

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

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FORGETTING

What a wonderful thing is the memory—one of the many precious faculties with which the Creator has endowed us. By it we are enabled to live the past over again in our minds, to revive the early experiences of childhood, to recall the words of those who are no longer with us. By it we may review the Lord's dealings with us in grace and in providence, call back to mind His interventions on our behalf, delivering us when in straits or rejoicing our hearts while He talked with us by the way. By it we can turn over the pages of our chequered lives and read what is recorded both for and against us. Memory is the power of retention, the storehouse in which all our knowledge is preserved. It is not possible to assess its value in silver and gold. How much poorer should we be if everything were erased from its tablets! One of the greatest tragedies of life is for a person to lose his mind and memory. It is indeed hard to part with any, but, if compelled to make the choice, probably most of us would rather be deprived of our limbs, our hearing, or even our sight, than our mentality—yet comparatively few cultivate and use it as they should.

The memory is indeed of vast importance, for it is the treasurer of the soul: what the understanding takes in, the memory stores up. Knowledge, intellectual growth, social fellowship, the spiritual life, all have their roots in this faculty of retention. But this invaluable gift, like all others, entails a corresponding obligation. Each talent that God has bestowed upon us is for *use*, and if it be not employed it will deteriorate. As limbs unexercised become stiff and muscles flabby, so an unused memory becomes enfeebled. The memory may be developed and controlled—though time and trouble are required for them, as for everything else of worth. Memory is largely a matter of volition: said the Psalmist, “*I will not forget thy word*” (119:16). Definiteness of purpose is required, whether we shall recall a thing or dismiss it from our minds. Remembering is a setting knowledge awork, reviewing the notions and impressions we have received, by exercising our thoughts about and meditating upon them. The seat of the memory is the heart: of Mary it is said that she kept all these things “in her heart” (Luk 2:19, 51)—things kept *there* are never lost.

This leads us to point out that there is both a notional or speculative remembering and a practical or influential one. The former is where we barely think of things and receive no profit or benefit from them. The latter is where the mind is so engaged with the object recalled that the affections are fired and the will moved by it. Thus the faculty of memory is given us by God as a means unto an end to be a help in promoting *piety*. The Scriptures abound with exhortations to remembrance. At the fore of them, we would place that one where those of tender years are bidden, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not” (Ecc 12:1)—bear in mind that, since He be your Maker, He is therefore your rightful Lord and Owner, so carry yourself toward Him as such, rendering unto Him the homage and honour that are His due. Meditate much upon His glorious perfections, call Him to mind constantly while your heart is yet impressionable and habits for good or evil are being formed for life; and thereby you will be fortified against the temptations of youth. All of men's wickedness and misery comes through forgetting God, hence the warning, “Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God” (Deu 8:11).

“They soon forgat his works” (Psa 107:13), so superficially were they affected by them. Pathetic and tragic statement! Of whom was it made? Of the heathen? No, of His own highly favoured people, Israel. They had witnessed Jehovah's mighty power in the plagues upon Egypt. They had themselves been the immediate objects and beneficiaries of the operations of His hand, delivering them from the house of bondage. They had again beheld His intervention for them by miraculously opening a way through the Red Sea and then causing its waters to close over Pharaoh and his hosts. Seemingly, their hearts had been deeply impressed on that occasion, for they had raised a song of acknowledgment and praise unto the Lord for what He had wrought for them—yet mark the sad sequel. Those signal interpositions of God ceased to engage their thoughts; the benefits and blessings of which they had been the partakers, no longer moved them. Nor was it only after an interval of years that those gracious actings of the Lord faded from their minds, but “they *soon* forgat his works.” Base ingratitude! Not only so; instead of thankful recollections, they broke forth in murmurings, saying to Moses and Aaron, “ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill the whole assembly with hunger” (Exo 16:2-3).

So it has been in all ages. The first man soon forgot the One who gave him such an excellent being and had entered into solemn covenant with him, allowing the allurements of the serpent and the solicitation of his wife to drive all holy considerations from his mind. How quickly did Noah forget his wonderful salvation from the fatal deluge, no sooner spared from water than he was drowned in wine. How soon did Lot

forget his rescue from Sodom and fall into the fire of lust. How quickly did David forget the Lord's delivering him from Saul, and fall into the sins of adultery and murder. How soon did Solomon forget the One who had appeared unto him thrice, turning unto false gods and committing the terrible sin of idolatry. Of the ten lepers who were healed by Christ, all but one forgot to return and give thanks unto God. Even the apostles quickly forgot the miracles of the loaves (Mat 16:9-10). And these things, my reader, have been recorded for *our* learning and warning, for us to take to heart and turn into earnest prayer—that we may be kept from such God-dishonouring conduct, for we are men "subject to like passions" (Jam 5:17).

Not only is the Lord grievously slighted by our forgetfulness of Him, but we ourselves are greatly the losers. As God declared of old through His prophet, "My people hath been lost sheep...they have *forgotten* their restingplace" (Jer 50:6). As the Lord is the only true refuge for the soul, so He alone is its resting-place. Consequently, when He is not in our thoughts, not only are we exposed to danger, but we are given up to a spirit of unrest and disquietude. There can be no joy in communion, no delight in His service, no calm and cheerful subjection to His will when God is forgotten. There can be no strength for the performance of duty, no calm facing of our problems, no courage to enter into conflict with the enemy, unless the sufficiency and fidelity of God be the heart's stay, and the remembrance of His past mercies and deliverances and His present promises be much in our thoughts. Instead, we become like "lost sheep"—pastureless, wretched, an easy prey for the wolves all around us. It is by keeping fresh in our minds how graciously the Lord dealt with us yesterday, how unfailingly He supplied our every need, that faith is strengthened and hope stimulated today. Forget not answered prayers as you ply the throne of grace afresh.

The reasons for our sinful forgetfulness of God are not hard to discover. *First*, it issues from the universal depravation of our nature. No part of man's complex being escaped serious injury when he apostatized from God, his intellect suffered seriously. Fearful indeed have been the effects of the Eden tragedy, chief of which is that the natural man likes not to retain God in his thoughts (Rom 1:28). *Second*, it flows from the little esteem in which we hold the wondrous works of God. The works of the creature are admired, but those of the Creator are slighted. Let a person be desperately ill and then be restored under the ministrations of a doctor, and he will be praised to the skies—while the great Physician will scarcely be thanked at all. *Third*, it results from the mind's being so stuffed with other things. It was thus when the Son of God appeared: the inn was so crowded, they laid Him in a manger. The minds of God's people are so crammed with the things of this world that there is little room for spiritual objects. *Finally*, it is because the gracious actings of God make such slight impressions upon us. When the seed fails to penetrate the surface of the earth, the fowls quickly snatch it away. Things not cherished and meditated upon are soon forgotten.

Grievous as is the sin of forgetting God, a much greater crime is it when we are guilty of attributing the same failure unto Him; yet what reader of these lines can truthfully aver¹ that he has never done so? Even the Psalmist, in a fit of dejection, asked, "Hath the LORD forgotten to be gracious?" (77:9). What a woeful word to fall from the lips of a renewed person! Even though divine mercy has preserved you from such a grievous utterance, has not the wicked idea been entertained in your mind? Oh, what vile creatures we are! God can no more cease to be gracious unto His children than He can cease to *be*. It is because we give way to unbelief and judge the Lord by sense that such a concept is allowed a place in our hearts. He waits to be gracious (Isa 30:18)—till *we* are ready, till we come to the end of our resources. The vessel must be empty before He pours in His favours. His time is now; it is you who are not prepared for His blessing!



¹ **aver** – assert as a fact.

EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

11. Sin Denied (1:8, 10)

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

We have linked together these two verses because they are so similar in their substance—giving a separate treatment of verse 9 in the next chapter. Each of them opens with the words “If we say,” which indicates that it is the testing of Christian profession that is in view. In the second half of this chapter, John is very discriminating. All through its last five verses and the first two of the following one (which complete this section), we behold the apostle distinguishing sharply between the wheat and the tares, or separating the good fish from the bad ones (Mat 13:24-30, 47-48)—in each instance dealing first with the latter. Those referred to in 1 John 1:6, 8, 10, are guilty of making an empty boast and are expressly charged with falsehood. Over against them are placed genuine Christians, their characteristic marks being described and their peculiar privileges and portions named: they walk in the light, confess their sins, have an Advocate with the Father. The careful reader will observe the absence of the word “say” in 1:7, 9, and 2:1, because therein he was not exposing a worthless claim, but delineating the features of those who actually enjoyed fellowship with God.

What has been pointed out above at once serves to refute superficial students of this epistle who have complained that the apostle followed not so orderly a method as Paul was wont to do. The structure of his opening chapter contains clear evidence that he wrote according to a definite plan and expressed his thoughts regularly and logically. The above paragraph also illustrates two features that are quite prominent in this epistle. *First*, John's habit of drawing sharp contrasts: 1:6-7; 1:8-9—seen again in 2:3-4; 2:7-8; 3:8-9. *Second*, his fondness for combining triplicates of objects, as the three different classes of graceless professors described in 1:6, 8, 10. That is the first of several triads. For example, in 2:13, he divides the children of God into three grades—fathers, young men, little children. In 2:16, he makes the world to consist of “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” Three references are made to the “antichrist”: 2:18, 22; 4:3, and three to “overcoming”: 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:4. In 5:7, mention is made of the “Three that bear record in heaven,” and in 5:8, of the three “that bear witness in earth.”

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (verse 8).

Five things in connection with this verse claim our best attention. First, its connection. Second, its comprehensiveness. Third, its proud boast. Fourth, its divine diagnosis. Fifth, its solemn verdict.

Its connection

In view of what is affirmed in the verse immediately preceding, the avowal made at the beginning of the present one appears logically and necessarily to follow. If those who walk in the light as God is in the light have fellowship with Him and He with them, and if the blood of Jesus Christ His Son “cleanseth them from all sin” (1Jo 1:7), it is to be expected that they would say “we have no sin.” Had verse 7 stood alone, that is the only conclusion that could be drawn. Let those who are so fond of repeating that “Scripture says what it means and means what it says” give due weight to this consideration: that in those two verses the same term “sin” is used, but with two very different shades of meaning, and that, unless the distinction here drawn be clearly apprehended by the Lord's people, they are in real danger of misunderstanding what is so plainly declared at the close of verse 7. By noting the connection between the two verses, we perceive how the Holy Spirit in verse 8 guards us against drawing a wrong inference from verse 7, and how that the latter statement serves to fix the precise signification of the former: that the believer is cleansed from all sin judicially, but not so inherently.

“While the apostle insisted on the necessity of an habitual holy walk, as the effect and evidence of the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus and of communion with Him, he guarded, with equal care, against the

opposite error of self-righteousness and pride” (T. Scott).² Therein we have a striking example—and one which every preacher should most diligently heed—of how careful the blessed Spirit ever is to preserve the balance of truth, and to prevent us drawing a false conclusion from one aspect of it, by failing to supplement the same by bringing in its complementary aspect. To acquit the consciences of the saints of all sin and guilt on Gospel grounds—and thereby raise up their minds to such conceptions of the virtue and efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ as will encourage them to hold communion with the Father in the clear and full apprehension that the blood of His Son cleanseth the believer from all sin—is one of the most blessed and important works in which His servant can engage. Yet it is also his duty to remind them that the blood of the Lamb has not cleansed their unholy natures or made them pure from sin. Instead, though their hearts are sprinkled from an evil conscience, and they have liberty to enter the holiest by the blood of Christ, nevertheless, the inherency of sin is not yet taken away.

By linking together verses 7 and 8, we perceive that the apostle would have his Christian readers learn how to distinguish sharply between what they were in Christ and what they still were in and of themselves. The blood of Christ is the believer’s everlasting purity in the eyes of divine justice. By it he is completely cleansed from every spot and stain of sin. His purity in the sight of God’s Law is such as cannot be fully conceived by any of us, for not only was the whole of the Christian’s pollution removed when Christ was made sin for him, but he is made “the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21), the perfect obedience of his Surety³ being reckoned to his account. Nevertheless, neither his guilt being charged to the Lord Jesus, nor the imputation unto him of the merits of His finished work, has removed the inherency of sin out of him. His old evil nature still remains within him—unchanged, filthy, vile, with “no good thing” dwelling therein (Rom 7:18). That which we inherited from our first parents, which was a part of us at our birth, still defiles every member of our complex beings, and does so unto the very last moment of our earthly history; yet that in no wise contradicts or even qualifies the blessed fact that “the blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

As one with Adam, both federally and seminally, we have derived from him the total depravation of our whole persons. In consequence thereof, we are “born like a wild ass’s colt” (Job 11:12)—stupid and intractable. By birth we are “all as an unclean thing,” and consequently “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6). His inbred corruptions continue to be the Christian’s plague of heart (1Ki 8:38) so long as he be left in this world. These are very humiliating facts, the consideration whereof ought at all times to humble us before the Lord. So far as our carnal nature be concerned, we are always one and the same, though indwelling sin is more manifest at some times than others. That should teach us to look outside of ourselves for our present and eternal purity before God. There is no other way of getting above the influences and effects of our natural depravity than by having our spiritual minds engaged in real fellowship with God, and in true apprehension of what is contained in the precious and efficacious remedy which His grace has provided. Nothing will so relieve the heart when oppressed by a sense of our vileness as believing views of what we are in Christ: “complete in him” (Col 2:10), “perfected for ever” (Heb 10:14).

It might naturally be supposed that walking in the light and enjoying fellowship with the Holy One will exert a cleansing effect upon our natures. Not so; it leaves “the flesh” unchanged. Yet many cherish the idea that if only they walked more fully in the light, and had closer and more constant fellowship with God, the flesh would cease opposing the spirit. And again we say: Not so, though in such a case they would be more delivered from fulfilling its lusts (Gal 5:16). It is obvious, then, that one gracious design of the Holy Spirit in the verse before us is to comfort distressed believers, who are so apt to think that their own grievous case is such as none but themselves have any experience of—the more so if they listen to the glowing “testimonies” of certain ones, for fear is then awakened that they are strangers to the supernatural and saving operations of divine grace. When beholding the cheerful countenance and exuberant spirit of some of their fellows, they are perhaps ready to conclude that they are yet in the bond of iniquity. But appearances are proverbially deceptive. Many a smiling face conceals a heavy heart. While the heart knows its own bitterness, it is not privy to the groans of others, who, in secret, frequently have occasion to cry, “Oh, wretched man that I am” (Rom 7:24).

² **Thomas Scott** (1747-1821) – Anglican minister, born in Lincolnshire, England. He served for some years as parish priest before conversion during correspondence and mentoring from John Newton (1725-1807). He is best known for his *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, his autobiography *The Force of Truth*, and being a founder of the Church Missionary Society.

³ **Surety** – one who assures the fulfillment of something; a guarantor.

Its comprehensiveness

Look now at the comprehensiveness of this statement. It is not “if ye,” but “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.” By that word John included himself and his fellow apostles, just as he had all through the foregoing verse. He did so with the design of showing that the predication here made is one which admits of no exception. No matter who be the person that affirms he has no sin, he is utterly deceived. Not even the eleven, who were favoured above all other believers; nay, not the very one who was privileged to recline on the Saviour’s bosom could truthfully aver that he was all pure within. See here the omniscience of God, with His foreview of the future, guiding His servant’s pen to use the pronoun “we” rather than “ye”! Undoubtedly the Holy Spirit was anticipating the fact that there would arise those of apparently exceptional piety and attainments who would lay claim to this very thing, and therefore He here cautions the children of God to give no heed unto their arrogant and absurd assertion, assuring us that all such are deluded souls.

Listen attentively, my sin-harassed and distressed brother, to the language that John here employs, as he (by necessary implication) declares that I myself, and my fellow apostles, have sin within us. Mark how he is pointing out that your sad case is far from being unique; as he indirectly affirms, we too are but sinners saved by grace, and still have the root and seeds of all evil within us. Yet, on the other hand, observe well that he did not say they were under sin or that sin reigned in and over them. He could not say that of any of the regenerate, though to their senses there are times when such seems to be the case. No, sin is in them, and is ever more or less active, yet it does not have complete dominion over them—such a thing would be utterly incompatible with the state into which the saints are brought by the new birth, when, being made new creatures in Christ, they are freed from their former slavery and fitted to walk in newness of life; though, alas, they often fail to live up to their privileges.

It is indeed the sincere desire and endeavour of every real child of God to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing and be fruitful in every good work (Col 1:10), but to eradicate his carnal nature is altogether beyond him: “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” (Pro 20:9). But cannot the grace of God effect sinless perfection? “There is no channel for such a grace to run in, no promise in all the Word of God to bottom such a persuasion upon. There is a promise for the subduing of iniquity, but not for the annihilating of it; a promise that sin shall not reign in us, but none that it shall not be. Therefore, the believer would not seek for that in himself which is found only in Christ, nor for that on earth which is reserved for heaven” (E. Polhill, 1675). God leaves sin in His people to wean them from self-love and self-righteousness, and to develop in them the grace of perseverance, through oppositions and temptations from within and without. His power is rendered the more evident in preserving the plant of holiness in a heart so filled with noxious weeds. He would conform them to Christ’s sufferings: as He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, so they endure the contradiction of sin against themselves. The compassion of our great High Priest is demonstrated in bearing with our infirmities.

“*If we say that we have no sin.*” Such an arrogant assertion goes much farther than saying we commit no sin. It is a declaration that they are without the root from which all evil fruits proceed: that their very nature is undefiled, clean. It seems almost incredible, yet there are those who make the audacious boast of moral perfection, that their hearts are holy, and that all their desires are regular. They are so puffed up with the conceit of their own attainments as to declare themselves to be as immaculate in heart and holy in life as the Law of God requires. They aver themselves to be so “entirely sanctified” that their “old man” has been wholly purged and purified. So imbued are they by a spirit of vainglory that such people profess to be without sin internally or externally, spotless in thought, word and deed, faultless before God and man. That such a preposterous boast should be made by the heathen Gnostics⁴ is, in measure, understandable, but that it is made by any professing Christians only shows the awful deceitfulness of sin and the blinding power of pride.

“*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,*” or “err ourselves”—not in the doctrinal but the ethical sense, for their state is far more serious than if only intellectual ignorance were involved, being like unto that of those of whom it was said “they do always err in their hearts” (Heb 3:10). They have so imposed on themselves as to be utterly led astray, regarding darkness as light. Such is the divine diagnosis here made of their condition: the omniscient Physician declares them to be most awfully deluded. Imagin-

⁴ **Gnostics** – (from Greek *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge”) a group of 2nd and 3rd century heresies that taught escape from the material world through gaining secret knowledge.

ing themselves to be the excellent of the earth, they are in reality a stench in God's nostrils, for nothing is so abhorrent to Him as pride. So far from being holier than the rank and file of believers, they are in total spiritual darkness, for they have never seen themselves in God's light or had an experiential discovery made to them of the depravity of their hearts. What is here in view is not deliberate hypocrisy, but a species of self-imposition, and such a state is well-nigh hopeless, for this is the most fatal of all forms of deception.

"And the truth is not in us" is the divine verdict. It is contrary to Scripture, to universal experience, to the confession of every saint recorded in the Word, for one and all acknowledged they were the subjects of sin, inwardly defiled and all their actions affected with it. Neither Abraham, Job, Moses, David, Elijah, Daniel, nor Paul could maintain any such thing. Thus it is such self-deception as proves these braggarts to be destitute of a saving acquaintance with the Gospel. Instead of having received what they term "the second blessing," they were never the subjects of the first. Instead of occupying the highest rank in Christ's army, they are not members of it at all. Had the Word of God been in them as a principle of life and light, they could never have made so gross a mistake as proves them to be completely ignorant of God and His holy Law and their own hearts. If they were not so, they would be painfully conscious of the evil that is ever at work within them, and would cry, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Psa 19:12). Herein we are shown, from another angle, what a terrible thing sin is: it not only defiles us and renders us obnoxious to God, but it fatally deceives the natural man.

"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (verse 10).

Its proud boast

Since sin indwells us it cannot but follow that we must, more or less, have the evidence of the same in our experience. This is the ordination of Him who is too wise to err and too loving unto His own people to be unkind to them. But why? Would He not be more glorified had indwelling sin been destroyed and they lived sinless lives in this world? No, or He had so ordered it. Some of the reasons for His not doing so have been intimated above. In addition, we may perceive that, as things are, the saints obtain a much fuller realization of their total depravity and marvel the more at God's amazing grace unto them. Thereby too they come to perceive more clearly their dire need of, and to value more highly, that Fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness. Sometimes God permits their iniquities to prevail against them (Psa 65:3), that they may be humbled and made to loathe and wholly renounce themselves, and wonder at His infinite patience and forbearance with them.

Those known as "sinless perfectionists" are not the only ones to say they have not sinned, for this preposterous and wicked assertion is made by several other classes. It is the implicit if not the explicit avowal of those Satan-blinded people who call themselves "Christian Scientists," for they emphatically deny that there is any such thing as sin, declaring it to be a delusion of mortal minds: and thus they are neither Christians or scientists—those who "know." Some extreme Antinomians⁵ have taught that they are "in Christ" in such a way, so one with Him, that they not only *do not* but *cannot* sin, wresting such words as "dead indeed unto sin" (Rom 6:11), as they also do "dead to the law" (Rom 7:4). It is also the doctrine of the infatuated papists⁶ that a man may, all his lifetime, eschew every mortal sin, and do all that the Law of God requires of him; yea, that he can do more than he is obligated unto, and supererogate⁷ and merit for others who fall short of perfection.

Its divine diagnosis

"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar," for we flatly contradict the Word of truth. In verse 6 it is the hypocrite who is exposed as a liar; in verse 8, those who so believe their own lie as to become fatally self-deceived; in verse 10, those whose consciences are so calloused and hearts hardened by

⁵ **Antinomians** – (from the Greek *anti* - against, and *nomos* - law) antinomianism basically means "against law." It generally means one who holds the theological view that God's Law has no place in the life of a believer.

⁶ **papists** – those devoted to the pope, i.e., Roman Catholics.

⁷ **supererogate** – to do more than is required or expected.

unbelief that they blasphemously assert that which makes God a liar. He has expressly stated that “there is no man that sinneth not” (1Ki 8:46), that “there is not a just man on earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecc 7:20). It is not pre-conversion sins that are in view in our verse, but those committed after, as verse 9 clearly shows. No matter how strict he be over his outward walk, or what he appears in the eyes of his fellows, the most godly and favoured Christian cannot truthfully aver that he is without sin in thought and word and deed; nay, he has to acknowledge himself to be included in the divine declaration, “in many things we all offend” (Jam 3:2)—even when those things wear a religious garb—and therefore does he make daily use of that petition in the family prayer, “Forgive us our sins” (Luk 11:4).

Its solemn verdict

It is highly important that we should understand what sin is, in its vile nature and exceeding sinfulness. Yet sin as it really is can be seen only in the light of God’s Word and Spirit. None but the regenerate have a true concept of that “abominable thing” which God hates (Jer 44:4). Inherent sin is a self-acting principle and is always at work, whether we perceive it or not, defiling our whole being and all that we do. Some sin most in thought, others in words—the boiling over of a hot temper; others in deeds. Rightly did S. E. Pierce (1746-1829) point out, “None of us are saved from sin so much as we conceive. We are saved from a state of sin and sinfulness; we are also saved from a gross way of sin and sinfulness; yet we are not always saved from cursed and carnal affections, nor from dispositions and expressions of our sinfulness”—and every regenerate person is taught of God honestly to acknowledge the same. I cannot say I have not sinned while reading the Scriptures, or when upon my knees, or in the pulpit. Atonement has to be made for our “holy things” (Lev 5:15)! The closer we walk with God, the more conscious are we of our sins.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

64. *The Conqueror (10:28-43)*

We have now arrived at a passage that offers much less scope for the expositor than did most of those in the preceding chapters, for the closing portions of Joshua 10 consists largely of a series of repetitions, with only slight differences between them. They record how that Joshua and those who were with him encamped before a certain place, fought against it, conquered it, and slew all its inhabitants. Precisely the same thing is narrated again and again of other towns. In the previous articles, we have entered into a close examination of the details of the first twenty-seven verses of Joshua 10, and have commented upon them separately, but for the reason just mentioned, we do not propose to do so with its closing verses—any such attempt would be wearisome to the reader, seeing that they furnish so little variety. Instead, we shall summarize their contents and treat them topically, noticing their several details only so far as they serve to illustrate our theme. This will at least enable us to cover more ground in a shorter time, though as a rule such a course is of very doubtful merits, resulting in mere generalizations that are of little profit.

Taking verses 28 to 43 as a whole, they present a blessed picture of our triumphant Redeemer. Joshua is definitely mentioned in each of the eight sub-divisions, his name occurring no less than eleven times; and in addition he is referred to under the personal pronouns “he” or “him” no less than twenty-five times. We read, “Joshua took Makkedah”; “and Joshua smote him and his people, until he left him none remaining”; “So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded”; “And Joshua smote them from Kadesh-barnea even unto Gaza”; “And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel.” Thus we here behold the nation’s leader as the victorious and irresistible warrior, none being able to withstand him or check his onset. Now, as most of our readers probably know, Joshua means “saviour,” so that in this passage we have a vivid foreshadowment of *the conquering Christ*. That brings before us something which is very precious to the hearts of God’s people.

No feeble and foiled Saviour is the Son of God, but One who is all-powerful and prevalent. Far too little is this dwelt upon either by those in the pulpit or those in the pew. The *balance* has been lost here too. There has been a disproportionate emphasis on the humiliation and sufferings of Christ, and far too little upon His glorious triumphs. Even Calvary may be viewed from too one-sided an angle, so that we fail to perceive that the darkest cloud which ever hung over this earth has a silver lining. Unto the natural man, the cross presents an appalling sight, but the saint is moved thereby to bow in adoring worship before the One suspended upon it. The carnal eye sees only the execution of a criminal—a promising life cut short in ignominy and defeat; spiritual vision beholds the accomplishment of Christ’s mission upon the field of triumph. It was there the Captain of our salvation fought and conquered. Dreadful beyond words was the conflict. “This is *your* hour, and the power of darkness” (Luk 22:53) said Christ to His enemies: nevertheless it was *His* “hour” too (Joh 8:20; 12:23), for the power of Light vanquished the hosts of darkness.

The fight of the ages was waged at Golgotha. It was the decisive conflict between good and evil, and though incarnate Goodness expired, the forces of evil were utterly overthrown. The outward eye looks upon what appears to be nothing but the Saviour’s woe and dishonour, but to the eye of faith the cross itself was His triumphal chariot. It was there that the woman’s Seed confounded the serpent and recovered for His people all that [it] had taken from them in Eden. It was there that He made an end of their sins and brought in for them an everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24). It was there He took away the sting of sin (1Co 15:56) and annulled him which had the power of death (Heb 2:14). It was there He magnified the Law and made it honourable (Isa 42:21) by offering unto God a complete satisfaction unto all its righteous claims. It was there that He blotted out “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross,” and there “having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly” (Col 2:14-15). It was there He overcame the world (Joh 16:33).

Mark attentively how valorously Christ carried Himself upon the cross. He had expressly declared, “I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself” (Joh 10:17-18), and very plainly did He demonstrate the fact, both immediately before and at that very time, that He was no helpless victim in the hands of His enemies. By a word from His lips, the band of officers sent to arrest Him “went backward, and fell to the ground” (Joh 18:6)—awestruck as they dimly apprehended

that they were in the presence of incarnate Deity, overpowered by a sense of His majesty. How easily could He have walked quietly away, leaving them prostrate on the ground! Instead, He meekly delivered Himself up into their hands and “was *led* [not “driven”!] as a lamb to the slaughter” (Act 8:32). In like manner, Christ died not from a broken heart (as sentimentalists have imagined), nor from the venom of the serpent, nor even from the thrust of the Roman soldier’s spear (for He had then already expired); but because He had voluntarily “laid down his life.”

During the hours while He hung upon the accursed tree, the Lord Jesus made full proof that instead of being conquered by death, He was the master of Himself. Hear Him making intercession for the transgressors, rather than soliciting prayer for Himself. Behold Him still engaged in His beneficent mission by saving the dying thief. Mark the evidence He gave that He was in complete possession of His mental faculties, as with unclouded mind He reviewed the entire scope of Messianic prophecy, and realizing that there was one particular detail about His sufferings (Psa 69:21) unaccomplished, “that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst” (Joh 19:28). See Him making provision for His widowed mother as He tenderly entrusted her to His beloved John. Listen to Him crying triumphantly, “It is finished.” Above all, note well His final act, as “with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit; and having said thus, he gave up the ghost” (Luk 23:46), or as Mark 15:37 literally means, He “breathed out his spirit”—like a king dismissing His servant. That “loud voice” bore unmistakable testimony to the fact that it was no exhausted sufferer who then expired.

It has been far too little realized that Christ’s death was as wondrous and miraculous as His birth. Everyone else who had expired was helpless in his death, for when the divine summons comes, none is able to resist; but the Prince of life (Act 3:15) could not die except by His own consent. In all other instances, their souls were taken from them; of the Redeemer alone could it be said, “He hath poured out his soul unto death” (Isa 53:12). At the close of life, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, *receive* my spirit” (Act 7:59), only the Lord of glory could *dismiss* His spirit. Christ on the cross was not the helpless victim of violence, but the mighty Victor. He was no mere passive sufferer, but an active Agent who “*offered himself*” unto God as a sacrifice for sin, who out of love for His Church “*gave himself for it*” (Heb 9:14; Eph 5:25). So manifestly did He triumph in that hour that the Roman centurion exclaimed, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Mat 27:54). So evidently had He laid down His life, instead of expiring from exhaustion, that “Pilate marveled if he were already dead” (Mar 15:44). His glorious victory at Calvary was signaled by the rending of the temple veil and the quaking of the earth.

In the book of *Revelation*, we are shown all heaven moved to profoundest praise, not when the King of kings comes forth crowned with many diadems, but when it beholds standing “a Lamb as it had been slain”! Yet the unique death of Christ is not the crowning glory of the Gospel: rather is that His triumph over the tomb and His enthronement in heaven. Even a rapid skimming through the sermons recorded in Acts will show that the apostles never made mention of Christ’s death without going on to proclaim His victorious emerging from the grave. The same fact is made prominent in the epistles. Paul reminded the Corinthians that the Gospel he preached was “how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day,” and when indicating the relative importance thereof, declared, “It is Christ that died, *yea rather*, that is risen again” (Rom 8:34). Much is said in the epistle to the Hebrews about the atoning sacrifice of Christ, yet no less than seven times is He there viewed as seated on high, at God’s right hand; while in the closing book of the Scripture, again and again, we behold the Lamb in the midst of the throne.

Such death, as we have attempted to describe above, cannot possibly fail in its design or be defeated in the fulfillment of its purpose. The death of such a Person *must*, my reader, accomplish what it was meant to achieve, and actually secure all that it purchased. If Christ so triumphed on the cross, how much more so must He do so now that He has risen from the dead and ascended on high, and been crowned with glory and honour! Alas, that there should be the slightest need to labour such a point in these pages, and for us to offer proof of what is self-evident. Yet there *is*. For while every Christian will heartily assent to and find his heart drawn out in praise by the above paragraphs, yet—due to the defective and erroneous teaching they have sat under—some of our readers do not really believe what is affirmed in the opening sentences of this one. On the contrary, they imagine that Satan or the “free will” of men may *rob* the victorious Saviour of the spoils of His victory. They may well shrink from such a horrible charge when it is plainly made, yet *that* is exactly what it amounts to; for if Christ shed His precious blood in order that all mankind might be saved thereby, and a large part of the human race be lost, then for them at least His blood was shed in vain.

A defeated or disappointed Christ is a fiction of human invention, for it is entirely foreign to the teaching of Holy Writ. Of old, it was predicted, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged" (Isa 42:4). At His incarnation, it was announced, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he *shall save* his people from their sins" (Mat 1:21)—not merely attempt to do so. His own explicit declaration was, "This is the Father's will which hath sent me: that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (Joh 6:39). And at the close, after saying, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do," He added, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am: that they may behold my glory" (Joh 17:24), and the Father hears *Him* "always" (Joh 11:42)! The great atonement, my reader, possesses far more than a conditional efficacy, namely an infallible efficiency. It did not merely make possible the salvation of those who hear the Gospel, but has rendered certain the eternal salvation of all God's elect. The successful outcome of Christ's finished work is not left either to chance or the fickle will of men, but is secured by the almighty power and invincible operations of the triune God.

The population of heaven is no more dependent upon the caprice and will of man than was its creation. When it be clearly apprehended that the atoning work of Christ was according to an eternal compact entered into between the Father and the Son, and that the everlasting covenant is "ordered in all things, and sure" (2Sa 23:5), then we are preserved from much confusion of thought on the subject and delivered from any God-dishonouring errors. Everything in connection with Christ and His Church was indefeasibly⁸ settled before the foundation of the world. The precious blood of the Lamb was not poured out at random, but as He so definitely averred, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed *for many* for the remission of sins" (Mat 26:28). Since God has borne unmistakable witness unto His acceptance of the full satisfaction that His incarnate Son made unto divine justice and holiness, then it is evident that all the perfections of Deity stand pledged to save or deliver every captive of sin and prisoner of Satan for whom the ransom was paid. To send to hell a single soul for whose sins Christ made atonement would be unjust—demanding payment twice over for the same debt. The law of suretyship demands the reinstatement to God's favour of all those in whose stead Christ served as Sponsor. Whatever Christ purchased for His people must be bestowed on them, or the righteousness of God would cease to be.

What has been pointed out above is very much more than theological argument, though even as such it cannot be overthrown by any fair reasoning. It is a summarizing of what Holy Writ plainly teaches thereon. To go no farther afield than the ringing testimony of Isaiah 53: in that chapter we have the fullest and most graphic setting forth of the sacrificial and successful work of Christ contained in any single passage of God's Word. Well has it been said, "It contains both the sum and substance of the Gospel." Therein the Lord Jesus is described in His person and natures as both God and man. Therein He is set forth in His three principal offices: as the Priest, offering Himself as a sacrifice to meet the requirements of the broken law; as the Prophet, uttering His knowledge to the justifying of many; as the King, dividing the spoil with the strong. Therein too are the two states in which He was to serve plainly depicted: His humiliation, in the nature and design thereof; His exaltation, as the blessed issue of the former and the reward for His sufferings. It is this last, foretold in verses 10-12, which here more immediately concerns us.

Christ's Exaltation

Those verses record the promises which the Father made to the Son in the everlasting covenant. Since Christ has faithfully fulfilled His part of that compact, the reward must be bestowed upon Him. First, "He *shall see his seed*": a spiritual posterity was assured Him, for that was one of the grand ends of the covenant. Second, "the pleasure of the LORD *shall prosper in his hand*." He would infallibly make good God's purpose: no matter what might be the opposition, not one jot or tittle⁹ of the divine decree would fail. Third, "He *shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied*," which could not be the case if any of those for whom He laid down His life were to perish eternally. It will be in beholding a completed and glorified Church that its Head will find eternal satisfaction. No defeated and disappointed Saviour will appear before the Father in the last great day: instead, He will triumphantly exclaim, "Behold I and the children which thou hast given me" (Heb 2:13)—not one of them lost.

⁸ **indefeasibly** – without the possibility to be lost or overturned.

⁹ **jot or tittle** – *jot* - the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet; *tittle* - the smallest stroke on a letter in the Hebrew alphabet (Mat 5:18).

So infallibly certain was Christ's triumph that the Old Testament saints forestalled the same in a paean of praise. "O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvelous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory. The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God" (Psa 98:1-3). As these last words clearly indicate, this "new song" was *faith's anticipation*—so fully assured, that it celebrated Christ's conquest centuries beforehand! A universal chorus was here called for from the redeemed to laud the Lamb, for He had done marvelous things. He put away their sins by the sacrifice of Himself. He vanquished the hosts of hell on their behalf. He conquered death by dying and triumphed over the grave. He gained such a victory as none besides Him could. All the glory, therefore, is due to Him alone. It was by His own right hand He conquered, and His Church partakes of its fruits. Thus it well becomes them to sing His praises forever.

Psalms 98 was written to celebrate the great salvation which Christ has wrought out for His people. He has won complete victory over all the enemies of Himself and His Church. His triumph will last forever, and He will wear the glory of it on high as long as heaven is heaven. His victory and salvation are now made known and openly revealed by the preaching of the Gospel (Rom 3:21). Proclamation thereof is made unto the Gentiles, for God will have a world-wide testimony borne to the exploits of His Son. Out of them too He is taking a people for His name, and they also shall sing this song to the honour of the great Redeemer. As He declared, so it has come to pass: "all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God." Such was the immutable will of the triune JEHOVAH. Such was the word of Him that cannot lie, that a thousand years before the divine incarnation, the full results thereof were announced as something already accomplished. The complete fruits of Christ's victory have not yet been gathered in, but so surely will they be that even now the redeemed are to give thanks for the same and "make a joyful noise unto the Lord" (Psa 98:4).



INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 4

The preacher should be, above everything else, a man of the Book, thoroughly versed in the contents of God's Word, one who is able to bring forth out of his treasure "things new and old" (Mat 13:52). The Bible is to be his sole text-book, and from its living waters he is to drink deeply and daily. Personally, we use nothing else than the English *Authorized Version* and *Young's Concordance*, with an occasional reference to the Greek Interlinear and the American *Revised Version*. Commentaries we consult only *after* we have made a first-hand and exhaustive study of a passage. We strongly urge young preachers to be much on their guard against allowing commentaries to become a substitute for, instead of a supplement to, their own minute and full examination and pondering of Holy Writ. As there is a happy mean between imagining either that the Bible is so plain and simple that anyone can understand it, or so difficult and profound that it would be a waste of time for the average person to read it—so there is between being mainly dependent on the labours of others and simply echoes of their ideas, and utterly disparaging that light and help which may be obtained from God's servants of the past.

It is at the feet of God that the preacher must take his place, learning from Him the meaning of His Word, waiting upon Him to open its mysteries, looking to Him for his message. Nowhere but in the Scriptures can he ascertain what is pleasing or displeasing unto the Lord. There alone are opened the secrets of divine wisdom, of which the philosopher and scientist know nothing. And as the great Dutch Puritan rightly pointed out, "Whatever is not drawn from them, whatever is not built upon them, whatever does not most exactly accord with them, however it may recommend itself by the appearance of the most sublime wisdom, or rest on ancient tradition and consent of learned men, or the weight of plausible arguments, it is vain, futile, and, in short, a lie. 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them' (Isa 8:28). Let the theologian delight in those sacred Oracles: let him exercise himself in them day and night, meditate in them, draw all his wisdom from them. Let him compass all his thoughts on them, let him embrace nothing in religion which he does not find there" (Herman Witsius, 1636-1708).

The inter-relation of the Old and New Testaments

Coming now to those principles which are to guide the student in his efforts to interpret God's Word, we place first and foremost the need for recognizing *the inter-relation and mutual dependence* of the Old and New Testaments. We do so because error at this point inevitably results in a serious misunderstanding and perverting of not a little in the later Scriptures. We do not propose to enter into a refutation of the modern heresy of "Dispensationalism,"¹⁰ but to treat of this section of our subject constructively. After a long and careful comparison of the writings of that school with *The Institutes* of John Calvin (1509-1564), and our observation of the kind of fruit borne by the one and the other, it is our conviction that that eminent reformer was far more deeply taught by the Holy Spirit than those who claimed to receive so much "new light on God's Word" a century ago. We would therefore urge every preacher who possesses Calvin's *Institutes* to give his very best attention unto its two chapters on "The Similarity of the Old and New Testaments" and "The Difference of the Two Testaments."

The *similarity* of the two Testaments is much greater and more vital than their dissimilarity. The same triune God is revealed in each, the same way of salvation is set forth, the same standard of holiness is exhibited, the same eternal destinies of the righteous and the wicked made known. The New has all its roots in the Old, so that much in the one is unintelligible apart from the other. Not only is a knowledge of the history of the patriarchs and of the institutions of Judaism indispensable for an understanding of many details in the Gospels and the Epistles, but its terms and ideas are identical. That it is entirely unwarrantable for us to suppose that the message proclaimed by the Lord Jesus was something new or radically different from the early communications of God appears from His emphatic warning: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Mat 5:17)—to vindicate and sub-

¹⁰ **Dispensationalism** – the system of theology that divides the Word of God into arbitrary periods with supposed differences in the way God saves men from their sins. It proposes that the Old Testament saints were not a part of the Church of God, and that the Law has no bearing on the Christian as a guide to moral living.

stantiate them, to free them from human perversions and misrepresentations, and to make good what they demanded and announced. So far from there being any antagonism between the teaching of Christ and divine messengers who preceded Him, when He enunciated “the golden law,” He stated, “for this is the law and the prophets” (Mat 7:12).

Most certainly there was no conflict between the testimony of the apostles and that of their Master, for He had expressly enjoined them to teach their converts “to observe all things whatsoever I *have* [not shall!] commanded you” (Mat 28:20). Nor did the doctrinal system of Paul differ in any wise from that enunciated in the Old Testament. At the very beginning of the first epistle bearing his name, he is particular to inform us that the Gospel unto which God had separated him was none other than the one He “had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures” (Rom 1:2): and when he stated that the righteousness of God was now revealed apart from the Law, he was careful to add, “being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (3:21). When he vindicated his teaching on justification by faith without the deeds of the Law, he did so by appealing to the case of Abraham and the testimony of David (Rom 4). When he admonished the Corinthians against being lulled into a false sense of security because of the spiritual gifts that had been bestowed upon them, he reminded them of the Israelites, who had been highly favoured of God, yet that did not keep them from His displeasure when they sinned, even though they “did all eat *the same* spiritual meat: and did drink the same spiritual drink” (1Co 10:1-5). And when illustrating important practical truth, he cites the history of Abraham’s two sons (Gal 4:22-31).

In many respects, the New Testament is a continuation of and a complement to the Old. The difference between the old and new covenants referred to in Hebrews is a relative and not an absolute one. The contrast is not really between two opposites, but rather between a gradation from the lower to the higher plane—the one preparing for the other. While some have erred in too much Judaizing Christianity, others have entertained far too carnal a conception of Judaism, failing to perceive the *spiritual* elements in it, and that, under it, God was then as truly administering the blessings of the everlasting covenant unto those whom He had chosen in Christ as He is now; yea, that He had done so from Abel onwards. Rightly, then, did Calvin rebuke the madness of our modern dispensationalists when reproving those of their forerunners who appeared in his day, saying, “Now what would be more absurd than that Abraham should be the father of all the faithful, and not possess even the lowest place among them? But he cannot be excluded from the number, even from the most honourable station, without the destruction of the Church.”

Whether the speaker is Christ or one of His apostles, at almost every vital point he clinches his argument by an appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures, proof-texts therefrom being found in almost every page in the New. Innumerable examples might be adduced to show that both the ideas and the language of the former have given their impress to the latter—more than six hundred expressions in the one occurring in the other. Every clause in the “Magnificat” (Luk 1:46-55) and even in the family prayer (Mat 6:9-13) is drawn from the Old Testament. It therefore behoves the student to give equal attention to *both* of the principal divisions of the Bible, not only thoroughly familiarizing himself with the latter, but endeavouring to drink deeply of the spirit of the first, in order to fit him for understanding the second. Unless he does so, it will be impossible for him to apprehend aright much in the Gospels and Epistles. Not only is a knowledge of the types necessary to comprehend the antitypes¹¹—for what would “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1Co 5:7) mean to one ignorant of Exodus 12; and how much in Hebrews 9 and 10 is intelligible apart from Leviticus 16?—but many important words of the New Testament can be correctly defined only by referring back to their usage in the Old Testament: such as “firstborn, redeem, propitiation,” etc.

That there must be a fundamental harmony between Judaism and Christianity appears in the fact that the same God is the Author of both, and is unchanging in His perfections and the principles of His government. The former was indeed addressed more to the outward man, was transacted under visible forms and relations, and had respect primarily to a worldly sanctuary and earthly inheritance; nevertheless, they were all of them a “shadow of heavenly things” (Heb 8:5; 10:1). “In the New Testament, we have a higher, yet very closely related, exhibition of truth and duty than in the Old, which involves both the agreements and differences of the two covenants. The agreements lie deeper and concern the more essential elements of the two economies; the differences are of a more circumstantial and formal nature” (Patrick Fairbairn, 1805-1874). Personally, we would say that the principal variations appear in that, in the one, we have promise and prediction, in the other, performance and fulfillment—first the types and shadows (the “blade”), then

¹¹ **types...antitypes** – *types* - figures or symbols representing other things, often spiritual truths; *antitypes* - those things which are represented.

the reality and substance of "full corn in the ear." The Christian dispensation¹² excels the Mosaic in a fuller and clearer manifestation of God's perfections (1Jo 2:8), in a more abundant effusion of the Spirit (Joh 7:39; Act 2:3), in its wider extent (Mat 28:19-20), and in a larger measure of liberty (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:2-7).

Scriptural quotation

The second principle that the expositor must make a most careful study of is that of *scriptural quotation*. Not a little help in ascertaining the right laws of interpretation may be obtained from diligently observing *the manner in which and the purpose for which* the Old Testament is cited in the New. There can be little room for doubt that the record which the Holy Spirit has supplied of the way in which our Lord and His apostles understood and applied the Old Testament was as much designed to throw light *generally* on how the Old Testament is to be used by us, as it was to furnish instruction on the particular points for the sake of which passages in the Law or the prophets were more immediately appealed to. By examining closely the words quoted and the sense given to them in the New Testament, we shall not only be delivered from a slavish literalism, but be better enabled to perceive the *fullness* of God's words, and the varied application which may be legitimately made of them. A wide, but generally neglected, field is open for exploration, but instead of endeavouring here to make a thorough canvass of the same, we shall simply supply a few illustrations.

In Matthew 8:16, we are told that on a certain occasion Christ "healed all that were sick," and then, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the evangelist added, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet [namely in 53:4], saying, himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." Such a use of that Messianic prediction is most illuminating, intimating as it does that it had a *wider* signification than the making of atonement for the sins of His people, namely that during the days of His public ministry, Christ entered sympathetically into the condition of the sufferers, and took upon His spirit the sorrows and pains of those to whom He ministered, that His miracles of healing cost Him much in the way of compassion and endurance. He was personally afflicted by their afflictions. Christ began His mediatorial work of removing the evil which sin had brought into the world, by curing those bodily ailments which were the fruits of sin, and by so doing shadowed forth the greater work He was to accomplish at the cross. The *connection* between the one and the other was more plainly indicated when He said alternatively to the sick of the palsy, "Thy sins be forgiven thee" and "arise, take up thy bed and go unto thine house" (Mat 9:2, 6).

Consider next how Christ used the Old Testament to refute the materialists of His day. The Sadducees held the notion that the soul and body are so closely allied that if one perishes the other must (Act 23:8). They saw the body die, and therefrom concluded that the soul had also. Very striking indeed is it to behold incarnate wisdom reasoning with them on their own ground. This He did by quoting from Exodus 3, where JEHOVAH had said unto Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." But *wherein* were those words to the point? What was there in them which exposed the error of the Sadducees? Nothing explicitly, but much implicitly. From them Christ drew the conclusion that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Mat 22:32). It was not that He had been their "God," but that He was so still—"I *am* their God," therefore they still lived. Since their spirits and souls were yet alive, their bodies must be raised in due course, for being their "God" guaranteed that He would be to them and do for them all that such a relation called for, and not leave a part of their nature to be a prey of corruption. Therein Christ established the important principle of interpretation that we may draw any clear and necessary *inference* from a passage, provided it clashes not with any definite statement of Holy Writ.

In Romans 4:11-18, we have a remarkable example of apostolic *reasoning* from two short passages in Genesis, wherein God made promise unto Abraham that he should be a father of many nations (17:5) and that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed (22:18). Since these assurances were given to the patriarch simply as a believer, *before* the divine appointment of circumcision, Paul drew the logical conclusion that they pertained to Jews and Gentiles alike, providing they believed as he did and thereby had imputed to them the righteousness of Christ, that the good of those promises belonged unto *all* who "walk in the steps of his faith." Therein we are plainly taught that the "seed" of blessing mentioned in those ancient prophecies was essentially of a *spiritual* kind (cf. Gal 3:7-9; 14:29), including all the members of the household of faith, wherever they be found. As Stiffler (James M., 1840-1910?) pertinently remarked, "Abraham is called *father* neither in a physical sense nor a spiritual: he is father in that he is head of the faith clan, and so the normal type." In Romans 9:6-13, the apostle was equally express in *excluding* from the good of those promises, the merely natural descendants of Abraham.

¹² **dispensation** – age; period.

Romans 10:5-9 supplies a striking illustration of this principle in the way that the apostle “opened” Deuteronomy 30:11-14. His design was to draw off the Jews from regarding obedience to the Law as necessary unto justification (Rom 10:2-3). He did so by producing an argument from the writings of Moses, wherein a distinction was drawn between the righteousness of the Law and the righteousness of faith. The Jews had rejected Christ because He came not to them in the way of their carnal expectations, and therefore refused the grace tendered by Him. They considered the Messiah was far off, when in fact He was “nigh” them. There was no need, then, for them to ascend to heaven, for Christ had come down from thence; nor to descend into the deep, for He had risen from the dead. The apostle was not merely accommodating to his purpose the language of Deuteronomy 30, but showing its evangelical drift. As Thomas Manton (1620-1677) said, “The whole of that chapter is a sermon of evangelical repentance” (see verses 1 and 2). It obviously looked forward to a time after Christ’s ascension when Israel would be dispersed among the nations, so that the words of Moses there were strictly applicable to this Gospel dispensation. The substance of verses 11-14 is that the knowledge of God’s will is freely accessible, so that none are required to do the impossible.

In Romans 10:18, more than a hint is given of the profound depths of God’s Word and the wide breadth of its application. “But I say, Have they not heard [the Gospel, though they obeyed it not—verse 16]? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world” (cf. Col 1:5-6), but was as general and free as the divine declarations of the heavens (Psa 19:1). “The universal revelation of God in nature was a providential prediction of the universal proclamation of the Gospel. If the former was not gratuitous, but founded in the nature of God, so must the latter be. The manifestation of God in nature is for all His creatures to whom it is made, in pledge of their participation in the clearer and higher revelations” (E. W. Hengstenberg, 1802-1869). Not only did Old Testament prophecy announce that the Gospel should be given to the whole world, but the heavens *mystically* declared the same thing. The heavens speak not to one nation only, but to the whole human race! If men did not believe, it was not because they had not heard. Another example of the *mystical* signification of certain Scriptures is found in 1 Corinthians 9:9-10.

In Galatians 4:24, the inspired pen of Paul informs us that certain domestic incidents in the household of Abraham “are an allegory,” that Hagar and Sarah represented “the two covenants,” and that their sons prefigured the kind of worshippers those covenants were fitted to produce. But for that divine revelation unto and through the apostle, we should never have known that in those facts of history, God had concealed a prophetic mystery, that those domestic occurrences prophetically shadowed forth vitally important transactions of the future, that they illustrated great doctrinal truths and exemplified the difference in conduct of spiritual slaves and spiritual freemen. Yet such was the case, as the apostle showed by opening to us the occult meaning of those events. They were a parable in action: God so shaped the affairs of Abraham’s family as to typify things of vast magnitude. The two sons were ordained to foreshadow those who should be born from above and those born after the flesh—that even Abraham’s natural descendants were but Ishmaelites in spirit, strangers to the promise. While Paul’s example here is certainly *no precedent* for the expositor to give free rein unto his imagination and make Old Testament episodes teach anything he pleases, it *does* intimate that God so ordered the lives of the patriarchs as to afford lessons of great spiritual value.

We have, above, designedly selected a variety of examples, and from them the diligent student (but not so the hurried reader) will discover some valuable divine hints and helps on *how* the Scriptures are to be understood, and the principles *by which* they are to be interpreted. Let them be reread and carefully pondered.

The Analogy of Faith

Third, constant care must be diligently taken strictly to conform all our interpretations to the *Analogy of Faith*, or, as Romans 12:6 expresses it, “let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.” Charles Hodge (1797-1878), who for doctrinal soundness, spiritual scholarship, and critical acumen is unsurpassed, states that the original and proper meaning of the word “prophet” is *interpreter*—one who declares the will of God, who explains His mind to others. He also says that the word rendered “proportion” may mean either proportion, or measure, rule, standard. Since “faith” in this verse must be taken *objectively* (for there were “prophets” like Balaam and Caiaphas, who were devoid of any inward or saving faith), then this important expression signifies that the interpreter of God’s mind must be most particular and scrupulous in seeing to it that he ever does so in accordance with the revealed standard He had given us. Thus “faith” here is used in the same sense as in such passages as “the faith” in Galatians 1:23, 1 Timothy 4:1, etc.—

namely, the “one faith” of Ephesians 4:5, “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3), the written Word of God.

The exposition made of any verse in Holy Writ must be in entire agreement with the Analogy of Faith, or that system of truth which God has made known unto His people. That, of course, calls for a comprehensive knowledge of the contents of the Bible—sure proof that no “novice” is qualified to preach unto or attempt to teach others. Such comprehensive knowledge can be obtained only by a systematic and constant reading of the Word itself—and only then is any man fitted to weigh the writings of others! Since all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, there are no contradictions therein; thus it obviously follows that any explanation given of a passage which clashes with the plain teaching of other verses is manifestly erroneous. In order for any interpretation to be valid, it must be in perfect keeping with the scheme of divine truth. One part of the truth is mutually related to and dependent upon others, and therefore there is full accord between them. As Johann A. Bengel (1687-1752) said of the books of Scripture, “They indicate together one beautiful, harmonious, and gloriously connected system of truth.”



THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

4. *Its Consequences, Part 3*

Having considered those consequences which fell more immediately upon our first parents for their original offence, we shall now look at those they entailed upon their descendants. Nor do we have to go outside of Genesis 3 to find proof that the penal consequences of their transgression are visited upon their posterity. What God said to the whole of mankind, for since the sin was common to all, so was the penalty too. “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children” (verse 16), and such has been the lot of all Eve’s daughters. “Cursed is the ground for thy sake: in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life....In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground...for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (verses 17, 19), and such has been the portion of Adam’s sons—in every generation and in all parts of the earth. The calamity or evil which then descended upon the world continues unto this hour: all of Adam’s and Eve’s children are equally involved in the sentence of the pain of childbirth, the curse upon the ground, the obligation to live by toil and sweat, the decay and death of the body.

But let it be pointed out that the things just mentioned above, severe and painful though they be, are trivial in comparison with the divine judgment which has been visited upon man’s *soul*, that they are but the external and visible marks of the moral and spiritual calamity which overtook Adam and his race. By his disobedience, he forfeited the favour of his Maker, fell under His holy condemnation and curse, received the awful wages of his sin, came under the sentence of the Law, was alienated from the life of God, became totally depraved—and as such, an object of abhorrence to the Holy One, driven from His presence. Since the guilt of his offence was imputed or judicially charged unto all those he represented, it follows that they participate in all the misery that came upon him. Guilt consists of an obligation or liability to suffer punishment for an offence committed, and that in proportion to the aggravation of the same. In consequence thereof, every child is born into this world in a state of ante-natal¹³ disgrace and condemnation, and with an entire depravity of nature or disposition which inevitably leads to and produces actual transgression, and with a complete inability of soul to change its nature or do anything pleasing to God.

Psalm 58:3

“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (Psa 58:3). First, from the moment of birth, every child is morally and spiritually cut off from the Lord—a lost sinner. “Estranged from God and all good: alienated from the divine life, and its principles, powers, and blessings” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). Adam lost not only the image of God, but His favour and fellowship too, being expelled from His presence: and each of his children was born *outside* Eden, born in a state of guilt. Second, in consequence thereof, they are delinquents, perverts from the beginning. Their very being is polluted, for evil is bred in the bone with them, their “nature” being inclined unto wickedness only; and, if God leaves them unto themselves, they will never return therefrom. Third, quickly do they supply evidence of their separation from God and the corruption of their hearts—as every godly parent perceives to his sorrow. While in the cradle itself, they evince their opposition to truth, sincerity, integrity. “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child” (Pro 22:15): not “childishness” but “foolishness”—that positive propensity to evil, the entering into an ungodly course, the forming and following of bad habits; “bound in the heart”—held firmly there by chains invincible to human power.

But in all ages, there have been those who sought to blunt the sharp edge of Psalm 58:3, by unwarrantably narrowing its scope, denying that it has a race-wide application; those who are determined at all costs to rid themselves of the unpalatable truth of the total depravity of all mankind. Pelagians¹⁴ and Socinians¹⁵

¹³ **ante-natal** – *ante* - prior to; *natal* - birth; prior to birth.

¹⁴ **Pelagians** – those who (perhaps unknowingly) follow the teachings of the heretic Pelagius (c. 354-c. 420), a British monk who argued that people could reform themselves by free will and that they can take the first steps toward salvation without the assistance of God’s grace. His views were condemned as heresy by the Council of Ephesus (431).

have insisted that that verse is speaking only of a particularly reprobate class, those who are flagrantly wayward from an early age. Rightly did John Owen (1616-1683) point out: "It is to no purpose to say that he speaks of wicked men only: that is, such as are habitually and profligately so. For whatever any man may afterwards run into by a course of sin, all men are morally alike from the womb, and it is an aggravation of the wickedness of men that it begins so early and holds on in an uninterrupted course. Children are not able to speak from the womb, as soon as they be born. Yet here are they said to speak lies. It is therefore the perverse acting of depraved nature in infancy that is intended, for everything that is irregular, that answers not the law of our creation and rule of our obedience, is a *lie*."

Ephesians 2:3

"And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph 2:3). That statement is, if possible, even more awful and solemn than Psalm 58:3. It signifies much more than that we are born into the world with a defiled constitution, for it is not simply "children of corruption," but "of wrath"—obnoxious to God, criminals in His sight. Depravity of our natures is no mere misfortune: if it were, it would evoke pity and not anger! The expression "children of wrath" is a Hebraism, a very strong and emphatic one. In the margin of 1 Samuel 20:30 and 11 Samuel 12:5, we read of "the son of death," that is one unto whom death is due. And in Matthew 23:15, Christ used the fearful term "the child of hell"—one whose sure portion is hell; while in John 17:12, He designated Judas "the son of perdition"—divinely appointed thereto. Thus "children of wrath" connotes those who are deserving of wrath, heirs thereto, meet¹⁶ for it. They are born unto wrath, and under it, as their heritage. Not only defiled and corrupt creatures, but the objects of God's judicial indignation. But why so? Because the sin of Adam is imputed unto them, and therefore they are regarded as guilty of having broken God's Law.

Equally forcible and explicit are the words "*by nature* the children of wrath," for it is in designed contrast with that which is artificially acquired. Many have insisted (contrary to the facts of common experience and observation) that children are corrupted by external contact with evil, that they *acquire* bad habits by imitation of others. We do not deny that environment has a measure of influence, yet if any baby could be placed in a perfect one and surrounded only by sinless beings, it would soon be evident that he was corrupt. We are depraved not by a process of development, but by genesis. It is not "on account of nature" but "by nature," because of our nativity: it is innate, bred in us. As Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) solemnly pointed out, "They are children of wrath in the very womb, before they commit any actual sin." The depraved nature itself is a *penal evil*, and that is because of our federal union with Adam, as partaking of his transgression. We are the children of wrath because our federal head fell under the wrath of God: "There would be no truth in the assertion of Paul that all are by nature the children of wrath, if they had not been already under the curse before their birth" (John Calvin, 1509-1564).

Romans 9:11-13

But a greater than Calvin has informed us: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom 9:11-13). This goes back still farther: Esau was an object of God's hatred before he was born. Obviously, a righteous God could not abominate one who was pure and innocent. But how could Esau be guilty prior to doing any good or evil? Because he shared Adam's criminality! And for precisely the same reason, all of us are by nature the children of wrath, obnoxious to divine punishment—not only by virtue of our own personal transgressions, but first because of our constitution; it is coeval¹⁷ with our very being. We are members of a cursed head, branches of a condemned tree, streams of a polluted fountain; in a word, the guilt of Adam's sin lies hard upon us. No other explanation is possible; since our guilt and liability unto punishment be not, in the first place, due to our personal sins, they must be because of Adam's being imputed to us.

¹⁵ **Socinians** – followers of the sect founded by Faustus Socinius, 16th century Italian theologian, who denied the deity of Christ and denied that the cross brought forgiveness of sins.

¹⁶ **meet** – fit; suitable.

¹⁷ **coeval** – contemporary.

It is for the same reason that infants *die* naturally, for sin is not merely the occasion of physical dissolution, but the cause of it. Death is the wages of sin, the sentence of the broken law, the penal infliction of a righteous God. Had Adam never sinned, neither he nor any of his descendants would have become subject to death. Death is altogether unnatural and abnormal to man, as the longevity of the patriarchs evidenced. Had not the guilt of Adam's offence been charged to his posterity, none would die in infancy. Yet it does not necessarily follow that any who expire in early childhood are eternally lost. That they are born into this world spiritually dead, alienated from the life of God, is clear; but whether they die eternally, or are saved by sovereign grace, is probably one of those secret things which belong unto the Lord. If they be saved, it must be because they are among the number elected by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and regenerated by the Spirit—without which none can enter heaven; but concerning these things Scripture appears to us to be silent. The Judge of all the earth will do right, and there we may submissively yet trustfully leave it. Parenthood is an unspeakably solemn matter!

Ephesians 2:1-3 and John 3:36

In the opening verses of Ephesians 2, the Holy Spirit has described our fallen state. First, as being dead in trespasses and sins (verse 1): dead judicially, under sentence of the Law; dead experientially, without a spark of spiritual life. Second, the outward course of such is depicted (verses 2-3): as completely dominated by "the flesh" or evil principle, inspired unto an ungodly walk by Satan, so that our every action is sinful. Third, the resultant punishment (verse 3): obnoxious to the divine Judge, born in such a condition, and remaining so while in a state of nature. Until the sinner believes, "the wrath of God abideth on him" (Joh 3:36). Though the sentence be not yet executed, it is suspended over him. The word "abideth" here denotes *perpetuity*: as Augustine (354-430) said, "It hath been upon him from his birth, and remains to this day upon him. The children of wrath, *even as others*": this is the case of *all* of Adam's descendants, and it is *equally* so. It is a common heritage: by nature no man is either better or worse than his fellows. The very fact that this awful visitation is *universal* can only be accounted for by our relation to the first man, as our covenant head and legal representative.

Atonement for original sin?

It would hardly be fair to conclude this article without taking some notice of those who attempt to dismiss all which has been pointed out above by dogmatically insisting that "Christ made atonement for original sin," so that the guilt of our first father's transgression rests not on his sons. But such an arbitrary assertion is manifestly contrary to those patent facts which confront us on every side. The judgment which God pronounced upon Adam and Eve is being as surely visited upon their children *today* as ever it was before the Son of God died upon the cross. The curse upon the ground, the peculiar sufferings of females and the pain of childbirth, the necessity to toil for our daily bread, the universal reign of death, including the demise of so many infants, are all just as evident and prevalent in the New Testament era as ever they were in the Old. But obviously such things could not be were the Arminian¹⁸ view sound, for if the *guilt* of original sin has been removed, the *effects* thereof could no longer continue. Such an affirmation is baseless, unconfirmed by a single clear statement in Scripture; though some do make a far-fetched attempt to substantiate it by appealing to John 1:29.

"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." We wonder how many of our readers can perceive anything in those words which strikes them as relevant to the point. Men must surely be hard put to it when they have to press such a verse into service in order to bolster up their theory. Our Lord's forerunner was here presenting the Messiah unto the people in that sacrificial character which both type and prophecy had prepared them to look for Him, and not raising an abstruse question in theology, which is nowhere else mentioned in Scripture. Had those words occurred in one of Paul's profound doctrinal discussions, we should be ready to look for a deeper meaning in them, though we would require something very specific in the context obliging us to define "the sin of the world" as the sin *of Adam*! John was the herald of a new dispensation: one which

¹⁸ **Arminian** – pertaining to the theology of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), Dutch theologian. He rejected the Reformers' understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God's predestination of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will.

would be radically different in its *scope* from the previous one, and one which should be inaugurated by breaking down the "middle wall of partition" (Eph 2:14).

For two thousand years, the grace of God had been restricted almost entirely unto a single nation; but now it was on the point of flowing out unto all. The Baptist was there announcing Christ as the heaven-appointed sacrifice which was to expiate the sin not of believing Jews only, but of Gentiles also. Though "the world" be a general expression, it is not to be regarded as comprehending a universality of individuals, as synonymous with mankind. It is an *indefinite* expression, as "The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and *all flesh* shall see it together" (Isa 40:5) and "all flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Saviour" (Isa 49:26). "The *sin* of the whole world" signifies all the sins of all God's people as a collective whole, as one great and heavy burden—just as in Isaiah 53:6, "the LORD hath laid on him *the iniquity* of us all." It was the entire penalty and punishment of sin which Christ took on Himself, and bore away from before the divine Judge. As Hebrews 9:26 tells us, "But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," and since that sacrifice was a *vicarious* one, it necessarily removed the guilt of all those in whose stead it was made.

Not only is the theory we are here controverting without any scriptural evidence to support it, but it is refuted by very considerable evidence to the contrary. If attention be paid to *the relations* which Christ sustained to those in whose stead He obeyed and suffered, it at once appears that His work was no mere indefinite and general one, but with a particular and restricted design. He transacted as a Shepherd on behalf of His sheep (Joh 10:11, and contrast 10:26)—if He died also for the goats and the wolves, then there was no point in saying He laid down His life for the sheep. It was in the relation of a Husband He served (Eph 5:25-27): *there* is singleness of affection, the exclusiveness of conjugal love! He sustained to His beneficiaries the relation of Head, there being a federal and legal *unity* between them (Heb 2:11). The redemptive work of Christ was like His coat, "without seam," one complete and indivisible whole, so that what He did for one He did for all—and not merely took away the guilt of original sin.

If it were true that Christ atoned for Adam's offence, then it would necessarily follow that the government under which the human race is now placed is one which recognizes not the original curse. But such is far from being the case. From the Fall until now, all are born dead in sin, the objects of God's displeasure. That is very evident from the teaching of Romans 3, where, in unequivocal language, the whole world is pronounced to be under condemnation, brought in "guilty before God" (verses 10-19)—not merely a possible condemnation, but an actual one; not one which may be incurred, but which has been incurred already, and under which all are now lying; and the only way of deliverance therefrom is by faith in Christ. Precisely the same representation is given in the New Testament of the condition of all when first visited by the Gospel. They are addressed as those who are sinners, lost, lying beneath the curse of a broken law, for the dark background of the Gospel is that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness" (Rom 1:18), and until the terms of the Gospel are met, men have *no* hope (Eph 2:12).

The very scene into which we are born confronts us with innumerable evidences that the earth is under the curse of its Maker. "The frowning aspect of Providence which so often darkens our world and appalls our minds, receives the only adequate solution in the fact that the Fall has fearfully changed the relations of God and the creature. We are manifestly treated as criminals under guard. We are dealt with as guilty, faithless, suspected beings that cannot be trusted for a moment. Our earth has been turned into a prison, and sentinels are posted around us to awe, rebuke, and check us. Still, there are traces of our ancient grandeur; there is so much consideration shown to us as to justify the impression that those prisoners were once kings, and that this dungeon was once a palace. To one unacquainted with the history of our race, the dealings of Providence in regard to us must appear inexplicably mysterious. But the whole subject is covered with light when the doctrine of the Fall is understood. The gravest theological errors with respect alike to the character of God and the character of man have arisen from the monstrous hypothesis that our present is our primitive condition, that we are now what God originally made us" (James H. Thornwell, 1812-1862).

