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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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

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WAKING

“I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me” (Psa 3:5). There is not guarantee when we lie down at night, even though it be in good health, that we shall awake in this world the next morning. Thousands have not done so, and each time we *do*, it is because the LORD has been pleased to “sustain” us: sustain the action of the heart, the circulation of the blood, the heaving of the lungs—none of which is done by us. It is blessed to know that during the hours of darkness, we are the objects of God’s care, protecting us not only from physical harm, but also from the assaults of Satan. What child of God can doubt that our arch-enemy, filled as he is with enmity and hatred against the saints, attacks them in the sleep state? Some of our experiences at that time seem clearly to demonstrate it. Doubtless, many of our dreams are attributable to a disordered stomach or distempered mind; yet by no means all of them. Some of our nightmares cannot be satisfactorily accounted for by any physical or mental cause. That the Christian is not harassed by them regularly is due alone to the sovereign goodness of God in preventing such.

We are equally in danger from the workings of a disordered mind as from extraneous enemies. Some have walked in their sleep and walked to their death. Why have not we or our loved ones done so? And again, the answer is, “I awaked; for the LORD sustained me.” Some of our dreams supply evidence of a greatly heated imagination and deluded fancy. James Hervey (1714-1758) relates a well-authenticated case known to him, in which two friends who had hunted through the day spent the night together. One of them pursued a stag in his dreams, crying out, “I’ll kill him, I’ll kill him.” As he felt for the knife in his pocket, his companion sprang out of bed, and by the light of the moon, saw his friend give several deep stabs in the very place where a moment before his own throat had lain. Hervey added, “This is mentioned as proof that nothing hinders us from being assassins of others, or murderers of ourselves, amid the mad sallies of sleep, save the preventing care of our heavenly Father.”

In the previous article, we called attention to the element of *mystery* in sleep; let us now point out that it is just as real and evident in connection with our waking. We do not awaken automatically or according to any mere process or law of “nature.” Nor is it caused by any act of *our* will. No, we are awakened from slumber by the same One who put us to sleep. True, we are not sensible thereof, yet that alters not the fact itself. True also that God may employ a variety of means, nevertheless the fact remains: “He wakeneth morning by morning, *he* wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned” (Isa 50:4). As John Gill (1697-1771) pointed out, “The allusion is to masters calling their students betimes to their studies.” While this verse is part of a Messianic prophecy, we doubt not that it has a general application, particularly unto the regenerate. In this matter, as in many others, God often deigns to make use of human instruments and other agents, while at other times He dispenses entirely with them. Whether by means,¹ or without them, it is *the LORD* who awakens us each morning. Unless He did so, our eyes would never again open in this world. The clock would run down and stop!

The experience of waking is such a common and everyday one that few of us make any attempt to ponder and analyse it. The supernatural origin of it appears in its very characteristics. Why is it that the minute a person awakes, he is in full possession of his faculties, that after hours of heavy slumber and total subconsciousness, his strength is renewed, his muscles ready for immediate action, his senses alert, the mind thoroughly refreshed? Why is it that we *instantly* arouse from the profoundest stupor which deadens all our powers? How very different is the protracted and disagreeable recovery to full consciousness after an anaesthetic! How thankful we should be that our waking by God is not a lengthy and nauseous process. Our daily emergence from hours (not a few minutes) of total inactivity, which closely resembles death itself; our bodies being completely and suddenly restored to vigour and activity—surely this is “the LORD’s doing,” and it should be “marvellous in our eyes” (Psa 118:23) and move us to praise and thanksgiving.

How completely dependent we are upon the LORD appears further from the terms of that lovely prayer, “Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning” (Psa 143:8). Such should be one of our last petitions each night: if it be Thy good pleasure for me to see the light of the morning, awaken me with my heart attuned to Thy beneficence. Arouse me from my slumbers with my faculties attent unto Thy goodness, that my first waking thoughts may be engaged therewith. The fact that David made request, “Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness,” evinces that he had no confidence in his own ability to do so. It is only

¹ means – human instruments and other agents.

when we make that our sincere, earnest, and trustful request each night that we may warrantably expect to be able to say, "When I awake, I am still with thee" (Psa 139:18). Not "thou art still with me"—though that be blessedly the case—but "I am still with thee": conscious of Thy nearness, sensible of Thy favours, enjoying happy communion with the eternal Lover of my soul.

As the comparison of one passage with another requires us to believe, it was in humble dependence upon God that David declared, "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up" (Psa 5:3). Such was his holy determination that the LORD should be given the first place and not be crowded out by temporal concerns. As His protection was essential for the night, so divine direction would be equally necessary for the day: grace would be required to oil the wheels of pious actions, wisdom from above to instruct him in the performance of duty, and the avoidance of the fowler's snares. All of this he was resolved to ask for, leaning not unto his own understanding, but seeking unto the LORD at an early hour. Nor would he make request in a merely perfunctory way, but in confident expectation of an "answer of peace," as his "I...will look up" connotes. Furthermore, he purposed, "I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning" (Psa 59:16). God's compassions fail not, but are "new every morning" (Lam 3:22-23); equally so should be our acknowledgment of them. That is indeed a "good beginning" when we commence the day with prayer and songs of praise.

"Awake to righteousness, and sin not" (1Co 15:34). While the immediate reference there [is] a call to arouse from the spiritual torpor into which false teachers had lulled the Corinthians, through the unsuspected effect of their evil communications; yet those words may suitably be regarded as a divine exhortation unto a holy life, and particularly, as a summons for us to attend unto at the beginning of each fresh day. Considered thus, its force is: employ your renewed energies not in self-pleasing, but in walking by the rule that God has given us, for "righteousness" ever has reference to conformity unto a moral or spiritual standard. Earnestly set yourself to the glorifying of Him who has permitted you to see the light of another day; live it as though you knew it would be your last one on earth. Shun sin and the occasions thereof as you would a deadly plague, yea, "abstain from all appearance of evil" (1Th 5:22). Before getting out of bed, remind yourself of this imperative injunction: "Awake to righteousness, and sin not," and lift up your heart for enabling grace to heed the same.

It is both interesting and instructive to consider some of the different experiences met with by awakened souls. "And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him" (Gen 9:24). What a sad awakening was that—recorded as a lasting warning against intemperance. "But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God" (Jon 1:5-6). What a rude awakening was that, when one of God's servants was rebuked by a heathen! "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not" (Gen 28:16)—blessed experience was that. "Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him" (Mat 1:24)—may a like spirit of obedience characterize us. "And they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mar 4:38)—even His slumbers were disturbed by the unbelieving! "And when they were awake, they *saw his glory*" (Luk 9:32)—may that be, more and more, the happy lot of both writer and reader.



THE EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

8. *Light and Darkness (1:5-6)*

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1Jo 1:5). We shall now consider, first, the connection of this verse with the immediately preceding ones—its bearing on the epistle as a whole will be shown under our exposition of verse 6. Second, its message or assertion. Third, its scope, in view of the teaching of Scripture on light and darkness. Fourth, its design, or the reasons why this declaration is here made.

The A.V.² is rather misleading, for the “then” suggests that the apostle is drawing an inference or pointing out a consequence from what he had stated previously. But such is not the case. The literal meaning of the Greek is “*And* this is the message,” and is so rendered in Samuel Bagster’s (1772-1851) *Interlinear* and the R.V.³ The opening “*And*” intimates not only a direct connection between this verse and the foregoing ones, but a *continuation* of the same subject. As usual, the Holy Spirit has graciously hung the key on the door for us by announcing the theme of this epistle in its opening verses, namely *fellowship*—with God, with the apostles, with fellow saints. Concerning that fellowship, we have already seen that it has been made possible by the Son of God becoming incarnate and giving His people an experiential knowledge of Himself as the Word of Life. It is regeneration which capacitates us to enter into this inestimable privilege. Not only is it a fellowship of spiritual life, but also in the truth, consisting of a saving knowledge of Christ and the Father. It is likewise a gladsome fellowship, which, if entered into intimately and constantly, produces “fullness of joy.” Now we are informed it is a *holy* fellowship, for it is exercised only in “the light.”

The blissful fellowship which the apostle was speaking of is radically different from anything known to the natural man. The joy which it produces is greatly superior to any experienced by the senses. It is in nowise carnal, but wholly spiritual. It transcends all natural emotion. It was necessary to insist upon this so that neither congenial social intercourse nor religious excitement should be mistaken for it. There has always been a “mixed multitude” who attach themselves to the people of God, making a profession of Christ and claiming to enjoy communion with God. While this fellowship is open and free for all who are partakers of the Holy Spirit, yet no unregenerate persons can participate in this high favour. It was therefore a point of great practical importance that the apostle should make a clear statement thereon so as to guard against all erroneous conceptions of it and its joy. This he does by a most searching description of the One with whom such communion is had, and by the solemn assertion that “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (verse 6).

Again, one can perceive almost at a glance that “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you” (verse 5) is intimately related to the contents of the previous verses. Both in the first and the third verses, John had made mention of what he and his fellow apostles had heard from that blessed One who had been made manifest unto them, and which it was their mission to “declare” unto His redeemed (verse 3). And now he gives an epitomized statement of what Christ *had* made known unto them: “This then is the message.” The R.V. rendering is preferable: “heard *from* him,” for it was not merely something *about* Christ which the apostles proclaimed, but rather, what they had actually heard from His own lips. The “*from him*” clearly has reference to the incarnate Word: because He is the principal Person spoken of in the immediate context, because He was the Sender of the apostles, and because He is the next antecedent in verse 3. The apostles and ministers of the Gospel are the messengers of the Lord Jesus, and it is their business to communicate *His* mind and will, both to the churches and to the world: “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:11-12).

² **A.V.** – The Authorized Version, commonly known as the King James Version, is an English translation of the Christian Bible by the Church of England completed in 1611. It was begun in January, 1604, when King James VI of Scotland and I of England convened the Hampton Court Conference. There the Puritans advocated a new English version in response to the problems of two earlier translations. The A.V. has become the most enduring Bible of all time due to its literal translation, use of the *Textus Receptus* Greek text, and majestic style.

³ **R.V.** – The Revised Version, completed in 1885, had Westcott and Hort on the translation committee, attempted to update the A.V., and began the modern translation movement.

The Greek term translated "message" has several different shades of meaning when rendered into English. Young's Literal Translation (1862) defines it as "promise," for that word in 2 Peter 3:13 is derived from the same root and indicates its benign character. In Acts 22:30, it is translated "commandment," which emphasizes its lordly nature. These agree with the first two statements made in the New Testament concerning our Lord's oral ministry: His hearers "wondered at the *gracious* words which proceeded out of his mouth" (Luk 4:22); "the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having *authority*" (Mat 7:28-29). But here in our text, it is used to express the sum of the revelation communicated by Him. John here puts into a terse sentence what the apostles had gathered from Christ's announcements. Or, if we place the emphasis on "This then is *the* message which we have heard of him," its force would be, "This was the dominant and central doctrine our Master proclaimed, around which all others rotated and from which all others issued." This "message" was one of the greatest importance, both in itself and also in the consequences of it, for it respected the ineffable purity of the divine nature and the imperishable glory of the same.

John's style here is similar to his opening words in the Apocalypse: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to *shew unto* his servants," which He sent "unto his servant John: Who *bare record* of the word of God" (Rev 1:1-2). As the Son said unto the Father, "For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me" (Joh 17:8), so they in turn communicated the same unto their converts (compare 2Ti 2:2). Christ came here to declare and reveal the true and living God (Joh 1:18), and John here summarized His teaching: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light" (1Jo 1:5). This was not a discovery which the apostles made for themselves, nor an inference which they drew from the divine works and ways. No, it was an authoritative communication which they had received from the Saviour, and therefore is to be accepted without question. We heartily agree with James Morgan (1799-1873), who said of the substance of this message, "Its simplicity and comprehensiveness are amazing. It is so simple, a child perceives its meaning; while it is so comprehensive as to render a full exposition of it impossible."

"God is indefinable, because to define is to *limit*, and to speak of limiting *infinitude* is an absurdity. Names are ascribed to God in Scripture, and attributes, yet they convey only some faint notions of His exalted perfections; but sufficient is revealed to preserve the mind from vain imaginations or gross conceptions of His Being. Man knows nothing of God, and can know nothing except what He has revealed. In condescension to our capacity, God has revealed Himself under names and notions which may best strike our *senses*—the channel of all our reasonings and the medium by which we know"—Ambrose Serle (1742-1812). Three statements are made (we dare not call them "definitions") concerning what God is *in Himself*, which, for want of better terms, may be said to tell us something of His nature or character, and they should be reverently pondered in the order in which they occur in Scripture: "God is a Spirit" (Joh 4:24), "God is light" (1Jo 1:5), and "God is love" (1Jo 4:8).

"*God is a Spirit*" (Joh 4:24, A.V.) The absence of the article (in the Greek) imports that God is spirit in the highest sense. The indefinite article in the English, "*a Spirit*" is objectionable, because it places Deity in a class with others. He is spirit itself, absolutely, the alone Source of spirit. The word "spirit" signifies, in man's liping speech, "air" or "breath" or "wind," being that subtle fluid by the respiration of which all things live. "What the air is in motion in the natural world, that the divine Spirit is in the spiritual world... The Deity is revealed under the name of Spirit in order to declare that all existences, both corporate and incorporate, derive their spiritual life and being from Him. He is Spirit in the fount—the creatures are only so as streams proceeding from Him"—A. Serle. *Life* is a principle of power to act or move planted in a substance or being. A living creature then is one which can act from within itself, yet is wholly dependent upon its Giver—the living God, the Author and Sustainer of all life. Negatively, "God is a Spirit" signifies that He is both incorporeal and invisible.

That declaration was necessary in order to correct the erroneous views entertained by those Jews and Samaritans who had, from the elaborate ritual of Judaism, formed a wrong concept of God. It was JEHOVAH Himself who ordained the imposing furnishings of the tabernacle and temple, with their vessels of silver and gold, their brilliantly coloured curtains, and the gorgeous vestments of the high priest. But those things were never intended to intimate that the great God derived any personal satisfaction from them: rather were they appointed as types and emblems of Christ. "Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Act 7:48). Nor is He charmed by elaborate services therein. God is spirit, immaterial, and therefore, not sensual or influenced by the senses. God cannot be gratified with carnal things.

It is not costly architecture, beautiful music, lovely flowers, and fragrant incense, which please the eyes, ears, and nostrils of the creature, but that which issues from renewed hearts He requires. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (Joh 4:24)—spiritually and sincerely.

“*God is light*” tells us very much more than the former statement. God is not only *the* light, but Light itself—absolute, essential, infinite—the source of all light. Scripture speaks of God in a peculiar and immediate relation to light. The pillar of fire was the symbol of His presence with Israel in the wilderness. Daniel tells us, “his throne was like the fiery flame” (Dan 7:9). Habakkuk declared, “And his brightness was as the light” (Hab 3:4). The Psalmist avers,⁴ “Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment” (Psa 104:2), on which Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) remarked, “The concept is sublime: but it makes us feel how altogether inconceivable the personal glory of the Lord must be: if light itself is but His garment and veil, what must be the blazing splendour of His own essential being?” Perhaps the nearest we can come in framing an answer to that question is to employ the words of 1 Timothy 6:16—“dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see.” In James 1:17, He is denominated “the Father of lights.”

“God is light” expresses all the excellence and glory of Deity. It is to be taken in its widest sense, as including the divine essence and the three Persons therein, for though the Father be primarily in view, yet the Son and the Spirit are equally possessed of the divine nature, and therefore are equally “light.” “God is light” is a word to search and awe us, for we “were sometimes darkness” (Eph 5:8), such being our woeful condition by nature. But it is also a word to gladden and warm us, for light shines for the benefit of others, as darkness is wrapped up in itself. Thus, there is the *Gospel* in this word, for it tells us that Deity has been pleased to reveal and make Himself known unto men. “Light maketh all things visible on which it falls and from which it is reflected, but it becomes itself visible only in a radiant point or disc, like that of the insufferable sun, from which it floods the world. So God is unknown except in the person of Christ”—George Smeaton (1814-1889). That is why Christ designated Himself “the light of the world” (Joh 8:12; 9:5) and why prophecy pointed to Him as “the Sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2), for where He is unknown, men “sit in darkness” (Luk 1:79) and “in the region and shadow of death” (Mat 4:16).

“The supreme thing in the physical world is light. Apart from this, there could hardly be a world at all, for all life and movement depend on it. It was the first of God’s creations, and it is the last thing that will fade before the approaching glory of the New Jerusalem. And yet, of all things, light is the most mysterious. The distance of the sun from the earth can be measured, the rate at which light travels across space can be gauged, and the rays can be passed through the prisms, divided, and analysed. But the sun itself still dwells in light inaccessible. No eye can search its burning depths, and no mind can wrest from it its profound secret” (L. Palmer). “God is light”: “He is all the beauty and perfection that can be represented to us by light. He is self-acting, uncompounded spirituality, purity, wisdom, holiness, and glory; and then the absoluteness and fullness of that excellency and perfection” (T. Reynolds).

Most appropriate and comprehensive is the metaphor here used. “God is light” is a summarized expression of the divine perfections. It tells us that He is the *living* God, for the rays of the sun exert a quickening influence, being a minister of vigour, health, and growth to all creatures. It is the parent of all fruitfulness, for those regions (the poles) where the sun scarcely shines at all are barren wastes; so it is spiritually. It announces that God is a most *glorious* Being, for light is a thing of lustre, dazzling the eyes of its beholder. It proclaims God’s *excellency*: “Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun” (Ecc 11:7). If it be a pleasant thing to behold the natural light, how much more so for the eyes of faith to behold the King in His beauty! It declares that He is a *beneficent* Being, the Fount of all blessedness. Light is the source of helpfulness and gladness to all who bask in its bright and genial rays. No beauty can appear anywhere without the light: exclude it, and all charm at once disappears from every object. Nor can there be any beauty in the soul until God commands “the light to shine...in our hearts” (2Co 4:6).

More distinctly, light is the emblem of God’s *holiness*. Light is simple or pure. In it is neither mixture nor pollution, nor can there be. Its very nature and property repels defilement. It traverses unstained each object and medium of uncleanness. Snow is so bright that there is no other whiteness equal to it, but man’s step mars and defiles it. Water sparkles brightly as it issues from the spring, but man’s hand soils it. But none can make light’s purity less pure! Such is God in His ineffable purity. Again, light is a symbol of

⁴ *avers* – asserts as a fact.

God's *omnipresence*, for it is diffused throughout all creation, scattering its rays everywhere. In like manner, "Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD" (Jer 23:24), which made the Psalmist exclaim, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Psa 139:7). "Light is on the hill and in the valley, on sea and on land, in the city and in the desert. With its crystal fingers, it clasps the round earth, and throws its mantle of brightness over all worlds" (L. Palmer).

In a most striking way, light also adumbrates⁵ God's *omniscience*. Not only because it is the figure of knowledge and wisdom, but because of its searching power, entering into every corner and cranny of creation, revealing the hidden things of darkness. "But all things that are reprov'd ['discovered,' margin] are made manifest by the light" (Eph 5:13). Light is all-revealing, equally so are the rays of divine holiness, detecting sin and unmasking the world as a monster lying in the wicked one. As light reveals, so nothing can be hidden from God. He cannot be deceived, but sees things as they actually are. Our motives and aspirations are as palpable to Him as our bodies. "O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off...and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether...Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee" (Psa 139:1-4, 12).

In Scripture, darkness and light are used in quite a number of figurative senses: among them, as signifying ignorance and knowledge (Eph 5:8), a state of nature and a state of grace (1Pe 2:9), heaven (Col 1:12), and hell (Mat 25:30). Thus, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1Jo 1:5) necessitates and draws the essential moral distinction between good and evil, holiness and sin, innocence and guilt. It also intimates that it is possible for creatures, yea, fallen creatures, to have fellowship with God, for light is diffusive, self-communicating, shining upon and illuminating dark bodies. Therein lie both its beneficence and its ascendancy over the darkness, as in Genesis 1:2-3. But more: this most comprehensive "message" elucidates the whole plan of redemption, wherein God acted throughout in *this* character, both exhibiting His opposition to the darkness and yet triumphing over it. In the person of His Son, the light came to save those in darkness, yet preserving inviolable His own ineffable⁶ purity. Nor was there any surrender of the light to the darkness: no concession, no compromise—for when made sin, God "spared not his own Son" (Rom 8:32)! Likewise are *we* made to hate sin and repent, before forgiveness is ours. Salvation is not only a miracle of *grace*, but the *triumph of holiness*.

"And in him is no darkness at all." In the Greek, there is a double negative. God is absolutely perfect: there is no blemish, nor ignorance, no sin, no limitation, naught contrary to His perfections, nothing to mar or dim the splendour of His character; no possibility of any deterioration—for with the Father of lights, there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jam 1:17). God is light which is never clouded, which never wanes. Therein, we behold His paramount excellence. How radically different is the true and living God from every "god" of human invention or conception! While the heathen endowed their imaginary deities with certain virtues, they also attributed some vice or other to them. In the "god" of Pantheism and other systems of philosophy, the distinction between good and evil is only seeming and relative, and not real and absolute, for "he" is identified as much with the one as the other. Here, once more, we have illustrated the *uniqueness* of Holy Writ, for here alone is One made known to us in whom there is "no darkness at all."

That could not be said of the holy angels, whom He "charged with folly" (Job 4:18), because prior to their establishment in holiness, they were liable to fall. Nor could it be said of Adam in his innocency, for his holiness was but a *mutable* one. But God is immutably holy, impeccable,⁷ for He "cannot be tempted with evil" (Jam 1:13). We cannot conceive of the least defect in God, for His holiness is *His very being*, and not a superadded thing like ours. "God *is* light": He not only clothes Himself with the light and dwells in the light, but He Himself *is* light, *only* light, and there is nothing in Him but light. Now to make this affirmation yet more emphatic, the negative is added to the positive: "And in him is no darkness *at all*": no kind of darkness, in any degree or manner; whatever falls under the appellation of "darkness" is excluded from His being. This has the value of intimating that we are to regard the term "light" in its widest possible latitude, and not to restrict it to holiness, for the antithesis—"darkness"—includes more than *sin*. No ele-

⁵ **adumbrates** – exhibits a faint resemblance.

⁶ **ineffable** – incapable of being expressed; too great to be described in words.

⁷ **impeccable** – incapable of sin.

ment enters into His light to obscure it; there is no limit to His knowledge, no stain on His holiness, no hindrance to His blessedness.

The *design* of the apostle in verse 5 may be briefly summarized thus. First, to indicate the nature of that fellowship into which the saints are called: it is a holy one, "in the light." *That* is its distinctive character, and is necessarily determined by the nature of God. Second, to impress upon believers the deep reverence of the divine Majesty: that as light cannot mix with darkness, so they cannot converse with God except as their hearts are in a suitable frame, and their minds filled with proper apprehensions of the great, holy, and glorious Being they are approaching. Third, to intimate to all succeeding generations of Christians that the holiness of God shines in and through every doctrine, every part of the truth, and every ordinance He has appointed. Fourth, to prepare his readers for what follows in his epistle.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

60. Miracles (10:12-13)

“And the LORD discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter” (Jos 10:10). Therein, we behold a solemn exemplification of Christ’s utterances in Matthew 18:6: “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” JEHOVAH had previously acted in accordance with that principle in connection with Egypt, for it was because Pharaoh oppressed and afflicted the Hebrews so sorely that his land and people were visited by the ten great plagues. And now the five kings of Canaan had provoked the Most High by their assault upon Gibeon (verses 4-5), for its inhabitants had made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel, entering into a league with them, and thereby coming under the LORD’s protection. As pointed out in a previous article, the Gibeonites are to be regarded as young converts; and in seeking their destruction, the Amorites had affronted God Himself, for as the prophet assured His people, “For he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye” (Zec 2:8, and compare Act 9:1, 4). Many of those Amorites had fallen beneath the sword of Israel, but a still greater number died under the great hailstones which the LORD cast upon them from heaven (Jos 10:11). In whatever direction they fled, the vengeance of God overtook them, for as Isaiah 28:21 informs us, the LORD acted in wrath with them.

A great number of the Canaanites had fallen, but the remnant of their armies continued in flight. Joshua was reluctant that complete victory should be prevented by failing daylight, and though he and his men had marched all through the preceding night (Jos 10:9) in hastening to the relief of the sorely menaced Gibeonites, so that he could spring a surprise attack upon their invaders; and though they had been engaged in fighting and pursuing the retreating foe over the mountain passes, yet he was loath to call a halt before his task was completed. We therefore behold him, next, supplementing his self-sacrificing diligence by a remarkable display of faith: “And he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon” (verse 12). From the natural standpoint, that appears like the act of a madman; and even from a spiritual aspect, it seems to be the height of presumption. Yet it was neither the one nor the other: rather was it the exercise of full confidence in a miracle-working God. Faith must not be judged by the standards of carnal reason.

But, it may be asked, must not faith have something solid to rest upon, some word of God’s to lay hold of and direct it? Generally, yes; but not necessarily something specific in every instance. For example, when David committed his fearful sin in connection with Uriah, no provision was made for such a case, nor had he any promise from God which he could plead. What then did he do? Psalm 51 informs us. He cast himself upon the *known character* of his God. No sacrifice was appointed under the Law for murderers; and therefore, the guilty one here acknowledged, “For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it” (Psa 51:16). What then? “According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (verse 1) was his plea. And Psalm 32:5 shows it prevailed! Again, when Daniel was cast into the lions’ den, so far as the Scripture informs us, he had no definite word from God of deliverance; yet he *was* delivered, and that “*because* he believed in his God” (Dan 6:23). Without any specific promise to appropriate to his case, Daniel’s faith confided in the power and sufficiency of his God to extricate him from his perilous position; and the LORD did not confound him. Of course not! It is always safe to trust Him.

In the present instance, there is little room for doubt that Joshua had an extraordinary impulse or impression made on his heart by the Holy Spirit, for that alone will satisfactorily account for so pious a man asking God to do this unprecedented thing, as it alone explains why He granted such an unheard-of request. It may be objected that nothing is here said of Joshua making any request. Neither are we told in 1 Kings 17 that Elijah made request of the LORD that there should be a drought, yet James 5:17 informs us that he *did*: “He prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” But further, let it be duly noted, we are informed that, “Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel” (Jos 10:12). Surely that confirms the thought expressed at the opening of this paragraph, that Joshua acted here in response to an extraordinary impulse from above, as was not frequently the case with eminent servants of God during the Old Testament era.

“Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon” (Jos 10:12). The two things, it will be noted, are here joined together, and their order intimates their relationship. The inspired record here is too brief to justify dogmatic assertions. To us, it appears that Joshua asked God’s permission so to command the sun; or that while he communed with Him, he received commission to do so. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out, “The prayer had not been granted by the divine power, if it had not been dictated by the divine grace. God wrought this faith in him and then said, ‘According to your faith,’ and to the prayer of faith, ‘be it unto you’ (Mat 9:29). It cannot be imagined, however, that such a thing as this should have entered into his mind if God had not put it there. A man would have a thousand projects in his head for the completing of the victory, before he would have thought of desiring the sun to stand still; but even in the Old Testament saints, ‘the Spirit...maketh intercession...according to the will of God’ (Rom 8:27). What God will give, He inclines the hearts of His praying people to ask; and for what He will do, He will ‘be enquired of’ (Eze 36:37).”

Not only was Joshua’s ordering of the sun to stand still a glorious exhibition of his faith and implicit confidence in God, but it also manifested his *zeal* in the service of God. This appears more plainly if we bear in mind what has already received our notice; namely, that he had engaged in a tiring uphill march all through the previous night; and then had been employed in fighting from early dawn till late that day, for the terms of this double command to the celestial luminaries intimate that the sun was then near the hour of its setting; and the moon, of its rising. Yet instead of now welcoming a respite, and an opportunity to rest himself and his men, his heart longed for the prolongation of the hours of daylight, so that he might complete his task and utterly exterminate the enemy. How blessedly he here typed out the One who declared by the Spirit of prophecy, “For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up” (Psa 69:9)! In its practical application unto ourselves, this detail makes it evident that there must be unwearied efforts put forth by us in our spiritual warfare, and that we are not to rest satisfied with partial victories, but must continue fighting until complete success is ours. No doubt Joshua and his men found that “they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength” (Isa 40:31); and so shall we, if we do likewise.

“And he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon” (Jos 10:12). To express himself thus before all his army evinced how strong was the assurance of his faith. Joshua was not afraid that the LORD would put him to confusion before the people. Confident that God had inspired his cry, he doubted not that it would be answered. It was to the Almighty, the Creator of the sun and moon, that he looked; and with Him, all things are possible (Mat 19:26; Mar 10:27). Doubtless, he counted too on JEHOVAH’s special favour unto His covenant people. Moreover, He had said, “I have delivered them into thine hand” (Jos 10:8); and therefore, the remaining Amorites must not be allowed the opportunity of escaping under the shelter of nightfall. Looking higher: what anointed eye can fail to see in his action here a striking adumbration of Christ as the miracle-worker, who, by His many wonders and signs, gave proof that He was not only the promised Messiah, but none other than God, manifest in flesh. How vividly does Joshua’s staying the planets in their courses remind us of that One who had such command over the elements that His disciples marveled saying, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” (Mat 8:27).

“And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies” (Jos 10:13). This is one of the favourite passages which infidels scoff at. Wise in their own conceits, they affirm that for such a thing to happen as is here recorded is contrary to science and philosophy. We do not propose to waste any time in replying to them. It was long ago pointed out by Bishop Watson: “The machine of the universe is in the hand of God, and He can stay the motion of any part, or of the whole, with less trouble than any of us can stop a watch.” If a human engineer can slow the speed of an express train by putting on the brake, and bring it to a complete standstill by cutting off the steam, what cannot the divine engineer do with any ponderous body which He has Himself set in motion. The sun is but an instrument, made by God to perform His good pleasure. That He is in no wise dependent upon or limited by it is clear from the fact that light existed, and the earth was clothed with vegetation, *before* the sun was made (Gen 1)! By the miracles of Joshua 10:13, and Isaiah 38:8, the Most High demonstrated that the daily rising and setting of the sun is *not* from a blind instinct of nature, and that He controls its course: “Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not” (Job 9:7).

“And the sun stood still.” Here, as in many other passages, we are taught that the LORD God has a superintendence over all the creatures of His hand. He sends forth His imperious commands not only unto angels and men (Dan 4:35), but to the birds of the air (1Ki 17:4), and to the wild beasts (Dan 6:22), yea, to

inanimate things. He issues His edicts to the clouds and to the light of the sun, and they promptly submit and obey. He addresses the light as though it were a rational creature: He commands it not to shine, and it shines not. The host of heaven, as well as the inhabitants of the earth, are entirely at His disposal. The whole course of nature moves or stands still at the mere will of its Maker. As the sun stood still at His Word through Joshua, so at His fiat,⁸ it went backward in the days of Hezekiah (Isa 38:8); and it is by *His* orders that the same sun, at any time, withdraws its genial beams and is muffled up with dark vapours. "With clouds he covereth the light; and commandeth it not to shine by the cloud that cometh betwixt" (Job 36:32).

Those who profess to believe in an omnipotent God, do but betray their crass folly when they attempt to reason and conclude that He either cannot, or does not, exercise His power in other ways than those known to our very limited experience. It is true that the sun rises and proceeds in a natural course, yet only by divine commission. Though nothing in nature be more constant than the rising of the sun, God can suspend its motion whenever He likes. He who at first commanded it to rise can easily countermand it. What is swifter in motion than the sun? All creatures upon earth are but slugs in comparison; the eagle of the air, but a snail. Yet God can stop it instantly. When He sends forth His prohibition, it cannot stir a foot till He removes that prohibition. It shone not for three days upon Egypt (Exo 10:22). Since He can stop the sun from shining, what cannot He do! Great indeed is God's power; equally great is His goodness, which causes His "sun to rise on the evil" (Mat 5:45), and unthankful when it is in His power to withhold it. How little is that realized by the world! O that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and "for his wonderful works unto the children of men" (Psa 107:8, 15, 21, etc.).

Nothing is more "natural" than the succession of the four seasons; nevertheless, there is so great diversity and such marked inequality between Summer and Winter (even in the same part of the earth) that it is obvious to all enlightened minds that each is controlled and regulated by a new and particular providence of God. It was indeed wonderful that when a blind beggar cried, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And *Jesus stood still*, and commanded him to be called," and healed him (Mar 10:48-49). Behold, there "the Sun of righteousness" (Mal 4:2) stayed in His course by the appeal of a poor sinner! There are some who think the action of Joshua in this amazing incident foreshadowed Christ at His second coming when He saves Israel, appealing to Zechariah 14:7—that in the day of the LORD's battle with the nations, "It shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light"; upon which, at present, this writer has no definite opinion, either pro or con, having learned from long experience to be very wary of prophetic speculations. Sufficient for him to know that whatever the LORD has purposed, promised, or threatened concerning His future dealings with the earth will certainly come to pass.

Rather would we dwell upon the *practical* message which this miracle has for us today. The Christian's confidence in the LORD ought to be greatly strengthened by a pondering of the same. Though God no longer halts the sun in its course, yet He *does* many remarkable things in answer to the believing supplications of His people. When George Mueller (1805-1898) was crossing the Atlantic to fulfil an important preaching engagement, his ship was delayed by a dense fog off the coast of Newfoundland. Said he to the captain, "I have never yet been late for an appointment: let us go to prayer." The fog lifted almost immediately, and the ship arrived in port on time! When entering our train from Chicago to Pittsburgh (April 1931), we encountered a Christian lady in distress. The porter had wrongly put her into an *express*, which would carry her hundreds of miles beyond her destination; and the ticket collector informed her that there was no possibility of the train halting at her village. The writer and his wife reminded her that nothing is too hard for God. We had special prayer, and were able to assure her that the LORD would *stop the train*. Some hours later, she was told to get ready, and it stopped for a few seconds. Some of our readers in Pennsylvania will recall this incident, for they saw the letter of thanks which Mrs. Pink received, telling of how the experience had brought her to trust more fully in a miracle-working God.

"And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher?" (Jos 10:13). The book of Jasher is generally thought to be the same as "the book of the wars of the LORD" mentioned in Numbers 21:14. A further reference is made to it in 2 Samuel 1:18. Apparently, it was a book in which were chronicled outstanding events in the fighting of Israel. The fact that this miracle was recorded in such a book during the lifetime of Joshua not only indicates the deep impression which this phenomenon had made upon the minds of the people, but

⁸ **fiat** – formal or solemn command.

attests its verity. As at a later date Israel sang, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1Sa 18:7; 21:11; 29:5), so they would recite this memorable deed of Joshua's which had an effect upon the whole frame of nature, producing an alteration therein. What is still more important, this miracle is referred to in the inspired writings of the prophets: "The sun and moon stood still in their habitation" (Hab 3:11). As a miracle is of divine causality—an event wrought in the external world by the immediate power of God—so miracles are authenticated by divine testimony, usually by at least "two witnesses" (Deu 17:6).

Remarkable as was this event, it by no means stands entirely alone in a class by itself. We have already alluded to Exodus 10:22 and Isaiah 38:8, and would further compare the statement that "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera" (Jdg 5:20), and also the star which miraculously moved and led the wise men from the East to the house where the infant Saviour then was (Mat 2). But let us also point out the *mystical* interpretation which may be legitimately made of what has been before us. As God controls the movements of the sun, causing it to shine brightly or to be overcast with dark clouds, so it is with spiritual light. Those parts of Africa and Asia upon which the Sun of righteousness shone so blessedly during the first three centuries of this Christian era have since been under the black dominion of Mohammedanism; and such lands as Italy and Spain, which were favoured with the glorious light of the Gospel in the days of Paul, have long languished under the darkness of popery. On the other hand, heathen lands are now being evangelized. God orders *spiritual* light and darkness as truly as the natural.

What most impresses us in connection with this miracle is the clear demonstration which it affords of the supremacy of God and His absolute control of all creatures. There was no power in Joshua, nor any extraordinary dispensation committed him, to exert such an influence upon the whole frame of nature as to produce so great an alteration therein. No, it is clear that he had a divine warranty to speak that which he knew JEHOVAH Himself was about to effect. He first addressed himself to Him in prayer, then received assurance from Him; and then, at his word, the heavenly bodies remained stationary for many hours. Therein we behold how the living God is both the Alpha and Omega, the first cause and the last end (Rev 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13), the wise Contriver and the sure Moderator of everything to His own glory, according to the counsel of His own will. Thus will faith perceive the wisdom, goodness, and power of God in every event. Anything short of that is virtual atheism, which gives God no place in His dominion over the world. Writing on Joshua 10:13, John Gill (1697-1771) said, "How this is to be reconciled with the Copernican system or that with this, I shall not inquire"—wise man not to pretend to understand what has not been divinely revealed. Wiser still in refusing to allow the theorizings of a Prussian astronomer to cast doubt on what He *has* made known, or to suggest an interpretation which "harmonizes" the same with the hypothesis of "science falsely so called" (1Ti 6:20).



THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

3. *Its Imputation*

At the close of our last, we carefully considered the solemn teaching of Romans 5:12; and we now propose to examine the verses which immediately follow, for they are not only of deep importance in connection with the present aspect of our subject, but their meaning is very little apprehended today, for they receive scarcely any notice either in the pulpit or the religious press. In Romans 5:13-14, the apostle takes no notice of our personal transgressions, but shows the effects of *Adam's* sin. His design in these verses is to intimate that the *universality* of physical death can only be satisfactorily accounted for on the ground that it is a penal infliction because of the first man's offence. The argument of verse 13 is as follows: the infliction of a penal evil presupposes the violation of a law, for death is the wages of sin. The violation of the Mosaic Law does not account for the universality of death, because multitudes died before *that* law was given. As therefore death implies transgression, and the Law of Moses explains not all of death's victims, then it clearly and necessarily follows that the whole human race is subject to the penal consequence of the primitive law being transgressed by their first father.

"For until the law sin was in the world" (Rom 5:13). The opening "For" imports that the apostle is now about to furnish proof of the assertion made in verse 12. "The law" here has reference to the Mosaic. "Sin," as all through this passage, signifies guilt or the judicial ground of condemnation, and not the corruption of human nature. "The world" includes the entire race: all were accursed, and are so regarded and treated by the Judge of all the earth. Having stated in verse 12 that all mankind participated in Adam's original sin, and that in consequence all share in its punishment, Paul pauses to vindicate and amplify his assertion that "all have sinned" in Adam. The method he follows is by reasoning backward from effect to cause. The argument is somewhat involved and calls for close attention, yet there is no difficulty in following its course if we perceive that it moves back from death to sin, and from sin to Law—the one, in each case, being necessarily implied by the other. Sin was in the world before the Law of Moses was given, as was evident from the fact that death held universal sway from Eden to Sinai—witness the oft-repeated "and he died" in Genesis 5. Thus far, the argument is simple, but the next point is more difficult.

"But sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Rom 5:13). The meaning of this clause has been missed by many, through failing to follow the course of the apostle's reasoning. They have imagined it signifies that, though sin was in the world prior to Moses, yet it was not reckoned to the account of those who were guilty. Such an idea is not only erroneous, but manifestly absurd. Where sin exists, the Holy One must deal with it *as* sin. And He did so from earliest times, as the flood demonstrated. "Sin is not imputed when there is no law." Why? Because "sin" or guilt is the correlative of "law." Sin or condemnation implies the Law: one cannot be without the other—"sin is the transgression of the law" (1Jo 3:4). None is guilty where no law exists, for criminality presupposes the violation of a statute. Thus, for any to be adjudged guilty is the same thing as saying he has broken the law. This prepares us for verse 14, where proof is adduced that a law, given previous to Moses, *had been violated*; and consequently, God dealt with sinners as sinners long before the time of Moses.

"Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses" (Rom 5:14). Though it be a truth that there is no sin where there is no Law, and that where there is no Law transgressed, there can be no death, yet it is a divinely certified fact that death reigned during the first twenty-five centuries of human history. Therefore, the conclusion is so self-evident that Paul leaves his readers to draw it—the human race must have transgressed an earlier law than the Mosaic. Thus, verse 14 clinches the interpretation we have given of verses 12 and 13. Since men died prior to the Sinaitic transaction, there must be some other reason and ground for their exposure to death. Note well "death *reigned*": it held undisputed and rightful sway. If, then, men were justly subject to its power, they must have been criminals. Death is far more than a calamity: it is a punishment, and that argues the breaking of a law. If men were punished with death from the beginning, then it inevitably follows that they were law-transgressors from the beginning. Moreover, death furnished proof that sin *was* "imputed"—because men were guilty of Adam's offence.

"Even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" has reference unto those who in their own persons and conduct had never violated any law by which their exposure to death could be accounted for. The word "even" here suggests a contrast. Generally speaking, death had reigned from Adam to Moses over all alike; but to particularize, it did so even over a class who had not (in their

own persons) sinned as Adam had. If we bear in mind that in verses 13 and 14, Paul is proving his assertion (at the end of verse 12) that death comes on all because of the first man's sin, then his line of reasoning is easier to follow. The word "even" here implies that there was a particular class who it *appears* ought to have been exempted from the dominion of sin, namely *infants*. Thus, the death of infants supplied a conclusive proof of the doctrine here inculcated. Physical death is a penal infliction; and falling as it does on infants, it must be because of Adam's sin. On no other ground can their demise be accounted for. *They* furnish the climacteric demonstration that all sinned in Adam and suffer the penal consequences of his offence.

At the close of verse 14, the apostle stated that Adam was "the figure of him that was to come": he foreshadowed Christ as the federal head and legal representative of His people. In verses 15-17, it is pointed out that there were contrasts, as well as resemblances, between the first man and Christ. "But not as the offence, so also is the free gift" (verse 15). The Fall differed radically from the restoration: though they are alike in their far-reaching effects, they are quite unlike in the nature of those effects. "For if through the offence of one many be dead"—literally "many died," legally. The "many" includes infants; and since they die because of the one man's offence, that proves they are adjudged guilty of it; and therefore, that God imputed it unto them, for He never punishes where there is no sin.

"Much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many" (verse 15). Here, the first contrast is drawn—between justice and grace. The "much more" does not mean numerically, for Christ cannot restore more than Adam ruined, and he encompassed the downfall of all his posterity. Nor does this "much more" signify that grace is more abundant and efficacious than the offence in its effects—that is brought out in verse 20. No, it is employed *argumentatively*, as a logical inference and as a note of certainty. If God willed it that one man should ruin many, much more can we suppose it to be agreeable that His Son should rescue many. If many be suffering from the offence of Adam, much more should we expect that many will benefit from the merits of Christ. Thus, it is not a "much more" either of quantity or quality, but of assurance and certainty. If it was a meet⁹ arrangement in the divine government that the principle of representation should operate, though it entailed the curse, much more may we look for that principle to operate in producing blessing. If Scripture teaches the imputation of sin, we should not stumble when we find it affirming the imputation of righteousness. If God dealt in inflexible justice with the original sin, then, from all we know of Him, much more may we look for a display of the riches of His grace through Christ.

"And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one [sin] to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification" (verse 16). Here the second contrast is drawn. Though there be a close resemblance between ruin and redemption, in that each was accomplished by the one man, yet there is a great difference between the scope of their respective effects. The destroying power of the former went not beyond the one sin of Adam, whereas the restoring power of the latter covers our countless iniquities. How vastly more extensive then is the reach of the "free gift"! Thus this verse explains itself—the second clause interpreting the first. The divine sentence of condemnation fell upon the entire human family, because of the single offence of their head, but believers are justified by Christ from many offences—"having forgiven you *all* trespasses" (Col 2:13). Christ does very much more than remove the guilt which came upon His people for the first man's sin: He has also made full satisfaction or atonement for all their personal sins—"who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity" (Ti 2:14).

"For the judgment was by one to condemnation." Each term requires to be carefully weighed. The word "judgment" obviously signifies a judicial sentence—pronounced by God—and that judgment was "to condemnation" and *not*, be it noted, to "corruption" or vitiation of nature. The judgment "was by one"—not (here) by one man, but rather by one sin, for it is set over against the "many offences" which we have personally committed. Thus, it is expressly asserted that judgment came by Adam's initial transgression; and if all be condemned for that sin, then all must be accounted guilty of it, for the righteous Judge will not condemn the innocent. "But the free gift is of many offences unto justification"—where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. The finished work of Christ not only provides for the cancellation of original sin, but acquits from the accumulated guilt of all our sins. Moreover, believers in Christ are not merely pardoned, "but justified"—exonerated and pronounced righteous by the Law. They are not only restored to their unfallen state, but given a title to enjoy the full reward of Christ's obedience. As Adam's posterity

⁹ *meet* – fitting; appropriate.

participate in his guilt, depravity, and death, so Christ's seed receive through Him righteousness, holiness, and eternal life.

"For if by one man's offence death reigned by one [better, 'by the offence of the one man death reigned']; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (verse 17). Here is the third contrast: death and life, issuing from the two heads. Here again the central truth of the whole passage is reiterated: death comes on men, not because their natures have been corrupted, nor because of their own personal transgression, but as a judicial sentence passed on account of Adam's crime. It is here expressly said that death reigned "by [because of] one man's offence," and therefore, everyone over whom death has dominion must be regarded as guilty. The word "reigned" here is very impressive and emphatic: those who die are looked upon as death's *lawful subjects*, for it is regarded as their king. In other words, death has a legal claim upon all men. The forceful language of Hebrews 2:14-15 contains the same concept: "That through death he [Christ] might destroy him that had the power [authority] of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them"—i.e. free death's lawful prisoners. Note how this verse indirectly confirms Romans 5:14—death could have no dominion over infants, unless they were charged with Adam's sin.

"Much more they which receive abundance of grace," etc. The "much more" of this verse emphasizes a different thought from that of verse 15. There, it refers to God dealing with Adam and his posterity consistently with His own perfections: if God could righteously condemn all mankind because of the disobedience of their first parent, then much more could He justify the seed of Christ (Isa 53:10) on the ground of the obedience of their Representative. But here, the "much more" has reference to the *modus operandi* of condemnation and justification. If death has come upon us as a judicial infliction for an offence in which we did not actively participate, then much more shall we share the reward of Christ's righteousness, which we voluntarily "receive" by faith. There is a double thought conveyed by "the gift of righteousness," which it is important to observe, for most of the commentators have missed the second. First, it signifies that righteousness is entirely *gratuitous*, neither earned nor merited. Second, it implies that it is *imputed*, for a "gift" is something which is transferred from one person to another. Not only pointless, but senseless is the objection that if righteousness were transferred from Christ to us, it would leave Him without any. Does God's gift of life unto sinners leave Him without any?

"Shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." They who, by faith, receive the gift of His righteousness are not only saved from the consequences of the Fall, but are partakers of eternal life and made joint-heirs with Christ and sharers of His celestial glory. They who have been wholly under the power of death are not only completely freed from it and spiritually quickened, but as one with the King of kings, they are made "kings...unto God" (Rev 1:6). They are not reinstated in the earthly paradise, but shall be brought to honour and glory and immortality in heaven—given title to a state of eternal and supernal blessedness. The careful student should have observed both a threefold comparison and a threefold contrast between the first and last Adams in Romans 5:15-17. Both are sources of radical influence—"abounded unto many" (verse 15); both are conveyors of a judicial sentence—condemnation, justification (verse 16); both introduce a sovereign regime—"death reigned," "reign in life" (verse 17). But by Adam we lost, whereas in Christ we gain; we were charged with the one offence, but are cleared from many; we were the subjects of death, but are made co-heirs with Christ. By Adam, we were ruined; by Christ, we are more than restored. In Adam, we occupied a position a little lower than the angels; in Christ, we are instated far above all principality and power.

"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (verse 18). In verse 12, only the first member of the contrast was given (verses 13-17 interrupting the extension by a necessary parenthesis), but here the case is stated in full. Throughout the whole passage, Paul contrasts a state of divine wrath and divine favour, and not the states of depravity and holiness. Here, it is plainly asserted that all are condemned for Adam's sin. Infants are therefore included, for they would not be punished if innocent—if Adam's sin was not legally theirs. In precisely the same way, all for whom Christ transacted as their covenant Head are justified by His merits being legally reckoned to their account. As something *outside of ourselves* is the judicial ground of our falling under the divine curse, so something outside of ourselves is the judicial ground of our being under the blessing of God. The second half of this verse speaks not of something which is provided for all mankind, but that which God actually imputes to all believers (compare Rom 4:20-24).

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (verse 19). This goes farther than the preceding verse. There it was the *causes* of condemnation and justification which were stated; here, it is their actual issue or *results*. From verse 11 onwards, the apostle has shown that God’s sentence is grounded upon the legally constituted unity of all with their covenant heads. By his breaking of the divine Law, all who were federally one with the first Adam were made sinners; and all who were federally one with the last Adam are made righteous. The Greek word for “made” (*kathistemi*) never signifies to effect any change in a person or thing, but means to “ordain, appoint,” to “constitute” legally or officially, as a reference to Matthew 24:45, 47, Luke 12:14, [and] Acts 7:10, 27 clearly shows. Note well that it is *not* here said that Adam’s disobedience makes us unholy: Paul goes farther back and explains why such should follow, namely, because we are first constituted sinners by imputation.

Romans 5:12-21 is one of the most important passages in the Bible. In it, the fundamental doctrine of federal representation is openly stated, and the fact of imputation is emphatically affirmed. Here is revealed the basic principle according to which God deals with men. Here we behold the old and the new races receiving from their respective heads. Here are set before us the two central figures and facts of all history—the first Adam and his disobedience, the last Adam and His obedience. Upon those two things, the apostle hammered again and again with almost monotonous repetition. Why such unusual reiteration? Because of the great doctrinal importance of what is here treated of, because the purity of the Gospel and the glory of Christ’s atonement turned thereon, because Paul was insisting upon that which is so repulsive to the proud heart of fallen man. Plain as is its language, this passage has been wrested and twisted to mean many things which it does not teach; the Socinians,¹⁰ Arminians,¹¹ and Universalists¹² refuse to accept what is so plainly asserted.

Wherever this passage has been plainly expounded, it has, in all generations, encountered the fiercest opposition—not the least so from men professing to be Christians. The doctrine of imputation is as bitterly hated as those of unconditional election and eternal punishment. Those who teach it are accused of representing God as dealing *unjustly*. The only reply necessary is, What saith the Scriptures? As we have seen, Romans 5 declares that death has passed upon all men because all sinned in Adam (verse 12), that “through the offence of one many be dead” (verse 15), that “the judgment was by one to condemnation” (verse 16), that “by one man’s offence death reigned” (verse 17), that “by the offence of one [man,] judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (verse 18), that “by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (verse 19). “In Adam all die” (1Co 15:22). God deals with men on the principle of *imputation*. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children (Exo 20:5). The curse of Canaan fell on all his posterity (Gen 9:25). The Egyptians perished for Pharaoh’s obduracy. His whole family died for Achan’s crime (Jos 9:24). All Israel suffered for David’s sin (2Sa 24:15, 17). The leprosy visited upon Gehazi passed “unto [his] seed for ever” (2Ki 5:27). The blood of all the prophets was exacted of the members of Christ’s generation (Luk 11:50).

If there be one word which fitly expresses what every man is by nature, it is “sinner.” Waiving all theological systems, if we inquire what be the popular meaning of that term, the answer is, “one who has sinned,” or one who makes a practice of sinning. But such a definition comes far short of the scriptural import of that word. “For as *by one* man’s disobedience many were made sinners.” They are such legally made so—neither because of what they have done personally, or by what they are in the habit of doing, but rather, by the action of their first parent. It is quite true that it is the nature of sinners to sin, but according to the unmistakable testimony of Romans 5, we are all sinners *antecedent to* and independent of any personal transgressing of God’s Law. It was by the offence of Adam that we were legally constituted sinners. The universal reign of death is the *proof* of the universal power of sin, yet so far from representing death as the consequence of individual acts of disobedience, it is expressly insisted upon that death reigns over infants who are incapable of acts of disobedience. Human probation ended with the original offence; and, in con-

¹⁰ **Socinians** – followers of the teachings of Socinus, a 16th century Italian theologian, who reject the deity of Christ, the Trinity, and original sin.

¹¹ **Arminians** – followers of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), Dutch theologian, who reject the Reformers’ understanding of God’s predestination, believing instead salvation is based on man’s accepting or rejecting Christ by his own free will.

¹² **Universalists** – those who reject the particular atonement of Christ for His children, believing instead that Christ died for all men and that all will go to heaven.

sequence, not only was human nature vitiated¹³ at its fountain-head, but all of Adam's descendants fell under the curse of God, the guilt of his transgression being imputed to them.

No finite creature—and still less, a fallen and depraved one—is capable of measuring or even understanding the justice of the infinite God. Yet this we may ask: Which appears to be more consonant to human conceptions of justice—that we should suffer through Adam *because* we were legally connected with him and he transacted in our name; or that we should suffer solely because we derive our *nature* from him by generation, though we had *no part* in or connection with his sin? In the former, we can perceive the ground on which his guilt is charged to our account; but by the latter, we can discover no ground or cause that *any* share of the fatal effects of Adam's sin should be visited upon us. The latter alternative means that we are depraved and wretched without any sufficient reason; and in such an event, our present condition is but a misfortune and in no wise criminal. Nor is God to be blamed: He made man upright, but man deliberately apostatized. Nor was God under any obligation to preserve man from falling. Finally, let it be remembered that our salvation depends upon the self-same principle and fact: if we were cursed and ruined by the first Adam's disobedience, we are redeemed and blessed by the Last Man's obedience.



¹³ **vitiated** – corrupted.

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part I

Man is notoriously a creature of extremes, and nowhere is that fact more evident than in the attitude taken by different ones to this subject. Whereas some have affirmed the Bible is written in such simple language that it calls for no explaining, a far greater number have suffered the Papists to persuade them that its contents are so far above the grasp of the natural intellect, its subjects so profound and exalted, its language so abstruse and ambiguous, that the common man is quite incapable of understanding it by his own efforts; and therefore, that it is the part of wisdom for him to submit his judgment to “holy mother church,” who brazenly claims to be the only divinely authorized and qualified interpreter of God’s oracles. Thus does the Papacy withhold God’s Word from the laity, and impose her own dogmas and superstitions upon them. For the most part, the laity are quite content to have it so, for thereby they are relieved of searching the Scriptures for themselves. Nor is it much better with many Protestants, for in most cases, they are too indolent to *study* the Bible for themselves, and believe only what they hear from the pulpits.

The principal passage appealed to by the Romanists in an attempt to bolster up their pernicious contention that the Bible is a dangerous book—because of its alleged obscurity—to place in the hands of the common people, is 2 Peter 3:15-16. Therein, the Holy Spirit has told us that the apostle Paul, according to the wisdom given him, spoke in his epistles of “some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” But as John Calvin (1509-1564) long ago pointed out, “We are not forbidden to read Paul’s epistles because they contain some things difficult to be understood, but that, on the contrary, they are commended to us, providing we have a calm and teachable mind.” It is also to be noted that this verse says “some things” and not “many,” and that they are “hard” and *not* “incapable of being understood”! Moreover, the obscurity is not in them, but in the depravity of our nature which resists the holy requirements of God, and the pride of our hearts which disdains seeking enlightenment from Him. The “unlearned” here refers not to illiteracy, but to being untaught of God; and the “unstable” are those with no settled convictions, who, like weather-vanes, turn according to whatever wind of doctrine blows upon them.

On the other hand, there are some misguided souls who have suffered the pendulum to swing to the opposite extreme, denying that the Scriptures need any interpreting. They aver¹⁴ they have been written for simple souls, saying what they mean and meaning what they say. They insist that the Bible requires to be *believed* and not explained. But it is wrong to pit those two things against each other: both are necessary. God does not ask for blind credence from us, but an intelligent faith; and for that, three things are indispensable: that His Word should be read (or heard), understood, and personally appropriated. None other than Christ Himself gave exhortation, “Whoso readeth, let him *understand*” (Mat 24:15)—the mind must be exercised upon what is read. That a certain amount of understanding is imperative appears further from our Lord’s parable of the Sower and the Seed: “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart...But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it” (Mat 13:19, 23). Then let us spare no pains to arrive at the meaning of what we read, for what *use* can we make of what is unintelligible to us?

Others take the position that the only Interpreter they need, the only one adequate for the task, is the Holy Spirit. They quote: “But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things...But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any *man* teach you” (1Jo 2:20, 27). To declare that I need none but the Holy Spirit to teach me may sound very honouring to Him, but is it true? Like all human assertions, that one requires to be *tested*, for nothing must be taken for granted where spiritual things are concerned. We answer that it is not; otherwise, Christ makes superfluous provision by giving “pastors and teachers; *For* the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry” (Eph 4:11-12). We must ever bear in mind that it is a very short step from trusting God to tempting Him, from faith to presumption (Mat 4:6-7). Neither should we forget what is God’s common and usual method in supplying the wants¹⁵ of His creatures—mediately and not immediately, by secondary causes and human

¹⁴ **aver** – assert as a fact.

¹⁵ **wants** – what is lacking.

agents.¹⁶ That pertains as much to the spiritual realm as to the natural. It has pleased God to furnish His people with gifted instructors; and instead of haughtily ignoring them, we ought (while *testing* their teaching, Act 17:11) to accept thankfully whatever help they can afford us.

Far be it from us to write anything which would discourage the young believer from recognizing and realizing his *dependence upon* God, and his need of constantly turning to Him for wisdom from above, particularly so when engaged in reading or meditating upon His Holy Word. Yet he must bear in mind that the Most High does not tie Himself to answer our prayers in any particular manner or way. In some instances, He is pleased to illumine our understandings directly and immediately; but more often than not, He does so through the instrumentality of others. Thereby, He not only hides pride from us individually, but places honour on His own institution, for He has appointed and qualified men to “feed the flock” (1Pe 5:2)—guides over us whose faith we are bidden to follow (Heb 13:7). It is true that, on the one hand, God has so written His Word that the wayfaring man, though a fool, should not err therein (Isa 35:8); yet, on the other hand, there are “mysteries” and “deep things” (1Co 2:10); and while there is “milk” suited to babes, there is “strong meat” which belongs only to those who are of full age (Heb 5:13-14).

Turning from the general to the particular, let us evince there is a real need for interpretation: First, in order to explain seeming contradictions. Thus, “God did *tempt* Abraham, and said unto him...Take now thy son...and offer him there for a burnt offering” (Gen 22:1-2). Now place by the side of that statement the testimony of James 1:13: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” Those verses appear to conflict openly with each other, yet the believer knows that such is not the case, though he may be at a loss to demonstrate that there is no inconsistency in them. It is therefore *the meaning* of those verses which has to be ascertained.

Nor is that very difficult. Manifestly, the word “tempt” is not used in the same sense in those sentences. The word “tempt” has both a primary and a secondary meaning. Primarily, it signifies to make trial of, to prove, to test. Secondarily, it signifies to allure, seduce, or solicit to evil. Without a shadow of doubt, the term is used in Genesis 22:1 in its primary sense, for even though there had been no divine intervention at the eleventh hour, Abraham had committed no sin in slaying Isaac, since God had bidden him do so. By the LORD’s tempting Abraham on this occasion, we are to understand not that He would entice unto evil as Satan does, but rather that He made trial of the patriarch’s loyalty, affording him an opportunity to display his fear of Him, his faith in Him, and his love to Him. When Satan tempts, he places an allurement before us with the object of encompassing our downfall; but when God tempts or tests us, He has our welfare at heart. Every trial is thus a temptation, for it serves to make manifest the prevailing disposition of the heart—whether it be holy or unholy. Christ was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without [indwelling] sin” (Heb 4:15). His temptation was real, yet there was no conflict within Him (as in us) between good and evil—His inherent holiness repelled Satan’s impious suggestions as water does fire. We are to “count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” (Jam 1:2) or “manifold trials,” since they are means of mortifying our lusts, tests of our obedience, and opportunities to prove the sufficiency of God’s grace. Obviously, we should not be called on to rejoice over inducements to sin!

Again, “The LORD is *far* from the wicked” (Pro 15:29), yet in Acts 17:27, we are told that He is “*not far* from every one of us”—words which were addressed to a heathen audience! These two statements seem to contradict one another; yea, unless they be interpreted, they *do* so. It has, then, to be ascertained in *what sense* God is “far from,” and in what sense He is “not far from” the wicked—that is what is meant by “interpretation.” Distinction has to be drawn between God’s powerful or providential presence and His favourable presence. In His spiritual essence or omnipresence, God is ever nigh unto all of His creatures (for He “fill[s] heaven and earth”, Jer 23:24), sustaining their beings, holding their souls in life (Psa 66:9), and bestowing upon them the mercies of His providence. But since the wicked are far from God in their affections (Psa 73:27), saying in their hearts, “Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways” (Job 21:14), so His gracious presence is far from them: He does not manifest Himself to them, has no communion with them, hears not their prayers (“the proud he knoweth afar off”, Psa 138:6), succours them not in the time of their need, and will yet bid them, “Depart from me, ye cursed” (Mat 25:41). Unto the righteous, God is graciously near: Psalm 34:18, 145:18.

¹⁶ **mediately...agents** – *mediately* is through secondary causes and human agents, as opposed to *immediately*, which is directly, without anything in between.

Once more, “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true” (Joh 5:31), and “Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true” (Joh 8:14). Another pair of opposites! Yet there is no conflict between them when rightly *interpreted*. In John 5:17-31, Christ was declaring His sevenfold equality with the Father: first in service, then in will. Verse 19 means He could originate nothing that was contrary to the Father, for they were of perfect accord (see verse 30). In like manner, He could not bear witness of Himself *independently* of the Father, for that would be an act of insubordination. Instead, His own witness was in perfect accord therewith: the Father Himself (verse 37), and the Scriptures (verse 39), bore testimony to His absolute deity. But in John 8:13-14, Christ was making direct reply to the Pharisees, who said His witness was false. That He emphatically denied, and appealed again to the witness of the Father (verse 18).

Yet again. “I and my Father are one” (Joh 10:30), and “My Father is greater than I” (Joh 14:28). In the former, Christ was speaking of Himself according to His essential being; in the latter, in reference to His mediatorial character or official position.

Second, interpretation is necessary to prevent our being misled by the mere *sound of words*. How many have formed wrong conceptions from the language used in different verses through their failure to understand its *sense*. To many, it appears impious to place a different meaning upon a term than what appears to be its obvious signification; yet a sufficient warning against this should be found in the case of those who have so fanatically and stubbornly adhered to Christ’s words, “This [unleavened bread] *is* my body” (Mat 26:26; 1Co 11:25), refusing to allow that it must mean “This *represents* my body”—as “The seven candlesticks which thou sawest *are* the seven churches” (Rev 1:20). The error of Universalism, based upon indefinite terms being given an unlimited meaning, points further warning. Arminianism errs in the same direction. “That he by the grace of God should taste death for *every man*” (Heb 2:9) no more included Cain, Pharaoh, and Judas, than “every man” is to be understood absolutely in Luke 16:16, Romans 12:3, and 1 Corinthians 4:5. And “all men” in 1 Timothy 2:4, 6 is no more to be taken as meaning “all without exception,” than it is in Luke 3:15, John 3:26, and Acts 22:15.

“Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations” (Gen 6:9). Of Job, too, it is said that he was “perfect and upright” (Job 1:1). How many have allowed themselves to be misled by the sound of those words. What false concepts have been formed of their import! Those who believe in what they term “the second blessing” or “entire sanctification” consider they confirm their contention that sinless perfection is attainable in this life. Yet such a mistake is quite inexcusable, for what is recorded very soon afterwards of those men shows plainly they were very far from being without moral defect: the one becoming intoxicated, the other cursing the day of his birth. The word “perfect” in those and similar passages signifies “honest, sincere”—as being opposed to hypocrisy. “Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect” (1Co 2:6). There, and in Philippians 3:15, the word signifies “mature” (compare “of full age” in Hebrews 5:14) as distinct from infantile.

“And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise men...and they shall sleep *a perpetual sleep*, and not wake, saith the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts” (Jer 51:57). Those words are cited by gross materialists, who believe in the annihilation of the souls of the wicked. They need not detain us long, for the language is plainly figurative. God was about to execute judgment upon the pride of Babylon; and, as a historical fact, that mighty city was captured while its king and his courtiers were in a drunken stupor, being slain therein, so that they awoke no more on earth. That “perpetual sleep” *cannot* be understood literally and absolutely is evident from other passages which expressly announce the resurrection of the wicked: Daniel 12:2, John 6:29.

“He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel” (Num 23:21). How often those words have been regarded absolutely, without any regard to their context. They were a part of Balaam’s explanation to Balak, why he could not curse Israel so that they should be exterminated by the Midianites. Such language did not mean that Israel were in a sinless state, but that up to that time, they were free from any open rebellion against, or apostasy from, JEHOVAH. They had not been guilty of any heinous offence like idolatry. They had conducted themselves as to be unfit for cursing and cutting off. But later, the LORD *did* see “perverseness” in Israel, and commissioned Babylon to execute His judgment upon them (Isa 10). It is unwarrantable to apply this relative statement to the Church absolutely, for God *does* “behold iniquity” in His children, as His chastening rod demonstrates—though He imputes it not unto penal condemnation.

Third, interpretation is needed for the *inserting of an explanatory word* in some passages. Thus, in “Thou art of purer eyes than to [approvingly] behold evil, and canst not [condoningly] look on iniquity”

(Hab 1:13), some such qualifying terms as these are required—otherwise, we should make them contradict such a verse as “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Pro 15:3). God never beholds evil with complacency, but He *does* to requite it.

Once more, “For who hath resisted his [secret or decreative] will?” (Rom 9:19); “neither did according to his [revealed or preceptive] will” (Luk 12:47)—unless those distinctions be made, Scripture would contradict itself. Again, “Blessed are they that [evangelically, i.e., with genuine desire and effort] keep his testimonies” (Psa 119:2)—for none do so according to the strict rigour of His Law.

For our concluding example of the need for interpretation, let us take a very familiar and simple verse: “Jesus Christ *the same* yesterday, and today, and for ever” (Heb 13:8). Does that “say what it means”? Certainly, says the reader; and the writer heartily agrees. But are you sure that you understand *the meaning* of what it says? Has Christ undergone no change since the days of His flesh? Is He the same absolutely today as He was yesterday? Does He still experience bodily hunger, thirst, and weariness? Is He still in “the form of a servant” (Phi 2:7), in a state of humiliation, the “man of sorrows” (Isa 53:3)? Interpretation is here obviously needed, for there must be a sense in which He *is* still “the same.” He is unchanged in His essential Person, in the exercise of His mediatorial office, in His relation unto and attitude toward His Church—loving them with an everlasting love. But He has altered in His humanity, for that has been glorified; and in the position which He now occupies (Mat 28:18; Act 2:36). Thus, the best known and most elementary verses call for careful examination and prayerful meditation in order to arrive at the meaning of their terms.

