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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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CHRISTIAN EMPLOYEES

How intensely practical is the Bible! It not only reveals to us the way to heaven, but is also full of instruction concerning how we are to live here upon earth. God has given His Word unto us to be “a lamp unto [our] feet, and a light unto [our] path” (Psa 119:105): that is, for the regulating of our *daily walk*. It makes known how God requires us to conduct ourselves in all the varied relations of life. Some of us are single, others married; some are children, others parents; some are masters, others servants. Scripture supplies definite precept and rules, motives and encouragements for each alike. It not only teaches us how we are to behave in the church and in the home, but equally so in the workshop and in the kitchen, supplying necessary exhortations to both employers and employees—clear proof God has not designed that all men should be equal, and sure index that neither “Socialism” nor “Communism” will ever universally prevail. Since a considerable portion of most of our lives be spent in service, it is both for our good and God’s glory that we heed those exhortations.

A secular writer recently pointed out that “work has increasingly come to be regarded as a distasteful means to the achievement of leisure, instead of leisure as a recuperative measure to refit us for work.” That is a very mild way of saying that the present generation is pleasure mad and hates any kind of real work. Various explanations have been advanced to account for this: such as the ousting of craftsmanship by machinery, the fear of unemployment discouraging zeal, and the doles, allowances, and reliefs which are available for those who don’t and won’t work. Though each of those has been a contributing factor, yet there is a more fundamental and solemn cause of this social disease—namely, the loss of those moral convictions which formerly marked a large proportion of church-goers, who made conscience of serving the Lord while engaged in secular activities, and who were actuated by the principles of honesty and integrity, fidelity and loyalty.

Nowhere has the hollowness of professing Christians been more apparent during the last two or three generations, than at this point. Nowhere has more reproach been brought upon the cause of Christ than by the majority of those employees who bore His name. Whether it be in the factory, the mine, the office, or in the fields, one who claims to be a follower of the Lord Jesus should stand out unmistakably from his fellow employees who make no profession. His punctuality, his truthfulness, his conscientiousness, the quality of his work, his devotion to his employer’s interests, ought to be so apparent that there is no need for him to let others know by his *lips* that he is a disciple of Christ. There should be such a marked absence of that slackness, carelessness, selfishness, greed, and insolence which mark the majority of the ungodly, that all may see he is motivated and regulated by higher principles than they are. But, if his conduct belies his profession, then his companions are confirmed in their opinion that “there is nothing in religion but talk.”

Nor does the whole of the blame rest upon them: *the pulpit* is far from being guiltless in this matter. The Lord has expressly bidden His servants to preach thereon, as being a subject of great importance and an essential part of that doctrine which is according to godliness. “Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. *These things teach and exhort*” (1Ti 6:1-2). But where is the minister today who does so? Alas, how many have despised and neglected such practical yet unpopular teaching! Desirous of being regarded as “deep,” they have turned aside unto doctrinal disputes or prophetic speculations which profit no one. God says, “If any man teach otherwise, He is proud, knowing nothing” (1Ti 6:3-4)!

Once again is the pastor divinely ordered, “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober...The aged women likewise...Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded...servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (Ti 2:1-10). Are you, fellow minister, speaking upon *these* things? Are you warning servants that all needless absenteeism is a sin? Are you informing those of your church members who are employees that God requires them to make it their constant endeavour to give full satisfaction unto their masters in every part of their conduct: that they are to be respectful and not saucy, industrious and not indolent, submissive and not challenging the orders they receive? Do you teach them that their conduct either *adorns* or *disgraces* the doctrine they profess? If not, you are sadly failing in carrying out your commission.

In view of the almost total silence of the pulpit thereon, it is striking to see how frequently the New Testament epistles inculcate and enlarge upon the duties of employees. In Ephesians 6, we find the apostle exhorting, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men" (Eph 6:5-7). Christian servants are required to comply with the calls and commands of their employers: to do so with respectful deference to their persons and authority, to be fearful of displeasing them. They are to be as diligent in their work and to discharge their duties with the same conscientious solicitude when their master is *absent* as when his eye is upon them. They are to perform their tasks "with good will," not sullenly and reluctantly, but thankful for an honest means of livelihood. And all of this as "the servants of Christ," careful not to dishonour Him by any improper behaviour, but seeking to glorify Him: working from such motives as will sanctify our labours and make them "spiritual sacrifice" unto God.

In Colossians 3, the apostle also exhorted, "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col 3:22-23). Every lawful command he must obey, however distasteful, difficult, or irksome. He is to be faithful in every trust committed to him. Whatsoever his hand findeth to do, he must do it with his might (Ecc 9:10)—putting his very best into it. He is to do it readily and cheerfully, taking pleasure in his work. All is to be done "as to the Lord," which will transform the secular into the sacred. Then it is added, "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col 3:24)—what encouragement to fidelity is that! "But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done" (Col 3:25) is a solemn warning to deter from failure in duty, for "either in this world or the other, God will avenge all such injury"—John Gill (1697-1771).

"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully" (1Pe 2:18-19). This repeated insistence of the apostles for employees discharging their duties properly, indicates not only how much the glory of God is involved therein, but also that an *unwillingness* on their part makes such repetition necessary—evidenced by those who take two or three days' extra holiday by running off to religious meetings, thereby putting their masters to inconvenience. Holiness is most visible in our daily conduct: performing our tasks in such a spirit and with such efficiency as will commend the Gospel unto those we serve. Let it be borne in mind that these instructions apply to *all* servants—male and female—in every station and condition. Let each reader of these pages who is an employee ask himself or herself, How far am I really making a genuine, prayerful, and diligent endeavour to comply with God's requirements in the performance of my duties? Let no "rules of unions" nor "regulations of shop stewards" be allowed to set aside or modify these divine commandments.

It is to be pointed out that the above precepts are enforced and exemplified in the Scriptures by many notable examples. See how the Spirit delighted to take notice of the devotion of Eliezer, even praying that the Lord God would "send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham" (Gen 24:12); and note how faithfully he acquitted himself and how well he spake of his master. Jacob could say, "And ye know that with all my power I have served" (Gen 31:6): can *you* aver the same? Though a heathen, "his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight" (Gen 39:3-4): what a testimony was that! Scripture also chronicles the unfaithfulness of Elisha's servant and the fearful judgment which came upon him (2Ki 5:20-27). Finally, let all domestics and employees remember that the *servant place* has been honoured and adorned for ever by the willing and perfect obedience of the incarnate Son of God! "*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do with thy might*" (Ecc 9:10)—*put your very best into it.*



THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

57. 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15-16, Part 2

“The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1Ti 6:15). The apostle here gives glory unto the triune God, first for that blessedness which is in Himself. To be “blessed” is for one to be richly endowed and joyous. Such is God to an infinite and inconceivable degree, for there is in Him such a meeting together and fullness of all excellencies as to render Him complete in Himself. God has not to go outside Himself for perfect felicity. As the apostle declared to the Athenians, the great God who made and rules the world is not beholden to men for the worship of their hands, “as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Act 17:25). God is obligated to none, being absolutely independent. Praise is then rendered to God as “the only Potentate,” as Sovereign over all. He has not only all-sufficiency and happiness within Himself, but He has absolute power and dominion over all creatures and things. Put the two together: infinite fullness and infinite might in Himself, and God is indeed “blessed,” and is to be owned as such, yea, feared, admired, and adored as “The Blessed One.” “Blessed be the most high God” (Gen 14:20). No less an honour is ascribed to Christ: “Who is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:5).

“Who only hath immortality” (1Ti 6:16). This is in apposition to or is the complementary perfection of “the King *eternal*”: God is not only without beginning of days, but end of them too. “Who only hath deathlessness” would be a literal rendering of the Greek word. The reason why God is immortal is because He is impeccable or not liable to sin. A different term is used in 1 Timothy 1:17 for “immortal,” and signifies “incorruptible.” “God cannot be tempted with evil” (Jam 1:13). Why? Because He is its very opposite: the ineffably Holy One. Death is the wages of sin, and since God be impeccable and incorruptible, He is immortal or deathless. Moreover, He is the living God: “For with thee is the fountain of life” (Psa 36:9). He has “life in himself” (Joh 5:26) by essence and not participation. God is not only immortal, but He “only hath immortality” (1Ti 6:16). The holy angels are immortal, as will also be the resurrected bodies of the redeemed, but that immortality is derived, bestowed by God. But God, and He alone, “*hath* immortality” essentially, underived, in full possession, in Himself and from Himself. He alone hath immortality simply and absolutely, being the fountain of it. As such, He is to be acknowledged and adored.

“Invisible” (1Ti 1:17). Observe carefully this is also celebrated as another of the divine perfections. There is a fullness in the words of Scripture which pertains not to those of man’s, so that frequently, there is more contained in and implied by them than is actually expressed. Such is the case here: God is not only invisible to sight, but He is impalpable to the senses and incomprehensible to reason. He is, in Himself, inscrutable unto all creature intelligence. Despite the revelation of Himself which God has been pleased to make by His Word and by His works, we still have to say, “Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?” (Job 26:14). “He admires the depths of that which is undiscovered. What we know of God is nothing in comparison with what is in God, and what God is. After all the discoveries which God has made to us and all the inquiries we have made after God, still we are much in the dark concerning Him”—Matthew Henry (1662-1714). Of His essential glory, we cannot conceive. Only as we entertain a due appreciation of the greatness of God and the immeasurable distance between Him and us, shall we be filled with holy fear and awe unto Him.

“Dwelling in light unapproachable” (Revised Version). Some may inquire, How is that to be harmonized with “Clouds and darkness are round about him” (Psa 97:2)? Several answers may be returned. First, the Psalmist has reference to the ways of God which are hidden from us. We are incapable of perceiving *how* He acts, much less of understanding *why*. His providences are greatly deep, much more so are His counsels inscrutable to the human mind. Secondly, that language is also designed to reprove our curiosity and presumption. We are far too prone to pry into what is not revealed, instead of performing our known duty. Third, it is said to try our faith: God will be trusted and honoured even when we cannot see His hand or perceive His undertaking for us. Fourth, after all, Psalm 97:2 approximates very closely to 1 Timothy 6:16, for even the saint is utterly incapable of understanding the divine essence or nature. There is such an overwhelming light in God that it is darkness to us. As one said, “The most eagle-like eyes of a human understanding are not only dazzled but quite blinded by His brightness.” We may indeed, draw near by faith unto Him who is light, but not so by reason.

The symbolism of the old covenant taught the same truth, namely, the unapproachable glory in which Deity dwells. Thus, in the setting of “bounds unto the people round about” the base of Sinai (Exo 19:12) at the giving of the Law; the veiled darkness in the holy of holies in the tabernacle and the temple, where the Shekinah abode between the cherubim on the mercy seat to which Solomon alluded at the dedication of the temple: “Then spake Solomon, The LORD said that he would dwell in the thick darkness” (1Ki 8:12); and in the seraphim veiling their faces as they stood above the throne of Jehovah (Isa 6:1-2). On the other hand, the figure is varied in “the light dwelleth with him” (Dan 2:22) and “in thy light shall we see light” (Psa 36:9). Putting the two together, “dwelling in light unapproachable” signifies that the divine glory is too ineffable for any creature to draw nigh or apprehend. God only is able to comprehend Himself. Our most spiritual and exalted notions of Him are obscure and inadequate at best. There must for ever remain an incalculable distance between the Infinite and the finite: the God-man Mediator is alone qualified to make known the One to the other—so far as it is for His glory and our good.

“Whom no man hath seen, nor can see” (1Ti 6:16). That fact is stated again and again in the Scriptures. Even the highly favoured Moses—who was granted such intimate and prolonged communion with God when he requested, “Shew me thy glory”—received answer: “I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee... Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exo 33:18-20). So too almost at the end of the New Testament, we are told, “No man hath seen God at any time” (1Jo 4:12). God is invisible, though the whole universe is full of Him and exhibits Him. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psa 19:1). Yet *that* is not to “see God,” but only what He hath wrought. “It is visible *that* He is, for He clothes Himself with light as with a garment (Psa 104:2), it is invisible *what* He is, for ‘he made darkness his secret place’: Psalm 18:11”—Stephen Charnock (1628-1680). The fullness of His glory can never be known by any creature: “His greatness is unsearchable” (Psa 145:3). Even the beatific vision of heaven will not consist of a sight of God as God, but rather as He shines forth in a manifestative and communicative way in the Person of Christ, as suited to finite capacities.

“Unto...the only wise God” (1Ti 1:17). As those words were before us in our exposition of Romans 16:27, and (D.V.) will come before us in Jude 25, they need not detain us now. They celebrate another of the perfections of Deity, namely, His omniscience. Yet when we utter such a term, how feebly do we grasp its immeasurable purport. “His understanding is infinite” (Psa 147:5) and “there is no searching of his understanding” (Isa 40:28). As one has said, “The profoundest creature wisdom deserves not the name of it when compared with God’s. The wisdom of the angels is but folly to Him.” All creature wisdom is imparted by God: *His* wisdom is original, essential, incapable of addition or diminution. “By wisdom [God] made the heavens” (Psa 136:5), “in wisdom hast thou made them all” (Psa 104:24). But above all is God to be praised for that “hidden wisdom” which He ordained before the world unto our glory: “Which none of the princes of this world knew” (1Co 2:7-8), but which is revealed in the Gospel, a contemplation of which moved the apostle to exclaim, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom 11:33). To the “only Potentate...Who only hath immortality” (1Ti 6:15-16), to “the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1Ti 1:17).

58. Philemon 4-6

Though it be one of the shortest books in the New Testament, the epistle to Philemon is one of the least read by God’s people and is certainly one of the least preached from. Scarcely anything appears to have been written on it. We have therefore decided to devote a few paragraphs unto the same, though more in the way of general remarks than a detailed exposition of the prayer itself, for it is full of important instruction and valuable lessons. The epistle to Philemon is the only strictly private letter of Paul’s which has survived the passage of time. Doubtless he wrote many more, but this one alone God saw fit to preserve in the canon of Scripture. All his others were either addressed unto local churches or were pastoral letters of authoritative direction. This one, though written under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, presents its writer to us from quite a different angle. Here we behold the “prisoner of Jesus Christ” (Phm 1) throwing off as far as possible his apostolic dignity and parental authority over his converts, speaking simply from the heart, as one Christian to another, in an admirable strain of humility and courtesy. It is sphere of peculiar interest and value, inasmuch as it falls outside of what may be termed Paul’s official sphere of ministry, affording us an insight into his personal and private life.

In this epistle, Paul throws off the restraint of authority and employs the language of familiar intercourse, addressing Philemon as “brother” (Phm 1, 7), which breathes the spirit of freedom and equality. Herein we behold how—under the apostolic mission, as well as under divine inspiration—there was room for the free play of personal character and intimate correspondence. “We seem to know him better as an apostle, because we are allowed to see him when he chooses not to be an apostle, but a minister and a man. But even beyond this, we may fairly draw from this epistle the priceless lesson as to the place which true courtesy and delicacy occupy in the Christian character, and especially as to their entire compatibility with high apostolic enthusiasm, with a keen insight into realities as distinct from forms, and with the greatest plainness of speech in due season. We understand how true courtesy, as distinct from artificial and technical culture of manners, is the natural outcome of the ‘lowliness of mind’ in which each esteems others ‘better than’ himself, and of the sympathy of love which looks not only upon our ‘own things,’ but even in greater degree upon ‘the things of others’ (Phi 2:3-4)”—Charles John (C. J.) Ellicott (1819-1905). A careful comparison of this epistle with his others will discover a marked difference of tone throughout it.

Philemon appears to have been a Christian of some eminence, residing at Colosse (Col 4:9), who had been saved under Paul’s ministry (Phm 19). Onesimus was one of his slaves, who had robbed his master, forsaken his service, and fled five hundred miles away to Rome. This was providentially overruled unto his eternal good, for the hand of God directed him to attend Paul’s preaching (Act 28:30-31), which was blest of the Spirit unto his conversion (Phm 10). Though Onesimus had greatly endeared himself to the one who was (instrumentally) his spiritual father and been useful unto him in his imprisonment, yet Paul realized it was only right to send him back unto his master. Accordingly, he wrote this touching letter unto Philemon begging that his erstwhile refractory slave might be given a favourable reception. His design was to effect a reconciliation between him and his fugitive servant, now a brother in Christ. The apostle had full confidence that his appeal would not be in vain. It is highly probable that Paul’s request was granted and that Onesimus was received into his master’s favour and given his freedom. Tradition says that he afterwards became a minister of the Gospel.

In the course of his letter, Paul used the most affecting arguments and affectionate inducements to move Philemon to grant his request. (1) An implied appeal from his love to the saints in general: verse 5. (2) From consideration of the one who made this request: who might have used his apostolic authority, but chose rather to entreat him in love, by an appeal to his own condition—aged, in prison, so deny me not: verses 8-9. (3) From the particular relation of Onesimus to Paul—his own son in the faith: verse 10. (4) From the transformation which had been wrought in him—“now profitable”: verse 11. (5) From the strong affection which Paul had for Onesimus: verse 12. (6) From his unwillingness to act herein without the approval of Philemon: verses 13-14. (7) From the special relation Onesimus now sustained unto Philemon—“a brother beloved”: verses 15-16. (8) From the intimate bonds which obtained between Paul and Philemon: verse 17. (9) From the assurance given by Paul that he would personally make good any loss Philemon incurred: verse 18. (10) From the joy and refreshment which his granting of this plea would afford the apostle: verse 20. Was a more powerful appeal ever made, or such an earnest and winsome suing for the pardon and kindly reception of a disloyal slave!

Many are the important truths exemplified in this epistle. Therein we have a striking demonstration of the sovereignty and abundant mercy of God upon a dishonest slave: though sin abounded, divine grace did much more abound. Therein we have inculcated the Christian duty of peace-making, seeking to bring together two brethren in Christ who are alienated. Paul’s unhesitating acknowledgment of this runaway slave as “my very heart” (verse 12, American Revised Version) intimates with what affection the ties between the minister and his people, the parent and his child, the master and his servant, should be felt and owned by saints in all the circumstances of life. How delicately yet forcibly did the apostle urge upon Philemon (and us) to “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies,” etc. (Col 3:12-13)! Admire and emulate the humility of Paul, who did not consider it was beneath him to be concerned in performing such an office as to reconcile a master to his servant. See here a blessed setting forth of the spiritual equality of all who are in Christ Jesus: the chief of the apostles freely owning this converted menial as “a brother beloved” (Phm 16).

Yet observe the balance of truth there. Though there be such equality so far as their standing before God and their spiritual inheritance were concerned, yet those facts in no wise set aside inequalities in other relations and respects. The rights which masters have over their servants are not cancelled when the latter become Christians. That new relation into which we are taken by virtue of a living union with Christ must

not be regarded as annulling the obligations of natural relations, nor of the arrangements and responsibilities of ordinary society, so far as they are not sinful. Though in Christ, there was now no difference between Philemon and Onesimus, that did not alter the fact that the one was still a master and the other a servant: the saving grace which had been communicated to the soul of the latter would be most suitably exercised in showing forth the respect and submission which was due unto the former. There is a *natural* order established by God on earth between husband and wife, parent and child. There is also a *governmental* order which God has allowed men to institute by His authority, and He requires His people to conduct themselves suitably to the order He has ordained; "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake," etc. (1Pe 2:13-15).

Finally, be it noted that we have in this epistle an exquisite typical picture of the grand truths set before us in the Gospel—let the young preacher develop the following outline into a separate sermon. First, the sinner's deep need is portrayed in the case and condition of Onesimus. God is our Creator, Owner, and Ruler, and therefore, as creatures and subjects, we are under bonds to serve or obey Him. But fallen man is "born like a wild ass's colt" (Job 11:12) thoroughly untractable, unwilling to wear the yoke. Not only is he a rebel against the divine government, but he is, morally, a thief: misusing his time and talents, and thereby robbing God of His glory. In consequence, he is alienated from God (Eph 4:18), a wanderer in the far country of self-pleasing and sin. See how all of this is illustrated in Onesimus, who became an unprofitable servant by revolting from his master, stealing from him and becoming a fugitive. It is to be noted that the "if he hath wronged thee" (Phm 18) is not one of doubt, but of concession, signifying "[since] he hath"—compare John 14:3; Colossians 3:1. Second, the experience of Onesimus shows that the condition of no sinner is hopeless: Luke 19:10; Hebrews 7:25. Third, in his case, the ministry of one of God's servants was used to his conversion.

Fourth, in Paul's proffering to be bondsman for Onesimus (Phm 18), we have a figure of the grace of Christ in voluntarily becoming the Surety of his people, assuming the whole of their debt. Those words, "Put that on mine account" express the same readiness as had the Redeemer to be charged with the sins of His redeemed. Fifth, let it be carefully noted that more than a bare reconciliation was to be effected between Philemon and Onesimus: "Receive him *as myself*" (Phm 17), said the typical surety. Not only is the guilt and pollution of the believing sinner removed from before the sight of God, but he is "accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:6). Thus the basic truth of *imputation* was here adumbrated. Onesimus was not only exempted from the punishment of his crimes, but—through the benevolence of his benefactor—made partaker of benefits which he had merited not. Believers receive the reward of Christ's righteousness by a reciprocal transference (2Co 5:21). Sixth, in the whole of Paul's pleading on behalf of Onesimus, we have an image of the intercession of Christ for "his own." Seventh, the real change effected in the character and conduct of the one saved by Christ appears in the return of Onesimus to his master—a chief evidence of genuine repentance is a present performance of those duties which had previously been neglected.

Very few words must suffice upon Paul's prayer for Philemon. First, its *object*: "my God" (Phm 1:4). That the special relationship which He sustains unto His children should be owned by them, was the first lesson in prayer. Christ taught us: "Say, Our Father which art in heaven" (Luk 11:2). "I will praise thee, O Lord my God" (Psa 86:12). "God, even *our own* God, shall bless us" (Psa 67:6). Second, its *heartiness*: "making mention of thee *always* in my prayers" (Phm 4). No casual supplicant was Paul. Third, its *occasion*: "I thank my God...hearing of thy love and faith" (Phm 4-5). The fact that thanks were returned to God for those graces was an acknowledgement that He is the Author of them: that they originate not with man. They are the fruit of the Spirit, evidences of His regenerating work. Thanksgivings should be offered unto God not for ourselves only, but for our fellow-Christians also. "We must be affected with joy and thankfulness for any good in them, or done by them, or bestowed on them, as far as it is known to us, and seek for them what they need. In this lies no little part of the communion of saints"—M. Henry. This was ever Paul's custom: Romans 1:8; Ephesians 1:15-6. Colossians 1:3-4.

"Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints" (Phm 5). Wherever the one grace exists, the other is found. In the mystical Body of Christ, believers have communion both with the Head and with all its members: with the One by faith; with the other, by love. Hence we find the two things so often conjoined by the apostle: not only as equally essential, but as equally necessary to prove our interest or participation in that Body. Without love unto the saints, we are no more members of Christ than without faith in Him. Fourth, its *petition*: "That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus" (Phm 6). Request was

here made that Philemon might be divinely enabled to give still further proof of his faith and love, by bringing forth more abundant fruit, in acts of benevolence, in ministering to the needs of others. Thereby those graces would be “effectual” in promoting the glory of Christ and the welfare of fellow saints.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

38. Defeat

The seventh chapter of Joshua presents to us a drastically different scene from those which have engaged our attention in the previous chapters; yea, so startling is the contrast that we are reminded of that old adage, "Truth is stranger than fiction." Up to this point, everything had gone smoothly and blessedly for Israel, but now their progress is suddenly halted. Hitherto we have witnessed them, under God, going from strength to strength and glory to glory. Strict obedience to the divine commands had marked their every movement; here, the very reverse obtained. They had duly attended to the essential matter of circumcision and had kept the appointed Passover feast. On His part, the Lord had wrought wondrously for them, bringing them through the Jordan dryshod and overthrowing the principal fortress of the enemy without a blow having to be struck by Israel. But a startling contrast now confronts us: immediately following the memorable victory at the formidable Jericho, Israel suffer humiliating defeat at the much weaker town of Ai. A member of the tribe of Judah had committed a grievous crime, and the whole nation suffers in consequence. As there was a serpent in Eden and a Judas among the apostles, so there was an Achan in the midst of an obedient Israel.

A series of sad failures are set before us in the passage we are about to consider. The whole nation is thus depicted, "The hearts of the people melted, and became as water" (Jos 7:5). That dejection of God's people was occasioned by the cowardice shown by three thousand of their armed men, who had "fled before the men of Ai," thirty-six of them being slain as the enemy chased them (Jos 7:4-5). That had been preceded by the remiss conduct of Joshua himself, who, instead of seeking counsel from the Lord, had acted upon the carnal advice of his spies (Jos 7:4). The men whom Joshua had sent out to the reconnoitre Ai so far forgot their place that, upon their return, instead of making a simple report, they presumed to inform their commander-in-chief of the policy which *they* deemed it best for Israel to follow on this occasion (Jos 7:3). But before all this, the anger of the Lord had been kindled against Israel by the sin of Achan at Jericho (Jos 7:1). *That* was what explained all which followed: the cause of which they were the consequences. One decayed apple will soon infect a whole box of sound ones; or, to change the figure for a more Scriptural one, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1Co 5:6).

In the light of history, there is nothing at all unusual in the sad failures mentioned above, for poor human nature is as "unstable as water" (Gen 49:4). Yet in view of the fact that this generation was far and away the best which Israel ever had, and that Jehovah Himself was their Captain (Jos 5:15) in the conquest of Canaan, it does seem strange that such a deplorable lapse now occurred. How are we to account for the divine permission, yea, foresay that the Lord suffered this grievous defection for such reasons as these? First, to teach all succeeding generations of His people that they are never in greater danger of yielding to the pride of their hearts than when the Lord's power has been most signally displayed on their behalf. Second, to exemplify the basic truth that, if we are to enjoy a continuation of God's governmental blessing, we must remain steadfast in our subjection to His holy will. Third, to set before His saints a lasting warning that the Holy One is jealous of His glory, and will not condone sin in His own people. Fourth, to emphasize that nothing can be concealed from Him: that the most secret actions of an individual fall beneath His observation (Pro 15:3).

How ominous is the initial "But" of Joshua 7:1—the first chapter of our book opening thus: sad intimation of what follows, and well suited to point the contrast with the closing verse of chapter 6. There we read, "So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country" (Jos 6:27); now we are told, "But the children of Israel committed a trespass...for Achan... took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel" (Jos 7:1). The contrast is a double one: the Lord was *with* Joshua, but here His anger was kindled *against* Israel. The consequence of the former was that Joshua's fame was proclaimed abroad; the sequel of the latter is that he was humiliated and lies on his face before the ark (Jos 7:5). How often are the brightest prospects dimmed and the most promising projects hindered by sin! It was so with king Saul, and later with Solomon. Thus with Israel's progress in the conquest of Canaan: victory at Jericho gives place to defeat before Ai. How this shows us that a time of success is when we most need to be on our guard, and "rejoice with trembling" (Psa 2:11). The moon never suffers an eclipse except at a time when it is at the full! Grace is needed by us to use the grace God gives us and to save us from turning His blessings into curses.

Here, then, is another most important practical lesson for us to lay to heart in connection with the possessing of our possessions and the present enjoyment of our spiritual heritage. When God has vouchsafed light from His Word and opened up to us some passage, beware lest we become conceited and attribute the same to our own perspicuity. When victory is granted over some lust or deliverance from a powerful temptation, boast not, but rather endeavour to become more watchful. When God gives the pastor souls for his hire and prospers his labours, humbling grace must be diligently sought that he may not cherish the spirit of Nebuchadnezzar and say, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of *my* power" (Dan 4:30). Remember that solemn warning, "But Jeshurun [Israel] waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; *then* he forsook God" (Deu 32:15). We need to be much on our guard and fight against the Laodicean self-sufficiency and self-glorying of this evil day. Unless we be kept "little in [our] own sight" (1Sa 15:17) and "poor in spirit" (Mat 5:3), the overthrow of some Jericho in our experience will be followed by an ignominious defeat before an Ai!

"But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing" (Jos 7:1). This awful trespass was committed within the very environs of Jericho, immediately after God had miraculously caused its walls to fall down flat. In connection with the destruction and sacking of that city, specific instructions had been given to Israel that they must neither spare any lives nor take any of the spoils unto themselves (Jos 6:17-19). The spiritual lesson for us therein is that "the good fight of faith" (1Ti 6:12) in which the Christian is called to engage consists of a mortifying of the flesh, the denying of self, and the renouncing of this world in our affections. It was far more than a bare theft of which Achan was guilty, namely, the heinous act of sacrilege—a taking of that which was "consecrated unto the LORD"! (Jos 6:19). It is to be carefully noted that the Holy Spirit has furnished us with the genealogy of the offender, and since there is nothing meaningless or unimportant in the Word of truth, it behoves us to attend to this detail. Achan was the immediate descendant of "Zerah," and *he* was the son of Judah's whoredom (Gen 38:15-30). What a solemn example of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children!

Significant indeed is the name of this disturber of the nation's peace and prosperity, for Achan means "Trouble." It is both solemn and striking to note how the Holy Spirit has phrased His allusion to Achan's sin: He does not say "one of," but rather "the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing" (Jos 7:1). God regarded them as a unit, and hence, what one individual (does is) considered also the sin of the nation. This is borne out by what follows, for the whole congregation was affected thereby; "and the anger of the LORD was kindled against [not simply "Achan" but] the children of Israel" (Jos 7:1). We have a parallel in the local church of the New Testament: "whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (1Co 12:26), an example of which is furnished in Joshua 5:1-7, of the same epistle. Israel had been plainly warned that if any one of them took of the accursed thing, they would "make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it" (Jos 6:18), yet that solemn warning deterred not the selfish and rebellious Achan. Until the walls of Jericho fell, all kept strictly to rank, but upon their fall, they went "every man straight before him" (Jos 6:20). Thus the moment discipline was relaxed, the reprobate cared only for himself.

"And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country" (Jos 7:2). Joshua did not rest on his oars, but proceeded to the task which lay before him, sending out scouts to examine the next place to be captured. After such a notable victory, he did not deem himself entitled to sit down and take things easy, or give himself to feasting; but believed in the policy of striking while the iron is hot. The best time to hoist sail is when the wind is blowing, so that advantage may be taken of the same. Thus it is spiritually. When favoured with a breeze from Heaven (Joh 3:8), it is a propitious season for religious enterprise. Yet observe that the zeal of Joshua was tempered with prudence: he did not rush blindly ahead, but wisely took a preview of what was next to be done. It is the feverish energy of the flesh which impels professing Christians to act hurriedly and rashly, instead of sitting down first, and consulting whether they be able and sufficiently equipped for the task which they assay (Luk 14:31). There is a happy mean between recklessness and a caution which degenerates into apathy.

Ai was a place of sacred memories, for in Genesis 12:8, we are told of Abraham that "he removed...unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent [emblem of being a 'stranger and pilgrim' there], having Bethel on the west, and Hai [same as 'Ai' in Joshua 7] on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD [symbol of his being a worshipper], and called upon the name of the LORD." But now this territory was occupied by the wicked and marked out for destruction. It was because

of their abominable idolatry and immorality that the Lord used Israel as His instrument of judgment upon the Canaanites (Lev 18:24-25; Deu 18:10-12). Evidence of this is found in the names mentioned in Joshua 7:2, for "Bethaven" signifies "House of vanity" or "iniquity." Incidentally, we may note an example of the minute accuracy of Scripture in the topographical reference there: "Go up and view the country," said Joshua, while the Holy Spirit informs us in Genesis 12:8 that Abraham "removed from thence unto a *mountain* on the east of Bethel"—which means "The House of God." Ah, my reader, there are no "contradictions" in Holy Writ, but, instead, the most perfect harmony throughout; but only the reverent and diligent student perceives that.

"But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan...took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel. *And* Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai...saying, Go up and view the country" (Jos 7:1-2). The two verses are linked together, and thereby a solemn lesson is pointed. It is evident that Joshua was ignorant of the perfidy of Achan, and therefore, was quite unaware that the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel. It is a very serious thing to provoke the Lord, and thereby forfeit His providential smile. Yet how few of the "churches" today are conscious that the anger of the Lord is kindled against them!—kindled against them for the self-same reason that it was here against Israel, namely, for having trafficked in "the accursed thing." Dispensationalists may deny it, and say *that* occurred under "the Dispensation of Law," but there is no parallel in this "Dispensation of Grace." Therein they betray their crass ignorance, and, it is much to be feared, their unregeneracy—hearts which know not the Holy One. The case of Ananias and Sapphira (Act 5; Rev 2:14-16 and 20-23) and a quenched Spirit in our midst clearly give the lie to their assertions.

"And the men went up and viewed Ai. And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few" (Jos 7:2-3). In carrying out Joshua's orders, those men acted commendably, but in taking it upon them to advise their general, their conduct was most reprehensible. It was nothing but downright impudence for those subordinates to tell Joshua what he should do. Had he asked for their suggestions, it had been a different matter, but to proffer them unsought was a piece of impertinence. It appeared to be the language of kindness, prompted by consideration of others—to save the great bulk of the nation from a needless waste of energy. Yet, plausible as were their words, it was carnal counsel they gave: as much so as Peter's "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee," which seemed to emanate from deep solicitude for Him, when in reality, it issued from Satan (Mat 16:22-23). The same answer which the Redeemer returned unto the apostle was due these spies: "Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." They were leaning on the arms of flesh, filled with a sense of self-sufficiency.

These men who returned from their reconnoitering were inflated with pride. Their language was that of presumption, engendered by previous success. They began to entertain the idea that they belonged to a great nation, and none could stand before them. They contemptuously regarded Ai as an easy prey, as their "for they are but a few" (Jos 7:3) indicated. What need for the whole of the army to journey thither: a small company of *our* men will suffice. There was no dependency upon the One who had wrought wonders for them. Instead, they felt that a couple of battalions could do wonders, and that there was no need for Israel to put forth all their strength. Alas, how like unto them God's servants and people often are today. When the Lord is pleased to exercise His power in the saving of souls, preaching appears to be an easy matter, and the minister is tempted to spend less time and labour in the preparation of his sermons. And when God grants a saint victory over some powerful lust, he is apt to feel there is less need to pray so earnestly. But such a spirit is disastrous. Only as we continue sensible of our weakness shall we seek strength from Above. Take warning from this incident and strive against pride and presumption, especially when God has granted some success.

"Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few" (Jos 7:3). How different was that conceited boast from the language of the first spies: "And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land" (Jos 2:24)! Let not victory lead to negligence. We have no right to count upon the Lord's doing all for us, unless we make full use of the means that He has appointed. All of Israel were required to assemble at Jericho: none was left behind in his tent, none suffered to remain at a distance as a mere spectator. It might appear to them as a needless waste of "man-power," but God required it; and gave success to their obedience. *There* was the precedent for them to follow. But the dictate of carnal wisdom

intervened. Ai appeared to be an inconsiderable place and no great force required to reduce it. Self-confidence promised an easy conquest, so the greater part of the army might be spared. Instead of regarding it as a blessed privilege for the whole nation to behold the Lord showing Himself strong in their behalf, these men said, "Make not all the people to labour thither" (Jos 7:3) or to be a "weariness," as the word is eight times rendered elsewhere—just as at the close of the Old Testament, a degenerate Israel said of God's worship, "what a *weariness* is it!" (Mal 1:13).

"So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men" (Jos 7:4). Very solemn indeed is that, for it shows us what the most honoured of God's servants are when left to themselves. We say not, "the most eminent," for that savours far too much of the flesh; but rather the "most favoured." Whatever privileges we have enjoyed, or nearness to God has been granted us, we are still entirely dependent upon Him for a *continuance* of preserving grace. If that be withheld from any one of us for a single hour, we shall miserably fail and sin. The upholding Spirit was now withdrawn from Joshua for a season (why so will be pointed out later), and therefore, he acted as a natural man would and followed the carnal policy advanced by his underlings. Instead of rebuking their pride with "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off" (1Ki 20:11), he adopted their fleshly policy. This was the more lamentable and excuseless because express instructions had been given him, "And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at *his* word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in" (Num 27:18-21).

Alas, the evil leaven of Achan's trespass was at work, "[leavening] the whole lump" (1Co 5:6), secretly yet surely defiling all his fellows. Failing to ask counsel of the Lord, Joshua was now deprived of spiritual perception, and so discerned not the carnality and evil of the plan set before him. He should have realized at once that it was at direct variance with the divine pattern given him at Jericho. *There* everything was done in complete obedience to the revealed will of God, in full dependence upon Him, and yet without the slightest neglect of means or human instrumentality—the entire congregation took their assigned places and parts. But *here* there was no inquiring of God's mind, no reliance on His intervention, and a small part only of the "armed men" (Jos 6:9, 13) were deemed sufficient to perform the work of the whole. Thus the greater part would be idle, and the congregation itself deprived of the grand privilege of witnessing the mighty works of their God. When Jericho fell, the whole nation saw by whose Hand its powerful walls were demolished, and could give Him the glory. Thus, the plan adopted now by Joshua was a breaking in upon the divine design.

How solemnly does that point the injunction, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isa 2:22). What a warning is there here for the pastor to give no heed to the carnal advice of his church officers, and to say with David, "My soul, wait thou only upon God" (Psa 62:5). Emulate the apostle who "conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal 1:16). It matters nothing what others think and say of you as long as you have the divine approbation. No matter how plausible may be the suggestions proffered, take orders from none save your Master. At the beginning of the campaign, Joshua had given commandment that the Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manassah should "remain in the land" and not enter into possession of their inheritance on the other side of Jordan "until the LORD have given your brethren rest" (Jos 1:12-15), thereby insisting that the whole of the twelve tribes should present a united front before the enemy until victory was complete. But the plan now followed introduced disunity. It is the following of fleshly methods which generally brings divisions among the people of God. Later, the Lord said to Joshua, "Take *all* the people of war with thee" (Jos 8:1). He had to return to the divine plan before there could be any success!



THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

22. *The Holy Bible, Part 14*

27. *Its undersigned coincidences.* Infidel impugners of the Scriptures and deniers of their divine inspiration have shown some industry and ingenuity in gathering together apparent contradictions between different statements in the Bible. But such alleged contradictions are only apparent, and betray the ignorance and misapprehension of those who urge them. The men who present them are merely retailing old cavils, which have been refuted again and again. On the other hand, those who undertake the defence of the Bible may appeal to innumerable proofs not only of its general harmony, but also of its detailed consistency and verbal precision. The veracity of Holy Writ is demonstrated by hundreds of undersigned coincidences in it, or the un-collaborated agreement of one part with another. Though the Bible has in it sixty-six books, written by forty penmen, covering so many generations in the world, relating to widely different states of society, containing such a variety of matter upon so many different subjects, and abounding in supernatural incidents; yet it exhibits concord in all its parts, which becomes increasingly evident the more closely it be examined. Their consonancy without collusion is too uniform to be accidental, and too incidental to have been mutually planned.

That which gives greater force to this argument is its self-evident feature that the perfect agreement of all its writers is *undersigned* on their part. The closer their productions be scanned, the more is it manifest that their perfect unity was not studied but casual. This line of argument was developed at considerable length by William Paley (1743-1805) and later by John James (J. J.) Blunt (1794-1855), who fully evinced the minute agreement and yet unpremeditated concurrence of one writer with another. The value of such evidence cannot be overestimated. As Professor Blunt pointed out, "It does not require many circumstantial coincidents to determine the mind of a jury as to the credibility of a witness in our courts even when the life of a fellow-creature is at stake." When independent narrators describe an incident in detail and there is no discrepancy but perfect accord between their several accounts, we logically conclude that they have related actual occurrences—the more so when there is no indication of either conference or contrivance. We shall now condense a number of examples from those authors.

After Joseph's brethren had cast him into the pit, we are told that "they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to *Egypt*" (Gen 37:25). Now this, by no means an obvious incident to have suggested itself, does appear to be a very natural one to have occurred. But what is more to our point, it tallies exactly with what we read of elsewhere; yet in a passage which has no reference whatever to the one just cited, namely, "Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to *embalm* his father...and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days" (Gen 50:2-3). This it was the practice of the Egyptians to embalm their dead; and hence, the Ishmaelites would find a ready market in Egypt for their spices! Again, when during the famine Joseph possessed himself on the king's account of all the land of Egypt, "only the land of the priests bought he not" (Gen 47:22)—as a specially favoured class, they were exempted. In perfect accord is the fact that the final mark of the king's regard for Joseph was his giving him to wife, "the daughter of Potipherah [*the*] priest of On" (Gen 41:45)—showing that the priests were held in peculiar esteem by their monarch.

"Moses...gave...two wagons and four oxen he gave unto the sons of Gershon, according to their service: And four wagons and eight oxen he gave unto the sons of Merari" (Num 7:6-8). Why twice as many to the one as to the other? No reason is expressly stated, yet if we turn to an earlier chapter—separated by sundry details on other matters—we discover for ourselves a satisfactory explanation: the sons of Gershon carried the *lighter* part of the tabernacle furniture (Num 4:25); those of Merari, the heavier (Num 4:32). Does cunning contrivance or truth lie behind that? "But he [Israel's king] shall not multiply horses to himself" (Deu 17:16) The governors of Israel rode on "white *asses*" (Jdg 5:10, and compare Jos 15:18; 1Sa 25:23); and it was the asses and not the horses of Kish which were lost (1Sa 9:3). News of Absalom's death was brought to David by runners on foot (2Sa 18:21-23). Thus, it appears quite incidentally in the history of Israel that for several centuries, they had *no horses*—a coincidence of reality which had never occurred in a fiction.

When praising the Lord for deliverance from their enemies, Deborah mentioned there was not "a shield or spear" among the Israelites (Jdg 5:8). Strange though that be, it fully accords with several other details

found in that book. Ehud “*made him a dagger*” (Jdg 3:16), Shamgar slew the Philistines “with an ox goad” (Jdg 3:31), Jael had to improvise and use a tent peg (Jdg 4:21), Samson searched in vain for a weapon till he “found a new jawbone of an ass” (Jdg 15:15). Yet more remarkable was Gideon’s victory over the Midianites with trumpets and broken pitchers, with their satirical cry of faith, “the *sword* of the LORD, and of Gideon” (Jdg 7:15-22). No explanation is furnished by the writer of Judges, nor does he link together those incidents. But when we turn to 1 Samuel 13:19-22, they are fully accounted for, for there we are told that when the Philistines subdued Israel, they suffered “no smith...throughout all the land of Israel”! Those who are qualified to weigh evidence will perceive in such “undesigned coincidences” the marks of truth—the more convincing, since our attention is not directly called to them.

“Goliath, of Gath” (1Sa 17:4). Let us mark the value of that casual mention of the giant’s town—a detail of such little importance that its insertion or omission apparently mattered nothing. In Numbers 13:32-33, we are informed that the sons of Anak were men of the giants. Later, that Joshua “cut off the Anakims from the mountains...[and] destroyed them utterly with their cities,” but a few remained “only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod” (Jos 11:21-22). Thus, 1 Samuel 17:4 is found to square with those independent statements in Numbers and Joshua—in the mouth of those three witnesses, the veracity of history being established! In 1 Samuel 22:3-4, David trusted his father and mother to the protection of the Moabites. Why he made such a strange and dangerous choice, we are not told. Had not the book of Ruth come down to us, the mystery had been left unexplained; but there, we learn that the grandmother of David’s father was a Moabitess (Ru 4:17); and thus, the propriety of his selection of their place of refuge appears—yet only by comparing the two books together is the circumstance accounted for.

The undesignedness of many passages in the Gospels is overlooked in our familiar acquaintance with them. For instance, why were the sick brought to Jesus “when the even was come” (Mat 8:16)? From the parallel passages (Mar 1:21; Luk 4:31), we learn that the transaction took place on the Sabbath—which ended at *sunset* (Lev 23:32). Then from Matthew 12:2—an entirely independent passage—we discover there was a superstition among the Jews that “it was not lawful to [heal] upon the sabbath day.” No explanation is given in Matthew 8:16; and had it not been for the accounts of Mark and Luke, we had not known it *was* “the sabbath”! Note Herod, “said unto *his servants*” (Mat 14:1-2). Why? There must have been some particular reason: Luke 8:3 and Acts 13:1 show that Christ had followers in Herod’s household. How came it to pass that Peter, a stranger, who had entered the house in the night, and under circumstances of some disorder, was identified by the maid in *the porch* (Mat 26:71)? Joh 18:16 tells us: Peter had stood there with John until “her that kept the door” admitted them—one Gospel minutely confirming the other.

The Bible, my reader, consists of no cunningly devised fables, but authentic records of momentous events. They court examination and will sustain the most diligent scrutiny, evidencing themselves to be eminently trustworthy and faithful accounts of actual happenings. While they relate much that is extraordinary, miracles many and mighty, yet confidence in the historicity is established by the numerous marks of reality, consistency, and accuracy, which the ordinary matters of fact combined with them constantly exhibit. The exact agreement between incidental statements in wider separated parts of the Bible argues the truthfulness of each of them. The closer we check one narrative with another, the more does the veracity of the writers appear. Thus, when I find Paul declaring that Cephas was accompanied by his “wife” (1Co 9:5), and that he alone of the twelve apostles was said to be married (Mat 8:14); and when I find him affirming that from “a child” Timothy had “known the holy scriptures” (2Ti 3:15)—which necessarily implies at least one *Jewish* parent—and then discover his mother *was* “a Jewess” (Act 16:1), I am compelled by the very obliquity of such statements to accept them as inerrant.

28. *Its dispassionate poise.* In all the historical narratives of Old and New Testaments alike, there is a most noticeable absence of any expression of feeling on the part of those who penned them. One and all maintain candour and calmness when chronicling the most pathetic or the most atrocious incidents. There is no trace anywhere of *their own* delight or anger, not a single outburst of that personal bitterness and rancour which so often mar the writings of uninspired men. Instead, we behold a mild equanimity and quiet dignity breathing throughout the sacred pages. Thus, when the fall of our first parents, with all its disastrous consequences, is recorded, it is without any reflections of the scribe annexed thereto. The murder of Abel is related, but no recriminations are cast upon Cain. Even when informing us there was “no room...in the inn” (Luk 2:7) for Joseph and Mary, and that the newly born Saviour was perforce laid in a manger, the evangelist indulges in no cutting invectives upon those who so grievously insulted the Son of God.

When another evangelist records the ferocious and wicked attempt of Herod upon the life of the infant Saviour, by ordering all the children in Bethlehem under the age of two to be slain, he voices no horrified denunciation at such brutality; and when he relates how the legal parents of Christ had to flee into Egypt in order to escape from the murderous designs of that king, he pronounces no railing accusation upon him, such as an ordinary writer had deemed fit. Another of them tells us of the tetrarch of Galilee vilely yielding to the demand of a dancing girl that the head of John the Baptist be brought to her in a charger, but refrains from all aspersion upon the woman's baseness and the weakness and wickedness of his consenting to the murder of our Lord's forerunner; and with unparalleled honesty, states that "the king was exceeding sorry" (Mar 6:26). It was not that the evangelists were devoid of feeling, but that they were so completely under the control of the One who moved them to write that their natural passions were wholly subdued.

Still more remarkable is the entire absence of any reproaches from the evangelists upon the glaring injustice of the judges of the Redeemer, the horrid indignities to which He was subjected during His last hours, and the blasphemous taunts hurled at him as He hung upon the tree. Their temperate and unvarnished description of Christ's trial and crucifixion is without a parallel. Instead of indignantly upbraiding Caiaphas and Pilate, instead of hot strictures upon the hypocritical priests and Pharisees, instead of strong declamations of the brutal soldiers, there is nothing but the calm discharge of their task as sacred historians. How entirely different from the temper and tone of the ordinary biographer when recounting the injuries of those he loves or highly esteems! So, too, in the accounts of our Lord's resurrection. What an opportunity did that unique event afford the evangelists to break forth in accents of admiration! What an occasion was it for extolling the powers of their triumphant Redeemer! Instead, there is only a brief account of the bare facts of the case. Surely it is patent that such moderation and sobriety can only be accounted for on the ground that the Holy Spirit fully controlled them; that as the amanuenses of God, they wrote not by natural impulse, but by divine inspiration.

29. *Its amazing anticipations.* Since these articles are specially designed for the young who are assailed by the infidelity of those who pose as "Advanced Thinkers," a few words require to be said upon the scientific reliability of the Bible. First, there is not a word which clashes with any known *fact* discovered since it was written. Therein it differs radically from the Shafter of the Hindus (which affirms the moon to be 50,000 leagues higher than the sun!), the Koran of Mahomet (which teaches the mountains were created "to prevent the earth from moving"!), the statement of Pope Saint Zachary (d. 752) (which denied the antipodes), or the blunders which the latest generation of scientists find in the writings of their immediate predecessors. Second, the Bible makes known "secrets of Nature," of which all contemporary writings were totally ignorant. Space permits of but few illustrations to show that the Bible has always been far in advance of "science."

There is not a little recorded in Holy Writ of which the ancients knew nothing, but which was verified long afterwards. For example: "Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south" (Job 9:9); centuries after that was said, the southern hemisphere was unknown! "He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing" (Job 26:7): sustaining it in space without any material support kept in position by the centre of gravity. As Dr. Leathers (King's College, London) pointed out, "Job, more than three thousand years ago, described in the language of scientific accuracy the condition of our globe." "Or even the silver cord [the spinal column] be loosed, or the golden bowl [the skull] be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel be broken at the cistern" (Ecc 12:6). The lungs take in and pour out air as a pitcher does water. The heart is "the wheel" on which the pitcher is brought up from the cistern: one of its lobes receives blood from the veins, the other lobe casts it out again, pulsing it through the arteries. Therein *the circulation of the blood* was figuratively described long before Harvey discovered it!

Any good encyclopedia will inform its readers that in the seventeenth century A.D., Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727) discovered the "law" of the circular motion of the wind; yet long before Solomon had declared, "The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits" (Ecc 1:6). It will likewise attribute to him the discovery of "the law of evaporation," yet the Bible had previously made known, "He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth" (Psa 135:7). One would think from man's writings that the scientists had invented these things! But many centuries before coal was first mined, Job declared, "As for the earth, out of it cometh bread: and *under it* is turned up as it were fire" (Job 28:5): combustible material which provides the most suitable fuel for the furnace. Millenniums before Henry Ford (1863-1947) was born, Nahum

(Nah 2:4) foretold, “The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings”!

In Genesis 15:5, God said to Abraham, “Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them,” while in Jeremiah 33:22, we read that “the host of heaven cannot be numbered.” When those verses were penned, none on earth had the least idea there was a countless number of stars. Claudius Ptolemy (AD 90-AD 168) made a catalogue of the whole sphere of the heavens and made them to be but 3,350! But when Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) turned his telescope on the heavens, he discovered there were many more than had been seen by the naked eye; when William Parsons (Lord Rosse, 1800-1867) used his great reflector, he found they were to be numbered by the million; and when Sir Frederick William Herschel (1738-1822) examined the “milky way,” he learned it was composed of countless myriads! How came it that Moses and Jeremiah used expressions so far in advance of the knowledge of their day, unless guided by Omniscience? “Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that *day*...he that is in the field...in that *night* there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left” (Luk 17:30-35). How strikingly accurate: day on one side of the earth, night on the other!—a fact quite unknown in Luke’s time!

30. *Its ineffable purity.* This appears relatively, by comparing the Bible with other writings, for it far excels all human codes of law in the injunctions, prohibitions, and motives, as the light of a sunny day does that of a foggy one. It is equally evident when considered absolutely, in itself lays open, as no other book, the turpitude and horrid nature of sin as “the abominable thing” which God hates (Jer 44:4), and which we are to detest and shun. It never gives the least indulgence or dispensation to sin, nor do any of its teachings lead to licentiousness. It sternly condemns sin in all its forms, and makes known the awful curse and wrath of God which are its due. It not only reproves sin in the outward lives of men, but discovers the secret faults of the heart, which is its chief seat. It warns against its first motions, and legislates for the regulating of our spirits, requiring us to keep clean the fountain from which are “the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). Its promises are made unto holiness, and its blessings bestowed upon the pure in heart. The ineffable and exalted holiness of the Bible is its chief and peculiar excellency, as it is also the principal reason why it is disliked by the majority of the unregenerate.

The Bible forbids all impure desires and unjust thoughts, as well as deeds. It prohibits envy (Pro 23:17), and all forms of selfishness (Rom 15:1). It requires us to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2Co 7:1), and bids us “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1Th 5:22)—injunctions which are quite foreign to the “moralists” of the ancients! Heavenly doctrine is to be matched with heavenly character and conduct. Its requirements penetrate into the innermost recesses of the soul, exposing and censuring all the corruptions found there. The law of man goes no farther than “thou shalt not steal,” but that of God, “thou shalt not covet” (Exo 20:15,17). The law of man prohibits the act of adultery, that of God reprehends the looking upon a woman to lust after her (Mat 5:28). The law of man says, “thou shalt not kill” (Exo 20:13); that of God forbids all ill-will, malice, or hatred (1Jo 3:15). It strikes directly at that which fallen nature most cherishes and craves: “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!” (Luk 6:26)—a denunciation of no human invention! It prohibits the spirit of revenge, enjoins the forgiveness of injuries, and contrary to the self-righteousness of our hearts, inculcates *humility*.

Though we have now set forth no fewer than thirty separate lines of evidence for the divine Authorship of the Scriptures, we are far from having exhausted the subject. We might have shown that the divine inspiration of the Bible is attested by its miraculous preservation through the centuries, its unrivalled influence upon humanity, its perennial freshness, its inexhaustible fullness, its marvellous unity, its verification in Christian experience; but we have previously written thereon. Separate sections could have been devoted to the setting forth of its minute accuracy, its pride-abasing contents, its inculcation of altruism, its power to search the conscience, its intense realism—dealing not with theorizings and idealizings, but the actualities of life, its utter unworldliness, its sanctifying tendency, its teaching on Providence; but we forbore lest the reader be wearied, and because young preachers should now be able to work them out for themselves.



SLEEPY SAINTS

“Went forth to meet the bridegroom” (Mat 25:1) denotes a craving for fellowship with and a definite seeking after Him, and where *they* be absent, it is vain to think we are among those who “love his appearing” (2Ti 4:8). Those words refer to the exercise of the believer’s graces, so that he can say, “My soul followeth hard after thee” (Psa 63:8). Of *faith*, acted upon its Object, viewing Him as His person and perfections are portrayed in the Word. Of *hope*, expecting to meet with Him, for Him to manifest Himself unto us (Joh 14:21), as well as being for ever with Him. Of *love*, which desires its Beloved and cannot be content away from Him. It is for the affections to be set upon “those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1), resulting in a stranger and pilgrim character on earth (1Pe 2:11). It is a going out of self, absorbed with the One who loves us and gave Himself for us. Only so can He be experientially encountered, beheld with delight, fellowshipped. That “went forth to meet the bridegroom” (Mat 25:1) is *such* a going forth of the affections and exercise of our graces upon Him as made Paul to say, “But what things *were* gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phi 3:7-8).

“While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept” (Mat 25:5). How pathetic! How searching and solemn! The season of *His* tarrying was the time of *their* failing. They did not continue as they began. Their graces were not kept in healthy exercise. They ceased to attend unto the great business assigned them. They grew weary of well-doing (2Th 3:13). Instead of occupying our heads with the “prophetic” fulfilment of the verse, we need to bare our hearts and suffer them to be searched by it. Instead of saying, Those words now accurately describe the present condition of Christendom as a whole, we need to inquire how far they pertain to each of us individually. Far more to the point is it to ask myself, *Am I* a slumbering and sleeping Christian? Nor is that question to be answered hurriedly. If on the one hand, I need to beware of thinking more highly of myself than I ought, or pretend all is well with me when such is not the case; on the other, God does not require me to act the part of a hypocrite, and in order to acquire a reputation for humility, claim to be worse than I am. Peter was not uttering a presumptuous boast when he said unto Christ, “Thou knowest that I love thee” (Joh 21:15-17). But Judas was an imposter when he greeted Him with a kiss (Luk 22:48).

But before we can truthfully answer the question, Am I spiritually asleep?, we must first ascertain what are the marks of one who *is* so. Let us then, in order to assist the honest inquirer, describe some of the *characteristics* of sleep. And since we are not making any effort to impress the learned, we will be as simple as possible. The things which characterize the body when it is asleep will help us to determine when the soul is so. When the body is asleep, it is in a state of inactivity, all its members being in repose. It is also a state of unconsciousness, when the normal exercises of the mind are suspended. It is therefore a state of insensibility to danger, of complete helplessness. Spiritual sleep is that condition wherein the faculties of the believer’s soul are inoperative and when his graces no longer perform their several offices. When the mind ceases to engage itself with divine things, and the graces be not kept in healthy exercise, a state of slothfulness and inertia ensues. When the grand truths of Scripture regarding God and Christ, sin and grace, heaven and hell, exert not a lively and effectual influence upon us, we quickly become drowsy and neglectful.

A slumbering faith is an inactive one. It is not exercised upon its appointed Objects, nor performing its assigned tasks. It is neither drawing upon that fullness of grace which is available in Christ for His people, nor is it acting on the precepts and promises of the Word. Though there still be a mental assent to the truth, yet the heart is no longer suitably affected by that which concerns practical godliness. Where such be the case, a Christian will be governed more by tradition, sentiment, and fancy, rather than by gratitude, the fear of the Lord, and care to please Him. So too when his hope becomes sluggish, he soon lapses into a spiritual torpor. Hope is a desirous and earnest expectation of blessedness to come. It looks away from self and this present scene and is enthralled by “the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1Co 2:9). As it eyes the goal and the prize, it is enabled to run with patience the race set before us. But when hope slumbers, he becomes absorbed with the objects of time and sense, and allured and stupefied with present and perishing things. Likewise when love to God be not vigorous, there is no living to His glory; self-love and self-pity actuating us. When the love of Christ ceases to constrain us to self-denial and a following of the example He has left us, the soul has gone to sleep.

Where those cardinal graces be not in healthy exercise, the Christian loses his relish for the means of grace, and if he attempts to use them, it is but perfunctorily. The Bible is read more from habit or to satisfy conscience than with eager delight, and then no impression is left on the heart, nor is there any sweet meditation thereon afterwards. Prayer is performed mechanically, without any conscious approach unto God or communing with Him. So in attending public worship and the hearing of the Word: the duty is performed formally and without profit. When the body sleeps, it *neither eats nor drinks*: so it is with the soul. Faith is the hand which receives, hope the saliva which aids digestion, love the masticator and assimilator of what is partaken. But when they cease to function, the soul is starved, and it becomes weak and languid. The more undernourished be the body, the less strength and ability has it for its tasks. In like manner, a neglected soul is unfit for holy duties, and the most sacred exercises become burdensome. Thus, when a saint finds his use of the means of grace wearisome and the discharge of spiritual privileges irksome, he may know that his soul is slumbering Godwards.

In the parable itself, four causes of spiritual sleep are indicated.

1. *Failure to remain watchful*. In its wider sense, “watching” signifies an earnest taking heed unto ourselves and our ways, realizing how prone we are to “turn again to folly” (Psa 85:8). So long as the saint be left in this world, he is in constant danger of bringing reproach upon the holy Name he bears, and becoming a stumbling-block to his brethren. Watchfulness (the opposite of carelessness) is exercising a diligent concern and care for our souls, avoiding all occasions to sin, resisting temptation (Mat 26:41). It is to “stand fast in the faith, quit you like men” (1Co 16:13)—be regular in our duties. When we be lax in serving the Lord, in mortifying our lusts, and less fervent and frequent in prayer, then slumber has begun to steal over us. Ultimately, it respects “looking for that blessed hope” (Ti 2:13), which is a very different thing from awaiting the fulfilment of prophecy or the accomplishing of an item in God’s “dispensational programme.” It is far more than expecting an important event, namely, the second advent of Christ Himself; and that implies delight in Him, yearning after Him, practical readiness for His appearing: Luke 12:35-36.

2. *The Bridegroom’s delay* resulted in lack of perseverance on their part. Since we know not how soon or how long deferred will be our call to depart from this world, we need to be unremitting in duty, in a state of constant readiness. Not only a desirous expectation, but a “patient waiting for Christ” (2Th 3:5) is required of us. “Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching... And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants... And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through” (Luk 12:37-39). It was because Moses tarried so long in the Mount that Israel grew weary of waiting and gave way to their lusts—a warning to us not to relax our vigilance. How long had the Old Testament saints to wait for His first advent! “Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it... Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts” (Jam 5:7-8), exercising faith and hope. See Luke 21:36.

3. *Intimacy with graceless professors*. The wise virgins failed because they were in too close contact and fellowship with the foolish ones. That is confirmed by the divine warning, “Be not deceived: evil communications [the verbal form of that Greek word is rendered ‘communed with’ in Act 24:26] corrupt good manners,” which is immediately followed by “Awake to righteousness, and sin not” (1Co 15:33-34), showing us that intimacy with the Christless produces lethargy. “We are more susceptible of evil than good: we catch a disease from one another, but we do not get health from one another. The conversations of the wicked have more power to corrupt than the good to excite virtue. A man that would keep himself awake unto God, and mind the saving of his soul, must shake off evil company”—Thomas Manton (1620-1677). See Psalm 119:115. It is not the openly profane, but the loose and careless professor who is the greatest menace to the Christian. Hence, “having a form of godliness, but denying [inaction] the power thereof: from such *turn away*” (2Ti 3:5).

4. *Inattention to the initial danger*: They “slumbered” (a lighter form) before they slept! How that shows the need for taking solemn and earnest heed to the beginnings of spiritual decline! If we yield to a spirit of languor, we shall soon lapse into a sound sleep. One degree of slackness and carelessness leads to another: “Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep” (Pro 19:15). Once our zeal abates and our love cools, we become remiss and heedless. If we do not fight against a cold formality when engaged in sacred exercises, we shall ultimately cease them entirely. All backsliding begins in the heart! Sin stupefies before it hardens. If we cease to heed the gentle strivings of the Spirit, conscience will become calloused. “David, when he fell into adultery and blood, he was like one in a swoon... We have need to stand always upon our watch.

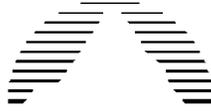
Great mischiefs would not ensue if we took notice of the beginnings of those distempers which afterwards settle upon us”—T. Manton.

Other causes of spiritual sleepiness which are not directly indicated in the parable are specified in or may be deduced from other passages. For example: “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way” (Psa 119:37). The apposition of those two petitions clearly connotes that an undue occupation with worldly things has a deadening effect upon the heart. Nothing has a more enervating influence on the affections of a believer than for him to allow himself an inordinate liberty in carnal vanities. Again, “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares... Watch ye therefore, and pray always” (Luk 21:34-36). Gluttony not only dulls the senses of the body, but renders the mind sluggish too; and thereby the whole man is unfitted for the discharge of spiritual duties, which call for the engaging and putting forth of “*all* that is within [us]” (Psa 103:1); equally so do carking cares which engross the attention and stupefy the understanding render the affections torpid. Yet more searching is it to observe that “be sober” *precedes* “be vigilant” in 1 Peter 5:8. Sobriety is freedom from excesses, particularly a sparing use made of the lawful comforts of this life. Any form of intemperance breeds inertia. If, then, we are able to keep wide awake, we must be “temperate in *all* things” (1Co 9:25).

The *consequences* of spiritual sloth are inevitable and obvious. Space allows us to do little more than name some of the chief ones. (1) Grace becomes inoperative. When faith be not exercised upon Christ, it nods and ceases to produce good works. When hope languishes and becomes inactive, the heart is no longer lifted above the things of time and sense by a desirous expectation of good things to come. Then love declines and is no longer engaged in pleasing and glorifying God. Zeal slumbers and instead of fervour, there is heartless formality in the use of means and performance of duties. (2) We are deprived of spiritual discernment, and no longer able to experientially perceive the vanity of earthly things and value of heavenly, and the need of pressing forward unto them. (3) A drowsy inattention to God’s providences. Eyes closed in sleep take no notice of His dealings with us, weigh not the things which befall us. Mercies are received as a matter of course, and signs of God’s displeasure are disregarded (Isa 42:24-25). (4) Unconcernedness in the commission of sin, so that we cease mortifying our lusts and resisting the devil. Spiritual stupidity makes us insensible to our danger. It was while David was taking his ease that he yielded to the devil (2Sa 11:1-2). (5) The Holy Spirit is grieved, His gracious operations are suspended, and His comforts withheld. (6) So far from us overcoming the world, when our spiritual senses be dulled, we are absorbed with its attractions or weighted down by its cares. (7) We are robbed by our enemies (Luk 12:39)—of God’s providential smile, of our peace and joy. (8) Fruitlessness: see Proverbs 24:30-31. (9) Carnal complacency: peace and joy being derived from pleasant circumstances and earthly possessions, rather than Christ and our heritage in Him. (10) Spiritual poverty: see Proverbs 24:33-34. (11) Indifference to the cause and interests of Christ: it was while men slept Satan sowed his tares, and abuses crept into the church. (12) A practical unpreparedness for Christ’s coming: Luke 21:36; Rev 16:15.

Let us now point out some of the *correctives*. (1) Spiritual sleepiness is best prevented by our faith being engaged with the person and perfections of Christ. It is not monastic retirement, nor the relinquishment of our lawful connection with the world, but the fixing of our minds and affections upon the transcendent excellency of the Saviour, which will most effectually preserve us from being hypnotized by the baits of Satan. A believing and adoring view of Him who is “fairer than the children of men” (Psa 45:2) will dim the lustre of the most attractive objects in this world. When the One who is “altogether lovely” is beheld by anointed eyes, the flowery paths of this scene become a dreary wilderness, and the soul is quickened to press forward unto Him, until it sees the King in His beauty face to face. (2) Especially will a keeping fresh in our hearts the unspeakable sufferings of the Saviour draw us away from threatened rivals, and inspire grateful obedience to Him. “For the love of Christ [particularly His dying love] constraineth us” (2Co 5:14). (3) By praying daily for God to quicken and revive us. (4) By being doubly on our guard when things are going smoothly and easily. (5) By maintaining a lively expectation of Christ’s appearing (Heb 9:28). (6) By attending to such exhortations as Hebrews 12:2-3, allowing no abatement of our vigour. (7) By putting on the whole armour of God (Eph 6:13-18).





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