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STUDIES
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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

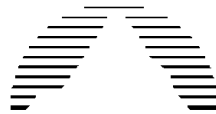
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Arthur W. Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886, and born again by God's Spirit in 1908. He studied briefly at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago before his pastoral work in Colorado, California, Kentucky, and South Carolina, USA, and in Sydney, Australia. In 1934, he returned to his native England, taking his final residence on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, in 1940, where he remained until his death in 1952.

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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ONE THING

“One thing thou lackest” (Mar 10:21). Those words addressed by our Lord to the rich young ruler who had approached Him with such apparent eagerness and earnestness, and in whom there were some admirable qualities which are rarely found in young men, especially those of affluence. He occupied an honourable position, for Luke 18:18 informs us he was a “ruler.” He had a clean moral record, for when Christ quoted to him the last six of the Commandments, he answered, “All these have I kept from my youth up” (Luk 18:21)—outwardly, his life was blameless. He was fearless, for he sought not unto Christ “by night” as Nicodemus did, but openly and publicly. He was no dilatory seeker, for he had come “running” (Mar 10:17). He was humble and reverent, for he “kneeled to him”—how few young men bow the knee to Christ, especially when the eyes of their fellows be upon them! He came to Christ inquiring the way of salvation: “What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” (Mat 19:16). What more could be required of him? There was a fatal defect, for the sequel informs us that he turned from Christ, and “went away grieved” (Mar 10:22). What was wrong with him?

“One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor...come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at *that* saying” (Mar 10:21-22). There was a struggle between his convictions and his corruptions: he desired to serve two masters—God and mammon; and when Christ told him that was impossible, he was chagrined. His fatal deficiency may be described in a variety of ways. He had no conviction that he was a ruined, lost and Hell-deserving sinner, no consciousness that he was a spiritual leper in the sight of God, no realization of his utter helplessness to better his condition. Though religious, he was still in nature’s darkness, and therefore, his affections were not raised above the vanities of this world. There was no love for God within him; and consequently, he was unwilling to deny himself, abandon his idols, and give God His rightful place in his life—serving, pleasing, and enjoying Him. He lacked a real and unreserved surrender of his heart to God. Reader, is that the case with you?

“One thing I know” (Joh 9:25). That was the confession of one upon whom our Lord had wrought a miracle of grace, namely, the man who was “blind from his birth” (Joh 9:1), to whom the Saviour gave sight. But no sooner was he made the recipient of the great mercy than he encountered opposition. First, some of his neighbours doubted his identity; but he reassured them. Then the Pharisees challenged him, but his parents avowed he was their son, and that his eyes had been opened. Then the Pharisees told him that his Benefactor was “a sinner.” To which he replied, “One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.” That is the averment, or at any rate, should be, of every truly regenerated person. Though unable to refute the sophistries of those who oppose the truth, he may appeal to his actual experience and the great change which God has wrought in him—a change apparent to those best acquainted with him. He cannot explain the process, but he is sure of the effects. He may not know the time when he passed from death unto life, but he does know that once he was blind to the glory of God, his own depravity, and the suitability of Christ—but he is no longer. His eyes have been opened to see the sinfulness of sin and the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning blood. Is that the case with you, my reader?

“One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple” (Psa 27:4). That expresses the paramount longing and dominant aim of each renewed soul, while his case remains a normal and healthy one. All his yearnings are concentrated into this; and after the attainment thereof, all his energies are directed, for that which is ardently desired will be diligently sought. “That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life” is but the Old Testament way of saying, That I may enjoy unbroken and close communion with Him. That desire evidences his love to God: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” (Psa 42:1). Previously, the majesty and almightiness of God terrified him, His sovereignty and justice repelled, His holiness and immutability were distasteful; but now the one quickened by Him exclaims, “My soul followeth hard after thee” (Psa 63:8), esteeming fellowship with Him far above all the pleasures and treasures of this perishing world. Is that the case with you, dear reader?

“But one thing is needful” (Luk 10:42). We may regard these words as the Lord’s intimation of how the desire of Psalm 27:4 may be realized. They were spoken first to the restless and feverish Martha, who was “cumbered [weighted down] about much serving” and was “careful and troubled about many things” (Luk 10:40-41). What that “one thing” was, Christ explained in the words at once following: “Mary hath

chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” “But *one* thing is needful”: how that would banish care did we but apprehend it! How many distractions would our hearts be freed from if we bowed to our Lord’s dictum! There are a great many duties which the Christian has to perform, but Christ would bring our hearts from everything else simply to this: to be absorbed with Himself, to receive from His fullness, to commune with Him, to be instructed by Him. That is the one thing needful for a God-honouring, fruitful, happy life. Have you, my reader, been let into that secret experimentally?

“This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phi 3:13-14). That expresses the practical outworking of what has been before us above. There are many things that we are obligated to hold in our remembrance: such as the Word of God, His manifold mercies, our past sins and failures—that a due recollection of them may humble us in the present and for the future. But there are other things which, in a certain sense, the believer needs to forget, namely, his past services unto the Lord, his attainments in grace, his victories over temptation—so that they be not made a matter of complacency, nor rested in as a substitute for present exertion. The Christian should ever be conscious of his imperfections and seek to rectify them; and so far from being content with his present knowledge, grace, and love, must press after a higher measure thereof. Are you, my reader, intent upon this one thing?—and diligently attending unto the same?

“But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2Pe 3:8). It would be outside our present scope and design to attempt an exposition of this verse; rather would we point out the practical lesson which it inculcates for each of our hearts. As the Christian strives after a closer communion with Christ and a fuller conformity unto His image, it appears to him that his efforts meet with little success, and that his pressing forward unto the things before is most tardy. As he cries unto God for more grace, He seems very slow in responding. But, beloved, “Be not ignorant of this one thing”: God’s measurement of time is very different from ours, nor does He ever delay a moment beyond His appointed hour. As the next verse assures us, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise” (2Pe 3:9). To our short-sighted impatience, He seems to delay, when in reality, “will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you” (Isa 30:18). Be not stumbled by His seeming slowness, but patiently wait for Him.

“Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof” (Jos 23:14). Those words, it seems to us, form a fitting climax to all that has been before us. They were the words of Israel’s leader unto them after their occupation of the promised inheritance. It was a tribute to the unfailing faithfulness of their covenant God. And will not the antitypical Joshua say unto those whom God has given Him, when they are all settled in their eternal Rest, “Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God” promised you!

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

47. 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, Part 1

It is both interesting and instructive to compare and collate the different things Paul prayed for on behalf of the several assemblies. For the Roman saints, he asked that they might be “likeminded one toward another” and be filled “with all joy and peace in believing” (Rom 15:5, 13). That the Corinthians might “come behind in no gift” and be confirmed “unto the end” (1Co 1:7-8). That the Ephesians might have “the eyes of [their] understanding...enlightened,” so that they might apprehend the wonders of God’s great salvation (Eph 1:18-23), and be so “strengthened” by the Holy Spirit as to experimentally possess their possessions (Eph 3:16-21). That the love of the Philippians might be regulated by knowledge (Phi 1:9-11). That the Colossians “might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:9-12). How rarely these blessings are made the burden of public prayers! There was no petition for justification!

For the Thessalonian saints, the apostle first besought their entire sanctification. *Their* spiritual condition was much above the average, as is evident from the whole of the opening chapter of the first epistle; and for them, he made an unusual request. They had progressed far in the school of Christ, and the apostle longed that they should attain unto the highest grade of all. Their case illustrates the principle that it is not those Christians who give the least promise at the outset who develop the least favourably, as those who make the best beginning do not always end well. In Acts 17:10-11, we read that those in Berea “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily.” Yet we are not told of a church being organized there; in fact, no further mention is made of them in the New Testament; whereas, two epistles are addressed to the church of the Thessalonians! So too of the churches of Galatia: time was when they “did run well,” but they ceased to do so (Gal 5:7).

As to exactly what the apostle prayed for in this particular one, there is considerable difference of opinion among the commentators, nor did our translators seem to have been very sure, as appears from the words in italics. It needs to be borne in mind that the Reformers and Puritans were but gradually and in part purged from the errors of Rome. Even the one who annotated this epistle in Matthew Henry’s (1662-1714) commentary, after alluding to the heavenly inheritance of the saints, wrote: “Now if this be our calling, our great concern should be *to be worthy of it* or meet and prepared for this glory; and because we have no worthiness of our own, but what is ours through the grace of God, we should pray that He *would make us worthy*, and then count us worthy, of this calling, or that He would *make us meet* to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (Col 1:12).” That is nothing better than diluted Romanism, and there is quite a little of that noxious poison still at work even in orthodox sections of Protestantism.

The clear teaching of the New Testament is quite otherwise. In the case of all regenerate souls, God already “*hath wrought [them]* for the selfsame thing” (2Co 5:5)—i.e. for their “house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2Co 5:1). The meritorious and imputed righteousness of Christ has obtained for them an indefeasible *title* to everlasting glory, and the regenerating work of the Spirit in their souls has experimentally *fitted* and qualified them for the same, as is clear from the case of the dying thief. Therefore, instead of striving to be worthy, or praying for God to make them so, it is their grand privilege and bounden duty to be daily “Giving thanks unto the Father, which *hath made us meet* to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12), to praise Him for what His grace has effected for and in us. And second, to diligently and constantly seek enabling grace that we may “*walk worthy of* the vocation wherewith [we] *are called*” (Eph 4:1)—that is, that our conduct accord with our high privilege, that our daily lives be such as become those so marvellously favoured.

“Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of *his* goodness, and the work of faith with power” (2Th 1:11). The two words in italics have been supplied by the translators, but as is so often the case, they serve to obscure rather than elucidate. On this verse, Bagster’s Interlinear (which preserves in English the order of words in the Greek and gives a literal translation) is to be preferred: “For which also we pray always for you, that you may count worthy of the calling of God, and may fulfill every good pleasure of goodness and work of faith with power.” Not only is that far truer to the original, but it is much sounder doctrine, besides being more intelligible. It should also be pointed out that “may count worthy” is a single word in the Greek, and is not a

forensic one, being quite different from the one rendered “counted” (i.e. legally accounted) in Romans 4:3, 5 and “imputed” in Romans 4:8, 11. The Greek word in our text is “axioo” and is found again in Luke 7:7, 1 Timothy 5:17, Hebrews 3:3 and 10:29, where in each place, it has the force of “deemed” or “esteemed.”

Now, whenever a verse presents any difficulty, our initial concern should be to carefully ponder its context. That is particularly incumbent upon us here, for our verse opens with the word “wherefore.” Let us then consider first *the occasion* of this prayer, for that will throw light upon its meaning. Verse 4 [of 2 Thessalonians 1] is the key to all that follows to the end of the chapter. There, the apostle declares, “So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure” or “are bearing.” They were being hotly assailed by the Enemy and were passing through “a great fight of afflictions” (Heb 10:32). So nobly had they conducted themselves that Paul had held them up as a pattern to other assemblies. And now he seeks to comfort and strengthen them. First, by pointing out the present advantage of their severe trials. Their fortitude and faith supplied “a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer” (2Th 1:5)—a statement the force of which none of the commentators seem to have grasped.

The Greek word for “manifest token” occurs again only in 2 Corinthians 8:24: “the *proof* of your love.” The word for “righteous judgment” is the same as in “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (Joh 7:24): that is, determine not your estimate of others on superficial and surface grounds, but let your decision or evaluation be a fair and impartial, an adequate and equitable one. Thus, taking verses 4 and 5 together [of 2 Thessalonians 1], the meaning of the latter should be obvious: by their becoming conduct in the furnace of affliction, the Thessalonians had clearly attested themselves to be among the effectually called—their “patience and faith” as surely evidenced their regeneration as did the bounty of the Corinthians give proof of their love. Consequently, their bringing forth that fruit in such an unfavourable season was proof of the just verdict of God in accounting them worthy or meet of His kingdom, for which they suffered. In other words, Wisdom was justified of her children: their deportment made it evident they bore the image of God—“that ye *may* be the children of your Father which is in heaven” (Mat 5:45) signifies, that ye *manifest* yourselves as such, by doing what is enjoined in verse 44.

Next, the apostle assured them that God, in His righteousness, would both deal with those who troubled them and exonerate His people at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from Heaven (2Th 1:6-10). Their Redeemer Himself would take vengeance on those who knew not God and obeyed not the Gospel of His Son; whereas He would be “glorified in his saints” and “admired in all them that believe” (2Th 1:10). Here then was solid consolation for them: in due time, their persecutors should be punished, while they should be richly rewarded and fully vindicated. Therein we are shown one of the many practical advantages of the “blessed hope” (Ti 2:13) of our Lord’s return. Instead of making that glorious event the subject of acrimonious controversy, it should be a means of comfort (1Th 4:18) and an incentive to piety (1Jo 3:2-3). The second coming of the Lord and the glorification of His entire Church at that time should be constantly viewed by the redeemed with the eyes of faith, of hope, and of love. The more it is so, the greater will be its holy influence upon their character and conduct; especially will it enable them amid tribulation to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

“Wherefore also we pray always for you” (2Th 1:11). The correctness of our analysis of the context is here borne out by the word “also.” In addition to the grounds of consolation set forth by me as pertinent to your suffering (which the opening “for which” looks back to), I would assure you that I make your case the subject of earnest prayer: the “always” meaning frequently. And *for what* would we here expect the apostle to make request? That they might be delivered from their persecutions and tribulations? No indeed—that had been a carnal or natural desire, but not a spiritual one. Paul had previously informed them that God’s people “are appointed thereunto” (1Th 3:3), knowing that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Act 14:22): the members of Christ’s mystical body are first conformed to their Head in suffering, before they are “glorified together” (Rom 8:17). Our prayers must be regulated by the revealed will of God (1Jo 5:14) and not by the promptings of mere flesh and blood, which are generally contrary thereto. Let us then now turn and consider the following.

Second, *the petitions* of this prayer, using the more accurate rendering of the Interlinear: “That you may count worthy of the calling our God.” Three things require elucidation: 1) What is here signified by “the calling”? 2) What is meant by “that you may count worthy of” the same? 3) Why did Paul make such a request for them? In Ephesians 1:18, the apostle prayed that those saints might know “the hope of *his* calling”; and in 2 Peter 1:10, all Christians are exhorted “make *your* calling and election sure”: it is one and the

same “calling,” of which God is the Author and we are the subjects. It is our call to Christianity. The same Greek word is rendered “walk worthy of the *vocation* wherewith ye are called,” or occupation (Eph 4:1). The artist’s vocation is to paint pictures, the wife’s vocation is to look after her home, the Christian’s vocation is to serve, please, and glorify Christ. He is to make holiness his trade; his business is to “*shew forth* the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1Pe 2:9), and thereby, “adorn the doctrine” (Ti 2:10) which he professes.

The Christian calling is described by a double attribute: “Who hath saved us, and called us with an *holy* calling” (2Ti 1:9); and “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the *heavenly* calling” (Heb 3:1). The former relates to the way; the other, to the end. Therefore, it is said He “hath called us *to* glory and virtue” (2Pe 1:3): meaning by “glory,” our eternal inheritance; and by “virtue,” grace and holiness—the latter being the way and means by which we arrive at the former. Both are to be viewed first as they are represented in the Gospel offer: “God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (1Th 4:7), and our daily work is to make holiness the business of our lives. So also God has “called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus” (1Pe 5:10)—so far from suffering loss by accepting the Gospel offer, we become incomparably the gainers. Second, our calling is to be considered as it is impressed upon us by the mighty operation of the Spirit. It is by *His* power that we truly respond to the Gospel and are effectually called from death unto life.

This designating the Christian’s life by a “calling” or vocation denotes there is work for him to do, duties to be performed. It is not a life of day dreaming and emotional rapture to which he is called, but rather to the carrying out of tasks which are neither easy nor pleasant to the natural man, though pertaining to and delightful for the spiritual nature—such as the mortifying of his lusts and the cultivation or practical godliness. Hence also, again, it is represented as a “race” which has to be run—demanding the forthputting of all our energies; and to a long “journey” which is both arduous and dangerous, for it lies through the Enemy’s territory (1Jo 5:19); and therefore, it is one beset with many perils. Severe trials have to be endured, temptations resisted, powerful foes overcome, or we shall be overcome by them and perish in the conflict. The Christian career, then, is a persevering in grace, a holding on his way along the highway of holiness, which alone lead to Heaven.

Much grace, then, is needed by the Christian that “having put his hand to the plough,” he does not look back and become unfit for the kingdom of God (Luk 9:62); that having enlisted under the banner of Christ, he does not yield to temptation and become a deserter because of the fierce opposition he meets with from those who hate him and would fain bring about his utter ruin. This brings us to our second question: What is meant by “that our God would count you worthy of this calling”?—a harder one to answer! All the prayers of the apostle may be summarized as a making request for supplies of grace, but more specifically, for some particular grace suited to the case and circumstances of each company for whom he petitioned. Bearing in mind that these Thessalonians were enduring a great fight of afflictions, it is evident that the principal blessing he would seek on their behalf would be the grace of perseverance, that they might hold out steadfast under all their “persecutions and tribulations” (2Th 1:4) and endure unto the end of the conflict.

Paul had recently sent Timothy to establish and comfort them: “That no man should be moved by these afflictions” (1Th 3:3). In his former prayer, he had made request that they should be “preserved blameless” (1Th 5:23); and here, he intimates *how* this was to be accomplished. These Thessalonian Christians had begun well, for which he thanked God (2Th 1:3); and now he makes supplication that they may end well—particularly in view of what they were suffering at the hands of their opponents. John Calvin (1509-1564), in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, refers to this as a prayer for “the grace of perseverance.” John Gill (1697-1771) wavered, but inclined to “perseverance in the grace by and to which they were called,” yet including also “the ultimate glory itself which the saints are called unto.” That it *was* their perseverance in faith and holiness which the apostle here had in view is definitely confirmed by each succeeding clause of this prayer, as we hope to make clear in our exposition of them.

“That our God would count you worthy of this calling.” There is no idea whatever here of anything entitled to reward: it is not the worthiness of condignity, but of congruity—that is, it is something which evidences meetness, and not that which is meritorious; as patience under sufferings makes it manifest, there has been that wrought in us which qualifies or fits us for the glory which is to be revealed. The Greek word for “would count...worthy” is rendered “desire” in Acts 28:22: “But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest”—that is, we deem it right or meet to give thee a fair hearing. So its negative form occurs in “But

Paul *thought not good* to take him with them” (Act 15:38)—we have referred to these passages to enable the reader to form his own judgment of what is admittedly a difficult word. In 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, we read the apostle had “charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God [suitably becomingly], who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory”; and here in our text, Paul prays that they would be moved to do so by highly esteeming their calling and *acting* accordingly.

The apostle was making request for God’s work of grace to be continued and completed in their souls; and more particularly, that they might be stirred to discharge their responsibilities in connection with the same. The Greek word occurs again, in an intensified form (“kataaxioo”), in “they which shall be accounted worthy [adjudged fit] to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead” (Luk 20:35), which denotes a sentence of approbation passed in their favour. And again, in “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. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be *accounted worthy* to escape all these things that shall come to pass” (Luk 21:34-36a)—which clearly implies some difficulty in realizing it and some danger of coming short. As the seed sown, so the harvest: if we “soweth to the Spirit,” then we “shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal 6:8)—but not otherwise.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

27. Circumcision, Part I

That which is to engage our attention on this occasion, as in the article following, is still concerned with what was preparatory to the real task awaiting Israel, and is found in what, strictly speaking, belongs unto the introductory portion of Joshua, rather than to the body of the book where Israel's conquest and occupation of Canaan is the distinctive subject. Yet it is in these opening chapters that the Holy Spirit has (in typical form) revealed the fundamental secrets of success in the Christian warfare, and their present enjoyment of the heritage which Christ has procured for them. It is, therefore, all the more needful for us to proceed *slowly* and seek to thoroughly assimilate these initial truths, if we are to obtain the richest benefit from them. The first thing absolutely indispensable to Israel's possession of Canaan was their crossing of the Jordan. That, as we have shown, was a figure of the Christian's passing through death and judgment in the person of his Surety, and then his entrance into "life." It is only one who is on *resurrection ground* that is qualified to overcome the foes which would prevent him possessing his possessions. Equally essential is it for the Christian to experience in a spiritual and practical way that which marked Israel's history at Gilgal.

"At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time" (Jos 5:2). With those words, chapter 5 ought to begin, for verse 1 in our Bibles obviously concludes the preceding one. Here in verses 2-9, the Holy Spirit has recorded what took place in Gilgal, namely, the circumcising of Israel. The narration of that important event is introduced by informing us *when* it occurred—a detail which must not be overlooked when seeking the spiritual application unto ourselves. "At that time"—i.e., first when the Lord their God had so signally shown Himself strong in their behalf by performing a miracle of mercy for them. Second, when they had just passed through the river which spake of death and judgment. Third, as soon as they had set foot within the borders of their promised inheritance. Fourth, four days before the Passover, as a necessary pre-requisite and qualification for them to participate in that feast. Fifth, ere they began the real task of possessing their possessions—by vanquishing those who would seek to prevent their enjoyment of the same. We shall ponder first the literal or historical meaning of this for the natural Israel, and then its application unto and significance as it respects the spiritual Israel—the Church of Christ.

The "circumcise again the children of Israel the *second time*" requires a word of explanation. It should be apparent at once that the reference is not unto a repetition of a painful operation upon those who had previously been circumcised, but rather, in contrast, from a *general* circumcising of Israel on an earlier occasion. In the light of Joshua 24:14, Ezekiel 20:7-8 and 23:3, it is clear that during their lengthy sojourn in Egypt, the children of Israel departed grievously from the revelation which God had made unto their fathers, and the statutes (Gen 26:5) He had given them; and judging from the case of Moses' own son (Exo 4:24-25), there is little doubt that the ordinance of circumcision had been generally—if not universally—neglected and omitted by them. The words, "God *remembered* his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Exo 2:24 and 6:5), imply that Israel had *forgotten* it. The express prohibition that none should partake of the Passover, save those who were circumcised (Exo 12:48-49), and the added statement, "Thus *did* all the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they," denotes that circumcision had at last been administered—probably at the beginning of the "thick darkness in all the land of Egypt" for the "three days" (Exo 10:21-22) that preceded the Passover night.

Verses 4 to 7 (of Joshua 5) tell us what it was that required such a wholesale circumcising of the male Israelites—adults as well as children—on this occasion: "Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had *not* circumcised" (Jos 5:5)—which, in view of Genesis 17:9-11, was a startling omission. There has been considerable conjecture as to why Israel had failed to administer this essential rite for so many years. Thomas Scott (1747-1821) says, "The reason for this omission is not so manifest." John Gill (1697-1771), "Because of their frequent journeying, and the inconvenience of performing it, being always uncertain when they pitched their tents how long they should remain and when they should remove...it was not safe to administer it." But the most popular explanation is that of *sinful neglect*. Yet, even though that were the case with the great majority, would not the pious among them have complied? If rank disobedience was

the cause, why is there no record of Moses rebuking them for such a grave sin? And why had not Joshua insisted upon it while they tarried in the plains of Moab, instead of waiting till the Jordan was crossed?

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) came very much nearer the true explanation, though he states it rather vaguely and with some measure of uncertainty. The real reason, we submit, was what occurred at Kadesh-barnea. It was there the murmuring and unbelief of Israel reached its awful and fatal climax, when they hearkened to the evil report of the ten spies and refused to go forward into the land of Canaan, saying, "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt"; and when Joshua and Caleb expostulated with them, "all the congregation bade stone them with stones" (Num 14:1-10). It was then that Jehovah swore in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest (Psa 95:11). It was then that He declared, "But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know *my breach of promise*" (Num 14:32-34)—their apostasy and breaking of the covenant releasing Him from His engagement to bring them into Canaan. *There* is the key to Joshua 5:5!

When Israel, after repeated provocations, at length consummated their rebellion by despising the promised land and refused to advance beyond Kadesh-barnea, God swore that only two of that generation should enter it—the remainder being condemned to perish in the wilderness. Thus, for thirty-eight years (Deut 2:14), Israel was in a state of *apostasy*; and during that time, their children bore the reproach of the same by being *denied* the "token" or "sign of the covenant" (Gen 17:11)—wrongly termed by men as "the seal of the covenant," for circumcision never "sealed" anything to anyone saving only to Abraham (Rom 4:11). While the awful sentence of Numbers 14:32-34 lasted, Israel was a rejected people; and therefore, their children were not entitled to bear the mark of covenant-relationship to God. But for the sake of their children, He did not withdraw every token of mercy from that generation, but provided sustenance and guidance throughout their journeys: the daily supply of manna, the pillar of cloud and fire, the erection of the tabernacle, etc., were so many intimations that God's favour would yet return unto Israel, though He had cast off their fathers.

The miraculous passage of the Jordan gave clear proof that Israel was once more *restored* unto the divine favour: that Jehovah had resumed His covenant relationship with them; that in emerging from the river of death, judgment was behind them; that His sentence upon their fathers had been completed. That miracle showed unmistakably that Jehovah now owned Israel as His people, and therefore, were they fit subjects again to receive the sign of the covenant upon their bodies. Circumcision was the token of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:11). That ordinance was the mark by which the natural seed of Abraham was distinguished from all other nations as a people in covenant with Jehovah, and which bound them by a special obligation to obey Him. It was the sign of the promissory part of the covenant which secured to Abraham's seed the land of promise (Gen 17:8). Thus, it was fitting that this second generation should *now* be circumcised. Moreover, the restoration of circumcision was to be accompanied by a revival of other institutions which had lapsed in the wilderness—such as the Passover feast, for which circumcision was a prerequisite. Upon Israel's entrance into Canaan, they came under a stricter discipline than hitherto (Deu 6:1; 12:1, 8).

"At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time" (Jos 5:2). At the very time when Israel had entered that land whose inhabitants their unbelieving fathers had reported to be "strong" and "the cities are walled, and very great," yea, "all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature" (Num 13:28, 32). What a testing of Joshua's faith was this: that all the males of Israel should now, for several days, be thoroughly incapacitated for fighting (Gen 34:25)! But God intended it should be made manifest that the camp of Israel was governed by Himself, and not by any worldly policy. "What general ever opened a campaign in an enemy's country in the manner that Joshua did? On such occasions, all attention paid to the exercises of religion is too generally considered as a needless waste of time. Yet if indeed the help of God be the best security for success, and if His anger is more to be feared than the sword of any enemy, it will be found true policy to begin every expedition with repentance of sin, and attendance on the solemn worship of the Lord, and with using every method of securing *His* protection, though to a carnal eye, it may appear unfavourable to success" (T. Scott).

"And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel" (Jos 5:3). Severe as was this testing of his faith to thus handicap his fighting forces, yet counting upon the Lord's protection, his confidence in Him triumphed over it. We need hardly say that such a vast undertaking was not performed

by him in person, but is attributed unto Joshua because the operation was carried out under his order and observation—just as we read that “Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples)” (Joh 4:1-2). Not only was this command of God’s a severe test of Joshua’s faith, but of the people’s too: their submission would evidence whether they owned the verity of that divine promise (Num 14:7-8) which their fathers had disbelieved. Moreover, their submitting unto circumcision was designed as a test of their *obedience*, for their conquest of Canaan was conditioned upon their punctilious compliance with all that God had commanded through Moses (Jos 1:8). Their willing compliance was a fulfilment of the promise which they had made unto Joshua in 1:17-18 and afforded a further demonstration that *they* were the best of all the generations of Israel—in answer to the prayer of Moses (Psa 90:13-17).

“And it came to pass, when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their places in the camp, till they were whole. And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal [or ‘rolling’] unto this day” (Jos 5:8-9). The commentators are strangely “at sea” concerning the significance of that expression, “the reproach of Egypt,” most of them regarding it as a reference to the stigma incurred by Israel when they were the slaves of the Egyptians. But surely *that* reproach was for ever rolled away when Jehovah delivered His people from Egypt by a high arm, brought them safely through the Red Sea, and there destroyed Pharaoh and his hosts. No, rather is it an allusion to Egypt’s taunt of Exodus 32:12. During the thirty-eight years when Israel was *rejected* by God, there appeared ground for Egypt’s sneer that they would perish in the wilderness, but all occasion for such a reproach had now been removed by the Lord’s return unto Israel. And by restoring the token of the covenant, He gave intimation that He had resumed His mighty works on their behalf—that they were His people, and He their God.

But we must turn now and consider the application of this unto ourselves, for like all the ceremonial rites and institutions of the Old Testament times, circumcision is, anti-typically, a real and substantial thing unto New Testament saints. Stating it first in a brief sentence, circumcision respected the *mortification of sin*, the putting off of the filth of the flesh. But that statement calls for explanation and amplification, for the great majority of Christians have very low and defective thoughts on this subject—inherited as they have been from the errors of Rome. Far too many of God’s children today suppose that “mortification” signifies a dying to some specific acts of sin, the overcoming of this or that particular corruption. But that is a serious mistake. Watching against, offering stern resistance unto, and obtaining the victory over some particular acts of sin, falls far short of real mortification. That is evident from the fact that none of that is beyond what persons in a state of nature may do, and not a few *have* actually done. Men and women whose hearts know nothing whatever of the power of Divine grace have, nevertheless, succeeded in gaining the mastery over an unruly temper, and of denying their craving for strong drink.

Again, let it be granted that, as the result of a course of strict self-discipline, a Christian has overcome some besetting sin; or, putting it on a higher ground, that by divine enablement in answer to prayer, he has become dead to some particular lust; nevertheless, the evil nature, the root, the filthy fountain from which such foul streams proceed, the whole body of sin, still remains within! No, Christian mortification consists of something much better, something far greater and grander than anything poor Papists are acquainted with. To be mortified unto sin is a higher and holier mystery than to be delivered from any mere acts of sin. It consists of having union and communion with Christ in *His* death unto sin (Rom 6:10-11). It is the effect and fruit of Christ’s death for us, and of Christ’s death in us by the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby we live upon and enjoy fellowship with Him in His death, and are made partakers of “the power of his resurrection” (Phi 3:10). As faith is exercised upon Him as our Head, we experience the virtue and efficacy of His death and resurrection in our hearts and lives.

That which was shadowed forth by circumcision, namely, the putting off of the filth of the flesh, all believers find the substance of *in Christ*, and the same is made good *in their souls*—in measure here, but perfectly so at death. In order to obtain a complete view of the Christian’s circumcision, we need to consider it federally and judicially, then spiritually and experimentally, and then practically and manifestatively. First, then, all believers are *legally* circumcised in Christ. That which circumcision prefigured was the removal of the pollution of sin, and that was accomplished for believers judicially in the death of their Head. Circumcision symbolized the entire mortification of sin, and that is the effect and fruit of Christ’s death for His people. “And ye are complete in him [Christ], which is the head of all principality and power: *In whom also ye* are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the

flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (Col 2:10-11). There we have the blessed fact stated that in Christ—their federal Head—His redeemed are already, truly legally circumcised. It is said to be "without hands" to distinguish it from the physical circumcision of the type, and to show that it is the result of no attainment of ours. Colossians 2:11 is a statement which is addressed to our *faith*, for it refers to something outside of our actual experience, to something which we have in Christ.

The apostle was moved by the Holy Spirit to employ quite a variety of terms to express the same fact. In Romans 6:2, he said of all believers, we "are *dead* to sin." In 1 Corinthians 6:11, "but ye are *washed*, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus." In Galatians 2:20, he declared—as the representative of all saints—"I am *crucified* with Christ." Here in Colossians 2:11, he affirms, "In whom also ye are *circumcised*," which signifies that in the sight of God's Law and justice, the total pollution and defilement of sin (as well as its guilt and criminality) has been for ever removed. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions" (Isa 44:22). "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee" (Song 4:7). "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight" (Col 1:21-22). Those Scriptures bear witness that Christ and the Church are federally and legally *one*: that God the Father accepts them and views them in the Beloved as both righteous and holy; that He now sees them as without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; that He pronounces them eternally cleansed and blessed.

The faith of many of God's people apprehends the blessed fact that the guilt and condemnation of their actual transgressions was perfectly atoned for by Christ, but the faith of very few apprehends that their evil nature itself and all their corruptions have been made *a legal end of* by the sacrifice of Christ. They recognize by faith that God views them as cleansed from the curse of the Law, that there is "no condemnation" resting upon them; but they fail to perceive that the justice of God regards them as purged from the very presence and defilement of sin in their natures, that there is no filth within them. Yet the latter is just as true of them as is the former. Their "old man is crucified with him [Christ]" (Rom 6:6). They were circumcised in Christ, which is described as a "putting off the body of the sins of the flesh" (Col 2:11). Indwelling sin is called a "body" because it consists of various parts and members, and that "body of sin" has been "put off," yea, "destroyed" or "annulled" as the word used in Romans 6:6 signifies. Not only so, but the holiness of Christ has been imputed or placed to the account of their souls, so that God Himself declares, "The king's daughter is *all* glorious *within*" (Psa 45:13), and not merely "without"—as covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness.

We say again that Colossians 2:11 is a divine declaration (as is Song of Solomon 4:7 and Psalms 45:13 quoted above) which is addressed *to faith*, and is not a description of Christian experience; though in proportion as faith really appropriates it, we experience the comfort and joy of it. Alas, that some of our readers are likely to refuse that comfort and joy through suspicion and fear that a belief of the same might lead to carelessness and low views of sin. When God bids His children to "reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin" (Rom 6:11)—which means exactly the same as "reckon ye also yourselves to be circumcised indeed in Christ, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh"—He certainly is not bidding them do anything which has a dangerous tendency. He exhorts them to so regard themselves because they have good and solid ground *for* doing so. They had a representative being and existence in their Head when He suffered and died to remove both the guilt and the defilement of their sins. Unless we were one with Christ in His death, there could be no pardon or cleansing for us. The saints then are to regard their state before God to be what Christ's is: delivered from sin's dominion, accepted in the Father's unclouded favour.

DIVORCE

Part 3

That to which we have called attention in the last three paragraphs supplies a forcible illustration and an unmistakable demonstration of the imperative need for the child of God to subject himself unto the written Word, and to be regulated by its teaching in all the practical concerns of his life. The utter inadequacy of his own understanding (even now that it has been renewed by the miracle of regeneration), and the definite insufficiency of his “new nature” to serve as his monitor, appear no more plainly than in the inability of each to solve this problem according to the mind of God. It might be supposed that “sanctified common sense”—and still more so, “the spiritual promptings”—of a born-again Arab or Japanese would intimate that it was his bounden duty to separate from a heathen wife who positively refused to give the Gospel a hearing and who was determined to remain an idol worshipper. Nevertheless, such a decision would be the very opposite of what God has prescribed in 1 Corinthians 7:12: “If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, *let him not* put her away”! Learn, then, dear reader, your imperative need of having a “thus saith the Lord” for your rule.

But we must turn now to an examination of the apostle’s language here. We will not dwell upon 1 Corinthians 7:1-9, where Paul was replying to the question, Should a young Christian remain single or marry? further than to say a few words upon verse 6. From his “I speak this by permission, and not of commandment,” some have drawn the erroneous inference that Paul was not here writing by inspiration of God, but was merely recording his own personal opinion. The reader will find it easier to follow the apostle’s line of thought if he places verses 3-5 in parentheses, for it is evident that verses 7-9 are a continuation of verse 2; and therefore, the “this” of verse 6 looks back to what had been said in verse 2—confirmed by the opening “for” of verse 7. The contrast between “permission” and “commandment” in verse 6 is not that of Paul writing as a private individual and as an inspired apostle (as verse 10 shows); but rather, that marriage itself is a thing allowable, but *not ordered* by God—as the extreme Jewish element taught. God has neither forbidden or commanded His children to marry: it is optional. Whichever you decide upon, you sin not. He who marries does well; he who marries not, does better—provided he has the gift of continency.

From verse 10 to the end of verse 17, the apostle deals with the matter of a believer who is already married to an unbeliever; and in the case of the Gentile Corinthians, of a believer who previously was a heathen, and whose mate is still an avowed idolater. “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband” (1Co 7:10). The apostle deals first (as what follows makes clear) with the case of those saints who, in the circumstances described above, contemplated the taking out of a divorce. And he tells them that, so far as *this* matter was concerned, there was no need for them to apply unto him for instruction: Christ Himself had already authoritatively declared that the marriage covenant could not be broken at the option of either of the parties, nor even by mutual consent. Except for the one sin of adultery, the wife had no right to leave her husband under any circumstances whatever, nor was the husband permitted to repudiate his wife for any cause. This the apostle, as His ambassador, emphatically enforces—as his “I command” unmistakably shows. His “yet not I, but the Lord” means that such a binding statement originates not from me; but rather, it is a maintaining of what the Lord Jesus laid down before me.

“Let not the wife depart from her husband” (1Co 7:10) signifies, let her not be unfaithful to her marriage vows, nor under any pretence, desert her husband. Difference of religion is not to cause a separation. No divorce is permissible, save for the one cause which Christ specified. “The Christian calling did not dissolve the marriage covenant, but bound it the faster by bringing it back to the original institution, limiting it to two persons, and binding them together for life” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). Even though the husband be an infidel, a persecutor, and a blasphemer, nevertheless, it is the Christian wife’s duty to still live with him and meekly bear his taunts and opposition. The trial of such a union is to be patiently endured, and the duties thereof cheerfully performed; and thereby, she would adorn her profession, and honour and magnify her Saviour. Such a trial, sore and protracted as it may be, affords opportunity for her to prove the sufficiency of divine grace. If God, in His sovereignty, be pleased to bless her kindness and good example, and hear her fervent prayers, the unbelieving husband may first be ashamed; and then “won,” as his heart is brought to seek and find Christ for himself (1Pe 3:1).

“But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife” (1Co 7:11). This is not said as countenancing such a departure, but rather is giving directions what each party is required to do where such a thing had happened. If the wife, upon being made a partaker of the saving grace of God, has hurriedly or rashly forsaken her heathen partner, yet such a procedure has not annulled the marriage; and therefore, she is not free to wed a Christian. She must either remain in the separate-but-married state, or “be reconciled to her husband”: that is, seek him out, acknowledge her fault in leaving him, ask his forgiveness, and avow her willingness to live with him in peace. That was her bounden duty. First, because of her marriage vows; and second, to prevent reproach being brought upon the Gospel, and however humbling it might be unto pride to own her mistake; and though against her spiritual inclinations, yet she must spare no effort to re-establish normal relations with the one who was still her husband.

Widening the scope from this particular case of a Christian woman united to a heathen, let us consider that of a Christian woman whose husband is *not* an idolater, but yet a godless man who mistreats his wife. It has been said, “There are cases undoubtedly which justify a woman in leaving her husband, which do not justify divorce. Just as there are cases which justify a child leaving, or being removed from the custody of a parent” (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878). We agree, yet must add, such cases are not common, and plainness of language is needed to specifically define them—otherwise, too wide a door will be opened, and many not warranted to do so will consider themselves entitled to avail themselves of it. Nothing can possibly justify a man in separating from his wife, nor a woman from her husband—be either one a believer or an unbeliever—except such things as really make it impossible for them to dwell together: neither dislike, differences of opinions, wasteful extravagance, nor even drunkenness and abuse, warrant one to forsake another whom he or she has solemnly promised to love and live with “till death do us part.”

“We can only conceive of two cases which would warrant a wife’s leaving her husband: (1) If he be abandoned to the vilest profligacy.¹ He may be unfaithful to her, but unless sunk in shameless profligacy, we do not think even that a sufficient cause for her leaving him. But if he bring prostitutes to his house, live in shameless adultery with the servant under her own roof, or by his base conduct entail on her personal suffering, we think she may, after exertion made to reclaim him, leave him—but even then, not fully, nor finally, but be willing to return and forgive him, if he be really reclaimed from his base ways and is desirous for her to come back. (2) Where violence is pushed to the edge of cruelty and life endangered...where there is a continued course of cruelty, an attempt made upon life or limb, and from abandoned drunkenness or insanity, the wife’s life is really in danger, and she cannot procure protection from the law, or from any other quarter; then, we think, she may leave her husband, for who would counsel her to stay to be murdered?”—J.C. Philpot, 1802-1869 (*Gospel Standard*, 1855, page 384). But even should he spend his remaining years in prison or in an insane asylum, she is still his wife, and is not free to marry another.

“But to the rest speak I, not the Lord” (1Co 7:12). We are not acquainted with any commentator who appears to have apprehended the force of the first four of those words. All whom we have consulted assume that the apostle is addressing himself to precisely the same class as he did in verses 10 and 11; yet one had thought the language here used was sufficiently explicit to preclude that idea. In the two preceding verses, Paul was giving counsel to those who wondered if it was their duty to obtain a divorce from their heathen partners. That is clear, first, from his “I command, yet not I, but the Lord” (1Co 7:10), for the only relevant matter upon which Christ had legislated or adjudicated was that of *divorce*. Since nothing but adultery was a just ground for a divorce, “Let not the wife depart from her husband.” Second, from the disjunctive “But” at the beginning of verse 12, and “to the rest [i.e. whose particular problem was not contemplated in verses 10 and 11] speak I” shows that a different class is about to be addressed.

The added words, “speak I, not the Lord” supply further confirmation that he is taking up another subject or dealing with a separate problem. Before considering the same, however, let us free that clause from a misconception which some have entertained of it. In their hostility to the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, enemies of God have searched diligently to find something in the Word which seemed to militate against that vital truth; and their *wish* being “father to the thought” led them to conclude they had found that they were looking for in the sentence now before us—i.e. that here the apostle acknowledged, in this place at least, he was giving out his *own* thoughts, that it was not the Lord who was speaking by him; which goes to illustrate the trite saying, “The Bible can be made to prove anything.” So it can—if we fail to

¹ **profligacy** – immorality.

understand *what* it says; if we suffer ourselves to be misled by the sound of its words, instead of going to the pains of ascertaining their sense; if we come to the Bible with our minds already made up of what it reveals, instead of humbly approaching it with the sincere and earnest prayer, "That which I see not teach thou me" (Job 34:32).

Nor is it only the more-or-less open enemies of the Truth who have wrested such statements as occur in 1 Corinthians 7:12, etc., for some who, in the main, were sound in their teaching, have erred grievously thereon. One such commentator, who exercised considerable influence in the second half of last century, interpreted the apostle to mean, "I do not claim, in this advice, to be under the influence of inspiration," which at once repudiates 2 Timothy 3:16. But when the apostle declared, "to the rest speak I, not the Lord," he was not drawing an antithesis between what is inspired and what is uninspired, but rather between what the Lord Jesus had taught while He was here on earth, and what His servant was now "moved by the Holy Ghost" to give out. "The Lord" is not the equivalent of "God," but of the Mediator (Heb 8:6)—compare 7:22; 10:21-22; 11:23; where in each instance, the reference is clearly unto *Christ*. On the subject of divorce, the Lord Jesus had given express commandment (1Co 7:10); but upon the wider problem which the apostle was now taking up, He had said nothing. Since there was not anything in Christ's teaching which met this particular case, Paul was now authorized by Him to give His people that necessary instruction which met the exigencies of their trying situation.

Under the Mosaic economy, the Lord had expressly forbidden His people to wed any of the heathen: "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son" (Deu 7:3). Because some of them had defied that statute in Babylon, upon the return of the remnant of Israel unto Palestine, Nehemiah "contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them" (Neh 13:23-25); and Ezra the priest (Ezr 7:12) gave orders to "separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives"; and accordingly, "they gave their hands that they would *put away* their wives, and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass" (Ezr 10:11, 19). Though silent thereon after His incarnation, through Ezra and Nehemiah, the Lord had revealed His will. It had therefore been the very height of presumption had Paul here given such directions without divine warrant. "It would amount to the most outrageous blasphemy if the apostle had not felt that in using this language, he was the mouth of God, and had he ventured to say of his own proper authority, 'It is not the Lord, it is I! I, I say, and not the Lord'"—Louis Gaussen, 1790-1863 (*Theopneustia*).

Here, then, is a contrast between the requirements of the two dispensations. Under the Old Testament economy, one of God's people who wedded an idolater must put her away; under the milder regime of the Gospel, he is not to do so. In His earthly ministry, Christ confined Himself to Palestine and restricted His teaching unto those who were under the old covenant. It was therefore fitting that His apostle unto the Gentiles should be His mouthpiece in resolving this difficulty for the Corinthian saints. Having solemnly ratified, as God's messenger, the primitive ordinance of marriage and asserted its unalterable validity (1Co 7:10-11), he turned to consider a case of lesser gravity—namely, whether a voluntary separation was proper, yea, advisable, where one party was a Christian and the other was not so. In the apostle's "I command, yet not I, but the Lord" (1Co 7:10) and his "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord," we have indubitable proof that he was dealing with different cases. In both instances, he was addressing married people, in both instances where one was a believer and the other an unbeliever; but in the former, where a *divorce* was contemplated; in the latter, where a *separation* only was in question.

"If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away" (1Co 7:12). The Corinthian, like most of the first Christian churches, was comprised of believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Some of those Jews had before conversion adhered more or less strictly to the Mosaic law, but others of them were lax (as many of their descendants today) and had learned "the way of the heathen" (Jer 10:2), and had taken wives from them. But now, with the fear of God in their hearts, they too would be most uneasy, apprehensive that probably they must do as their forebears did in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. No, says the apostle, such a drastic course is not now required, nor is even a separation called for. Christianity requires no believer to turn away from his wife though she be unconverted. On the contrary, if she still loves him and desires to live with him, the Lord Jesus permits her to do so. Christianity is not intended to overthrow the natural relations of life, but to strengthen, to enrich, to elevate them.

"And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him" (1Co 7:13). The apostle puts the case both ways, so that there might be no uncertainty. There was also a needs-be for him to do so, for since the husband be "the head of the woman [wife]" (1Co

11:3; Eph 5:23) and her “lord” (1Pe 3:6), she is required to be in loving subjection. The wife, recently converted, might think that her unconverted partner no longer *had* any authority over her, and that she was at full liberty to follow her own inclinations. Not so—even though her husband be destitute of faith, if he is willing for her to remain with him, she must do so. The marriage vows are to be held sacred, and not broken because any difference of religious opinion or experience has arisen. When the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, its favoured recipient will not be less, but far more solicitous for the welfare of those near and dear unto them. A Christian wife whose husband is an unbeliever has a God-given opportunity to let her light shine before him and to commend unto him the excellency of Christ. Then let her—by affection, kindness, patience, and prayer—seek to win him.

“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy” (1Co 7:14). Care needs to be taken to interpret this verse in strict accord with its context, and not read into it what is entirely foreign to the subject under discussion. To make it teach the eligibility of such children for Christian baptism, is to *force* into it what is far removed from the matter which the apostle was speaking of, as some pedo-baptists have themselves honestly admitted. In this fourteenth verse, as its opening “For” intimates, the servant of Christ was pointing out the *needlessness* of any separation, since the unbelieving one is “sanctified” by the believing partner. And second, he shows how *disastrous* would be the consequence if the idea were entertained that the conversion of one makes the marriage void and requires that they should part: if such were the case, then it would necessarily follow that the children born unto them were “unclean.” The precise meaning of the words “sanctified,” “unclean” and “holy” in this verse, we must now endeavour to show.

Bearing carefully in mind the nature of the particular case that the apostle was here dealing with—that of a Christian united to a heathen—it is clear that in this fourteenth verse, he was anticipating an objection. In the preceding verse, he had bade the believing wife to remain with her unbelieving husband. By so doing, her conscience was likely to demur and say, Shall I not be spiritually polluted by maintaining such a connection? Shall I not incur moral defilement in the sight of God by continuing to live with one who is an open idolater? If an Israelite during the Mosaic economy who had married a heathen became legally defiled, and his offspring were legally “unclean”—as is obvious from Ezra 10:3—then will not *my* children be in the same deplorable case? No—the cases are by no means parallel. Those Israelites had contracted unlawful marriages. But your case is otherwise: the matter upon which you have sought my counsel is one where the conversion of one has occurred *after* a legal marriage. That is easily resolved: the sanctity of the marriage relationship still obtains.

“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by [or ‘to,’ as the same Greek preposition is rendered in the next verse] the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by [‘to’] the husband” (1Co 7:14). First, let us point out what these words *do not* signify. They cannot mean that God regards the unbeliever as a Christian, merely because he is united to a wife who has become such; nor that he is internally sanctified, for that is effected only by the operations of the Holy Spirit. It does not mean that her having become a believer has brought the husband into a holier relationship, or (as one expresses it) has “diffused a kind of holiness over the unbelieving partner.” There is no reference either to moral character or ecclesiastical status. He or she is “sanctified” *only* in connection with that which is here under discussion: they are “sanctified” *maritally*. The unbelieving member is “sanctified” to the purpose of the marriage relation—otherwise conjugal contact could not be maintained. Since marriage is a divine institution, cohabitating therein is a holy thing, sanctioned by God Himself. In His sight, the twain are “one flesh”; and therefore, by continuing in the marriage state, it is “sanctified” to *both* of them.

The word “sanctified” is by no means used uniformly in the Scriptures, but instead, in a variety of senses. It rarely expresses any subjective or internal change. Occasionally, it imports the bare separation of one thing or person from others; but much more frequently, the setting of it (or him) apart unto God, for His service. “The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife” neither means that he is made inwardly holy nor “federally holy,” but that he is sanctified unto her *as an instrument* for a holy purpose. Marriage is as sacred as the Sabbath: by continuing in the marriage relationship, it was sanctified to each of them. Though an unbeliever, nevertheless, the husband is sanctified to his wife for a sacred *end*—for the lawful enjoyment of marital privileges. The question at issue was, Is it proper for such a couple to continue living together? The answer is, Yes, because they were—and still are—indissolubly united by the holy ordinance of God.

In *proof* thereof, the apostle points out by logical inference what the other alternative would necessarily entail: “else [otherwise] were your children unclean.” Not spiritually so—for all are “shapen in iniquity” and conceived in sin (Psa 51:5)—nor ceremonially so; but *legally*. If your connection has become unlawful and an abomination before God, then your children are bastards. If you take the ground that a separation is now necessary, then you are saying to the world that your marriage is no longer valid, that it has become improper for you to remain with your husband, and thereby, you expose your children to the stigma of disgrace. “But now [rather] are they holy” shows the error of such a supposition: therefore, a continued cohabiting with your husband must be sanctioned by God. “But now are they holy” means in the *same* sense that the parents are “sanctified”—i.e. in a legal and civil way: your children are *legitimate* offspring. They are “a godly seed” (Mal 2:15)—that is, they are reckoned by God as being born in lawful wedlock.

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

11. *The Holy Bible, Part 3*

At the close of our last, it was pointed out that our knowledge of and belief in all those events of the past which we did not personally behold are based upon the testimony of witnesses; and that we who live in this twentieth century have far better and surer evidence—judged from an historical standpoint—to be assured that Jesus Christ was an historical reality, than we have for believing that Julius Caesar existed. The only objection made against that fact, which has even the appearance of substance, is that whereas the history of Julius Caesar followed the ordinary course of events, that of Jesus Christ was radically different—so much so that the latter makes a far greater demand upon our credence than does the former. Those who preceded us have shown that this objection, so far from presenting any real difficulty, only serves to render our belief easier, for it calls attention to just what should be expected in such a case, thereby, rendering it more credible. Had the career of Jesus Christ flowed in normal channels, were there no extraordinary features to mark it, then we should indeed have good reason to suspect the records of it.

If Jesus Christ was the Son of God incarnate, then we should naturally expect Him to be born in a way none other ever was. If He came here on a unique mission, of supreme importance to the whole human race—a divine mission, having for its purpose a climacteric display of God's perfections, and the saving of His people with an everlasting salvation—then His life would obviously be without any parallel, yea, characterized by the supernatural. The very nature of His mission required that miracles should attest His teaching. Yet those very miracles being matter of fact, evident to the senses of those who witnessed them, of such a nature they could not be misunderstood, were, equally with common occurrences, the subject of *credible testimony*. They were not of a momentary nature, but permanent in their effects. They were not performed in secret, but in broad daylight in the midst of multitudes. They were not few only, but numerous. They were not performed only in the presence of friends, but before enemies, and under a government and priesthood which bitterly hated their Performer and the doctrine they supported.

The miracles wrought by the Lord Jesus were—both in their beneficent character and in their wondrous nature—worthy of Him who did them and of the mission which engaged Him. They were not performed as spectacular displays of power, but directed to such gracious and practical ends as feeding the hungry and healing the sick. Moreover, it is to be carefully borne in mind that those wonders were specifically *predicted* centuries before He was born at Bethlehem. Wrought as they were in the open, before friends and foes alike, had there been any deception practised, it must have been detected. But the fiercest of His detractors were compelled to acknowledge their reality (Joh 11:47; 12:18-19), though ascribing them to a diabolical influence. It is an historic fact that Christ's miracles were not denied in the age in which they were performed, nor for many centuries afterwards. They are related to us by eye-witnesses and are inseparably connected with the rest of the history of which they form a part. They are in perfect accord with what the rest of the Bible reveals of the power and goodness of God.

When Moses beheld the bush burning and not consumed, and heard the voice of the Lord speaking to him thereout, not only were his senses convinced, but the awe-inspiring effect upon his heart was self-attesting evidence that the living God was there revealed to him. But those to whom he related that startling experience—especially when he declared he had then received a divine commission to act as their leader—would require some convincing *proof* that God had indeed spoken to him. When the Lord bade him return into Egypt and inform the elders of Israel that the God of their fathers had appeared unto him in Horeb, Moses was fearful that his report would be received with scepticism, saying, "Behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice." Whereupon the Lord, in His condescending grace, told him to cast his rod on the ground, and it became a serpent; and take it by the tail, and it became a rod in his hand; so that repeating these miracles, "they may believe that the LORD God...hath appeared unto thee" (Exo 4:1-5). Thereby the mission which God had entrusted unto Moses would be *confirmed* beyond all dispute.

Upon this particular point, we know of none who has written more lucidly and convincingly than J.C. Philpot (1802-1869), from whom we shall now quote and paraphrase: "In such a matter as divine revelation, which, as being supernatural, is to fallen men naturally incredible, there is a necessity that the ordinary evidence of human testimony should be as it were backed and supplemented by extraordinary evidence, that is, the evidence of miracle and prophecy...Let us see the combined effect of testimony and miracle when Moses goes to execute his mission. 'And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders

of the children of Israel: And Aaron spake all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped' (Exo 4:29-31).

"First, there is *testimony*: 'And Aaron spake all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses.' Next there is *miracle*: 'And did the signs in the sight of the people.' Thirdly, there is *belief*: 'And the people believed.' Fourthly, there is *worship*: 'Then they bowed their heads and worshipped.' Thus, we see that the weakness of testimony ["weak" under *such* circumstances as those—a single weakness unto an unexpected and unprecedented occurrence: A. W. Pink] is made up for and supplemented by the strength of miracle. Without testimony, miracle would be purposeless; without miracle, testimony would be inefficacious. Testimony is to miracle what Aaron was to Moses—'instead of a mouth'; and miracle is to testimony as Moses was to Aaron—'instead of God' (Exo 4:16). But why should miracle possess this peculiar strength? For this simple reason: that it shows the special interposition of the Almighty. Thus the magicians, when baffled and confounded, confessed to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God' (Exo 8:19)."

Another instance of the place and value of miracles in connection with testimony is found in 1 Kings 18. Half a century before, ten of Israel's tribes had revolted from the throne of David. Jeroboam, their king, had set up the worship of the golden calves in Dan and Bethel, which marked the extremities of his kingdom. Two generations had grown up in idolatry and "for a long season Israel [in contradistinction from Judah] hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law" (2Ch 15:3). But in the days of the wicked Ahab, God raised up the prophet Elijah, and His messenger announced that "there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1Ki 17:1); and for three years, there was an unbroken drought (Jam 5:17), which resulted in famine and great distress. Yet when the Lord's hand was lifted up in such manifest judgment, "they [would] not see" (Isa 26:11), but Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord (1Ki 18:13), while Ahab vowed vengeance upon Elijah himself. Nor did the common people evince any sign of repentance.

Elijah gave orders that all Israel should be gathered together unto mount Carmel, with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of the grove. He then came unto the people and said, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (1Ki 18:21)—apparently because they were nonplussed, perceiving not how the controversy might be determined. Whereupon the servant of God proposed, "Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken" (1Ki 18:23-24). The controversy should be decided by *a miracle!* Nothing could be fairer than what Elijah proposed; no test more convincing than the one here put to the proof. The people unanimously assented, and forthwith the trial was made.

For hours, the prophets of Baal called upon their god to answer by fire, but there was no response; they leaped up and down at the altar, cutting themselves with knives till the blood gushed out upon them, but there was not "any that regarded" (1Ki 18:29)—the desired fire fell not. After their vain pretensions had been fully exposed, Elijah—to make more evident the miracle that followed—called for four barrels of water and poured it on the bullock which he had cut up and upon the wood, until "the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water." Then Elijah prayed unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob saying, "Let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again" (1Ki 18:36-37). Nor did the prophet supplicate in vain. "Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God" (1Ki 18:38-39).

Now what we would particularly note in that memorable scene on Carmel is the light which it casts upon the evidential value of miracles. That was made unmistakably plain in Elijah's prayer. The supernatural fire which came down from heaven in the sight of that vast assembly, consuming not only the bullock, but the very stones on which it was laid—and the water in the trench round about the altar—was designed

to make manifest, first, that Jehovah was God in Israel. Second, that Elijah was His authorized servant. Third, that his mission and work was according to the Word of the Lord. Fourth, that God still had designs of mercy in turning the hearts of Israel back again unto Himself. Here, then, is another case in point where the evidence of testimony was ratified by the evidence of miracle. The mission of Elijah was authorized by the miracles performed in answer to his prayers: the special interposition of God attested the divine origin of his message, for obviously, the Lord would not work such wonders in answer to the petitions of an impostor. God was pleased to perform those prodigies to testify His approbation of those who served as His mouthpieces, thereby leaving "without excuse" (Rom 1:20) all who turned a deaf ear unto them.

Herein we may at once perceive how futile and senseless is the method followed by the "Modernist" and "Higher Critics." They are obliged to acknowledge the canonicity of the books of the Bible, for the whole of the Old Testament was translated into the Greek more than two hundred years before Christ, while there is independent evidence for the existence of the books of the New Testament from a very early date in the Christian era; yet they refuse to believe the miracles recorded *in them*. But that is utterly irrational. One has but to read attentively either the Pentateuch, the four Gospels, or the Acts, to discover that their historical portions and their miraculous portions are so intimately related that we cannot logically accredit the former without accrediting the latter. They necessarily stand or fall together: if the history is true, so also are the miracles; if the miracles be spurious, so is the history. We could not delete the miraculous plagues upon Egypt and the supernatural destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea without rendering completely meaningless the historical portions of the book of Exodus. The same holds good of the book of Acts: abstract the miracles recorded therein, and much of the narrative becomes unintelligible.

The same feature obtains in the connection with the wonders wrought by the Saviour. "Take, for instance, the raising of Lazarus from the dead. How can we separate the narrative from the miracle, or the miracle from the narrative? To see this more clearly, let us look at the narrative as distinct from the miracle. How simply, and so to speak naturally, is it related, and with what a minuteness and particularity of circumstances, which could not from their very nature have been invented. The name of the sick and dying man; the place where he lived, not far from Jerusalem, and therefore, open to the closest investigation and examination; the names of his two sisters; the absence of Jesus at the time; the deep grief of Martha and Mary, and yet the way in which it was shown, so thoroughly in harmony with their characters elsewhere given (Luk 10:38-42); the arrival of Jesus; His conversation with them; His weeping at the tomb, and the remarks of the bystanders—what an air of truthfulness pervades the whole! There is nothing exaggerated, nothing out of place, nothing but what is in perfect harmony with the character of Jesus as reflected in the mirror of the other Gospels.

"But this narrative portion of the sickness and death of Lazarus cannot be separated from the miraculous portion—the raising of him from the dead. The first precedes, explains, introduces, and harmonizes with the second. Without the narrative, the miracle would be unintelligible. It would float on the Gospel as a fragment of a shipwrecked vessel on the waves of the sea, furnishing no indication of its name or destination. So without the miracle, the narrative would be useless and out of place, and of no more spiritual value than the sickness and death of a good man who died yesterday. But narrative and miracle combined, interlaced and mutually strengthening each other, form a massy web which no infidel fingers can pull to pieces. What we have said with respect to the miracle wrought at the grave of Lazarus is equally applicable to the other miraculous works of our blessed Lord. Narrative introduces the miracle, and miracle sustains the narrative—their combined effect being to prove that Jesus was the Son of God, the promised Messiah of whom all the prophets testified" (J. C. Philpot).

To the miracles which He wrought the Lord Jesus again and again appealed as evidence of His divine mission. Thus, His forerunner—while languishing in prison and dismayed by his non-deliverance therefrom—sent two of his disciples unto Him with the inquiry, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Mat 11:3). To which our Lord made reply, "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Mat 11:4-5). The Lord there authenticated the Gospel which He preached by the supernatural works He performed: those displays of divine goodness and power being the plain and irrefragable evidence that He was the Messiah "who should come," according to the unanimous declarations of the Old Testament prophets. On another occasion, after mentioning the testimony which John had borne unto Him, the Redeemer said, "But I have greater witness

than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me" (Joh 5:33, 36).

When the unbelieving Jews came and said unto Him, "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: *the works* that I do in my Father's name, *they* bear witness of me" (Joh 10:24-25). If it be asked, How could any eye-witnesses of those mighty works refuse to believe if they were indeed proofs of His divine mission? Because, since they rejected His *teaching*, God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts (Joh 12:37-40). But others *were* convinced. "Many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did" (Joh 2:23); and on the feeding of the great multitude with five loaves and two small fishes, we are told, "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" (Joh 6:14). Said Nicodemus, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (Joh 3:2): such displays of divine power demonstrated that His mission and message was divine.

Another striking illustration and exemplification of the value of miracles authenticating one employed upon a divine mission is found in Acts 2. Less than two months after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and His subsequent departure from this world, we find the apostle Peter declaring openly, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God *among you* by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him *in the midst of you*, as ye yourselves also know" (Act 2:22). This was not said to a company of Christians in private, but to a vast "multitude" in Jerusalem (Act 2:5-6). It formed part of an appeal made to the whole mass of the Jewish populace; and it was not contradicted by them, as it most certainly had been if Peter was making an empty boast. The apostle was reminding them that Christ had dispossessed demons and raised the dead not in a corner, but in the most public manner. Those miracles were incontestable, and the significance of them could not be gainsaid: they were so many testimonies from God of His approbation of the One who wrought them. They declared and demonstrated that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah and Saviour. They certified His mission and doctrine. Much failure attaches to *us* at every point. Our paramount desire to enjoy intimate and unbroken fellowship with the Lord, though sincere, is neither as intense, or as constant as it should be. Our efforts after the realization of that desire, and our use of those means which promote communion with Him, are not as diligent and wholehearted as is incumbent upon us. Our pressing forward unto the mark set before us is often most feeble and faulty. But there is no failure with our God: His purpose will be accomplished, He "*will* perfect that which concerneth" us (Psa 138:8).

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