

Vol. XXVII

November, 1948

No. 11

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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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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HONOURING GOD

“Them that honour me I will honour” (1Sa 2:30). Those words were addressed unto Eli after he had failed lamentably in his duty both as a father and as the high priest of Israel. His sons were wild and wayward, and he “restrained them not” (1Sa 3:13)—no, not even when they “made themselves vile,” and by their evil example, “[made] the LORD'S people to transgress” (1Sa 2:22-24). Interpretatively, Eli had “[honoured his] sons above [Jehovah]” (1Sa 2:29); and therefore, a terrible judgment from heaven fell upon himself and his house. Therein we behold a most striking contrast. When Israel committed idolatry at Shittim and one of them was caught in the act, the grandson of Aaron took a javelin and slew the man of Israel and his heathen paramour. In consequence, the Lord said, “Phinehas...hath turned my wrath away.” But more, “Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God” (Num 25:10-13). Phinehas the priest had honoured God, and God highly honoured him and his family. Eli had dishonoured Him, and he and his sons brought down condign judgment onto themselves (1Sa 2:31-36).

What has been pointed out above illustrates a fundamental principle in the governmental ways of God—namely, that He regulates His providences according to our conduct. Those who give Him His proper place in their lives are richly rewarded here, as well as hereafter. God’s dealings with us in this life are largely determined by the manner and measure in which we esteem and magnify Him. What is signified by “honouring” the Lord is clearly exemplified by the case of Phinehas: he put the glory of God’s name above all personal and sentimental considerations, being zealous in promoting and protecting His interests here on earth. Contrastively, what is meant by *not* “honouring” the Lord appears in the sad failure of Eli and his sons, who thought more of personal and family concerns than of hallowing God. In what follows, we seek to show some of the most important things that are included in this expression, “them that honour *me*.”

God Himself. This requires that we have right views of Him. Unless our thoughts about Him be shaped by what Scripture reveals concerning God’s being, character, and perfections, we shall entertain the most erroneous and degrading ideas of Him. Such, alas, is the case with the great majority today even in Christendom: to them the Deity of Holy Writ is “the unknown God.” The popular conception now prevailing is that God is fickle, sentimental, and weak, so that He has much cause to complain “thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself” (Psa 50:21). His absolute sovereignty, His ineffable justice, His awe-inspiring majesty, His ineffable holiness, are unperceived by multitudes of professing Christians. God is to be honoured by ascribing to Him the glory of His matchless excellency (Exo 15:11; Psa 104:1). He is to be honoured by sanctifying Him in our hearts (Isa 8:13). By trusting, adoring, and obeying Him. He is to be honoured in our public worship: “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints” (Psa 89:7). “Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious” (Psa 66:2).

His Son. Nothing is so dear unto God as the honouring of Christ. No sooner was He laid in the manger than a multitude of the heavenly host was sent over Bethlehem’s plains to proclaim, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luk 2:14). When in Servant form He was baptized in the Jordan, the heavens were opened, and the voice of the Father was heard saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat 3:17). When suffering unspeakable humiliation upon the cross, He moved the centurion to testify, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Mat 27:54). After His mission on earth was completed, God highly exalted Him by seating Him at His own right hand. It is His express will “that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father” (Joh 5:23): all manner of worship which is due to the Father is due to the Son (Rev 5). We honour Christ by resting on His finished work, by taking His yoke upon us, by obeying His precepts, by following the example He has left us, by showing forth His praises.

His Word. God has “magnified [his] word above all [his] name” (Psa 138:2), that is above every other medium through which His perfections are revealed. His wisdom and power are displayed in creation and providence, but His will and the way of salvation are made known in His Word. Our reverence for the Word indicates the measure in which we truly honour God. Our reverence for the Word is manifested by receiving it without question or qualification as the inspired and infallible communication from God. By yielding unreservedly thereto, subordinating reason and all natural inclinations to its divine authority. By taking it as our sole Rule and Standard in all matters of faith and practice, so that the determining question is not how do others believe and act, but what saith the Scriptures? (Act 17:11). By meditating upon it day

and night, making it the food of our souls. By our characters being formed and conduct regulated by its teachings: obeying its statutes, heeding its warnings, drawing strength and comfort from its promises.

His Sabbath. Our proper observance thereof is made a basic test of our honouring of the Lord (Isa 58:13). Its institution and divine observance is placed upon the very frontispiece of Holy Writ (Gen 2:2-3). It proclaims the Creator of heaven and earth and is a perpetual witness against the lie of evolution (Exo 20:11). It now celebrates the rising again of our Lord from the dead (Psa 118:22-24). It is an emblem of the eternal rest provided for the people of God (Heb 4:9-10). The most striking example of its holy observance by believers is found in Luke 23:56. Devoted women purposed to show respect to their Lord by anointing His dead body, which had been hurriedly placed in the grave. Accordingly, they “prepared spices and ointments,” but instead of performing love’s office that night or next morning, they “rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.” Not until the Sabbath was over did they go to the sepulchre with their spices. And they were the first to whom the risen Saviour appeared (Mat 28:9). That is recorded, my reader, for our learning.

His Gospel. It is in the proclamation of the same, as a revelation of divine grace through Christ unto sinners, that the churches most honour God. The Law must indeed be preached, yet in subserviency to the Gospel. The sinner requires to hear what the Law charges him with, that he may learn his need of fleeing to Christ for discharge from its curse and condemnation. While “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20), nevertheless, it is not by the preaching of the Law that sinners are delivered from its penalty. No, it is the Gospel of Christ which is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom 1:16). Now the triune God is honoured by the churches when the Gospel is preached in its unadulterated purity and its unfettered freeness; as it is slighted and insulted by the pulpit when displaced by any other substitute.

His Spirit. We must confine ourselves now to a single aspect. He is honoured by the evangelist and by the church when He is looked unto and counted upon for His blessing on the preaching of the Gospel. It needs to be clearly recognized that neither the faithfulness nor the earnestness—still less the logic or the rhetoric—of the preacher will or can quicken a single soul. “Not by [human] might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zec 4:6). Alas that the churches, in their desire to “appeal to the young people,” now have more faith in worldly methods and musical attractions; and in consequence, the Spirit is quenched. To our knees, in supplication to Him, is the great need and call of the hour.

His Cause. “Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase” (Pro 3:9). Remember that He it is who “giveth thee power to get wealth” (Deu 8:18). And think you that He does so in order that we may gratify selfish lusts and indulge extravagant tastes? No, God’s bounty unto us is to be used in works of piety and charity, and not wasted upon luxuries and vanities. Christ still sits over against the treasury, beholding how we cast into it (Mar 12:41; Heb 13:8). Our “substance” must not be limited unto money, but understood as including all the talents which God has given us: given, for the express purpose of honouring Him, and not for magnifying ourselves. All that we are and have is to be dedicated to His glory.

“Them that honour me I will honour” (1Sa 2:30). All history attests it. Those nations which have honoured God, circulated His Word, and respected His Sabbath, have been most blest by Him. Those churches which have preached His Gospel and depended on His Spirit have been the fruitful and flourishing ones. Those individuals who have honoured His Son and been regulated by the Scriptures have enjoyed most peace and joy in their souls.



THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

59. *Hebrews 13:20-21*

This prayer contains a remarkable epitome of the entire epistle—an epistle to which every minister of the Gospel should devote special attention. Nothing else is so much needed today as expository sermons on the epistle to the Romans and the Hebrews: the former supplying that which is best suited to repel the Legalism and Arminianism which are now so rife; and the latter to refute the cardinal errors of Rome and expose the sacerdotal pretensions of her priests. It provides the divine antidote to the poisonous spirit of ritualism, which is now making such fatal inroads into so many sections of a decadent Protestantism. That which occupies the central portion in this vitally important and most blessed treatise is the Priesthood of Christ, which embodies the substance of what was foreshadowed both in Melchizedek and Aaron. Therein it is shown that His one perfect sacrifice has forever displaced the Levitical institutions and made an end of the whole Judaic system. That all-sufficient oblation of the Lord Jesus made complete atonement for the sins of His people, fully satisfying every legal claim which God had upon them, thereby rendering needless any efforts of theirs to placate Him. “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14), or set apart unto God in all the excellence of His finished work.

God’s acceptance of Christ’s atoning sacrifice was demonstrated by His raising Christ from the dead and setting Him at the right hand of the Majesty on high. That which characterized Judaism was sin, death, and distance from God—the perpetual shedding of blood and the people shut out from the divine presence. But that which marks Christianity is a risen and enthroned Saviour, who has put away the sins of His people from before the face of God, and has secured for them the right of access unto Him. “Having therefore, brethren, boldness [liberty] to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:19-22); that is, with full confidence in the infinite merits of Christ’s blood, depending entirely thereon. In his prayer, the apostle makes request that the whole of what he had set before them in the doctrinal part of the epistle might be effectually applied unto their hearts. In a brief but comprehensive sentence, Paul asks that there might be wrought in the redeemed Hebrews all unto which he had exhorted them in the previous chapters. We shall consider the object, plea, request, and doxology of this benedictory invocation.

“Now the God of peace” is the One to whom this prayer is directed. As we have intimated in earlier articles, the various titles by which the apostles addressed the Deity were not used at random, but were chosen with spiritual discrimination. They were neither so poverty-stricken in language as to always supplicate God under the same name, nor so careless as to speak with Him under the one which first came to mind. Instead, in their approaches to Him, they carefully singled out that attribute of the divine nature, or that particular relationship that God sustains to His people, which most accorded with the specific blessing they sought. The same principle of discrimination appears in the Old Testament prayers. When holy men of old sought strength, they looked to the Mighty One. When they desired forgiveness, they appealed to “the multitude of [his] tender mercies” (Psa 51:1; 69:16). When they cried for deliverance from their enemies, they pleaded His covenant faithfulness. We dwelt upon this title, “the God of peace,” in our article upon Romans 15:33 (June 1944); and in addition to our previous remarks thereon, would now point out:

First, it is a distinctively *Pauline* title, no other New Testament writer employing the expression. Its usage here is one of the many internal proofs that he was the penman of this epistle. It occurs just seven times in his writings: in Romans 15:33, and 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 3:16; and here in Hebrews 13:20. It is evident therefrom that our apostle had a special delight in contemplating God in this particular character. And well he might, for it is an exceedingly blessed and comprehensive one; and for that reason, we have done our best, according to the measure of light granted us, to open its meaning. In the sequel, we shall suggest why Paul, rather than any of the other of the apostles, coined this expression.

Second, it is a *forensic* title, viewing God in His official character as Judge. It tells us that He is now reconciled to believers. It imports that the enmity and strife which formerly obtained between them is now ended. That previous hostility had been occasioned by man’s apostasy from his Maker and Lord. The entrance of sin into this world disrupted the harmony between heaven and earth, severed communion between God and man, and brought in discord and strife. Sin evoked God’s righteous displeasure and called for His

judicial action. Mutual alienation ensued, for a holy God cannot be at peace with sin, being “angry with the wicked every day” (Psa 7:11). But divine wisdom could devise a way whereby rebels should be restored to His favour without any reflection upon His honour, and divine grace did provide a means which put away their sins and fully satisfied His justice. Through the obedience and sufferings of Christ, full reparation was made to the Law and peace was re-established between God and sinners. By the gracious operations of God’s Spirit, that enmity which was in the hearts of His people is overcome, and they are brought into loyal subjection to Him. Thereby the discord had been removed and amity created.

Third, it is a *restrictive* title. God is “the God of peace” only to those who are savingly united unto Christ, for “there is therefore now no condemnation” to them which are in him (Rom 8:1). But far different is the case with those who refuse to bow to the scepter of the Lord Jesus and take shelter beneath His atoning blood. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (Joh 3:36). Note, it is not that he shall yet fall beneath God’s wrath in the day of judgment, but that he is under it *now*, for he is under the curse of the divine Law. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom 1:18). Yea, more: by virtue of their federal relationship to Adam, all his descendants are “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph 2:3), entering this world as the objects of God’s judicial displeasure. So far from being “the God of peace” to those who are out of Christ, “The LORD is a man of war” (Exo 15:3). “He is terrible to the kings of the earth” (Psa 76:12).

Fourth, this title “the God of peace” is therefore an *evangelical* one. The good news which His servants are commissioned to preach to every creature are designated “the gospel of peace” (Rom 10:15). Most appropriately is it so named, for it sets forth the glorious person of the Prince of peace, and His all-sufficient work whereby He “made peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20). It is the business of the evangelist to explain how Christ did so, namely, by His entering the awful breach which sin had made between God and men, having transferred to Him the iniquities of all who should believe on Him, suffering the full penalty for the same. When the Sinless One was made sin for His people, He came under the curse of the Law and the wrath of God, and therefore did He give orders, “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zec 13:7). Justice having been satisfied, God is pacified, and all who are justified by faith “have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).

Fifth, it is therefore a *covenant* title, for all that was transacted between God and Christ was according to everlasting stipulation: “And the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zec 6:13). It had been eternally agreed that the Good Shepherd should make complete satisfaction for the sins of His flock, reconciling God to them and them to God. That compact between God and the Surety of His elect is expressly denominated a “covenant of peace,” and the inviolability of the same appears in that blessed declaration, “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee” (Isa 54:10). The shedding of Christ’s blood was the sealing or ratifying of that covenant, as Hebrews 13:20 goes on to intimate. In consequence thereof, the face of the Supreme Judge is wreathed in smiles of benignity as He beholds His people in His Anointed One.

Sixth, this title “the God of peace” is also a *dispensational* one; and as such, it had a special appeal for the one who so frequently employed the same. Though a Jew by birth, and a Hebrew of the Hebrews by training, he was called of God to “preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8). That suggests what may be the reason why this appellation of Deity is peculiar to himself, for whereas the other apostles ministered and wrote principally to the Circumcision, Paul was pre-eminently the apostle to the Uncircumcision; therefore, he more than any would adore God, that peace was now to be preached unto those who were afar off, as well as to them that were nigh. A special revelation was made to him concerning Christ, that “he is our peace, who hath made both [believing Jews and Gentiles] one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition [which under Judaism had divided them]...for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace [between them]; And that he might reconcile both unto God” (Eph 2:14-16). Thus, there was a particular propriety in the apostle of the Gentiles addressing God by this title when making supplication for the Hebrews—as he had done when praying for the former.

Seventh, this is a *relative* title: by which we mean it is closely connected with Christian experience. The saints are not only the subjects of that judicial peace which Christ made with God on their behalf, but they are also the partakers of divine peace experientially. The measure which they enjoy the same is deter-

mined by the extent to which they are obedient to God, for piety and peace are inseparable. The intimate connection there is between the peace of God and the sanctifying of believers, which appears both from 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and here in Hebrews 13:20-21; for in each, request is made for the promotion of practical holiness, and in each, the "God of peace" is supplicated. When holiness reigned over the whole universe, peace prevailed also. There was no war in heaven until one of the chief of the angels became a devil, and fomented a rebellion against the thrice holy God. As sin brings strife and misery, so holiness begets peace of conscience. Holiness is well pleasing to God; and when He is well pleased, all is peace. The more this prayer be pondered in detail, and as a whole, the more the appropriateness of its address will appear.

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb 13:20). This reference unto the deliverance of Christ from the tomb we regard as *the plea* on which the apostle based the request that follows. Since we consider this to be one of the most important verses in the New Testament, we shall give our best attention to every word in it; that more so, as part of its wondrous contents is so little apprehended today. We should observe, first, the character in which the Saviour is here viewed. Second, the act of God in bringing Him forth from the dead. Third, the connection between the act and His office as "the God of peace." Fourth, how that the meritorious cause of the same was "the blood of the everlasting covenant." Fifth, the powerful motive which the same provides for the saint to "come boldly to the throne of grace," there to "obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16). May the Holy Spirit deign to be our Guide as we prayerfully ponder this portion of the truth.

"That great shepherd of the sheep." This title was most pertinent and appropriate in an epistle to Jewish converts, for the Old Testament had taught them to look for the Messiah in that specific relation. Moses and David, eminent types of Him, were shepherds. Of the one it is said, "Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Psa 77:20); and under the name of the other, God promised the Messiah unto them: "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant [the anti-typical] David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd" (Eze 34:23). That Paul here made reference to that particular prophecy is clear from what it went on to say: "And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods" (Eze 34:25). Here in Hebrews 13:20, the same three things are brought together: the God of peace, the great Shepherd, and the everlasting covenant—and in a manner (in perfect accord with the theme of the epistle) which refuted the erroneous conception which the Jews had formed of their Messiah. They imagined He would secure for them an external deliverance as Moses had, and a prosperous national state as David set up; having no idea that He would shed His precious blood and be brought down into the grave. Yet they should have done so.

When Christ appeared in their midst, He definitely presented Himself unto the Jews in this character. He not only affirmed, "I am the good shepherd," but added, "the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (Joh 10:11), even that "Lamb of God" as His forerunner had hailed Him (Joh 1:29). In that dual character, or under that twofold revelation, the Lord Jesus had been prophesied in Isaiah 53:6: "All we like sheep have gone astray...and the LORD hath laid on him [i.e. the Shepherd, whose the sheep are!] the iniquity of us all." Then in the next verse, it was foreannounced, "he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." Note that word, "*brought* as a lamb," and behold the Holy Spirit guiding the apostle to say that God—not "raised," but—"brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep." His being brought back again from the dead necessarily imported His having first been brought into death. How minutely accurate is the language of Holy Writ and how perfect the harmony—their *verbal* harmony—of the Old and New Testaments!

Peter, in his first epistle, under the Spirit, appropriated the same wonderful prophecy to the Lord Jesus, for after terming Him the "lamb without blemish and without spot," by whom we are redeemed (1Pe 1:18-19), went on to cite some of the predictive expressions of Isaiah 53—namely, that which spoke of us "as sheep going astray," and that which referred to Christ "by whose stripes [we are] healed"; and that in bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, it was as "the Shepherd and Bishop of [our] souls" (1Pe 2:24-25). He there transacted. Thus he was led to expound Isaiah portraying the Saviour as a Lamb in death and a Shepherd in resurrection. The excuselessness of the Jews' ignorance of Christ in this particular office appears still further in that through yet another of their prophets, it had been announced that God would say, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts:

smite the shepherd” (Zec 13:7). There, God is viewed in His judicial character as being angry with the Shepherd for our sakes: that since He bore our sins, justice must take satisfaction from Him. Thus was “the chastisement of our peace” (Isa 53:5) laid upon Him, and the Good Shepherd gave His life for the sheep (Joh 10:11) as a satisfaction unto the righteous claims of God.

“That great shepherd.” From what has been pointed out above, we may the better perceive why the apostle designated Him thus, rather than “*the* great shepherd.” “*That* great shepherd”: the One not only foreshadowed by Abel, by the patriarchal shepherds, by David, but also as portrayed in the Messianic predictions. We should note that both of His *natures* were contemplated under this appellation: “My shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD” (Zec 13:7). As the profound Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) pointed out centuries ago, this title also implies all of Christ’s *offices*. His prophetic “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd” (Isa 40:11, and compare Psa 23:1-2); His priestly—“the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (Joh 10:11); His royal, for the same passage which announced that He should be Shepherd over God’s people also denominated Him a “prince” (Eze 34:23-25). So also in the New Testament: “When the Son of man shall...sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats” (Mat 25:31-32). He is indeed that “great shepherd,” all-sufficient for His flock.

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep.” See there the relation of the Redeemer to the redeemed. Shepherd and sheep are correlative terms: one cannot properly term any man a “shepherd” if he has no sheep. The idea of Christ as Shepherd necessarily implies the chosen flock. Christ is the Shepherd of the *sheep*, and not of the wolves (Luk 10:3), nor even the goats (Mat 25:32), for He has received no charge from God to save them—how the basic truth of particular redemption stares us in the face on almost every page of Scripture! “He did not lay down His life for the whole herd of mankind, but for the flock of the elect which was given to Him by the Father as He declared: John 10:14-16, 26”—John Owen (1616-1683). Observe, too, how this title intimates His *Mediatorship*: as the Shepherd, He is not the Lord of the flock, but the Father’s Servant to take charge of and care for it: “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me” (Joh 17:6). Christ’s relation to us is seen again in “*our* [not *the*] Lord Jesus” (Heb 13:20), and therefore, our Shepherd—*ours* in His pastoral office, which He is still discharging: ours, as brought from the dead, for we rose in Him (Col 3:1).

“That great shepherd of the sheep” emphasizes His immeasurable superiority over all the typical and ministerial shepherds of Israel: just as “a great high priest” (Heb 4:14) stresses His eminency over Aaron and the Levitical priests. In like manner, it denotes His authority over the pastor which He sets over His churches, for He is “the chief Shepherd” (1Pe 5:4) in relation to all the under-shepherds. He is Shepherd of souls; and one of them is worth far more than the whole world, which is the value He sets upon them by redeeming them with His own blood. This adjective also looks at the excellence of His flock: He is the great Shepherd over all—both Jews and Gentiles. As He declared, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this [Jewish] fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (Joh 10:16)—“one flock” comprising the whole of the Old Testament and the New Testament saints. “That *great* shepherd” also respects His abilities: a particular knowledge of all His sheep, skill to heal and minister to them (Eze 24:16), power to effectually preserve them: “And they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (Joh 10:28). Then how greatly should He be loved, trusted, honoured, and magnified!



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

39. Defeat, Part 2

The sad failure of Israel before Ai is one which calls for the most careful and prayerful study. Not only because it points, in a general way, a warning which needs to be taken to heart by all of God's people, especially so by His servants, but more particularly because of the book in which it is recorded and the grand truth which is there illustrated. As we proceed from chapter to chapter, it needs to be definitely borne in mind that the theme of Joshua is Israel's entry into and conquest of Canaan, and that this typified the Christian's occupation by faith of *his* heavenly heritage. In the earlier articles of this series, we emphasized that fact considerably, frequently pointing out the principles which must regulate the saints if they are to actually "possess their possessions" (Oba :17) in *this* life. Alas that so few of them *do* enjoy their inheritance—because of their failure to act by the same. We need not now enumerate and describe these principles: suffice it to say that they are all summed up in unremitting submission to the revealed will of God. While Israel followed that course, all went well for them; but as soon as they departed therefrom, disastrous was the consequence. And that is written for *our* learning (Rom 15:4). O that a teachable spirit may be granted both writer and reader.

"The upright shall have good things in possession" (Pro 28:10). The upright are they who walk with their eyes fixed on God, in subjection to His authority, and in dependence on His grace. While they maintain that character, they have the "good things" purchased by Christ not merely in promise and prospect, but in present "possession," enjoying real and blessed foretastes of their eternal portion. But when self-will and self-pleasing obtrude, they are made to eat the bitter fruits of their folly. And hence, it is that in the book we are now studying we are shown, both in the crossing of the Jordan and the capture of Jericho, the blessed effects of Israel's obedience unto the Lord; and on the other hand, we have faithfully set before us—in the shameful defeat at Ai—the evil results which inevitably followed Israel's disobedience. In the one we are taught some of the secrets of *success*, or the things which must be attended to by us if we are to have the mighty power of God working in our behalf; while in the other is made known what are the certain precursors of the Lord's displeasure and of our being overcome by our enemies. The one is as necessary for our instruction as is the other.

It would be stating the same thing in a slightly different form and from another angle if we said, The principal subject developed in the book of Joshua is a showing unto God's people *how their enemies are to be conquered*, for Israel had to vanquish and dispossess the Canaanites before they could occupy their land. In like manner, the Christian must overcome the devil, the world, and the flesh before he can experimentally enjoy his heavenly heritage. Israel's warfare against the seven nations of the land was a figure of the believer's conflict with his spiritual foes. The grand lesson which is set before us in the type is that our foes can be subdued by none but the Lord, and that He will fight for us only so long as we are in complete subjection to Him and maintain entire dependence upon Him. "For *if* ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; *Then* will the LORD drive out all these nations from before you" (Deu 11:22-23). Blessedly was that exemplified at Jericho; but the converse was demonstrated at Ai: the former is chronicled for our encouragement; the latter is narrated as a solemn warning for us to take to heart.

The first thing for us to heed—as we observe that the defeat of Ai followed immediately after the victory at Jericho—is the startling fact that the people of God are never in greater danger of giving place to pride and presumption than when God has signally blessed and prospered them. Never does a believer need to act more warily and in full dependence upon the Lord than when his graces are in lively exercise and his heart in an exhilarated frame. Unless he does so, self-confidence will creep in, and more reliance will be placed upon inherent grace than upon the One from whose fullness we need to be continually receiving "grace for grace" (Joh 1:16). No matter how strong be our faith, joyful our heart, energetic our grace, we must still look up for fresh supplies and renewings in the inner man; for without such, our graces will no longer act, no, not for a single hour. Only as we remain in the place of conscious weakness are we really strong. Only as the empty hand of a beggar continues to be extended, shall we receive "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phi 1:19). Alas, how often do we give the Lord occasion to complain, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst [by thy self-sufficient attitude], I will not hear" (Jer 22:21).

The hidden cause of Israel's defeat at Ai was the sin of Achan, who had secretly committed a grievous trespass against the Lord (Jos 7:1); and as the sequel shows, it is a very solemn and serious matter to provoke Him. In this case, His displeasure was evinced by His leaving Israel to act in their own wisdom and strength, and that could issue in nought but disaster. Here we have illustrated the important truth that so long as there be an ungrieved Spirit in the midst of an assembly, He directs its counsels and moves its officers and members to work in a wise and becoming manner; but when He is slighted, then His gracious operations are suspended, and they are left to act in the energy of the flesh—to the dishonour of the Lord, and to their own undoing and sorrow. Thus it was here. Out of the hidden root of Achan's offence grew the more obvious causes of the Ai defeat. Pride and presumption were at work. Ai was regarded with contempt, as an easy prey (Jos 7:3); but to their own overthrow. Learn from this, my reader, that it is a fatal mistake to underestimate the strength of our enemies! It is only as we truly realize that our spiritual foes are too powerful for us to vanquish that we shall really seek help and strength from the Lord.

Alas, Joshua accepted the counsel of those who belittled Ai: "So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men" (Jos 7:4). And what was the inevitable outcome of such carnal self-confidence? This: "They fled before the men of Ai." What a spectacle! Behold attentively the consequence of leaving the place of humble dependency! Mark well what happens when we follow our own devices. Left to themselves, the courage of these men of war wholly deserted them. It is only as we take unto us "the whole armour of God," that we "may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph 6:13). If instead we lean upon the arm of flesh, it is certain to fail us. Sad it is to see those three thousand Israelites panic-stricken before the heathen, especially as the record of the same follows right after the final statement of chapter 6: "So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country" (Jos 6:27). How the ignominious defeat of his soldiers would reflect upon the name and fame of Israel's commander! Sadder still is it to know that *our* sinful failures not only injure ourselves and those people of God with whom we are connected, but that they also bring dishonour upon our Redeemer. Should not the realization of *that* make us "work out" our salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phi 2:12)?

"And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down" (Jos 7:5). How forcibly does this incident illustrate what was repeatedly pointed out in the earlier articles. Israel's success in conquering Canaan depended entirely upon the Lord's showing Himself strong in their behalf, and that turned upon their unqualified obedience to Him. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) rightly pointed out, the check which they here received "served to let them know they were still upon their good behaviour." Success was to come from God and not their own valour, yet that success was bestowed only so long as they adhered to the pattern which He had given them. One essential feature in that pattern was that the unity of Israel must be preserved—a united front was to be presented to the enemy; consequently, "*all* the men of war" and "*all* the people" of Israel were bidden to march against Jericho (Jos 6:3, 5). But in connection with Ai, the spies counselled Joshua quite otherwise: "Make *not all* the people to labour thither" (Jos 7:3). He acceded: "So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men"; and now we see them in flight, some of them slain, and the remainder chased to "Shebarim" (Jos 7:4-5), which most significantly means "*breaches*"!

Next we are shown the effects which this disgrace had upon the congregation. When they learned of the retreat and heard that some of their brethren had been slain, "the hearts of the people melted, and became as water" (Jos 7:5). And well they might. Had not Joshua previously assured the nation, "Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites" (Jos 3:10)? Now that He was no longer leading them to victory, but suffering them to be overcome by their foes, they had reason to be thoroughly dejected. As M. Henry well remarked, "True Israelites tremble when God is angry." Here again we may note yet another striking contrast. When Jehovah had put forth His mighty power on Israel's behalf in the drying up of the Jordan, we are told that "all the kings of the Canaanites," when they heard of it, "their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more" (Jos 5:1). But here, the hearts of *Israel* "melted, and became as water" (Jos 7:5)! Nevertheless, even then, God was working in mercy unto Israel. By that painful and humiliating providence, He was about to bring to light the hidden things of darkness, give His people an opportunity to dissociate themselves from the trespass of Achan, and punish the culprit.

"And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads" (Jos 7:6). It is to be duly noted that

nothing is here said of Joshua berating the soldiers for their cowardice, or of his expostulating with the people for their faint-heartedness. He did not prate about “the fortunes of war” and tell them there was no need to be dismayed, nor did he make any effort to raise their spirits. Rather did he realize the exceeding gravity of the situation and refuse to say, “Peace, peace” when he knew that something was radically wrong. The “elders”—the responsible heads of the nation—also recognized that the defeat was owing to the Lord’s being provoked, and they too abased themselves before Him. The rending of their clothes was symbol of perturbation and lamentation (Gen 37:23-24; 2Sa 1:11), the putting of dust on their heads betokened distress and grief (1Sa 4:12; Job 2:12). How very different was *their* conduct from the foolish and fatal “optimism” that is now so rife, and which is nothing else than declining to face realities, a refusing to recognize the fact that the Lord is displeased and is withholding His blessing.

When things go seriously wrong, either with the individual Christian or with the local church, diligent and solemn examination is called for. When the providential frown of God be upon us, and we ignore the same or “seek to make the best of a bad job,” we are only inviting still heavier chastisements. We are bidden to “hear ye the rod” (Mic 6:9), and not to disregard or steel our hearts against it; and the first thing required for us in order to ascertain its message is to humble ourselves before the One who wields it, for “the meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way” (Ps 25:9). When God afflicts us, we ought to afflict ourselves. “The day of the LORD [any season when He displays His displeasure and acts in judgment] is great and very terrible; and who can abide it? Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping...for he is gracious and merciful” (Joe 2:11-13). For thirty years past, that is what God has been saying—by His providences—to the whole of Christendom, and particularly to our nation. But alas, it has to be said of us, as Israel of old, “Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved...have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock” (Jer 5:3).

“And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD.” It is to be carefully observed that not only did he now humbly take his place in the dust, but he did so before that sacred coffer which was the symbol of the Lord’s throne and presence in Israel. Most suitably was that posture and position selected, for the holy ark had been grievously slighted! Both in the crossing of the Jordan and the march around Jericho, the ark had, by divine orders, been accorded the place of honour, as it was borne aloft by the priests, signifying unto Israel thereby that victory for them depended upon their covenant God being duly magnified and counted upon. His glory shone forth unmistakably as, by His almighty power, He had made a way for Himself and His people. It was Joshua’s sad failure in not giving the ark its proper place, which was the immediate cause of Israel’s humiliation at Ai. Not only had Israel’s unity been broken by his heeding the boastful suggestion of the spies, but the guidance and help of the ark was dispensed with, and thereby Jehovah had been affronted! It was, we believe, in the conscious realization of this, that Joshua now lay on his face before it.

Once before—and only once—had Israel suffered defeat at the hands of the heathen; and it is by comparing the two together that fuller light is obtained upon the incident now before us. Both that reverse in the wilderness and this one in the land issued from the same cause: the pride of self-confidence. The earlier defeat occurred just after the crisis at Kadeh-barnea when the nation succumbed to unbelief, refusing to follow the counsel of Caleb and Joshua, and listening to the God-dishonouring report of the ten spies. After hearing the divine sentence that all of them should perish in the wilderness, mourning and confessing their sin, they went to the opposite extreme, and in blatant self-sufficiency declared, “We...will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised” (Num 14:40). Moses at once rebuked them: “And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper. Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you. But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless *the ark* of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, *departed not* out of the camp. Then the Amalekites came down...and smote them” (Num 14:41-45). Thus, history repeated itself: in their mad assurance, the three thousand went to Ai without the ark and suffered defeat.

“And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD.” That act and attitude of his not only expressed an humbling of himself beneath the mighty hand of God, an unspar-

ing self-judgment of his failure, but it also betokened a spirit of *hope*. Does the reader ask, How so? Because that which formed the lid of the ark was the “mercy-seat,” where forgiveness could be obtained on the ground of propitiation. Nor do we regard it as a straining of the verse to introduce this idea here: rather does it appear to us to be required by the Spirit’s having informed us that Joshua continued thus “until the eventide” (Jos 7:6). Very blessed indeed is that if it be remembered that the God of Israel had appointed “thou shalt offer upon the altar; two lambs of the first year day by day continually. The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer at *even*” (Exo 29:38-39). Then does not Joshua remaining before the ark until the time of the evening sacrifice confirm that thought that he did so in the expectation of receiving “an answer of peace” (Gen 41:16) of obtaining mercy through the Lamb! Let the reader compare 1 Kings 18:36; Ezra 9:4-5; Daniel 9:21!

Ere passing from this verse, its central figure needs to be contemplated from yet another angle. Does not Joshua’s falling “to the earth upon his face” (Jos 7:6) *foreshadow* once more the divine Saviour! When we remember that the root cause of the Ai calamity, which Joshua was here lamenting, was the trespass of Achan in “the accursed thing” (Jos 7:1) must we not recognize in Joshua’s humiliation thereat a striking and solemn prefiguration of the Redeemer’s anguish in Gethsemane? When entering upon the climax of His sufferings and the Surety of His people was about to be “made a curse” (Gal 3:13) for them before God, we are told that He “fell on his face, and prayed” (Mat 26:39). And the very next thing which Joshua here did was *to pray* (Jos 7:7). If it be objected that Joshua was acknowledging his own sad failure, we answer, That only brings out more pointedly the type, for in Gethsemane, the Holy One is seen as the Sinbearer, the iniquities of His people being laid upon Him. Yet in all things, He has the pre-eminence: very different indeed was *His* prayer in the Garden from that of Joshua’s on this occasion, for the types instruct us not only by comparison, but also by way of contrast—as in Israel’s eating of the manna, and later dying; not so with those who eat the Bread of Life (Joh 6:49-50).

“And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?” (Jos 7:7). Here begins one of the prayers of the Old Testament, which, like those contained in the New, vary considerably both in tenor and tone. It is therefore well for us to inquire, What is prayer? That question may be answered in many ways, according as it be considered from various angles. Thus, prayer is communing with God, an adoring of Him. Prayer is offering praise to Him, a thanking Him for all His mercies. Prayer is also the making known of our needs unto God, and a looking to Him for the supply of the same. Likewise, it is an acknowledging of our sins before Him, and seeking His forgiveness and restoration. Further, it is a taking on our spirits the burdens of others and making intercession on their behalf. But here in Joshua 7, we have something quite different from any of those aspects of prayer, which, though an humbling one, is nevertheless one which all saints at some time or other in their lives need to avail themselves of. On this occasion, we behold Joshua overwhelmed, heavily burdened, deeply perturbed, and we hear him pouring out his heart before God without restraint. It is *our* privilege and duty to do so in similar seasons, though endeavouring to avoid his faults. It will bring relief to an oppressed spirit.

There was no eloquent phrasing, no pleading of the divine promises, no expressing of any definite petition in Joshua’s prayer; but instead, an unstudied and spontaneous unburdening of himself before the Lord. If it be examined in a critical and carping spirit, it will be easy to detect its faults and condemn it for its incoherency and inconsistency. But whatever defects this prayer possessed, it must not be overlooked that it obtained a hearing from God! It will therefore be well for each of us to ponder Joshua 7:7-9, in the light of the title of Psalm 102: “A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD.” Upon these words, an exceptionally favoured and honoured servant of God wrote: “You and I may be in various cases of affliction, [and] we may at times be overwhelmed with the same—it will be well with us if we act as the Psalmist here doth. I never in the whole of my life got any good by carrying my affliction, or speaking when overwhelmed with sorrow to anyone else; no, let it be with a saint of ever so great a degree in the school of Christ. When I have poured out my complaint before the Lord, I have. Blessed be His name for it.”



THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

23. *In the Soul*

We should be woefully unfaithful to our calling and fail lamentably in the exercise of our present task, did we not here issue a plain and solemn warning—one which we beg each reader, and especially the young preacher seriously to take to heart, namely, that something more than an intellectual belief in the existence of God and the inspiration of His Word is necessary to the soul's recovery. There are multitudes now in Hell who died and died in a firm belief that God *is* and that the Bible is a communication from Himself unto the children of men. It is one thing for the mind to be assured that creation must have a divine Creator, and quite another for the heart to be yielded up to Him. There is a radical difference between mental assent to the evidences of God's existence, and a wholehearted consent to take Him as *my God*: my only Lord, my chief Good, my supreme End—subject to Him delighting in Him, seeking His glory. So too with His Word. It is one thing to be thoroughly persuaded of the uniqueness and excellence of its content, it is quite another to submit to its authority and be regulated by its precepts. One may greatly admire the plan of redemption revealed therein, and yet have no acquaintance with its saving power!

The evidence adduced in the previous articles for the existence of God and the arguments produced in demonstration of the divine Authorship in the Bible, are amply sufficient for that purpose, yet they are incapable regenerating a single person or of producing saving faith in him. Though they be such as no infidel can refute, though they thoroughly expose the utter irrationality of scepticism, yet they will not be effectual in bringing one soul from spiritual death unto spiritual life. They are indeed sufficient to intellectually convince anyone who will impartially weigh the same, but they are unable to accomplish a spiritual transformation in the soul. Though they are strong enough to produce an historical faith, they are not to work saving faith. Something more is necessary for *that*. However desirable and valuable be a mental assent to the Bible's being the Word of God, we must not rest satisfied therewith. There is a vital difference between perceiving the transcendency of its teaching, its immeasurable superiority to all the writings of men, and for us to have a personal experience in our own soul of their sanctifying virtue. That can be acquired by no study or pains on our part, nor can it be imparted by the ablest reasoner or most searching preacher.

In the introductory article of this series, we stated that after treating of the manifestations which God has made of Himself in creation, in the moral nature of man, in His shaping of human history, in His incarnate Son, and in the sacred Scriptures, we would consider that saving revelation which He makes of Himself in the souls of His people. In each of the others, it was an *objective* revelation of God which engaged our attention; but this now concerns a subjective or inward revelation of Himself. This is a much more difficult branch of our subject, and one which requires to be handled with great care and reverence; yet it is the most vital of all so far as the eternal interests of the soul are concerned, and therefore, one which it behoves each of us to give our best attention unto. Yet there are few duties to which professing Christians are so reluctant to apply themselves. They would not think of crossing a river in a boat with insecure and leaky bottom, and yet will venture into the ocean of eternity on an *untested* (and, most probably, unsound) faith. All around us are those who mistake a theoretical knowledge of the Gospel for a saving acquaintance therewith.

There is a vast difference between being firmly persuaded that God is, and *knowing God* for myself, so as to have access to Him, communion with Him, delight in Him. Such a knowledge of Him cannot be obtained by any efforts on our part. It is impossible for a man by any exercise of his rational and reasoning powers, by acquired knowledge in the arts and sciences, or by philosophy or astronomy, to attain to the least spiritual knowledge of God. The existence of God may be known, His works seen and admired, His Word read and stored up in the mind, yet without any true and saving knowledge of the Triune Jehovah. No human study or learning can impart to us one spiritual idea of God and His Christ, or convey the slightest acquaintance with Him. The reader of these lines may acknowledge God, confess Him to be sovereign, holy, just, and good, and yet be entirely ignorant of Him to any good purpose. An infinite Being cannot be cognized by finite reason. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job 11:7). We may indeed say of His wondrous works, "Lo, these are parts of his ways," yet after the most exhaustive investigation and examination of them, we are obliged to add, "but how little a portion is heard of him?" (Job 26:14).

God can only be *known* as He is supernaturally revealed to the heart by the Spirit through the Word. None can be brought to a spiritual and saving knowledge of God apart from divine illumination and communication. Hear what Christ Himself declared on the subject: "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will *reveal him*" (Mat 11:27). They may entertain correct opinions of Him, have Scriptural ideas of Him in their brains, but *know Him* they do not and cannot, unless Christ, by His Spirit, make Him manifest to the soul. To the Jews He averred, "It is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: Yet ye have not *known him*" (Joh 8:54-55). So it is today, with the vast majority of preachers and professing Christians: they mistake a notional knowledge of God for an experiential acquaintance with Him. The Lord Jesus said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast *revealed them* unto babes" (Mat 11:25). "Unto babes," unto those whom divine grace has made simple and teachable, little in their own eyes, conscious of their ignorance, and who cling to Him in their dependency.

When Peter owned the Saviour as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," He answered, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not *revealed* it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Mat 16:16-17). Peter had long been in possession of the Old Testament, yet despite its prophecies so manifestly fulfilled in and by the Lord Jesus, it was not sufficient of itself to produce in him a saving conviction that He was the Messiah. Proof of that was supplied by the scribes and Pharisees in their rejection of Him. Nor were His wondrous miracles enough to bring spiritual assurance to Peter's heart—they did not to the multitudes who witnessed them! Nor is the Word of God, even in its unadulterated purity, adequate of itself to save souls. This too was unmistakably and solemnly demonstrated by the preaching of Christ: the great majority of those who listened to Him remained unaffected, or else had their native enmity against Him fanned into a flame. Nothing *external* to man can impart to him a saving knowledge of God and His Christ. There must be a supernatural application of the truth made unto the heart by the special power of God before it can be spiritually apprehended.

Not without good reason did the most favoured of the Old Testament prophets exclaim, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD *revealed*?" (Isaiah 53:1)—the second question answering the former. That evangelical prophet, like most of God's servants in all ages, has many Gospel hearers, but few in whose hearts a supernatural work of divine grace was wrought. The "arm of the LORD" is a figurative expression for His invincible power (Psa 136:11-12). The Lord in His conquering might is revealed subjectively by inward manifestation, with life and efficacy to the soul. In 1 Corinthians 2:4, the same expression is termed, "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Where there is not that powerful work of the Spirit in the heart, there is no genuine conversion. In order to do *that*, something more than faithful preaching is necessary—there must be a distinct personal, peculiar, immediate, miraculous, and effectual work of the Spirit: "And a certain woman named Lydia...whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto [‘took unto her’] the things which were spoken of Paul" (Act 16:14).

"You may listen to the preacher,
God's own truth be clearly shown:
But you need a greater Teacher
From the everlasting Throne.
Application is the work of God alone."

The most fearful and fatal delusion now so prevalent in most sections of so-called "evangelical" Christendom is, that a saving belief in Christ is within the power of the natural man, that by performing what is naively termed "a simple act of faith," he becomes a new creature. That is to make the sinner the beginner of his own salvation! *He* takes "the first step," and God does the rest; *he* believes, and then God renews him—which is a blatant denial of the imperative necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit. The fact is that, if there is one time more than another when a man is absolutely dependent upon the Spirit's power, it is at *the beginning*, for the most formidable difficulty lies there. To savingly believe in Christ is a supernatural act and is the direct product of a supernatural work of grace in the soul. Fallen and depraved man has no more power to come to Christ evangelically than he has merit of his own to entitle him to God's favour. He is as completely dependent on the Spirit's gracious operation within him as he is upon Christ's worthiness without him. Fallen man is spiritually dead (Eph 2:1), and a dead soul cannot "co-operate," any more than a physical corpse can with an undertaker.

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1Co 2:14). The “things of the Spirit” signify contents of the Word of truth, for they were penned under His immediate inspiration. The “natural man” is man in his fallen and unrenewed state; while the sinner remains unregenerate, he “receiveth not” either the divine Law or the Gospel. That requires a word of explication: the natural man can, and often does, receive the things of the Spirit in *the letter of the Law* as so many propositions or statements, but he cannot apprehend them as does one who has been made the subject of a miracle of grace. They are “foolishness”—absurd, unattractive, distasteful—to him. Yea, he cannot “know them”—he is disqualified to perceive their verity and value; “because they are spiritually discerned,” and spiritual discernment he has none. The sinner has to be transformed from a natural into a spiritual man before he has any spiritual perception. “Except a man be born again, he *cannot see* the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3). Only in God’s light can we see light (Psa 36:9), and in order to do *that*, we must be brought out of that darkness in which sin has enveloped the soul.

The natural man, by reading and hearing, is competent to receive the things of God in their grammatical sense and to acquire an accurate mental notion of them, but is quite incapable of receiving a spiritual image of them in his understanding, of taking them into his affections, of cordially accepting them with his will. They are neither discerned by him in their divine majesty and glory, delighted in by him, nor obeyed. The things of the Spirit are not only addressed to the intellect as true, but to the conscience as obligatory, to the affections as good and lovely, to the will to be yielded unto. The unregenerate are entirely unable to recognize by an inward experience their surpassing weight and worth. They may indeed receive the truth of God into their brains, but they never receive “*the love of the truth*” (2Th 2:10) in their affections. The natural man is insensible alike to the authority and the excellency of the things of the Spirit of God, because his whole inward state is antagonistic to them. There must be congeniality between the perceiver and the thing perceived: only the pure in heart can see God. We not only need the Spirit objectively to reveal unto us the things of God, but He must make us subjectively spiritual men before we can receive them into our hearts.

As the eye is fashioned to take in sights and the ear sounds, as the faculties of the mind are fitted to think, reason, and retain concepts, so God must make the heart of fallen man *suitable unto* spiritual things ere he can receive them. There must be a correspondency between the object apprehended and the subject apprehending, as there is between the qualities of matter and the senses of the body which cognize them. As I cannot truly appreciate an oratorio—no matter how acute my hearing—unless I have a musical ear and refined taste, neither can I delight in spiritual things until I be made spiritual. But between God and fallen man, there is no living relation, no answerableness. The “beauty of holiness” *cannot* be perceived by one who is in love with and blinded by sin. There is no harmony between the sinner’s spirit and the Holy Spirit. No matter how simply and clearly the things of God be set before the natural man, nor how logically and accurately he may reason about them, he cannot receive them in their actuality and spirituality, for he has no spiritual sight to discern their wisdom and goodness, no taste to relish their loveliness and sweetness, no capacity to take in their desirability and glory.

“And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (Joh 1:5). Though “the light of the world” (Joh 8:12) stood before them, they saw in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. Something more than an external revelation of Him is necessary, even such as that described in: “For God, who [in the beginning] commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). The unregenerate have their “understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18); and they have no more ability or power of their own to dispel the same than had the deep to dissipate the darkness which abode upon it (Gen 1:2). In the darkness of a heart which, in its native condition, is a chamber of spiritual death, God shines with a light that is none other than Himself. The One who is light irradiates the benighted soul, and in His light it now sees the fullness of truth and grace shining in the face of Jesus Christ. By Sovereign fiat and miraculous power, the soul is now enabled to discern the glory of the divine perfections manifested in and through the Redeemer.

For several generations past, there has been a woeful ignoring of what has been pointed out above. There has been little recognition of the fact, and still less acknowledgment of it, that all which the Father hath purposed and contrived, all that the Son hath done and suffered for the redemption of His people, is unavailable and ineffective to their souls until the Holy Spirit *applies* the same. The inestimable blessings of the Father’s love, through the Son’s mediation, are only brought home to the souls of the elect by the

testimony, power, and operations of the Spirit. But during the last century, the majority of “evangelists” displayed a zeal which was “not according to knowledge” (Rom 10:2). In their efforts to show the *simplicity* of “the way of salvation” (Act 16:17), they ignored the *difficulties* of salvation (Luk 18:24; 1Pe 4:18); and in their pressing the responsibility of men to believe, repudiated the fact that none can do so savingly until the Spirit imparts faith. One of His titles is “the spirit of faith” (2Co 4:13), because He is the Author and Communicator of it. Faith is “the gift of God” (Eph 2:8): not offered for man’s acceptance, but actually bestowed: “the faith of the operation [not of ‘man’s will,’ but] of God” (Col 2:12)—“Who by *him* do believe in God” (1Pe 1:21).

The work of the Spirit in the heart is as indispensable as was the work of Christ on the cross. The necessity for the Spirit’s inward and effectual operations are from the darkness, depravity, and spiritual emptiness of fallen human nature. He alone can discover to us our dire need of Christ, convince us of our lost and ruined condition, create within us a hatred and horror of sin, bring us to consent to Christ’s scepter, and make us willing in the day of His power to take Christ’s yoke upon us. By nature, we are totally averse to holiness, and from birth, have been accustomed to doing evil only. It is impossible for us to take into the arms of our affection a holy Christ until the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus first takes hold of us. Moreover, there is a transcendency in spiritual things which far exceeds the highest flight of natural reason. Nature stands in need of grace in order for the heart to be rightly *disposed* to receive the things of God, and no human culture or education can effect that. A Gospel which comes to us from heaven can only be savingly known by an inward revelation from heaven. The Gospel is a revelation by divine grace, such as had never entered the heart of man to conceive, so less is it capable of comprehending them—their Author must apply that to the heart.

The Gospel consists of supernatural truth, and it can only be perceived in a supernatural light. True, an unregenerate person may acquire a theoretical concept and notional knowledge of the Gospel, but that is a radically different thing from a spiritual and experiential knowledge thereof: the latter is possible only by the effectual application of the Spirit. The natural man lacks both will and power to turn unto Christ. Do some of our readers regard that as “dangerous teaching”? Then we would remind them of words of the Lord Jesus: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me *draw him*: and I will raise him up at the last day” (Joh 6:44). We who are “darkness” by nature must be made “light *in* the Lord” (Eph 5:8) ere we can enjoy the light *of* the Lord. As we cannot see the sun in the heavens but in its own light, neither can we see the Sun of righteousness but by the beams of His sacred illumination. “When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, To *reveal* his Son *in* me” (Gal 1:15-16). There Paul gives us an account of his conversion, ascribing it wholly unto God: unto His foreordination, His effectual call, His miraculous and inward illumination by the Spirit.

The Holy Scriptures, which are inspired of God, contain a clear and full revelation of His will concerning our faith and practice. They are able to make us “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”; and having done so, by them the man of God is “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2Ti 3:15-17). Great things are ascribed to those Scriptures and the most blessed effects are declared to be produced by them. “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psa 19:7-8). In all ages, the child of God has acknowledged, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa 119:105). All of the Christian’s peace and joy, assurance, and expectation, proceeds from the knowledge which he has of the love and grace of God as declared in His Word. Nevertheless, it remains that the operations of the Holy Spirit within our souls are imperative and indispensable: the Gospel needs to come to us—not only at first, but throughout our Christian lives—“not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost” (1Th 1:5). Our *reception* of the truth is due alone to the interposition and secret workings of an Almighty power in our hearts, making it effectual to our conviction, conversion, and consolation.



THE WORK OF THE LORD

Our present design is twofold: to censure a misuse, and to explain the meaning of the following verse: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1Co 15:58). In the heedless hurry of this slipshod age, not a few have taken those words as though they read, "Work *for* the Lord," and have used them as a slogan for what is now styled "Christian service," most of which is quite unscriptural—the energy of the flesh finding an outlet in certain forms of religious activities. In this day of pride and presumption, it has been quite general to speak of engaging in work for the Lord, and to entertain the idea that He is beholden to such people for the same, that were their labours to cease, His cause would not prosper. To such an extent has this conceit been fostered that it is now a common thing to bear and read of our being "co-workers with God" and "co-operators" with Him. It is but another manifestation of the self-complacent and egotistical spirit of Laodicea (Rev 3:17), and which has become so rife.

But, it is likely to be asked, Does not Scripture itself speak of the saints, or at least ministers of the Gospel, being "co-workers with God"? The emphatic answer is No, certainly not. Two passages have been appealed to in support of this carnal and blatant notion, but neither of them when rightly rendered teach any such thing. The first is 1 Corinthians 3:9, which in the Authorized Version is strangely translated, "For we are labourers together with God." Literally the Greek reads, "For God's we are: fellow-workers; God's husbandry, God's building, ye are." The apostle had just rebuked the Corinthians (1Co 3:1-3), particularly for exalting some of the servants of God above others (1Co 3:4). He reminded them, first, that the apostles were but ministers or "servants," mere instruments who were nothings, unless God blessed their labours and "gave the increase" (1Co 3:6-7). Then, he pointed out that one instrument ought not to be esteemed above another, for "he that planteth and he that watereth are one" (1Co 3:8) and shall each "receive his own reward." While in verse 9, he sums up by saying those instruments are "God's"—of His appointing and equipping; "labourers together [fellow-workers]," partners in the Gospel field.

The second passage appealed to lends still less colour to the conceit we are here rebutting: "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you" (2Co 6:1), for the words, "with him" are in italics, which means they are not contained in the original, but have been supplied by the translators. This verse simply means that the instruments God employed in the ministry of the Gospel were joint-labourers in beseeching sinners not to receive His grace in vain. There is no thought whatever of "co-operating" with God. Why should there be? What assistance does the Almighty need! Nor does He ever voluntarily *receive* any (Job 22:2-3; Luk 17:10). What an absurdity to suppose the finite could be of any help to the Infinite! At most, we can but concur with His appointments, and humbly present ourselves before Him as empty vessels to be filled by Him. It is wondrous condescension on His part if He deigns to employ us as His agents; the honour is ours, we confer no favour on Him. The Lord is the sole Operator; His servants the channel through which He often—though by no means always—operates. Ministers are not co-ordinates with God, but sub-ordinates to Him.

There is something particularly repulsive to a spiritual mind in the concept of worms of the earth "co-operating" with the Most High, for it is virtual deifying of the creature, a placing of him on a par with the Creator. Surely it is enough simply to point out that fact for all humble and Spirit-taught souls to reject with abhorrence such a grotesque fiction. Far different was the spirit which possessed the chief of the apostles. Said he, "I laboured more abundantly than they all: *yet not I*, but the grace of God which was with me" (1Co 15:10). When the Twelve responded to their Master's commission, we are told that "they went forth, and preached every where, *the Lord* working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen" (Mar 16:20)—otherwise their labours had yielded naught. Paul placed the honour where it rightfully belonged when he declared, "For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which *Christ* hath not wrought by me" (Rom 15:18). How different was that from regarding himself as "co-operator" with Him! It is just such creature boasting which has driven the Lord outside the churches.

In view of what has been pointed out above, it is scarcely surprising that those possessed of more zeal than knowledge should eagerly lay hold of the clause in 1 Corinthians 15:58, and adopt it as their motto. Such activities as holding Gospel services in the streets, engaging in what is called "personal work," taking part in meetings where young people are led to believe they are "giving their testimony for Christ," and other enterprises for which there is no warrant whatever in the Epistles (where church members are more

directly instructed and exhorted), are termed, "working for the Lord" or "serving Christ." Very different indeed is the task which *He* has assigned His followers: a task far more difficult to perform, and one which is much less palatable to the flesh, namely, to keep their hearts with all diligence: mortifying their lusts, and developing their graces (Col 3:5, 12), to cleanse themselves "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2Co 7:1), and to witness for Christ by their *lives*, showing forth His praises (1Pe 2:9).

There is therefore a real need for the inquiry, Exactly what is meant by "the work of the Lord" in 1 Corinthians 15:58? It should at once be apparent that we do not have to go outside the verse itself for proof that the popular understanding which now obtains of it is thoroughly unwarrantable. First, it is not one which specially concerns ministers of the Gospel nor "Christian workers," but instead, pertains to *all* the saints, for it is addressed to the "beloved brethren" at large. Second, the work of the Lord which it enjoins calls for us to be "stedfast [and] unmoveable," which are scarcely the qualities to be associated with what the churches term "Christian service"—had *that* been in view, such adjectives as "zealous and untiring" had been far more pertinent. Third, the duty here exhorted unto is one which allows of no intermission, as the "always abounding in" expressly states—even the most enthusiastic "personal workers" would scarcely affirm that! Finally, the "knowing [not praying or hoping] that your labour is *not in vain* in the Lord" (RV) makes it clear that the well-meant but misguided efforts of the religious world today are not in view.

Grammatically, "the work of the Lord" may import either that work which He *performs*, or that which He *requires* from His people. The fact that it is one unto which He calls *them*, obliges us to understand it in the second sense. When Christ was asked, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" (Joh 6:28), it should be obvious that they meant, What are those works which God requires of us? Our Lord answered: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (Joh 6:29): *that* is what He has commanded (1Jo 3:23), and that is what will be acceptable unto Him. The same inquiry should proceed from the Christian: What is the all-inclusive work which God has assigned us? The summarized answer is given in 1 Corinthians 15:58: the "work of the Lord," in which the saints are to be always abounding, is a general designation of the whole of Christian duty. As "the way of the LORD" (Gen 18:19) signifies the path of conduct which He has marked out for us, so "the work of the Lord" connotes that task He has prescribed us.

As is generally the case with erroneous interpretations, our moderns have taken this verse out of its setting and ignored its controlling context, paying no attention to its opening. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 15 is the great resurrection chapter, and may be outlined thus. First, the resurrection of Christ Himself (vv.1-11). Second, His rising from the dead secures the "resurrection of life" to all His people (vv.20-28). Third, the nature of their resurrection bodies (vv.42-54). In between those divisions, denials of the resurrection are refuted and objections thereto answered. Further indication is this: that to terminate the chapter with an injunction to engage in what is termed "Christian service" would be totally foreign to what precedes. Instead, the apostle closes his teaching on resurrection with a triumphant thanksgiving (vv.55-57) and an *ethical* inference drawn from the same. Therein is illustrated a fundamental characteristic of the Scriptures: that doctrinal declaration and moral exhortation are never to be severed, the former being the ground upon which the latter is based—first a statement of the Christian's privileges, and then pointing out the corresponding obligation.

In the context, the Holy Spirit has set before us something of the glorious future awaiting the redeemed of Christ: in 1 Corinthians 15:55-58, He makes practical application of the whole to the immediate present. Doctrine and duty are never to be divorced. Neither in the promise nor the precept is "the life that now is" separated from "that which is to come" (1Ti 4:8). All truth is designed to have a sanctifying effect upon our daily walk. Something more than a mere head belief of the contents of Scriptures is required of us, namely an incorporating of them in the character and conduct. Truth so blessed as that set forth in 1 Corinthians 15:42-54 should fill the hearts of believers with joy (vv.55-57) and move them to the utmost diligence, and endeavour to please and glorify the Lord (v.58). The "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v.57) is the language of *faith*, for faith gives a present subsistence to things which are yet future. The final verse announces the transforming effect which such a revelation and a hope so elevating should have upon us; or, stating it in other words, this injunction makes known the corresponding obligation which such a prospect entails: What that transforming effect should be, what that obligation consists of, we shall now seek to state.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” An analysis of this verse shows that it consists of two things: an exhortation and motives to enforce the same. The exhortation includes a threefold task: to be “steadfast” in the faith, in our convictions of the truth; to be “unmoveable” in our affections, in our expectation of the things promised; to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord,” in doing His will, in performing those good works which He has foreordained we should walk in (Eph 2:10). The “work of the Lord” may be regarded first as a general expression, comprehending all that He requires from us in the way of duty: in the exercise of every grace and the practice of every virtue. “Always abounding in the work of the Lord” signifies ever engaged in obeying His Word, seeking His glory, and aiming at the advance of His kingdom. More specifically, it imports that lifelong task which He has set before us and which may be summed up in two words—mortification and sanctification: the denying of self and putting to death of our lusts; the developing of our graces and bringing forth the fruits of holiness.

Strictly speaking, it is “the work of the Lord” to which we are here called, and the steadfastness and immovability are prerequisites to our “always abounding” therein. But we shall consider them as separate duties. First, “be ye steadfast” in the faith and profession of the Gospel, and not “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14). Be firmly fixed in your convictions: having bought the truth, sell it not (Pro 23:23). “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1Th 5:21). That by no means precludes further progress of attainment, for we are to press forward unto those things which are still before (Phi 3:13); yet in order thereto, there must be stability and resolution, a “holding fast the faithful word” (Ti 1:9), an eschewing of all false doctrine.

Second, “unmoveable,” which is a word implying testing and opposition. Suffer not the allurements of the world, nor the baits of Satan to unsettle you. Be not shaken by the trials of this life. Be patient and persevering whatever your lot. Seek grace to say of all troubles and afflictions, what Paul said are bonds and imprisonments—“none of these things move me” (Act 20:24). And why should they? None of them impugn God’s faithfulness. Moreover, they work for us “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen” (2Co 4:17-18). Then be unwavering in your expectations and “be not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Col 1:23), no matter what opposition you encounter. Notwithstanding your discouraging failures, the backslidings of fellow Christians, the hypocrisy of graceless professors, “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb 3:6).

Third, “always abounding in the work of the Lord”: constantly occupied in doing those good works which honour God. More specifically: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1Co 10:31). “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ...for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 1:5-11). *That* is “the work of the Lord,” *that* the task assigned us. Then let not the difficulty of such duties, nor the imperfections of your performances dishearten you; suffer not the hatred of your enemies, nor the severity of their opposition to deter you. “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal 6:9).

