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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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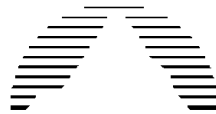
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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FAITH AS AN OVERCOMER

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1Jo 5:4). Four questions call for answer: Why “whatsoever” rather than “whosoever”? What is “the world” which is to be overcome? How does faith overcome it? What is the extent of its victory? The persons spoken of are the regenerate, and “whatsoever” is used because it takes in whatever may be their station or situation in this life. Whosoever is born of God, no matter what his rank or situation, “overcometh the world.” Regeneration is wrought equal and alike in all, and it produces the same fruits and effects in all, as it respects the essentials of godliness. It is not drawn forth into exercise and act in all alike, for there are particular duties to be performed and particular graces to be exercised—according to such times and places as are personal, but not universal—as, for example, one called to endure martyrdom. But “whatsoever [person] is born of God [no matter how distinguished from others by His providence] overcometh the world.”

The “world” is a term which is used in Scripture with many shades of meaning. Sometimes it means the earth; at others, the Church of Christ; at others, empty professors. When used in an ethical or religious sense, it denotes that system over which Satan presides as “prince” (Joh 14:30) or as “god” (2Co 4:4)—the supreme director of all false religions. Since there is nothing which the Devil hates so much as the Gospel, his main activities are engaged in the corrupting of it, in deceiving souls by plausible counterfeits. But that “faith” in Christ and His salvation—as results from a Scriptural knowledge of Him, imparted to the spiritual mind by the light and teaching of the Holy Spirit—sees through Satan’s imitations. Only by a believing reception of the Truth can error be overcome. One of the fruits of the new birth, then, is a faith which not only enables its possessor to overcome the sensual and sinful customs, and the carnal maxims and policies by which the profane world is regulated, but also the lying delusions and errors by which the professing world is fatally deceived.

1 John 5:4 opens with “For,” which intimates the reason why that to the regenerate the commandments of God “are not grievous” (1Jo 5:3); so in this verse, “the world” signifies whatever has the effect of rendering the Divine precepts distasteful to men. The “world” is in direct antagonism to God and His people, and we may detect its presence and identify it with certainty by perceiving the effect it produces on our hearts in *this* way: The world is that which ministers to the carnal nature—be it persons or things—and which tends to render obedience to God irksome and unpleasant. Any one or any thing which draws your heart away from God and His authority is *for you* “the world.” Whatever lessens your estimate of Christ and heavenly things, and hinders practical piety is, *for you*, “the world”—be it the cares of this life, riches, receiving honour from men, social prestige and pomp, the fear of man lest you be dubbed “peculiar” or “fanatical” is, *for you*, “the world”—and either you overcome it, or it will fatally overcome you.

Now, the only thing which will or can “overcome the world” is a God-given, but self-exercised faith. And faith does so, first, by receiving into the heart God’s infallible *testimony* of the same. He declares that “the world” is a corrupt, evanescent, hostile thing, which shall yet be destroyed by Him. His Holy Word teaches that the world is “evil” (Gal 1:4), that “all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1Jo 2:16), that “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1Jo 5:19) and shall yet be “burned up” (2Pe 3:10). As faith accepts God’s verdict of it, the mind is spiritually enlightened; and its possessor views it as a worthless, dangerous, and detestable thing. Second, *by obeying* the Divine commands concerning it, God has bidden us, “Be not conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2), “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1Jo 2:15), and warns us that “whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jam 4:4). By heeding the Divine precepts, its spell over the heart is broken.

Third, by occupying the soul with more glorious, soul-delighting and satisfying objects. We often hear and see 2 Corinthians 4:16 or 17 quoted, but rarely the explanatory words which follow. The daily renewing of the inner man and our afflictions working for us an eternal weight of glory are qualified by: “*While* we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2Co 4:18). The more the substance of the world to come engages the heart, the less hold will the shadows of this world have upon it. Thus, faith wrought in the saints of old: “For ye...took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb 10:34). “By faith he sojourned in the land of

promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: *For* he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:9-10).

Fourth, by drawing out the heart unto Christ. As it was, by fleeing to Him for refuge that the soul was first delivered from the power and thralldom of this world, so it is throughout the Christian life. The more we cultivate real communion with Christ, the less attraction will the baubles of this world have for us. The strength of temptation lies entirely in the bent of our affections, “for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mat 6:21). While Christ is beheld as “the chiefest among ten thousand” (Song 5:10) as “altogether lovely” (Song 5:16), the things which charm the poor worldling will repel us. Moreover, as faith beholds in the mirror of the Word, the “glory of the Lord,” the soul itself is “changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Co 3:18). The world gains the victory over the unregenerate by captivating their affections and capturing their wills; but the saint overcomes the world, because his affections are set upon Christ and his will yielded to Him.

What is the extent of the Christian’s victory? Through temporary weakness of faith, he may neglect the means of grace and fall into sin, yet his soul will be so wretched that he will return to Christ for cleansing and fresh supplies of grace. “Though the conflict of grace with corrupt nature, and the attractions and terrors of the world, is often very sharp, and though regenerate men may be baffled, cast down, and appear slain in the battle; yet the Divine life within him, being invigorated by the Holy Spirit, will again excite him to arise and renew the conflict with redoubled fortitude and resolution; so that at length, the victory will be his decidedly” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821). The life of faith is a “fight” (1Ti 6:12), a warfare in which there are no furloughs or “leaves,” and our success therein depends upon renouncing our own strength and counting solely on the sufficiency of Christ’s grace.

Here, then, we have a sure criterion by which we may determine our Christian progress or spiritual growth. If the things of this world have a decreasing power over me, then my faith is becoming stronger. If I am holding more lightly the things most prized by the ungodly, then I must be increasing in an experimental and soul-satisfying knowledge of Christ. If I be less cast down when some of the riches and comforts of this world be taken from me, then that is evidence they have less hold upon me. If I find the company of the most cultured and charming worldlings have a dampening effect upon my spirit, and I am happy when relieved of their presence, then my faith is overcoming the world. Yet the tense of the verb must not be overlooked: Faith which “overcometh the world” (1Jo 5:4)—not which “has overcome.” So far from being an immediate achievement, it is a lifelong business, a prolonged and continuous strife.

*“O may my heart be occupied, So wholly, Lord, with Thee,
That with Thy beauty satisfied, I elsewhere none may see.”*

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

22. *Ephesians 1:15-23, part 8*

For the past three months, we have been occupied with the exceeding greatness of God's power in connection with His work of grace within His saints. Let us remind the reader that the passage we have been and are considering is not part of a formal statement of doctrine, but rather of a *prayer*. In it, the apostle made request that God's people might know, first, what is the sublime excellency of that power; second, that it is "to us-ward"—for us, acting on our behalf, our grand recourse; third, that it is effectual, for we "believe" according to its invincible might. Fourth, that it operates unto and within us "according to" what it wrought in Christ when God raised Him from the dead: A might no less than *that* is carrying forward the "good work" in our souls to a triumphant completion. Now, it is of vast importance that Christians should more firmly and fully "know" and apprehend these things; otherwise, we should not here be taught (by Paul's example) to make earnest supplication for the same. Ere passing on, let us briefly point out the *kind* of "knowledge" which is here in view.

There are three ways by which the believer may obtain a knowledge of spiritual things: By a diligent application of the mind to the teaching of Scripture, by the exercise of faith on what is revealed, by a personal experience of them in the soul and life. Obviously, it is not a mere mental understanding of them that is here in view, for that may be obtained without having recourse to prayer. Nor do we think that this fourth petition had reference to an enlarged experience of the substance of it, and those who have followed *closely* our exposition of Ephesians 1:17-19 should neither be surprised, nor stumbled at our conclusion. When Paul expressed the longing, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection" (Phi 3:10), he was undoubtedly referring to a closer acquaintance with Christ and an increased measure of the virtue of His resurrection *in the effects* of it—that he might experience more deliverance from that spiritual deadness which the workings of unbelief produce even in the renewed. But this is not the particular aspect of Truth or of Christian experience which is before us in Ephesians 1:19-21.

In our comments upon "in the knowledge of him" (close of Eph 1:17), we sought to show the reference there is to a more intimate and influential knowledge of God in Christ, an increasing experimental acquaintance with Him, resulting in our delighting ourselves in Him and enjoying closer fellowship, leading to an open "acknowledgement" of Him by lip and life. Then we pointed out what "ye may know what is the hope of his calling" (Eph 1:18) means, that ye might perceive the grounds on which rest your realization of having received an effectual call from God—the clear evidences of the same—and thereby, be assured of your filial relation to Him. "And what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" we defined as: That ye may have a better apprehension of the object of your hope, and realise what a glory you have been called unto. "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power" (Eph 1:19) signifies that our hearts may be assured that, notwithstanding, all hindrances and obstacles, God will complete His good work in us and bring us safely into the promised inheritance.

Observe well, it is not "what is the exceeding greatness of his [God's] power *in us*," but which is "to us-ward" (Eph 1:19)—something objective for faith, and not subjective in experience. We, thus, concur with Thomas Goodwin, "For a man to take in and understand that he may glorify God and believe what a great power it was that raised up Christ from death to life, and that no less power works in believers when it produces faith, *that* is the 'knowledge' the apostle meant here." That believers might realise from the effects produced in them by the presence and operations of a God-given faith, what a mighty power must have wrought in them, and will continue doing so. Not only to have evidence of what God's power had wrought in them, but to perceive more clearly *the character* of that power itself and be trustfully occupied with the same. The power of God infinitely transcends all our feelings or experiences of it: It is the thing itself—and not merely the effects of it—that faith needs to be absorbed with.

The knowledge which faith conveys to the soul is all too little realised. Saving faith enables its possessor to conceive of things which are incomprehensible to mere human reason, imparting a knowledge to which scientists and philosophers are strangers: "Through faith we *understand* that the worlds were framed by the word [or mere fiat] of God" (Heb 11:3). Faith gives subsistence in the mind to the things hoped for and makes real things unseen. Faith engages the heart with objects which lie far beyond the reach of any feeling sense—such as, for example, the future resurrection of our bodies. Faith knows what reason cannot grasp and which feelings have nothing to do with. Man wants to know before he will believe, but faith has

to be exercised before the things of God can be *known*—"which believe *and* know the truth" (1Ti 4:3). It is not we are assured, therefore believe; but "we believe and *are sure*" (Joh 6:69). If, then, we would experience more of God's power, we must *know* more about it through the exercise of faith upon it. "If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God" (Joh 11:40)—that is His unchanging order.

In the preceding article, we dwelt on the fact that the power exercised by God in His "work of grace" within us is "according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead" (Eph 1:19-20), but that does not complete the inspired statement: "And set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power" (Eph 1:20-21)—that also exemplifies the power of God to us-ward. Not only God's raising of Christ, but His translation and exaltation of Him are also an essential part of the standard of His operations in and unto His saints. *This* is what God would have us *know*, and this is what our *faith* needs to be engaged with and exercised upon. That what God wrought in the Head, He will work in His members: That Christ is here represented as the pattern or standard of God's operations unto Christians. The love which moved the Father to work so gloriously in His Son is the love which the Father has for His sons (Joh 17:23). The physical, legal, and moral power which was put forth unto Christ is and will be unto us. The wondrous works it performed on the Redeemer, He will duplicate in the redeemed.

"And set him [or 'caused Him to sit'] at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:20). This brings before us one of the grand articles of the Christian Faith: The death, the resurrection, and the exaltation of Christ from the three-fold foundation on which rest all our hopes. Each transcends the grasp of finite intelligence, yet they are "without contradiction" to those taught of God. The moment we begin to reason about them, we create difficulties and confuse ourselves. Only as we receive in simplicity what is Divinely revealed thereon will our faith "stand...in the power of God" (1Co 2:5). The exaltation of Christ is as profound a mystery to carnal wisdom as His death and resurrection, but the one is as clearly set forth as the other in the Word of Truth. If it be asked, "How was it possible for God the Son to be exalted?"—it is sufficient reply to inquire, "How was it possible for Him to be abased?" It is not God the Son simply and absolutely considered that we are here contemplating, but God the Son as He had taken human nature into personal and permanent union with Himself. It was the God-man who died, who was raised again, who was exalted.

The question of how it was possible for a Divine person to be exalted is best resolved by considering what it consisted of. So far as we can perceive, it included three things: The removing of that veil which had been thrown over the Divine glory of the Son of God by His incarnation, the elevation of human nature into Heaven, the Divine reward bestowed upon the Person of the Mediator for His blessed work. "His exaltation answered His humiliation: His death was answered by His resurrection, His going into the grave by His ascending into heaven, His laying in the tomb by His sitting at God's right hand" (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677). So much for a general statement. Now let us proceed to amplify the same. None who accredit the declarations of Holy Writ will challenge the statement that in becoming incarnate, the glory of the Son was *veiled*—and it had to be, for no man can see God and live (Exo 33:20). "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phi 2:6-7).

The earthly life of our Saviour was one of profound abasement. From the manger to the tomb, it was a course of shame, suffering, and sorrow. During those thirty-three years, His Divine glory was eclipsed, though some rays of it broke through occasionally, manifesting to the attentive—and especially the spiritual—observers something of His essential and official dignity. Thus, the angelic hosts announcing His birth, the holiness of His life, the miracles He performed, the testimony of the Father from Heaven, His transfiguration on the mount—all proclaimed Him to be the Son of God, the promised Redeemer of Israel. Even the dark scene of His death was relieved by the phenomena which signified He was no ordinary sufferer—the darkness at mid-day, the earthquake, the rending of the temple veil by an invisible Hand. Nevertheless, sorrow and shame was Christ's experience from infancy unto death. He was, for the most part, despised and rejected of men and had not where to lay His head. It was not until His resurrection that the ignominy of His crucifixion was removed, the hope of His disciples renewed, and that His prayer in John 17:5 began to receive answer.

Let it be clearly understood that at the incarnation, there was no diminishing of the Son's essential glory, for that admits of neither decrease nor increase; but it was obscured in its *manifestation* before the eyes of both angels and men. The Puritans were wont to illustrate this by a total eclipse of the sun. During

that eclipse, the sun loses none of its native light and beauty, but remains the same in itself; but, because of heavy clouds or the moon coming between it and the earth, the sun *appears* dark unto us. Yet, as soon as the clouds are dispersed, or the sun is freed from the lunar interposition and resumes its normal place again unto us, its splendour is again revealed. So the Divine majesty of the Son was obscured when “the Word was made flesh” (Joh 1:14) for “the mighty God” took upon Him “the form of a *servant*” (Phi 2:7), entering the place of subserviency and submission, and became obedient unto death; yet, it was “Immanuel” (Isa 7:14; 8:8; Mat 1:23) who did so, and it was none other than “the Lord of glory” (1Co 2:8) who was crucified.

It was necessary that the Divine glory of Christ should, in large measure, have been concealed during “the days of his flesh” (Heb 5:7), for had it been manifested in its native brightness the sons of men had been utterly overwhelmed. But it was not meet that His Divine majesty should be obscured after He had accomplished His great work: “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Luk 24:26)—that “ought” governs and applies equally to both clauses. The sufferings of Christ were necessary for the expiating of our sins, and His exaltation was equally necessary for applying to us the merits of His death. The resurrection of Christ was a requisite step unto His elevation or entrance into glory, as the fetching of Joseph out of prison was ere he could be made next to Pharaoh—he could not be the governor of Egypt while he was a prisoner! Having accomplished the undertaking assigned Him by the Father and being brought forth from the tomb, there was no occasion for Him to prolong His stay on earth.

After establishing the faith of His apostles, His ambassadors by “many infallible proofs” (Act 1:3)—that He had triumphed over death and the grave, thereby vindicating His character from the aspersions of His enemies and demonstrating that He had “obtained eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12) for His people—it was expedient that He should be taken to Heaven, so that He might exercise His priestly office within the veil and send to them the Holy Spirit to carry forward His work on earth (Joh 16:5-7). In ascending to Heaven, Christ did not leave behind the veil of His flesh, but went there as still clothed in humanity, having taken the same into eternal union with His Divine person, and so He entered the Father’s presence in our nature. Scripture is too plain for any mistake on this score. The risen Christ appeared to His disciples in a body of “flesh and bones” and ate food before them (Luk 24:39, 43), and after “being seen of them forty days... while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight” (Act 1:3, 9); yet two angels assured them “this *same Jesus*, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have *seen* him go into heaven” (Act 1:11).

The change of place was followed immediately by a change of state. “As He descended to assume our nature, so He ascended to glorify our nature. By translating it to Heaven, assurance was given that it should never be laid aside, but be forever preserved in that marriage knot with the Divine” (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680). The glorification of our Lord’s humanity (a foreshadowing of which was vouchsafed upon the holy mount) is altogether beyond human comprehension, but several details are given to help us form some conception of it. At His baptism, God anointed Him “with the Holy Ghost and with power” (Act 10:38), but upon His ascension, it is said of Him “thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness (the Spirit) *above* thy fellows” (Heb 1:9), which we believe was to capacitate His humanity for the offices which were henceforth to be performed in it. “It was so enlarged and spiritualized as to be a convenient habitation for the fulness of His Deity to reside in and perform all its proper operations: ‘For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily’ (Col 2:9): Not dwelling as if imprisoned, but to break forth in all its glories and graces; not formerly so dwelling in it, but now dwelleth” (S. Charnock).

The glorified humanity of Christ is luminous and radiant. “If the righteous are to ‘shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father’ (Mat 13:43), the Head of the righteous shines with a splendour above the sun, for He hath a glory upon His body, not only from the glory of His soul (as the saints shall have), but from the glory of His Divinity in conjunction with it. The glory of His Divinity redounds upon His humanity like a beam of the sun that conveys a dazzling brightness to a piece of crystal” (S. Charnock). What that dazzling brightness appears like may be gathered from the blinding effect which a momentary appearance of it had upon Saul of Tarsus: It is described as “There shone from heaven a great light round about” (Act 22:6) him, accompanied by the voice of “Jesus of Nazareth;” and we are told that for a while, he “could not see for the glory of that light” (Act 22:6-11). How necessary it was then for Him to be taken to Heaven: No mortal could have lived in the presence of a glorified Christ on earth. The Man of Sin will be destroyed by “the brightness of his coming” (2Th 2:8).

Third, the exaltation of Christ was the Divine reward bestowed upon the Mediator for His blessed work. It was meet that God should glorify Christ, because of the glory which redounded unto Him from His work. The Redeemer was but stating a fact when He said to the Father, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (Joh 17:4). God received more glory from the completed work of Christ than He did from all the works of His own hands. His Law was magnified, His government vindicated, His arch-enemy overthrown, His image restored to His people; and therefore, it was fitting that He should crown the Mediator with glory and honour. Because He had poured out His soul unto death, God said, "*Therefore* will I divide Him a portion with the great" (Isa 53:12). Because He had loved righteousness and hated iniquity, "Therefore God anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellows" (Psa 45:7). Because He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name" (Phi 2:9). That was a mediatory glory which was conferred upon Him.

What that reward consists of, the closing verses of Ephesians 1 go on to inform us. It was the seating of Christ as the Mediator at God's own right hand. It was the elevating of Him above all the celestial hierarchies. It was the putting of all things under His feet, so that the very forces of evil are now beneath His immediate control. It was the giving of Him to be Lord over all things, the actual Governor of the universe. It was that He might exercise universal dominion for the good of His Church. It was that He might fill all things. Thus, we see again the needs-be for translating Christ from earth to Heaven. Since all providence is administered from Heaven, and since all power (Mat 28:18) and all judgment (Joh 5:22) has been committed unto Christ, it was meet that He should sit upon a celestial throne. He who has been given the nations for His inheritance and the uttermost part of the earth for His possession could not suitably sway His scepter from some local corner of His empire. As Charnock pointed out, "It was not congruous that He who was made the Head of principalities and powers, the Governor of the angelic spirits, should have a meaner dwelling than the greatest of His subjects and as low as the vilest of His vassals." "And such a high priest *became* us—holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Heb 7:26).

So, too, did the French Puritan Jean Daille (1594-1670) ably argue: "The wisdom of God hath disposed all causes in an order superior to those effects which depend upon them: The heavens are above the earth because the earth is influenced by them; and the sun above the earth because the earth is enlightened by it. It was no less necessary according to the order of God's wisdom, that He who was made by God His Vice-roy both in heaven and in earth, and had the management of all things conferred upon Him, should be lodged in a place superior to those things He governs, and from whence He might send forth His directions to all His subjects." It was meet that as an earthly king should have an earthly palace, our great High Priest should dwell in a temple not made with hands. How could He fittingly bring the Church to a happy immortality, unless He was first in possession of that Heaven to which He was to conduct it? Since He is ordained the Judge of the whole world, must He not sit in the heavenly Court; and there, in majesty, execute that solemn charge?

As Mediator, Christ was and is both God and man—or better, the God-man—and it is as such, He has been exalted and rewarded. His Divine glory is no longer eclipsed, for instead of acting in the form of a servant, He now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. His humanity has been elevated to Heaven and glorified with a glory that outshines every other creature. Though He is still clothed with flesh, yet His Divine glory is not now veiled as it once was, His humanity is now filled with all the Divine perfections of which a created nature is possibly capable. It is not deified, but glorified. "It is not made omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, but is exalted in a fulness of all Divine perfections and infinitely above the glory of angels and men. For the *substance* of this glory of the human nature of Christ, believers shall be made partakers of it, for when we shall see Him as He is, 'we shall be like him' (1Jo 3:2); but as unto the degrees and *measure* of it, His glory is above all that we can be made partakers of" (John Owen, 1616-1683).

There is very little poetry in the natural make-up of this writer, but he confesses that since his conversion, the following lines have strongly appealed to him, and we close with them because they express more sublimely than any language he can command and sum up most succinctly what he has laboured hard to set before the reader:—

*"The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now:
A royal diadem adorns
The mighty Victor's brow.*

*The highest seat that Heaven affords
Is His by sovereign right:
The King of kings and Lord of lords
He sits enthroned in light."*

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

2. His Earlier Days

Joshua was born in the land of Egypt, and with the sole exception of Caleb, he was the only adult Israelite in the great exodus who survived the forty years wanderings in the wilderness and actually entered Canaan. He is mentioned for the first time in Exodus 17:9, where he is introduced to our notice most abruptly, nothing being told us there of his parentage, early history, or his piety. It was on the occasion when Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim: "And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek." From that brief statement, we gather that our hero had already attracted the notice of Moses, gained his confidence; and was, therefore, a man of valour and competent to be captain over others. The following verse also represents him in a favourable light: "So Joshua did as Moses had said to him" (Exo 17:10). He made no demure, objected not to receive orders from his superior, but obediently complied with his instructions. "And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword" (Exo 17:13)—thus, success attended his efforts.

What we have briefly glanced at above supplies a most striking illustration of the law of *first mention*. The initial occurrence of anything in Scripture invariable supplies the key to the later ones, forecasting by means of a broad outline its subsequent usage. In other words, the first time a subject or object, a person or thing, is brought before us in God's Word, what is there said of him or it, virtually supplies a definition of its meaning—or at least gives us the principal clue to the significance of its later mentionings. Thus it is here. The very first time Joshua is brought to our notice, it is as a successful warrior—and note carefully, not slaying innocent people, but in fighting the enemies of the Lord. How this brief allusion in Exodus 17 foreshadowed the great work which lay before him! The immediate sequel confirms this: "And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of [not Israel, but] *Joshua*: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (Exo 17:14)—a plain hint of his future work, as an appointed instrument to execute the Divine vengeance upon His foes.

Personally, we believe there is a definite reference unto Joshua in Exodus 23:20-23, though his name be not specifically mentioned. Those verses contain a Divine prophecy and promise unto Israel, and as is so often the case with similar passages, there is, we conceive, a *double* allusion. "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared" (Exo 23:20). No doubt the primary reference is to Christ as the Angel of the Covenant, yet subordinately it points, we think, unto Joshua as God's "messenger" or "angel"—for he was the one who actually brought Israel into the heritage which God had prepared for them. So, too, it seems clear that there is a double allusion in "my name is in him" (Exo 23:21): When the Angel of the covenant became incarnate, it was said, "They shall call his name Emmanuel" (Mat 1:23), and when our hero's name was changed from "Oshea" to "Jehoshua" (Nu 13:16), the Divine name was incorporated into his! Israel were ordered to "obey his voice" (Exo 23:21-22); and in Joshua 1:16, they affirmed to him, "All that thou commandest us we will do"!

The next reference to him is found in Exodus 24:13, when in response to Jehovah's bidding, Moses went up unto Him in the mount that he might receive from Him the tables of the Law, we are told that "Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God" (Exo 24:13). From this reference, we learn the peculiar and honoured position which he occupied even at this early stage in his career: He was the "minister" or assistant of Moses, the personal attendant of that eminent man of God. But there is more in it than that: He was subservient to Moses, yet he was also to complement his work. Moses brought Israel out of Egypt, but Joshua would bring them into Canaan. That the latter was not disconnected from the former is clear from the opening verses of his book, for not only is Joshua there again designated "Moses' minister" (Jos 1:1), but when the Lord gave to him his great commission, He expressly bade him "to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee" (Jos 1:7). So in the antitype: Christ was "made under the law" (Gal 4:4).

When Moses left the camp to go unto Jehovah into the mount, his minister Joshua accompanied him, though evidently, only a part of the ascent—the attendant being left at some lower level, as Moses drew near unto the Lord. In what follows, we are furnished with a valuable side-light on our hero's character. Joshua was left alone for "forty days and forty nights" (Exo 24:18)! What a testing of his faith, his patience, and his fidelity was that! His response to that severe test shines out the more blessedly when contrasted from the conduct of Aaron in the camp. Exodus 25 to 31 gives a record of the instructions which Moses

received, while the opening verses of 32 show us what transpired in the camp. "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses...we wot not what is become of him" (Exo 32:1). Apparently, Aaron shared their fears that they would see Moses no more, for he yielded to their solicitation.

Now, in blessed contrast from the unbelief and impatience of the people and of Aaron, Joshua trustfully and perseveringly awaited the return of his master. Thus was he tried and proved, manifested to be "a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use" (2Ti 2:21) before the grand task of conducting Israel into Canaan was assigned unto him. Proof that Joshua had remained in the mount during those forty days and nights is supplied by Exodus 32:15-18—for there, we are informed: "And Moses turned, and went down from the mount...And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted [in their idolatrous and carnal revelry: see verse 6]...he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear"—observe that though puzzled by what he heard, yet Joshua placed a favourable construction upon it, not supposing the worst.

When Moses drew nigh unto the camp and beheld the idolatrous and lascivious scene spread before him, he was filled with righteous indignation, and took the golden calf, burnt it in the fire, ground it to powder, strewed it upon the water and made the children of Israel drink. Under his order, the Levites slew about three thousand men and the Lord "plagued the people" (Exo 32:35). After they had been severely chastened and humbled, Moses "took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp" (Exo 33:7). Then as he entered into the tabernacle, the Cloudy Pillar descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. Later, "he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle" (Exo 33:11). That is indeed a remarkable statement, yet too brief to warrant inferences. But it at least shows the distinguished favour bestowed upon the honoured servant of Moses, that he—rather than Aaron—was here left in charge of the sacred tent of meeting; whether he was inside it when Jehovah stood at its door, we cannot say.

Another brief mention is made of Joshua in Numbers 11. On the occasion when Moses gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and set them round about the tabernacle, the Lord came down in a cloud and spake unto him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and gave unto the seventy elders, so that "they prophesied, and did not cease" (Num 11:25). Two others of the elders had, for some reason, remained in the camp, yet the Spirit now rested upon them, so that they, too, "prophesied" even in the camp. Evidently deeming this irregular, a young man ran and told Moses of the unusual occurrence: "And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them" (Num 11:28). That, too, reveals his character: He did not take it upon himself to rebuke the elders, nor did he request Moses to slay them. It was zeal for his master that promoted his petition, as Moses' reply clearly indicates: "Enviest thou for my sake?" (Num 11:29). There was no jealousy or self seeking here on the part of Joshua, but only a concern for the honour of the one he served.

We turn now to that passage which is probably the most familiar to the reader wherein our hero figures. When the Lord gave order to Moses that he send twelve men to "search the land of Canaan" (Num 13:2), a ruler from each tribe, Oshua was the one selected from the tribe of Ephraim. And it was on this occasion that his name was changed to "Jehoshua" (Num 13:16), or in its abbreviated form "Joshua," so that he was one of the persons mentioned in Scripture—all of them of eminence—whose name was changed. "Oshua" means "salvation;" and "Jehoshua" means "he by whom Jehovah will save." We need hardly add that, through the Greek, Joshua is precisely the same as "Jesus"—see Acts 7:45, Hebrews 4:8. When the twelve spies returned to Moses and made report of what they had seen, though they acknowledged the land was one that flowed with milk and honey, yet its inhabitants appeared to them so formidable and their cities so powerful they declared, "We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we" (Num 13:31). The immediate sequel was most solemn and sad.

Though Caleb boldly declared, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it" (Num 13:30), his fellow-spies persisted in their "evil report" and the whole congregation wept, murmured against Moses and Aaron, lamented that they had ever started out on their journey and said one to another, "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt...Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly...And Joshua...and Caleb...rent their clothes" (Num 14:4-6). Then it was that our hero (and his faithful companion) evinced his spiritual character and caliber, for we are told that they said

unto the whole company of Israel: "The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land...If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us...Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not" (Num 14:7-9). Thus, we see their confidence in God and their courage, for as the next verse shows, they took their lives into their hands in so remonstrating with the people.

It was there that the wayward and stiff-necked generation of Israel filled up the measure of their sin. It was then that Jehovah swore in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest (Psa 95:11, Heb 3:18). They had said: "Would God we had died in this wilderness!" (Num 14:2), and now He took them at their word, declaring, "Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised" (Num 14:29-31). The ten spies who brought an evil report upon the land "died by the plague before the LORD...But Joshua...and Caleb...lived" (Num 14:37-38), being the only two adults who came out of Egypt which entered into Canaan.

In Numbers 27, we have an account of the ordination of Joshua to office as the future leader of Israel. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; [the symbol of identification], and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight [as proof of his induction into office]. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient [to him]. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord: at his [Joshua's] word shall they go out and at his word shall they come in, he and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation. And Moses did as the Lord commanded him" (Num 27:18-22). Thus, to all who feared the Lord and had respect unto His servant Moses, none could henceforth doubt that Joshua was the man appointed to lead Israel after the removal of Moses from this scene.

"Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt...shall see the land... Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun: for they have wholly followed the LORD" (Num 32:11-12). That is another statement which throws light upon the spiritual character and caliber of Joshua. When Jehovah declared he had "wholly followed" Him, He did not signify he had lived a sinless life, but that he had trod the path of obedience, faithfully performed his duty, and sincerely aimed at the glory of God in it. He had stood firm and fearless in a day of prevailing unbelief and general apostasy. In passing, it may be pointed out, at a later date, Caleb did not hesitate to affirm he *had* "wholly followed the LORD" (Jos 14:6-8), upon which Matthew Henry (1662-1714) rightly said that "since he had obtained this testimony from God Himself, it was not vain glorious in him to speak of it, any more than it is for those who had God's Spirit witnessing with their spirit they are the children of God, to humbly and thankfully tell others, for their encouragement, what God has done for their souls."

"These are the names of the men which shall divide the land unto you: Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun" (Num 34:17): Here we learn that our hero, under the guidance of the high priest (Jos 14:1), was to apportion the inheritance among the tribes. "But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him: for he shall cause Israel to inherit it" (Deu 1:38). That was surely necessary, for well might he be discouraged after seeing Moses himself fall under the weight of leadership. A part of the encouragement which Moses gave to his successor is recorded in Deuteronomy 3:21: "I commanded Joshua at that time [namely, when reviewing the overthrow of the powerful monarchs of Bashan and Og], Thine eyes have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto these two kings: so shall the LORD do unto all the kingdoms whither thou passest," which was as though Moses reminded Joshua, when the Lord begins a work, He finishes it—His overthrow of those kings was an *earnest* of the destruction of all who opposed His people. It is blessed to remember that those whom God calls into His service, He also grants "encouragement" along the way. So we have always found it.

"And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed" (Deu 31:7-8). Here was further "encouragement" for Joshua and the final charge, which he received from his predecessor. That

“charge” was a wise mingling of precept and promise, of calling unto the discharge of duty and of informing him where his strength lay for the performance thereof. It is blessed to see that the apostle did not hesitate to apply unto all the people of God (Heb 13:5) this promise made specifically to Joshua: “He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Deu 31:6)—something which should be carefully noted by those who have so much to say about “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Ti 2:15)!

“And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses” (Deu 34:9). This is the final reference to Joshua in the Pentateuch, occurring right after the account of the death and burial of Moses. God may remove His workmen, but He ceases not to carry forward His work. When one of His servants be removed, He raises up another to take his place—not always to *fill* his place, for the work may already be completed (for the time being, at any rate) in that particular section of His vineyard; and if so, the new man may be called upon to break soil elsewhere. This was really the case here. Moses was raised up specifically to bring Israel out of the house of bondage—a stupendous and difficult task—and by Divine enablement, he accomplished it. He was Israel’s leader throughout their wilderness journeys, but now they were over. An entirely new venture lay before the people of God: Their entrance into and taking possession of their heritage, and that called for a new leader.

In the preceding paragraphs, we have seen how the new leader of Israel had been duly appointed by God (not chosen by the people!), and then publicly ordained or inducted into his office, for God requires all things—especially in connection with His immediate service—to be done “decently and in order” (1Co 14:40). We have seen, too, something of the qualifications which Joshua possessed for the work assigned him, for when God calls a man to a work, He endows him suitably for the same, equipping him both naturally and spiritually. Pharaoh might require the Hebrews to make bricks without supplying them with straw, but not so the Lord! Joshua was indwelt by the Spirit (Num 27:18), possessed of unusual faith, patience and courage, and “full of the spirit of wisdom” (Deu 34:9)—that being as necessary as any of the others. Finally, we are told above, “and the children of Israel hearkened unto him,” for God ever works at both ends of the line: When He fits a man to minister, He also prepares a people for him to minister unto.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

8b. Its Scope

Some times the “world” signifies *the Gentiles* in general, in contrast from the Jews in particular, as in “If the fall of them [unbelieving Israel] be the riches of the world” (Rom 11:12), which is explained in the next clause: “And the diminishing of them [Jews] the riches of the Gentiles;” and “if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world” (Rom 11:12, 15). In other places, the “world” refers to the *non-elect*, as in “Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him” (Joh 14:17), and “I pray not for the world” (Joh 17:9). In Luke 2:1, it is the *profane* world that is in view: “That there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed” (Luk 2:1)—yet, even that included only those parts of the earth which were subject to the Romans; whereas in John 15:18-25, it is the *professing* world—it was the religious sections of Judaism Christ alluded to when He said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (Joh 15:18).

In Romans 4:13, the “world” signifies *the Church*, for when Abram is there said to be “the heir of the world” (Rom 4:13), it manifestly expresses the same ideas as when he is termed, “the father of all them that believe” and “the father of many nations” (Rom 4:11, 18). When Christ said of Himself “For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth [not merely “offereth”] life unto the world” (Joh 6:33), He *must* have meant His Church, for all who are not members of it remain dead in sins until the end of their careers. We have just as much right to cite the words, “the world knew him not” (Joh 1:10), as a proof that not a single member of Adam’s race knew Christ—when aged Simeon *did* (Luk 2:25-30)—as we have to argue that “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (Joh 1:29) means the sin of all mankind. When it is said, “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1Jo 5:19), it cannot mean every one alive on earth, for all the saints are excluded; and “all the world wondered after the beast” (Rev 13:3), except the faithful remnant!

It should be quite clear to any candid and careful reader that, taken by itself, the word “world” in 2 Corinthians 5:19 supplies no proof and furnishes nothing decisive in enabling us to determine the scope or extent of reconciliation, for that term is an indefinite and general one: More so than usual here, for in the Greek, there is no definite article—literally, “reconciling world unto himself” (2Co 5:19). It should also be obvious that this verse calls for a careful and detailed exposition—pointing out its relation to what precedes and its connection with what follows, seeking also to define each separate expression in it. To the best of our ability, we will now set ourselves to this task; and in so doing, seek to show that everything in it and the setting in which it is found *obliges us* to regard the “world” reconciled to God as connoting His Church—and not the entire human family.

Under our next main division (D.V.)—when we shall deal with *our reception* of the Reconciliation, or our response to the Gospel call, “Be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20)—we hope to enter more fully into the scope of the whole context (from verse 11 onwards). Suffice it now to begin at verse 17. Nor shall we even attempt an exposition of that much-misunderstood verse; rather, we will limit ourselves to its central truth—namely, that of regeneration. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2Co 5:17)—literally, “a new creation.” That is, if any one be favoured to be “in Christ”—first, by federal constitution or legal representation—then it will (must) sooner or later follow that he is “in Christ;” second, by vital union or regeneration. Whatever be meant by “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2Co 5:17), no explanation of those words can possibly be right if it clashes with Romans 7:21-25 and Galatians 5:17—for Scripture is perfectly harmonious.

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” (2Co 5:18). When expounding the “all things are of God,” Charles Hodge (1797-1878) rightly pointed out that, “this is *not* spoken of the universe as proceeding from God as its Author, nor does it refer to the providential agency of God by which all events are controlled. The meaning is: ‘But all is of God,’ i.e., the entire change of which he had been speaking. The new creation experienced by those in Christ is ‘out of God’ (Greek), proceeding from Him as its efficient cause. It is *His* work.” Proof that it *is* His work and that “God” here refers to the Father in His official character appears in what immediately follows: “Who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ.” But that last clause does something more than supply evidence that the glorious work of regeneration issues from the Father as its originating source: It also explains to us the meritorious cause by which the new creation is brought into existence—regeneration is the effect of reconciliation!

The connection then between verses 17 and 18 is plain: Having spoken of the new creation in the former, the apostle proceeded to point out the legal foundation on which that new creation rests—namely, God's having been pacified by the work of His Son, and that work having purchased rich blessings for His people. It is not simply as our Maker, but as a reconciled God, that He quickens His people into newness of life. On verses 17-18, the eminent English Puritan, Stephen Charnock, declared: "God is first the God of peace before He be the God of sanctification: 'And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly' (1Th 5:23). The destruction of the enmity of our nature (against Him) was founded upon the removing the enmity in God (against us). There had been no sanctification of our natures had there not been a reconciliation of our persons." Thus, there had been no regenerating of us by God, until He had been reconciled to us. "All the powerful effects and operations of the Gospel in the hearts of men are from God *as* reconciled by Christ, not from God as Creator" (S. Charnock).

What has just been before us in the immediate context of 2 Corinthians 5:19 provides a clear index to the scope of reconciliation, being of equal extent with the new creation! It may be stated either way: The ones whom God regenerates are those to whom He has been reconciled; all to whom He was reconciled, in due course, He makes new creatures. If the one be universal, the other is; if the one be limited, the other must be. "And hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (2Co 5:18): The "us" refers first to the apostles; and second, to all whom God has specially called and qualified to act as His heralds. "The ministry of reconciliation" is but another name for the proclamation of the Gospel, except that it is more specific, having in view that particular aspect of the Gospel which is concerned with the doctrine of reconciliation. Exactly what that consists of in its essential elements is stated in verses 19-21. First, "To wit [or 'namely'] that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2Co 5:19).

The relation of verse 19 to verse 18 is also quite clear. In the former, the apostle said, "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ" (2Co 5:18)—which signifies (as shown in an earlier article) has turned away His wrath from His fallen people and received them into His favour by virtue of the mediation of His Son. But here, he informs us that transaction was not one which began of late to be done by Him, but rather had engaged His mind and will in His eternal counsels. "God *was* in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2Co 5:19). As the Church was in Christ from everlasting, as her Surety and Head, so God was in Him from everlasting as His ambassador, making peace for those who had revolted against Him. The reference is not to a present process by which God is little by little winning the world back into allegiance with Himself, but to something actually accomplished. God is already propitiated. "God in Christ" (Gal 3:17) signifies the *covenant*-God of His people, for out of Christ "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29). "God *was* in Christ" (2Co 5:19) speaks, then, in the language of the "everlasting covenant" (Heb 13:20); and that embraced none but the elect.

Definite light is thrown upon what "world" it was unto which God is reconciled by ascertaining the force of that clause: "God was in Christ, reconciling" it (2Co 5:19). In His ancient designs, He formed the purpose of reconciliation in, by, and through the Mediator. The identical idea is conveyed whether it be said we are "in Christ" or God was "in Christ acting toward us"—namely, that He designed to show favour unto us as a covenant God, for God never was and never will be "in Christ" toward any other persons but His Church. Redemption was not the work of the Son only: The Father appointed the Mediator, received the stipulated price from Him, and imputes the full value of it to His believing people. The Saviour distinctly affirmed, "the Father is in me" (Joh 10:38). As the elect were in Christ mystically, federally, and legally, the Father was in Him authoritatively and efficiently as His Plenipotentiary. Yet, the ultimate reference is to God's being in Christ immanently by His eternal decree.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2Co 5:19). It is in that last clause we have the most decisive proof of all that the "world" there cannot possibly signify mankind in general, for most certainly God *does impute* their trespasses unto all who are without Christ. The great problem which confronted the Divine government was how sin could be remitted without righteousness being compromised; but since God has received full satisfaction to His broken law, He has laid aside His official wrath and justice, which can no longer clamour for punishment. The pardon of sin is one of the main branches and fruits of reconciliation. Not to impute sin is to forgive it: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity" (Psa 32:1-2). Here, then, is the "world" to which God is reconciled—the pardoned, the justified, the elect (Rom 8:33).

Not only do the verses preceding, not only do all the terms used in 2 Corinthians 5:19 oblige us to understand the "world" there as an indefinite term—including all "children of God that were scattered abroad" (Joh 11:52)—but the closing words of the passage compel us to take the same view. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2Co 5:21). Here we learn why God does not impute their trespasses unto His believing people: It is because they were transferred and imputed to their Surety; and accordingly, vengeance was executed upon Him. Here, too, we learn that not only is there no charge laid to the account of God's elect, but that, positively, they are constituted the righteousness of God in Christ—all the merits of His obedience being charged unto them. Thus, the "reconciled us" of verse 18, the "their" of verse 19, and the "us" and "we" of verse 21 all refer to the same company—and that company is one and the same as "world" in verse 19.

If it be inquired, since it is the Church—the mystical body of Christ—that is in view in 2 Corinthians 5:19, why did the Holy Spirit designate her by the term "world"? First, to show it was not the fallen angels: No mediator, nor Reconciler was provided for them. Second, to show that the love of God in Christ was not restricted unto the Jews (as they supposed), but included also a people to be taken "out of them a people [Gentiles] for his name" (Act 15:14). Third, to represent the freeness of God's grace. "The whole world lieth in wickedness" (1Jo 5:19). "In themselves God's elect differ nothing from the rest of the world till grace prevent them: They were as bad as any in the world, of the same race as cursed mankind" (T. Manton). Fourth, "to awaken all that are concerned to look after their privilege, which is come to all nations. The offer is made indifferently to all sorts of persons where the Gospel cometh, and this grace is effectually applied to all the elect of all nations" (T. Manton).

None should be stumbled by a particular redemption which pertains only to the Church of God being expressed in such extended terms as "the world" and "all men" in the N.T. The employment of such language is fully accounted for by the change of dispensation, from the local religion of Judaism to the international reach of Christianity. The Mosaic economy was entirely exclusive, whereas that of the Gospel is inclusive. In anticipation of that, we should note the indefinite language used by the Prophets when predicting the blessings of Messiah, as extending beyond Judea and bestowed indiscriminately. "The desire of *all* nations shall come" (Hag 2:7). "Yea, *all* kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him" (Psa 72:11). "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall *all flesh* come" (Psa 65:2). "I will pour out my spirit upon *all flesh*" (Joel 2:28)—interpreted by Peter as accomplished on the day of Pentecost (Act 2:16)! Such language was as universal as any employed by Christ and His apostles, yet, it certainly did *not* signify that every individual the earth over would become a subject of Christ's kingdom and a partaker of His saving benefits.

There are other general terms used in the New Testament besides "world," which cannot be taken in an unlimited sense. For example, "every man." We read of one to whom the Lord gave sight that he "saw *every* man clearly" (Mar 8:25). The kingdom of God was preached "and *every* man presseth into it" (Luk 16:16). The early Christians sold their possessions and goods "and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Act 2:45). "God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom 12:3, but see 2Th 3:2!) "Then shall *every man* have praise of God" (1Co 4:5). Other passages could be quoted where "every man" cannot be understood without qualification. "The Gentiles" is another general expression which is restricted by what is predicated of them in each case. For instance, "on *the Gentiles* also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost (Act 10:45). And again, "God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Act 11:18). "Declaring the conversion of the Gentiles" (Act 15:3). "The salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Act 28:28). Let those who say of John 3:16 or 2 Corinthians 5:19, "We keep by the plain declaration of the passage" apply the same principle to the verses quoted in this paragraph!

"And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col 1:20). These words bring before us another aspect of our theme, and one which has been generally overlooked by writers on this subject. By means of His mediatory work, Christ has not only effected a reconciliation between God and the whole election of grace, but He has also closed the breach which existed between the celestial hosts and the Church. At the creation of the world, the holy angels sang together and even shouted for joy (Job 38:7), "because though it was not made for them, but for the children of men, and though it would increase their work and service, yet they knew that the eternal Wisdom and Word whom they were to worship (Heb 1:6), would 'rejoice in the habitable parts of the earth' and that a large part of 'His delight would be with the

sons of men': Proverbs 8:31" (M. Henry). Likewise, when the grand foundations of the new creation was laid, we read of "the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luk 2:13-14).

When God made the earth and placed man therein, the angels rejoiced in the work of their Creator's hands; and so far from being jealous at the appearing of a further order of beings, they took delight therein. But upon man's revolt from his Maker and Lord, they would be filled with disgust and holy indignation. The sin of Adam (and of the race in him) not only alienated man from God, but also from the holy ones on high. No sooner did our first parents fall from their original estate—followed by their expulsion from Paradise—than God had employed the holy angels as the executors of His vengeance against them: Represented by the cherubim with the flaming sword (for He "maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire"—Heb 1:7) to keep them out of Eden and from the tree of life (Gen 3:24). Yet now, they are "all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb 1:14). And, my reader, it is the blood of the cross which has brought about that blessed change: The atonement of Christ has made the celestial hosts the friends and helpers of His people.

It was not that "the things in heaven" were alienated from God, but that Adam's fall introduced disruption into the universe, so that the inhabitants of Heaven were alienated from those on earth; but Christ has restored perfect concord again. His sacrifice has repaired the breach between the elect and the holy angels; He has restored the broken harmony of the universe. As one has well pointed out, "If Paul could address the Corinthians concerning one of their excluded members, who had been brought to repentance, 'To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also' (2Co 2:10), much more would the friends of righteousness (the angels) say in their addresses to the great Supreme concerning an excluded member from the moral system, 'to whom *Thou* forgivest anything, we also.'" Hence, we find "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luk 15:10)—for another has been joined to their company as worshippers of the Most High.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

10. Its Decline

First, *its nature*. That which we are here to be concerned with is what some writers term “backsliding”—a lucid and expressive word that is not employed so often as it should be or once was. Like most other theological terms, this one has been made the occasion of not a little controversy. Some insist that it ought not be applied unto a Christian since the expression occurs nowhere in the New Testament. But that is childish: It is not the mere word, but the thing itself which matters. When Peter followed his Master “afar off,” warmed himself at the enemy’s fire, and denied Him with oaths, surely he was in a backslidden state—yet, if the reader prefers to substitute some other adjective, we have no objection. Others have argued that it is impossible for a Christian *to* backslide, saying that the “flesh” in him is never reconciled to God and that the “spirit” never departs from Him. But that is mere trifling: It is not a nature, but the *person* who backslides, as it is the person who acts—believes or sins.

It is not because the word “backslide” is a controversial one that we have preferred “decline”; but because the former is applied in Scripture to the unregenerate, as well as the regenerate—to professors as such, and here we are confining our attention unto the case of a child of God whose spirituality diminishes, whose progress is retarded. There are, of course, degrees in backsliding—for we read of “the backslider in heart” (Pro 14:14), as well as those who are such openly in their ways and walk. Yet, to the great majority of the Lord’s people, a “backslider” probably connotes one who has wandered a long way from God, and whom his brethren are obliged to sorrowfully “stand in doubt of” (Gal 4:20). As we do not propose to restrict ourselves unto such extreme cases—but rather to cover a much wider field—we deemed it best to select a different term, and one which seems better suited to the subject of spiritual growth.

By “spiritual decline,” we mean the waning of vital godliness, the soul’s communion with its Beloved becoming less intimate and regular. If the Christian’s affections cool, he will delight himself less in the Lord, and there will be a languishing of his graces. Hence, spiritual decline consists of a weakening of faith, a cooling of love, a lessening of zeal, an abatement of that whole-hearted devotedness to Christ, which marks the healthy saint. The perfections of the Redeemer are meditated upon with less frequency, the quest of personal holiness is pursued with less ardour, sin is less feared, loathed and resisted. “Thou hast left thy first love” (Rev 2:4) describes the case of one who is in a spiritual decline. When that be the case, the soul has lost its keen relish for the things of God, there is much less pleasure in the performance of duty, the conscience is no longer tender, and the grace of repentance is sluggish. Consequently, there is a diminishing of peace and joy in the soul, disquietude, and discontent more and more displacing them.

When the soul loses its relish for the things of God, there will be less diligence in the quest of them. The means of grace—though not totally neglected—are used with more formality and with less delight and profit. The Scriptures are then read more from a sense of duty than with a real hunger to feed on them. The Throne of Grace is approached more to satisfy conscience than from a deep longing to have fellowship with its Occupant. As the heart is less occupied with Christ, the mind will become increasingly engaged with the things of this world. As the conscience becomes less tender, a spirit of compromise is yielded to; and instead of watchfulness and strictness, there will be carelessness and laxity. As love for Christ cools, obedience to Him becomes difficult, and there is more backwardness unto good works. As we fail to use the grace already received, corruptions gain in the ascendancy. Instead of being strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, we find ourselves weak and unable to withstand the assaults of Satan.

A born-again Christian will never sink into a state of unregeneracy—though his case may become such—that neither himself, nor spiritual onlookers, are warranted in regarding him as a regenerate person. Grace in the Christian’s heart will never become extinct; yet, he may greatly decline with respect to the health, strength, and exercise of that grace—and that, from various causes. The Christian may suffer a suspension of the Divine influences unto him. Not totally so—for there is ever such a working of God as maintains the being of the spiritual principle of grace (or “new nature”) in the saint—yet he does not at all times enjoy the enlivening operations of the blessed Spirit on that principle, and its activities are then interrupted for a season; and in consequence, he becomes less conversant with spiritual objects, his graces languish, his fruitfulness declines, and his inward comforts abate. The flesh takes full advantage of this and

acts with great violence; and in consequence, the Christian is made most miserable and wretched in himself.

If it be asked, “*Why* does God withdraw the gracious operations of His Spirit from His people, or suspend His comforting influences, which are so necessary for their walking in Him?”—the answer may be made both from the Divine side of things and the human. God may do this in a *sovereign way*, without any cause in the manner of their behaviour toward Himself. As He gives five talents to one, and only two to another—according as seems good in His sight—so He varies the measure of grace bestowed on one and another of His people as best pleases Himself. Should any one be inclined to murmur against this, then let him pay attention to this silencer: “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?” (Mat 20:15). God is supreme, independent, free, and distributes His bounties as He chooses—both in nature, in providence, and in grace. God takes counsel with none, is influenced by none, but “worketh all things after the counsel of his *own will*” (Eph 1:11). As such, He is to be meekly and cheerfully submitted unto.

But it is not only from acting according to His own imperial right that God withdraws from His people the vitalizing and comforting influences of His Spirit. He does so also that He may give them a better knowledge of themselves and *teach them* more fully their entire dependency upon Himself. By so acting, God gives His children to discover for themselves the strength of their corruptions and the weakness of their grace. Though saved from the love, guilt, and dominion of sin, they have not yet been delivered from its power of presence. Though a holy and spiritual nature has been communicated to them; yet, that nature is but a creature—weak and dependent—and can only be sustained by its Author. That new nature has no inherent strength or power of its own: It only acts as it is acted upon by the Holy Spirit. “In the LORD have I righteousness and strength” (Isa 45:24). Every believer is convinced of the former; but usually, it is only after many a humiliating experience that he learns his strength is not in himself, but in the Lord.

It is rather in a way of *chastisement* that—in the great majority of instances—God withholds from His people the gracious operations of the Spirit; and that brings us to the human side of things, wherein *our* responsibility is involved. If the saint becomes lax in his use of the appointed means of grace—which are so many channels through which the influences of the Spirit customarily flow—then he will necessarily be the loser, and the fault is entirely his own. Or if the Christian trifles with temptations and experiences a sad fall, then the Spirit is grieved, and His comforting operations are withheld as a solemn rebuke. Though God still loves his person, He will let him know that He hates his sins; and though He will not deal with him as an incensed Judge, yet He will discipline him as an offended Father—and it may be long before he is again restored to the freedom and familiarity that he formerly enjoyed with Him. See Isaiah 59:2, Jeremiah 5:25, Haggai 1:9-10.

Though God draws not His sword against His erring saints, yet He uses the rod upon them. “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips” (Psa 89:30-34). *Then* it is our wisdom to “hear...the rod” (Mic 6:9), to humble ourselves beneath His mighty hand (1Pe 5:6), and forsake our folly (Psa 85:8). If we do not duly repent and amend our ways, still heavier chastisements will be our portion; but “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9). When the Spirit’s influences are withheld from the Christian, it is always the safest course for him to conclude he has displeased the Lord and to cry, “Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me” (Job 10:2).

Second, *its causes*. The root cause is failure to mortify indwelling sin, called “the flesh” in Galatians 5:17, which makes constant opposition against “the spirit” or the principle of grace in the soul of believers. A carnal nature is ever present within them, and at no time is it inactive, whether they perceive it or no. Yea, they are often unconscious of many of its stirrings, for it works silently, secretly, with subtlety, deceptively—prompting not only to outward acts of disobedience, but producing unbelief, pride, and self-righteousness, which are most offensive to the Holy One. This enemy in the soul possesses great advantages, because its power to rule was unopposed by us all through our unregeneracy, because of its cursed cunning, because of the numerous temptations by which it is excited, and the variety of objects upon which it acts. Yet, it is our responsibility to keep our hearts with all diligence, to jealously watch over its workings—for the principal part of the “flight” to which the Christian is called consists of continually resisting the uprisings and solicitations of his evil principle: In other words, to *mortify* them.

The more carefully the believer observes the many ways in which indwelling sin assails the soul, the more will he realise his need of crying to God for help that he may be watchful and faithful in opposing its lustings. But alas, we become slack and inattentive to its serpentine windings and are tripped up before we are aware of it. This is stupid folly, and it costs us dearly. By our slothfulness, we get a sore wound in the soul, our graces droop, our conscience is defiled, our relish for the Word is dulled, and we lag in the performance of duty. Grace cannot thrive while lust is nourished, for the interests of the flesh and of the Spirit cannot be promoted at the same time. And if our corruptions be not resisted and denied, they will—they must—flourish. If the daily work of mortifying the flesh be not diligently attended to, sin will most certainly become predominant in its actings in our hearts. If we fail there, we fail everywhere.

True, the lustings of the flesh cannot be rendered inactive, but we must refuse to provide them with fuel: “Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14). Those lusts cannot be eradicated, but they can (by the Spirit’s enablement) be refused. *There* is where the responsibility of the Christian comes in. It is his bounden duty to prevent those lusts occupying his thoughts, engaging his affections, and prevailing with the will to choose objects which are agreeable to them. Take covetousness as an example—a lusting after the empty things of this world. If the mind permits itself to have anxious thoughts for material riches, and the affections to be drawn unto them and pleasing images are formed in the imaginations, the lust has prevailed and our conduct will be ordered accordingly. An earnest pursuit after corrupt things preys upon the vitals of true spirituality. The preventative for that is to set our affection upon things above, to make Christ our satisfying portion, and having “food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1Ti 6:8).

It is very evident then that the Christian should spare no pains in seeking to ascertain and be sensibly affected by the real causes of his spiritual decline—for unless he knows from what causes his spiritual decays proceed, he cannot “remember therefore from whence” he has “fallen,” nor truly “repent” of his failures, or to again “do the first works” (Rev 2:5); and unless—and until—he does these very things, he will deteriorate more and more. It is equally clear that if there be certain appointed means—the use of which promotes spiritual growth and prosperity—then the slighting of those means will inevitably hinder that growth. As the first of those means is the mortifying of the flesh, it will be found that slackness at *that* point is the place where all failure begins. It is sin unmortified and unresisted, yielded to and allowed, and—what is still worse—unrepented of and unconfessed, which brings a blight upon the garden of the soul. Sin unmourned and unforsaken in our affections is more heinous and dangerous than the actual commission of sin.

Closely connected with the mortifying of sins is the Christian’s devoting of himself entirely unto God. Christian progress is largely determined by continuing as we began—by the measure in which we steadfastly adhere to the surrender we made of ourselves unto Christ at our conversion and to the vows we took upon us at baptism. If our conversion was a genuine one, we then renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil, and received Christ as our alone Lord and Saviour. If our baptism was a scriptural one, and the believer entered intelligently into the spiritual import and emblematic purport of that ordinance, he then professed to have put off the old man; and as he emerged from the water—as one symbolically risen with Christ—he stood pledged to walk in newness of life. As the adult Israelites were “baptized unto Moses” (1Co 10:1-2)—accepting him as their lawgiver and leader, so those who “have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27)—having enlisted under His banner, they now wear His uniform.

The more consistently the believer acts in harmony with the public profession he made in his baptism, the more real progress will he make. Since Christ be “the Captain” of his salvation, he is under bonds to fight against everything opposed to Him—for “they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2Co 5:15). Each day, the saint should renew his consecration unto God and live in the realization that he is not his own, for he is “bought with a price” (1Co 6:19-20; 7:23)—no longer free to gratify his lusts. The more Christ’s purchase of him be kept fresh in his mind, the more resolutely will he conduct the work of mortification. It is forgetfulness that we belong to God in Christ, which makes us slack in resisting what He hates. It is such forgetfulness and slackness that explains the call: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen” (Rev 2:5)—i.e. thy dedication unto God and thy baptismal avowal of identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

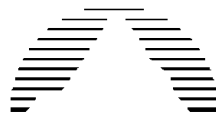
While there be a healthy desire after God and a delighting of ourselves in Him, an earnest seeking to please Him, and the enjoyment of communion with Him—then there is necessarily an averseness for sin and a zeal against it. While we have a due sense of our obligations to God and high valuation of His grace

to us in Christ, we continue to find duty pleasant and direct our actions unto His glory. But when we become less occupied with His perfections, precepts, and promises, other things steal in; and little by little, our hearts are drawn from Him. The light of His countenance is no longer enjoyed, and darkness begins to creep over the soul. Love cools and gratitude unto Him wanes; and then the work of mortification becomes irksome, and we shelve it. Our lusts grow more unruly and dominant, and the garden of the soul is overrun with weeds. In such a case, we must “repent” and return unto “the first works” (Rev 2:5)—contritely confess our sinful failures and re-dedicate ourselves unto God.

Again, if the Christian accords not unto the Word of God that honour to which it is so justly entitled, he is certain to be the loser. If the Word holds not that place in his affections, thoughts, and daily life—which its Author requires—then sad will be the consequences. If the soul be not nourished by this heavenly bread, if the mind be not regulated by its instructions, if the walk be not directed by its precepts—disastrous must be the outcome. We must expect God to hide His face from us, if we seek Him not in those ways wherein He has promised to meet with and bless us—for such a neglect is both a violation of His ordinance and a disregard of our own good. I may spend as much time in reading the Bible today as ever before, but am I doing so with a definite and solemn treating with God therein? If not, if my approach be less spiritual, if my motive be less worthy—then a decline has already begun, and I need to beg God to revive me, quicken my appetite, and make me more responsive to His injunctions.

Finally, it requires few words here to convince a believer that if there be a decreasing occupation of his heart with Christ, his fine gold will soon become dim. If he ceases to grow in a spiritual knowledge of his Lord and Saviour, if he becomes lax in desiring and seeking real communion with Him, if he fails to draw from that fulness of grace which is available for His people—then a blight will fall upon all his graces. Faith in Him will weaken, love for Him will abate, obedience to Him slacken, and He will be “followed” at a greater distance. His own words on this point are too clear to admit of mistake: “He that abideth in me, and I in him [note the order: *We* are always the first to make the breach!], the same bringeth forth much fruit [his graces are healthy and his life abounds in good works], for without me [cut off from fellowship] ye can do nothing” (Joh 15:5). The same things which opposed our first coming to Christ will seek to hinder our *cleaving* to Him; and against those enemies, we must watch and pray.

“Faith which worketh by love” (Gal 5:6). Since it is “with the *heart* man believeth” (Rom 10:10), saving faith and spiritual love cannot be separated—though they may be distinguished. Faith engages the heart with Christ; and therefore, its affections are drawn out unto Him. Thus, faith is a powerful dynamic in the soul, and acts (to borrow the words of Thomas Chalmers, 1780-1847) as “the impulsive power of a new affection.” A little child may be amusing itself with some filthy or dangerous object—but present to him a luscious pear or peach, and he will speedily relinquish it. The world absorbs the heart and mind of the unregenerate, because he is of the world and so knows nothing better, for the Christ of God is a Stranger to him. But the regenerate has a new nature, and by faith, becomes occupied with Him who is the Center of Heaven’s glory; and the more the mind be stayed upon Him, the less appeal will the perishing things of time and sense make upon him. It is faith in exercise upon its glorious Object which overcometh the world.



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