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“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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NEVER

The word never means “at no time, in no degree,” yet, paradoxical though it seems, it is one of the emphatic and dogmatic terms of Scripture, as its occurrences show. It is both interesting and instructive to observe the different connections in which it is found in the Bible. They are of considerable variety. Some of them are inexpressibly blessed unto God’s children; others should evoke terror in those who are strangers to Him. What a fearful contrast is there between “Hell and destruction are never full” (Pro 27:20) and “David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne” (Jer 33:17); and between “For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin...it shall never be built” (Isa 25:2) and “The God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed” (Dan 2:44)! It is by such graphic antitheses that the truth is presented more impressively. Set over against the complaint of the elder son to his professed father, “Thou never gavest me a kid” (Luk 15:29), is the promise of Christ, “He that cometh to me shall never hunger” (Joh 6:35). Let us now take a closer look at a few of the verses in which this term is found.

“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2Ti 3:7). Here is the “never” of *a fruitless quest*, and alas, there are many engaged in such. It is a sad thing that one may acquire much theological lore, be well versed in the writings of God’s most honoured servants, and sit regularly under sound preaching, and yet have no saving acquaintance with the truth. It is a still more solemn fact that one may spend considerable time daily not only in reading God’s Word, but in diligently studying the same, and yet attain unto no spiritual and experiential knowledge of the truth. The scribes and Pharisees are a case in point, and there are many in Christendom today who are in a like state. Why is this? What is the explanation of this fruitless quest? It is because such souls are not taught by the Spirit of God, and unless *He* be our Instructor, all our efforts are, spiritually speaking, in vain. It is because they are unregenerate, and therefore devoid of spiritual discernment: the Lord has not given them “an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear” (Deu 29:4). Where such be the case, the mind is “corrupt” and the truth is resisted, as 2 Timothy 3:8 goes on to show.

“Never man spake like this man” (Joh 7:46). That is the “never” of *unique utterance*. Everything connected with Christ was unique. His birth was unparalleled, so were His character and conduct, His mission and miracles, His death and resurrection. His speech was no exception, His enemies being witnesses, for that testimony in John 7:46 was borne to Him not by His apostles, but by the officers sent by the scribes and Pharisees to apprehend Him. But instead of arresting Him, they had themselves been arrested and awed by what they heard from His lips. In like manner, those who listened to Him teaching in their synagogue were astonished, and asked, “Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?” (Mat 13:54). And before the end, so nonplussed were His critics by the profound solutions which He returned to their riddles that “no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions” (Mat 22:46). And why was it that “never [any] man spake like” *He* did? (Joh 7:46). Because He was more than man—man’s Creator. In Him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). It was the truth incarnate Who tabernacled among men. It was God speaking “by his Son” (Heb 1:2), and therefore are we commanded to “hear ye him” (Mat 17:5).

“He that believeth on me shall never thirst” (Joh 6:35). That is the “never” of *an unfailing supply*. But let us first note that these words point a most solemn contrast between the satisfying portion of the believer and the experience of the Saviour upon the Cross. Near the close of His awful sufferings there, Christ cried, “I thirst” (Joh 19:28). He made reference to a far more acute pang than any bodily one. It was not mere physical thirst to which He alluded: rather was it to the anguish of His soul. During the three hours of darkness, the face of God had been turned from Him, and He was left alone—“forsaken”—as He endured the fierce fires of God’s outpoured wrath. That cry told of the severity of the spiritual conflict as He yearned for communion again with the Father. In *that* sense, the Christian will never thirst. Nor will he as he did when convicted of his lost state and dire need. Nor will Christ ever suffer him to be so parched spiritually as to have no moisture in him. He will indeed pant after a fuller knowledge of Christ, but that is more an evidence of deepening desire after holiness. “His soul’s desires are longing ones, not languishing; a desiring thirst he has for more and more of God, but not a despairing thirst”—Matthew Henry (1622-1714).

“And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. LORD, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong” (Psa 30:6-7). That is the “never” of *carnal security*. It throws not a little light on the latter part of David’s life, and also shows us what foolish ideas even saints may entertain. This psalm was

probably written (see verse 1) after his deliverance from Saul's persecuting malice, when he was peacefully settled upon the throne. The LORD had wrought mightily and rendered him victorious over the enemies of Israel, and after the fierce storms there followed a great calm. David now felt quite secure from danger, and in his rashness, imagined all his troubles were ended. He indeed ascribed his prosperity unto the LORD; but to compare his present state to a mountain which stood strong, savoured of pride; and to declare he would never be moved was the language of self-confidence. The sins into which he fell, and his flight from Absalom, demonstrated his error. "Let us beware lest the fumes of intoxicating success get into our brains and make fools of us also"—Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892). Neither a continuance of outward prosperity, nor inward peace, is anywhere promised us absolutely; yet how apt we are to say, "To morrow shall be as this day" (Isa 56:12). Let us "rejoice with trembling" (Psa 2:11), and seek grace to heed that warning, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1Co 10:12).

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (Joh 10:28). That is the "never" of *eternal security*. The ones to whom such safety is divinely assured are—as the immediate context shows—those who "hear" (heed) Christ's voice, who are "known" (approved) by Him, who "follow" Him (and not their own natural inclination); and thus, their preservation is neither mechanical nor one apart from their own concurrence. From the divine-grace side of things, "they shall never perish," because the Redeemer has given to them eternal life, because He has undertaken "to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb 7:25), because they are gripped firmly by Omniscience: "All his saints are in thy hand" (Deu 33:3). From the human-responsibility side of things, they shall never perish, because the LORD causes them to take to heart the solemn warnings and admonitions of His Word; and thereby avoid the things which would destroy them, because He gives them a spirit of prayer and dependence upon Him which delivers them from ruinous self-confidence; because He moves them to feed on His Word and obtain spiritual strength; because He brings them to comply with His precepts, and thus leads them safely Home along the way of practical holiness.

"I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mat 7:23). This is a word to graceless professors, and is the most solemn "never" in all the Bible, for it is that of *divine repudiation*, and sounds the eternal doom of those to whom it is uttered. Christ is here heard speaking in the Day of Judgment to many who boasted that they had preached and done many wonderful things in His name. His words do not signify that He was unacquainted with their persons or not cognizant of their performances, for the remainder of the verse shows that He had penetrated their disguise and knew them to be workers of iniquity. Instead, it means that He did not accept or approve of them, that He refused to own them as His. When it is said, "the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous" (Psa 1:6), it means that He is pleased with the same. "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2Ti 2:19) imports that He *loves* them. "I never knew you" (Mat 7:23): neither in the eternal counsels of God, nor while you were in the world, had I any affectionate regard for you; at no time did I view you with favour. To the contrary, you were an offence: "Depart from me." Highly esteemed in the churches; objects of abhorrence to the Holy One.

"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb 13:5). Here we have the most blessed and comforting "never," for it is that of *the abiding companionship of Christ*, which ensures His continual provision and protection. Living as we are in a world where all is "change and decay"—ourselves unstable and unreliable—how thankful we should be that there is One whose care may ever be counted upon. The power of this companion is illimitable, His wisdom infinite, His faithfulness inviolable, His compassion immutable. And why will He never desert one of His own? Because He loves him, and love delights to be near its object. Because he can do nothing to kill or even chill that love, for He foreknew his every sin when first setting His heart upon him. Because of His covenant engagement: "I will not turn away from them, to do them good" (Jer 32:40). Therefore, we should fear no want, dread no trial, nor view death with any trepidation.



THE EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

5. Fellowship (1Jo 1:3), Part 2

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Here we have a communicated knowledge, an affectionate desire, an emphatic assertion, and a shared privilege. The apostles openly proclaimed what they had received immediately from Christ. They did so because they had an unselfish longing that others should also be benefited thereby. It was no figment of an enthusiastic imagination that they referred to, but a divine and spiritual verity. Fellowship with God is the highest dignity and richest blessing we can be favoured with, either here or hereafter. It is one of the great mysteries of grace. Reason cannot comprehend it, and sense has nothing to do with it. None can have the least conception of its excellence save those who are actual participants in the same. In order thereto, there must be oneness of nature, an intimate knowledge, concord of heart, unity of interests and aims, and an open acknowledgment of one another. Though this fellowship be the utmost of blessedness, it is one in which all the saints partake.

Great is the honour, wondrous the privilege, of being admitted unto communion with the Lord God. Fellowship with Him is both an objective fact and a subjective realization: that is to say, it is based upon a relationship, and is enjoyed in the soul's experience. Since all believers are regenerated and reconciled to God, they are in communion with Him—in a state of sacred friendship. That state consists of a reciprocal communication in giving and receiving after a holy manner; God's in renewings of grace and fresh supplies of His Spirit; ours in the outgoing of our hearts unto Him in the ways which He has appointed. It is consciously *enjoyed* by the exercise of faith and love (for they are the two hands of the soul by which we take hold of God), and by the heart's being engaged with His ineffable perfections and gracious bestowments. Some believers enter into a much richer experience of this fellowship than do others of their fellows, and the degree in which he actually participates may vary considerably with the same believer from day to day. It is chiefly *acted out* by us in praise and prayer. It is *maintained* by avoiding those things which hinder and by using the means which further it—especially devout meditations upon God and His Word.

Opinions differ as to whether the Father and the Son are to be considered here conjointly or distinctly. Grammatically, each is permissible. For ourselves, we incline to the view taken by Robert Candlish (1806–1873), namely that the Object of the Christian's fellowship is *one*. Certain it is that we first have fellowship with the Son, for only through Him may sinners have access unto the Father (Joh 14:6). Christ is the only way, the new and living way, unto Him. But as that expositor pointed out, it is not thus that Christ is presented: rather is the Son here regarded as *associated with* the Father—“together in Their mutual relationship to one another, and Their mutual mind and heart to one another (and unto the saints), They constitute the one object of this fellowship.” In 1 Corinthians 1:9, we read, “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord,” in view of which we, personally, prefer to say that our fellowship is with the Triune God in their Person of the Mediator—borne out, we consider, by 1 John 1:5-6, where the Object of our fellowship is simply said to be “God,” without distinction of persons. Yet since They may indeed be contemplated separately, it is quite warrantable to distinguish between the communion which we have with Each, and so shall we treat thereof.

Another consideration which supplies confirmation that, essentially regarded, our fellowship is with God in Christ is the fact that our communion is based upon *union* with Him. Now our union with God is not immediate or direct but, mediate through the Lord Jesus. We are first joined to Christ, and then through Him with the Father (1Pe 3:18). The saint's oneness with Christ is a very wonderful and many-sided subject, which we can now but barely outline. First, from all eternity we had an election union with Christ, being chosen in Him. There was also a federal union, so that we were one with Him as the last Adam: it was as such that He took our place and discharged our legal obligations. There is likewise a vital union when, because of regeneration, it becomes true that “he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1Co 6:17). From that issues a moral union, when by faith and love we are espoused to Him. That in turn leads to a practical union, when we take His yoke upon us and walk in subjection to Him. All of this issues in an experiential union in which we enjoy an intimate intercourse with Christ, drinking into His Spirit.

Now each aspect of that multiform union has a corresponding communion. By virtue of our *election* union with Christ, we are “blessed...with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” with Him (Eph 1:3-4). Because of our *federal* union with Him, we become legal partakers of His righteousness, and

entitled to the full reward of His meritorious obedience. In consequence of our *vital* union with Him, we are made recipients of Christ's life and are indwelt by His Spirit. As the result of our *moral* union with Him, we enter into His salvation and receive out of His fullness "grace for grace" (Joh 1:16). By our *practical* union with Him, we walk together in agreement: we now "cleave unto the Lord" (Act 11:23) in a life of dependence upon and devotedness unto Him, becoming more and more conformed to His holy image. From our *experiential* union with Christ, we enter into His peace and joy, and become fruit-bearing branches of the Vine. "And there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Pro 18:24) expresses His side of this communion; "Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved" (Joh 13:23) declares *our* side of it. This is the result of our *practical* union and communion: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (Joh 14:21).

The intimate union which there is between the Lord and His people is intimated in their very names: He is "the Christ"; they Christians: "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them *brethren*" (Heb 2:11) and to treat them accordingly. The figure that is most frequently used in the New Testament to set forth the oneness of the Redeemer and the redeemed is that of His mystical "body," of which He is the head, and they the members: "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Eph 5:30). The result of that union is communion, or sharing together: "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song 2:16)—to mutually delight in, to further each other's interests, to be together for all eternity. It is therefore my sacred privilege not only to have personal contact and converse with Him, but the most unreserved dealings. There is no aloofness on *His* part, and there should be none on *mine*. Christ has not only given Himself for His people, but *to* them—to make full use of: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1Pe 5:7). He is ours to feed upon (Joh 6:57), and as our "lamb" (Exo 12:5): that is, Christ in His *sacrificial* character—exactly suited to sin-harassed souls.

Nor is that feasting a one-sided thing: Christ delights to commune with His own—"With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Luk 22:15) illustrates the fact. He *seeks* such fellowship: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door [for He forces Himself upon none, see Luke 24:28-29], I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20)—addressed, be it remembered, to a church! The intimate fellowship which there is between Christ and His Church is blessedly exhibited in the Song. He makes request, "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely" (Song 2:14); while the spouse declares, "Cause me to hear [thy voice]. Make haste, my beloved" (Song 8:13-14). He exclaims, "Behold, thou art fair, my love" (Song 4:1); and she rejoins, "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand" (Song 5:10). There is sweet entertainment on both sides: says she, "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits" (Song 4:16); "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved" (Song 5:1) is His answering call. They are mutually charmed with each other: does she bear testimony, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight" (Song 2:3), "How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights" (Song 7:6) is His gracious acknowledgment.

We will now consider that communion which we have with each of the divine Persons distinctly. Clearly there can be none with any of them except through the Mediator. We can only approach the Father through the Son incarnate. Our union with the One is via our union with the Other. We are the sons of the Father (1Jo 3:1), because made one with His Son, and therefore, does the latter say, "Behold *I and the children* which God hath given me" (Heb 2:13). After His resurrection, He said to His disciples, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (Joh 20:17), thereby making it clear that the relation in which He stood to God was theirs also. That relation is further made good unto them by God's sending forth "the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal 4:6); and thus, they cherish toward Him the affections of children. From whence, we may perceive *the character* of that fellowship which the Christian has with the Father. As a child has near access to his father, so does the believer unto God. As a child enjoys his father's favour, so does the believer that of God. As an earthly parent delights to gladden the heart of his child by special tokens of his love, "How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Mat 7:11).

The nature of our fellowship with the Father is also indicated by the very meaning of that term, namely, a community of interests, and that it is a reciprocal thing. Thus, the Father and His children take mutual pleasure in His beloved Son. Blessedly was that depicted by the Saviour in what is known as the parable of

the prodigal son. When the wanderer returns from the far country, and is welcomed home, the father says, "And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let *us* eat, and be merry" (Luk 15:23)—figure of them feasting on a once-slain Christ and rejoicing together. In like manner, as the glorifying of Christ is the chief end which the Father has before Him in all the outworkings of His eternal purpose, such is our grand aim too. Again, the Father makes us "partakers of his holiness" (Heb 12:10), even of His own nature (2Pe 1:4), so that what He hates, they hate, and what He delights in, they do also. Again, they have fellowship with the Father in His affectionate regard for all His dear children: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1Jo 3:14). Further, a most blessed intercourse is maintained between the Father and His children through the means which He has appointed to that very end. As they endeavour to perform His will, He takes upon Him the care of all their concerns.

"And with his Son Jesus Christ." Yes, and in that precise order. First, we have fellowship with Him as God's Son, because made His sons, as being "his seed," yea, "the travail of his soul" (Isa 53:10-11). This explains why Christ is designated "The everlasting Father" (Isa 9:6). Second, we have fellowship with Him as "Jesus," for as faith lays hold of Him, we become partakers of His so-great salvation—as those who believingly touched the hem of His garment were healed of their plagues. Since the exercise of effectual faith be a spiritual act, we must first be made sons, spiritual persons, "new creature[s]" in Christ (2Co 5:17) by regeneration. Faith gives a saving union to Christ, and He is then "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1Co 1:30). Not only are our sins removed as far as the east is from the west, but we obtain a personal interest in all that He is and has. Third, we have fellowship with Him as "Christ", that is, the Anointed One. As "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost" (Act 10:38), so believers "have an unction [same word] from the Holy One," and "the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you" (1Jo 2:20, 27)—the anointing oil on the head of the High Priest (Exo 29:7) "went down to the skirts of his garments" (Psa 133:2)!

The believer's fellowship with his Saviour opens to him a perennial fountain of blessedness. Since He be God, He is fully competent to undertake for him in every situation and supply all his need. Since He [is] man, He is capable of being touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and is full of tender sympathy to His sorrowing people. He was tempted in all points as we are, sin excepted, and therefore, fully understands our trials. He personally experienced poverty, neglect, reproach, injustice, and harsh treatment. He was misunderstood by His friends and hated by the religious leaders. He knew what it was to suffer hunger and thirst, and weariness of body, as well as anguish of soul. Consequently, He is "a brother...born for adversity" (Pro 17:17) and is moved with compassion when He beholds the afflictions of the members of His mystical body; yea, it is written, "In all their affliction he was afflicted" (Isa 63:9). So close is the bond that unites the Redeemer to the redeemed, that when Saul of Tarsus (in the days of his unregenerate madness) ill-treated His children, Christ said unto him, "Why persecutest thou me?" (Act 22:7)—by assailing *them*, he "toucheth the apple of *his* eye" (Zec 2:8).

Thus, there is everything in Christ to invite and encourage us to seek and maintain the closest and freest communion with Him. He wears our nature, and we are recipients of His. All the infinite resources of Deity are exercised on our behalf. As He endured our poverty, so we are made the partners of His riches. His righteousness is as truly ours as He made our sins His own. His reward He shares with His redeemed, so that the glory which the Father gave Him He has given to them (Joh 17:22). There is a community of affections between them—running in the same channels, fixed upon the same objects: "I love them that love me" (Pro 8:17). They have familiar intercourse together: they pour out their complaints unto Him, He communicates to them His consolations. They have mutual desires: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am" (Joh 17:24); "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20) is their response. They participate in like privileges and honours: He is Priest and King, and He "hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father" (Rev 1:6). They gladly endure loss for His sake, bear His reproach, and enter into "the fellowship of his sufferings" (Phi 3:10).

It may be asked, Why is no mention made in 1 John 1:3 of the believer's fellowship with *the Holy Spirit*? Though He be not expressly referred to, He is necessarily implied, for none can have fellowship with the Father or with the Son save by Him. "For through him [Christ] we both [believing Jews and Gentiles] have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph 2:18). The Holy Spirit is the sole efficient cause of all spiritual fellowship. Necessarily so, for the Father and the Son are imperceptible to sense, the Objects on which our faith is exercised, and with whom communion is enjoyed; and it is the Spirit who makes Them real and precious unto us, drawing out our hearts unto Them. He it is who sheds abroad in our hearts the

love of the Father, and who takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. Thus the Spirit is not specifically named here, because He is *the author* of our fellowship with the Triune God in Christ. He introduces us into the same, and is the only transactor of it, for it is by His enablement that we are lifted out of ourselves and our affections drawn unto things above. Yet it must not be overlooked that in 2 Corinthians 13:14, while “grace” is attributed to the Lord Jesus, and “love” unto God, “communion” is definitely ascribed to the Spirit. We are also sharers of His nature, and His mission to glorify Christ.

A word now upon the fellowship which the saints have one with another: “If we have fellowship with the Father, then we are His children, and animated by His Spirit. If we have fellowship with Jesus Christ, then we are His redeemed ones, and the subjects of His grace. It follows, therefore, as a necessary consequence, that wherever there is fellowship with the Father and the Son, there must also be fellowship with those who believe in Them. And this is the very light in which the subject is presented in the text, where the three forms of fellowship are treated as indissolubly connected with one another”—James Morgan. It is to be noted that whereas “that ye also may have fellowship with us” is mentioned *before* “our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (because, as previously explained, it is by means of the writings of the apostles that we obtain a full saving knowledge of Them); yet in experience, fellowship with believers *follows* that of our fellowship with the divine persons; for we are united first with the former ere we have any spiritual union with the latter. What that fellowship consists of Ephesians 4:4-6 tells us: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

Believers are sharers together of the riches of God’s grace, joint partakers of all the benefits of Christ’s mediation and merits. They possess the same nature and associations of heart. They have common beliefs, experiences, and hopes. They will be together with the Lord for ever. Therefore are they enjoined: “Endeavouring to keep [not ‘make’] the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). But that is possible in a practical way only as they personally heed the preceding exhortation, “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (Eph 4:2). Not only is it their mutual interest so to do, but thereby Christ is most honoured and glorified by them (Joh 13:35). Thus, it should be their earnest and constant endeavour to cultivate this fellowship. If they do not, then their claim to enjoy communion with God is but an idle boast. As this very apostle declares: “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1Jo 4:20). Not only are the object of fellowship inseparable, but, the enjoyment of the one is commensurate with the other: in proportion as we have fellowship with the Father and His Son shall we have fellowship (in prayer, at least) with all who believe.

It is not our intention to supply a sermon outline on each verse, for we desire to stimulate unto study, and supply hints of how to go about it, rather than encourage laziness. With this article and the preceding one before him, the young preacher should have no difficulty in culling out sufficient material for at least one sermon on Fellowship—the simpler his style and the fewer his divisions, the better. Homiletically considered, the opening sentences of this article furnish an analysis of verse 3. By way of introduction, the different things which *prevent* any fellowship between God and an unbeliever, and the divine provisions to remove those hindrances, should be shown, such as sin divorcing from holiness—overcome by atoning blood; spiritual death—by the communication of life; alienation of heart—by reconciliation at conversion; the distance between the finite and the infinite—bridged by the Mediator.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

57. War Declared

The typical teaching of the Old Testament is one of its most striking and blessed features. It not only demonstrates the divine authorship thereof, by causing the shadows to outline so accurately the coming substance, but supplies valuable instruction for the student of the New. We are sometimes reminded that “in the Old Testament, the New is contained; and in the New Testament, the Old is explained”; but there is a danger, lest we draw the inference that the latter has largely displaced the former. This is so far from being the case that the former casts considerable light on the latter, and supplies the keys which unlock many of its details. Rather are the two Testaments like the two eyes of our body—both necessary in order to complete vision, the one complementing the other. Not only are we largely dependent upon the prophets for an understanding of the predictions made by Christ and through His apostles, not only is there much in the historical books which supplies vivid illustrations and exemplifications of the practical teaching and precepts of the Epistles, but the ordinances and ceremonies of Judaism foreshadowed and help to open unto us many aspects of Gospel truth. We have sought to give prominence to this in our progress through the book of Joshua, showing that in numerous ways, its central character prefigured the Lord Jesus, that Israel’s experiences in the conquest of Canaan adumbrated the Christian’s spiritual warfare, and that both solemn and precious evangelical pictures are to be found therein.

During the past century, there were those who rendered a valuable service unto Christendom by the stress they laid upon the importance and worth of the Old Testament types, and how that many incidents recorded in its historical books set forth “the way of salvation.” Yet it is much to be regretted that they were so partial in their selection, and that their emphases on certain particular aspects of the way of salvation were often so disproportionate. It is indeed blessed to point out how that Rahab was delivered from destruction and obtained a place among the people of God by the exercise of *faith*, and how that the Cities of Refuge are a blessed representation of that *security* which is to be found in Christ for those who are pursued by the Law; but it is equally striking to behold, and necessary to insist on, if the balance of truth is to be preserved, that the Gibeonites *making peace* with Joshua provides just as real and striking a “Gospel picture” as do the former. There are some of the types which more especially magnify the grace of God; there are others which exemplify His holiness. In the one is displayed His benevolent overtures; in the other, the claims of His righteousness. Sometimes it is the freeness of the divine mercy which is stressed; at others, the responsibility of the sinner is pressed.

Those who have read critically our last six articles on the Gibeonites (Jos 9) may have concluded that we were guilty of contradicting ourselves, for we began by viewing them as illustrating the character and conduct of empty professors and hypocrites applying for union with God’s people, yet ended by regarding them as types of repentant sinners coming to Christ and making their peace with God. It was not a case of our forgetting what we had first pointed out, nor is there anything inconsistent therewith in our latter remarks. There is a fullness in God’s Word which pertains not to the writings of men, and many and varied are the “applications” which may be legitimately made of a single passage in it. In Genesis 22, Isaac is first a type of Christ, in his subjection to his father’s will and his readiness to be offered in sacrifice; but later, he is a figure of the sinner—the ram taking his place and dying in his stead! From Exodus 16, many striking *comparisons* can be drawn between the manna and Christ as the Bread of Life, yet in John 6, we find Him making some very definite *contrasts* between them. Some of the characters in Scripture portray both the unsaved and backslidden believers, nor is there anything incongruous in their so doing. So it is with the Gibeonites: they need to be regarded in two different relations, in accordance with the marked change in their early and later conduct.

We must distinguish between the Gibeonites as they were moved by Satan to act dishonestly and tempt Israel and as they were subsequently moved by the Holy Spirit to surrender unto Joshua and made willing to take his yoke upon them. In his natural condition, the sinner is a hypocrite, and even when he is brought sincerely to seek after Christ, not a little carnality is mingled with his efforts. There is a very marked difference to be observed between the wily conduct of the Gibeonites in Joshua 9:3-6, and their frankness and meekness in verses 24-25; and equally so should there be between the “applications” which the expositor makes of them. What follows in chapter 10 *confirms* the accommodation we made of the closing verses of chapter 9. No sooner had the Gibeonites made their peace with Joshua, than the rage of the enemy was

stirred against them. Thus it is in the experience of a saved sinner. If he be truly converted—gives Christ His rightful place in his heart and life, making a thorough break from the world—it is not long before he discovers that, so far from his former companions congratulating him, or being ready to emulate him, they now turn against him and become antagonistic, persecuting him in some form or other, seeking to bring about his downfall rather than encourage him.

But we must take a yet closer look at those who *opposed* the Gibeonites. Five kings of the Amorites combined together to destroy them: they were not only fellow Canaanites, but close neighbours. Thus, we regard them as something more than a figure of the Christian's foes in general, namely as pointing more definitely to those whom, at first, he does not suspect of being inimical to him. When a young convert has broken from the ungodly, he is more or less prepared for the enmity of the profane world, but not so of the professing world: rather does he expect that those who bear the name of Christ will be his friends. Alas, he has to discover (in principle at least, and often literally) that "a man's enemies are the men of his own house" (Mic 7:6)—quoted by our Saviour in Matthew 10:36. This is yet another lesson that the Christian has to learn in connection with his spiritual warfare, and a particularly painful one it is. But sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master, for we are told of our Lord that "neither did his brethren believe in him" (Joh 7:5), and that His kinsmen regarded Him as crazy, saying, "He is beside himself" (Mar 3:21); while it was one of His apostles who betrayed Him.

What has just been pointed out was clearly adumbrated by those who assailed the Gibeonites. First, as already remarked, they were near neighbours, fellow Canaanites. Second, they dwelt in the *mountains* (Jos 10:6), and it is ever to be borne in mind that there are no meaningless details in God's Word. To inform us that these kings resided in the mountains is only another way of saying that they occupied high ground, that theirs was an elevated position. Sad to say, it is often those who hold a similar place in the religious realm who are the least friendly toward the Lord's little ones. Desiring to have the pre-eminence, they are merciless unto any who refuse to be subject to them—as the Sanhedrin hounded Christ to death and forbade His ambassadors to preach in His name. The mountains are also a symbol of *pride* (Isa 40:4) with which every Diotrefes is filled (3Jo :9). Third, the same feature appears again in the high-sounding names of these kings (Jos 10:3), for Adonizedek, the prime mover, means "lord of righteousness"; Hoham, "Jah (God) protects"; Piram, "wild" or "fierce"; Japhia, "high" or "elevated"; Debir, "speaker"—suitable cognomens¹ for pretentious professors!

Adonizedek, the king of Jerusalem, sent a message unto the four kings saying: "Come up unto me, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon" (Jos 10:4). Very soon after the Gibeonites had entered into their friendly league with Israel, they found the most powerful forces of southern Canaan arrayed against them. They had done them no wrong, but rather had shown their fellows the wisest and best course to adopt. Yet this was the very thing which the arch-conspirator most dreaded (verses 1-2). Incidentally, we may note how, at that early date, Jerusalem exerted more or less of a dominating influence in the land of Palestine, for not only was it its king who took the lead in this movement, but his city was to be the gathering centre for the others. Yet apparently, he had not sufficient confidence in his own forces to act alone, so sought the co-operation of four of his fellows. Had it been merely a matter of coming to *his* aid, it is to be doubted whether they would have responded, for they were more or less rivals. Human nature and tribal bigotry being the same then as now, it would be *self-interest* which moved them to accede; and since Gibeon was "as one of the royal cities" (verse 2), they coveted a share of its spoils.

But let us observe next, *the ground* of Adonizedek's appeal unto his fellows: "For it [Gibeon] hath made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel" (Jos 10:4). That which so incensed him was their union with the people of God. It is to be duly noted that this is the third time their "making peace" is mentioned (Jos 9:15; 10:1), and the setting in which the phrase occurs leaves us in no doubt as to its precise import. It connotes a change of relationship and the complete reversal of the old order of life. Spiritually speaking, it is our response to the Gospel call, "Be ye reconciled to God" (2Co 5:20)—cease your enmity against Him. The very expression occurs in "Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may *make peace with me*" (Isa 27:5). It is a complete surrendering of ourselves unto God. It is identical with conversion, which is a thorough right-about-face. Genuine repentance is always accompanied by reformation of conduct. The wicked must abandon his course of self-will and self-pleasing and "return unto the LORD" (from whom he departed in Adam's apostasy) if his sins are to be pardoned (Isa 55:7, and compare Pro 28:13).

¹ *cognomens* - a name, especially a descriptive nickname.

The Scriptures are full of what is deliberately and fatally omitted from the false “evangelism” of our day, which blatantly announces that nothing is required from the sinner except faith in Christ. But an impenitent heart cannot savingly believe, nor is there any forgiveness for those who are determined to continue in a course of carnality and worldliness. “Now therefore put away...the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel” (Jos 24:23)—idols must be abandoned before He can be loved and served. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted” (Act 3:19) is the divine demand. Observe well what immediately follows: “*That* your sins may be blotted out.” The same order occurs again in Mark 4:12: “Lest at any time they should [1] be converted, and [2] their sins should be forgiven them.” That is the order of *human responsibility*. “We...preach unto you that ye should [1] turn from these vanities [2] unto the living God” (Act 14:15). Again, Paul declared that his business was to turn men “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Act 26:18); and note well that *precedes* “that they may receive forgiveness of sins.” Likewise must a Christian “cast off the works of darkness” ere he can “put on the armour of light” (Rom 13:12).

“Therefore the five kings of the Amorites...gathered themselves together, and went up, they and all their hosts, and encamped before Gibeon, and made war against it” (Jos 10:5). That is set over against the “made peace” of the preceding verse, teaching us clearly that to make our peace with God signifies to cease fighting against Him. It also shows that, when we do so, those who are opposed to Him will turn against us; and that, no matter how circumspectly we conduct ourselves. It is the desire of a Christian to live amicably with all men, but he soon has cause to say with the Psalmist, “I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war” (Psa 120:7). The enemies of the LORD will not leave alone those who wear His yoke and are joined to His people. In uniting with Israel, the Gibeonites had alienated themselves from their heathen neighbours. The four kings offered no objection to Adonizedek’s plan, but willingly made common cause in seeking the destruction of their fellows. What a sidelight that casts upon the character of the Canaanites! How it serves to demonstrate their fitness to be the objects of JEHOVAH’s judgment! It is also to be noted that all of these five kings were Amorites, and these were the ancient enemies of God’s people (Num 21:21-23).

In those days, it was not the custom of an invading army to make an immediate attack upon a city, but rather to surround it and weaken its inhabitants by a process of starvation—cutting them off from all further supplies from without. Ancient cities were surrounded by high and thick walls and protected by powerful gates; and to make a direct assault at first would prove a costly undertaking. Accordingly, we read that the hosts of these kings “encamped before Gibeon” (Jos 10:5). They were evidently quite sure of themselves and had no doubt of success. Probably, they thought it unlikely that Joshua would go to the trouble of honouring his league with the Gibeonites; and, in any case, that the camp of Israel was too far distant for their fighting men to come up to the relief of the besieged city; and therefore, that the task would prove a simple one. But like many others before and since, they were to prove that “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong” (Ecc 9:11). Like Pharaoh of old, these kings had left the LORD out of their reckoning! And they, too, discovered that nothing more surely provokes Him against evil-doers and hastens their destruction than for them to make war against those who have entered into a covenant with Him.

But why should God permit this unprovoked attack? Why did He suffer the Gibeonites to be so menaced? Since they had made their peace with Him, why did He not cause the rest of the Canaanites to be at peace with them? For a variety of reasons. First, to impress upon them their *own origin*. They too were “clay, of the same lump” (Rom 9:21); and in the evil conduct of their invading fellows, they had a solemn reminder of what *they* were by nature. By this painful method, the LORD was saying to them, “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh...having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:11-12). It was naught but sovereign grace which made them differ from those who sought to slay them. It is a salutary exercise of heart for us to heed that divine injunction, “Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged” (Isa 51:1). Such a look will remove pride from us; such a realization will keep us in our proper place—in the dust before God. The Gibeonites belonged to the same accursed race as these five kings; and it was only God’s distinguishing mercy which prevented them from sharing their doom. Seek to remember that, Christian reader, when you are being persecuted by the world, and ask yourself *Who* it is that has delivered you from being among the persecutors!

Many other answers may be returned to our question as to why God permitted the Gibeonites to face such a situation. It was to *test their faith* and make it evident unto them whether or not they now regretted the radical step they had recently taken. Would they tell themselves what fools they had been to antagonize

their former companions, or were they prepared to endure afflictions for the LORD's sake? Those who heed Christ's exhortation to first sit down and "counteth the cost" (Luk 14:28) before enlisting under His banner will *not* think it "strange" when "the fiery trial" comes upon them (1Pe 4:12). Again, it was to make them realize that they were living in a hostile world, "as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Mat 10:16). Sooner or later, each believer is made to prove that unwelcome fact. "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" (1Jo 3:13). It *did* your Master, and the more faithful you be to Him, the more fellowship will you have with His sufferings. Again, this trial was designed to cast them back the more upon the LORD: to wean them from any hankering they had to maintain communion with those who were strangers to Him. Finally, it afforded an opportunity to prove God's sufficiency: His compassion, fidelity, and power.

And *how* did the Gibeonites react to the peril threatening them? They did not repudiate their alliance with Israel and apologize to Adonizedek for what he would regard as their perfidy. They did not put their trust in the strength of the city's walls; nor did they, on the other hand, regard their predicament as hopeless, and despairingly await their end. Instead, "the men of Gibeon sent unto Joshua to the camp to Gilgal, saying, Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us: for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us" (Jos 10:6). Either they had advance tidings of the impending attack, and in order to save time, dispatched messengers unto Joshua; or the cordon which their enemies had thrown around the city was not so complete as to prevent some of their number issuing forth on their mission. Very blessed is it to behold their conduct on this occasion. They appealed to the one who had recently shown them mercy and spared their lives. They had full confidence in him, neither questioning his willingness to come to their aid, nor doubting his ability to rescue them.

In appealing to Joshua for help, they disavowed their self-sufficiency. So far from proudly entertaining the idea that they were capable themselves of repulsing the enemy, they looked to Joshua for deliverance. Though by nature all the men of Gibeon were "mighty" (Jos 10:2), they relied not on their own skill and valour, but humbled themselves by applying elsewhere for assistance. Note this well, dear reader, if you would be victorious in the fight of faith. Recognize that the forces confronting you are far too formidable for your own wisdom and might. Take the place of dependence and look to the antitypical Joshua. It is in conscious weakness that our strength lies (2Co 12:10). There is no other way of becoming "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph 6:10) than by utterly discounting our own fancied competency. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (Isa 40:29). On the other hand, woe is denounced on those who "trust in chariots" (Isa 31:1). Trust in the LORD, and thou shalt not be confounded (Psa 22:5).



THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

2. *Its Origin, Part 4*

In the preceding article, we called attention to the exceeding brevity of the narrative of Genesis 3 and the need for us to weigh carefully every word in its opening verses and ponder the implication of each clause. We pointed out that not a little is contained “between the lines”; and therefore that, while we must refrain from reading into it what is *not* there, we must be careful not to overlook anything of importance which *is* there, either explicit or implicit—by definite statement or necessary inference. We also gave our reasons for believing that Eve was away from the side of her husband, and that it was because she had entered dangerous ground by approaching so closely unto the fatal tree that she was there confronted by the serpent and subjected to temptation. Further, we intimated that the sentence passed upon the serpent by the LORD in verse 14 warrants us to conclude that before he seduced the woman, he stood erect, and that his form and appearance at that time were very different from the present repulsiveness of that reptile. We also made reference to the opinion of many reputable writers that there seems reason to think that Eve beheld the serpent himself eating of the forbidden fruit, that such a spectacle evoked from her an ejaculation of surprise, and that this alone accounts for the abruptness of his opening statement.

“And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Gen 3:1). As Matthew Henry (1662–1714) pertinently pointed out, “Satan tempted Eve that, by her, he might tempt Adam; so he tempted Job by his wife, and Christ by Peter. It is his policy to send temptations by unsuspected hands, and theirs that have most interest in us and influence over us.” Eve’s suspicions ought at once to have been aroused when the serpent introduced such a subject for conversation, and she should have turned away immediately from him. “Those that would keep from harm, must keep out of harm’s way”—M. Henry. Or, as one infinitely greater than any human commentator bids us, “Go *from* the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge” (Pro 14:7). And again, “Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge” (Pro 19:27) The serpent’s opening word was designed to produce in Eve a spirit of discontent. It was really a sly insinuation which amounted to this: If you cannot eat of all the trees, you might as well eat of none—as Ahab, with all his royal possessions, was dissatisfied while he denied Naboth’s vineyard; and Haman, though he had found favour with the king, petulantly exclaimed, “All this availeth me nothing” (Est 5:13), so long as Mordecai refused to pay him deference.

If Eve was not already secretly desiring the forbidden fruit, would she have paid any attention to the cunning query made to her? We very much doubt it. Still less can we conceive of her entering into a discussion with the serpent on the subject. Dalliance with temptation always implies a lusting after the object presented. Had she been content with God’s grant in Genesis 2:16, and were she satisfied with the knowledge He had given her by creation, she would have *abhorred* the false knowledge proposed by the tempter; and that would have precluded all parleying with him! That is more than a supposition of ours, for it is obviously confirmed by what follows. Compare her conduct with Christ’s, and observe how very differently He acted! He steadfastly refused to enter into any debate with the devil. He did not dally with temptation, for He had no desire for anything but the will of God. Each time He firmly repulsed the enemy’s advances by taking His stand upon God’s Word—as Eve ought to have done—and concluded by thrusting away Satan’s solicitation with the utmost detestation. A greater contrast cannot be imagined: the woman’s Seed met Satan’s temptation with holy loathing; the woman was in a condition to respond to the serpent’s wiles with unholy delight.

“And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die” (Gen 3:2-3). Instead of fleeing in dread from the serpent, Eve conferred with him, which, as the outcome showed, was both foolish and fatal. Satan is much wiser than we are, and if we attempt to meet him on his own ground and argue with him, the result will be disastrous. His evil influence had already begun to affect Eve injuriously, as appears from a close examination of the first part of her reply. The LORD had said, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest *freely* eat” (Gen 2:16); and Eve’s omission of that word “freely” was both significant and ominous—indicating that the generosity of the divine grant was not influencing her heart as it should. But on the other hand, we do not agree with those who charge her with *adding* to God’s Word in Genesis 3:3, for while the “neither shall ye touch it” was not dis-

tinctly expressed in Genesis 2:17, nevertheless, it was clearly and necessarily implied: how could she eat of the fruit *without* “touching” it?—the one act requires the other.

There is a very important principle involved in what has just been pointed out: one which it behoves us to understand clearly and make conscience of. That principle may be stated thus: when God forbids any act, He, at the same time, forbids everything tending thereto and leading up to it. Our Lord made that very plain in His sermon on the Mount, as He enforced the spirituality and strictness of the Law when repudiating the errors of the rabbis, who were guilty of modifying its holy requirements. He insisted that “thou shalt not kill” (Exo 20:13) is by no means to be restricted unto the bare act of murder: that it also prohibits every evil exercise of the mind and heart preceding it—such as hatred, ill-will, and malice. In like manner, He declared that “thou shalt not commit adultery” (verse 14) included very much more than interdicting unlawful intercourse between the sexes, even impure imaginations and desires. That commandment is broken as soon as there is an unchaste lusting or even looking. God demands very much more than merely keeping clean the outside of the cup and platter (Mat 23:25-26). So too “thou shalt not steal” (Exo 20:15) includes not even *thinking* of so doing, nor handling what is not yours—still less borrowing anything when you have no intention of returning it.

Eve, then, was quite right in concluding that the divine commandment forbidding them to *eat* of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil comprehended “neither shall ye touch it,” for the act of eating involves not only the desire and intention so to do, but the touching, handling, plucking, and placing of the fruit in the mouth. But we are not so sure about the exact force of her words, “lest ye die.” Many have supposed she was there toning down the LORD’s “thou shalt *surely* die” of Genesis 2:17. They may be right, but we are not at all sure. “Kiss the Son, *lest* he be angry” (Psa 2:12) is obviously not the language of uncertainty. The Hebrew for “lest” here is *pen* and, in Genesis 24:6, is rendered “that...not.” If the reader will compare John 3:20, 12:42, and 1 Corinthians 1:17, he will see that the force of “lest” in these passages is “otherwise.” John Gill (1697-1771) also states that Eve’s employment of the “lest” is “not at all conclusive that she expressed any doubt, since the word may also be used of the event of anything as in Psalm 2:12, and hence may be rendered, “that ye die not.” We therefore prefer to leave it as “an open question.”

“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die” (Gen 3:4). Perceiving his advantage that he had now gained Eve’s ear, the tempter grew bolder and flatly contradicted the divine threatening. He began by seeking to instill a doubt—Is it so or not?—by casting a reflection upon the divine goodness and making Eve dissatisfied with God’s most liberal grant; and then he denied that there was any danger in eating of the fruit. First he had, by implication, slandered God’s character; and now he told a downright lie. If, as we believe was the case, he had himself eaten of the forbidden tree in the woman’s presence, then his action would lend colour to his falsehood. It was as though he said, You need not hesitate, God is only seeking to frighten you. You can see for yourself the fruit is quite harmless, for I have partaken of it without suffering any ill effects. Thus does the great enemy of souls seek to persuade man that he may defy God with impunity, inducing him when “he heareth the words of this curse” to “bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst” (Deu 29:19).

No excuse can be made for Eve now. If she had acted foolishly in approaching so near to the fatal tree, if her suspicions were not at once aroused by the serpent’s opening remark, she certainly ought to have been deeply horrified, and turned away immediately, when she heard him giving the lie to the LORD her God. If Joseph “fled” from his temptress (Gen 39:12), much more reason had Eve now to run from the serpent with loathing. Instead, she remained to hear him add, “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). Therein he declared that not only would no harm be suffered, but they would be the gainers by heeding his suggestion and doing as he had done. A threefold promise or inducement was set before the woman. First, that by eating of this fruit, their capacity of discernment and perception would be considerably increased, for that is the force of “your eyes shall be opened”—those of their bodies were so already, therefore, his reference must be to the eyes of their understanding. Second, their position would be improved and their power enlarged: they should be as “gods” or angels. Third, their wisdom would be much augmented: “knowing good and evil,” as though that were most desirable, and all of this *at once*—“then,” without any delay.

It will be observed from the above that the serpent addressed himself not to Eve’s bodily appetites, but to the noblest part of her being, by the inducement of such an increase of wisdom as would elevate our first parents above their then condition and fit them to be meet companions for the celestial creatures. Therein

lay the force of his temptation: seeking to fan a desire for forbidden knowledge and self-sufficiency—to act independently of God. From then until now, Satan’s object has been to divert men from the only Source of wisdom and cause them to seek it from him. Nevertheless, the bait dangled before Eve in nowise hid the barb he was using to catch her. Taking together the whole of his statement in verses 4 and 5, the serpent not only charged God with making a threat which He had no intention of fulfilling, but also accused Him of being tyrannical in withholding from them what He knew would be for their good. Said he, You need have no fear that God will be as severe and rigorous as His language sounded. He is only seeking to intimidate you. He is well aware that if you eat this fruit, your knowledge will be greatly enlarged; but this He is unwilling should be your portion, and therefore, He is seeking to prevent it by this unreasonable prohibition.

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat” (Gen 3:6). Ere examining the details of this tragic verse, let us carefully consider two questions, and endeavour to supply answers thereto. First, why did not the divine threat in Genesis 2:17 deter Eve from disobeying God? David declared, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart [to be awed thereby, to put it into practice], that I might not sin against thee” (Psa 119:11). It is clear from Genesis 3:3 that God’s Word was at least in Eve’s thoughts when the serpent accosted her: then how was it that it did not preserve her from sin? Surely the answer is that she did not make use of it, but instead dallied with temptation, parleyed with God’s enemy, and believed his lie; and therein is to be found a most solemn warning for us. If we would have God deliver us from the destroyer, then we must determine to shun every occasion of evil and, as Joseph, flee from temptation when it is presented to us. If we really take to heart the solemn failure and fall of Eve, then we shall pray with ever-increasing earnestness, “Lead [me] not into temptation,” and if Thou art pleased for me to be tested, “deliver [me] from evil” (Mat 6:13; Luk 11:4).

Second, in 2 Corinthians 11:3, we are informed that “the serpent beguiled [or ‘cheated’] Eve through his subtily”; and in 1 Timothy 2:14, that she was “deceived.” How then are we to explain what is recorded of her in Genesis 3, where the historical account seems to make it very plain that she committed the act after due deliberation, with her eyes wide open? Wherein was she “deceived” if she knowingly disobeyed God? The answer is that, as soon as she ceased to be regulated by the light of God’s Word, her imagination became filled with the false impressions presented to her by Satan, and her foolish mind became darkened. Unholy lustings were begotten within her. Her affections and appetites overrode her judgment, and she was persuaded to disbelieve what was true and believe what was false. Oh, the “deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13), which calls good evil and bitter sweet. She was beguiled by consenting to listen to another voice than God’s, and because she disregarded her allegiance to her husband. Oh, my reader, the prelude to every fall from grace is the alienation of the heart from Christ (the Christian’s spiritual Husband), with the consequent beclouding of the judgment. When the truth be rejected, error is welcome. Satan, in his efforts to induce souls to seek their happiness in departing from God, ever adapts his temptations to the cases and circumstances of the tempted.

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food,” and that it was “pleasant to the eyes.” Let it be duly considered at *what point* this statement comes in the narrative: not at the commencement, but after all that is recorded in the preceding verses had transpired! Let us also observe the *order* of those two clauses. We would naturally expect to find it said that Eve saw the tree was “pleasant to the eyes” *before* mention being made that it was “good for food.” Why then are the two things reversed? Does not the raising of these queries the better enable us to understand exactly what is meant by “*when* the woman *saw* that the tree was good for food”? The time-mark must not be ignored, for it cannot be without significance. We suggest that it looks back to the foregoing action of the serpent, which we believe to be clearly implied in the context, namely her seeing him personally eat of the forbidden fruit. How else could she perceive the tree was “good for food” before she had herself partaken of it? Does not the third clause of the verse confirm and clinch this interpretation, for how else could Eve possibly know the fruit was “to be desired to *make one wise*,” unless she had previously witnessed what appeared to her to be an ocular demonstration of the same?

Is it not evident, then, that the words, “And when the woman saw that the tree *was good* for food” signify that since she had beheld the serpent eating thereof without dying or even suffering any injury, she need have no fear to emulate him; yea, could infer that it was from his so doing that he had acquired the faculty of reason and the power of speech, and she too would be much advantaged by partaking of the same? Instead of acting faith on the Word of God, she walked by sight, only to discover—as her sons and

daughters often do—that *appearances* are very deceptive. Moreover, she saw “that it was pleasant to the eyes”: there was nothing in the outward appearance of the fruit to denote that it was unfit for eating; on the contrary, it looked attractive. In Genesis 2:9, we read that “out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food”; and, as the remainder of that verse shows, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was no exception. All creation was beautiful and agreeable to the senses, but by her yielding to the serpent’s temptation, *that* tree was now particularly appealing unto Eve: she had a secret hankering after it and unlawfully coveted the same.

Had there been any uncertainty in her mind, her course was plain—to consult her husband, which is ever the wife’s duty and privilege. Instead, we are told that she saw the tree was “to be desired to make one wise.” That is to say, she judged it entirely by what the serpent had told her—and not by what God had said—as a reference to the preceding verse shows. She was flattered with the false hope which the enemy had held out to her. She first gave credence to his “ye shall not surely die.” Next, she was attracted by the prospect of becoming like the “gods” or angels. And then, on her believing the promise of augmented knowledge, lustful longing consumed her. The Hebrew word for “desired” in Genesis 3:6 is the one that is rendered, “Thou shalt not *covet*” in Exodus 20:17. It is the same thing as is termed “concupiscence” in Romans 7:8, and “lust” in James 1:15. Indeed, we may see how that latter passage traces for us in detail the course of Eve’s downfall, and how, in turn, her conduct solemnly illustrates James 1:14-15—“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away [from the path of rectitude] of his own lust [as Eve evidently was in approaching the forbidden tree], and enticed [as she was by the serpent]. Then when lust hath conceived [in her by the seductive promises of the serpent], it bringeth forth sin [externally]: and sin, when it is finished [i.e. the outward act is completed], bringeth forth death”!

“God’s commandment in its full form was Thou shalt not lust after, but abhor the knowledge of good and evil; thou shalt not choose, but refuse it. The prohibition in the instance of the Eden statute, as in that of the Ten Commandments, involved both the inward desire and the outward act, both inclination and volition”—William Shedd (1820–1894). Note well that the holiness of Christ is described as a *refusing* of the evil and choosing the good (Isa 7:15). He who *desires* the prohibited evil does in effect *choose* it; as he who hates another violates the sixth commandment, though he does not actually slay him. The fruit was *not* to be “desired” by Eve, for God had forbidden her to eat it. Instead of desiring, she should have *dreaded* it, but she turned from God as her everlasting portion and chief end. In lusting after what God had prohibited, she preferred the creature to the Creator. Unspeakably solemn warning for us. If we estimate things by our senses, or by what others say of them, instead of accepting God’s valuation, we are certain to err in our judgment. If we resort to carnal reasoning, we shall quickly persuade ourselves that wrong is right. Nothing is *good* for you, my reader, save that which you can receive from *God’s* hand and thank Him for it!

“She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat” without consulting Adam. So strong was the unlawful lusting of her heart that she could no longer abstain; and thus, she committed the overt act, thereby completing “the transgression.” Yes, “*she* took of the fruit thereof, and did eat”—it was not the serpent who put it into her mouth! The devil may tempt, but *force* anyone he cannot. It was by her own free act she took of the fruit, and therefore, she could rightly blame none but herself. By this time, Adam had rejoined her, for we are told that she “gave also unto her husband *with her*”—the first time he is mentioned in the sacred narrative as being by her side! Such is the vile nature of sin: ourselves yielding to temptation, and then becoming the tempters of others—seeking to drag them down to our level. “And he did eat,” instead of refusing what his God-defying wife proffered him. He “was not deceived” (1Ti 2:14), which, if possible, made his guilt the greater. He “hearkened unto the voice of [his] wife” (Gen 3:17): probably, she repeated to him what the serpent had said unto her, commending the fruit, and possibly pointing out that they must have misunderstood the LORD’s words, since she had eaten and was still alive.

Thus did man apostatize from God. It was a revolt from his Maker, an insurrection from His supremacy, a rebelling against His authority. He deliberately resisted the divine will, rejected God’s Word, and deserted His way. Thereby, he was despoiled of his primitive excellence and forfeited all his happiness. Adam cast himself and all his posterity into the deepest gulf of woe and wretchedness. Such, my reader, was *the origin* of human depravity. Genesis 3 gives us the divinely inspired account of how sin entered this world, and supplies the only adequate and satisfactory explanation both of its six thousand years’ history and of its present-day condition.



PRIVATE JUDGMENT

Part I

It is our present design to treat of the right, the necessity, and the duty of each person freely to exercise his reason, conscience, and will—especially in matters pertaining to his soul. Every man has the right to think for himself and express or aver his thoughts on political, moral, and spiritual matters, without being subject to any civil or ecclesiastical penalty or inconvenience on that account. Conversely, no man is entitled to force his ideas upon others and demand that they subscribe thereto, still less to propagate them to the disturbing of the public peace. This is a truth which needs proclaiming and insisting upon today, not only because of the widespread apathy towards taking a firm stand for the same, but because the dearly bought liberties, which have, for so many years, been enjoyed by those living in the English-speaking world [and] are now in danger of being filched from them. On the one hand is the steady growth of what is termed, “Totalitarianism,” under which the minds and bodies of its subjects are little more than robots; and on the other hand is the rapidly increasing power and arrogance of Rome, in which the souls of its members are the slaves of a rigid and merciless tyranny.

In writing upon the freedom of the individual, it is our design to shun as far as possible anything which savours of *party* politics; yet, since the scope of our present theme requires us to say at least a few words on the right of *civil* liberty, we cannot entirely avoid that which pertains to human governments. But instead of airing our personal views, we shall treat only of those broad and general principles which are applicable to all nations and all ages, and restrict ourselves very largely to what the Holy Scriptures teach thereon. God has not left His people, or even men at large, without definite instruction concerning their civil and spiritual duties and privileges; and it behoves each of us to be informed and regulated thereby. Broadly speaking, the purpose of the State is to promote the welfare of the commonwealth, and to protect each individual in the enjoyment of his temporal rights; but it is entirely *outside* its province to prescribe the religion of its subjects. Rulers, be they civil or ecclesiastical, have only a delegated power, and are the agents and servants of the community, who entrust to them so much power as is necessary to the discharge of their office and duty.

No human government is perfect, and it may appear to us that a particular form of government is acting unwisely in its legislation and arbitrarily in its administration. The question therefore arises, How should a Christian citizen act under a particularly *offensive* one? First, the Word of God requires from him full submission and obedience to all those of its enactments which are not in themselves *sinful*: and that not because the government is one of his choice or because its policy meets with his approval, but because God Himself has ordered, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God...Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God” (Rom 13:1-2). Whatever be the particular *form* of government, it is of divine ordering, and His providence has placed us under it. This is also evident from both the teaching and personal example of Christ, who bids us, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s” (Mat 22:21). But second, if the government should demand of me compliance with anything which is contrary to the revealed will of God, then it is my bounden duty to *refuse* obedience; yet in such a case, God requires me to submit meekly to any penalty imposed upon me for my declining to comply.

That a child of God *must* refuse to do the bidding of a government when it enjoins something contrary to the divine will is clear from the cases of the three Hebrews (Dan 3:18), and of Daniel in Babylon (verses 10-13), who firmly declined to conform unto the king’s idolatrous demands. It is equally evident from the case of the apostles, who, when they were commanded by the authorities “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus,” answered, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye” (Act 4:18-19, and compare 5:29). Yet note well that, while insisting upon their spiritual rights, in neither case did any of them defend themselves or their cause by resorting to violence against the chief magistrate. Let it be steadily borne in mind that an incompetent or an unjust government is better than none, for the only other alternative is anarchy and a reign of terror, as history clearly and tragically testifies—witness the horrors perpetrated in Paris, when its streets literally ran with blood at the great French Revolution; and the awful carnage and sufferings which more recently obtained in Russia when the regime of the Czars was overthrown. “For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing” (1Pe 3:17).

A further question needs considering at this point: *Who* is to be the judge of *which* decrees of a government are *sinful*? Obviously, in the last resort, [it is] the citizen himself. That is the scriptural and Protestant doctrine of the right of private judgment: to test what the law of the land requires by the divine Law. God's authoritative Word forbids me doing anything which He has prohibited, or which is morally wrong. If any form of government insists upon being the absolute judge of its own case, then there is an end of personal independence and freedom. Every rational being lies under moral obligations to God—obligations which are immediate and inevitable. No government, and no human creature, can answer for him before God in a case of conscience, or come between him and his guilt; and therefore, it is the most monstrous injustice and iniquity that any power, save the divine, should dictate to the conscience. It may be said that this is a dangerous doctrine that it is likely to lead to disorder and insurrection. Not so where the *two* parts of it be maintained: the right to refuse *only* when something is demanded which God's Word forbids, and the duty of meekly submitting to the penalty thereof—the latter will check a misuse of the former.

Under no conceivable circumstances should any man relinquish the right to think and decide for himself. His reason, will, and conscience are divine gifts, and God holds him responsible for the right use of them, and will condemn him if he buries his talents in the earth. But as it is with so many other of His favours, this one is not valued at its true worth and soon may not be prized at all, unless it be entirely removed and there be a return to the bondage of the "dark ages." A considerable majority of the present generation are largely, if not wholly, unaware—so ignorant are they of history—that for centuries, even in Britain, civil liberty and the right of private judgment upon spiritual things were denied the masses by both State and Church, politicians and prelates alike lording it over the people. Nor was their tyrannical dominion easily or quickly broken: only after much suffering and a protracted fight was full freedom secured. Alas, that such a dearly bought and hard-won privilege should now be regarded so lightly and be in real danger of being lost again. Nearly two hundred years ago, Augustus Toplady (1740-1778) pointed out, "Despotism has ever proved an insatiable gulf. Throw ever so much into it, it would still yearn for more." Significantly did he add, "Were liberty to perish from any part of the English-speaking world, the whole would soon be deluged by the black sea of arbitrary power."

But we must now turn to that part of our subject which more especially concerns the child of God and his *spiritual* interests. There were three basic truths which the battle of the Reformation recovered for Christendom: the sufficiency and supremacy of the Scriptures, the right of private judgment, and justification by faith without the deeds of the Law. Each of those was flatly denied by the Papacy, which taught, and still insists, that human "traditions" are of equal authority with God's Word, that the Romish church alone is qualified to explain the Bible or interpret its contents, and that human merits are necessary in order to our acceptance with God. Having treated at some length, in recent articles, with the first, we are now considering the second. Rightly did Martin Luther (1483-1546) affirm that man is responsible to none but God for his religious views and beliefs, that no earthly power has any right to interfere in the sacred concerns of the soul—to be lord of his conscience, or to have dominion over his faith. But while the Reformers contended vigorously for the right and privilege of each individual to read the Scriptures for himself, and, under the illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to form his own opinions of what they teach, yet considerable *qualification* was made in the application and outworking of that principle in actual practice. So it was too in the century that followed, commonly termed "the Puritan period."

The early Reformers and many of the Puritans were for one uniform mode of worship and one form of temporal government, with which all *must* comply outwardly, whatever their individual convictions and sentiments. However desirable such a common regime might appear, to *demand* subjection thereunto was not only contrary to the very essence and spirit of Christianity, but also at direct variance with the right of private judgment. No man should ever be *compelled*—either by reward or punishment—to be a member of any Christian society, or to continue in or of it any longer than he considers it is his duty to do so. Any attempt to *enforce* uniformity is an attack upon the right of private judgment, and is to invade the office of Christ, who alone is the Head of His people. But alas, how few are fit to be entrusted with any measure of authority. When Anglicanism was supreme, at the close of the sixteenth century, anyone who failed to attend the parish church was subject to a fine! In the next century, when the Presbyterians held the reins, they proved to be equally intolerant to those who differed from them.

"Each party agreed too well in asserting the necessity for uniformity in public worship, and of using the sword of the magistrate for the support and defence of their principles, of which both made an ill use whenever they could grasp the power into their own hands. The *standard* of uniformity according to the

Bishops was the Queen's supremacy and the laws of the land; according to the Puritans, the decrees of provincial and national synods, allowed and enforced by the civil magistrate; but neither party was for admitting that liberty of conscience, which is every man's right, so far as is consistent with the peace of the civil government"—Daniel Niel (1678-1743), *History of the Puritans*, volume 2 (page 92). Well did that faithful and impartial historian point out, "Christ is the sole lawgiver of His Church, and has appointed all things necessary to be observed in it to the end of the world; therefore, when He has indulged a liberty to His followers, it is as much their duty to maintain it, as to observe any other of His precepts." Differences of opinion, especially in "church government," soon led to further divisions and the formation of parties and sects; and in many instances, Protestants were as dictatorial and tyrannical as the Papists had been, demanding unqualified submission to *their* articles of faith and forms of worship. Only after bitter persecution and much hardship did real religious liberty gradually emerge, and never yet has it fully and universally obtained in Protestantism.

No doubt it would be interesting to many of our readers were we to trace the gradual emergence of religious freedom from bondage in Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Britain, and the U.S.A., and the various and often unexpected set-backs experienced; but even a bare outline of its history would be too lengthy a digression. Nor is it hardly necessary. Human nature is the same in all lands, and in all ages, and those possessing a workable knowledge of the same in themselves and their fellows can easily visualize with their minds the *nature* of those events. Most of us, if we are honest, must acknowledge that there is quite a bit of the pontiff in us, and therefore, we should not be surprised to learn that there have been many popish men in most sections of Christendom, and that a spirit of intolerance and uncharitableness has often marred the characters of real Christians. It has been comparatively rare for those of prominence to insist that "Every species of positive penalty for differing modes of faith and worship is at once anti-Christian, and impolitic, irrational, and unjust. While any religious denomination of men deport themselves as dutiful subjects to the State, and as harmless members of the community, they are entitled to civil protection and social esteem, whether they be Protestants, Papists, Jews, Mohammedans, or Pagans"—A. Toplady. *That*, and nothing short of that, is a true Christian and Catholic spirit.

"Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read" (Isa 34:16), for in it alone is His will made known, the divine way of salvation revealed, and a perfect rule and standard of conduct set before us. That Book is a divine communication, an authoritative, "Thus saith the LORD." It is addressed to the entire human race, and is binding on every member of it. By it, each of us will be judged in the Day to come. It is therefore both the duty and privilege of every person to read it for himself, that he familiarize himself with its contents, perceive their meaning, and conform his conduct to its requirements. It is to be read reverently, for it is the voice of the Most High which speaks therein. It is to be read impartially, setting aside personal prejudices and preconceived ideas, receiving it without doubting or question. It is to be read humbly, begging its Author to enlighten the understanding, and teach His way. It is to be read constantly, daily, so that we may drink into its spirit and make it our counsellor. It is not only to be read, but also "seek ye out of the book": take the trouble to compare one part with another, and thereby obtain its full light on each particular subject and detail. By such pains, it will be found that the Holy Scriptures are self-interpreting.

In a matter so momentous as my obtaining a correct understanding of God's will for me; and where the eternal interests of my soul are concerned, it deeply concerns me to obtain *first-hand* information of the same; and not to accept blindly what others say and do, or receive without question what any church teaches. I must rigidly examine and test by God's Word all that I hear and read. "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom 14:12). Religion is an intensely personal thing which cannot be transacted by proxy. It consists of immediate dealings between the individual soul and its Maker. No one can repent for me, believe for me, love God for me, or render obedience to His precepts on my behalf. Those are personal acts which God holds me responsible to perform. Every man is responsible for his beliefs. Neither ignorance, nor error, is merely a misfortune, but something highly culpable, since the truth is available unto us in our mother tongue. If some be deceived by false prophets, the blame rests wholly on themselves. Many complain that there is so much difference and contrariety among preachers, they scarcely know what to believe, or what to do. Let them do as God has bidden: "Seek ye out of the book of the LORD" (Isa 34:16)!

God has given me that precious Book for the very purpose of making known to me what I am to believe and do; and if I read and search it with a sincere desire to understand its meaning and be regulated by its precepts, I shall not be left in the dark. If I so act, there will be an end to my perplexity because of the

“confusion of tongues” in the religious world—for there are not contradictions, no contrarities in God’s Word. He holds me responsible to *test* everything preachers say: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:20). That Word is the sole standard of faith and practice, the “sure word of prophecy” to which we do well to give heed as unto a light shining in a dark place (2Pe 1:19). Faith rests not upon the testimony of any man, nor is it subject to any man. It rests on the Word of God, and it is amenable to Him alone. “He that builds his faith upon preachers, though they preach nothing but the truth, and he pretends to believe it, hath indeed no faith at all, but a wavering opinion, built upon a rotten foundation”—John Owen (1616-1683). Then “cease ye from man...for wherein is *he* to be accounted of?” (Isa 2:22), and “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Pro 3:5).

