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STUDIES
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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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LOOKING UNTO THE LORD

Looking unto the LORD is an attitude of the soul, an act of the will, and the exercise of faith—a turning away from all that is of the creature and relying solely upon the living God. It is tersely, but graphically, expressed in these words: “But our eyes are upon thee” (2Ch 20:12), and blessed is the one who can really so aver. That is the language of all God’s children when they are in their right minds. At that time, they place no reliance upon self, have no confidence in the flesh, and expect nothing good from the world; but they put all their trust in the Lord. Their hearts are engaged with an almighty God, and, like Moses, they endure “as seeing him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27). It is this which characterizes those who are members of the Household of Faith: in their need, they look to God for their supplies; in straits, for deliverance; in trouble, for comfort; in weakness, for strength. It is this which distinguishes them from unbelievers, who lean upon the “arm of flesh” (2Ch 32:8) and look to their fellows for help. In proportion, as we maintain this attitude of dependence on and expectation from our heavenly Father, our hearts will be kept in peace, our souls made to rejoice, and our every want will be supplied. For the sake of young preachers, we will topicalize our subject.

1. The look of *salvation*. “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa 45:22). Look not to the Law, the priest, nor to your baptism, nor church attendance. Look not to your sincerity and good intentions, nor to your prayers and good deeds; nor even to your convictions of sin. None but *Christ* can save you. This is very humbling to the proud creature: to have to look away from self, and be wholly indebted to Another. It is not a matter of what we are—how good or bad—but of what He is: namely, an all-sufficient Saviour, freely offered in the Gospel to every hearer. If you look unto Him, as the serpent-bitten Israelites looked upon the divinely appointed object (Joh 3:14)—with simple but confident faith—He will save you. No qualifications are needed to entitle you to do so: the command of God and the invitation of the Gospel supply sufficient authorization. The viler you feel yourself to be, the more suited to Christ’s cleansing blood. He is the great Physician and can heal the foulest leper. Do you say, “But I am blind”? True, yet you are not bidden to “See,” but “Look”—and sight comes by looking!

2. The look of *illumination*. “They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed” (Psa 34:5). Faith’s looking unto Christ is the grand means of blessing appointed by God: pardon and peace, light and liberty, are obtained thereby. Of old, Job said, “Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living” (Job 33:29-30). He does so by the power of His Spirit working faith in us upon Christ. God announced concerning His beloved Son, “I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles” (Isa 49:6). And in due time, the Sun of righteousness arose “with healing in his wings” (Mal 4:2), putting an end to the night of darkness for many a soul. By His Gospel, He declares, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (Joh 12:46). Then look unto Him, and you too shall be divinely illumined: your faith shall not be confounded, nor your face covered with confusion.

3. The look of *supplication*. “But our eyes are upon thee” (2Ch 20:12). The setting of those words is very striking. A great army of the heathen had gathered together to do battle against Judah. When their king was informed, he “set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast” (verse 3). Then, in the hearing of the congregation, he addressed himself unto the God of their fathers, saying, “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee” (verse 12). It was an earnest appeal unto the omnipotent One by those in the place of conscious weakness and helplessness. It was likewise an expression of humble but confident faith. It was also an expectation of help from the Almighty. Nor was this simple but affecting supplication in vain. Of course it was not! JEHOVAH made answer: “Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s” (verse 15). He caused the enemy to fall upon themselves, “and none escaped” (verse 24). *There* is the grand remedy for every strait. No matter how desperate the situation, nothing is too hard for the LORD. Turn unto Him the eyes of faith, of dependence, of reliance, of confident expectation, and you will not be mocked.

4. The look of *transformation*. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass [mirror] the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Co 3:18). This “beholding” is not simply one of faith, but especially of holy ambition and resolve. As the be-

liever contemplates the moral perfection and character of Christ as they are set forth in the Word, there is born within him a deep yearning to be conformed to His likeness and to “walk, even as he walked” (1Jo 2:6). As that yearning persists and is accompanied by earnest prayer, the Holy Spirit works in him a deeper spirit of obedience, causing him to be increasingly regulated by Christ’s example and precepts, and thereby “changes” him, little by little, unto the same image. The Greek verb for “change” here is rendered “transformed” in Romans 12:2, and “transfigured” in Matthew 17:2. As the will is brought into subjection to Christ, we drink into His Spirit and become partakers of His holiness. This lifelong process will be completed when “we shall see him as he is” (1Jo 3:2), “face to face” (1Co 13:12).

5. The look of *inspiration*. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher [better, “Leader and Captain”] of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). In Hebrews 10:32, the apostle began to set before suffering, tried, and persecuted saints a number of considerations calculated to nerve them for the conflict and stimulate unto the continued performance of duty. Throughout chapter 11, he showed how faith was what animated the Old Testament worthies. As a climax, he reminded them of the Saviour, who supplied the perfect example of faith and fortitude under unparalleled suffering. When, then, you grow weary of running the race set before you, look unto your Leader and draw inspiration from Him—see Hebrews 12:3-4. Do as He did: look beyond the present sorrows to “the joy” awaiting you; see above the painful Cross an eternal crown prepared for him who “endureth to the end” (Mat 10:22). It is by so looking unto our great Exemplar, by devoutly contemplating His spirit of self-sacrifice and steadfastness, that we obtain strength to bear the hardships of the way.

6. The look of *expectation*. “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Ti 2:13). That is a very different thing from having the mind engaged with signs of the times or charmed with the study of prophecy; or even being on the *qui vive* (alert) for the next appointed item on the divine programme. It is concerned not so much with an event as with the advent of a Person. The second coming of Christ is ridiculed by the infidel (2Pe 3:2-4) and dreaded by the world (2Th 1:8); but it is regarded by the saints with great delight, for then will be the perfecting of their salvation (Heb 9:26). Titus 2:13 describes a spiritual attitude of heart. It is an attitude of *faith*—and faith is not influenced by sensational items taken from the newspapers! It is an attitude of *hope*—joyous anticipation of our being rid of sin. It is an attitude of *love*, so that we cry, “Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices” (Song 8:14). *Such* looking weans the heart from the world (Heb 11:9-10), produces patience in trials (Jam 5:6-8), and purifies the heart (1Jo 3:3). Therein we may behold the *practical* side of our blessed hope. Such an expectation of the returning Saviour works in us a careful attention to our conduct, that we may “not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1Jo 2:28).

7. The look of *consummation*. “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness” (Psa 17:15). That is the ultimate longing of every believer: to behold the King in His beauty and for ever gaze upon His blessed features. Such too is *His* desire: to have us with Him, beholding His glory (Joh 17:24)—nothing less will satisfy the eternal Lover of our souls. In a real sense, believers discern something of the glory of Christ even now, but oh, how feebly and faintly! But hereafter, we shall look upon Him without hindrance or interruption. That will be the fruition of our hope: to have immediate communion with Him. That will fill us with joy, and make us overflow with praise. Oh, how altogether lovely will He appear, when we see Him no longer “through a glass, darkly [obscurely]”—but “face to face” (1Co 13:12)!



THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

71. Revelation 1:5-6

Our present prayer really forms the closing part of the salutation and benediction of Revelation 1, verse 4, where “grace” and “peace” are sought from the Triune God in His distinct persons. First, from “him

which is, and which was, and which is to come”: that is, from JEHOVAH as the self-existing and immutable One—He is addressed by His memorial name (Exo 6:3). Second, from “the seven Spirits which are before his throne”: that is, from the Holy Spirit in the fullness of His power and diversity of His operations (Isa 11:1-2). Third, from “Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:5), who is mentioned last as the connecting Link between God and His people. A threefold appellation is here accorded the Saviour: 1) “The faithful witness,” which contemplates and covers the whole of His virtuous life from the manger to the Cross. 2) “The first begotten [better, “Firstborn”] of the dead,” which celebrates His victory over the tomb. It is a title of dignity (Gen 49:3), and signifies priority of *rank* rather than time. 3) “And the prince of the kings of the earth,” which announces His regal majesty and dominion, and views the Conqueror as exalted “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.” He is the One upon whose shoulder the government of the universe has been laid (Isa 9:6), who is even now “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3), and before whom every knee shall yet bow (Isa 45:23; Rom 14:11).

That recital of the Redeemer’s perfections and dignities evoked the adoring exclamation, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5-6). Thus, the *nature* of our prayer is again a doxology. Its *object* is the Son of God incarnate, in His mediatorial character and office. Its *adorers* are the “us” who are the beneficiaries of His mediation. Its inciting *reasons* are our apprehensions of His fathomless love, the cleansing efficacy of His precious blood, and the wondrous dignities He has conferred upon His redeemed. Its *ascription* is “to him be glory and dominion,” not merely for a thousand years, but “for ever and ever”; and closes with the assuring affirmation, “Amen”—it shall be so. For the benefit of young preachers, we will add a few more remarks to those made in a previous article on doxologies in general.

The doxologies of Scripture reveal our need of forming more exalted conceptions of the divine persons, and, in order thereto, more frequent and devout meditations on their ineffable attributes. How little do our thoughts dwell upon the display of them in the material creation. Divinity is “clearly seen” in the things which He has made, and even the heathen are charged with inexcusable guilt because of their failure to glorify God for His handiwork (Rom 1:19-21). Not only should our senses be regaled by the lovely colourings of the trees and perfumes of the flowers, but our minds ought to dwell upon the motions and instincts of animals, admiring the divine hand which so equipped them. How little do we reflect upon the marvels of our own bodies: the structure, convenience, and perfect adaptedness of each member. How few unite with the Psalmist in exclaiming, “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works” (Psa 139:14). How much more wonderful are the faculties of our souls, raising us high above all irrational creatures. How better can our reason be employed than in extolling the One who has so richly endowed us? Yet how little grateful acknowledgment is made unto the beneficent Donor of our beings.

How little do we consider the wisdom and power of God as manifested in the *government* of the world. For example: in the balance preserved between the sexes, and in the relative number of births and deaths, so that the population of the earth is maintained from generation to generation without any human contriving. Or in the various temperaments and talents given to men, so that some are wise for counsels and contrivances, some are better qualified for hard manual labour, and others to serve at the desk. Or in curbing the baser passions of men, so that such a measure of law and order obtains generally in society that the weak are not destroyed by the strong, nor the good unable to live in a world which lieth in the wicked one. Or in setting bounds to the success of rapacious dictators, so that when it appears they are on the very point of carrying all before them, they are suddenly stopped by the One who has decreed they shall go “no further.” Or in His application of the law of retribution, so that individuals and nations are made to reap as they sow, whether it be good or evil. It is because we pay so little attention to this and a hundred other similar phenomena that we are so rarely moved to cry, “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Rev 19:6).

But it is the wondrous works of God in the realm of *grace*—rather than in creation and providence—which are most calculated to draw out the hearts of God’s people in adoring homage, and more particularly those wherein the Darling of His own heart is more immediately concerned. Thus it is in the verses we are now pondering: no sooner are the peerless person and perfections of the eternal Lover of their souls set before them, than the saints exultant cry, “To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:6). It is the spontaneous response and outgoings of their souls unto Him. And that leads us

to point out that one thing which is common to all the doxologies is that praise is ever offered unto Deity, and never concerns anything of or by the saints themselves. Self-occupation and self-gratulation have no place whatever in them. Far different than from the low level of spirituality generally prevailing in the churches today. This writer was once present at a service where a hymn was sung, the chorus of which ran, "Oh, how I love Jesus," but we could not join in it. None in heaven are guilty of lauding themselves or magnifying their graces, nor should any Christians do so here upon earth.

The *Object* of this adoration and thanksgiving is that Blessed One who undertook—with the Father and the Spirit—to save His people from all their sins and miseries by the price of His blood and the arm of His power. In His essential person, He is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit—"who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom 9:5). He is the uncreated Sun of righteousness. In Him, all the glory of the Godhead shines forth; and by Him, all the perfections of Deity have been manifested. In response to this very homage, He declares, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev 1:8). Before the worlds were made, He entered into covenant engagement to become incarnate, to be made in the likeness of sin's flesh, to serve as the Surety of His people, to be the Bridegroom of His Church—its complete and all-sufficient Saviour. As such, He is the Man of "the right hand of God" (Col 3:1; Heb 1:3), the Fellow of "the LORD of hosts" and the "King of glory" (Psa 24:10). His work is honourable, His fullness infinite, His power omnipotent. His Throne is for ever and ever. His name is "above every name" (Phi 2:9). His glory is above the heavens. It is impossible to extol Him too highly, for His glorious name "is exalted *above all* blessing and praise" (Neh 9:5).

In the immediate context, this adorable One is viewed in His theanthropic person, as incarnate, as the God-man Mediator. There He is set forth in His threefold office as Prophet, Priest, and Potentate. His prophetic office is clearly connoted in the title, "the faithful witness" (Rev 1:5)—for in the Old Testament prophecy, the Father announced, "Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people" (Isa 55:4); while Christ Himself declared unto Pilate, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth" (Joh 18:37). As such, He proclaimed the Gospel unto the poor and confirmed the same by mighty miracles. His sacerdotal office is necessarily implied in the expression, "first begotten [Firstborn] of the dead" (Rev 1:5)—for in death, He offered Himself as a sacrifice unto God to make satisfaction for the transgressions of His people; and then rose again that He might continue to exercise His priesthood by His constant intercession for them. His regal office appears plainly in the designation, "prince of the kings of the earth"—for He has absolute dominion over them: by Him, they reign (Pro 8:15); and to Him, they are commanded to render allegiance (Psa 2:10-12). To Him, we are to hearken; in Him, we are to believe; unto Him, we are to be subject. Singly and collectively, these titles announce that He is to be greatly respected and revered.

While an exile on the isle of Patmos, John was engaged in contemplating Immanuel in the excellencies of His person, offices, and work; and as he did so, his heart was enraptured, and he exclaimed, "Unto him that loved us" (Rev 1:5), which is a preferable rendering (we think) in the passage to the "loveth us" of the Revised Version. The love of Christ is here expressed by the apostle in the *past* tense, not because it is inoperative in the present, but to focus our attention upon its earlier exercises. The love of Christ is the grandest fact and mystery revealed in Holy Writ. That love originated in His heart and was in operation from all eternity, for before the mountains were formed, His "delights were with the sons of men" (Pro 8:31). That wonderful love was put forth by Christ in connection with the everlasting covenant, wherein He agreed to serve as the Sponsor of His people and discharge all their obligations. That He should take complacency in creatures of the dust is the marvel of heaven. That He should set His heart upon them while viewed in their fallen estate is incomprehensible. That love was expressed openly in His incarnation, humiliation, obedience, sufferings, and death.

Scripture itself declares that "the love of Christ...passeth knowledge" (Eph 3:19). It is entirely beyond finite computation or comprehension. That the Son of God should ever deign to *notice* finite creatures was an act of great condescension on His part (Psa 113:6). That He should go so far as to *pity* them is yet more wonderful. That He should *love* us in our pollution entirely transcends our understanding. That the outgoings of His heart unto the Church moved Him to lay aside the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, take "upon him the form of a servant," and "became obedient unto death" for their sakes—"even the death of the cross" (Phi 2:6-8)—surmounts all thought and is beyond all praise. That the Holy One should be willing to be made sin for His people and endure the curse that endless blessing should

be their portion is altogether inconceivable. As Samuel E. Pierce (1746-1849) so ably expressed it, "His love is one perfect and continued act from everlasting to everlasting. It knows no abatement or decay. It is eternal and immutable love. It exceeds all conception and surpasses all expression. To give the utmost proof of it, 'Christ died for the ungodly' (Rom 5:6). In His life, He fully displayed His love. In His sufferings and death, He stamped it with an everlasting emphasis."

The love of Christ was a *disinterested* one. Entirely so, for it was uninfluenced by any external considerations or any thing in its objects. There was nothing whatever in them, either actual or foreseen, to call it into existence. Nothing actual, for they had rebelled against God, and deliberately chosen as their exemplar and master one who was a liar and murderer from the beginning. Nothing foreseen, for no excellence could they bear, except what His own gracious hand wrought in them. The love of Christ infinitely excelled in purity, in intensity, in its disinterestedness, any that ever moved in a human breast. It was altogether free and spontaneous. He loved us when we were loveless and unlovely. We were entirely unable to render Him any compensation or fit return. His own essential blessedness and glory could neither be diminished by our damnation, nor increased by our salvation. His love was uninvited, unattracted, altogether self-caused and moved. It was that which stirred everything else—His wisdom, power, holiness—to activity: "He delivered me, *because* he delighted in me" (Psa 18:19) is the divine explanation of my redemption.

The love of Christ was a *discriminating* one. "The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Psa 145:9). He is benevolent unto all His creatures, making His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sending rain on the just and on the unjust (Mat 5:45). "For he is *kind* unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luk 6:35). But Christ *loved* the Church and gave Himself for it with a love such as He does not bear all mankind. The Church is the one special and peculiar object of His affections. Thus, He does not love universal creaturehood, or all mankind without exception or difference. Husbands are bidden to love their wives "even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph 5:25). The love of a husband toward his wife is a special and exclusive one: so Christ cherishes for His Church a particular affection. It is set upon His Bride, rather than upon the human race at large. She is His peculiar treasure. "Having loved *his own* which were in the world" (Joh 13:1). Instead of caviling at this truth, let us enjoy its preciousness. Christ's love is also a constant and durable one, exercised upon its objects "unto the end" (Joh 13:1; Mat 28:20); and, as we shall now see, it is a sacrificial and enriching one.

The *manifestations* of Christ's love correspond to our woe and want, its operations being suited to the condition and circumstances of its objects. Our direst need was the putting away of our sins, and that need has been fully met by Him. His love alone could not remove our transgressions "as far as the east is from the west" (Psa 103:12). The claims of God must be met, the penalty of the Law endured. "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb 9:22); and Christ so loved the Church as to shed His precious blood for her. Hence, the saints here are heard exclaiming, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in [or 'by'] his own blood" (Rev 1:5). That is the second inspiring reason or motive of this benediction. It necessarily imports His Deity, for none but God can forgive sins. It is likewise a witness to the vicarious nature and efficacy of His sacrifice—how otherwise could it wash us from our sins? Moreover, it celebrates the supreme proof of His care for His people. "For love is strong as death...Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (Song 8:6-7), as was demonstrated at the Cross, where "all [the] waves and [the] billows" of God's wrath (Psa 42:7) went over the Sinbearer.

The surpassing love of Christ was evidenced by His espousing the persons of God's elect: undertaking their cause, assuming their nature, obeying and suffering in their room and stead. The apostle brought the whole of this blessed subject home with application unto believers when he said, "Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour" (Eph 5:2). He knew what was necessary for our deliverance, and His love prompted Him to the accomplishment of the same. To "[wash] us from our sins" (Rev 1:5) was the one thing essential in order to our salvation; and for that, His blood *must* be shed. What stupendous proof was that of His love! Herein is love: that the Just should voluntarily and gladly suffer for the unjust, that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8), making full atonement for those who were "enemies." He chose to lay down His life for those who were by nature and by practice rebels against God, rather than that they should be a sacrifice to the wrath of God for ever. The guilty transgress, but the innocent One is condemned. The ungodly offend, but the Holy One endures the penalty. The servant commits the crime, but the Lord of glory blots it out. What reason have we to adore Him!

Christ cannot love His people beyond what He has done. He cannot increase in His love to them unto all eternity. He cannot give a greater evidence of His love to them than He has already done. He shone forth in all the meridian power and splendour of His love in Gethsemane and on Calvary. There, He sustained in His soul the whole of the awful curse which was due to the sins of His people. Then it was that “it pleased the LORD [the Father] to bruise him” (Isa 53:10) and put His soul to grief. His anguish was inconceivable. He cried out under it, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46; Mar 15:34). It was *thus* He loved us, and it was *thereby* He provided the fountain to cleanse us from our iniquities. Through the shedding of His precious blood, He has purged His people from the whole guilt and defilement of sin. “Blessings, eternal blessings on the Lamb who bore our sins and carried our sorrows! His bloody sweat is our everlasting health and cure. His soul-travail is our everlasting deliverance from the curse of the Law and the wrath to come. His bearing our sins in His own body on the Tree is our everlasting discharge from them. His most precious blood-shedding is our everlasting purification”—S. E. Pierce.

“And washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev 1:5). Sin alike blots our record before God, pollutes the soul, and defiles the conscience; and naught can remove the same but the atoning and cleansing blood of Christ. Sin is the only thing which the Lord Jesus hates. It is essential to His holiness that He should do so. He hates it immutably, and can as soon cease to be God as love it. Nevertheless, His love to His people is even greater than His hatred of sin. Through their fall in Adam, they are sinners: their fallen natures are totally depraved. By thought, and word, and deed, they are sinners. They are guilty of literally countless transgressions—for their sins are more in number than the hairs of their heads (Psa 40:12). Yet Christ loved them! He did so before they sinned in Adam; and His foreviews of them in their fallen estate produced no change in His love to them. Nay, it afforded greater opportunity for Him to display the same. Therefore, did He become incarnate that He should blot out their sins. Nothing was more loathsome to the Holy One of God; yet He was willing to be an alien to His mother’s children, despised and rejected of men, mocked and scourged by them—yea, abandoned by God for a season—that they might be cleansed.

We fully agree with John Gill (1697-1771) when he says on the words, “washed us from our sins” (Rev 1:5), that “this is not to be understood of the sanctification of their natures, which is the work of the Spirit, but of atonement for their sins and justification from them.” In other words, it is the impetration (purchase) of redemption, and not its application, which is here in view. The latter, of course, follows at regeneration—for all whom He washed from the guilt and penalty of sin are in due time cleansed from the love and dominion of sin. That which is imported in the clause before us is guilt cancelled, condemnation removed, the curse of the Law taken away, and the sentence of acquittal pronounced. This is the portion of *all* believers: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). We must distinguish between the justification of our *persons* once for all (Act 13:39), and the pardon of our sins as Christians (1Jo 1:9) which must be penitentially confessed; and then, we are forgiven and cleansed on the ground of Christ’s blood. It is the former which is in view in Revelation 1:5, where the saints are rejoicing in the love of Him whose blood has once and for all washed their *persons*; the latter is owned in Revelation 7:14, where their travel-stained *robes* [garments] are cleansed day by day.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

51. *Enemy Reactions, Part 2*

In our last, we pointed out that the word “And” at the beginning of Joshua 9 has a double force: intimating that what now follows is to be linked with, first, what is recorded in the closing verses of Joshua 8—namely the magnification of the divine Decalogue on mount Ebal and the renewing of the Mosaic covenant by this new generation of Israel; and second, with the whole of chapters 6-8, which narrate their conquests, under God, of Jericho and Ai. In other words, the contents of Joshua 9 make known to us the

enemy's reactions to those incidents. As the events were twofold, so were his reactions. First, we are informed that as soon as the kings of Canaan "heard thereof," they "with one accord" agreed to unite themselves together "to fight with Joshua and with Israel" (verses 1-2). Up to this point, they had acted on the defensive; but now that they saw *their own* interests were threatened, they determined to make a mass attack upon Israel. "The varied expressions here used [in Joshua 9:1] include the inhabitants of the land to the utmost western and northern borders"—Thomas Scott (1747-1821). It was not an immediate attack that was planned, but a consulting together how best to put a stop to Israel's progress and secure their own territories.

Verily, "there is no new thing under the sun" (Ecc 1:9). A "League of Nations" or federating together with different peoples to "pool" their resources is no modern invention, but as old as human history. Here was a banding together of rival kings to make common cause in opposing the people of God. They entered into an agreement "at top level" to support and assist each other, and ultimately to assail Israel—which they did, as Joshua 11:1-5 shows. For the time being, they were willing to sink their individual differences and combine together. Nor was this the first time that such a thing had happened. As far back as Abraham, we are told that "it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar. All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea" (Gen 14:1-3)—which may well be designated "the Western bloc of nations" against the "Eastern power and its satellites." At a later date, we find still another consulting "together with one consent" of a number of nations, and a federating of themselves against Israel (see Psa 83:4-8).

That which is recorded in Joshua 9:1-2 should be of real practical value unto those who are engaged in fighting "the good fight of faith" (1Ti 6:12). There is real wisdom in that old adage, "To be forewarned is to be forearmed." It is often a very real help to have reliable information of what effects a certain action produces upon the foe. Here we are shown the nature of such, immediately upon Israel's solemn renewal of their covenant with JEHEVOH. The lesson in plain: it is when God's people are most conscious of their obligations, when most determined by grace to discharge the same, when most zealous in fully consecrating themselves unto the LORD, that the ire of Satan breaks out the fiercest. As we have pointed out, up to this point, these Canaanitish kings had remained quiescent, but now they planned aggression. Naturally speaking, it seems strange that they were not actually hostile from the beginning, opposing Israel's crossing of the Jordan, for they had received notice of their approach (Jos 2:9-10). Nor had these kings made any attempt to go to the relief of Jericho when that city was seriously threatened by those under Joshua's command.

But notice what these kings *did not do*. They did not surrender themselves unto Israel. They did not consider themselves outnumbered, and cast themselves on Joshua's mercy. Even after they learned of the miraculous crossing of the Jordan and the falling of Jericho's walls, they did not capitulate. Nor do the enemies of the Christian. No matter how marked or extensive the victory God grants us, we must not conclude that the worst of the fight is now over. Satan in his activities is the nearest approach to "perpetual motion" found in any creature. He never accepts defeat or quits the field. One had thought he must recognize the utter futility of assailing Immanuel, but he did not. And though completely worsted and routed in his attempt, it was only "for a season" (Luk 4:13) he left Him. Why, then, should any of His followers expect to be exempted! The same is true of "the flesh" with all its evil lusts. Indwelling sin never surrenders to the new nature, nor ceases its attacks upon it. Nay, the farther a Christian advances into an experiential entrance into and enjoyment of his spiritual heritage, the fiercer the conflict becomes, and the more determined and concentrated the efforts of his enemies to thwart him.

It is striking to see how the Holy Spirit has particularized *the diversity* of the kings described in Joshua 9:1: some were from the mountains, some from the valleys, and yet others from the sea coasts; yet, though so widely scattered, they federated together against Israel. That illustrates the fact that the spiritual enemies of God's people are of many kinds and types, that every form of worldliness—its most refined and elevated, as well as its coarsest and lowest—is a menace to them. Equally so are their own evil lusts varied and numerous: self-will, pride, unbelief, slothfulness, cowardice, impatience, discontent, and a host of others—all have to be resisted and mortified. How the unanimity of those heathen tribes should shame Christians because of their divisions! And how their banding together against Israel ought to arouse the believer to the realization that *all his graces* must work actively together—faith strengthening hope, love

animating both—in waging the fight to which he is called. If it appears strange that these kings had been quiet so long, to carnal reason, it seems the more so that they should now plan an offensive after God had so signally shown Himself strong on the behalf of His people. But behind the scenes, the LORD was saying, “Associate [assemble] yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces” (Isa 8:9). Thus will it yet be with the enemies of His Church.

But we must now turn to and consider the second reaction of the Canaanites unto the recent conquests of Israel. This is quite different from the former one, and is described in Joshua 9:3-7. Here, we are informed, “And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai, They did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up; And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy. And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us.” In Joshua 10:2, we are told that “Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities... greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty”; nevertheless, they were afraid of Israel. Herein we behold the sovereignty of God: His “terror” (Gen 35:5) fell not upon the kings mentioned in the preceding verses, yet it *did* upon the Gibeonites! Yet God was not acting arbitrarily or capriciously: He had His own wise reasons for making the Gibeonites an exception.

“And when the inhabitants of Gibeon *heard* what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai” (Jos 9:3). This is all of a piece with what is recorded in Joshua 2:9-10, where Rahab had said to the spies, “I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us... For we have *heard* how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.” Here is a further example of the same thing, which serves to demonstrate the consistency and truthfulness of this history. Spiritually considered, it illustrates this principle: that the unbelieving world do not remain in ignorance of the mighty works of God, which renders their unbelief the more inexcusable and adds to their guilt. The miracles of Christ were not wrought in a corner, but openly and publicly, so that even His enemies were obliged to acknowledge the reality of them (Joh 11:47); and Herod, too, was informed of the same (Luk 23:8). The same is true today: both of the providential interpositions of the Most High in the affairs of nations, and the supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit in His elect.

Whenever there is a definite and striking display of the Holy Spirit’s power, some of the unregenerate are impressed and attracted thereby, and seek to join themselves unto the objects of the same. We behold an instance of that in connection with Abraham. He experienced an effectual call from God, which produced a supernatural effect, for it was against nature that he should leave his home, abandon the land of his fathers, and go forth “not knowing whither he went” (Heb 11:8). It was a peculiarly distinctive work of God of which he was made the subject, for the LORD Himself tells us, “I called him *alone*” (Isa 51:2). Nevertheless, we find that both his father and his nephew were so impressed by the change wrought in Abraham and his determination to make a complete break from his old manner of life, that they accompanied him as he left Chaldea (Gen 11:31)—though the former died before Canaan was reached, and the latter was far from happy therein. Likewise, when the children of Israel left Egypt, in order to go unto their inheritance, “a mixed multitude went up also with them” (Exo 12:38), and had an evil influence upon the people of God (Num 11:4). It was the same again when those in captivity availed themselves of the edict of Cyrus, that they might return to Palestine—for after they did so, and the Law of Moses was restored, we read that “they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude” (Neh 13:3)!

In this dual reaction of the Canaanites unto the mighty works which JEHOVAH had wrought in their land—their determining to use force against Israel, and under the pretence of friendship, to seek union with them—we have exemplified the two principal characters assumed by the arch-enemy of God and His people, and the methods employed under them. The devil is depicted in the Scriptures both as the roaring lion and the subtle serpent. As the lion, he uses force and seeks to terrorize; as the serpent, he employs cunning and endeavours to poison and corrupt. In the former character, he acts more openly, and assaults from without; in the latter, he works more secretly, aiming to defile from within. Against our first parents, he appeared as the lying and beguiling serpent; but in employing Cain to murder righteous Abel, we behold the power and cruelty of the lion (1Jo 3:12). Thus it was in connection with what we have here. In stirring up the kings of Canaan to fight with Joshua, Satan was relying upon the use of arms; but in moving the

Gibeonites to cloak their character and pose to be what they were not—so that Israel might be deceived into making a league with them—we behold his craftiness, purposing to introduce his leaven into the meal.

We often point out in these pages that God does not work according to a stereotyped plan, but that infinite variety marks His operations. The same is true, in a lesser degree, of the devil—who is ever a marked imitator. He too acts not uniformly. If one plan or method fails, he always has another in reserve, as the whole history of Christendom has repeatedly demonstrated. He altered his tactics with Christ: first seeking to slay Him while a babe, then almost posing as “an angel of light” (2Co 11:14) when tempting Him, and then, as the dragon of darkness (Luk 22:53), he bruised His heel. So, too, with the followers of the Lord Jesus: first openly and directly persecuting, then flattering and fawning upon, and then corrupting by unholy alliances. The opposition and cruelty of Nero and other Roman emperors failing, the patronage of Constantine, and the making of Christianity the state religion, succeeded in accomplishing Satan’s design; just as centuries later, the spirituality and power of the great Reformation, under Martin Luther (1483-1546), was curtailed when the German princes gave support to it because of the political liberty which it promised them. No wonder the apostle declares that—with the Word of truth in our hands—“we are not ignorant of his [Satan’s] devices” (2Co 2:11); and with the records of the last nineteen centuries before us, there is still less excuse for our being unacquainted with his strategy.

That which is narrated in Joshua 9:3-6, of the dishonest Gibeonites, gives us a typical picture of graceless professors seeking to “join” the people of God. They knew there was no likelihood of their desire being realized if they presented themselves before Israel in their true character, so they resorted to guile in order to deceive them. “They did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors” (verse 4). It must not be overlooked that while Satan is very subtle, *the flesh also* is exceedingly artful, fully capable of playing many parts in order to gain its own ends. Behold how it moved Jacob to cover himself with a hairy skin and masquerade as Esau, king Saul to disguise himself when he went to the witch of Endor (1Sa 28:8), the wife of Jeroboam feigning herself to be another when she visited the prophet Elijah, whose eyes were set by reason of age (1Ki 14:1-6); and the wolves in sheep’s clothing of Christ’s day (Mat 7:15). In his second epistle, Paul warned the Corinthians against “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ” (2Co 11:13); and Jude complained that ungodly men had “crept in unawares” into the assemblies of the saints (Jude :4). The churches are full of such today.

Those Gibeonites posed as “ambassadors”—men not only of peaceful design, but of importance—fitted to enter into an official engagement with Israel and make a covenant with them. Such is the character assumed by thousands of hypocrites who apply for church membership. They pretend to be fully qualified to be taken into fellowship among the LORD’s people, claiming that the peace of God is in their hearts. These Gibeonites pretended to have journeyed from a far country and attired themselves accordingly. They “took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up; And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy” (Jos 9:4-5). Very thorough were they in this work of imposture, well made up for the part they were playing—even in conforming to Israel’s peculiar ways by using “asses” rather than horses. In like manner, empty professors will often go to considerable trouble in their efforts to impose upon the people of God, affecting an outward change in their conduct and laying claim to inward graces which they possess not. They pose as being “poor in spirit” (Mat 5:3), convicted of sin, and hungry for “the bread of life” (Joh 6:35), and prate about their unworthiness.

Not only does this incident point a solemn and urgent warning for the churches of Christ to be much on their prayerful guard against taking hypocrites into their membership, but it also intimates how the individual Christian needs to be aware of his danger in being imposed upon by his *inward enemies*, for his lusts not only assume a great variety of forms, but often pretend to be his friends. He knows, both from Scripture and his own experience, that “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit” (Gal 5:17); but often, he fails to realize that even his corruptions are capable of posing as virtues, and would fain persuade him that they are kindly disposed and have good design toward him. It is not merely that his evil lusts become less active for a season and even appear to be asleep, but that they seem to have undergone a change for the better, and now assume the garb of piety. For example, it is easy for a Christian—if he fails to weigh everything in the balances of the Sanctuary and rigidly test his motives by Holy Writ—to persuade himself that his natural self-will is now a holy zeal for God, or that his impatience is really spiritual earnestness, or that his slothfulness is a holy caution.

The “flesh” or sinful nature takes upon itself many plausible guises; and those carnal enemies which are actually very near to us—yea, a part of our very selves—often pretend to have come from “a far country” (Luk 19:12): that is, from heaven itself, just as the Gibeonites presented themselves before Israel as having come from a great distance. In other words, what we sometimes regard as heavenly graces are nothing but our native corruptions dressed up to deceive us. Particularly is this the case with *mock humility* and lowliness. The Gibeonites appeared not in the attractive apparel of purple and fine linen, but in rags and tatters! Likewise will our very pride take on a deceptively modest appearance and pose. One may, from the teaching of God’s Word, be intellectually convinced of the total depravity of man—yea, be thoroughly persuaded of *his own* sinfulness and unworthiness—without his heart being in the least affected and bowed in contrition before God. He may even imagine that he has made considerable progress in the work of mortifications, and become *complacent* in the belief that he is increasingly “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Ti 2:12)—perceiving not that such complacency is a sure sign that pride is at work.

Oh, how powerful and terrible is the “deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13). If Joshua himself was imposed upon by these hypocritical Canaanites, how carefully and cautiously do we need to carry ourselves, and seek to profit from this incident. Make no mistake here, my reader: the *real* Christian has many “Gibeonites” within his own breast to contend with! In addition to what has been pointed out above, let us add that one may be not only absorbed with his good works, but even *well pleased with* the knowledge and sense which he has of his own corruptions. Truly, “the heart *is* deceitful above all things” (Jer 17:9). Who can know it? Yet, if we be sincere and diligent in examining ourselves, in comparing the workings of our hearts with the searching and holy teachings of God’s Word—daily viewing ourselves in *its* mirror—we shall perceive more of its “wiliness.” True humility is never engaged with itself, still less is it pleased therewith; but rather mourns over its paucity and the constant opposition produced by the workings of pride. True humility delivers from self-importance and self-exaltation, and keeps us from posing as “ambassadors”—wanting to have the pre-eminence.



DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

2. Its Nature and Origin

We concluded our last by affirming that both the context and the Greek require us to understand 2 Peter 1:20 as signifying, “No portion of God’s Word is of human origination.” That is no novel invention of ours. The renowned Puritan, Joseph Caryl (1602-1673), said, “These words show us the authority and original of the Scriptures than the way of their interpretation. The apostle’s scope being to prove that the prophets did not declare their own private opinions, but the mind of God is what they spake; and therefore, the Word of Prophecy, as the apostle adviseth in the previous verse, is to be heeded carefully. The words following in 2 Peter 1:21 lead us to the same sense. The prophets were the interpreters of the mind of God

to the people, and not the messengers of their own minds. The false prophets vended their own dreams and ran of their own hearts before they were sent, therefore, their prophecies *were* of ‘private interpretation’: that is, they opened only that to the people which themselves were the authors of; but so *did not* the true prophets.” So too John Owen (1616-1683) said on the passage: the prophecies of Scripture “were not a fruit of any man’s private conceptions, nor was subject to the wills of men so as to attain it or exercise it by their own ability.” “Peter especially bids us to believe the prophets as the indubitable oracles of God, because they have not emanated from man’s own private suggestions”—John Calvin (1509-1564).

“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2Pe 1:21). Here, unlike 2 Timothy 3:16, the penmen themselves *are* seen. “Penmen” we say, for this statement must not be understood only of the oral utterances of the prophets—for it is made in exemplification of what is said in the preceding verse, where “the scripture” (i.e. the writing) is specifically in view, and is adduced in proof that no part thereof is of human origination. Note well what is postulated of these human instruments, and how completely they were under the control of God. Negatively, no portion of what they uttered or wrote originated from human impulse or issued from human brains. Positively, they acted only as they were acted upon by a divine impulse. The Greek word for “moved” (*pluro*) is a very strong one, and signifies to be “carried” or borne along, as a ship is by the wind! A supernatural inflatus or divine power was put forth upon the human instruments, impelling them to communicate God’s mind. They were carried along by a secret but powerful impulse from above.

Before proceeding farther, let us show that in the Word, the term “prophecy” includes much more than to make known future events, signifying not merely to foretell, but to *forthtell*—to give out a message from God. According to the Scriptural purport and usage, a “prophet” was both the recipient and the deliverer of a message from heaven: whether it was a disclosure of some important truth, the inculcation of an imperative duty, or the revealing of something yet to be. There is no record that Abraham ever made any predictions, yet the LORD declared “he is a *prophet*” (Gen 20:7)—one who was admitted into His secret counsels (Amo 3:7). Still more definitely is the term defined for us in its second occurrence: “And the LORD said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be *thy prophet*” (Exo 7:1), which is explained by, “I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God” (Exo 4:15-16). Moses received the communication from God, transmitted it verbally to his brother, and Aaron was his “prophet” or mouthpiece unto Israel.

The “prophet,” then, was God’s mouthpiece unto man; and whatever he thus uttered was a prophecy or forthtelling. Moses himself is termed a “prophet” (Hos 12:13), because he received free communications from God. David declared, “The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue” (2Sa 23:2): he spoke not what he did from his own spirit or out of his own heart, but as the Spirit gave him utterance. The prophets were not able to prophesy at their own option, but only as they were influenced, empowered, and directed by the Holy Spirit. This was so well known in Israel that Zedekiah the king put this question to Jeremiah: “Is there any word from the LORD?” (Jer 37:17)—knowing full well that God’s servant could say nothing to good purpose, or that could be relied upon as a divine oracle, unless God vouchsafed him a message by His own sovereign pleasure. The Bible, then, is something vastly superior to a book written by unenlightened men, expressing their own genius—namely one by which the living God spoke through and by its writers. In Romans 16:26, the penmen of the New Testament are designated “prophets.” So too the incarnate Word (Deu 18:18), because, as He averred, “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me” (Joh 7:16, and compare Joh 8:28; 12:49-50).

Literally understood, the Greek of 2 Peter 1:21, reads, “For not by [the] will of man was brought at any time prophecy, but by [the] Spirit Holy being borne, spake the holy men of God”—Bagster’s *Interlinear*. “It was *brought*—brought to the prophet as well as to us—nor had a human will, either ours or his, the least agency in that first bringing of it, any more than in the case of the Voice that sounded forth from the excellent glory at the transfiguration, or in that of the sun’s rays”—John Lillie (1812-1867). Those men were merely the instruments employed in delivering to us the Word of God—simply the channels of its transmission. They delivered what they received: nothing more, nothing less, exactly as they received it. They were “holy men” not in the sense of being sinless—a meaning which the term very rarely, if ever, has in Scripture—but as being separated and consecrated to this sacred function, being used of God in His immediate

service. As another has well expressed it, "They spake under the sway of the heavenly Breath, as the organ sounds only under the hand of its master."

When it is said that the prophets spoke or wrote as they were "moved" or "borne along" by the Holy Spirit, we understand that a divine impulse carried them out of—lifted them above—their natural condition, as John was "in the Spirit," and then "heard behind [him] a great voice" (Rev 1:10); and "I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven" (Rev 4:2). They were transported into a higher and entirely spiritual state, losing consciousness of everything except that they were holding direct intercourse with God. Yet this raptured experience neither destroyed nor impaired their natural faculties, for they wrought in accord with their personal characteristics. As grace comes not to annihilate, but to sublimate, the powers of our souls—to quicken, purge, enlighten, energize, and exalt—so the Holy Spirit put forth a supernatural exercise of His power upon those men; yet doing no violence to the workings of their minds, and leaving intact the distinctive peculiarities of each individual. He did not set aside their faculties, but made them the instruments of His working. As J. Calvin expressed it, "He moved, not bereaved them of their mind." Their agency was transferred to the divine sphere, thus securing them from all mistakes.

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb 1:1-2). Here is yet another divine statement which casts light upon the nature or modus of inspiration. It intimates that God also acted sovereignly here, in accordance with His "ways," that diversity and variety mark all His works. He did not act uniformly, but communicated His mind not only piecemeal at intervals, but in many ways. There was indeed a unity of purpose, but not so of means. As to *why* God did not adhere to one mode, but changed it to different persons—and even to the same person at different times—it is not for us to say. So far from the divine revelation being made all at once to one man, it was given in portions of various sizes over a period of many centuries and through dozens of individuals, yet there was a manifest continuity of design and a sustained and superintending power over the whole, which constitutes it "The Holy Bible."

If the Old Testament be read carefully, not a few examples will be found of the "divers manners" in which God vouchsafed to make known His mind to different ones. Sometimes the LORD was pleased to reveal Himself directly and communicate His will by audible voice, as He did unto our first parents, unto Abraham, unto Samuel, and on many occasions unto Moses, as he himself tells us: "And when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubims" (Num 7:89). At other times, He communicated with men indirectly, through an angel, as with the prophet Zechariah (Zec 1:14; 2:3; 4:1; etc.), with Joseph (Mat 1:20), the father of the Baptist (Luk 1:11), and Mary (Luk 1:28); also, while the whole of the Revelation, which God gave unto Jesus Christ, "he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John" (Rev 1:1). Another mode of revelation was by "visions" or representations made to the senses, as in the cases of Isaiah (Isa 6:1-9), Ezekiel (Eze 1:1), and Peter (Act 10:5-20). Often, the LORD made use of supernatural dreams, as with Jacob at Bethel (Gen 28:10-16), and Paul at Troas (Act 16:9). In some instances, the dream was sent to one person, and another was employed to explain it—as Pharaoh and Joseph, and Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel.

Generally, the word of the LORD came to the prophet without previous meditation or study on his part: "suddenly" as in Numbers 12:4, and as when the Spirit seized upon the young king Saul (1Sa 10:10-11), with Amos—"And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel" (Amo 7:15). At times when least expected: "And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came unto the prophet" (1Ki 13:20). In the case of Caiaphas, quite unknown unto himself (Joh 11:51). Usually, the prophet was enabled to understand the purport of what he was made to say; but by no means was this always the case, as is clear from Daniel 12:8, and 1 Peter 1:10-11. Oh, the sovereignty of God! Sometimes the Word of God came to the prophet with intense and irresistible power: "But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I *could not stay*" (Jer 20:9)—but was obliged to deliver the same, however painful to himself or unpalatable to its recipients.

But what is perhaps the most striking feature of all, and one which forcibly exhibits the *uniqueness* of prophecy, is that many were made the mouthpieces and messengers of God *against* their own wills. The case of Balaam is by no means an isolated one: "The LORD put a word in his [Balaam's] mouth," so that he acknowledged, "Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it" (Num 23:5, 16, 20)—as much as he desired to do so. Moses was most reluctant to accept the

divine commission (Exo 3:11; 4:1, 10). The role of prophet was forced upon him—clear proof that his messages were not the products of his own imagination. Isaiah, too, at first demurred at it, feeling his personal unfitness for such an office (Isa 6:5). Jeremiah, though appointed by God before his birth to be a prophet, complained, “Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child” (Jer 1:5-6). When Ezekiel was given a most distasteful message to deliver, he tells us, “I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me” (Eze 3:14), compelling him. We all know how hard Jonah tried to shirk his commission, but unsuccessfully.

It is indeed remarkable to behold how many instances there were of the prophet’s reluctance and opposition, and how faithfully the same is recorded by themselves. It scarcely needs pointing out that each of the examples adduced above supplies a striking illustration and exemplification of the statement that “the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man” (2Pe 1:21). This same phenomenon also serves to demonstrate one of the fundamental differences between the Bible and all the ordinary works of literature: the source of the former is from without; of the latter, from within—the knowledge of the one was divinely imparted; the other, humanly acquired. The prophets expressed ideas altogether distinct from their own origination and comprehension, and often opposed to their own sentiments; whereas all other literary works embody and express the personal views of their authors. All the penmen of the Bible were wholly under the superintendence of God: He possessed their hearts, moved their wills, and regulated their minds and tongues, so that the very words they employed were, in the highest sense, not their own, but His.

We shall now consider more definitely *the extent* of inspiration. Yet in so doing, we shall not, strictly speaking, be turning to a different branch of our subject, but rather providing fuller explanation and exemplification of what has already been before us. The *fact* of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures really defines its *scope*: for since “scripture” means “writing,” and writing is made up of letters and words, then it plainly and necessarily follows that the Scriptures are *verbally* inspired. Nor is this a mere academical question or theological dogma, but rather, a matter of great practical importance. Surely, it deeply concerns us to know exactly what measure of reliance should be placed upon the actual *words* used by the sacred writers: whether implicit credit is to be given to every utterance, or whether we are at liberty to regard some statements as being merely their own personal views, and (for example) summarily reject “Let your women keep silence in the churches” (1Co 14:34) by affirming, “Oh, that was only Paul’s idea.” Once it is clearly apprehended that inspiration respects *the matter* of Scripture and not the men who wrote it, the issue is clearly drawn: it is either full and verbal inspiration, or none at all! It is entirely a matter of *divine testimony*, which we must submissively receive, or impiously refuse.

There is no middle ground. We either take 2 Timothy 3:16 at its face value—without qualification and equivocation—or spurn it as an imposture. There is no other alternative: either the Bible is a fraud, the word of man, or “as it is in truth, the word of God” (1Th 2:13). Since divine inspiration is predicated not of the human instruments, but of what was transmitted through and by them, there can be no question of varying kinds and degrees of inspiration. It had not for its objects the penmen who were soon to pass away, but their *books*, which were destined to reveal from age to age the counsels of God unto the world. Inspiration covers every part of Scripture equally—both in substance and form—so that the whole is the very “Word of God.” Its express design was to communicate truth to us in an infallible manner, so that no error intermingled therewith; that the Holy Spirit determined every “jot” and “tittle” (Mat 5:18; Luk 16:17) recorded by His scribes. As an ancient writer well expressed it, “Whatsoever God willed that we should read either of His doings or sayings, that He commissioned His agents to write, as if their hands had been His own hands.” The absolute needs-be for such appears plainly in what we transcribe below.

“They behoved to have this full inspiration in order to recite, without any error, facts inaccessible to man’s knowledge: the creation of the universe, the extrication of chaos, the birth of light, the rise of the mountains, the intervention of angels, God’s secret counsels, the thoughts of man’s heart and his secret faults. But they specially behoved to have it in order that they might prefigure Christ by a thousand types unperceived by the writer himself, and thus exhibit even in their narratives of the past the character of the Messiah, His sufferings, His death, and the glories that were to follow. It was necessary for them, in order that they might speak in a suitable manner of those events even that were known to them: to pass over some in silence, to relate others, to characterize them, to judge them; and thus, to show in them the thought of God. But it was above all necessary for enabling them to describe in the just measure prescribed by that thought of God and by the needs of the future Church: the scenes—whether national or domestic—which behoved them to carry along with them the types of the work of redemption, to prefigure the last times, and

to take in a vast sweep of thousands of years posterior to them. They required it for the purpose of determining the measure of what they might confide to their readers, and what they should withhold; for the discreet use of their expressions, and for that admirable restraint upon themselves which they have uniformly preserved"—François Samuel Robert Louis Gausson (1790-1863).

Whatever difficulty the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures may appear to involve in connection with the free agency of their penmen and the stamp of their own individuality being upon their several books—and which of the divine operations is free of difficulty to *our* finite and feeble comprehension?—they are as nothing in comparison with those involved in their non-inspiration, or even their partial. Had the human writers been left to themselves in any measure, we could have no certainty of the absolute reliability of what they wrote. The very best of human productions are marred by defects; and it was as truly a miracle for God to communicate His Word to us through human media—*without* it partaking of any of its infirmities—as it was for Him to cause the fingers of a man's hand to come forth from the wall of Babylon's palace—and *without* any human mind to direct it—to write those fatal words, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting" (Dan 5:27). How simple, then, for Him to direct the intelligence and pious pen of an apostle to transmit to us His message! That He *has* done so, the Scriptures affirm; that He *must* have done so is obvious—"The law of the LORD is *perfect*" (Psa 19:7), which could not have been the case had anything in it been left to man.

While we must insist that all Scripture is God-breathed, yet, that fact does not oblige us to draw the conclusion that the channels He used were mere ciphers in its communication. Though the Holy Spirit moved them to write precisely as they did, He neither prevented nor wholly set aside the use of their natural faculties. That is evident from the obvious variety of styles which is seen in the different books they penned—styles which can sometimes be clearly identified with the education and spiritual maturity of the writers. Nevertheless, the Spirit so operated in and through their faculties that every sentence which they wrote was an exact transcription of *His* mind. A very beautiful expression is used in the margin of Judges 6:34, which we believe casts light on the point now before us: "The Spirit of the LORD *came upon* [clothed Himself with] Gideon." It must also be borne in mind that, though it pleased God that neither the mental calibres, nor the individual characters of the men He used should be hidden, yet both their natural endowments and spiritual capacities were given to them by Himself—given to serve this very end, that each instrument was fitted by Him and made suitable for the task in view. As the LORD used those whom He had specially qualified to make the garments of Israel's high priest (Exo 28:3), and those whom He filled with wisdom and understanding to fashion the holy vessels of the tabernacle (Exo 35:30-35), so He equipped Paul to be a fit instrument to write the epistle to the Romans, and John to compose epistles on brotherly love.



EVANGELICAL OBEDIENCE

This article is intended to be the sequel to those which have recently appeared under the title of "Glorious Sinai." It is designed chiefly for the enlightenment and comfort of those of God's people who are deeply exercised over their own obedience, and are often cast down by the defectiveness of the same. There is a real need for a Scriptural opening-up of this subject, for there are very few pulpits today—even in the most orthodox circles—where anything clear and definite is given out thereon; in fact, we doubt if half of our readers have ever heard or read the term, "evangelical obedience." It is also a subject which needs the most careful handling; and if a comparative "novice" attempts to deal with it, he is likely to do more harm than good. The difficulty involved in it is to maintain on the one hand the high and holy standard of obedience, which God has set before us in His Word; and to show on the other, the gracious provision which He

has made for the relief of those who honestly endeavour, yet sadly fail, to measure up to that standard. The path between the two is a narrow one.

No matter how cautiously one may deal with this theme, if he is to be of any service to the real people of God, his efforts are sure to be put to a wrong and evil use by hypocrites, for they will “wrest [it], as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2Pe 3:16). Such is the perversity of human nature. When a discriminating sermon is preached—the particular design of which is to draw a clear line of demarcation between genuine and nominal Christians, and to “take forth the precious from the vile” (Jer 15:19)—the graceless professor will *refuse* to make application of the same and examine his own heart and life in the light thereof; whereas the possessor of divine life is only too apt to draw a wrong deduction and deem himself to be numbered among the spiritually dead. Contrariwise, if the message be one of comfort to God’s little ones, while too many of them are afraid to receive it, others who are not entitled will misappropriate it unto themselves. But let not a realization of these things prevent the minister of the Gospel from discharging his duty; and while being careful not to cast the children’s bread unto the dogs, yet the presence of such is not to deter him from setting before the children their legitimate portion.

Before developing our theme, we will define our terms: “Evangelical obedience” is obviously the opposite of *legal*, and that is of two sorts. First, the flawless and constant conformity unto His revealed will—which God required from Adam, and which He still demands from all who are under the Covenant of Works—for though man has lost his power to perform, God has not relinquished His right to insist upon what is His just due. Second, the obedience of unregenerate formalists, which is unacceptable unto God—not only because it is full of defects, but because it issues from a natural principle—is not done in faith, and is rendered in a mercenary spirit, and therefore consists of “dead works” (Heb 6:1; 9:14). Evangelical is also to be distinguished from *imputed* obedience. It is blessedly true that when they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God reckons to the account of all the subjects of the Covenant of Grace the perfect obedience of their Surety, so that He pronounces them justified, or possessed of that righteousness which the Law requires. Yet *that* is not the only obedience which characterizes the redeemed. They now *personally* regulate their lives by God’s commands and walk in the way of His precepts; and though their performances have many blemishes in them (as they are well aware), yet God is pleased for Christ’s sake to accept the same.

It should need no long and laborious argument to demonstrate that God must require obedience—full and hearty obedience—from every rational agent, for only thus does He enforce His moral government over the same. The one who is indebted to God for his being and sustenance is obviously under binding obligations to love Him with all his heart, serve Him with all might, and seek to glorify Him in all that he does. For God to issue commands is for Him to impose His authority on the one He has made; and for him to comply is but to acknowledge his creaturehood and render that submission which becomes such. It is as the Lawgiver that God maintains His sovereignty; and it is by our obedience that we acknowledge the same. Accordingly, we find that upon the day of his creation, Adam was placed under Law, and his continued prosperity was made dependent upon his conformity thereto. In like manner, when the LORD took the nation of Israel into covenant relationship with Himself, He personally made known His laws unto them and the sanctions attached thereto.

There are no exceptions to what has just been pointed out. The inhabitants of heaven, equally with those of earth, are required to be in subjection to their Maker. Of the angels, it is said they “do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word” (Psa 103:20). When His own Son became incarnate and assumed creature form, He too entered the place of obedience and became subservient to God’s will. Thus it is with His redeemed. So far from the subjects of the Covenant of Grace being released from submission to the divine Law, they are under additional obligations to render a joyful and unqualified obedience to it: “Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently” (Psa 119:4). Upon which Thomas Manton (1620-1677) said, “Unless you mean to renounce the sovereign majesty of God, and put Him besides the throne, and break out into open rebellion against Him, you must do what He has commanded. ‘Charge them that are rich in this world’ (1Ti 6:17)—not only *advise*, but *charge* them!” Christ is Lord, as well as Saviour; and we value Him not as the latter, unless we honour Him as the former (Joh 13:13).

Not only does God require obedience, but an obedience which issues from, is animated by, and is an expression of, *love*. At the very heart of the divine Decalogue are the words: “And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Exo 20:6). While there must be respect for

His authority, unless there is also a sense of God's goodness, and an outgoing of the affections unto Him because of His excellency, there can be no hearty and acceptable obedience. The severest self-denials and the most lavish gifts are of no value in God's esteem, unless they are prompted by love. The inseparability of love and obedience was made plain by Christ when He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Joh 14:15). "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (Joh 14:21). "If a man love me, he will keep my words" (Joh 14:23). Likewise taught His apostles: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1Jo 5:3). "Love is the fulfilling [not a substitute for, still less the abnegation] of the law" (Rom 13:10), for it inspires its performance.

To proceed one step farther: God has graciously promised to work obedience in His people: "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Eze 36:27)—He would not only point out the way, but move them to go therein; not force by external violence, but induce by an inward principle. "They all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them" (Eze 37:24). Christ makes them "willing in the day of [His] power" (Psalm 110:3) that He should rule over them, and then directs them by the scepter of His righteousness. Under the new covenant, God has engaged Himself to create in His people, by regenerating grace, a disposition which will find the spirituality and holiness of His requirements congenial unto it: "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb 8:10)—I will bestow upon them a new nature which will incite unto obedience and cause them to delight in My Law after the inward man. Herein lies a part of their essential conformity unto Christ: "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psa 40:8).

In accordance with those promises, we find that in the ministry of Christ, two things were outstandingly prominent: His enforcement of the claims of God's righteousness, and His proclamation of divine grace unto those who felt their deep need. Matthew 5:17-20, 19:16-21, and 22:36-40, exemplify the former; Matthew 11:4-6, 28-30, 15:30-31, Luke 23:42-43, and John 4:10, illustrate the latter. The Son of God came not to this earth in order to open a door unto self-pleasing and loose living, but rather to maintain God's holiness and make it possible for fallen creatures to live a holy life. Christ came here not only as a Saviour, but as a Lawgiver (Deu 18:18-19) and "to be ruler in Israel" (Mic 5:2); and therefore, He is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey* him" (Heb 5:9). His mission had for its design not to lessen God's authority or man's responsibility, but to put His people into a greater capacity for serving God. Hence, we find Him saying to His disciples, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Joh 15:14); and when commissioning His servants, He bade them teach believers "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Mat 28:20).

Love to God and our neighbour is indeed the great duty enjoined by Law (Deu 6:5; Lev 19:18) and Gospel alike (Gal 5:13-14); yet it is a love which manifests itself by a hearty obedience (2Jo :6). Though Christ delivers from the curse of the Law, yet not from its precepts: "That we being delivered out of the hand of our [spiritual] enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (Luk 1:74-75). Every privilege of the Gospel entails an added obligation upon its recipient. As creatures, it is our bounden duty to be in entire subjection to our Creator; as new creatures in Christ, it doubly behoves us to serve God cheerfully. It is a great mistake to suppose that grace sets aside the claims of righteousness, or that the Law of God demands less from the saved than it does from the unsaved. Nowhere are the high demands of God set forth more fully and forcibly than in the epistles addressed to the saints. Take these as samples: "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1Pe 1:15); "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:10).

But right here, a formidable difficulty presents itself. On the one hand, the renewed soul clearly perceives the necessity and propriety of such a standard being set before him, and cordially acquiesces therein; yet on the other hand, he has to acknowledge, "to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom 7:18). Though it is his deepest longing to measure up fully to the divine standard, yet he is incapable of doing so; and though he cries earnestly unto God for enabling grace and unquestionably receives no little assistance from Him, yet at the close of this life, his desire remains far from being realized. Now the healthy Christian is deeply exercised over this, and instead of excusing his failures cries, "O that my ways *were* directed to keep thy statutes!" (Psa 119:5). But that is only half of the problem, and the least difficult half at that. The other half is, How is it possible for a holy God to accept and approve of imperfect obedience from His children? That He will not lower His standard to the level of their infirmities

is clear from the passages quoted above; yet that He *does* both graciously receive and reward their faulty performances is equally plain from other verses.

In what has just been stated, we discover one of the fundamental differences between the Covenants of Works and Grace. Under the former, a rigorous and inflexible demand was made for perfect and perpetual conformity to God's Law, and no allowance or relief was afforded for the slightest infraction of it. A single default, the least failure, was reckoned guilty of breaking all the commandments (Jam 2:10)—for not only are they, like so many links in the same chain, a strict unit, but the authority of the Lawgiver behind them was flouted. Nor was any provision made for the recovery of such a one. The constitution under which the first man—and the whole human race in him—was placed was without any mediator or sacrifice; and no matter how deep his remorse, or what resolutions of amendment he made, the transgressor lay under the inexorable sentence: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Eze 18:4, 20), for God will by no means clear the guilty. Moreover, under the first covenant, God provided no special grace to enable its subjects to meet His requirements. He made man in His own image, and pronounced him "very good," and then left him to his native and created strength. Finally, under that covenant, man was required to yield obedience in order to his justification—for upon his compliance, he was entitled unto a reward.

Now under the Covenant of Grace, everything is the very opposite of that which obtained under the Covenant of Works. Complete subordination to the divine will is indeed required of us, yet not in order to our justification before—and acceptance with—God. Instead, the moment we believe on the Lord Jesus and place our whole dependence on the sufficiency of His sacrifice, His perfect obedience is reckoned to our account; and God pronounces us righteous in the high court of heaven, and we are entitled to the reward of His Law. Consequently, our subsequent obedience is rendered neither under threat of damnation nor from a mercenary spirit, but out of gratitude for our deliverance from the wrath to come, and because of our acceptance in the Beloved. Nor are we left to our own strength, or rather, weakness. God does not barely command us, and then leave us to ourselves; but "worketh in [us] both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phi 2:13), He communicates to us His blessed Spirit and makes available that fullness of grace and truth which there is in Christ our Head—for He is not only a Head of authority, but also of efficacious influence: "From whom the whole body [the Church] fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part" (Eph 4:16).

What is yet more to the point in connection with our immediate subject, under the New Covenant, provision *has been made* for the failures of its subjects. God does not reject their obedience because it is faulty, but graciously accepts the same when it is prompted by submission to His authority, is performed by faith, is urged by love, and is done with sincerity of purpose and endeavour. Sin has disabled from an exact keeping of God's commandments, but He approves of what issues from an upright heart and which unfeignedly seeks to please Him. We are bidden to "have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably [not flawlessly!] with reverence and godly fear" (Heb 12:28). While God still justly requires from us a perfect and perpetual obedience, nevertheless, He is graciously pleased to receive and own genuine efforts to conform to His will. He does so because of the merits of Christ and His continued mediation on our behalf. Having accepted our persons, He also accepts our love-offerings—note the order in Genesis 4:4. We present spiritual sacrifices unto Him, and they are "acceptable to God *by Jesus Christ*" (1Pe 2:5).

That we are here propounding no new and dangerous error will be seen from the following quotations: "Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works are also accepted in Him: not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unreprieveable in God's sight, but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, though accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections"—The Westminster Confession of Faith. "I call it Gospel obedience, not that it differs in *substance* from that required by the Law, which enjoins us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, but that it moves upon *principles*, and is carried on unto *ends*, revealed only in the Gospel"—John Owen (1616-1683). According to the modification of the new covenant, "God, out of His love and mercy in Christ Jesus, accepts of such a measure of love and obedience as answereth to the measure of sanctification received"—T. Manton.

Though the above quotations are far from being divinely inspired—and therefore, are without any binding authority upon the children of God—nevertheless, they are from men who were deeply taught and much used by the Holy Spirit, and thus, are deserving of our serious and prayerful attention. While the Christian is forbidden to call any man "father," that is far from signifying that he should despise such teachers. There is no Antinomian laxity in the above citations, but a holy balance such as is scarcely ever

found in the ministry of our day. We urge a careful re-reading of them, ere turning to the second and concluding part of this article in the December issue.

