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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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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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A GOOD CONSCIENCE

Not a little is said in the Bible about the conscience, even where it is not called by that particular name. In many places, the “heart” (1Jo 3:20, etc.), the “spirit” (Rom 8:16; 1Co 2:11), the “reins” (Psa 16:7), the “candle of the Lord” (Pro 20:27), and the “eye” (Luk 11:34-36) all signify the conscience. This inward monitor is one of the two eyes of the soul, the other one being the reason. Conscience is that faculty which perceives moral qualities, enables us to discern of conduct in reference to right and wrong, which decides upon the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our desires and deeds, which discriminates between truth and error. It estimates and declares the ethical character of whatever is presented to the mind and that according to the measure of light which it has from reason and from the Word. Thus, conscience has a threefold office to perform. First, to discover sin to us and to reveal our duty, with the penalty of the one and the reward of the other. When it has passed the verdict, pronouncing an act to be good or bad, its next office is to bear witness that we have done the one or the other. Thus, third, it performs the office of judge, acquitting or condemning the soul by the comforting or terrifying evidence which it testifies unto.

Twice we read of a “pure conscience” (1Ti 3:9; 2Ti 1:3), and no less than six times is a “good conscience” mentioned in the New Testament, Acts 23:1; 1 Timothy 1:19; Hebrews 13:18; 1 Peter 3:16, 21. What then is a good conscience? Not the natural faculty itself, for that is defiled by sin, but rather one that has been made good, as it was awakened by the Spirit, renewed by grace, purged by the blood of Christ (Heb 9:14), purified by faith (Act 15:9), instructed by the Scriptures. It is an enlightened monitor which directs unto holy conduct. It is one which sets God before it, moving its possessor to act as in His presence, seeking to please Him, and to avoid whatever displeases Him—as in the case of Joseph, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9). For the same reason, it causes its possessor to weigh what he says and ponder before he acts, and though

fallible, yet according to the best of his knowledge he honestly endeavours to abstain from that which is evil and to cleave unto that which is good. He does so impartially and universally, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Act 23:1). Thus, a "good conscience" is to have a heart that reproaches not, but testifies in my favour.

A good conscience is one that properly discharges its office. It does not deal deceitfully, wrongly informing or flattering me. Yet, we say again, that in order to act properly, the conscience must be well-informed, illumined by the lamp of God's Word, for as there is a religious zeal which is not according to knowledge (Rom 10:2), so there are both activities in God's service (Joh 16:2) and humanly devised austerities (Col 2:20-22), which issue from a mistaken or ignorant conscience. A good conscience bears witness within that I am really sincere in desiring with all my heart to have done entirely with sin and to be holy as God is holy, that my strivings to please Him in all things and my ardent longings for unbroken communion with Him are genuine. And that I am honest when I mourn over my oft-repeated failures. It is one that is kept "pure" and clean, or clear from guilt, and that by keeping short accounts with God, promptly confessing every known sin unto Him, and washing daily in that fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness (Zec 13:1). Therefore are we exhorted, "Let us draw near [unto God] with a true heart in full assurance of faith [i.e., in a firm belief in the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice and an exclusive dependence upon Him], having our hearts sprinkled [by the approbation of Christ's blood] from an evil conscience" (Heb 10:22).

The *maintenance* of a good conscience is an essential part of personal piety. Said the apostle, "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and men" (Act 24:16). By which we understand him to mean that he observed a strict self-discipline, being careful that it might not justly accuse him of any offence. Paul took great pains to preserve peace within, and laboured hard to discharge faithfully every duty required of God, both toward Himself and toward His creatures—being ever on his guard against offending the One or laying a stumbling-block before the others. His, "I exercise myself," was the human-responsibility side, the discharge of his moral obligations. Such too was Job's resolution. Said he, "My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live" (Job 27:6)—he was determined so to conduct himself that his conscience would not accuse him for any action. We should be just as careful not to offend conscience as we are of avoiding anything that would displease our best friend. A good conscience can only be maintained by daily searching the Scriptures to discover our duty—"Understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph 5:17), by serious inquiry into the state of our heart and ways—"Commune with your own heart" (Psa 4:4), and by a uniform course of obedience—"Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him" (1Jo 3:19).

The *testimony* of a good conscience is priceless. "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward" (2Co 1:12). The apostle was conscious both of the holiness of his life and the purity of his motives. He had an inward witness to the rectitude of his deeds, which approved of all and condemned for none. Though others ascribed his zealous service to unworthy incitements and ends, conscience testified to his integrity and piety. He acted in

“simplicity” or candour, for the word stands opposed to “double-dealing.” He was actuated not by carnal prudence, but the grace of God. Asking himself not, “Is this good policy” or expedient, but “Is it *right*?” He knew that he was not directed by crookedness, that his spirit was without guile, and the realization thereof was his “rejoicing.” Hence, he could say again that he had “renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2Co 4:2). He dreaded histrionic devices, relied not on the force of rhetoric, but aimed—with an eye single to God’s glory and the good of souls—to convict his hearers by the truth.

Those who labour to keep conscience free from guilt receive rich dividends in return. It supplies comfortable relief when we are falsely accused and unjust aspersions are cast upon us. It did so with Job when he was so misunderstood by his friends, for he feared not to say, “Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know my heart” (Job 31:6). Though Jeremiah was defamed of many, he was peacefully assured that his aims were upright. And therefore he hesitated not to expose his cause unto Him that “triest the righteous and seest the reins and the heart” (Jer 20:10-12). So too David, “Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity” (Psa 26:1). A clear conscience gives us assurance to approach unto God and freedom of utterance before him, “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God” (1Jo 3:21). It is a real support under trouble, and in the approach of death. Thus, Hezekiah appealed to God, “Remember now, O LORD...how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect [sincere] heart” (Isa 38:3). In 1 Timothy 1:5 and 3:9, faith and a good conscience are linked together, for we cannot hold the one except in the other. It is with the conscience that the Holy Spirit bears witness (Rom 8:16), shining upon His own work in the soul, assuring of our sincerity, giving us to see the genuineness of our profession by such evidences and fruits of the same.

Here are some of the qualities or characteristics of a good conscience. *Sincerity*. Alas, how little of this virtue now remains in the world today. What shams and hypocrisy abound on every hand. There is scarcely any fidelity or reality left. But where the fear of the Lord is, there is a genuine desire to please Him—“in all things willing to live honestly” (Heb 13:8). *Tenderness*. There is a wakefulness and sensitiveness, so that it smites for sin on all occasions. So far from being indifferent to God’s claims, the heart is acutely sensible when they have been ignored. Even for what many regard as trifling matters, a good conscience chides and condemns. *Fidelity*. A constant judging of ourselves before God and a measuring of our ways by His Word. The favourable opinion of his fellows affords no satisfaction to an upright man unless his heart can assure him that his conduct is right in the sight of God. No matter what be the belief and customs of others, he will not knowingly offend his inward monitor.

Marked are the differences between the actings of the natural conscience and those of a renewed and good one. The former works mainly by means of slavish fear and the terror it impresses on the heart. It usually smites for total omissions or gross deeds, but not for the absence of spirituality or perfunctory performances. It works mainly when convictions are strongest, minding duty in time of distress, “in their affliction they will seek me early” (Hos 5:15). But a good conscience moves us to perform duty out of love to God. If there

were no binding precept, gratitude would prompt to the bringing of a thank-offering to Him!

EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

31. Christian Knowledge (2:21)

*"I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth,
but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth."*

"*But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things*" (verse 20). It is important to perceive the intimate connection between those two things: the believer's anointing and his knowledge are related as are cause and effect. Not only are the regenerate separated from the world by this unction, but they are also distinguished from the unregenerate in point of essential knowledge. The gift of the Spirit consecrates their souls and bodies as His temples to dwell in, and His gracious operation within imparts to them the true knowledge of divine things. As we saw in our last, when we dwelt almost entirely upon the first part of the verse, the Spirit, which Christ received without measure, He communicates to His redeemed in a degree suited to finite creatures. In consequence thereof they are sharers, in their measure, of His knowledge, so that they can say, "we have the mind of Christ" (1Co 2:16). Himself the Wisdom of God, His saved ones are the children of wisdom (Mat 11:19), the children of light. Thus, from another angle, verse 20 is a reiteration of "which thing [namely the exercise of brotherly love] is true [is realized] in him and in you" (verse 8): in Him originally, in us derivatively; in Him essentially, in us reflectively; in Him perfectly, in us faultily.

"*But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*" The last clause, equally with the first, calls for the expositor, that it's meaning may be made clear. It is another example where we must distinguish between the sound and the sense of Scripture. To take the "ye know all things" at its face value, without restriction, would be to affirm that the regenerate are omniscient—a manifest absurdity. Let this be duly noted by those who are so fond of saying, "Scripture always means what it says, and requires no explaining by man." There is not a little in the Bible that requires a divinely qualified teacher to interpret, for it is God's general way to make use of such in "opening" His Word to the rank and file of His people. "Ye know all things" signifies that those who have received the Spirit are given a saving apprehension of the fundamental parts of the Gospel, so that they are brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light, and thereby fitted to commune with and obey Him. Believers can say that God "hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true" (1Jo 5:20), and knowing Him, they know all things that are necessary to their everlasting well-being. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (Joh 17:3).

We can have no saving and sound knowledge of divine things without this anointing, for the natural man is incapable of discerning spiritual things. All the teaching of men, even of the Lord's most faithful and eminent servants, is inefficacious without it. God cannot be apprehended merely by the intellectual faculty, for He is spirit (Joh 4:24), and therefore can be known only by those who are made spiritual. A living knowledge of God consists of a personal discovery of Him to the heart, such as conveys a true, supernatural, affecting realization of His surpassing excellence. When He makes such a discovery of Himself to the soul, its favoured recipient exclaims, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee" (Job 42:5), as a glorious reality.

Note well, John did not say, "we know all things," but "ye": it was not a privilege peculiar to the apostles. Nor is this an experience reserved for the "fathers" in Christ only: rather is it shared by all the renewed. Said the Saviour to His Father, "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Mat 11:25). Contextually the "and ye know all things" means that by the gracious teaching of the Spirit believers are granted an experiential and effectual knowledge of divine things so that no propagator of error can fatally deceive them. He alone can impart that wisdom which secures against delusions. The Spirit of Truth communicates such a personal and practical acquaintance with the things of God as preserves from total apostasy. Still more narrowly, they are admitted into a saving acquaintance with the person and work of Christ, which the antichrists denied. Not that any are vouchsafed a perfect knowledge, for in this life we only "see through a glass, darkly" (1Co 13:12); nor all Christians to the same degree and extent. But each one has so opened to him the mysteries of grace that he is secured against all the ruinous cheats of the enemy—it is to be noted that in 2 Corinthians 1:21, "establisheth" and anointing are linked together.

If, however, the "and ye know all things" be interpreted in the light of the general analogy of faith, it has a much wider meaning: "The whole truth concerning Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Father, in all its bearings on the divine character and counsels, as well as on human experience and hope" (Calvin). Let us amplify the second part of the Reformer's definition.

Assurance

It is with the desire to help some of our weaker and fearing brethren that we now enter into detail. Such are inclined seriously to doubt that they have "an anointing from the Holy One"; for so far from being assured that they savingly "know all things," they are painfully conscious of their ignorance.

1. Then, first, those who have received this anointing are firmly persuaded that the Bible is the Word of God, so that they doubt not its inspiration, nor question its authority. A work of grace is attended with a spiritual conviction of the judgment of the reality and certainty of divine things. Its subjects are assured of the truth of the Gospel, so that they no longer halt between two opinions of its origin. God's way of salvation ceases to be a doubtful thing to them. These are matters which are settled in their minds beyond any dispute, so that they value them above all else. They know the Bible to be God's Word, for it has judged and searched them, exposing the secrets of their hearts (Heb 4:12-13). They have the weight and power of it on their souls.

2. Second, they have a *humbling and experiential knowledge of sin*, not merely from an awakened conscience, but more immediately from the anointing they have received. The former occupies the mind more with sin's consequences, the latter with its nature. The Holy Spirit is the great Convicter of sin (Joh 16:8). It is an essential part of His office work to remove the scales from the eyes of those in whom He operates, so that they behold Him in the light of God's holiness. As He does so, the soul perceives the awful sinfulness of sin: its excuselessness, its filthiness, its vileness; that it is "that abominable thing" which the Lord hates (Jer 44:4). The soul now realizes what all sin really is, namely a revolt against God, an opposition to Him, the outbreaking of the heart's inveterate enmity against Him. The Holy Spirit brings to light the hidden things of darkness and makes the convicted soul recognize that the whole of his life has been one of self-seeking and self-pleasing, of continuous insubjection to God. That brings him to condemn himself as a guilty criminal, as a vile leper,¹ and to take his place before God in the dust.

3. Third, they know *what real repentance is*, not only theoretically, but practically. As the sinner learns what he is in himself—in a state of depravity, darkness, and death, utterly unfit for the presence of God—he is overwhelmed with horror and anguish. God now reproves him, setting his sins in order before his eyes (Psa 50:16-21), so that he exclaims, "my sin is ever before me" (Psa 51:3). "The arrows of the Almighty" stick in his heart so that he cannot get rid of them (Job 6:4). He is made to feel what an evil and bitter thing it is to treat his Maker with contempt. He realizes that he has acted toward God with the basest ingratitude, abusing His goodness, perverting His mercies, despising His authority. His comeliness is turned into corruption (Dan 10:8), and he cries, "Woe is me! for I am undone" (Isa 6:5). He is filled with the most poignant sorrow for having offended so infinitely gracious a Being as the Majesty of heaven. He confesses, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Psa 51:4).

4. Fourth, they know *Christ as the sinner's Saviour*. They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. None but those with an urgent sense of need really turn unto the great Physician. It is only those who are conscious of being heavily laden who come unto Christ for relief and rest (Mat 11:28). Yet so legalistic and self-righteous is the human heart that, generally, a convicted sinner sets about his reformation and gives himself earnestly to religious performances, hoping to find peace for his conscience therein. But proving all self-efforts to be utterly vain, he is driven to despair. Then it is that his heart is prepared to welcome the good news of the Gospel. Then it is that this anointing gives him to see that Christ is in every way suited to his wretchedness, that His finished work is perfect, that His blood and righteousness require nothing whatever to be added unto them, that His so-great salvation is free, without money and without price (Isa 55:1). The blessed Spirit now works faith in such a soul, causing him to place his entire confidence in the Lord Jesus for the whole of his salvation. *Now* it is that he personally knows Christ to be an all-sufficient Saviour.

Verse 21

"I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth" (vs. 21).

¹ See Pink's tract *Vile*, available from Chapel Library.

Once more the apostle inserts an explanatory word (compare 1:4; 2:1, 12-14), stating why he has penned this section of his epistle. The frequency with which he did so strikingly evinced his modesty. Can the reader imagine “the Pope” of Rome, when sending a message to his “cardinals and priests,” condescending to give any reason for his conduct? No indeed, he is far too self-important and arrogant to do so. Not so this honoured ambassador of Christ, who almost apologizes for writing what he has. He pauses to assure them that it is not because he deems them to be uninstructed, nor because he fears they are unsound, or even wavering, in the faith. Those are points on which the saints are very tender, resenting any suspicion upon their orthodoxy. Thus, this explanatory word of John’s was not only a mark of his humility, but a delicate consideration of their feelings as well. He would at once relieve their minds by letting them know that he entertained no doubts about their spiritual intelligence, but assured them that, since they had received an unction from the Holy One, he was fully persuaded that they were savingly acquainted with the Gospel in all its parts.

Yet as we first ponder this verse as a whole, there seems to be somewhat of a lack of coherence between it and the remainder of the passage of which it forms a part. After consulting many expositors, we consider that John Gill (1697-1771) best perceived its force. He suggested that the apostle was here obviating an objection, which he saw might be made against what he had last said. Since he acknowledged that they “knew all things,” why was it necessary for him to write as he was here doing? To this question John replies that he writes to them not as *ill-informed* but as *instructed* ones. They “knew the truth”: the Father as “the God of truth” (Jer 10:10), Christ as the embodiment of the truth (Joh 14:6), the Spirit as “the Spirit of truth” (Joh 15:26), the Scriptures as “the word of truth” (Eph 1:13), by which the truth is to be defended and confirmed. If they had not “known the truth,” it had been to no purpose for him to write them about the antichrists. Moreover, though they were already taught of God, it was very proper for him to declare afresh those things which were most surely believed by them (Luk 1:1), that they might be still further established in the faith and fortified against false doctrine.

The connection between our present verse and the preceding one appears too in that there the “ye know all things” (as the result of the Spirit’s anointing) is here defined more definitely as a knowledge of “the truth,” and therefore qualified to detect error. As John Calvin (1509-1564) expressed it, “they would be able readily to distinguish between light and darkness because they had the Spirit for their guide.” From the above paragraph it will be seen that we do not restrict “the truth” in our text to either the personal Word or the written Word. We are always wary of limiting any biblical expression. Christ Himself is “the truth,” because the whole truth of God is summed up and embodied in Him. Equally, as Christ said to the Father, “Thy word is truth” (Joh 17:17). Even where the truth is already known, there needs to be “precept upon precept, line upon line” (Isa 28:10). As Jude said, “I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this” (verse 5); and Paul, “To write the same things to you, to me is not grievous, but for you it is safe” (Phi 3:1). Not only are the eyes of our understanding opened gradually, but memory is weak, affections sluggish, and much opposition is made by the flesh. Truth requires to be driven home, blow upon blow, if it is to be fixed “as a nail in a sure place” (Isa 22:23). Christ often repeated the same thing.

The nature of the believer's knowledge

Having shown above something of the scope and contents of the believer's knowledge, let us now consider the kind or nature of it. There is a real and radical difference between the knowledge that a Christian has of the things of God and that which non-Christians may obtain of them, as there is between the substance and the shadow cast by it. The latter is but "the form of knowledge" (Rom 2:20), a merely *traditional*, intellectual, and historical knowledge, such as children have when they are taught to read and memorize the Scriptures without believing or understanding them. Later, it becomes an *opinionative* knowledge, so that they form their own ideas about certain doctrines or aspects of the truth, and are able to discuss and dispute about them; yet it cannot be said of them that "wisdom entereth into" their hearts (Pro 2:10). They do not act out what they talk about. Yet there is a *further degree* of this speculative and theoretical knowledge, which may in some measure exercise their conscience and work upon their natural affections so as to offer opposition to temptations from without. They may be influenced thereby to lead moral and decent lives, so as to escape "the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the [not "their"] Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2Pe 2:20), yet their knowledge falls far short of conforming them to the image of God's Son (Rom 8:29).

1. The difference between gracious and graceless professors as to their knowledge lies not so much in the *matter* as in the *manner* of it. Some of the latter may greatly outstrip the former in the extent of their theological lore, and yet know nothing yet as they ought to know, nothing in a right manner, nothing spiritually; whereas the excellence of a believer's knowledge lies not in the largeness of his apprehension of divine things, but that he sees them in the light and knows them in the power of the Spirit, so as to produce communion and walking with God. "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power" (1Co 4:20), which means that the rule or dominion which God has over the hearts of His children is not a theory but a reality; it consists not in bare notions, nor in confident assertions, but in God's working effectually in the soul. "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance" (1Th 1:5), inclining the heart to heavenly things. When the effects and fruits of the Gospel are accomplished in the inner man, an indelible and affecting impression is made upon the soul, such as the apostle had reference to when he said, "even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you" (1Co 1:6).

2. Christian knowledge is an *experiential* one. The different aspects of truth are no longer abstract propositions to him, but are by the effectual operation of the Spirit wrought into the very warp and woof of his soul. Hitherto he had at best only a nominal information of them, but now he has an inward and intuitive realization of the same. To the Jews Christ said, "I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom you know not" (Joh 7:28). Despite all their boasted belief in the one only, true and living God (Rom 2:17-18), they were at heart complete strangers to Him—well informed theologically, they had no spiritual union with Him. Nor had the writer or the Christian reader, until they could say, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Co 4:6). It is only by an inward revelation that He is savingly known: "and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me" (Gal 1:15-16).

3. Christian knowledge is a *soul-humbling* and self-abasing one. That knowledge of divine things, which is received in a natural way from men or from the reading of books, “puffeth up” (1Co 8:1), producing self-esteem and presumption. But that spiritual knowledge which comes from God reveals to a person his empty conceits, his ignorance, his worthlessness. The teaching of the Spirit convinces the soul what a miserable failure he is, how very far short he falls of measuring up to the standard of conduct set before him, what horrible corruptions indwell him, and that makes him little in his own eyes. Among those born of women was not greater than John the Baptist—wondrous were the privileges granted him, abundant the light he was favoured with—yet he felt that “I am not worthy to unloose” Christ’s shoe’s latchet (Luk 3:16). None granted such an insight into heavenly things as Paul, yet he regarded himself as being not “the greatest Bible teacher of the age,” but as “less than the least of all saints” (Eph 3:8).

4. Christian knowledge is a *certifying* one. Its glorious object is no longer known speculatively and inferentially, but truly and immediately—not by a process of reasoning, but directly. He who is spirit and invisible is made visible and palpable to the soul: Moses endured “as seeing him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27)—God was real to his faith though imperceptible to his senses. Believers know “the grace of God in truth” (Col 1:6) by a sensible experience. As it is one thing for a friend to call upon us and inform us that the wind is biting cold, and quite another for us to walk with him or her to the bus and have the frost nip our nose and ears; so it is a very different thing to hear the preacher saying God’s grace is sufficient for His children, and for them to prove the sustaining power of the same under the most trying and painful afflictions. So, too, to read that God is a prayer-hearing God, and for me to obtain definite and wonderful answers to my petitions. Again, as I ponder Romans 7, I know it is a true and accurate description of the saint’s inward conflict, for it is verified in myself.

5. Christian knowledge is an *operative* one, for it is not a species of information that adds to our mental store, but an inspiration that stirs the soul unto action. However scriptural be the notions possessed by the natural man, they exert no sanctifying influence upon him, and yield no godliness of character and conduct. His light is like that of the moon: it quickens not, nor produces fruit; however orthodox, it leaves the heart cold and barren. Whereas, the light which the blessed Spirit communicates is like that of the sun: it not only illumines the understanding, but it searches the conscience, moves the will, and sets the heart on fire for God. His teaching is dynamical, having a vitalizing effect upon the whole of the inner man, stirring its subject unto holy endeavours. Spiritual knowledge is intensely practical, altering the disposition, producing obedience, conforming unto Christ.

There are multitudes in Christendom today of whom it must be said that they are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2Ti 3:7). They are not only regular attenders upon preaching, but many of them are even engaged in running around to one special “meeting” or “communion” to another, read much religious literature, and have their heads stored with a mass of undigested theological details, yet arrive not at an experiential, practical, humbling, operative, and transforming acquaintance with the things of God. And why is this? Because they have never received an anointing from the Holy One; that is what makes all the difference! But that anointing gives the regenerate a supernatural and sanctifying realization of the truth. Not that they know as fully as they ought,

or so as to preclude their duty of a diligent application on their part to make further progress therein. While they only “know in part” (1Co 13:9), and a very small part, yet they know it in a spiritual and saving way.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

83. Indolence, Part 1

Before turning to the next chapter, an incident recorded in Joshua 17 requires our attention. It may be recalled that the fourteenth chapter closed with the words, “And the land had rest from war.” At first sight, that seems to be a blessed statement, but in view of several later ones, it should rather be regarded as the striking of an ominous note. The fact is that Israel had, temporarily at least, become weary of well-doing, and were resting on their oars, for they had failed to complete the task which God had assigned them. There were many places yet unsubdued, numerous companies of the Canaanites which were still unconquered. That resting from war was fraught with evil consequences, for soon after we are told, “As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out” (Jos 15:63). And again, it is recorded of the Ephraimites, “They drave not out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer: but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites unto this day, and serve under tribute” (Jos 16:10). And once more, “Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities; but the Canaanites would dwell in the land” (Jos 17:12). Sad blemishes were those in the account given of the general success of the nation.

The above failures are to be accounted for by God’s *withholding* of His power and blessing upon their efforts. And why did He not show Himself strong on their behalf? Because they had failed in their duty, for, instead of finishing the work which the Lord had given them to do, they became slack and took their ease. And later, like poor Samson when he awoke out of his sleep, said, “I will go out as at other times,” but “wist not that the LORD was departed from him” (Jdg 16:20). Thus it happened with them—they were shorn of their strength. For God to have given success unto those Israelites would be countenancing their indolence. Never does He place a premium upon slothfulness, but, instead, leaves those who yield thereto to suffer the painful effects thereof. The lessons *for us* to learn therefrom are obvious. God grants His people no furloughs in the “good fight of faith” (1Ti 6:12) to which He has called them, and should they take one, then their enemies will inevitably prove too strong, nor will the Captain of their salvation fight their battles for them. Our commission is, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1Co 16:13), and if we heed not, most unpleasant will be the outcome.

It is important to note carefully *the order* of those four precepts, for the first three must be obeyed in order to the realization of the fourth. Unless we be vigilant in guarding against the temptations and dangers on every side, are faithful in holding the truth of the Gospel both doctrinally and practically, are undismayed and undaunted by those who op-

pose us—conducting ourselves boldly and bravely—we shall have no strength with which to overcome our foes. Nor is there to be any cessation in the discharge of those duties—the divine command is “always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1Co 15:58) i.e., striving against sin, resisting the devil, bringing forth the fruits of holiness. But note well the precise point at which the great failure of Joshua 14:15 occurred. It was immediately following the most notable successes which had attended their arms, so that they probably thought they were now entitled to a respite. Here too the lesson is plain for us. It is right after some signal victory which grace has given us over our lusts that we are most in danger—tempted to relax our efforts. Ah, my reader, forget not that it is the “fool” who says, “Take thine ease” (Luk 12:19), whereas God enjoins us, “Let not thine hands be slack” (Zep 3:16).

In Joshua 17:14-18, an incident is recorded which afforded a further opportunity for Joshua to display yet another striking quality of his character. There, we read of the children of Joseph coming to Israel’s leader with a complaint, “Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people, forasmuch as the LORD hath blessed me hitherto?” (verse 14). The tribe of Joseph was, of course, a *double* one, comprising the descendants of both Ephraim and Manasseh. Nevertheless, we consider that avowal of their greatness had reference to something more than their numerical strength, namely, their honourable parentage—their being the descendants of the man whom Pharaoh had made lord of Egypt—and thus it was the breathing of pride. This is borne out by the subsequent history of this tribe, in the light of which their complaint unto Joshua was thoroughly characteristic of the haughty spirit that possessed them. Thus, we behold their arrogance again in their murmuring against Gideon (Jdg 8:1), in the conduct of Jephthah (Jdg 11:9, 30-31), and later still in the days of David, they were constantly asserting their claim to superiority in Israel without exhibiting any qualification for it.

“And Joshua answered them, If thou be a great people, then get thee up to the wood country, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants, if mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee” (Jos 17:15). Thus did Joshua turn their argument against themselves, rebuking their pride and discontent, as well as their unbelief and indolence, for there was plenty of room for their expansion if they possessed the necessary enterprise and courage. C. J. Ellicott (1819-1905) pointed out that it is plain from what is here stated that a large part of the country of Palestine then consisted of uncleared forest. That the inhabitants of that district were far fewer than those in the valley of Esdrealon and of the territory assigned to Judah in the south. Also, that this fact justifies the strategy of the attack of Israel upon *the centre* of the country, so that the forces of the Canaanites were necessarily divided, and thus, Israel could strike first with their whole force at the southern armies, and then, turn round upon the enemies in the north. This serves to explain the ease with which they set up the Law at Ebal (Jos 8:30) at the commencement of the invasion, and the selection of Shiloh for their capital afterwards.

“And the children of Joseph said, The hill is not enough for us; and all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, both they who are of Beth-shean and her towns, and they who are of the valley of Jezreel” (Jos 17:16). Here we behold their covetousness, for Joshua 17:5 informs us that “There fell ten portions to Manasseh, beside the land of Gilead and Bashan, which were on the other side Jordan,” while another and

separate inheritance had been allotted unto their brethren the Ephraimites. But though they had been given the largest share of Canaan, they were not satisfied. While the reference they made unto the "chariots of iron" possessed by the Canaanites, who occupied the adjacent valleys, at once revealed the unbelief and timidity of their hearts and disproved their pretensions to being "a great people" (Jos 17:14). See here again, my reader, the evil results of allowing ourselves an intermission from the warfare to which the Christian is called. As surely as he ceases therein and takes his ease, so will a spirit of discontent with his lot come upon him, and so too will unbelief occupy him with the might of his enemies and dispirit him.

"And Joshua spake unto the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, Thou art a great people, and hast great power; thou shalt not have one lot only: but the mountain shall be thine; for it is a wood, and thou shalt cut it down; and the outgoings of it shall be thine; for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong" (verses 17-18). We do not regard that as the language of satire, but rather as pressing upon them the discharge of their responsibility, and calling upon them to trust in the Lord and go forward in His name. Joshua pointed out that there were extensive tracts of wooded country which could be cleared for agricultural use, so that, if they continued to multiply, land would be available for their families. True there was the menace of the powerfully armed Canaanites in the immediate vicinity, but if they bestirred themselves and performed their duty, looking to the Lord for protection and help, they might assuredly count upon His enabling them to drive out those who then possessed that land which He had given unto the seed of Abraham, and be granted strength to vanquish all their enemies. Thus, from Joshua's reply, it is clear that they were lacking in diligence and enterprise.

There can be little doubt that the Ephraimites and Manassehites expected to receive preferential treatment from Joshua, since he himself belonged to the tribe of Ephraim (Num 13:8). But Joshua refused to show partiality unto his brethren, thereby demonstrating his fidelity unto the commission JEHOVAH had given him. Blessed is it to behold in that refusal still another adumbration in the character of his Antitype, for when the Saviour was asked to assign the seats on His right hand and on His left unto those who were nearest and dearest to Him (James and John), He declined to show any favouritism (Mat 20:20-23). In his *Practical Observations* on this passage, Thomas Scott (1747-1821) well remarked, "Alas, professing Christians are often more disposed to murmur, envy and covet, than to be content, thankful, and ready to distribute. Indeed, we are more prone to grasp at what belongs to others, than to manage our own to the best advantage; and many complain of poverty, and encroach upon the benevolence of others, because they rebel against the sentence of divine justice, 'Thou shalt eat thy bread in the sweat of thy brow' (Gen 3:19).

"Men excuse themselves from labour on any pretence, and nothing serves the purpose better than having rich and powerful relations, though by providing for them, these are often partial and unfaithful in disposing of those funds with which they are entrusted for the public benefit. But there is more real kindness in pointing out to men the advantages within their reach, that they may be excited to improve them, than in gratifying their indolence and profusion. True religion gives no sanction to these evils. 'We commanded,' says the apostle, 'that if any man would not work, neither should he eat' (2Th 3:10); and many of our *cannots* are only the language of sloth, which magnifies every difficulty into an impos-

sibility, and represents every danger as inevitable destruction. This is especially the case in our spiritual work and warfare; but even our professed relation to the Captain of the Lord's host will not avail us if we be indolent and self-indulgent. Our very complaints that comforts are withheld, frequently result for negligence and fear of the cross; and when convinced that we can do nothing, we are apt to sit still and attempt nothing." Such has been poor human nature throughout the ages—either spurred on by the feverish energy of the flesh, so that we run without being sent, or lazing and repining instead of doing with our might what God has bidden us to do.

"And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them" (Jos 18:1). The commentators are unanimous in supposing that this moving of Israel's camp and headquarters was by divine appointment. They surmise that Joshua had received some message from JEHOVAH, either direct or through the Urim and Thummim of the high priest, bidding him remove the tabernacle from Gilgal to Shiloh, and they also point out the advantages of this new location. Gilgal was at the extremity of Palestine, being situated on the bank of the Jordan, whereas Shiloh was in the heart of the land, and, thus, would be much more handy for the males to visit (Deu 16:16) after the tribes had departed to their separate sections. Personally, we consider that is assuming too much. There is not the slightest hint that God had given any orders for them to leave Gilgal, where they had been encamped ever since their supernatural entrance into Canaan, and we regard the absence of any record of God's revealing His will for them to do so as ominous. It seems to us much more likely that this move was dictated by what the flesh terms "prudential consideration"—their own convenience. "Shiloh was in the lot of Ephraim, the tribe to which Joshua belonged, and it was expedient that the sanctuary should be near the residence of the chief governor" (Scott). But if *that* was the reason which prompted Joshua to act, then he was leaning to his own understanding, instead of having his paths directed by the Lord (Pro 3:5-6).

Gilgal was the place of circumcision (Jos 5:8-9)—typically the mortifying of the flesh and separation from the world—and so long as Israel returned thither after each campaign, the power and blessing of the Lord rested upon them. They should, therefore, have been very slow in leaving Gilgal, even though what it signified spiritually was very unpleasant to nature. Nothing is said of their waiting upon the Lord for guidance, no mention made of their seeking His mind via the high priest. Let it be carefully borne in mind that what is here said in Joshua 18:1 follows right after the record of a number of sad failures. Observe too that the Holy Spirit does not here designate the sacred tent "the house of the LORD" as He did in Joshua 6:24, or "the LORD's tabernacle" as in Joshua 22:19, but merely "the tabernacle," as though to indicate that He did not endorse or associate Himself with the move made—cf. "the Jews' passover" and "a feast of the Jews" (Joh 2:13; 5:1), rather than "the LORD's passover" (Exo 12:11) and a feast "of the LORD" (Lev 23:2). It is also solemnly significant that in the opening chapters of Judges (which record Israel's failures after the death of Joshua), we are told "There arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD" (Jdg 2:10). So, apparently, they had forsaken the angel of His presence, who had remained at their true base.

During several generations of Israel's spiritual poverty and powerlessness, the tabernacle remained at Shiloh (1Sa 4:3), but in centuries later, when God through Elijah and Elisha was granting a revival unto Israel, those prophets made Gilgal, and not Shiloh, their headquarters (2Ki 2:1). The Holy Spirit thereby intimating that, if in a dark day of declension, we make the place of circumcision (devotedness unto God) our camping ground or centre, then the divine blessing will be upon us. But *Gilgal* is not at all popular, making demands which are unwelcome to flesh and blood. Thus in the type itself—Gilgal lay at the very extremity of the land, a long and tiresome journey being entailed for the men of war to return to camp, and, therefore, a more convenient headquarters—easy to the flesh—would be far more acceptable. The commentators dwell upon the fact that “Shiloh” was one of the names by which the Messiah was fore-announced (Gen 49:10), and conclude that it was with an eye to Him that Israel so designated the place to which the tabernacle was now taken and erected. But we very much question such a view, for Joshua 18:1 reads as though this place was already known as Shiloh when they arrived there, and not that *they* gave it such a name on this occasion. The word itself means “rest,” and *that* was what appealed to them now that so much of Canaan had been subdued.

We have pointed out above that what is recorded in Joshua 18:1 comes right after several marked failures on the part of three of Israel's tribes, and now, immediately following it, we find Joshua upbraiding seven of the other tribes, saying “How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the LORD God of your fathers hath given you?” (Jos 18:3)! Thus, the whole context is directly *against* a favourable construction being placed on this mention of moving their headquarters to Shiloh. Instead, we consider that they acted precipitately, that they walked by sight instead of by faith, and consulted too much their own convenience. Viewed thus, there is pointed another practical lesson unto which *we* do well to take heed. Not only is it our bounden duty, but also for our good both spiritually and temporally, that we heed the divine precept “He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16). To act by impulse or passion is unworthy of a rational creature, yet it is only by definite prayer, constant watchfulness and strict self-discipline that we shall be preserved from the frenzied spirit of this foolish generation, which makes a god of speed.

More specifically, the above incident cautions us to be slow when contemplating *a change of our location*. Only too often the Lord's people are regulated in this matter by material considerations rather than by spiritual ones, thinking more of improving their position than of glorifying God—and many of them are made to smart for their pains. “Ponder the path of thy feet” (Pro 4:26) is wisdom's counsel, and failure to do so results in many a fall. Those who act hastily usually have reason to repent at their leisure. “The prudent man looketh well to his going” (Pro 14:15). The Christian should do more than that, “Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass!” Nor is that all, “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him” (Psa 37:5, 7) to make His way plain before your face, and remember that He guides us a step at a time, rather than making evident the whole of our path at once. Lean not unto your own understanding (Pro 3:5), nor confer with flesh and blood. Instead, beg the Lord to work patience in you, and let your attitude be that of David's, “My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him” (Psa 62:5). “The way of the righteous [the one whose heart is right with God] is made plain” (Pro 15:19). Until it be so, remain where you are.

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

12. Its Remedy, Part 2

In our last, we dwelt upon some of the difficulties, yea, seeming impossibilities, which stood in the way of the recovery of any of the fallen sons of Adam, showing that there required to be something more than a benign purpose of grace on God's part to effect the same, something more than the forthputting of His mighty power. That the obstacles which needed to be removed were so many and so great that "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph 3:10) must also needs be called into play. The difficulty from the human side was the desperate state of the sinner. How his darkness could be changed into light, his enmity into love, his unwillingness into willingness, without any violence being done to his moral agency. The obstacles from the divine side were how the Most High could restore such wretches to His favour, and yet not compromise His perfections. How He could have dealings with moral lepers without sully His holiness, clear the guilty without repudiating His law, exercise mercy consistently with His justice. To provide a remedy for such a malady, and to do so in a way that honoured the throne of God, was far beyond the reach of created intelligence.

We saw that, in order to save a law-cured and hell-deserving sinner, it was necessary that some method and means be devised whereby he should be delivered from all the consequences of the fall, and, at the same time, meet all the requirements of the divine government. Sin had to be dealt with unsparingly, yet transgressors be exempted from their merited doom. Full conformity unto the law must be rendered, yet by one in *the same nature* as those who had violated it. That was clearly adumbrated under the Old Testament types. The redeemer has to be a *kinsman* of those he befriended (Lev 25:25; Ruth 4:4-6). Moreover, the requirements of the law could be met only by one whose nature was derived from *the same* stock as those on whose behalf he transacted. Yet, his humanity must not be tainted in the least degree by their common defilement. It was required that he be a man of the seed of Adam (Luk 3:31-38) and of Eve (Gen 3:15), yet an absolutely pure and holy man, for none other could personally and perpetually obey in thought, word and deed. But none such existed, "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecc 7:20), nor would there ever have been one had the human race been left to itself. Naught but the manifold wisdom and miracle-working power of God could produce him.

Yet, one who was *more than man*, even though a perfect one, yea, far superior to those heavenly beings who veil their faces in the presence of deity, was needed in order to discharge the liabilities of depraved sinners, and renew them in holiness. This is evident from several considerations. The most exalted creature, simply because he is a creature, is *obligated* to render perfect obedience unto his Maker, and, therefore, could merit nothing on the behalf of others. If he fully performed his duty, he would indeed work out a righteousness and be entitled to the reward of the law—but he would need that righteousness *on his own account*, and, therefore, it would not be available for imputation unto another—and still less unto many others. Again, the work he had to do—pay in full that incalculable debt incurred by those who were to be saved, make expiation for all their sins, reconcile them to God, restore them to His favour, make them meet for the inheritance of the saints in

light—was far beyond the compass of any mere creature, no matter how high his rank in the scale of being. Moreover, any deliverer of the apostate sons of Adam must be essentially and infinitely holy, for none less could be qualified to put away the infinite guilt of their countless iniquities.

In order for any portion of mankind to be eternally saved *unto the glory of God*, it was necessary that not only a flawless obedience be rendered unto God's law, but such an obedience as brought more honour unto His holiness than was dishonour cast upon it by the disobedience of all. To affirm that it matters little what becomes of the glory of God, so long as poor sinners be saved in some way or other, is naught but the blasphemous belchings of the carnal mind. Where God be revered and loved above all, very different will be the sentiments of such a one. Namely, better far that the whole of Adam's race perish than that the character of deity be sullied and the foundations of His throne undermined. But such an obedience could not be rendered by any mere creature, no matter how pure his nature or eminent his rank. For there must needs be somewhat of *the divine* in it, in order for his performance to possess an infinite value. Nor must that obedience be constrained, but rather a voluntary one, for that which is forced proceeds not from love, and is valueless. Nor must his conformity unto the law be one which he was personally *responsible* to render unto it, for in such case, it could not be accepted as a due compensation for the disobedience of all.

It was not a single individual who was to be recovered from the fall and be brought unto glory, but "ten thousands" (Jude 1:14), and each of them had more sins to his account than the hairs upon his head. And every sin had in it an immeasurable guilt, since it was committed against the infinite Majesty of heaven. The woe unto which all of them were obnoxious was also infinite, the duration thereof being eternal—everything unspeakably dreadful and painful which our nature is capable of suffering. Nor could they be delivered from the awful consequents of their sin without an adequate satisfaction being made to the offended justice of God. To assert the contrary is all one as to say it matters not to God whether He be obeyed or disobeyed, whether He be honoured or dishonoured in and by His creatures, and that would be to deny His very being, seeing it is directly contrary to the glory of all His perfections. But where was the person qualified to make, and capable of making, the requisite propitiation for sin? Where was the one fitted to act as mediator between God and men, between the Holy One and the unholy? Where was the one who could bestow life on the dead and merit everlasting blessedness for them?

If a remedy be provided for sinners, it must be one that restores them unto the same state and dignity wherein they were placed before the fall. To recover them unto any lesser honour and blessedness than that which was theirs originally would not consist with either the divine wisdom or bounty. "Yea, seeing it was the infinite grace, goodness and mercy of God to restore him, it seems agreeable unto the glory of the divine excellencies in their operations that he should be brought into a better and more honourable condition than that which he had lost." In his primitive state, man was subject unto none but his Maker. Though he was less in dignity than the angels, yet he owed them no obedience. They were his fellow servants of the Lord God. Obviously (as John Owen, 1616-1683, also pointed out), if the sinner were saved by any mere creature, he could not be restored to his first state and dignity, for in such a case he would owe allegiance and subservience unto that

creature who had redeemed him—he would become the property of the one who bought him. That would not only introduce the utmost confusion, but the sinner would be in a still worse case than he was before the fall, for he would *not* be in a position wherein he owed subjection and honour unto God *alone*.

From the foregoing, it will be seen that the only sufficient deliverer of fallen men must be one possessed of infinite dignity and worthiness, in order that he might be capable of meriting infinite blessings. He must be a person of infinite power and wisdom, for the work he must perform could be successfully accomplished by none less. But more, it was requisite that he should be a person who was infinitely dear to God the Father, in order to give an infinite value to his transactions in the Father's esteem, and that the Father's love to him might balance the offence and provocation of our sins. He must also be a person who could act in this matter in his own right, that in himself he be not a servant and subject of the Most High. Otherwise, he could not merit anything for those he would save. Moreover, he must be a person possessed of infinite mercy and love, for none other would voluntarily undertake a task so arduous, so humiliating, and involving such unspeakable suffering, for creatures so unworthy and foul as fallen men. But, where in all the universe was such a one to be found? No created person possessed the necessary qualifications. When the apostle John beheld (in vision) the seven-sealed book, we are told that he wept much, because no man in heaven or earth was found worthy to open the book (Rev 5:1-4). And, had not the manifold wisdom of God found the solution to all these problems, men and angels alike had for ever been nonplussed by them.

The various elements in the complicated problem of salvation for any of Adam's children are far from being exhausted in those already pointed out. Man was made to serve and glorify God. In spirit and soul and body, in all his faculties and powers, in all that was given to and entrusted with him, he was not his own, but in the place of a servant. The same was equally the case with the angels. A creature, and one who is in all respects in subjection to his Maker, are convertible terms. But, from that condition and status the human race in Adam revolted, determining to be "as gods" (Gen 3:5)—lords over themselves. There is something of *that* in every sin—a preferring of self-will to the will of the Almighty. By his insurrection, man fell into complete bondage to sin and Satan. In order to free the sinner from his captivity, it was necessary for any deliverer to take the position man originally occupied. He must enter the place of *absolute subjection* to God, entirely subordinating his own will to His, for in no other way could adequate compensation be made to the outraged government of God, and the damage wrought by our first parents be repaired. But how could any uncreated being occupy the position of a creature? With what propriety could one possessed of infinite dignity and excellence suffer such humiliation? How could one who was above all law come under the law and render obedience to it?

Again, in his original state, man had naught but what his Creator had bestowed upon him. Made out of the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7), he was endowed with intelligence and moral agency—but to be employed in the divine service. He was also dependent upon his Maker for every breath he drew. That state of need and dependence he deliberately forsook, determining to enrich himself and assume absolute dominion. But his awful crime brought upon him, and all whom he represented, the loss of his original endowments. He lost the image of God, his right unto creatures here below, his own soul. Consequently, any

saviour for him must needs experience *the degradation and poverty* which the sinner had brought upon himself, so that he would not have where to lay his head (Luk 9:58). But how was such an experience possible for anyone who was infinitely rich in himself, and in his own right? Since Adam stood for and transacted on the behalf of all whom he legally represented, it follows that any saviour must serve not in a private capacity but as the covenant head of those whom he was to recover. Finally, since God made the first man lord of the earth, giving him dominion over all creatures therein (Gen 1:28), which dominion he forfeited upon his fall, then a deliverer must be capable of recovering the lost estate. But where was one that was able to purchase so vast an inheritance?

“The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luk 18:27). Omniscience found a solution to all those problems which had for ever baffled the minds of men. Scripture throws not a little emphasis upon this. It is referred to as “the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory”—i.e., our salvation (1Co 1:7). “In a mystery” connotes that which is undiscoverable by human reason, incomprehensible to the finite capacity, completely concealed until divinely revealed, and, even then, beyond our powers to comprehend fully. In Ephesians 1:8, we are told of it, “Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.” The word “abounded” has the force of gushing out, overflowing. It is called “all wisdom” for its excellency. It was not a single concept or act, but a conjunction of many excellent ends and means to the glory of God. Unto wisdom is added “prudence.” The former refers to the eternal contriving of a way, the latter to the ordering of all things unto the accomplishment of God’s counsel or purpose—wisdom in devising, prudence in executing. In Ephesians 3:10, it is designated “the manifold wisdom of God” because of its complexity and variety—the salvation of sinners, the defeat of Satan, the full discovery of the blessed Trinity in Their different persons, separate operations, combined actions, and expressions of goodness, and because of the vastness of its extent.

That “manifold wisdom of God,” now exhibited before the angels in the redemption of the Church, is said to be “according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:11). The eternal Son of God, predestined to be the God-man Mediator, is the grand medium, means, and manifestation of the divine omniscience, and, therefore, is He called “The Word of God” (Rev 19:13), and “the wisdom of God” (1Co 1:24). “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Eph 1:9-10). “The mystery of the will of God is His counsels concerning His own eternal glory in the sanctification and salvation of the Church here below, to be united unto that above. The absolute original hereof was in His own good pleasure, or the sovereign acting of His wisdom and will. But it was all to be effected in Christ, which the apostle twice repeats. He would gather ‘all things into a head in Christ, even in Him,’ that is, in Him alone.

“Thus, it is said of Him with respect unto His future incarnation and work of mediation that ‘the LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was’ (Pro 8:22-23). The eternal personal existence of the Son of God is supposed in these expressions...without it,

none of these things could be affirmed of Him. But, there is a regard in them both unto His future incarnation and the accomplishment of the counsels of God thereby. With respect thereto, God possessed Him in the beginning of His way, and set Him up from everlasting. God possessed Him eternally as His essential wisdom, as He was always and is always in the bosom of the Father, in the mutual, ineffable love of the Father and Son, in the eternal bond of the Spirit. But He signally possessed Him 'in the beginning of his way' as His wisdom acting in the production of all the ways and works that are outwardly in Him. The beginning of God's way before His works, are His counsels concerning them, even as our counsels are the beginning of our ways with respect unto future works. And He 'set Him up from everlasting' as *the foundation* of all the counsels of His will, in and by whom they were to be executed and accomplished" (J. Owen)

The eighth chapter of Proverbs is an exceedingly profound chapter, but a most blessed one. In it, as the first verse shows, the voice of "wisdom" is heard speaking. That it is a *person* who is there in view is evident, again, from verse 12, "I wisdom dwell with prudence," and verse 17, "I love them that love me." That it is a *divine* person may be seen from verse 15, "by me kings reign." But, it is equally clear from the language of verses 24 and 25, "I was brought forth," and "I was by him [the Father], as one brought up with him" (verse 30), that such expressions could not be predicated of the Son of God absolutely, that is as co-eternal and co-equal with the Father. No, "wisdom" is here to be understood of the Son as the God-man Mediator in His *two natures*, as the One ordained to be the incarnate "wisdom of God" (1Co 1:24). When He declares, "The LORD possessed me: the beginning [the Hebrew is without the "in"] of his way, before his works of old" (Pro 8:22), it is the Mediator speaking in the covenant subsistence which he had before God ere the universe was called into union with the eternal Son, was "the beginning" (cf. Rev 1:8) of the Triune God's "way," for in all things He must "have the pre-eminence" (Col 1:18).

The *first counsel* of God had respect unto the Man, Christ Jesus, for He was appointed to be not only the Head of His Church, but "the firstborn of every creature" (Col 1:15). The One whom the Lord of hosts addresses as "the man, my fellow" (Zec 13:7) was predestinated unto the grace of divine union and glory. "In the head [Greek] of the book it is written of me" (Heb 10:7), He being the Object and Subject of God's original decree. "Our Redeemer came forth of the womb of a decree from eternity, before He came out of the womb of the Virgin in time. He was hid in the will of God before He was made manifest in the flesh of a Redeemer. He was a Lamb slain in purpose before He was slain upon the cross. He was possessed by God in the beginning or the beginning of His way (the Head of His works), and set up from everlasting to have His delights among the sons of men" (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680). The person of the God-man Mediator was the origin of the divine counsels. As such, the triune JEHOVAH "possessed" or embraced Him, as a Treasury in which all the divine counsels were laid up, as an efficient Agent for the execution of all His works. Christ was God's first Elect (Isa 42:1) and, then, the Church was chosen in Him (Eph 1:4).

"I was set up, from everlasting." That declaration concerns Him not essentially, as God the Son, but economically, as the Mediator—"set up" or, literally, "anointed" by a covenant constitution and by divine subsistence before the mind of God. Before all worlds, in the "council of peace" (Zec 6:13), Christ was appointed and anointed to His official char-

acter. Before God planned to produce any creature, He first “set up” Christ as the great Archtype and Original. “Then I was by him as one brought up, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him” (Pro 8:30). It was not the Father’s complacency in the second person in the Trinity (as such) which is there in view, but His satisfaction and joy in the Mediator, as God contemplated Him in the glass of His decrees as the Repository of all His designs. The Hebrew word for “brought forth” also signifies “master-builder,” and is so rendered in the Revised version—how blessedly it described Him who could be relied upon to carry out the Father’s purpose! In His eternal thoughts and primitive views, the Man Christ Jesus was the object of God’s love. By Him, all things were to be created (Col 1:16). By Him, vessels were to be formed for His glory (Col 1:16). By Him, the grand remedy was to be provided for sin’s victims (Col 1:14).

It is indeed lamentable that so few of the Lord’s people have been instructed in these “deep things of God” (1Co 2:10), for they have been revealed for their edification and consolation. What we have sought to explain in Proverbs 8 throws light on other passages. For example, how many a thoughtful reader has been puzzled by John 6:62, “What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?”—in what sense had He been in heaven as Man before He became incarnate? But though *we* be ignorant of this wondrous truth, the Old Testament saints were not, as is clear from Psalm 80:17, “Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the Son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.” Though the Man Christ Jesus had no historical existence then, He *had* a covenant subsistence before the Father, as taken into union with the second person of the Trinity. As faith gives a present “substance” (the Greek word means “a real subsistence”) in the believer’s heart and mind of the things hoped for, so that he has a present enjoyment of things yet future, so, in the mind of Him before whom all things are ever present, Christ as incarnate was ever a living reality. Thus, when God said, “Let us make man in our image” (Gen 1:26), the ultimate reference was to the God-man, who is *par excellence* “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15).

Let us pause here and admire and adore the glorious wisdom of God, which found a way to save His people in a manner that was infinitely becoming and honouring to Himself. And let us bow in wonderment and worship before the Lord Jesus, who, notwithstanding the unspeakable shame and suffering involved therein, delighted to do the Father’s will. The manifold wisdom of God is seen in *His choice* of the One to be the Head and Saviour of the Church, in that He was in every respect fit to perform that office and work, possessed of all the necessary qualifications, and in that He was the *only* person suited thereunto. God’s abounding wisdom appeared in His knowing that Christ *was* a fit person. Naught but omniscience itself could have thought of God’s dear Son becoming the Redeemer of hell-deserving sinners.

THE APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 2

Some dispensationalists do not go quite so far as others in arbitrarily erecting noticeboards over large sections of Scripture, warning Christians not to tread on ground which belongs to others, yet there is general agreement among them that the Gospel of Matthew—though it stands at the beginning of the New Testament and not at the close of the Old!—pertains not to those who are members of the mystical body of Christ, but is “entirely Jewish.” That the sermon on the mount is “legalistic” and not evangelistic, and that its searching and flesh-withering precepts are not binding upon Christians. Some go so far as to insist that the great commission, with which it closes, is not designed for us today, but is meant for “a godly Jewish remnant” after the present era is ended. In support of this wild and wicked theory, appeal is made to and great stress laid upon the fact that Christ is represented, most prominently, as “the son of David” (Mat 1:1) or King of the Jews (Mat 2:2). But they *ignore* another conspicuous fact, namely, that in its opening verse, the Lord Jesus is set forth as “the son of Abraham” (Mat 1:1), and *he was a Gentile!* What is still more against this untenable hypothesis—and as though the Holy Spirit designedly anticipated and refuted it—is the fact that Matthew’s is the only one of the four Gospels where the Church is actually mentioned twice (Mat 16:18; 18:17)!—though in John’s Gospel its members are portrayed as branches of the Vine (Joh 15:5), members of Christ’s flock (Joh 10:15-16), which are designations of saints which have *no* dispensational limitations.

Equally remarkable is the fact that the very same epistle which contains the verse (2Ti 2:15), on which this modern system is based, emphatically declares, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2Ti 3:16-17). So far from large sections of Scripture being designed for other companies, and excluded from our immediate use, ALL Scripture is meant for and is needed by us. First, all of it is “profitable for doctrine,” which could not be the case if it were true (as dispensationalists dogmatically insist) that God has entirely different methods of dealing with men in past and future ages from the present one. Second, all Scripture is given us “for instruction in righteousness” or right doing, but we are at a complete loss to know how to regulate our conduct if the precepts in one part of the Bible are now outdated (as these teachers of error assert) and injunctions of a contrary character have displaced them, and if certain statutes are meant for others who will occupy this scene after the Church has been removed from it. Third, all Scripture is given that the man of God might be “perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”—every part of the Word is required in order to supply him with all needed instruction and to produce a full-orbed life of godliness.

When the dispensationalist is hard pressed with those objections, he endeavours to wriggle out of his dilemma by declaring that though all Scripture be *for* us, much of it is not addressed *to* us. But really, that is a distinction without a difference. In his exposition of Hebrews 3:7-11, Owen rightly pointed out that when making quotation from the Old Testament, the apostle prefaced it with “the Holy Spirit saith” (not “said”), and remarked,

“Whatever was given by inspiration from the Holy Spirit and is recorded in the Scriptures for the use of the Church, He contrived to speak it to us unto this day. As He liveth for ever, so He continues to speak for ever; that is, whilst His voice or word shall be of use for the Church—*He speaks now unto us*... Many men have invented several ways to lessen the authority of the Scriptures, and few are willing to acknowledge an *immediate* speaking of God unto them therein.” To the same effect wrote that sound commentator, Thomas Scott, “Because of the immense advantages of perseverance, and the tremendous consequences of apostasy, we should consider the words of the Holy Spirit as addressed to us.”

Not only is the assertion that—though all Scripture be *for us*, all is *not to us*—meaningless, but it is also impertinent and *impudent*, for there is nothing whatever in the Word of truth to support and substantiate it. Nowhere has the Spirit given the slightest warning that such a passage is “not to the Christian,” and still less that whole books belong to someone else. Moreover, such a principle is manifestly *dishonest*. What right have I to make *any use* of that which is the property of another? What would my neighbour think were I to take letters which were addressed *to him* and argue that they were meant *for me*? Furthermore, such a theory, when put to the test, is found to be *unworkable*. For example, to whom is the book of Proverbs addressed, or, for that matter, the first epistle of John? Personally, this writer, after having wasted much time in perusing scores of books which pretended to rightly divide the Word, still regards the whole of Scripture as God’s gracious revelation to him, and for him, as though there were not another person on earth, conscious that he cannot afford to dispense with any portion of it, and he is heartily sorry for those who lack such a faith. Pertinent in this connection is that warning, “But fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve...so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (2Co 11:3).

“But, are there not many passages in the Old Testament which have no direct bearing upon the Church today?” Certainly not! In view of 1 Corinthians 10:11—“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples [margin, “types”]; and they are written for our admonition”—Owen pithily remarked, “Old Testament examples are New Testament instructions.” By their histories, we are taught what to avoid and what to emulate. That is the principal reason why they are *recorded*. That which hindered or encouraged the Old Testament saints was chronicled for our benefit. But, more specifically, “Are not Christians unwarranted in applying to themselves many promises given to Israel according to the flesh during the Mosaic economy, and expecting a fulfilment of the same unto themselves?” No indeed, for if *that* were the case, then it would not be true that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4). What comfort can I derive from those sections of God’s Word which these people say, “do not belong to me”? What “hope” (i.e., a well-grounded assurance of some future good) could possibly be inspired today in Christians by what pertains to none but Jews? Christ came here, my reader, not to cancel, but “to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy” (Rom 15:8-9)!

It must also be borne in mind that, in keeping with the character of the covenant under which they were made, many of the precepts and the promises given unto the patriarchs and their descendants possessed a *spiritual and typical* significance and value, as well as a

carnal and literal one. As an example of the former, take Deuteronomy 25:4, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn," and, then, mark the application made of those words in 1 Corinthians 9:9-10, "Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope." The word "altogether" is probably a little too strong here, for *pantos* is rendered "no doubt" in Acts 28:4, and "surely" in Luke 4:23, and in the text signifies "assuredly" (ASV) or "mainly for our sakes." Deuteronomy 25:4 was designed to enforce the principle that labour should have its reward, so that men might work cheerfully. The precept enjoined equity and kindness—if so to beasts, much more so to men, and especially the ministers of the Gospel. It is a striking illustration of the freedom with which the Spirit of grace applies the Old Testament Scriptures, as a constituent part of the Word of Christ, unto Christians and their concerns.

What is true of the Old Testament precepts (generally speaking, for there are, of course, exceptions to every rule) holds equally good of the Old Testament *promises*—believers today are fully warranted in mixing faith therewith and expecting to receive the substance of them. First, because those promises were made to saints as such, and what God gives to one, He gives to all (2Pe 1:4)—Christ purchased the self-same blessings for every one of His redeemed. Second, because most of the Old Testament promises were typical in their nature—earthly blessings adumbrated heavenly ones. That is no arbitrary assertion of ours, for anyone who has been taught of God knows that almost everything during the old economies had a figurative meaning, shadowing forth the better things to come. Many proofs of this will be given by us a little later. Third, a *literal* fulfilment to us of those promises must not be excluded, for since we be still on earth and in the body, our temporal needs are the same as theirs, and, if we meet the conditions attached to those promises (either expressed or implied), then we may count upon the fulfilment of them, according unto our faith and obedience so will it be unto us.

"But surely we must draw a definite and broad line between the Law and the Gospel." It is at this point that the dispensationalist considers his position to be the strongest and most unassailable. Yet nowhere else does he more display his ignorance, for he neither recognizes the grace of God abounding during the Mosaic era, nor can he see that Law has any rightful place in this Christian age. Law and grace are to him antagonistic elements, and (to quote one of his favourite slogans) "will no more mix than will oil and water." Not a few of those who are now regarded as the champions of orthodoxy tell their hearers that the principles of law and grace are such contrary elements that, where the one be in exercise, the other must necessarily be excluded. But this is a very serious error. How could the Law of God and the Gospel of the grace of God conflict? The one exhibits Him as "light," the other manifests Him as "love" (1Jo 1:5; 4:8), and both are necessary in order fully to reveal His perfections. If either one be omitted, only a one-sided concept of His character will be formed. The one makes known His righteousness, the other displays His mercy, and His wisdom has shown the perfect consistency there is between them.

Instead of law and grace being contradictory, they are complementary. Both of them appeared in Eden before the fall. What was it but grace which made a grant unto our first parents, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat" (Gen 2:16)? And it was law which said, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it"

(Gen 2:17). Both of them are seen at the time of the great deluge, for we are told that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen 6:8), as His subsequent dealings with him clearly demonstrated, while His righteousness brought in a flood upon the world of the ungodly. Both of them operated side by side at Sinai, for while the majesty and righteousness of JEHOVAH were expressed in the Decalogue, His mercy and grace were plainly evinced in the provisions He made in the whole Levitical system (with its priesthood and sacrifices) for putting away of their sins. Both shone forth in their meridian glory at Calvary. For whereas, on the one hand, the abounding grace of God appeared in giving His own dear Son to be the Saviour of sinners, His justice called for the curse of the Law to be inflicted upon Him while bearing their guilt.

In all of God’s works and ways, we may discern a meeting together of *seemingly* conflicting elements—the centrifugal and the centripetal forces which are ever at work in the material realm illustrate this principle. So it is in connection with the operations of Divine providence. There is a constant interpenetrating of the natural and the supernatural. So, too, in the giving of the sacred Scriptures. They are the product both of God’s and of man’s agency. They are a Divine revelation, yet couched in human language, and communicated through human media. They are inerrantly true, yet, written by fallible men. They are divinely inspired in every jot and tittle, yet, the superintending control of the Spirit over the penmen did not exclude nor interfere with the natural exercise of their faculties. Thus, it is also in all of God’s dealings with mankind. Though He exercises His high sovereignty, yet, He treats with them as responsible creatures, putting forth His invincible power upon and within them, but in no wise destroying their moral agency. These may present deep and insoluble mysteries to the finite mind, nevertheless, they are actual facts.

In what has just been pointed out, to which other examples might be added—the person of Christ, for instance, with His two distinct yet conjoined natures, so that though He was omniscient, yet, He “grew in wisdom” (Luk 2:52); was omnipotent, yet, wearied and slept (Joh 4:6; Mat 8:24); was eternal, yet, died (Mat 27:50)—why should so many stumble at the phenomenon of divine law and divine grace being in exercise side by side, operating at the same season? Do law and grace present any greater contrast than the fathomless love of God unto His children, and His everlasting wrath upon His enemies? No indeed, not so great. Grace must not be regarded as an attribute of God which eclipses all His other perfections. As Romans 5:21 so plainly tells us, “That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness,” and not at the expense of or to the exclusion of it. Divine grace and divine righteousness, divine love and divine holiness, are as inseparable as light and heat from the sun. In bestowing grace, God never rescinds His claims upon us, but rather enables us to meet them. Was the prodigal son, after his penitential return and forgiveness, less obliged to conform to the laws of his Father’s house than before he left it? No indeed, but more so.

That there is no conflict between the Law and the Gospel of the grace of God is plain enough from Romans 3:31, “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.” Here, the apostle anticipates an objection which was likely to be brought against what he had said in verses 26-30. “Does not the teaching that justification is entirely by grace through faith evince that God has relaxed His claims, changed the standard of His requirements, set aside the demands of His government?” Very far from it!

The divine plan of redemption is in no way an annulling of the Law, but rather the honouring and enforcing of it. No greater respect could have been shown to the Law than in God's determining to save His people from its curse by sending His co-equal Son to fulfil all its requirements and Himself endure its penalty. Oh, marvel of marvels! The great Legislator humbled Himself unto entire obedience to the precepts of the Decalogue. The very One who gave the Law became incarnate, bled, and died, under its condemning sentence, rather than that a tittle thereof should fail. Magnified thus was the Law indeed, and for ever, "made honourable" (Isa 42:21).

God's method of salvation by grace has "established the law" (Rom 3:31) in a three-fold way. First, by Christ, the Surety of God's elect, being "made under the law" (Gal 4:4), fulfilling its precepts (Mat 5:17), suffering its penalty in the stead of His people, and, thereby, He has "brought in everlasting righteousness" (Dan 9:24). Second, by the Holy Spirit, for at regeneration He writes the Law on their hearts (Heb 8:10), drawing out their affections unto it, so that they "delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom 7:22). Third, as the fruit of his new nature, the Christian voluntarily and gladly takes the Law for his rule of life, so that he declares, "with the mind I myself serve the law" (Rom 7:25). Thus is the Law "established," not only in the high court of heaven, but in the souls of the redeemed. So far from law and grace being enemies, they are mutual handmaids. The former reveals the sinner's need, the latter supplies it. The one makes known God's requirements, the other enables us to meet them. Faith is not opposed to good works, but performs them in obedience to God out of love and gratitude.

