unto condemned criminals designated "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1Ti 1:11), because His ineffable glories are there so brightly displayed. The consummate wisdom of God is evidenced far more eminently in the work of redemption than in any of His marvels in creation or in providence, so that none but the blind can be unconvinced thereby.

The Gospel evinces its divinity by the solution which it offers to a problem for which the combined wisdom of all mankind can furnish no adequate solution. That problem is succinctly stated thus: "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4). The problem is twofold: legal, and moral, respecting man's relation to the divine Law, and his fitness for the celestial temple. Man is a transgressor of the divine Law. Every member of the human race is such. Anything short of perfect and perpetual obedience to the divine commandments in thought and word and deed constitutes one a transgressor. Measured by such a standard, each of us must plead guilty, for we come far short of it. The Law condemns us: how, then, can we be acquitted? On what possible ground can the righteous Judge declare us to be entitled to the award of the Law? But more! We are fallen and sinful creatures; and as such, unfit to dwell in the immediate presence of the ineffably holy God. How shall we get rid of our defilement? How obtain that unsullied purity to make us meet for heaven?

Let us briefly amplify the several elements which enter into that problem. 1. The requirements of God's Law. They are founded upon the perfections of its Framer, and therefore, nothing less than spotless holiness is demanded of us. Negatively, it proscribes not only wrong deeds and corrupt counsels of the heart, but—as no human legislation ever did—it also prohibits evil desires and propensities, so that all unchaste imaginations are forbidden, as also the spirit of discontent, envy, and revenge; anything which is contrary to the perfections of God Himself is interdicted. Positively, the divine Law demands from us an entire, unreserved, and uninterrupted yielding of soul and body, with all their faculties and powers, unto God and His service. It requires not only that we love Him with all our heart and strength, constantly, but that love to Him must actuate and regulate all our actions unvaryingly. Nor is that unreasonable, for we are all God's creatures, made for His glory, and originally created without sin, in His own image and likeness.

2. The charge preferred against us: "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom 3:10). Not a single member of our fallen race measures up to the holy standard which our Maker and Governor has set before us; not one meets the just requirements of His Law. Nor is there one who has made a genuine, whole-hearted, and sustained effort to do so. So far from subordinating all his interests to the will of God, the natural man follows the desires and devices of his own heart, giving place to God only so far as that is pleasing to himself. Though he owes his very life to His daily care, yet he has no concern for His glory. He

is ungrateful, unruly, ungodly, abusing God's mercies, despising His reproofs, and trampling under foot His commandments. And therefore, "all the world [stands] guilty before God" (Rom 3:19).

3. The sentence of the Law. This is clearly stated in the divine Word: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal 3:10). Whoever violates a single precept of that Law exposes himself to the displeasure of God, and to His just punishment as the expression of that displeasure. No allowance is made for ignorance, no distinction is made between persons, and no relaxation of its strictness is possible. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Eze 18:4) is its inexorable pronouncement. No exception is made whether the transgressor is young or old, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile: the wages of sin is death, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18).

4. The Judge Himself is inflexibly just, "that will by no means clear the guilty" (Exo 34:7). In the high court of divine justice, the Lord interprets the Law in its sternest aspect and judges rigidly according to the strictness of its letter. "For he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins" (Jos 24:19). God is inexorably righteous, and will not show any partiality either to the Law or to its violator. "But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things... Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom 2:2, 6). He has determined that His Law shall be faithfully upheld and its sanctions strictly enforced.

5. The sinner is unquestionably guilty. It is not merely that he has infirmities, or that he has done his very best yet failed to attain unto absolute perfection. He has set at naught God's authority, and has proved a proud rebel rather than a loyal subject. He has gone his own way and gratified himself, without any concern for the divine honour. Morally respectable he may be in the sight of his fellows, but a criminal before the divine tribunal. It is impossible for any man to clear himself of the solemn charge: he can neither disprove the accusations which the Law prefers against him, nor vindicate himself for the perpetration of them.

Here, then, is how the case stands. The Law demands flawless and continuous obedience to its precepts in heart and in act, in motive and performance. God charges us with having failed to meet those just requirements, and declares us guilty. The Law then pronounces sentence of condemnation, and demands the infliction of the death penalty. The One before whose tribunal we stand is omniscient, and cannot be imposed upon; He is inflexibly just, and swayed by no sentimental considerations. We are unable to refute the charges of the Law, unable to vindicate our sinful conduct, unable to offer any reparation or atonement for our crimes. Truly our case is desperate to the last degree.

Here, then, is the problem. How can God justify the willful transgressor of His Law without justifying his sins? How can He receive him into His favour without being the Patron of a rebel? How can God deliver him from the penalty of His broken Law without going back upon His Word that He "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exo 34:7)? How can life be granted to the culprit without repealing the sentence, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die"? How can mercy be shown to the sinner without justice being flouted? That is a problem which none of the jurists of this earth could solve, one which must for ever have baffled every finite intelligence. Yet, blessed be His name, God *has*, in His consummate wisdom, devised a way whereby the chief of sinners can be dealt with by Him as though he were entirely innocent; nay more. He pronounces him righteous, up to the required standard of the Law, and entitled to its reward of eternal life. The Gospel provides a plain, satisfactory, and glorious solution to that problem, and therein evidences its *divinity*. To that solution we now direct the reader's attention.

That solution may be summed up in one word, namely *substitution*, though a million words could not express all the stupendous wonders attending the same. God decreed that salvation should be provided for transgressors, and in order that His righteousness might not be compromised, determined that another should take their place; and in their stead, make a full satisfaction to the divine Law, by rendering a flawless obedience to it. But where was to be found one suitable for this task, for, first, he must be a *sinless* being? There was not a single candidate among the sons of men, for the whole human race was guilty. From whence, then, could a substitute be found? Suitable, we say; for not only must he be without sin, but his obedience to the Law must possess such super-abounding *worth* as to pay the debts not of one sinner, but of *all* sinners for whom it was vicariously performed. His obedience must needs possess more merit than their total demerits. That necessarily excluded all the angels, for as creatures of God, they themselves were obligated to render perfect obedience to Him, and in so doing, merely performed their duty; consequently no *merit* attached to the same, and so there was no over plus for others.

Further, none would be suitable, save one who could act in his own absolute right, one who in himself was neither a subject nor a servant; otherwise, he could merit nothing for others: he that has nothing that is absolutely his own cannot pay any price to redeem others. He must be a person possessed of infinite dignity and worthiness, so that he might be capable of meriting infinite blessing. He must be endowed with infinite power and wisdom to qualify him for such a stupendous undertaking. He must be one of unchanging integrity and immutable faithfulness, or he could not be depended upon for such a momentous task. He must be one of matchless mercy and love to willingly serve as the substitute and *die* in the room of fallen and depraved men. It was also requisite that he should be a person infinitely dear unto God the Father, in order to give an infinite value to his transaction in God's esteem. Now where, my reader, was such a one to be found? Had that question been propounded to the ablest of men, yea, to a conclave of angels, it had remained unanswered for ever.

But "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luk 18:27). That problem which was far above the compass of all creatures was solved by Omniscience. The surpassing goodness and infinite wisdom of God selected *His own Son* for the undertaking, for He was in every way fit, possessing in Himself all the requisite qualifications. But here another problem, no less than the former, presented itself. The Son was absolute Sovereign in Himself: how then could He serve? He was infinitely above all law: how then could He perform obedience to law? He was the Lord of glory, worshipped by all the heavenly hosts: how then could He be substituted in the place of worms of the dust? Moreover, as their substitute, He must not only fulfill all the preceptive requirements of the Law, but He must also take upon Him their *sins* and expiate their guilt; He must suffer the Law's condemnation, endure its penalty, and receive the awful wages of sin. But how could One of such infinite dignity enter such depths of humiliation? How could the ineffably Holy One—"who knew no sin"—be judicially "made...to be sin" for them? (2Co 5:21). How could the blessed One be made a curse? How could the Lord of life die?

As another has said, "If God had declared who the person is that should do this work and had gone no further, no creature could have thought which way this person could have performed the work. If God had told them that His own Son must be the Redeemer, and that He alone was a fit person for the work, and that He was a person every way sufficient for it, but had proposed to *them* to contrive a way how this fit and sufficient person should succeed—we must conclude that all created understandings would have been utterly at a loss." Yet the Gospel makes known the wondrous and glorious solution to that problem, a solution which had never entered the mind of man to conceive; and in the revelation made of that salvation, the Gospel bears unmistakably the impress of divine wisdom and carries its own evidence of its divinity.

The manifold wisdom of God determined that His Son should become the Representative and *Surety* of sinners and so be substituted in their place. But who else would have thought of such a thing: that the Son should occupy the place of rebels and become the Object of divine wrath! And in order for the Son to be the sinner's *Surety*, He must render satisfaction to the Law in man's own nature! What created intelligence had deemed such a thing possible: that a divine Person should become incarnate and be both God and man in one Person! Had God made known such a marvel, what finite intelligence could have devised a way whereby the Son should become flesh *without* partaking of the pollution of fallen human nature! Not only that the Infinite should become finite, the Ancient of days an infant, but that He should be born of a woman without being tainted by the virus of sin! No angel had ever dreamed of the miracle of the virgin birth, whereby an immaculate human nature was produced in Mary's womb by the operation of the Holy Spirit—so that "a holy thing" (Luk 1:35), spotless and impeccable, was born by her! But that was no mystery to divine wisdom. The Son of God became the Son of man.

And so we might continue, paragraph after paragraph, pointing out that the circumstances of Christ's birth, the details of His life, the reception which He met with from the world, the character of His mission, the nature of His death, His triumphant resurrection from the tomb, His ascension into heaven, His there being crowned with honour and glory, seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, and now reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords—each and all of which transcend the powers of human imagination. But a word requires to be added upon *the application of Christ's work* to His people. How shall they partake of the benefits of His redemption without robbing Him of His glory? By what means shall their enmity be subdued and their wills be brought into subjection to Him? That was a further problem which no man could have solved. It is by the Spirit's communicating to them a new nature, making them sensible of their wretchedness and need, and causing them to stretch forth the beggar's hand and receive eternal life as *a free*

gift. Though indwelling sin be not removed in this life, Christ's love has so won their hearts that it is now their fervent desire and sincere endeavour to live daily so as to please and glorify Him.

Now we submit to the critical reader that the Gospel is stamped with the divine glory that the wisdom of God appears conspicuously in the way of salvation that it exhibits. In its unique contrivances, its accomplished designs, its glorious ends, its blessed fruits, its stupendous wonder in transforming lawless rebels into loving and loyal subjects, we have that which is worthy of Omniscience. Never had it entered into the heart of man to conceive not only of hell-deserving sinners being saved in a way suited to all the divine perfections, but which also provides for their being personally conformed unto the image of God's Son, "made like" Him (Heb 7:3) in holiness and happiness, made "joint-heirs" (Rom 8:17) with Him and eternal sharers of His glory. When impartially examined, it is self-evident that the Gospel is not of human origin. Certainly the Jews did not invent it, for they were its bitterest enemies. Nor the Gentiles, for they knew nothing about it until the apostles preached it to them. Nor did the apostles themselves, for at first they were offended at it (Mat 16:21-22). The Gospel is of God: thanks be unto Him for His unspeakable gift.

In what way shall depraved and guilty creatures be delivered from wickedness and punishment and restored to holiness and happiness is the most difficult, as well as important, question which can engage the mind. Such an inquiry is of no interest to a pleasure-loving trifler, but is of vast moment to the sin-convicted soul. He knows that God is justly displeased with him, but how He shall become reconciled and receive him into His favour passes his comprehension. A sense of guilt makes him afraid of God: how shall the cause of that fear be removed? Those are difficulties which human religions do not resolve, and before which reason is silent. No amount of present repentance and reformation can cleanse the blotted pages of the past. When brought face to face with the dread realities of death, judgment, and eternity, the soul is appalled. A vague hope in the general mercy of God suffices not, for that leaves His justice unsatisfied. The Gospel alone provides a satisfactory solution to these problems, and peace for the burdened conscience.

Neither sorrowing, nor amendment of conduct, can right the wrongs of which the sinner is guilty before God; nor can he by any self-effort change himself for the better, still less fit himself for heaven. A debauchee may be filled with bitter remorse for his vicious excesses, but tears will not heal his diseased body, or deliver him from an early grave. The gambler will condemn himself for his folly, but no self-recriminations will recover his lost estate, or save him from spending his remaining years in penury. Thus it is evident that when it comes to the blotting out of his iniquities before God and the obtaining of a new nature which renders him fit for the divine presence, man must look outside himself. But where is he to look for deliverance *from himself*, for sin has made fallen man averse to fellowship with the Holy One? How then shall he desire, seek after, and delight in that which is repellent to him? He is bidden to look unto One who is "mighty to save" (Isa 63:1). The Gospel presents a divine Physician who can heal the moral leper, yea, give eternal life to one who is spiritually dead. The Lord Jesus is "able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb 7:25). His salvation is an all-sufficient and everlasting one, freely offered "without money and without price" (Isa 55:1). Such a Saviour, such a salvation, is of no human invention; therefore, the Book which makes them known must be divine.

It may be asked, If the Gospel be self-evident, why do not all men believe it? The answer is, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (Joh 3:19). The great majority deliberately close their eyes and steel their ears against its appeal, because that appeal clashes with their corruptions and worldly interests. Not until men solemnly contemplate the character of God, their relation to Him as the subjects of His government, and their utter unpreparedness for His awful tribunal, will they seriously consider the claims of His Gospel. As food is relished most by the famished, as health is valued highest by those who have suffered a painful and protracted illness, so the Gospel is only welcomed by those who realize they are under the curse of a sin-hating God, stricken with a moral malady which no human remedy can relieve, and hastening to a hopeless eternity. Nevertheless, he who believeth it not shall be damned (Mar 16:16).

