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**STUDIES**  
**IN THE**  
**SCRIPTURES**

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

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# STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

## SHOUTING

Upon first consideration, one would scarcely expect to find much upon this subject in Holy Writ, for shouting seems to conflict with that decorum which becomes sacred things. Certainly we would not have concluded from any *a priori* reasoning that the Most High would call upon His people to engage in any such noisy exercise. Yet again and again, we find Him *bidding them* to shout for joy. It is what may be termed one of the surprises of Scripture when we read “O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph” (Psa 47:1), which surprise is increased when we are told in that same Psalm that “God is gone up with a shout” (verse 5)! Yet further reflection should at least modify our surprise, for after all, shouting is but an expression of intensity and earnestness, and *that* cannot be out of place even in connection with spiritual things, so long as it be decorous and orderly. As it is with speech and song, so there are different kinds of shouting—a carnal and vulgar one, a spiritual and God-glorifying one. Obviously, displays of animal excitement, hysterical outbursts, and disorderly emotionalism should not be permitted in the house of prayer; anything that savours of the flesh or is irreverent is to be suppressed.

1. The shouting of *delirium*. “When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp”; but Moses answered that it was “the noise of them that do sing” (Exo 32:17-18). That was an evil shouting, connected with one of the most dreadful events recorded in the Word. During the absence of Moses and his minister in the mount, the people said unto Aaron, “Up, make us gods, which shall go before us” (verse 1). Instead of faithfully rebuking them for their wickedness, he tamely yielded and complied with their demand. Bidding them break off their golden ear-rings, he fashioned a molten calf, saying, “These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt,” and proclaimed a feast unto the Lord on the morrow. Next morning, the very ones who had only recently worshipped before the manifested majesty of JEHOVAH presented their offerings before the golden calf, and then “rose up to play”—obscenely

sporting themselves before their idol (verse 25). A most appalling scene was presented, as they gave free rein to the lusts of the flesh. Pandemonium broke loose, and horrible yelling filled the air. Joshua, with his military mind, construed the distant sound of the tumult as due to tidings of war; but Moses, with his keener perception, recognized the noise as that of frenzied merriment.

2. The shouting *of faith*. “So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets...with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city” (Jos 6:20). How vastly different was *this* shouting from that briefly noted above! It was a God-appointed, God-inspired, God-honouring shout. That it was a trustful one is clear from Hebrews 11:30, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.” In Joshua 6:3-6, we find the Lord giving minute instructions unto His servant of the procedure to be followed, and assurance that upon compliance complete success should crown their efforts. Thus the faith of Israel included both obedience to God’s precept and confidence in His promise. Both the one and the other would appear senseless to carnal reason, for how could the mere marching around the city for seven days, and then the blowing of trumpets and the united shout of the people, bring down the powerful walls of this fortress? But He who cannot lie had declared that it *should* (verse 5), and, in full accord with God’s directions and with implicit confidence in His word, Israel acted. After completing their thirteenth circuit of Jericho in absolute silence, as God had enjoined, they were to give proof of their reliance upon Him by uttering a great shout while the mighty walls still stood intact; and immediately they toppled over. Therein we are shown the wonderful power of faith when it lays hold of God’s promises—that nothing can stand before it, that the most formidable obstacles give way to it.

3. The shout *of decision*. “When he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire” (Jdg 15:14). This too is quite a different shout from the others. That strange character Samson had been a very painful thorn in the side of the Philistines, whom the Lord had used to chasten His wayward people, and now they were overjoyed as they beheld their formidable defier a prisoner in their hands. Securely bound as they supposed, for not only had they tied his hands tightly together, but also pinioned his arms close to his body, the Philistines proceeded to make a laughingstock of him, regarding him as a fit object for their sport. Elated at their capture, they contemptuously mocked him. Thinking they had nothing further to fear at his hands, they jeered at and ridiculed him. But their jeering was of very short duration, for they had reckoned without Samson’s *God*. Suddenly he was endowed with supernatural strength, possibly in answer to his believing prayer. For though there be no mention of such in the historical narrative, it is to be remembered that Samson’s name is included in the men of faith of Hebrews 11. The tables were at once turned, and Samson slew a great number of His enemies, so that their shouting soon gave place to shrieking.

4. The shout *of anticipation*. “Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass, that God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah” (2Ch 13:15). The incident with which this shouting is connected is deserving of much fuller consideration than we can now give it. With an army twice the size of Abijah’s, Jeroboam came up against him. In vain did the king of Judah remonstrate, plead the

justice of his cause, and say, "Behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you, O children of Israel, fight ye not against the LORD God of your fathers: for ye shall not prosper." But Jeroboam disregarded the earnest plea and warning, preferring to rely upon the arm of flesh. Counting upon an ambush to surround and destroy Abijah and his men, Jeroboam was assured that he would overwhelm them by superior forces and strategy. In their extremity, menaced before and behind, the men of Judah cried unto the Lord, and so great was their confidence of His succour that before striking a blow they made a united shout of anticipated victory. Nor were they confounded: so wondrously did the Lord deliver the enemy into their hands that they slew half a million of them that day.

5. The shout of *worship*. "Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy" (Psa 5:11). Holiness and happiness go together, and loud hosannas unto the Son of David well become His jubilant subjects. While worship should ever be decorous and reverent, it should also be gladsome and fervent from those who are partakers of God's great salvation and are enraptured by His excellency. We are not to suppress our joy, but to let it overflow, expressing it with our voices, that our fellows may hear it too. Since *we* be affected by the glad tidings, let us seek to affect others. Said Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892), "Well-bred whispers are disreputable here...our joy may be demonstrative, yet He will not censure it." Thrice blessed is that religion which makes it a duty to be jubilant: "Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise" (Psa 98:4).

6. The shout of *welcome*. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation" (Zec 9:9). In fulfilment of that prophecy, the royal claims of Christ were presented in the Jewish capital, and a large number with a temporary faith broke forth in acclamations of gladness. This was the "triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem," when for a brief moment He shone forth in the rays of His Messianic glory. Yet the form it took clearly showed that His kingdom is "not of this world" and comes not with observation or pomp. Instead of appearing before Caesar in Rome, He presented Himself before the daughter of Zion, not riding in a golden chariot, but seated on the back of an ass. He rode not at the head of armed battalions, but appeared in meekness. He came not as Judge to sentence the guilty, but as the Prince of peace. Joyously was He hailed as King. It was God who put it into their hearts to evince that Christ was entitled to the homage of His creatures. It was the Father causing a public testimony to be borne to the glory of His Son, that before wicked hands should be laid upon Him, the dignity of His person should be openly acknowledged.

7. The shout of *triumph*. "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout...with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1Th 4:16). His apostles were assured, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner" (Act 1:11). Among the analogies between what marked His departure and return is this one: "God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a *trumpet*" (Psa 47:5), and thus shall He come down. He went up with a shout of victory over all His enemies. Though His disciples on earth heard it not, we cannot conceive of His returning to heaven in silence. Nor will He descend in silence, but "with the shout of a king" (Num 23:21), namely, "the King of glory" (Psa 24:7). He will come with a shout of identifica-

tion, of triumph, of joy, of authority, which will awaken the dead (Joh 5:28); with a shout of welcome unto His redeemed, crying, "Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away" (Song 2:10).

## EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

### 22. *Forgiven Children (2:12)*

*"I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake."*

The title of this article raises the question, Are there any unforgiven children? To which we reply, certainly there are—the whole company of God's elect remaining so while in their natural condition. "But surely such could hardly be denominated 'children'—children of God." Wrong, they are children of God when they enter this world, though they possess not then the divine nature, and therefore are as yet unmanifested as such, and unknown either to themselves or to others until they be born again. They are God's children by eternal predestination (Eph 1:5). It was as such that Christ died for them (Joh 11:52). It is because they are such that, in due time, the Holy Spirit is sent into their hearts (Gal 4:6). But their sins are not forgiven them before they savingly believe in Christ, and that is not until the Holy Spirit is given them and they are quickened into newness of life, for it is impossible that anyone who is dead in trespasses and sins should really feel his dire need of a Saviour and come to Him for pardon. Thus our text speaks of the regenerated children of God whose sins are forgiven.

What a truly amazing thing it is that there should be such a thing as divine forgiveness of sins—transgressions of God's Law, affronts to His holiness, rebellions against His exalted majesty. What a marvel that God does not deal with all mankind as He did with the angels when they fell—"delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2Pe 2:4)! Next to the gift of Christ Himself and the grace we receive from His fullness (Joh 1:16), forgiveness of sin is the greatest blessing God bestows, and therefore does it head the list of benefits for which the Psalmist blessed the Lord with all his soul (103:2-3). Forgiveness may be defined as that judicial act of God whereby the penitent believer is released from the guilt of his transgressions against the Law, without receiving any satisfaction at his hands or inflicting any punishment upon him. It is the remitting of the penalty, which he had incurred. It is a revoking of the sentence of justice, an acquittal of his person before the bar of God. It is described in Scripture by a variety of expressions, which serve to open unto us the nature of the thing itself. Several of them are brought together in Psalm 32:1-2.

Before proceeding any further to develop the principal subject of our verse, let us outline its contents. "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." Five things call for consideration.

- The connection between that statement and what precedes as well as follows.
- The significance of “I write unto.”
- The appellation which is here given to those addressed—“little children.”
- The reason why the apostle sent this epistle unto them—“because your sins are forgiven.”
- The ground of this blessing—“for His name’s sake.”

First, *the relation between 2:12-14, and its context*. Hitherto we have had before us the fellowship of the Father with His children: the nature of that fellowship, the means<sup>1</sup> appointed for its maintenance, and the obligations and privileges which the same entails. Now we are introduced, as it were, to the different members of God’s family, notice being taken of their several ages or stages of growth, with their corresponding spiritual attainments. But before John begins to divide the family into its component parts he addresses himself to the whole thereof, comprehending them all under the endearing expression of “little children,” announcing their sins to be forgiven. That was in strict accord with his central design in this epistle: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life,” (v. 13), for a saving faith in Christ which issues in forgiveness is a sure sign that the one exercising the same is already in possession of eternal life.

“These verses (12-14) form a break or interruption in the apostle’s line of argument. There is, as it were, a pause. John calls upon those to whom he writes to consider, not only what he is writing to them, but what they themselves were to whom he is writing: what is their character and standing: what he is entitled to assume in and about them as likely to ensure a fair reception of his message. That was the common apostolic method. It is a courteous and complaisant way of insinuating advice; taking for granted the attainments to be enforced. But it is far more than that, and it is so emphatically here. It is a trumpet call summoning all the faithful to a recognition of their real and true position before God; and that with a view to their receiving aright what His servant is now writing to them” (Robert S. Candlish, 1806-1873).

In other words, verses 12-14 pave the way for what follows.

While stressing the necessity of a godly walk and a fruitful life, the foundation on which they rest must ever be insisted upon. “Holiness of life ought indeed to be urged, the fear of God to be carefully enjoined; men ought to be sharply goaded to repentance, newness of life, together with its fruits. But still we ought ever to take heed lest the doctrine of faith be smothered—that doctrine which teaches that Christ is the only Author of salvation and all its blessings. On the contrary, such moderation ought to be presented that faith may ever retain its primacy. This is the rule that is presented to us by John: having faithfully spoken of good works, lest he should seem to give them more importance than he ought to have done, he carefully calls us back to contemplate the grace of Christ” (Calvin).<sup>2</sup> In other

<sup>1</sup> **means** – the instruments through which God works to communicate to the hearts of men.

<sup>2</sup> **John Calvin** (1509-1564) – the father of Reformed and Presbyterian theology. During the course of his ministry in Geneva, lasting nearly twenty-five years, Calvin lectured to theological students and preached an average of five sermons a week in addition to writing a commentary on nearly every

words, duly to observe the order and balance of truth. Doubtless there is, too, a designed link with verse 10: real faith, saving faith, “worketh by love” (Gal 5:6), and where it exists and is exercised, we may be assured that this results from God’s having pardoned our sins.

“*I write unto you.*” Three things were intimated by that language. First, a holy privilege. It was the conferring of a great favour upon them. If the reader were to receive a letter from the official secretary of the king of England, he would feel himself highly honoured: how much more so to be addressed by one of the ambassadors of the King of kings! Second, a call to duty. As 2:1, shows, “I write unto you” is a hortatory expression. I John am telling you what to do, and what not to do: sin not (verse 1), keep God’s commandments (verses 3-5), follow the example Christ has left us (verse 6), love the brethren (verses 7-11), love not the world (verse 15). Give heed then to my injunctions for they are invested with divine authority. Third, a permanent record: writing conveys the idea of fixedness. The message delivered by the apostle was no mere transient one, allowing a subsequent revision, either of subtraction or addition. It was the imperial and imperishable Word of God for all generations, and a solemn curse is pronounced upon anyone who adds to or takes from the same (Rev 22:18-19). Thereby God’s children are graciously provided for against all the attacks of Satan and his agents, who are ever to be met with “It is written”!

“*Little children.*” The word used here is quite another from the one found in the next verse, and from “newborn babes” in 1 Peter 2:2. In the Greek there are two different words which are both translated “little children” in our English version without distinguishing between them. The one in our text is *teknion*, which occurs seven times in this epistle, and in each instance is applied to the whole company addressed: 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21. The one in verse 13 is *paidion*, which occurs again only in 2:18, and is restricted to spiritual infants. The former is a term of affection, and is given to the entire believing family; whereas the latter is a discriminating word, which signifies those who are very young, and in verse 13 is limited unto a particular class in God’s family—the spiritual babes, in contradistinction from the “young men” and the “fathers.” *Teknion*, then, is used of believers of all ages and degrees of growth. This is clear from its first occurrence, for in both halves of 2:1, the whole household of faith is obviously in view: “*My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any one sin, we have an advocate with the Father.*”

The blessing which is predicated in our text of those written unto is not one that is peculiar to any special grade of Christians—as are the attainments of the several classes referred to separately in verse 13, but is true of all alike, for the forgiveness of sins pertains to every one of them. There is a community of life, and pardon is the portion of all saints. By the new life received at regeneration, they are related to God as Father and to each other as brethren; by forgiveness a title is conveyed which makes them heirs of heaven. In verse 12 the apostle postulates that which pertains to every believing child of God; but in verse 13 he describes that which characterizes their respective grades according to their measures of growth. In styling all “little children,” John expressed both his authority and his affection: it stamped his address with weight and dignity, and at the same time revealed the warmth of his heart unto them. From the remainder of the sentence he would have them

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book of the Bible as well as numerous treatises on theological topics. His correspondence fills eleven volumes. Born in Noyon, Picardie, France.



know that it was out of love to Christ and to them that he penned this letter: not to distress, but to promote their spiritual happiness and mutual affection one to another.

“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you.”

“As this epistle is what we style a catholic epistle, so the address is suited to this, and a universal blessing which belongs unto and is actually bestowed on all the members of the true Church of Christ is expressed. This is the reason he assigns for writing to them, and why he so lovingly addressed them. He had before declared that the blood of Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth them now, in the present tense, from all sin. He then proceeded to declare if any of them should sin, they had in Christ an all-prevailing Advocate. He was with the Father. He was their righteousness and their atonement. Then he showed what the true and spiritual knowledge of this, and communion with Christ in the blessings and benefits of the same, would consequently and evidentially produce. And now he addressed them because they were the pardoned ones of God. Thus here is consolation, abounding consolation, increasing consolation for them. They were brought to the knowledge of the Father and the Son; they were admitted into fellowship with Them; they were in Christ, pure and righteous. He was their High Priest before the Majesty in the heavens. Their sins were completely taken away, and they were in their individual persons pardoned” (S.E. Pierce, 1746-1829).

“For thou, LORD, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee” (Psa 86:5). What a word is that in Nehemiah 9:17, “Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness”! It was on the basis of that blessed fact that Daniel prayed, “To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him” (Dan 9:9). In Psalm 32:1, forgiveness of sins is likened, first, to a removal of them: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven” is literally “whose transgression is lifted up”—taken off him because laid on Christ. Second, to a covering of them—by the blood of Christ. Sin is nauseous and abhorrent to the eye of the Holy One. Third, to a non-imputation of them: they are not reckoned to his account, because charged to his Surety. In Isaiah 43:25, to a blotting out of sins; in Luke 7:41-42 and Matthew 6:12, to the cancellation of debts; in Hebrews 8:12, to God’s no more remembering them—thinking no further about them, His justice having been satisfied; and in Isaiah 1:18, to a washing of them “as white as snow.”

It is therefore very clear that one grand design of a Gospel ministry is the assuring and comforting of the saints, for unbelief is ever at work within them, and Satan constantly engaged in efforts to destroy or at least disturb their peace. No small part of the work assigned to the Lord’s servants is so to set the person and work of the Saviour before His redeemed that, by occupying their hearts with the same, they will be lifted out of themselves and delivered from their fears. The forgiveness of sins of those who believe is one of the first blessings announced by the Gospel: in fact there is no true proclamation of God’s good news where that is not plainly set forth. When the Lord Jesus gave the great commission to His apostles, He declared, “that repentance and remission [forgiveness] of sins should be preached in his name among all nations” (Luk 24:47), and accordingly we find that when Peter was sent to Cornelius and his friends he asserted of Christ, “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall re-

ceive remission of sins” (Act 10:43). Paul, too, bore witness at Antioch, “Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things” (Act 13:38-39).

The object of divine pardon is a penitent believer, and the fruit thereof is a longing and determination to please the Bestower of it. “And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven...Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace” (Luk 7:48, 50). Faith is as necessary in an instrumental way as Christ’s satisfaction in a meritorious way: “that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Act 26:18). Christ purchased remission of sins, faith puts us in possession of it. It is fitting that those who are indebted to Christ for this benefit should give up themselves to Him, both in a way of dependence and of submission, putting their case into His hands as the Advocate with the Father, and devoting themselves in subjection to Him, for He is “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb 5:9). Evangelical repentance issues from the renewed heart’s sorrow and horror of sin—which cost the Saviour so dearly. Saving faith is that which clings to Christ as our only refuge and hope. Gratitude flows forth in affection to Him: “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven [in their own apprehension], the same loveth little” (Luk 7:47).

This divine pardon of sins is free, no charge being exacted of its subject: “the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph 1:7). Our redemption and recovery cost us nothing, and since it be by grace, then without our deserving. “Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money” (Isa 52:3). It is bestowed without respect to anything in us or from us: “and when they had nothing [wherewith] to pay, he frankly forgave them both” (Luk 7:42). Thus it is wholly gratuitous.<sup>3</sup> “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake” (Isa 43:25)—whatever God does in our salvation it is to glorify His mercy, and out of compassion for our misery. “For thy name’s sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great” (Psa 25:11): the penitent believer has no other plea but the honour of God’s name engaged by gracious covenant. Well may we exclaim, “Who *is* a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?” (Mic 7:18).

Divine forgiveness is full: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa 55:7). And since He does so “according to the riches of his grace,” we may be sure it is neither niggard<sup>4</sup> nor grudging. Possibly the reader has acknowledged a fault unto a fellow Christian, and he has said, “I forgive you,” but in such a tone of voice and expression of countenance that you felt you had been just as well without such a pardon. But when God forgives, there is—as Luke 15:20 reveals—just as much joy in His heart as there is in the recipient’s. God does things not by halves, but perfectly: “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities” (Psa 103:3), canceling the whole, so that not one is left on record in His book. A partial forgiveness would not shed sufficient glory on

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<sup>3</sup> **gratuitous** – free; without cost or condition.

<sup>4</sup> **niggard** – stingy or ungenerous.

the blood of the Lamb. As John Gill<sup>5</sup> said of His atoning sacrifice, “It reaches to all sins: original and actual, secret and open, past, present, and to come.”

Divine forgiveness is final. When God pardons it is not merely for a season, but forever. His sentence is irrevocable, releasing the believer from the whole guilt of his transgressions, so that the triumphant challenge goes forth, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?” (Rom 8:33-34). His sentence is never repealed; the saint is fully discharged from all punishment, for the Law can demand no penalty from him. “Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic 7:19), and the ocean, my reader, never casts up anything which has sunk into its depths. When God pardons sin it is never charged again to the culprit: “their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 10:17). Divine forgiveness is permanent and continuous because of the everlasting value and validity of Christ’s atonement. It is the standing office of Christ to act as the great High Priest of His people, and His blood has not only cleansed, but “cleanseth from all sin.”

The great assize is indeed at the last day, but God is exercising His judicial office even now. “Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth” (Psa 58:11) weighing every action, passing verdict on each person, forgiving or not forgiving. The final judgment is but a public proclamation and execution of the same. As Manton<sup>6</sup> so aptly pointed out, there is a threefold distinction between God’s forgiving us now and then. First, during this life the sentence of the Law may be revoked, but then it is definitive and peremptory. One who is now condemned by the Law may be absolved. Every son of Adam is “condemned already” (Joh 3:18), and he binds that condemnation upon himself if he dies in his unbelief and impenitence, in contempt of the gracious offer of the Gospel. That his state is now capable of alteration is clear from John 5:24, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is [judicially] passed from death unto life.” But at the last great day the sentence is inexorable and irrevocable, and as the tree fell so will it forever lie.

Second, the divine sentence is now given in private; then it shall be proclaimed publicly. At conversion the verdict is passed in the awakened conscience according to the Word of God, the Holy Spirit sealing upon the renewed and believing heart some sure promise of God. But when the dread tribunal is set up the sentence will be pronounced by the Judge’s own mouth before an assembled universe, saying either “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat 5:34) or “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat 5:41). As the believer now has the Spirit’s witness within him, then it will be ratified in open court, the Judge of all the earth publicly exonerating him. Third, then there will be

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<sup>5</sup> **John Gill** (1697-1771) – Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar. Author of *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* and his nine-volume *Expositions of the Old and New Testaments*. Born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, England.

<sup>6</sup> **Thomas Manton** (1620-1677) – nonconformist Puritan preacher. Graduated from Oxford and preached until forbidden by the Act of Uniformity of 1662. Preached in his own house, was imprisoned, then preached in London. James Ussher called him “one of the best preachers in England.” Appointed as one of three clerks at the Westminster Assembly. Born in Lawrence-Lydiat, county of Somerset, England.

an actual execution of the sentence. Now we have our everlasting portion either by promise or threat; but then both the promise and the threat will be fully made good.

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

### *74. Caleb (14:6-15), Part 2*

In our last, we left Moses and Aaron on their faces, not before the Lord in supplication, but before Israel in consternation. Then it was that Caleb, supported by Joshua, once more faithfully remonstrated with the people. First, we are informed that they “rent their clothes” in token of their deep distress and as an expression of their horror at the unbelief and wicked words that had issued from the lips of the congregation—their tongues “set on fire of hell” (Jam 3:6), for the people had slandered JEHOVAH, charging Him with malice and cruelty and basest hypocrisy, declaring that all His previous goodness and promises were but means to decoy them and encompass their destruction. Next, they “spake unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.” In the Hebrew, the word “exceeding” is repeated, and Matthew Henry (1662-1714) rendered it, “It is a very, very, very good land.” Then they added, “If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land...a land which floweth with milk and honey.” Bold and God-honouring language was that! If the Lord continues to delight in us, it is impossible that the Canaanites can prevent our possession of the land, nothing but defiance of Him will forfeit His favours—hence his exhortation. “Only rebel not ye against the LORD” (Num 14:9).

The glorious outshining of Caleb’s faith in one of the darkest hours in all the chequered history of Israel is most noteworthy, and the appeal he then made unto them deserving of our closest consideration. In rebutting their doleful contention that the difficulties and dangers ahead were much too formidable for them to overcome, he stressed the goodliness of the heritage which would be theirs, teaching us that if we were more convinced of the inestimable benefits of serving God and the gains and rewards of spirituality, we should not shrink so much from the sacrifices and denying of self which are required from us. Then he reminded them, “If the LORD *delight in us*, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us.” The Lord’s delight, be it of a people or an individual, is the secret of all blessing. “Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people” (Deu 10:15). “He delivered me, because he delighted in me” (2Sa 22:20). “Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel” (1Ki 10:9). “The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy” (Psa 147:11). “Thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee” (Isa 62:4). “When a man’s ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Pro 16:7).

Next, Caleb addressed a solemn word of warning, “Only rebel not ye against the LORD”—to revolt against Him is highly provoking, for “rebellion is as the sin of witch-

craft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1Sa 15:23). The renunciation of God’s authority is certain to result in the loss of His good will. As another of His faithful witnesses told the people at a later date, “If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God: But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be *against you*, as it was against your fathers” (1Sa 12:14-15). Thus, everything turned on that “If the LORD delight in us”. If our conduct continues to be pleasing unto Him, if we be not distrustful of His promises and slight not His precepts, then no enemy can stand before us. If the Lord be our Friend, there is nothing whatever to fear. The only danger was *in themselves*—yielding to unbelief, and a spirit of self-will. It is that alone which ruins sinners and ensures their damnation. “None are excluded the heavenly Canaan but those that exclude themselves” (Henry).

Finally, Caleb added, “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.” If we forfeit the Lord’s favour and He turn against us, then woe indeed be unto us. But if we are submissive to His sceptre and rely upon His power, then God will be for us, and who can stand against us? When we have scriptural warrant to say, “The Lord is on my side,” then we may add with confidence, “I will not fear: what can man do unto me?” (Psa 118:6). If the Lord be “the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psa 27:1). Verily, “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God” (Psa 146:5). In declaring of the inhabitants of Canaan “they are bread for us,” Caleb was doing very much more than making a play upon the words of the unbelieving spies (who had said, “It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof”), to wit, affirming that their armies should, under God, be cut in pieces by Israel and devoured by them. In support of which, he reminded the congregation, “Their defence is departed from them”—the providence of God shall no longer secure them. They are abandoned by Him to destruction. When such be the case with any nation, its defence is gone and its doom is sure.

But alas, all was of no avail. Not only were the people deaf to that God-honouring and most reasonable appeal, but they were exasperated by it, and became still more outrageous in their conduct. “But all the congregation bade stone them with stones” (verse 10). Thus did they persist in their revolt and madness. Their menacing attitude and murderous language only made the more evident the great courage of Caleb and Joshua in daring to stand forth and remonstrate with the discontented and mutinous people, before whom Moses and Aaron had fallen on their faces. Note the plural number, “Stone *them*,” which agrees with verse 30, where Joshua is coupled with Caleb. Those under the power and dominion of sin are no respecters of persons. Nay, it is ever the way of those whose hearts are fully set on doing evil to rage against those who give them good counsel. Since they be determined to have their own way at any cost, they hate those who oppose them and tell them the truth, and, unless restrained by God, will do violence unto them. Thus, at a very early date did Israel begin to ill-treat their prophets and determine to stone those whom God sent unto them (Mat 23:37).

Very striking and solemn, yet blessed, was the immediate sequel: “And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.” In

threatening Caleb and Joshua, they had touched the apple of JEHOVAH's eye, and He interposed on their behalf. The dread *Shekinah*, or fiery emblem of the Lord's presence, descended, and there was an awe-inspiring manifestation made of His majesty, similar to that which had been seen on the summit of Sinai a year previous. How often have those who faithfully and fearlessly exposed themselves for the cause of God been taken under His special protection and delivered from the fury of those who menaced them! Addressing Himself unto Moses, the Lord said, "How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they." Blessed indeed was the response of Moses, who pleaded with God on Israel's behalf, urging Him to do nothing that would cause the surrounding nations to despise His name, and begging Him to act graciously and mercifully. In answer to that appeal, the Lord pardoned the nation, but made it evident that they had missed His best, declaring that that evil generation should not enter the land which He had given unto their fathers. Terrible indeed were the effects of the evil account given of Canaan by the ten unbelieving spies—alas, how many are prejudiced against godliness by the gloomy reports of graceless professors.

The awful gravity and magnitude of Israel's sin on this occasion is evident from the frequent mention of it in the later Scriptures. The Psalmist had it in mind when he said, "They despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word....Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness" (106:24, 26). Though assured in full detail of what a goodly land it was (Deu 8:7-9), they did not deem it worth the trouble of entering and conquering, and even referred to Egypt, where they had suffered such severe bondage, as though they preferred it. It was a high offence to despise such a fair heritage as God had so graciously chosen for the descendants of Abraham, and therefore did He cause them to be consumed by divers sicknesses and diseases, and sundry kinds of death, so that the entire company of adult Israelites who came out of Egypt died in the wilderness, Caleb and Joshua alone being spared. Paul alludes thereto in 1 Corinthians 10:5, and devoted most of Hebrews 3 and part of 4 unto the same, emphasizing the fact that "They could not enter in because of unbelief"—they who believe not God's Word, think lightly of His promises, and where *they* be not rested on, we soon murmur against His providences. Jude also mentions this sad incident (verse 5).

"Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice: Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it." Here we behold what a terrible thing it is to sin against divine light, favours and privileges, and that their sin consisted in not hearkening to—heeding, complying with—the Lord's voice. It is our response to God's Word which determines how far we enjoy His blessing, and if we disregard it, He will not be slighted and mocked with impunity, but, sooner or later, causes His rebellious subjects to reap as they have sown. In barring their entrance into Canaan, God in no wise falsified His promises, for what He had sworn unto the patriarchs was that "their seed" should inherit the same, and they *did so*—not this evil generation, but the one that immediately succeeded it. Thus, whereas human beings may miss God's best, the divine purpose is not and

cannot be thwarted. In like manner, there are some now who come near to the borders of the kingdom of God, but never enter the same—stumbled by the inconsistencies of graceless preachers and professing Christians (Mat 23:13; Heb 4:1). Nevertheless, all that the Father has given the Son shall come to Him (Joh 6:37), for “the foundation of God [His eternal decree] standeth sure” (2Ti 2:19).

“So I swear in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest” (Heb 3:11). But it is most blessed to find that, “In wrath he remembered mercy,” for immediately after pronouncing sentence on the unbelieving nation, we find JEHOVAH saying, “But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereunto he went; and his seed shall possess it” (Num 14:24). Caleb had proved himself the faithful servant of the Lord, walking in His fear. He had acted in courage and zeal, in trustfulness and perseverance, with full purpose of heart, relying on the veracity of the divine promises. A very different “spirit” actuated him from that which governed the ten skeptical spies, namely, a filial, dutiful and obedient one, which issued in faith and holiness, which was ready for the most self-sacrificing and perilous tasks. And He who cannot lie has declared, “Them that honour me, I will honour” (1Sa 2:30), and He did so here, not only assuring Caleb that he would personally enter Canaan, but that his descendants also should possess a valuable portion in it. Yet mark it well, my reader, that one’s being highly in favour with God does not ensure his being immune from the contempt and contumacy of men. Nevertheless, that also is part of the “honour” which God bestows upon him—to have fellowship with the sufferings of Christ!

Then said the Lord of Israel, “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” (verse 30). Those words make it clear that Joshua took his stand by Caleb’s side and supported him in his expostulating with the people. Probably Caleb is mentioned alone throughout the preceding verses because he seems to have been the one who took the most active part in witnessing for the Lord and rebuking his unbelieving fellows. And the Lord said, “I will surely do it unto all this evil generation that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness shall they be consumed, and there they shall die. And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD. But Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were the men that went to search the land, lived still” (14:35-38). Thus does the Lord distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, and “knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations” or “trials” (2Pe 2:9). It is to be noted that in verse 30, Caleb is mentioned first, as the one who took the most prominent part on that occasion; but in verse 38, the order is reversed, to show they were equal in dignity and honour.

From Numbers 34:19, we learn that still another honour was conferred by the Lord upon Caleb. When it was divinely revealed unto Moses *who* should take part in the important task of the yet future dividing of the land by inheritance to the children of Israel, he was told that Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun should have charge thereof. But in addition the Lord named “one prince of each tribe” to fill a subordinate place therein, and from the tribe of Judah, Caleb was appointed, and he is accorded the first place in the list

(verses 16-28). In selecting one representative from every tribe, all partiality was precluded thereby and any ground for dissatisfaction of the others prevented. Whereas Eleazar the priest and Joshua were to preside in the actual casting of the lots, the twelve princes were evidently designed to serve as overseers, and thus be able to certify unto their brethren that all had been done “decently and in order.” Important principles are those for us to bear in mind today in connection with the government of the local church, and particularly in the disbursement of its funds. No room should be left for suspicion of dishonesty or complaint of unfairness. Mark the solemn warning of Acts 6:1-6. How much discontent and wrangling would be avoided if the affairs of God’s house were conducted along the lines laid down by Him for His people of old.

Numbers 14:26-29 is much too important a passage to be hurriedly slurred over, so therefore we offer a few further remarks on the same. Very striking indeed was the communication given through Moses on that occasion. In the first place, infallible assurance was here given that, despite the forfeiture of their inheritance by the first generation of Israel, and the exclusion of Moses himself, there would be no failure on the part of JEHOVAH and no revoking of His promise to give the land of Canaan unto the descendants of Abraham. In the second place, by the actual naming of the priest, Joshua and the twelve princes so long in advance, divine intimation was made that the lives of all those men would be preserved from mortality—not only from natural death, but from all the hazards of warfare in Canaan. What a proof was this that our lives are in God’s hands (Psa 31:15), and that until His ordained hour arrives, nothing can possibly terminate our existence! Third, in the appointing of a prince from each of the tribes to guard their interests, we are taught that every separate congregation should be a well-organized body, that responsible overseers should be selected, so as to prevent any one individual acting from impulse, bias or favouritism without regard to others, and so as to give satisfaction unto all. Finally, by His placing Caleb at the head of the list in verses 19-28, we see how graciously God confirmed his testimony and put to confusion those who had spoken of stoning him.

And now we turn to the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Joshua, which records another striking incident in the life of our hero—one that occurred forty years after those which we have been reviewing. It is narrated in verses 6-15, to which we ask the reader to turn, as the passage is rather too lengthy for us to quote here. While Eleazar and Joshua were about to distribute the land, Caleb, accompanied by men of Judah, came and presented his claim, telling Joshua of what the Lord had said unto Moses concerning him. First, he reminded Joshua that Moses had sent him to spy out the land, and that he made report “as it was in mine heart,” where he had hidden God’s word, treasuring up His promises; and therefore was he fully persuaded that neither the giants nor the iron chariots of Canaan could withstand Israel while they enjoyed the favour of JEHOVAH. Next, he mentioned the infidelity of his fellow spies, and added, “But I wholly followed the LORD my God.” That was not the language of proud boasting, but a plain statement of fact, made also by the Lord Himself (Num 14:24). It did not import that he had attained unto sinless perfection, for no fallen creature, though regenerated, ever does so in this life. Rather did it signify that he had acquitted himself faithfully on that memorable occasion, that he completely discharged his duty—resting on God’s veracity, boldly witnessing for Him, displaying undaunted courage and perseverance in the face of strong opposition and personal danger.



Then Caleb quoted the words which Moses had uttered when he had acted so valiantly, "Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's forever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD." That was the divine reward for his fidelity—an assurance not only that his life should be preserved, so that subsequently he should enter Canaan, but that a particular portion thereof, namely, Horeb, should be his and his descendants'. After acknowledging that it was the Lord who had kept him alive during the intervening years, "as he said," and declaring that he was now four score and five years old, he added, "As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said." Very blessed and striking is it to hear this aged pilgrim using such language. Though eighty-five years old, he feared not the hardest task of all, that of entering into possession of that part of Canaan inhabited by the giants. His, "if so be the LORD will be with me," was not the language of doubt, but the disowning of his own strength and sufficiency. Joshua readily admitted Caleb's claim and granted his request.

## THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

### *9. Its Ramifications, Part 1*

While endeavouring to present a complete picture of fallen man as he is depicted by the divine pencil in the Scriptures, it is very difficult to avoid a measure of overlapping as we turn from one aspect or feature of the same to another, or to prevent a certain amount of repetition when devoting a separate portrayal of each. Yet, seeing that this is the method which the Holy Spirit has largely taken, an apology is scarcely required from those who seek to follow His plan. In the preceding articles, we have shown, in a more or less general way, the terrible havoc which sin has wrought in the human constitution; now we shall consider the same more specifically. Having presented the broad outline, it remains for us to fill in the details. In other words, our immediate task is to ponder and describe *the several parts of human depravity*, according as it has vitiated the several sections of our inner man. Though the soul, like the body, is a unit, it also has a number of distinct members or faculties, and none of them has been exempted from the debasing effects of man's apostasy from his Maker.

This, we consider, was strikingly exemplified in the miracles of Christ. The various bodily disorders which the divine Physician healed during His sojourn on earth were not only so many prefigurations of the marvels of grace that He performs in the spiritual realm in connection with the redeemed, but they were also so many emblematical representations of the moral diseases which affect and afflict the soul of fallen man. The poor leper, covered with noisome sores, solemnly portrayed the horrible pollutions of the human heart.

The man born blind, incapable of beholding the wonders and beauties of God's external works, expressed the benighted state of the human mind, which, because of the darkness that is upon it, is unable to discover or receive the things of the Spirit, no matter how simply and plainly they be explained to him. The paralytic's enervated limbs shadowed forth the impotency of the will Godwards, its being totally devoid of any power to turn us unto Christ. The woman lying sick of the fever, producing unnatural craving, delirium, etc., depicted the disordered state of our affections. The demon-possessed man, dwelling amid the tombs, incapable of being securely bound, crying, and cutting himself, adumbrated the various activities of the conscience in the unregenerate.

Corruption has invaded every part of our nature, overspreading the whole of man's complex being. As physical disorders spare no members of the body, so man's very spirit has not escaped the ravages of depravity. Yet who is capable of comprehending the same in its awful breadth and depth, length and height? It is not simply the inferior powers of the soul which the plague of sin has seized, but the contagion has ascended into the higher regions of our persons, polluting the sublimest faculties. This is a part of God's punishment. It is a great mistake to suppose that the divine judgment on man's defection is reserved for the next life. Mankind are heavily penalized in this world, both outwardly and inwardly, as they are subject to many adverse dispensations of providence therein. Outwardly, in their bodies, names, estates, relations, and employments; finally, by physical death and dissolution. Inwardly, by blindness of mind, hardness of heart, turbulent passions, the gnawing of conscience. However little regarded, by reason of their stupidity and insensibility, yet the inward visitations of God's curse are far more dreadful than the outward ones, and are regarded as such by those who truly fear the Lord and see things in His light.

1. *Blindness of mind.* The mind is that faculty of the soul by which objects and things are first cognized and apprehended. In distinguishing the understanding from it, the latter is that which weighs, discriminates, and determines, judging between the concepts formed in the former, being the guide of the soul, the selector and rejector of those notions the mind has received. Both alike are deranged by sin, for if we are told that "their minds were blinded" (2Co 3:14), we also read of "having the understanding darkened" (Eph 4:18). As a derelict from God, the fall has completely shuttered the windows of man's soul, yet he perceives it not; yea, emphatically denies it. Heathen philosophers and the schoolmen of medievalism both allowed that the affections, in the lower part of the soul, were somewhat defiled, but insisted that the intellectual faculty was pure, saying that reason still directed and advised us to the best things. When our Lord declared, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind," some of the Pharisees who heard Him indignantly asked, "Are we blind also?" (Joh 9:39-40).

Now it is not strange that blind reason should think it sees, for while it judges everything else, it is least capable of estimating itself because of its very nearness to itself. Though a man's eye can see the deformity of his hands or feet, it cannot see the bloodshot that is in itself, unless it has a glass by which to discern the same. In like manner, even corrupt nature, by its own light, recognizes the disorder in the sensual part of man, yet it cannot discern the defilement that is in the spirit itself. The glass of God's Word is required to discover *that*, and even that mirror is not sufficient—the light of divine grace has to shine

within, in order to expose and discover the imbecility of the reasoning faculty. And hence it is that Holy Writ throws the main emphasis on the depravity of this highest part of man's being. When the apostle would show how impure are unbelievers, who nevertheless profess that they know God, he averred "*even* their mind and conscience is defiled" (Ti 1:15). They least of all suspected that those parts were tainted, especially since they were illumined with some rays of the knowledge of God. Thus, in opposition to this, their conceit, the superior faculties alone are mentioned, and they stressed with an "even."

How weighty and full the testimony of Scripture is upon this solemn feature appears from the following. "When they knew God [traditionally], they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom 1:21-22)—the reference is to the Gentiles after the flood. One of the fearful curses executed upon Israel, because they hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord their God and refused to do His commandments, was "The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: and thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness" (Deu 28:28-29). Of all mankind, it is said, "There is none that understandeth...the way of peace have they not known" (Rom 3:11, 17)—so far from it that, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Pro 14:12). "The world by wisdom knew not God" (1Co 1:21)—despite all their schools, they were ignorant of Him. "Desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1Ti 1:7). "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2Ti 3:7).

The natural darkness which blinds them from those regular operations that are directed by their outward senses is twofold—either external or internal. When night falls, unless there be the aid of artificial light, they can no longer perform their work. If they be blind, then it is one perpetual night to them. Such too is spiritual darkness—objective and subjective. A darkness that is both *on* men and *in* men. The first consists in a lack of those means whereby alone they may be enlightened in the knowledge of God and heavenly things. What the sun is to the earth unto natural things, that is the Word and the preaching of it as to things spiritual (Psa 19:1-4; cf. Rom 10:10-11). This darkness is upon all unto whom the Gospel is not declared or by whom it is despised and rejected. Now it is the mission and work of the Holy Spirit to take away this objective darkness, and, until it be done, none can see or enter the kingdom of God. This He does by sending the Gospel into a country, nation, or town. It does not obtain entrance there, nor is it restrained anywhere, by accident or by human effort; but it is dispensed according to the sovereign will of the Spirit of God. He it is who gifts, calls, and sends men forth to preach, determining the places where they shall minister, either by His secret impulses or by the operations of His providence (Act 16:6-10).

But it is the *subjective* darkness upon the minds of the unregenerate, with the influences and consequents thereof, which is here more immediately to be considered. This is not a mere privative thing, but a positive, consisting not simply of ignorance, but of a foul disease, with a habitual evil disposition. "He is proud, knowing nothing; but *sick* about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of *corrupt minds*, and destitute of the truth" (1Ti 6:4-5). Not only

are their minds such as assent not to wholesome doctrine, but they are diseased and corrupt—"sick about questions"—longing for them as a diseased stomach does for any trash. This distemper of mind is also called an itch after fables (2Ti 4:3-4). Still more solemnly, Scripture calls that contentious wisdom of which the learned of this world are so proud "earthly, sensual, devilish" (Jam 3:15). Both the verse before and the one following show that all the envy, malice, lying and dissembling, though in both the affections and the will, is rooted in the understanding. Hence, it is that God must give "repentance" or a change of mind before there is an acknowledgment of the truth and a recovery from the snare of the devil (2Ti 2:25-26).

This darkness of the understanding is the cause of that rebellion which is in the affections and will, for why do men seek so inordinately the pleasure of sin, but because their minds know not God, and are strangers to Him and can have no fellowship with Him. For all friendship and fellowship is grounded upon knowledge. To have communion with God, the knowledge of Him is necessary, and accordingly the principal thing which God does when He gives admittance into the covenant of grace is to teach men to know Him (Jer 31:33-34). Contrariwise, men are estranged from Him through ignorance (Eph 4:17-19). The darkness of the mind is not only the root of all sin, but is the cause of most of the corruptions in men's lives. Hence we find that Paul mentions "fleshly wisdom" as the antithesis of the principle of grace (2Co 1:12). For the same reason, men are said to be "sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge" (Jer 4:22). That this *is* the cause of the greatest part of wickedness which is in the world is clear from Isaiah 47:10, "Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee." Corrupt reasonings and false judgments of things are the chief movers in all our sinnings. Pride has its chief place in the mind, as Colossians 2:18 shows.

That this darkness is forceful and influential—yea, dynamical—appears from that expression in Colossians 1:13, "delivered us from the *power* of darkness"—the word signifying that which sways or bears rule. It fills the mind with enmity against God and all His ways, and turns the will in a contrary direction, so that, instead of the affections being set upon things above, the unregenerate "mind earthly things" (Phi 3:19). Such is its habitual inclination. It minds the things of the flesh (Rom 8:5), setting itself to provide sensual objects for the gratification of the body. It fills the mind with strong prejudices against the spiritual things proposed in the Gospel. Those prejudices are called "strongholds" and "imaginations" [or "reasonings"], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God" (2Co 10:4-5), which are pulled down and cast down in the day of God's power, when souls are brought into willing subjection to Him. The sins of the mind are of longest continuance, for when the body decays and its lusts wither, those of the mind are as vigorous and active in old age as in youth. As the understanding is the most excellent part of man, so its corruption is worse than that of the other faculties, "If...the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Mat 6:23).

Fearful indeed are the effects of this darkness. Its subjects are rendered incapable of discerning or receiving spiritual things, so that there is a total inability with respect unto God and the ways of pleasing Him. No matter how well-endowed intellectually the unregenerate man may be, what the extent of his education and learning, how skillful in connection with natural things, in spiritual matters he is devoid of intelligence until he is

renewed in the spirit of his mind. As a person who lacks the power of seeing is incapable of being impressed by the strongest rays of light reflected upon him, and cannot form any real ideas of the appearance of things, so the natural man, by reason of this blindness of mind, is unable to discern the nature of heavenly things. Said Christ to the Jews of His day, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are *hid* from thine eyes" (Luk 19:42)—concealed from thy perception as effectually as things which are purposely hidden from prying eyes. Even though a man had the desire to discover them, he would search in vain for all eternity unless God was pleased to *reveal* them, as He did to Peter (Mat 16:17).

The spiritual blindness which is upon the mind of the natural man not only disables him to make the first discovery of the things of God, but even when they are published and set before his eyes, as in the Word of truth they plainly are, he cannot discern them. Whatever notions he may form of them, they are dissonant to their nature, and the thoughts he has of them are the very reverse of what in fact they are—the highest wisdom they regard as folly, and objects most glorious in themselves are despised and rejected. "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you" (Act 13:41). The preceding verses show that Paul had clearly preached to them Christ and His Gospel, and then closed with a caution that they beware lest that came upon them which was spoken by the prophet. Thus, it is not the bare presentation of the truth which will convince men. Though clearly propounded, it may still be obscure to them, "It is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2Co 4:3-4). Their understandings need to be divinely opened in order to understand the Scriptures (Luk 24:45)!

The subjects of this darkness are spiritually insensible and stupid. This it is which prevents them from making a true inspection of their hearts. They see only the outward man, and feel not the deadly wound within. There is a sea of corruption, but it is unperceived. The holiness, beauty and rectitude of their nature have departed, but they are quite unconcerned. They are miserable and poor, blind and naked, yet totally unaware of it. This it is which causes the unregenerate to go on in a course of rebellion against the Lord, and at the same time conclude that all things are well with them. Thus they live securely and happily. As the goodness of God melts them not, neither do His sorest judgments move them to amend their ways. So far from it, they are like unto that wicked king Ahaz, of whom it is recorded, "And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD" (2Ch 28:22)—how madly and defiantly did the masses conduct themselves throughout the battle of Britain! So now, while the peace of the whole world is so seriously menaced, "LORD, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see" (Isa 26:11).

Space will allow us to mention only one other effect, and that is what Ephesians 4:17 terms "the vanity of their mind." Things in Scripture are said to be *vain* which are useless and fruitless. In Matthew 15:9, it signifies "to no purpose." Hence, the idols of the heathen and the rites used in their worship are called vain things (Act 14:15). In 1 Samuel 12:21, vain things are said to be those "which cannot profit nor deliver." It is also synonymous with folly, for in Proverbs 12:11, vain men are all one with "persons void of understanding." In Jeremiah 4:14, vain things are yoked with "wickedness," thus, they are sinful ones—vain men and sons of Belial are synonymous (2Ch 13:7). This vanity of the mind

induces the natural man to pursue shadows and miss the substance, to be engaged with figments instead of realities, to prefer lies to the truth. This it is which leads men to follow the fashions and revel in the pleasures of a vain world. This sinful vanity of mind is in all sorts of persons and ages, acting itself in foolish imaginations, whereby it makes provision for the flesh and its lusts. It appears in a loathness to think upon holy things, so that when under the preaching of the Word, the mind wanders like a butterfly in the garden. It “feedeth on foolishness” (Pro 15:14), and has an itching curiosity about the affairs of others.

2. *Hardness of heart.* The heart is the centre of our moral being, out of which flow the issues of life (Pro 4:23; cf. Mat 12:35). The nature of it is at once indicated by its being designated a “*stony heart*” (Eze 11:19). The figure is a very apt one. As a stone is nothing but a product of the earth, so it has the property of the earth—heaviness, a tendency to fall. Thus it is with the natural mind. Men’s affections are wholly set upon the world, and though God made man upright with his head erect, yet the soul is bowed down to the ground. The physical curse pronounced upon the serpent is also fulfilled in his seed, for the things upon which they feed turn to ashes, so that dust is their meat (Isa 65:25). Sin has so calloused man’s heart that, Godwards, it is loveless and lifeless, cold and insensible. That is one reason why the moral Law was written upon tables of stone: to represent emblematically the kind of hearts which men had, as is clearly implied by the contrast presented in 11 Corinthians 3:3—stupid, unyielding.

The heart of the unregenerate is also likened to “the rock” (Jer 23:29), and to an “adamant stone” (Zec 7:12), which is harder than a flint. The same thing is termed being “stout-hearted” (Isa 46:12), and in Isaiah 48:4, God says, “Thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass.” This hardness is often ascribed to the neck (“stiff-necked”), being a figure of man’s obstinacy taken from refractory oxen which will not endure the yoke. This hardness evidences itself by a complete absence of spiritual sensibility, so that it is unmoved by God’s goodness, has no awe of His authority and majesty, and no fear of His anger and vengeance; a presentation of the joys of heaven or the horrors of hell makes no impression upon it. As the prophet of old lamented, they “put far away the evil day” (Amo 6:3), dismissing it from their thoughts as an unwelcome subject to dwell upon. They have no sense of guilt, no consciousness of having offended their Maker, no alarming realization of His wrath abiding on them, but are secure and at ease in their sins. So far from sin being a burden to them, it is their element and delight to enjoy its pleasures for a season.

## INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

### *Part 15*

1 Corinthians 10:1-4 furnishes another illustration of what we are here treating of—to wit, *the spiritual content* of many passages in God's Word. "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them: and that rock was Christ." As a matter of fact, historically, divinely recorded, they partook of material food and drank of water which flowed from a literal rock; yet three times over the apostle declared that the same were *spiritual*. In so doing, Paul was not merely intimating that there was a close analogy between God's dealings with the Hebrews of old and with His saints today, rather was he insisting that the wilderness experiences of Israel after the flesh adumbrated the soul experiences of Israel after the spirit. It is not only that the divine institutions under Judaism possessed a symbolical and typical significance, but that Christians enter into the spiritual substance of which they were but the shadows. Christ is our altar (Heb 13:10), our Passover (1Co 5:7), our High Priest (Heb 4:14). In Him, we are spiritually circumcised (Col 2:11).

"But ye are come unto mount Sion" (Heb 12:22) is also to be understood spiritually, and not literally. That should be quite obvious, yet, because of the gross and carnal ideas of modern dispensationalists, there is need for us to labour the point. That is one of the many passages where the blessings and privileges of the new covenant are expressed in language taken from the old, the antitype being presented under the phraseology of the type. Thus, when Christ announced the free intercourse which now exists between heaven and earth, and which His redemptive work was to produce, He described it in words taken from Jacob's vision, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (Joh 1:51). Very remarkable and full was that statement, containing much more within it than has been discerned by the majority of expositors. It not only declared that there was to be restored a blessed intercourse between the holy spirits of the upper world and the saints while here in the lower one, but it also revealed the foundation on which that intercourse rests, furnishing the key to such passages as Acts 12:7 and Hebrews 1:4. It is to be carefully noted that Christ here referred to Himself as "the Son of man," a title which uniformly alludes to His self-abasement as the last Adam, or to some of the consequences of His obedience unto death.

As the result of Christ's atoning death, a new and living way has been opened into the very presence of God, blood-washed sinners having the title to draw near unto Him in full assurance of faith. But John 1:51 teaches something more than that the Redeemer is the uniting link between heaven and earth, the alone Mediator between God and men, namely, that one of the precious fruits of His atoning work is the restoration of that long-forfeited

intercourse between men and angels. As Christ broke down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles by His death upon the cross, having thereby slain the enmity which was between them (Eph 2:14-16), so He has also made an end of the estrangement which sin had caused between holy angels and men. They are brought together as the two branches of one family, gathered and united under one Head (Eph 1:10). By the blood of His cross, Christ has reconciled all things in heaven and in earth (Col 1:20), uniting them together in one happy fellowship, and for that reason did an angel say unto John, "I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 19:10). Thus John 1:51 teaches us that Christ is the Medium of a spiritual communion between the inhabitants of earth and heaven, the Maintainer of their fellowship.

Now as Christ announced the oneness which He would produce between the angels and His people by an allusion to Jacob's vision, so He referred to paradise as "Abraham's bosom" (Luk 16:22), and His apostle spoke of the new covenant (prefigured by Sarah) as "Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal 4:26) and the New Testament saints as "the circumcision" (Phi 3:3). In like manner (to return to Hebrews 12:22), when he said, "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God," he referred to the *spiritual* "Sion," or that blessed and glorious state into which believers have been called by the Gospel. That language looks back, of course, to the Old Testament, where (according to the different spellings in the Hebrew and Greek) it is called "Zion," and which represented or exemplified the highest revelation of divine *grace* in Old Testament times. It was the place of God's habitation (Psa 76:2). It was the object of God's special love, and the birthplace of His elect, "The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God...And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her" (Psa 87:2-3, 5). Salvation and all blessings proceed therefrom (Psa 128:5; 134:3).

Zion was not only the site of the temple, but the seat from which David reigned and ruled over the kingdom of Israel, issuing his laws and extending the power of his government over the whole of the holy land. As such, it adumbrated the Messiah's kingdom. It is (in fulfilment of the Father's promise) to the *celestial* Zion that the Lord Jesus has been exalted (Psa 2:6 and cf. Heb 2:9), and there He sways His sceptre over the hearts of His people. Zion is where the spiritual David is enthroned, and whence "the rod of his strength" goes out, not only in bringing His redeemed into willing subjection, but by ruling "in the midst of his enemies" (Psa 110:2; Isa 2:3). Thus, in saying to believers of the Gospel, "Ye are come unto mount *Sion*, and unto the city of the living God," the Holy Spirit assures them that they have been given a personal interest in all the goodly things said of Sion anywhere in the Scriptures—that the spiritual content of those good things belongs to the New Testament saints, particularly, that they have access to the spiritual throne of the antitypical David—the throne of grace. Since "all the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen" (2Co 1:20), then those in Christ have a right and title to all the glorious things spoken of Zion in the Old Testament. Compare Joshua 1:5 and Hebrews 13:5-6 for an illustration of this principle.

There is another class of passages, somewhat different from those noticed above, which needs to be considered under this head of the spiritual import of verses in the Word. These may be suitably introduced by a statement in Revelation 11:8, "And their dead bodies shall



lie in the street of the great city, *which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt*, where also our Lord was crucified.” As might well be expected, even by those who have only a comparatively slight acquaintance with the numerous works upon the Apocalypse, with their manifold interpretations, commentators differ widely in their explanations of this verse. We do not propose to add to their number by attempting to identify the “two witnesses” or to determine if the “great city” where they are slain is to be understood literally or symbolically, nor whether the reference be to some place or some thing in the past, the present, or the future, for such speculations possess no practical value, offering not the slightest aid in fighting the good fight of faith. It is sufficient for our present purpose simply to call the reader’s attention to the words we have italicized, and to point out how that clause establishes once more the principle of exegesis which we are here illustrating.

By saying that the “great city” of Revelation 11:8 is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, the Holy Spirit intimates that it is characterized by the same evils which Scripture teaches us to associate with those places, that the filthiness of Sodom and the harshness of Egypt, in embittering the lives of God’s people of old, marked the scene where the two witnesses testified for God and were slain for their fidelity. It is probable that the language of Revelation 11:8 contains a designed allusion to Ezekiel 16:44-59, where repeated mention is made of a mystical Sodom. “Mystical” we say, for when the Lord declared, “When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters” (verse 53), and the question be asked whether there will yet be a restoring of the historical Sodom and the other cities of the plain, that is but to carnalize what is to be understood spiritually (by literalizing what is figurative), and would be to transfer the subject there spoken of from the moral government of God toward men, for the merely natural reign of the divine providential arrangements respecting the material world.

When the Lord said unto the inhabitants of Jerusalem, “Thou art thy mother’s daughter, that loatheth her husband and her children...your mother was an Hittite, and your father an Amorite” (Eze 16:45), He was charging them with being guilty of the same abominations that marked the original dwellers in Palestine, who at a very early date apostatized from God, being among the first idolators after the great deluge. “As I live, saith the LORD God, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness” (16:48-49). God spoke thus unto the backslidden and corrupt Jewish nation because she trod the polluted way and imitated the sins of that ancient city of ill fame. To designate the covenant people “Sodom,” because the state and manners of the one were identical with the other’s, was one of the most solemn and impressive ways that could be taken to describe their inveterate depravity and vile character. Clear, then, it is that “Hittite,” “Amorite” and “Sodom” in those verses are no more to be taken literally than is “David” in Ezekiel 34:23, or “Balaam” and “Jezebel” in Revelation 2:14, 20.

One more illustration of this kind must suffice. When His disciples asked Christ, “Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?” He answered them, “Elias is come already,” and we are told, “Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist” (Mat 17:10-13). That is one of the passages which Theosophists appeal to in support of their belief in reincarnation, and if our Lord’s words are to be taken at their face value, then we should have to admit that they lend some colour at least to that theory. Like

the dispensationalists of our day, the scribes were great sticklers for the letter of Scripture, and insisted that the divine promise, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Mal 4:5) meant just what it said. Here is certainly another case in point where the interpreter is needed, carefully to compare Scripture with Scripture and bring out the spiritual purport of them. That John the Baptist was *not* the actual person of the Tishbite is quite clear from his own blank denial, for when he was asked, "Art thou Elias?" he expressly declared, "I am not" (Joh 1:21). The question therefore remains, What did our Lord signify when He said of His forerunner, "*Elias is come already*"?

That Christ was uttering a profound truth, one which could be apprehended only by spiritual and divinely enlightened souls, when He declared that John the Baptist was Elijah, is very evident from His words unto the apostles in Matthew 11:13-14, "For all the prophets and the law were prophesied until John. And *if ye will receive it* [or "him"], this is Elias, which was for to come." Those words also contained an indirect rebuke of their carnal beliefs and sentiments respecting the expected kingdom of the Messiah. His added, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (verse 15) confirms what we have just pointed out, for that call was never made except when something difficult for the natural man to understand was in view. John the Baptist was rejected by Israel's leaders, Herod had beheaded him, and Christ declared that He too should "suffer" (Mat 17:12), and that was something which ill accorded with their views. A suffering Messiah, whose herald had been murdered, was difficult to harmonize with the teaching of the scribes concerning Malachi 4:5. Yet there is nothing in that verse which should stumble us today, for our Lord has made its meaning quite clear.

In addition to the elucidation of Malachi 4:5 furnished above, it should be pointed out that the key passage which opens the mystery is Luke 1:17, where it was announced that John should go before Christ "in the spirit and power of Elias"—language which manifestly signifies that he was not a reincarnation of the Tishbite. The essential oneness of the two men in their character and work rendered the history of the earlier one a prophecy of the other. The latter appeared at a time when conditions were much the same as those which characterized the state of Israel in the days of Ahab. The resemblances between the two men are many and marked. John was essentially a preacher of repentance. He was a man of great austerity, garbed similarly to the prophet of Gilead. Real trial was made of his fidelity also by the hatred and persecution of the ungodly, but he was zealous for the Lord, both in reproving sin in high places, and in seeking to bring about a reformation of his nation. Both his mission and his disposition were Elijah-like in character.

Ere leaving this branch of our many-sided subject, a much more numerous class of passages, which also differ considerably from those already noticed, require our attention, namely, those which delineate the ups and downs of the Christian life. Many of them are set forth in plain and literal terms, others in highly figurative or typical language. Still others are concealed behind historical transactions which were divinely designed to shadow forth the trials and temptations, the backslidings and falls, the conflicts and chastenings, the hopes and disappointments, the revivings and recoverings of saints in this era. We have left these until the last, not because they are of lesser importance, but because they require a divinely taught and mature expositor to deal with them. They call for one who is well

acquainted with his own heart, both with the workings of corruption and the operations of grace therein, as well as one with a considerable knowledge of God's "ways," if he is to trace out the different experiences of His people as they are reflected in the Scriptures. It is comparatively easy to bring out the spiritual meaning of, say, Exodus 15:23-25, or of Psalm 23; but it is harder (though necessary) to do so with Psalm 38:9-10; 63:1-2; 107:17-20; Proverbs 24:30-34; Isaiah 17:10-11; and Hosea 2:14-15.

Let us now illustrate from the history of Jonah as it spiritually portrays the experience of many a backslidden saint. The Lord gave that prophet a commandment, but it was contrary to his natural inclinations. He disobeyed, seeking to flee "from the presence of the LORD"—yielding to self-will saps the spirit of prayer and relish for the Word. Jonah went down into a ship, seeking the things of the world. God began to chasten him, by sending out "a great wind into the sea" because of his disobedience. That ought to have spoken loudly to his conscience, but, alas, he was sound asleep. Jonah perceived not the first manifestation of the divine displeasure, and therefore was not troubled over the same. So it is with a backslidden saint—conscience slumbers when God afflicts—he is too stupefied to "hear the rod." But God would not allow Jonah to remain indifferent. He was rudely aroused from his slumbers by the shipmaster, lots were cast, and it fell upon Jonah himself. His "cast me forth into the sea" (1:12) was the language of that despondency which comes upon one when he is made to reap the whirlwind. Yet God did not desert His wayward and despairing child. He "prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah," supernaturally preserving him. The sequel is blessed—said the erring one, "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me" (2:2); yes, and delivered him.

Such are, in their essential features, the usual experiences of a carnal believer who is determined to have his own way. In His lovingkindness, the Lord disciplines such a one for his self-will and carnality. When he acts like "a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke" (Jer 31:18), and follows a course of disobedience, God makes his self-pleasing plans to miscarry and prevents him reaching some Tarshish on which he set his heart. The Lord will not long suffer any of His own to do as they please. By the workings of His providence, a "great wind" comes and thwarts their desires and designs. If they fail to see God's hand therein and do not penitently humble themselves beneath it, then His rod falls still more heavily upon them. Then it is that they cry unto Him in their affliction. Note how Jonah looked beyond all instruments and acknowledged, "*Thou* hast cast me into the deep" (2:3) and owned his folly (2:8). In his "I will pay that that I have vowed," (2:9) we behold him restored to a spirit of submission; while his "salvation is of the LORD" freely ascribes his recovery unto His goodness. Thus Jonah 1 and 2 contain a spiritual picture both of the trials of a forward saint and of the faithfulness and mercy of God in His dealings with him.

## DEATH PREFERABLE TO RAPTURE

I hear some brethren rejoicing that perhaps the Lord will come, and that therefore they will not die. I would sooner die, had I my choice. I see no comfort in the hope of not dying. "They that are alive and remain shall not prevent them that are asleep"; they shall not have preference over them that die. And indeed it is written, "The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." So that kind of priority is even allotted to the dead in Christ. If I die not, I shall have lost what thousands will have who die, namely, actual fellowship with Christ in the grave. Let me have it, let me have it my Lord. Let me wear the clay cold shape of death that once was Thine, and sleep within the sepulchre as Thou didst. To die and rise again, and be with Thee forever, is to complete the circle of the perfect. Those who think that to be alive when He cometh will be so great a glory, will perhaps find it no such great thing compared with death and resurrection, in the likeness of the Lord Jesus (Spurgeon). ❧