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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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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

MUCH MORE

Whereas the Bible is far from being a philosophical treatise, there is nothing in it which is contrary to real wisdom. Though there be not a little in it which far transcends the grasp of the finite mind, none of its teaching is opposed unto the principles of sound reasoning. In one passage, the Lord Himself says, “Come now, and let us reason together” (Isa 1:18), and frequently does He make use of logical arguments when addressing the children of men. Thus, He employed Old Testament prophecy to demonstrate the excuselessness of the Jews’ skepticism concerning His Messiahship (Joh 5:39, 46), and on the same ground, rebuked the unbelief of His disciples (Luk 24:25-26). So too, He appealed to His miraculous works as furnishing incontrovertible proof that He was sent of God (Joh 10:25; 14:11). In like manner, His apostles frequently drew logical inferences from established principles. “If children, then heirs” (Rom 8:17)—since the former be a fact, the latter necessarily follows. If we meekly submitted when the fathers of our bodies chastised us, “Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits” when He disciplines us? (Heb 12:9). Further examples are contained in what follows.

“Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not *much more* clothe you, O ye of little faith?” (Mat 6:30). Christ is rebuking those who were absorbed by the trifles of this world, who gave more anxious thought to the obtaining of material things than to spiritual and eternal ones, who were more concerned about the garbing of the outward man than with the adorning of the inner one. By a simple process of logic, the Master demonstrated the utter unreasonableness of distrustful worry in connection with the supply of temporal necessities. His argument is drawn inferentially from the greater to the less. God has given us our lives, our bodies, and the life is vastly superior to meat and the body to raiment. His direct appeal is made to the workings of providence—If God bestows such care upon the short-lived and comparatively worthless herbage of the field, then, He certainly will not

neglect those who are destined for immortality and eternal happiness. God evidences His care of the former by clothing it with vegetation—Therefore, He may assuredly be counted upon to provide clothing for our bodies. Thus, anxiety about the supply of material needs betrays paucity of faith. It is the evil fruit of distrusting God's goodness.

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, *how much more* shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Mat 7:11). There is a double contrast here—first, between an earthly parent and God—second, between their respective characters. If the former allows not his little ones to starve, but instead freely ministers to their needs, then certainly God will respond to the cries of His own children. They were but the begetters of our bodies, He the maker of our souls. Their resources are very limited, His are infinite. What abundant evidence God has given the Christian that He *is* his loving heavenly Father! By the sending of His Son, the gift of His Spirit, the bestowal of eternal life, His erection of the throne of grace, appointing of the Mediator, the innumerable promises He has made, all exclude the idea that He will turn a deaf ear unto their requests. But more, our parents were “evil,” whereas God is essentially good. The principal emphasis lies there. If they who by nature are corrupt and filled with selfishness could find in their hearts to bestow things needful on their offspring, then, how safely may He who has nothing in Him to check His benignity be relied upon. He is an ocean of all blessedness, which is ever seeking an outlet to communicate itself to those whom He has loved, chosen, and made His sons and daughters. What encouragement is there here for praying souls!

Romans 5 is the “much more” chapter of the New Testament, the words occurring therein five times. Their force is so self-evident that they call for little comment. If God so loved us when we were guilty sinners as to give Christ to die for us, He surely will not pour His wrath upon us now that we have been justified by Christ's blood (Rom 5:8-9). If God would do so much for His enemies, what will He not do for His friends? Since the death of Christ accomplished so much, His resurrection will have greater potency. If, when we had no love for God, Christ's death procured His favour, much more will His mediation on high deliver us from our sins as Christians (Rom 5:10). If God righteously willed that the first Adam should ruin the many, then, it is to be expected that the last Adam will ransom many, especially when we set over against the crime of the one the merits of the Other (Rom 5:15). If death came upon us as a judicial infliction for an offence in which we did not actively participate, assuredly we shall share in the reward of righteousness which is voluntarily received by faith (Rom 5:17). As life is greater than death, so grace exceeds sin (Rom 5:20). “The grace of God has proved itself much more efficacious in the production of good, than sin in the production of evil” (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878).

“For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, *much more* doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory...For if that which is done away was glorious, *much more* that which remaineth is glorious” (2Co 3:9, 11). In this chapter, the superiority of Christianity over Judaism is clearly shown. The enemies of Paul were challenging his authority as a servant of Christ, and in his vindication, the apostle used the occasion to evince how greatly the ministry of the new covenant excelled that of the old. The one was but preparatory and introductory to the other, a temporary arrangement which was to give place unto that which is permanent. All the splendour of the Mosaic ritual has long since

passed away, but the glory of the Gospel abides and its blessed effects will last for ever. Though the giving of the law and the dispensation connected therewith was glorious, for the whole thereof bore the unmistakable stamp of divinity, yet since it left every transgressor under the curse, it was, therefore (abstractedly considered), a ministry of condemnation and death. But the ministry of the new covenant is much more glorious, for it reveals how sinners may be constituted righteous before God through faith in Christ, secures and communicates the sanctifying Spirit to those who believe, and assures of eternal life. There the law was written on tables of stone, but now upon renewed hearts. Judaism was for one nation, the Gospel for all. Under the former, the perfections of God were viewed through figures and emblems, under the latter, they shine forth openly in the face of Jesus Christ.

“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; *how much more* shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works?” (Heb 9:13-14). The thrice holy Jehovah dwelt in Israel’s midst, and enforced the claims of His purity by requiring those, who approached as worshippers, to do so in a meet condition, lest His displeasure be visited upon their pollutions. Accordingly, provision was made for the symbolical satisfying of His justice and the removal of their carnal defilement. Thereby was a disqualification removed from those who were about to enter the sacred courts. Now, if the blood and ashes of beasts, under the ordinance of God, availed unto an external and temporary justification and sanctification of the flesh—that is, the typical putting away of both the guilt and defilement of sin—how much more must the precious blood of Christ, appointed and accepted by God, effectually and eternally cleanse the souls of those to whom it is divinely applied and give title of access into heaven itself. The blood of animals possessed no intrinsic value and owed its efficacy solely to God’s appointment. But that of Christ was invested with the infinite excellence of His divine person and is “precious” in itself (1Pe 1:19).

“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, *much more* shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven” (Heb 12:25). This presents another of the many contrasts drawn between Judaism and Christianity. The speaker is, in each of these instances, the same. The difference was in the *mouthpieces* which He employed—the former were men, the “prophets,” the latter was in and by His Son (Heb 1:1-2). That indicated the relative importance of the two economies—the one was religion for the earth and a temporary arrangement—the other was a revelation of a heavenly calling and inheritance, and concerned eternal relations and realities. And it was by “the Lord from heaven” that its grand secrets were disclosed. Now, the greater the privileges enjoyed, the more is required from us (Luk 12:48). The clearer the light given, the fuller the response demanded. Therefore, failure to meet increased obligations incurs deeper guilt and involves heavier punishment (Heb 2:2-3; 10:28-29). Condemnation and penalty will be proportioned to the condescension despised and the favour rejected. The recompense of the one was temporary. The doom of the other will be eternal.

SAVING FAITH

5. *Its Evidences*

The great majority of those who read this article will, doubtless, be they who profess to be in possession of a saving faith. To all such, we would put the questions: Where is your proof? What effects has it produced in you? A tree is known by its fruits, and a fountain by the waters which issue from it, so the nature of your faith may be ascertained by a careful examination of what it is bringing forth. We say "*a careful examination,*" for as all fruit is not fit for eating nor all water for drinking, so all works are not the effects of a faith which saves. Reformation is not regeneration, and a changed life does not always indicate a changed heart. Have you been saved from a dislike of God's commandments and a disrelish of His holiness? Have you been saved from pride, covetousness, murmuring? Have you been delivered from the love of this world, from the fear of man, from the reigning power of every sin?

The heart of fallen man is thoroughly depraved, its thoughts and imaginations being only evil continually (Gen 6:5). It is full of corrupt desires and affections, which exert themselves and influence man in all he does. Now, the Gospel comes into direct opposition with these selfish lusts and corrupt affections, both in the root and in the fruit of them (Ti 2:11-12). There is no greater duty that the Gospel urges upon our souls than the mortifying and destroying of them, and this indispensably, if we intend to be made partakers of its promises (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5, 8). Hence, the first real work of faith is to cleanse the soul from these pollutions, and therefore, we read, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal 5:24). Mark well, it is not that they "ought to" do so, but that they *have actually*, in some measure or degree.

It is one thing really to *think* we believe a thing, it is quite another actually to do so. So fickle is the human heart that, even in natural things, men know not their own minds. In temporal affairs, what a man really believes is best ascertained by his practice. Suppose I meet a traveler in a narrow gorge and tell him that just ahead is an impassable river, and that the bridge across it is rotten. If he declines to turn back, am I not warranted in concluding that he does not believe me? Or if a physician tells me a certain disease holds me in its grip, and that in a short time it will prove fatal if I do not use a prescribed remedy which is sure to heal, would he not be justified in inferring that I did not trust his judgment were he to see me, not only ignoring his directions, but following a contrary course? Likewise, to believe there is a hell and yet run unto it, to believe that sin continued in will damn and yet live in it—to what purpose is it to boast of *such* a faith?

Now, from what was before us in the last article, it should be plain beyond all room for doubt that when God imparts saving faith to a soul, radical and real effects will follow. One cannot be raised from the dead without there being a consequent walking in newness

of life. One cannot be the subject of a miracle of grace being wrought in the heart without a noticeable change being apparent to all who know him. Where a supernatural root has been implanted, supernatural fruit must issue therefrom. Not that sinless perfection is attained in this life, nor that the evil principle, the flesh, is eradicated from our beings, or even purified. Nevertheless, there is now a yearning after perfection, there is a spirit resisting the flesh, there is a striving against sin. And more, there is a growing in grace and a *pressing forward* along the “narrow way” which leads to heaven.

One serious error so widely propagated today in “orthodox” circles, and which is responsible for so many souls being deceived, is the seemingly Christ-honouring doctrine that it is “His blood which *alone* saves any sinner.” Ah, Satan is very clever. He knows exactly what bait to use for every place in which he fishes. Many a company would indignantly resent a preacher’s telling them that getting baptized and eating the Lord’s Supper were God’s appointed means for saving the soul. Yet most of these same people will readily accept the lie that it is *only* by the blood of Christ we can be saved. That is true Godwards, but it is not true manwards. The work of the Spirit in us is *equally* essential as the work of Christ for us. Let the reader carefully ponder the whole of Titus 3:5.

Salvation is twofold. It is both legal and experimental, and consists of justification and sanctification. Moreover, I owe my salvation not only to the Son, but to all three persons in the Godhead. Alas, how little is this realized today, and how little is it preached. First and primarily, I owe my salvation to God the Father, who ordained and planned it, and who chose me unto salvation (2Th 2:13). In Titus 3:4, it is the Father who is denominated, “God our Saviour.” Secondly and meritoriously, I owe my salvation to the obedience and sacrifice of God the Son incarnate, who performed as my Sponsor everything which the Law required, and satisfied all its demands upon me. Thirdly and efficaciously, I owe my salvation to the regenerating, sanctifying, and preserving operations of the Spirit. Note that *His* work is made just as prominent in Luke 15:8-10, as is the Shepherd’s in Luke 15:4-7! As Titus 3:5 so plainly affirms, God “*saved* us *by* the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,” and it is the presence of *His* “fruit” in my heart and life which furnishes the immediate evidence of my salvation.

“With the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom 10:10). Thus it is the heart which we must first examine in order to discover evidences of the presence of a saving faith. And first, God’s Word speaks of “*purifying* their hearts by faith” (Act 15:9). Of old, the Lord said, “O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from the wickedness, that thou mayest be saved” (Jer 4:14). A heart that is being purified by faith (cf. 1Pe 1:22) is one fixed upon a pure Object. It drinks from a pure fountain, delights in a pure Law (Rom 7:22), and looks forward to spending eternity with a pure Saviour (1Jo 3:3). It loathes all that is foul and filthy—spiritually as well as morally—yea, hates the very garment spotted by the flesh (Jude 1:23). Contrariwise, it loves all that is holy, lovely, and Christlike.

The pure in heart shall see God (Mat 5:8). Heart purity is absolutely essential to fit us for dwelling in that place into which there shall in no wise enter anything “that defileth, neither worketh abomination” (Rev 21:27). Perhaps a little fuller definition is called for. Purifying the heart by faith consists of, first, the purifying of the understanding, by the shining in of divine light, so as to cleanse it from error. Second, the purifying of the

conscience, so as to cleanse it from guilt. Third, the purifying of the will, so as to cleanse it from self-will and self-seeking. Fourth, the purifying of the affections, so as to cleanse them from the love of all that is evil. In Scripture, the "heart" includes all these four faculties. A deliberate purpose to continue in any one sin cannot consist with a pure heart.

Again, saving faith is always evidenced by a *humble* heart. Faith lays the soul low, for it discovers its own vileness, emptiness, impotency. It realizes its former sinfulness and present unworthiness. It is conscious of its weaknesses and wants, its carnality and corruptions. Nothing more exalts Christ than faith, and nothing more debases a man. In order to magnify the riches of His grace, God has selected faith as the fittest instrument, and this, because it is that which causes us to go entirely out from ourselves unto Him. Faith, realizing we are nothing but sin and wretchedness, comes unto Christ as an empty-handed beggar to receive all from Him. Faith empties a man of self-conceit, self-confidence, and self-righteousness, and makes him seem nothing, that Christ may be all in all. The strongest faith is always accompanied by the greatest humility, accounting self the greatest of sinners, and unworthy of the least favour (see Mat 8:8-10).

Again, saving faith is always found in a *tender* heart. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Eze 36:26). An unregenerate heart is hard as a stone, full of pride and presumption. It is quite unmoved by the sufferings of Christ, in the sense that they act as no deterrent against self-will and self-pleasing. But the real Christian *is* moved by the love of Christ and says, "How can I sin against His dying love for me?" When overtaken by a fault, there is passionate relenting and bitter mourning. Oh, my reader, do *you* know what it is to be melted before God, for you to be heart-broken with anguish over sinning against and grieving such a Saviour? Ah, it is not the absence of sin, but the grieving over it, which distinguishes the child of God from empty professors.

Another characteristic of saving faith is that it, "worketh by love" (Gal 5:6). It is not inactive, but energetic. That faith which is "of the operation of God" (Col 2:12) is a mighty principle of power, diffusing spiritual energy to all the faculties of the soul and enlisting them in the service of God. Faith is a principle of life, by which the Christian lives unto God; a principle of motion by which he walks to heaven along the highway of holiness; a principle of strength, by which he opposes the flesh, the world, and the devil. "Faith in the heart of a Christian is like the salt that was thrown into the corrupt fountain that made the naughty waters good and the barren land fruitful. Hence it is that there followeth an alteration of life and conversation, and so bringeth forth fruit accordingly, 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good fruit,' which treasure is faith" (John Bunyan in *Christian Behaviour*, 1628-1688).

Where a saving faith is rooted in the heart, it grows up and spreads itself in all the branches of obedience, and is filled with the fruits of righteousness. It makes its possessor act for God, and thereby evidences that it is a living thing and not merely a lifeless theory. Even a newborn infant, though it cannot walk and work as a grown man, breathes and cries, moves and sucks, and thereby shows it is alive. So with the one who has been born again—there is a breathing unto God, a crying after Him, a moving toward Him, a clinging to Him. But the infant does not long remain a babe. There is growth, increasing strength,

enlarged activity. Nor does the Christian remain stationary. He goes “from strength to strength” (Psa 84:7).

But observe carefully, faith not only “worketh,” but it “worketh *by love*.” It is at this point that the “works” of the Christian differ from those of the mere religionist. “The papist works that he may merit heaven. The Pharisee works that he may be applauded, that he may be seen of men, that he may have a good esteem with them. The slave works lest he should be beaten, lest he should be damned. The formalist works that he may stop the mouth of conscience, that will be accusing him, if he do nothing. The ordinary professor works because it is a shame to do nothing, where so much is professed. But the true believer works because he *loves*. This is the principal, if not the only motive that sets him a-work. If there were no other motive within or without him, yet would he be working for God, acting for Christ, because he loves Him. It is like fire in his bones” (David Clarkson, 1621-1686).

Saving faith is ever accompanied by *an obedient walk*. “Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1Jo 2:3-4). Make no mistake upon this point. Infinite as are the merits of Christ’s sacrifice, mighty as is the potency of His priestly intercession, yet they avail not for any who continue in the path of disobedience. He acknowledges none to be His disciples save them who do homage to Him as their Lord. “Too many professors pacify themselves with the idea that they possess imputed righteousness, while they are indifferent to the sanctifying work of the Spirit. They refuse to put on the garment of obedience. They reject the white linen which is the righteousness of the saints. They thus reveal their self-will, their enmity to God, and their non-submission to His Son. Such men may talk what they will about justification by faith and salvation by grace, but they are rebels at heart. They have not on the wedding-dress any more than the self-righteous, whom they so eagerly condemn. The fact is, if we wish for the blessings of grace, we must in our hearts submit to the *rules* of grace, without picking and choosing” (Charles H. Spurgeon on, “The wedding garment,” 1834-1892).

Once more—Saving faith is *precious*, for, like gold, it will endure trial (1Pe 1:7). A genuine Christian fears no test. He is willing, yea, wishes to be tried by God Himself. He cries, “Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart” (Psa 26:2). Therefore is he willing for his faith to be tried by others, for he shuns not the touchstone of Holy Writ. He frequently tries himself, for where so much is at stake, he must be *sure*. He is anxious to know the worst as well as the best. That preaching pleases him best which is most searching and discriminating. He is loath to be deluded with vain hopes. He would not be flattered into a high conceit of his spiritual state without grounds. When challenged, he complies with the apostle’s advice in 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Herein does the real Christian differ from the formalist. The presumptuous professor is filled with pride, and, having a high opinion of himself, is quite sure that *he* has been saved by Christ. He disdains any searching tests, and considers self-examination to be highly injurious and destructive of faith. That preaching pleases him best which keeps at a respectable distance, which comes not near his conscience, which makes no scrutiny of his heart. To preach to him of the finished work of Christ and the eternal security of all who

believe in Him strengthens his false peace and feeds his carnal confidence. Should a real servant of God seek to convince him that his hope is a delusion, and his confidence presumptuous, he would regard him as an enemy, as Satan seeking to fill him with doubts. There is more hope of a murderer being saved than of *his* being disillusioned.

Another characteristic of saving faith is that it gives the heart victory over all the vanities and vexations of things below. "For whatsoever is born of God *overcometh the world*: and this is the victory that *overcometh the world*, even our faith" (1Jo 5:4). Observe that this is not an ideal after which the Christian strives, but an actuality of present experience. In this, the saint is conformed to his Head, "Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world" (Joh 16:33). Christ overcame it for His people, and now He overcomes it in them. He opens their eyes to see the hollowness and worthlessness of the best which this world has to offer, and weans their hearts from it by satisfying them with spiritual things. So little does the world attract the genuine child of God that he longs for the time to come when God shall take him out of it.

Alas, that so very few of those now bearing the name of Christ have any real experimental acquaintance with these things. Alas, that so many are deceived by a faith which is not a saving one. "He only is a Christian who *lives for Christ*. Many persons think they can be Christians on easier terms than these. They think it is enough to trust in Christ while they do not live for Him. But the Bible teaches us that if we are partakers of Christ's death, we are also partakers of His life. If we have any such appreciation of His love in dying for us as to lead us to confide in the merits of His death, *we shall be* constrained to consecrate our lives to His service. And this is the only evidence of the genuineness of our faith" (Charles Hodge on 2 Corinthians 5:15, 1797-1878).

Reader, are the things mentioned above actualized in your own experience? If they are not, how worthless and wicked is your profession! "It is, therefore, exceedingly absurd for any to pretend that they have a good heart while they live a wicked life, or do not bring forth the fruit of universal holiness in their practice. Men that live in the ways of sin, and yet flatter themselves that they shall go to heaven, expecting to be received hereafter as holy persons, without a holy practice, act as though they expected to make a fool of their Judge—which is implied in what the apostle says (speaking of men's doing good works and living a holy life, thereby exhibiting evidence of their title to everlasting life). 'Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap' (Gal 6:7). As much as to say, 'Do not deceive yourselves with an expectation of reaping life everlasting hereafter, if you do not sow to the Spirit here. It is in vain to think that God will be made a fool of by you'" (Jonathan Edwards in *Religious Affections*, 1703-1758).

That which Christ requires from His disciples is that they should magnify and glorify Him in this world and that by living holily to Him and suffering patiently for Him. Nothing is as honouring to Christ as that those who bear His name should, by their holy obedience, make manifest the power of His love over their hearts and lives. Contrariwise, nothing is so great a reproach to Him, nothing more dishonours Him, than that those who are living to please self, and who are conformed to this world, should cloak their wickedness under His holy name. A Christian is one who has taken Christ for his example in all things. Then how great the insult which is done Him by those claiming to be Christians whose daily lives

show they have no respect for His godly example. They are a stench in His nostrils. They are a cause of grievous sorrow to His real disciples. They are the greatest hindrance of all to the progress of His cause on earth, and they shall yet find that the hottest places in hell have been reserved for them. Oh, that they would either abandon their course of self-pleasing or drop the profession of that name which is above every name.

Should the Lord be pleased to use this article in shattering the false confidence of some deluded souls, and should they earnestly inquire how they are to obtain a genuine and saving faith, we answer, "Use the means which God has prescribed." When faith be His gift, He gives it in His own way. And if we desire to receive it, then, we must put ourselves in that way wherein He is wont to communicate it. Faith is the work of God, but He works it not immediately, but through the channels of His appointed means. The means prescribed cannot effect faith of themselves. They are no further effectual than as instruments in the hands of Him who is the principal cause. Though He has not tied Himself to them, yet He has confined us. Though He be free, yet the means are necessary to us.

The first means is *prayer*, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you" (Eze 36:26). Here is a gracious promise, but in what way will He accomplish it and similar ones? Listen, "Thus saith the LORD God: I will yet for this *be enquired of* by the house of Israel, to do it for them" (Eze 36:37). Cry earnestly to God for a new heart, for His regenerating Spirit, for the gift of saving faith. Prayer is a universal duty. Though an unbeliever sin in praying (as in everything else), it is not a sin for him to pray.

The second means is the *written Word* heard (Joh 17:20; 1Co 3:5) or read (2Ti 3:15). Said David, "I will never forget thy precepts: for *with them* thou hast quickened me" (Psa 119:93). The Scriptures are the Word of God, through them He speaks. Then read them—asking Him to speak life, power, deliverance, peace, to your heart. May the Lord deign to add His blessing.

PROFITING FROM THE WORD

9. *The Scriptures and Joy*

The ungodly are ever seeking after joy, but they find it not. They busy and weary themselves in the pursuit of it, yet all in vain. Their hearts being turned from the Lord, they look downward for joy, where it is not—rejecting the substance, they diligently run after the shadow, only to be mocked by it. It is the sovereign decree of heaven that nothing can make sinners truly happy but God in Christ—but this, they will not believe, and therefore, they go from creature to creature, from one broken cistern to another, inquiring where is the best joy to be found. Each worldly thing which attracts them says, "It is found in me," but each disappoints. Nevertheless, they go on seeking it afresh today in the very thing which deceived them yesterday. If after many trials, they discover the emptiness of one

creature comfort, then, they turn to another, only to verify our Lord's word, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again" (Joh 4:13).

Going now to the other extreme—There are some Christians who suppose it is sinful to rejoice. No doubt many of our readers will be surprised to hear this, but let them be thankful they have been brought up in sunnier surroundings, and bear with us while we labour with those less favoured. Some have been taught—largely by implication and example, rather than by plain inculcation—that it is their duty to be gloomy. They imagine that feelings of joy are produced by the devil appearing as an angel of light. They conclude that it is well-nigh a species of wickedness to be happy in such a world of sin as we are in. They think it presumptuous to rejoice in the knowledge of sins forgiven, and if they see young Christians so doing, they tell them it will not be long before they are floundering in the Slough of Despond. To all such, we tenderly urge the prayerful pondering of the remainder of this article.

"Rejoice evermore" (1Th 5:16). It surely cannot be unsafe to do what God has commanded us. The Lord has placed no embargo on rejoicing. No, it is Satan who strives to make us hang up our harps. There is no precept in Scripture bidding us, "Grieve in the Lord always: and again I say, Grieve"; but there is an exhortation which bids us, "Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright" (Psa 33:1). Reader, if you be a real Christian (and it is high time you tested yourself by Scripture and made sure of the point), then Christ is yours, all that is in Him is yours. He bids you, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink *abundantly*, O beloved" (Song 5:1). The only sin you may commit against His banquet of love is to stint yourself. "Let your soul delight itself *in fatness*" (Isa 55:2) is spoken not to those already in heaven, but to saints still on earth. This leads us to say that:

1. We profit from the Word when we perceive that *joy is a duty*.

"Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice" (Phi 4:4). The Holy Spirit here speaks of rejoicing as a personal, present, and permanent duty for the people of God to carry out. The Lord has not left it to our option whether we should be glad or sad, but has made happiness an obligation. Not to rejoice is a sin of omission. Next time you meet with a radiant Christian, do not chide him, ye dwellers in Doubting Castle, but chide yourselves. Instead of being ready to call into question the divine spring of his mirth, judge yourself for your doleful state.

It is not a carnal joy which we are here urging, by which we mean a joy which comes from carnal sources. It is useless to seek joy in earthly riches, for frequently they take unto themselves wings and fly away. Some seek their joy in the family circle, but that remains entire for only a few years at most. No, if we are to "Rejoice evermore," it must be in an object that lasts for evermore. Nor is it a fanatical joy we have reference to. There are some with an excitable nature who are happy only when they are half out of their minds, but terrible is the reaction. No, it is an intelligent, steady, heart delight in God Himself. Every attribute of God, when contemplated by faith, will make the heart sing. Every doctrine of the Gospel, when truly apprehended, will call forth gladness and praise.

Joy is a matter of Christian duty. Perhaps the reader is ready to exclaim, "My emotions of joy and sorrow are not under my control. I cannot help being glad or sad as circumstances dictate." But we repeat, "Rejoice in the Lord" is a divine command, and to a large extent, obedience to it lies in one's own power. I am responsible to control my

emotions. True, I cannot help being sorrowful in the presence of sorrowful thoughts, but I can refuse to let my mind dwell upon them. I can pour out my heart for relief unto the Lord, and cast my burden upon Him. I can seek grace to meditate upon His goodness, His promises, the glorious future awaiting me. I have to decide whether I will go and stand in the light or hide among the shadows. Not to rejoice in the Lord is more than a misfortune, it is a fault which needs to be confessed and forsaken.

2. We profit from the Word when we *learn the secret of true joy*.

That secret is revealed in 1 John 1:3-4, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." Ah, when we consider the littleness of our fellowship with God, the shallowness of it, it is not to be wondered at that so many Christians are comparatively joyless. We sometimes sing, "Oh happy day that fixed my choice on Thee my Saviour and my God! Well may this glowing heart rejoice and tell its raptures all abroad." Yes, but if that happiness is to be maintained, there must be a continued steadfast occupation of the heart and mind with Christ. It is only where there is much faith and consequent love that there is much joy.

"Rejoice *in the Lord* always" (Phi 4:4). There is no other object in which we can rejoice "always." Everything else varies and is inconstant. What pleases us today may pall on us tomorrow. But God is always the same, to be enjoyed in seasons of adversity, as much as in seasons of prosperity. As an aid to this, the very next verse says, "Let your *moderation* be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand" (Phi 4:5). Be temperate in connection with all temporal things. Do not be taken with them when they seem most pleasing, nor troubled when displeasing. Be not exalted when the world smiles upon you, nor dejected when it scowls. Maintain a stoical indifference to outward comforts. Why be so occupied with them when *the Lord Himself* "is at hand"? If persecution be violent, if temporal losses be heavy, the Lord is "a very *present* help in trouble" (Psa 46:1)—ready to support and succour those who cast themselves upon Him. He will care for you, so "be anxious for nothing" (Phi 4:6). Worldlings are haunted with carking cares, but the Christian should not be.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (Joh 15:11). As these precious words of Christ are pondered by the mind and treasured in the heart, they cannot but produce joy. A rejoicing heart comes from an increasing knowledge of and love for the truth as it is in Jesus. "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer 15:16). Yes, it is by feeding and feasting upon the words of the Lord that the soul is made fat, and we are made to sing and make melody in our hearts unto Him.

"Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy" (Psa 43:4). As Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) well said, "With what exultation should believers draw near unto Christ, who is the antitype of the altar! Clearer light should give a greater intensity of desire. It was not the altar as such that the Psalmist cared for, for he was no believer in the heathenism of ritualism. His soul desired spiritual fellowship, fellowship with God Himself in very deed. What are all the rites of religion unless the Lord be in them, what, indeed, but empty shells and dry husks? Note the holy rapture with which David regards his Lord! He is not his joy alone, but his *exceeding* joy—not the fountain of

joy, the giver of joy, or the maintainer of joy, but *the joy itself*. The margin hath it, 'The gladness of my joy,' i.e. the soul, the essence, the very bowels of my joy."

"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither fruit be in the vines: the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice *in the LORD*, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab 3:17-18). Ah, that is something of which the worldling knows nothing. Alas, that it is an experience to which so many professing Christians are strangers. It is in God that the fount of spiritual and everlasting joy originates. From Him it all flows forth. This was acknowledged of old by the Church when it said, "All my springs are in thee" (Psa 87:7). Happy the soul who has been truly taught this secret.

3. We profit from the Word when we are taught *the great value of joy*.

Joy is to the soul what wings are to the bird, enabling us to soar above the dregs of earth. This is brought out plainly in Nehemiah 8:10, "The joy of the LORD is *your strength*." The days of Nehemiah marked a turning-point in the history of Israel. A remnant had been freed from Babylon and returned to Palestine. The Law, long ignored by the captives, was now to be established again as the rule of the newly formed commonwealth. There had come a remembrance of the many sins of the past, and tears not unnaturally mingled with the thankfulness that they were again a nation, having a divine worship and a divine law in their midst. Their leader, knowing full well that if the spirit of the people began to flag they could not face and conquer the difficulties of their position, said unto them, "This day is holy unto the LORD: this feast we are keeping is a day of devout worship; therefore, mourn not, neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh 8:10).

Confession of sin, and mourning over the same, have their place, and communion with God cannot be maintained without them. Nevertheless, when true repentance has been exercised, and things put right with God, we must forget "those things which are behind" and reach forth unto "those things which are before" (Phi 3:13). And we can only press forward with alacrity as our hearts are joyful. How heavy the steps of him who approaches the place where a loved one lies cold in death! How energetic his movements as he goes forth to meet his bride! Lamentation unfits for the battles of life. Where there is despair, there is no longer power for obedience. If there be no joy, there can be no worship.

My dear readers, there are tasks needing to be performed, service to others requiring to be rendered, temptations to be overcome, battles to be fought, and we are only experimentally fitted for them as our hearts are rejoicing in the Lord. If our souls are resting in Christ, if our hearts be filled with a tranquil gladness, work will be easy, duties pleasant, sorrow bearable, endurance possible. Neither contrite remembrance of past failures nor vehement resolutions will carry us through. If the arm is to smite with vigour, it must smite at the bidding of a light heart. Of the Saviour Himself, it is recorded, "Who for the *joy that was set before him* endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb 12:2).

4. We profit from the Word when we attend to *the root of joy*.

The spring of joy is faith, "Now the God of hope fill you with all peace and joy in believing" (Rom 15:13). There is a wondrous provision in the Gospel, both by what it takes from us and what it brings to us, to give a calm and settled glow to the Christian's heart. It takes away the load of guilt by speaking peace to the stricken conscience. It

removes the dread of God and the terror of death which weighs on the soul while it is under condemnation. It gives us God Himself as the portion of our hearts, as the Object of our communion. The Gospel works joy, because the soul is at rest in God. But these blessings become our own only by personal appropriation. Faith must *receive* them, and when it does so, the heart is filled with peace and joy. And the secret of *sustained* joy is to keep the channel open, to continue as we began. It is *unbelief* which clogs the channel. If there be but little heat around the bulb of the thermometer, no wonder that the mercury marks so low a degree. If there is a weak faith, joy cannot be strong. Daily do we need to pray for a *fresh* realization of the preciousness of the Gospel, a fresh appropriation of its blessed contents, and then there will be a renewing of our joy.

5. We profit from the Word when we are *careful to maintain* our joy.

“Joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17) is altogether different from a natural buoyancy of spirit. It is the product of the Comforter dwelling in the hearts and bodies, revealing Christ to us, answering all our need for pardon and cleansing, and so setting us at peace with God, and forming Christ in us, so that He reigns in our souls, subduing us to His control. There are no circumstances of trial and temptation in which we may refrain from it, for the command is, “Rejoice in the Lord *always*” (Phi 4:4). He who gave this command knows all about the dark side of our lives, the sins and sorrows which beset us, the “much tribulation” through which we must enter the kingdom of God. Natural hilarity leaves the woes of our earthly lot out of reckoning. It soon relaxes in presence of life’s hardships. It cannot survive the loss of friends or health. But the joy to which we are exhorted is not limited to any set of circumstances or type of temperament, nor does it fluctuate with our varying moods and fortunes.

Nature may assert itself in the subjects of it, as even Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. Nevertheless, they can exclaim with Paul, “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2Co 6:10). The Christian may be loaded with heavy responsibilities, his life may have a series of reverses, his plans may be thwarted, and his hopes blighted, the grave may close over the loved ones who gave his earthly life its cheer and sweetness, and yet under all his disappointments and sorrows, his Lord still bids him, “Rejoice.” Behold the apostles in Philippi’s prison, in the innermost dungeon, with feet fast in the stocks, and backs bleeding and smarting from the terrible scouring they had received. How were they occupied? In grumbling and growling, in asking what they had done to deserve such treatment? No, “At midnight Paul and Silas prayed and *sang* praises unto God” (Act 16:25). Ah, there was no sin in their lives, they were walking obediently, and so the Holy Spirit was free to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto their hearts, so that they were filled to overflowing. If we are to maintain our joy, we must keep from grieving the Holy Spirit.

When Christ is supreme in the heart, joy fills it. When He is Lord of every desire, the source of every motive, the subjugator of every lust, then will joy fill the heart and praise ascend from the lips. The possession of this involves taking up the cross every hour of the day. God has so ordered it that we cannot have the one without the other. Self-sacrifice, the cutting off of a right hand, the plucking out of a right eye, are the avenues through which the Spirit enters the soul, bringing with Him the joys of God’s approving smile and the assurance of His love and abiding presence. Much also depends upon the spirit in which we enter the world each day. If we expect people to pet and pamper us, disappointment

will make us fretful. If we desire our pride to be ministered unto, we are dejected when it is not. The secret of happiness is forgetting self and seeking to minister unto the happiness of others. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," so it is a happier thing to minister unto others than to be ministered unto.

6. We profit from the Word when we are sedulous *in avoiding the hindrances to joy*.

Why is it that so many Christians have so little joy? Are they not all born children of the light and of the day? This term, "light," which is so often used in Scripture to describe to us the nature of God, our relations to Him, and our future destiny, is most suggestive of joy and gladness. What other thing in nature is as beneficent and beautiful as the light. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1Jo 1:5). Ah, it is only as we walk with God, in the light, that the heart can truly be joyous. It is the deliberate allowance of things which mar our fellowship with Him that chills and darkens our souls. It is the indulgence of the flesh, the fraternizing with the world, the entering of forbidden paths, which blight our spiritual lives and make us cheerless.

David had to cry, "Restore unto me *the joy of thy salvation*" (Psa 51:12). He had grown lax and self-indulgent. Temptation presented itself and he had no power to resist. He yielded, and one sin led to another. He was a backslider, out of touch with God. Unconfessed sin lay heavy on his conscience. Oh, my brethren and sisters, if we are to be kept from such a fall, if we are not to lose our joy, then self must be denied, the affections and lusts of the flesh crucified. We must ever be on our watch against temptation. We must spend much time upon our knees. We must drink frequently from the fountain of living water. We must be out and out for the Lord.

7. We profit from the Word when we *diligently preserve the balance between sorrow and joy*.

If the Christian faith has a marked adaptation to produce joy, it has an almost equal design and tendency to produce sorrow—a sorrow that is solemn, manly, noble. "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2Co 6:10) is the rule of the Christian's life. If faith casts its light upon our condition, our nature, our sins, sadness must be one of the effects. There is nothing more contemptible in itself, and there is no surer mark of a superficial character and trivial round of occupation, than unshaded gladness that rests on no deep foundations of quiet, patient grief—grief, because I know what I am and what I ought to be; grief because I look out on the world and see hell's fire burning at the back of mirth and laughter, and know *what* it is that men are hurrying to.

Ah, He who is anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows (Psa 45:7) was also "the man *of sorrows* and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3). And both of these characters are (in measure) repeated in the operations of His Gospel upon every heart that really receives it. And if by the fears it removes from us, and the hopes it breathes into us, and the fellowship into which it introduces us, we are anointed with the oil of gladness; on the other hand, by the sense of our own vileness which it teaches us, by the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, there is infused a sadness which finds expression in, "O wretched man that I am?" (Rom 7:24). These two are not contradictory, but complementary. The Lamb must be eaten with "bitter herbs" (Exo 12:8).

HEART WORK

Part 3

“Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1Sa 16:7). How prone we are to be occupied with that which is evanescent, rather than with the things that abide. How ready to gauge things by our senses, instead of by our rational powers. How easily we are deceived by that which is on the surface, forgetting that true beauty lies within. How slow we are to adopt God’s way of estimating. Instead of being attracted by comeliness of physical features, we should value moral qualities and spiritual graces. Instead of spending so much care, time, and money on the adorning of the body, we ought to devote our best attention to the developing and directing of the faculties of our souls. Alas, the vast majority of our fellows live as though they had no souls, and the average professing Christian gives little serious thought to the same.

Yes, the Lord “looketh on the heart.” He sees its thoughts and intents, knows its desires and designs, beholds its motives and motions, and deals with us accordingly. The Lord discerns what qualities are in our hearts—what holiness and righteousness, what wisdom and prudence, what justice and integrity, what mercy and kindness. When such graces are lively and flourishing, then is fulfilled that verse, “My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies” (Song 6:2). God esteems nothing so highly as holy faith, unfeigned love, and filial fear. In His sight, a “meek and quiet spirit” is of “great price” (1Pe 3:4).

The sincerity of our profession largely depends upon the care and conscience we have in keeping our hearts. A very searching example of this is found in 2 Kings 10:31, “But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart.” Those words are more solemn because of what is said of him in the previous verse, “And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according unto all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel” (2Ki 10:30). Jehu was partial in his reformation, which showed his heart was not right with God. He abhorred the worship of Baal, which Ahab had fostered, but he tolerated the golden calves which Jeroboam had set up. He failed to put away all the evil.

Ah, my reader, true conversion is not only turning away from gross sin, it is the heart forsaking *all* sin. There must be no reserve, for God will not allow any idol, nor must we. Jehu went so far, but he stopped short of the vital point. He put away evil, but he did not do that which was good. He heeded not the law of the Lord to walk in it “*with all his heart.*” It is greatly to be feared that those who are heedless are graceless, for where the principle of holiness is planted in the heart, it makes its possessor circumspect and desirous of pleasing

God in all things—not from servile fear, but from grateful love—not by constraint, but freely—not occasionally, but constantly.

“Keep thine heart with all diligence” (Pro 4:23). Guard it jealously as the dwelling place of Him to whom you have given it. Guard it with the utmost vigilance, for not only is there the enemy without seeking entrance, but there is a traitor within desirous of dominion. The Hebrew for, “with all diligence,” literally rendered is, “above all.” Above all the concerns of our outward life, for, careful as we should be as to that, it is before the eyes of men, whereas the heart is the object of *God’s* holy gaze. Then, “keep” or preserve it more sedulously than your reputation, your body, your estate, your money. With all earnestness and prayer, labour that no evil desire prevails or abides there, avoiding all that excites lust, feeds pride, or stirs up anger, crushing the first emotions of such evils as you would the brood of a scorpion.

Many people place great expectations in varied circumstances and conditions. One thinks he could serve God much better if he were more prospered temporally; another, if he passed through the refining effects of poverty and affliction. One thinks his spirituality would be promoted if he could be more retired and solitary; another, if only he could have more society and Christian fellowship. But, my reader, the only way to serve God better is to be content with the place in which He has put you, and therein, *get a better heart!* We shall never enter into the advantages of any situation, nor overcome the disadvantages of any condition, until we fix and water the root of them in ourselves. “Make the tree good, *and his fruit good*” (Mat 12:33). Get the heart right, and you will soon be superior unto all “circumstances.”

“But how can I get my heart right? Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?” (Jer 13:23). Answer: You are creating your own difficulty by confounding “heart” with “nature.” They are quite distinct. It is important to recognize this, for many are confused thereon. There has been such an undue emphasis upon the “two natures in the Christian” that often it has been lost sight of that the Christian is *a person* over and above his two natures. The Scriptures make the distinction clear enough. For example, God does not bid us keep our “nature,” but He does our “hearts.” We do not believe with our “nature,” but we do with our “hearts” (Rom 10:10). God never tells us to “rend” our nature (Joe 2:13), “circumcise” our nature (Deu 30:6) or “purify” our nature (Jam 4:8), but He does our “hearts”! The “heart” is the very centre of our responsibility, and to deny that we are to improve and keep it is to repudiate human accountability.

It is the devil who seeks to persuade people that they are not responsible for the state of their hearts, and may no more change them than they can the stars in their courses. And the “flesh” within finds such a lie very agreeable to its case. But he who has been regenerated by the sovereign grace of God cannot, with the Scriptures before him, give heed unto any such delusion. While he has to deplore how sadly neglected is the great task which God has set before him, while he has to bemoan his wretched failure to make his heart what it ought to be, nevertheless, he wants to do better. And after his duty has been pressed upon him, he will daily seek grace better to discharge his duty, and instead of being totally discouraged by the difficulty and greatness of the work required, he will cry the more fervently to the Holy Spirit for His enablement.

The Christian who means business will labour to have a “willing” heart (Exo 35:5), which acts spontaneously and gladly, not of necessity; a “perfect” heart (1Ch 29:9), sincere, genuine, upright; a “tender” heart (2Ch 34:27), yielding and pliable, the opposite of hard and stubborn; a “broken” heart (Psa 34:18), sorrowing over all failure and sin; a “united” heart (Psa 86:11), all the affections centred on God; an “enlarged” heart (Psa 119:32), delighting in *every* part of Scripture and loving all God’s people; a “sound” heart (Pro 14:30), right in doctrine and practice; a “merry” heart (Pro 15:15), rejoicing in the Lord always; a “pure” heart (Mat 5:8), hating all evil; an “honest and good heart” (Luk 8:15), free from guile and hypocrisy, willing to be searched through and through by the Word; a “single” heart (Eph 6:5), desiring only God’s glory; a “true” heart (Heb 10:22), genuine in all its dealings with God.

The duty of keeping the heart with the utmost diligence is binding upon the Christian at all times. There is no period or condition of life in which he may be excused from this work. Nevertheless, there are distinctive seasons, critical hours, which call for more than a common vigilance over the heart. And it is a few of these which we would now contemplate, seeking help from above to point out some of the most effectual aids unto the right accomplishment of the task God has assigned us. General principles are always needful and beneficial, yet details have to be furnished if we are to know how to apply them in particular circumstances. It is this lack of definiteness which constitutes one of the most glaring defects in so much modern ministry.

1. *In times of prosperity.* When providence smiles upon us and bestows temporal gifts with a lavish hand, then has the Christian urgent reason to keep his heart with all diligence. For that is the time we are apt to grow careless, proud, earthly. Therefore was Israel cautioned of old, “And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, and houses full of good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not: when thou shalt have eaten and be full: *then beware* lest thou forget the LORD” (Deu 6:10-12). Alas that they heeded not that exhortation.

Many are the warnings furnished in Scripture. Of Uzziah, it is recorded, “When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction” (2Ch 26:16). To the king of Tyre, God said, “Thine heart is lifted up, because of thy riches” (Eze 28:5). Of Israel, we read, “And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. *Nevertheless* they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee” (Neh 9:25-26). And again, “Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols” (Hos 8:4).

Sad indeed are the above passages, the more so because we have seen such a tragic repetition of them in our own days. Oh, the earthly-mindedness which prevailed, the indulging of the flesh, the sinful extravagance, which were seen among professing Christians while “times were good!” How practical godliness waned, how the denying of self disappeared, how covetousness, pleasure, and wantonness possessed the great majority of those calling themselves the people of God. Yet great as was their sin, far greater was

that of most of the preachers, who, instead of warning, admonishing, rebuking, and setting before their people an example of sobriety and thrift, criminally remained silent upon the crying sins of their hearers, and themselves encouraged the reckless spending of money and the indulgence of worldly lusts. How, then, is the Christian to keep his heart from these things in times of prosperity?

First, by seriously pondering the dangerous and ensnaring temptations which attend a prosperous condition, for very, very few of those who live in the prosperity and pleasures of this world escape eternal perdition. "It is easier [said Christ] for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mat 19:24). What multitudes have been carried to hell in the cushioned chariots of earthly wealth and ease, while a comparative handful have been shipped to heaven by the rod of affliction. Remember, too, that many of the Lord's own people have sadly deteriorated in seasons of worldly success. When Israel was in a low condition in the wilderness, then were they "holiness unto the Lord" (Jer 2:3). But when fed in the fat pastures of Canaan, they said, "We are lords; we will come no more unto thee" (Jer 2:31).

Second, diligently seek grace to heed that word, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Psa 62:10). Those riches may be given to try you. Not only are they most uncertain things, often taking to themselves wings and flying swiftly away, but at best, they cannot satisfy the soul, and only perish with the using. Remember that God values no man a jot more for these things. He esteems us by inward graces, and not by outward possessions. "In every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Act 10:35). Third, urge upon your soul the consideration of that awful day of reckoning, wherein according to our receipt of mercies, so shall be our accountings of them, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luk 12:48). Each of us must yet give an account of our stewardship.

2. *In times of adversity.* When providence frowns upon us, overturning our cherished plans, and blasting our outward comforts, then has the Christian urgent need to look to his heart, and keep it with all diligence from replying against God or fainting under His hand. Job was a mirror of patience, yet his heart was discomposed by trouble. Jonah was a man of God, yet he was peevish under trial. When the food supplies gave out in the wilderness, they who had been miraculously delivered from Egypt, and who sang Jehovah's praises so heartily at the Red Sea, murmured and rebelled. It takes much grace to keep the heart calm amid the storms of life, to keep the spirit sweet when there is much to embitter the flesh, and to say, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Yet this is a Christian duty!

To help thereunto, first consider, fellow Christian, that despite these cross providences God is still faithfully carrying out the great design of electing love upon the souls of His people, and orders these very afflictions as means sanctified to that end. Nothing happens by chance, but all by divine counsel (Eph 1:11), and therefore, it is that, "All things work together *for good* to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). Ah, beloved, it will wonderfully calm your troubled breast and sustain your fainting heart to rest upon that blessed fact. The poor worldling may say, "The bottom has dropped out of everything," but not so the saint, for the eternal God is *his* refuge, and underneath him are still the "everlasting arms" (Deu 33:27).

It is ignorance or forgetfulness of God's loving designs which makes us so prone to chafe under His providential dealings. If faith were more in exercise, we should "count it all joy" when we fall into divers temptations, or trials (Jam 1:2) Why so? Because we should discern that those very trials were sent to wean our hearts from this empty world, to tear down pride and carnal security, to refine us. If, then, my Father has a design of love unto my soul, do I well to be angry with Him? Later, if not now, you will see that those bitter disappointments were blessings in disguise, and will exclaim, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psa 119:71).

OWNERSHIP OWNED

"In all thy ways acknowledge him" (Pro 3:6)

We are frequently the losers through failure to observe the *order* in which *divine* truth is set before us. For example, how obvious is the progression to be observed in, and how necessary it is that we should lay to heart, the fourfold injunction of Psalm 37:3-7. First, "Trust in the LORD, and do good" (verse 3); second, "Delight thyself also in the LORD" (verse 4); third, "Commit thy way unto the LORD" (verse 5); fourth, "Rest in the LORD" (verse 7). So it is in the book from which our text is taken. These "proverbs" are not so many maxims strung together at random, but instead, they are presented according to a divine plan. And the more they are prayerfully pondered, the more will the wisdom and love which lie behind their arrangement be perceived by the anointed eye. Proverbs 3:5-6 is a case in point.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart" (Pro 3:5). This comes first because it is the primary duty. With *this*, everything else is vain. "Trust" in His lovingkindness. Can He who is love withhold anything which is really for your good? "Trust" in His wondrous power. Is anything too hard for the Almighty? No matter how critical your situation, "Trust in the LORD." "Trust" in His unchanging faithfulness. Has He not promised? Then will He not perform? Has He not said? Then will He not also do it?

"And lean not unto thine own understanding" (Pro 3:5). This comes next to put us on our guard concerning the principal enemy of faith. Just as we cannot serve *two* masters, so we cannot trust in the Lord and lean unto our own understanding. It is a word of warning against the inveterate tendency of our evil hearts. To rely upon our own wisdom, to follow the dictates of common sense, is the chief obstacle in our way against wholehearted trust in the Lord.

Then comes the word, "In all thy ways acknowledge him" (Pro 3:6). This goes much farther than trusting in the Lord with all the heart, though, of necessity, it must be preceded by that. Unless our hearts are completely occupied with God, the acknowledgment of Him in our outward ways will be nothing more than a perfunctory performance, which is of no value in His sight. That which the Lord requires and desires is the obedience of love. Confidence in the Lord is now to be translated into conformity to His will. Our "ways,"

that is, all the details of our walk, are to make manifest our unreserved trust in the Lord. To “acknowledge” the Lord in all our ways signifies:

1. *Seek His permission for everything you do.* Dare we be so presumptuous as to act *without* leave? We are but creatures. He is God. We are but servants. He is our Lord and Master. We are but purchased property. He is our Redeemer, “Ye are not your own” (1Co 6:19). Therefore, we are not free to please ourselves, but under deepest obligation to be in subjection to the divine will. God’s leave should be *asked* even when a thing is lawful and right. A striking illustration of this is furnished in the prayer which Christ taught His disciples, and that so many have been puzzled by it only reveals the wicked independence of our hearts. We refer to the clause, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Numbers of times has the inquiry been put to us, “How can I sincerely ask this, when bread for the day is already at hand?” Let us draw a homely analogy. Here are cakes and tarts in the pantry. Shall a child enter and help itself? Not if it has been properly brought up. Though the food is there, it should first ask mother’s permission before taking any. In like manner, God requires that we first ask of Him, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Mat 6:11), lest like thieves we take without His leave.

2. *Seek His guidance in every undertaking.* Not to do so is to act in a spirit of independence, which is as the worldling does. “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts” (Psa 10:4). The clear implication of this is that God *ought to be* in all his thoughts, and that it is through pride that He is not. No matter how great or how small the undertaking may be, divine guidance should be definitely sought. “In *every thing* by prayer and supplication” (Phi 4:6). It is only as we so act that God’s lordship is owned by us in a practical way and He is really honoured.

We are not only to “Trust in the Lord,” count upon Him, but also to “acknowledge Him,” seek His direction and help. Has not Christ, here as everywhere, left us an example? “I have set the LORD always before me” (Psa 16:8) was His confession. Ah, fellow Christians, is there any wonder that so many of our “ways” have turned out so disastrously? Let us daily seek grace to heed this word, “In all thy ways acknowledge him.”

3. *Seek His glory in everything.* That this also must be regarded as being included within the scope of the word “acknowledge” is clear from 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” Ah, if only we did so, how very different many of our “ways” would be! If we more frequently paused and inquired, “Will *this* be to God’s glory?” we should be withheld from much sinning and saved from much foolishness, with all the painful consequences. Yet, right here, we need to give diligent heed to the clause preceding our text, “Lean not unto thine own understanding” has a close connection with what follows, as well as with that which goes before. God has not left *us* to decide and determine *what* will be to His “glory.” No, in His loving-kindness He has supplied us with an unerring standard by which everything may be tested, namely His Word.

4. *Seek His blessing upon everything.* Surely *this* is what the Christian desires above everything else. Without it, temporal prosperity, the approval and applause of our fellows, or the fleeting pleasure anything may bring you, is worse than worthless. But what right

have we to expect God's blessing if we have not prayerfully sought it? Note how in Deuteronomy 14:29; 15:10, 18, the Lord's blessing is promised to those who *have* acknowledged Him in their ways by carrying out His revealed will. What business worries, domestic heartaches, social disappointments, and spiritual failures had been spared us had we but sought God's permission, God's guidance, God's glory, God's blessing on everything! The past is beyond recall. For the present, "Consider your ways" (Hag 1:5).

Let us now observe that the Scriptures record examples of how men of God "acknowledged" Him in the manner indicated above. First, behold how David, on two occasions, sought the Lord's *permission* concerning his actions, "And David enquired at the LORD, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop?" (1Sa 30:8). "And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up" (2Sa 2:1).

Second, in the case of Abraham's servant, we have a blessed illustration of one who sought divine *guidance* on his undertaking, "And the servant...arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water. And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water: and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink: and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also, let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac: and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master" (Gen 24:10-14).

Third, the outstanding case of one who sought God's *glory* was His incarnate Son, "Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee" (Joh 17:1)—this ever actuated Him. Fourth, in Romans 1:10, we find the apostle Paul seeking God's *blessing* on his journey.

On the other hand, Scripture mentions not a few instances where the Lord's people *failed* to "acknowledge" Him in all their ways, and records the disastrous consequences which attended their self-will. After Abraham had entered Canaan, "There was a famine in the land," sent, no doubt, to chasten and to test him. But, alas, as is so often the case with us, he failed. Instead of seeking guidance from the Lord, he "went down into Egypt to sojourn there" (Gen 12:10). Ultimately, he was delivered, but for many years after he reaped an unpleasant harvest through Hagar, whom he acquired in Egypt. Concerning the Gideonites who deceived Israel, it is written, "And the men took of their victuals, and *asked not counsel* at the mouth of the LORD. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them" (Jos 9:14-15). The sequel shows that they became a thorn in Israel's side. These things are written for our learning.

"In all thy ways acknowledge him" (Pro 3:6). This precept applies to the arrangements of the home, our business affairs, our social life, our church relations, our service for Christ. And our obedience thereto determines the measure in which our lives are pleasing to God, glorifying to Him, and really blessed by Him. Then, let us, more earnestly, daily seek grace to conform to it in everything.

THE CHRISTIAN'S ARMOUR

Part 1 – Ephesians 6:10-18

In the passage which is to be before us, the apostle gathers up the whole previous subject of the epistle into an urgent reminder of the solemn conditions under which the Christian's life is lived. By a graphic figure, he shows that the Christian's life is lived on the battlefield, for we are not only pilgrims but soldiers. We are not only in a foreign country, but in the enemy's land. Though the redemption which Christ has purchased for His people be free and full, yet between the beginning of its application to us and the final consummation of it, there is a terrible and protracted conflict through which we have to pass. This is not merely a figure of speech, but a grim reality. Though salvation is free, yet it is not obtained without great effort. The fight to which God's children are called in this life is one in which Christians themselves receive many sore wounds and thousands of professors are slain. Now, as we shall see in the verses which follow, the apostle warns us that the conflict has to do with more than human foes. The enemies we have to meet are superhuman ones, and therefore, in order to fight successfully against them, we need supernatural strength.

We must remember that the Christian belongs to the spiritual realm as well as the natural, and so he has spiritual as well as natural foes. Hence, he needs spiritual strength as well as physical. Therefore, the apostle begins here by saying, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph 6:10). The word, "finally," denotes that the apostle had reached his closing exhortation, and the words, "be strong," link up with what immediately precedes as well as with what now follows. Some of you will remember that the whole of the fifth chapter and the opening verses of the sixth chapter are filled with exhortations, and in order for the Christian to obey them, he needs to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

"Finally, my brethren [after all the Christian duties I have set before you in the previous verses], be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." The words, "be strong," mean to muster strength for the conflict, and be strong "in the Lord," signifies that we must seek that strength from the only source from which we can obtain it. Note carefully, it is not, "be strong *from* the Lord," nor is it, "be strengthened *by* the Lord." No, it is, "be strong *in* the Lord." Perhaps you will get the thought if I use this analogy. Just as a thumb that is amputated is useless, and just as a branch cut off from the vine withers, so a Christian whose fellowship with the Lord has been broken is in a strengthless, fruitless, useless state. Thus, "be strong in the Lord" means, first of all, see to it that you maintain a live practical relationship to and remain in constant communion with the Lord. It is deeply important that we should, ere we proceed farther, grasp the exhortation found in verse 10, otherwise there will be no strength for the conflict.

“Be strong in the Lord, *and* in the power of his might.” At first sight, there seems to be a needless repetition there, but it is not so. A soldier not only needs strength of body, he also needs *courage*, and that is what is in view in verse 10—the last clause brings in the thought of boldness. “Be strong”—in faith, in hope, in wisdom, in patience, in fortitude, in every Christian grace. To be strong in grace is to be weak in sin. It is vitally essential to remember that we need to have our strength and courage renewed daily. Be strong in the Lord—seek His strength at the beginning of each day. God does not impart strength to us wholesale. He will not give us strength on Monday morning to last through the week. No, there has to be the renewing of our strength and that strength has to be drawn from the Lord by the actings of faith, appropriating from *His* “fulness.”

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11). Our first need is to stir up ourselves to *resist* temptation by a believing reliance upon God’s all-sufficient grace. That is, obtaining from Him the strength which will enable us to go forth and fight against the foe. Our second greatest need is to be *well armed* for the conflict into which we must daily enter. *This* is the relation between verses 10 and 11. “Be strong in the Lord,” and, “Put on the whole armour of God.” First, stir up yourselves to resist temptation, seeking strength at the beginning of the day for the conflict. Then, see to it that you take unto yourselves, put on, the whole armour of God.

The Christian is engaged *in a warfare*. There is a fight before him, hence, armour is urgently needed. It is impossible for us to stand against the wiles of the devil unless we avail ourselves of the provision which God has made for enabling us to stand. Observe that it is called the “armour *of God*.” Just as the strength we need comes not from ourselves, but must be supplied by the Lord, so our means of defence lie not in our own powers and faculties, but only as they are quickened by God. It is called the “armour of God” because *He* both provides and bestows it, for we have none of our own. And yet, while this armour is of God’s providing and bestowing, *we* have to put it on! God does not fit it on us. He places it before us, and it is *our* responsibility, duty, task, to *put on* the whole armour of God.

Now, it is very important that we should recognize that this term “armour” is a figurative one, a metaphor, and refers not to something which is material or carnal. It is a figurative expression denoting the Christian’s *graces*, and when we are told to “put on” the armour, it simply means we are to call into exercise and action our graces. Those who wish to approve themselves of being in possession of grace must see to it that they have all the graces of a saint. “Put on the whole armour of God, that [in order that] ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” There is no standing against him if we are not armoured. On the other hand, there is no failing and falling before him if our graces are healthy and active.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12). The opening, “For,” has the force of “because” The apostle is advancing a reason, which virtually amounts to an argument, so as to enforce the exhortation just given. Because we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, not against puny human enemies no stronger than ourselves, but against the powers and rulers of the darkness of this world, the panopoly of God is essential. That is brought in to emphasize

the terribleness of the conflict before us. It is no imaginary one, and no ordinary foes we have to meet, but spiritual, superhuman, invisible ones. Those enemies seek to destroy faith and produce doubt. They seek to destroy hope and produce despair. They seek to destroy humility and produce pride. They seek to destroy peace and produce bitterness and malice. They seek to prevent our enjoyment of heavenly things by getting us unduly occupied with earthly things. Their attack is not upon the body, but upon the soul.

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph 6:13). The opening, “Wherefore,” means that, in view of the fact that we wrestle against these powerful, superhuman, invisible foes, who hate us with a deadly hatred and are seeking to destroy us, therefore, appropriate and use the provision which God has made, so that we may stand and withstand. The first clause of verse 13 explains the opening words of verse 11. Verse 11 says, “Put on,” make use of all proper weapons for repulsing the attacks, and verse 13 says, “Take unto you the whole armour of God.” We, “Put on,” by taking it, “unto us,” that is by appropriation, by making it our own. “That ye may be able to withstand.” To *withstand* is the opposite of yielding, of being tripped up, thrown down, by the devil’s temptations. It means that we stand our ground, resist the devil. “That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” The “*stand*” is the opposite of a slothful sleep or a cowardly flight.

I want you to notice that we are not told to *advance*. We are only ordered to “*stand*.” God has not called His people to an aggressive war upon Satan, to invade his territory, and seek to wrest from him what is his. He has told us to occupy the ground which He has allotted us. I want you to see what would have been implied had this verse said, “Take unto you the whole armour of God, and advance upon the devil, storm his strongholds, liberate his prisoners.” But not so. The Lord has given no charge or commission to the rank and file of His people to engage in what is now called, “Personal work,” “Soulwinning,” “Rescuing the perishing.” All such feverish activities of the flesh, as we now behold in the religious world, find no place in this divine exhortation. This is the third time in these verses that the Spirit of God has repeated that word “stand”—not advance, not rush hither and thither, like a crazy person. “Stand therefore” is *all* God has told us to do in our conflict with the devil.

“Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.” Now that brings before us the first of the seven pieces of the Christian’s armour mentioned in this passage. First, let me warn you against the carnalization of this word, thinking of something that is external, visible, or tangible. The figure of the “girdle” is taken from a well-known custom in oriental countries, where the people all wear long, flowing outer garments reaching to the feet, which would impede the actions when walking, working, or fighting. The first thing a person does there when about to be active is to gird up around his waist that outer garment which trails to the ground. When the garment is not girded and hangs down, it indicates that the person is at rest. To, “gird up,” is therefore the opposite of sloth and ease. Be girdled about with a girdle of truth. I believe there is a double reference or meaning here in the word, “truth.” But first of all, I want to take up *what* it is that we need to “gird.”

The breastplate is for the heart, the helmet for the head. What, then, is the “girdle” for? In that form from which the figure is borrowed, the reference is to *the waist* or loins. But what does that metaphor denote? Plainly the centre or mainspring of all our activities. And

what is that? Obviously, *the mind* is the mainspring of action. First, the thought and then, the carrying out of it. 1 Peter 1:13 helps us here, “Gird up the loins *of your mind*.” “Let yours loins be girt about with truth.” It is not so much our embracing the truth as the truth embracing us. Thus, the spiritual reference is to *the holding in and regulation of the thoughts of the mind*. The mind, “girded up,” means a mind which is disciplined. The opposite of one where the thoughts are allowed to run loose and wild. Again, the “loins” are the place of strength, so is the mind. If we allow our thoughts and imaginations to run wild, we will have no communion with God, and no power against Satan.

“Having your loins girt about with truth.” I think the word, “truth,” has reference, in the first place, to the Word of God. “Thy word is *truth*” (Joh 17:17). *That* is what must regulate the mind, control the thoughts, subdue the imaginations. There must be a knowledge of, faith in, love for, subjection to, God’s Word. “Stand, therefore, having your loins [your mind] girt about with *truth*.” Now that suggests to us the characteristic quality of the adversary against whom we are called upon to arm. Satan is a liar and we can only meet him with the truth. Satan prevails over ignorance by means of guile or deceit, but he has no power over those whose minds are regulated by the truth of God.

I think the word, “truth,” here has a second meaning. Take for example Psalm 51:6, God “desireth truth in the inward parts.” “Truth” there signifies reality, sincerity. Truth is the opposite of hypocrisy, pretence, unreality. That is why the girdle of truth comes first, because *it*, being lacking, everything else is vain and useless. The strength of every grace lies in *the sincerity* of it. In 1 Timothy 1:5, we read, “faith unfeigned,” which means true, genuine, real faith, in contrast with a faith which is only theoretical, notional, lifeless, inoperative—a faith which utterly withers before the fires of testing.

The girdle of truth (corresponding to the military belt of the warrior) signifies, then, the mind being regulated by real sincerity, and this alone will protect us against Satan’s temptations unto slackness and guile and hypocrisy. Only as this is “put on” by us shall we be able to “*stand* against the wiles of the devil.” To “stand” is to “resist,” that he does not throw us down.

