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*“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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## THE LORD LOOKING ON US

### NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE TO BE READ JANUARY 1<sup>ST</sup>

As we near the close of another period of time, it is our desire (following our usual custom) to look unto the LORD and ask Him to graciously give us a word, which—with His blessing upon the same—will prove a real help to His people for the new year, and which may serve to keep up their faith upon Him throughout the days which lie ahead. Here is the one which is now laid upon our heart: “Look thou upon me” (Psa 119:132). It is a very brief address unto the living God, yet much is contained in it, and most comprehensive is the same. It is an appeal unto the divine compassion, a looking to God for help, a request for mercy, a petition for His favourable regard, a begging Him to take notice of our need. It is a very modest request, for the least discovery of the divine favour is welcome to a tried or afflicted soul. Any regenerate person regards it as a great favour for God to look upon him; and there is nothing he values so highly as a token and sense of His approbation.

Since my looking unto Thee is often so slight, so formal, so distant, that little impression is made upon my heart, do Thou condescend to “look upon me.” Vouchsafe me such a look as will melt me to tenderness and contrition. “Lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon [me]” (Psa 4:6), so that all darkness will be dispelled from my soul, that “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Phi 4:7) may be mine in increasing measure. Grant me such a sight of Thy countenance as will kindle my affections and draw out my heart unto Thee. Such a request is an expression of faith and hope: “Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless” (Deu 26:15)—such a look is fraught with *blessing*! As Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) well put it: “If a look from us to God has saving virtue in it, what may we not expect from a look from God to us!” It is much to be thankful for when this is really the desire of our hearts: when, instead of shrinking from God and dreading His notice of us, we have such confidence in His goodness and mercy that we cry, “Look thou upon me.”

There was a time when the LORD said unto you, “Look unto me, and be ye saved” (Isa 45:22), and by enabling grace, you did so; and now you say unto Him, “Look thou upon me.” Thus, we see how Christ and the believer speak one and the same language: and no marvel, for one and the same Spirit who dwells in the Head dwells also in His members! “Look thou upon me” is a word which every soul who is hungering and thirsting after Christ may well appropriate. It is one which is most suitable for each of them to lay hold of at the beginning of a new year, for—no matter what may be your circumstances—it will prove an appropriate one for every day and every hour in it. Though so short, this prayer is exceedingly full, and expresses all we need to say, whatever be our situation. Whether in prosperity or adversity, joy or sorrow, health or sickness, life or death, you will need nothing more than for the LORD to look upon thee. Whether a babe or a mature saint, all your spiritual desires are summed up in this one expression.

All is well with the believer when the LORD looks in a manifestative way upon him with a look of love. Christ cannot look upon one of His own without His heart being drawn out to him, “for we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb 4:15). Far otherwise: “In all their affliction he was afflicted” (Isa 63:9). Ask the genuine Christian what his case is, and he will reply, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18). Ask him how this affects him, and he will say, “The heart knoweth his own bitterness” (Pro 14:10). But this makes way for him to put up this petition: “Look thou upon me.” Is that the experience of the reader? It is frequently so with the writer. Thus, your case and mine are one and the same. Such experience consists of a knowledge of self and of sin; and this it is which fits us to live upon Christ—the sinner’s Saviour. “O LORD, I am *oppressed*; undertake for me” (Isa 38:14).

As none are freed from indwelling sin, so none are from its workings and effects. Nor is any child of God exempted in this life from the sorrows and distresses which are the consequences of the same. As a regenerate soul is conscious of the activities of indwelling sin and their defiling effects, he cannot but grieve over the same; and such grief produces manifold disquietude of mind. Then it is that all of us are far too apt to lose sight of Christ and cast away our confidence in Him. Too often, the saints resort to reasoning, and draw gloomy conclusions—if not downright false inferences—from their uncomfortable feelings. But it ought not to be so. God suffers His people to be brought frequently into such a condition that they may make fuller use of this prayer: “Look thou upon me.” When do you have most *need* for Him to look

upon you? When sensible of your sins, and cast down by them! He gives us a clear sight of what we are by nature to wean us from self and cast us more upon Himself.

Sometimes we are sorely tried by our outward circumstances—when, to carnal reason, everything seems to have gone wrong—and we petulantly exclaim with Jacob, “All these things are against me” (Gen 42:36). Yet they were not. His conclusion was, in fact, entirely erroneous, for all those things were working in his favour at that very time. Yet it often appears to us that everything is contrary to our best interests. Yes, my reader, God permits that *testing*, yea, orders those seemingly unpropitious circumstances. And why? To lead you from the creature unto Himself. Were we not painfully conscious of our straits and wants, what occasion would there be for us to go unto the LORD with such a prayer, as “Look thou upon me?” What saint is there who has not found exactly suited to his case those words, “Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is *overwhelmed*: lead me [for I seem to have lost my way] to the rock that is higher than I” (Psa 61:1-2)?

It is a wonderful relief to the mind to recall that Christ is the Saviour of sinners, yea, of the very chief of sinners. To remember that He loved us before ever we loved Him. That He loved us when there was nothing but sin in us. We readily assent to that as sound doctrine; but when, in experience, we feel how sinful we still are—what complete failures we have proved to be—we are slow to give full and hearty consent thereto. That is because we are too much occupied with our wretched selves. We forget that the greater the skill of the physician, the more suited to him is a desperate and urgent case. All too frequently we neglect coming to the great Physician. Do you feel there is none in more need of Him? Then say, “Look thou upon me.” Have compassion upon me, O LORD, even though I be not worthy to be called Thy son. If He deigns to look upon us—and when did He ever cast out one who came to Him?—we are sure to be the better for it.

The LORD has said everything in His Word to encourage His people to turn unto Him. He declares: “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands” (Isa 49:16). “And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me” (Isa 65:10). “But my kindness shall not depart from thee” (Isa 54:10). “I will not turn away from them, to do them good... Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good” (Jer 32:40-41). Christ regards His redeemed as His “brethren,” as members of His mystical body, as the travail of His soul, and as the apple of His eye. Therefore, we may well cry unto Him, “Look thou upon me.” In so doing, you give Him His glory. O fellow believer, suffer what you may, experience whatever it be, and allow it not to weaken your confidence in your most gracious LORD. Say to Him, Didst not Thou bear all my sins in Thine own body on the tree? Hast Thou not redeemed me from the curse of the Law, by being made a curse for me? Hast Thou not loved me, even me, and washed me from my sins in Thine own blood? Then “Look thou upon me” now.

If you be in health and strength, pray “Look thou upon me” (Psa 119:132) that they may be used to Thy honour and praise. If you are being ill treated by friends and deserted by brethren, here is your relief. When sin has mastered and overthrown you, make this your recourse. When you can feelingly confess, “I am vile” (Job 40:4), plead Isaiah 66:2. When bowed down with bereavement and your heart is too full to add more, say, “Look upon mine affliction” (Psa 25:18). If lying upon a bed of pain or the cold hand of death be nearing your brow, this is most suitable language to address the eternal Lover of your soul. You cannot have a need which He is unable to supply. He is interested in your body, as well as your soul, and is engaged to care for us in temporals, as well as spirituals. Nothing is too hard for Him. Such is His grace that “he giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength” (Isa 40:29). If we are spared to enter 1950, may each of us make frequent use of this prayer: “Look thou upon me.”



## THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

### 72. Revelation 1:5-6, Part 2

Two evidences of the love of Christ for His people are mentioned in this prayer: His cleansing, and His enriching of them by the dignities He bestows upon them. But there is also a third expression and manifestation of His love, which, though not distinctly expressed, is necessarily implied here—namely His *provision for* them. As the result of the work which His love prompted Him to perform on their behalf, He meritoriously secured the Holy Spirit for His people (Act 2:33). He therefore sends Him to regenerate them, to take of the things of Christ and show the same unto them, to impart an experiential and saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and to produce faith in their hearts, so that they believe on Him unto everlasting life. We say that all of this is “necessarily implied,” for thereby—and thereby alone—are they enabled truly and feelingly to exclaim, “Unto him that loved *us*” (Rev 1:5); yea, so that each of them may aver, “who loved *me*, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). That is the quintessence of real blessedness: to be assured by the Spirit from the Word that they are the objects and subjects of Christ’s infinite and immutable love. The knowledge thereof makes Him “altogether lovely” (Song 5:16) in their esteem, rejoices their souls, and sanctifies their affections.

See here the appropriating nature of saving faith. It takes hold of Christ and His sacrifice for sinners as made known in the Word of Truth. It says, Here is a love-letter from heaven about the glorious Gospel of the Son of God, which gives an account of Christ’s love and the strongest and greatest possible proofs thereof. I see that letter is *for me*, for it is addressed to sinners, yea, to the very chief of sinners; and that it both invites and commands me to receive this divine Lover unto myself, and unfeignedly believe in the sufficiency of His atoning blood for *my* sins. Therefore, I take Him as He is freely proffered by the Gospel, and rely on His own word, “And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37). This faith comes not by feelings of my love to Christ, but by the *hearing* of His love to sinners (Rom 5:8; 10:17). True, the Holy Spirit, in the day of His power, makes impressions on the heart by the Word—yet the *ground* of faith is not those impressions, but the Gospel itself. The *Object* of faith is not Christ working on the heart, and softening it, but rather, Christ as He is presented to our acceptance in the Word. What we are called upon to hear is not Christ speaking secretly within us, but Christ speaking openly, objectively, without us.

A most dreadful curse is pronounced upon all who “love not the Lord Jesus Christ” (1Co 16:22), and solemn indeed is it to realize that the same rests upon the vast majority of our fellows, even in those countries which are reputed to be Christian. And why does any sinner love Christ? Because he believes the love of Christ to sinners. He perceives the wonder and preciousness thereof, for “faith...worketh by love” (Gal 5:6), even by the love of Christ manifested to us. It receives or takes His love unto the heart. There, it works peace in the conscience, gives conscious access to God (Eph 3:12), joy in Him, communion with and conformity to Him. That faith, implanted by the Holy Spirit, and which works by love—the reflex of our apprehension and appropriation of Christ’s love—slays our enmity against God, and causes us to delight in His Law (Rom 7:22). Such faith knows, on the authority of the Word of God, that our sins—which were the cause of our separation and alienation from Him—have been washed away by the atoning blood of Christ. How inexpressibly blessed it is to know that in the fullness of time, Christ appeared “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26); and that God says of all believers, “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 10:17).

Upon our belief of these divine testimonies, it depends, to a large extent, on both our practical holiness and our comfort. In proportion to our faith therein will be our love to Christ and adoration of Him. Where there is a personal assurance of His love, there cannot but be a joining with the saints in heaven in praising Christ for washing us from our sins (Rev 5:9-10). But many will object, “I still have so much sin in me, and it so often gets the mastery over me, that I dare not cherish the assurance that Christ has washed me from *my* sins.” If that be your case, we ask, Do you mourn over your corruptions, and earnestly desire to be forever rid of them? If so, that is proof you are entitled to rejoice in Christ’s atoning blood. God sees fit to leave sin in you, that in this life you may be kept humble before Him, and marvel the more at His longsufferance. It is His appointment that the Lamb should now be eaten “with bitter herbs” (Exo 12:8). “This is not your rest” (Mic 2:10), and He suffers you to be harassed by your lusts that you may look forward more

eagerly to the deliverance and rest awaiting you. Though Romans 7:14-25 be your experience, Romans 8:1 also declares, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus"!

"And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father" (Rev 1:6). Here is the third inspiring reason of the ascription which follows. Having owned their indebtedness to the Saviour's love and sacrifice, the saints are now heard celebrating the high dignities which He has conferred upon them. They, in their measure, are made partakers of the honours of Him who is both the King of kings and our great High Priest; and the apprehension thereof evokes a song of praise unto Him. As it is realized that the Lord Jesus shares His own honours with His redeemed—conferring upon them both regal dignity and priestly nearness to God—they cannot but exultantly exclaim, "*To him* be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (verse 6). We were *virtually* made kings and priests, when He contracted to fulfil the terms of the everlasting covenant, for by that engagement, we were constituted such. *Imperatively*, we were made so, when He paid the price of our redemption, for it was by His merits that He purchased these privileges for us. *Federally*, we were made so, when He ascended on high (Eph 2:6), and entered within the veil as our Forerunner (Heb 6:20). *Actually*, we were made so, at our regeneration, when we became participants of His unction.

"And hath made us kings and priests unto God." Here we have the Redeemer exalting and ennobling His redeemed. This presupposes and follows upon our pardon, and is the *positive* result of Christ's meritorious sacrifice. The One who loved us has not only removed our defilements, but has also restored us to the divine favour and fellowship, and secured for us the award: He took our place that we might share His. In order that they may be protected from certain insidious errors—which have brought not a few of God's children into bondage—it is important to perceive that these designations belong not merely to a very select and advanced class of Christians, but equally to *all* believers. It is also necessary, lest they be robbed by dispensationalists, that they should realize these dignities pertain to them *now*, and are not postponed until their arrival in heaven, and still less, till the dawn of the millennium. Every saint has these two honours conferred on him at once: he is a regal priest, and a priestly monarch. Therein, we see the dignity and nobility of the Lord's people. The world looks upon them as mean and contemptible, but He speaks of them as "the excellent, in whom is all my delight" (Psa 16:3).

"Hath made us kings and priests" is definitely implied, though not actually stated—in "and hath anointed us" (2Co 1:21)—for it is a word expressive of *dignity*. Kings and priests were anointed when inaugurated in their offices; and therefore, when it is said that God has anointed all who are in Christ Jesus, it intimates that He has qualified and authorized them to the discharge of these high offices. As believers are informed through another apostle: "Ye have an unction from the Holy One" and "the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you" (1Jo 2:20, 27). We have a participation in Christ's anointing (Act 10:38), receiving the same Spirit wherewith He was anointed—a beautiful type of which is set forth in Psalm 133:2. The blessedness of the elect appears in that they are made both kings and priests by virtue of the Name in which they are presented before God. They who receive "abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall *reign* in life by one, Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:17). Though in all things, Christ has the pre-eminence, being "the King of kings" (1Ti 6:15)—for He has been "anointed thee with the oil of gladness *above* thy fellows" (Psa 45:7)—yet His companions are invested with royalty, and "*as* he is, *so* are we in this world" (1Jo 4:17). Oh for faith to appropriate that fact, and for grace to conduct ourselves accordingly.

We believe there is a designed contrast between the two expressions, "the kings *of the earth*" and "hath made *us* kings and priests unto God." They are kings naturally; and we, spiritually: they, unto men; and we, unto God. They are but kings; we are priests, too. The dominion of earthly monarchs is but fleeting; their regal glory quickly fades. Even that of Solomon—which surpassed them all—was but of brief duration. But *we* shall be sharers of a Throne (Rev 3:21) whose foundation is indestructible, whose scepter is everlasting, whose dominion shall be universal (Rev 21:6-7). We shall be clothed with immortality, and vested with a glory which shall never be dimmed. Believers are "kings"—not in the sense that they take any part in heaven's rule over the earth, but as sharers in their Lord's triumph over Satan, sin, and the world. In *that*, they are also distinguished from the *angels*—for they are not "kings," nor will they ever "reign," because they are not "anointed." They have no union with the incarnate Son of God, and therefore, they are not "joint-heirs" with Him as the redeemed are. So far from it, they are "all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb 1:14). A subordinate place and a subservient task is *theirs!*

Christ has not only done a great work *for* His people, but He accomplishes a grand work *in* them. He not only washes them from their sins, which He hates, but He also transforms by His power their persons, which He loves. He does not leave them as He first finds them—under the dominion of Satan, sin, and the

world. No, He makes them “kings”—and a king is one who is called to rule, is invested with authority, and exercises dominion; and so do believers over their enemies. True, some of the subjects we are called to rule are both strong and turbulent—yet we are “more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom 8:37). The Christian is “a king against whom there is no rising up” (Pro 30:31), for though he may often be overcome in his person, yet not so in his cause. There is still a law in his members warring against the law of his mind (Rom 7:23), yet sin shall not have dominion over him (Rom 6:14). Once, the world kept him in bondage—presuming to dictate his conduct—so that he was afraid to defy its customs, and ashamed to ignore its maxims. But “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1Jo 5:4)—causing us to seek our portion and enjoyment in things above.

“King is a name of honour, power, and ample possession. Here we reign spiritually, as we vanquish the devil, the world, and the flesh in any measure. It is a princely thing to be above those inferior things, and to trample them under our feet in a holy and heavenly pride. A heathen could say, ‘He is a king that fears nothing and desires nothing.’ He that is above the hopes and fears of the world, he that hath his heart in heaven and is above temporal trifles, the ups and downs of the world, the world beneath his affections; this man is of a kingly spirit. Christ’s kingdom is not of this world, neither is a believer’s. Thou ‘hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth’ (Rev 5:10)—namely in a *spiritual* way. It is a beastly thing to serve our lusts, but kingly to have our conversation in heaven and vanquish the world—to live up to our faith and love with a noble spirit. Hereafter, we shall reign visibly and gloriously when we shall sit upon thrones with Christ”—Thomas Manton (1620-1677). The saints will yet judge the world, yea, angels, too (1Co 6:2-3).

The work which is assigned to the Christian as a “king” is to *govern himself*. “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that *ruleth his spirit* than he that taketh a city” (Pro 16:32). As a “king,” the Christian is called upon to mortify the flesh (Rom 8:12-13; Col 3:5-9; Gal 5:19-21, 24), resist the devil (Jam 4:6-7), discipline his temper (Pro 16:32; 19:11; Col 3:8), subdue his lusts (Rom 6:12; 13:14; Gal 5:22-24; Eph 4:21-22), and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2Co 10:5). That is a lifelong task. Nor can he accomplish it in his own strength. It is his duty to seek enablement from above, and to draw upon the fullness of grace which is available for him in Christ. The heart is his kingdom (Pro 4:23); and it is his responsibility to make reason and conscience govern his desires, so that his will is subject to God. He is required to be the master of his appetites and the regulator of his affections (Gal 5:24; 1Co 9:25; 2Pe 1:6; Pro 23:21), to deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts,” to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Ti 2:12), to be “temperate in all things” (1Co 9:25). He is to subdue his impetuosity and impatience (Rom 12:12; 1Th 5:14; Jam 5:8), refuse to take revenge when others wrong him (Mat 5:39, 44; Luk 6:28-29), bridle his passions (Jam 3:2; Col 3:2), “overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21), and to have such control of himself that he “rejoice[s] with trembling” (Psa 2:11); and “in whatsoever state [he be, learn] therewith to be content” (Phi 4:11).

Some earthly monarchs have not a few faithless and unruly subjects, who envy and hate them, who chafe under their scepter, and want to depose them; nevertheless, they still maintain their thrones. In like manner, the Christian king has many rebellious lusts and traitorous dispositions which oppose and continually resist, yet he must seek grace to restrain them. Instead of expecting defeat, it is his privilege to be assured, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi 4:13). The apostle was exercising his royal office when he declared, “All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1Co 6:12)—and therein he has left us an example (1Co 11:1). He was also conducting himself as a king when he said, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1Co 9:27). Yet, like everything else in this life, the *exercise* of our regal office is very imperfect. Not yet do we fully enter into our royal honours, or act out our royal dignity. Not yet have we received the crown, nor sat down with Christ on His throne—which are essential for the complete manifestation of our kingship. Yet the crown is laid up for us: a mansion (infinitely surpassing Buckingham Palace) is being prepared for us, and the promise is ours—“The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom 16:20).

Following our usual custom, we have endeavoured to supply the most help where the commentators and other expositors afford the least. Having sought to explain at some length the kingly office of the believer, less needs to be said upon the sacerdotal. A “priest” is one who is given a place of nearness to God, who has access to Him, and who holds holy intercourse with Him. It is his privilege to be admitted into the Father’s presence and be given special tokens of His favour. He has a divine service to perform. His office is one of high honour and dignity (Heb 5:4-5), and pertains to no ecclesiastical hierarchy, but is common to

*all believers.* “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood” (1Pe 2:9). Christians are “an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1Pe 2:5). They are worshippers of the divine majesty, and bring with them a “sacrifice of praise to God continually” (Heb 13:15). “For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts” (Mal 2:7). As priests, they are to be intercessors “for all men”—especially “for kings, and for all that are in authority” (1Ti 2:1-2). But the full and perfect exercise of our priesthood lies in the future, when—rid of sin, legality, and carnal fears—we shall see God face to face and worship Him uninterruptedly.

“To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:6). This is an act of worship, an ascription of praise, a breathing of adoration unto the Redeemer from the hearts of the redeemed. Christians vary very much in their capacities and attainments, and differ in many minor views and practices, but they all unite with the apostle in this. All Christians have substantially the same views of Christ and the same love for Him. Wherever the Gospel has been savingly apprehended, it cannot but produce this effect. First, there is a devout acknowledgment of what the Lord Jesus has done for us, and then a doxology rendered unto Him. As we contemplate *who* it was that loved us—not a fellow mortal, but the everlasting God—we are bowed before Him in worship. As we consider *what* He did for us—shed His precious blood—our hearts are drawn out in love to Him. As we realize *how* He has bestowed such marvelous dignities upon us—made us kings and priests—we cannot but cast our crowns at His feet (Rev 4:10). Where such sentiments truly possess the soul, Christ will be accorded the throne of our hearts; and our deepest longing will be to please Him and to live unto His glory.

“To him be glory.” This is a word, which, according to its derivation, signifies solid excellence and weight of splendour. The “glory of man” is a phrase used to express the human soul, for that is his most noble part. The “glory of God” connotes the excellence of the divine being, and the perfections of His character. The “glory of Christ” comprehends His essential deity, the moral perfections of His humanity, and the high worth of all His offices. He has an intrinsic glory as God the Son (Joh 17:5). He has an official glory as the God-man Mediator (Heb 2:9). He has a merited glory as the reward of His work, and this He shares with His redeemed (Joh 17:22). In our text, “glory” is ascribed to Him for each of these reasons. Christ is here magnified both for the underived excellence of His person—which exalts Him infinitely above all creatures—and for that acquired glory which will yet be displayed before an assembled universe. There is a glory pertaining to Him as God incarnate, and this was proclaimed by the angels over the plains of Bethlehem (Luk 2:14). There is a glory belonging to Him in consequence of His mediatorial office and work, and that is celebrated only by the redeemed.

“And dominion.” This too belongs to Him first *by right*, as the eternal God. As such, Christ’s dominion is underived and supreme. As such, He has absolute sovereignty over all creatures, including the devil himself being under His sway. But more: universal dominion is also His *by merit*. God has made “that same Jesus,” whom men crucified, “both Lord and Christ” (Act 2:36), and “all power [authority] is given unto [Him] in heaven and in earth” (Mat 28:18). It was promised Him in the everlasting covenant as the reward of His great undertaking. The mediatorial kingdom of Christ is founded upon His sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection. These dignities of His are “for ever and ever,” for “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end” (Isa 9:7, and compare Dan 7:14). “Amen” sets faith’s seal to the same.

How blessed is this, that before any announcement is made of the awful judgments described in the Apocalypse, before a trumpet of doom is sounded, before a vial of God’s wrath is poured on the earth, the saints are *first* heard hymning the Lamb: “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests [not unto ourselves but] unto God and his Father [for His honour]; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5-6)!



## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

### 52. *The Gibeonites*

In our last, we dwelt upon the twofold reaction of the Canaanites, the notable victories which the LORD gave Israel at Jericho and Ai: namely, the determination of the kings to employ massed force (Jos 9:1-2), and the deception which the Gibeonites practised upon them (verses 3-6), which illustrates the dual character in which Satan opposes the people of God and the methods he employs therein—as the roaring lion seeking to devour (1Pe 5:8), as the subtle serpent using guile (2Co 11:3; Gen 3:13). Both Scriptural and ecclesiastical history demonstrate that the latter is far more dangerous and successful than the former. When open persecution fails either to exterminate or intimidate the faithful, Satan resorts to his secret wiles, which only too often corrupt their testimony. Nor is the reason for this hard to discover. Not only is the former method much more easily detected, but fierce opposition casts believers upon the LORD for enabling strength and fortitude—and thus, proves a blessing in disguise to them, whereas they are very apt to be less on their guard against Satan's sly artifices; and if pride persuades them that they are too well established in the truth to be misled by error or taken in by hypocrites, they more easily fall victims of his snares.

What has just been pointed out receives forceful exemplification in the incident we are pondering. By God's enablement, Joshua and his men made short work of the combined efforts of the kings and their vast armies (Jos 11:1-12), but, as 2 Samuel 21:1 shows, the descendants of these Gibeonites were long a thorn in Israel's side. But the fault was entirely their own: due (as we shall see) to their unwatchfulness and self-sufficiency. It was a solemn example of that which our LORD had in mind when He said, "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way" (Mat 13:24-25). In His interpretation, Christ stated that "the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one" (Mat 13:38). That is precisely what happened here. Let it be carefully noted that the enemy did not introduce among the wheat dandelion or thistles, but "tares," which are a spurious imitation of the wheat, and so closely alike in appearance that the one cannot be distinguished from the other, until the time of harvest. So these Gibeonites came not in their true characters, but posed as those who had come from a far country.

As stated in our last, a threefold view may be taken of these Gibeonites. First, as the world extending its patronage to corporate Christianity, seeking to destroy its distinctive testimony and heavenly character by an amalgamation with the state. In the light of that severe indictment, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" (Jam 4:4), we see that the proposal for such an unholy alliance and glaring infidelity unto God must be promptly refused. Second, as hypocrites applying for membership in the local church. In view of the divine prohibition, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" (2Co 6:14-15), how it behoves each Christian assembly to examine prayerfully and carefully the qualifications of each one seeking fellowship therewith! Third, as our evil lusts pretending to be what they are not—to have undergone a change for the better—so that they would fain persuade the unguarded that they are to be numbered among His graces. That which we are now to consider shows how inexcusable is our being imposed upon.

"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" (Jos 9:6). Incidentally, this reference to Gilgal makes it clear that Israel had made the long journey unto Ebal (Jos 8:30) for the express purpose of obeying the LORD's injunction in Deuteronomy 27:4-5, etc., that they remained there but a short time, and then returned to their original camp. But there is far more in it than that: the fact that Israel succumbed to this temptation at *this* particular place rendered their failure the more inexcusable. That will be evident from the sequel. "Gilgal" is mentioned for the first time in our book at Joshua 5:9; and there, we learn that it was the place where "the reproach of Egypt" was rolled away, when the male members of that new generation were circumcised. In other words, it was there that they received the outward mark and sign that they were separated from all other nations in covenant relation with JEHOVAH (Gen 17:9-10), set apart to

His service. It was also the place where they “kept the passover” (Jos 5:10)—for it is only those who submit to God’s ordinances and walk according to His precepts who can really enjoy communion with Him.

What has just been pointed out shows the need for looking up the marginal references of each passage, and seeking to ascertain the meaning of the proper nouns in Scripture—if we are too dilatory or in too much of a hurry to do so, we are sure to be the losers. It also supplies the key to the more specific typical signification of this incident. Circumcision connoted dedication unto God and was the Old Testament’s figure of mortifying the lusts of the flesh (Jer 4:4; Deu 10:16)—the two things which Satan hates in the LORD’s people above everything else and which he opposes at every turn, for they are what distinguish them from the world, and promote God’s glory. That which the devil is most anxious to destroy is the testimony of the saints as a peculiar people, devoted unto God, walking with Him in separation from the ungodly (Rom 12:1-2). They are to conduct themselves as “strangers and pilgrims” (1Pe 2:11) in this scene. Through Balaam, JEHOVAH had declared, “The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Num 23:9, and compare Deu 33:28). Through these Gibeonites—for it is ever his way to use human instruments (his “ministers”—2Co 11:14-15)—the enemy was making an attack upon Israel’s consecration, inducing them to ignore God’s injunction of separation, by a union with the heathen.

Thus, in the light of the special theme of Joshua, the outstanding lesson for us here is that a vital aspect of the believer’s spiritual warfare consists of the imperative need for maintaining his consecration to God and persevering with the work of mortification, ever being on the alert against the wiles of the devil to hinder him therein. But more: he must be on his most diligent guard against the *workings of pride* while engaged in this very work. That also clearly is implied in this incident. After their arduous journey to Ebal and full obedience to God there, they *had* returned to Gilgal, yet it was *here* they suffered themselves to be deceived by the craft of Satan! Alas, how deceitful are our hearts! How prone we are to be elated with the very things divine grace works in and through us. If we are gratified with our consecration, pleased with our self-denial, puffed up with our obedience, or proud of our prayerfulness and increasing dependence upon God, we are headed for disaster. “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Pro 16:18)—and pride was certainly at work in Israel at this time. Oh, how much we need to heed these injunctions: “Be not highminded, but fear” (Rom 11:20) and “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psa 2:11)!

It is true that God had said unto Israel, “When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee” (Deu 20:10-11)—a passage which must be kept in mind when reading Deuteronomy 20:16-17, and one which shows that even here, in holy wrath, God “remember[ed] mercy” (Hab 3:2). But *that* was an entirely different matter from what is now before us. There was nothing whatever in the case of these Gibeonites which justified Joshua in ignoring the plain injunction, “Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee” (Exo 34:12). There is nothing that the LORD abominates more than unholy mixtures: “Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds...Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together” (Deu 22:9-11) plainly states the principle; and Revelation 3:15-16 demonstrates His abhorrence of our repudiation of the same, for “Laodiceanism” is a union between the world and the professing Church.

“And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you?” (Jos 9:7). No doubt, it was the responsible heads of the congregation who took the lead in making answer to these disguised Canaanites, who had come with the express purpose of telling lies, to tempt the people of God, and lead them into sin. Three things are evident from their words. First, they were well instructed in the Law, for they realized it would be wrong to accede to this suggestion. Second, they were then occupying the ground of faith: “Dwell *among us*” (Jos 9:7, 22) was as though the whole of Canaan was already in their possession! Third, they did not immediately and impulsively grant their request, but voiced the language of distrust. It is those very things which made the sequel graver. It pays to be wary, yea, suspicious of impostors, if we are not to be deceived by glib tongues. “Put not your trust in princes” (Psa 146:3), and in a day like ours, “Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother” (Jer 9:4). We are sure to suffer if we disregard such warnings.

The careful reader will have observed that these “inhabitants of Gibeon” (Jos 9:3) are designated “Hivites” in verse 7; and, assured that there is nothing superfluous in Holy Writ, he will endeavour to as-

certain *why* this detail has been placed on record. It cannot be without reason and significance that the Spirit has here told us that these deceivers belong to the Hivites, and therefore, it is our duty to discover His design therein. That may require a little trouble on our part (for the meaning of much in the Word is withheld from those who fail to search it diligently), but if it serves to cast light on this incident, it is worth it. The only way to discover the Spirit's design is to use the concordance and look up other passages, particularly in the earlier books, where "the Hivites" are mentioned. Nor have we far to seek. In Genesis 34, we learn how the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father (who was a "Hivite"—verse 2) "*deceitfully*" (verse 13); and by a treacherous ruse, succeeded in slaying them and spoiling their city (verses 14-29). Here then was the bitter bit: the descendants of those who had so wickedly deceived the Hivites were now in turn deceived by them!

In the preceding article, we called attention to the fact that while the terror of the LORD had *not* fallen upon the kings of Joshua 9:1, yet it *had* upon the Gibeonites; and that while we may behold therein an illustration of His sovereignty—who makes one to differ from another, as He pleases—yet He acts not capriciously therein. Let us now amplify that statement. There was nothing arbitrary in the LORD's dealing with these Hivites; rather, He was treating with them according to the principles of His government. Though at times, His mills grind slowly, yet none the less surely. Centuries previously, the sons of Jacob had wickedly tricked the Gibeonites, and now God suffered their descendants to reap the consequences of such deception. Thus, what is here before us is a clear case of what is termed "poetic justice." But though God was righteous in permitting Israel to be imposed upon, that in no wise interfered with their accountability, or excused their slackness. Joshua and the princes of the congregation acted quite freely and—as verse 14 clearly intimates—were to blame because they sought not directions from the LORD. God's *Word*, and not His secret will, is the rule of our responsibility.

"And they said unto Joshua, We are thy servants" (Jos 9:8). This was the language of deference, signifying inferiority and expressing their willingness to perform any tasks assigned them. That was the bait to entrap Israel: We can be useful and do the rough work for you. But Joshua was not satisfied with their indefinite statement. He was on his guard, but not sufficiently so. "And Joshua said unto them, Who are ye? and from whence come ye?" It was at this very point that he failed. Instead of conferring with them, he should have gone apart and sought counsel from the LORD (Jos 9:14). He was evidently in doubt, and "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom 14:23). Even the wisdom of this world warns us, "When in doubt, do nothing." But the Word of God proffers the believer far better advice than that: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally" (Jam 1:5). It is always the height of folly for us to parley with the enemy. Moreover, in thus interrogating them, Joshua was but *tempting* these Gibeonites to tell further lies! Remember that, my reader, and go very slow in asking souls, "Are you saved?" or "How did you like the magazine I loaned you?" lest you be guilty of giving occasion to your friend (in order to "save his face") to utter a falsehood.

"And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, And all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroth" (Jos 9:9-10). The Gibeonites had already lied unto the princes of Israel (verse 6, and compare 15), and now that the further questioning of Joshua had given them an opportunity to declare their true characters, they only used it for an occasion to add to their guilt. Originally, they had stated, "We be come from a far country" (verse 6); now they said, "From a *very* far country" (verse 9), illustrating the solemn fact that one lie generally leads to another and still worse one. How earnestly we need to pray, "Remove from me the way of lying" (Psa 119:29)! It is very humiliating, but salutary to note that the LORD deemed it requisite to enjoin His own children, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour" (Eph 4:25). Exaggerating is lying, so also is the making of promises which we have no real intention of keeping. Do you really *mean* it when you say to certain ones, "I am so glad to meet you"? We may *act* a lie, as well as utter one.

A careful examination of the tale told to Joshua by these Gibeonites reveals how everything in it was designed to appeal unto Israel's *pride*. First, they claimed to have come from a very far country, which was to flatter Joshua that he was now being courted by those from so great a distance. That very feature was part of the temptation which fanned the egotism of Hezekiah and led to *his* undoing, because he was "glad" when the king of Babylon made friendly overtures unto him, and showed his messengers all his treasures—for when God's servant took him to task, he said: "They are come from a far country unto me" (Isa

39:3). Beware, my reader, of all those who fawn upon you, and remember that “the LORD shall cut off all flattering lips” (Psa 12:3). Second, their repeated “thy servants” emphasized their readiness to take an inferior and subordinate place, and be subservient to Israel. Third, they intimated that so great was the fame of Joshua’s God that, even so remotely situate, they had “heard” of His wondrous works. This, too, was said for the purpose of ingratiating themselves with Joshua, as though they, too, desired to come under JEHOVAH’s protection.

One Hebrew scholar tells us that their words, “From a very far country thy servants are come *because of the name of the LORD thy God*” may be translated “*unto the name of the LORD thy God*”: that is, willing to be proselytes to Judaism, desirous of embracing Israel’s religion—the added “*for we have heard the fame of him*” seems to confirm that rendering; and thus, a strong appeal was thereby made to Israel’s piety. They appeared to be deeply impressed by the wonders which God had wrought, and therefore, sought friendship with Israel. For this purpose, they had undertaken a very fatiguing journey, which evidenced their willingness to be tributary unto them. Their story had been carefully thought out and was “all of a piece,” for while they made reference to their knowledge of what JEHOVAH had done in Egypt and to the kings of the Amorites, they were careful to make no mention of the supernatural crossing of the Jordan, nor of Israel’s recent victories at Jericho and Ai—for tidings of them would not yet have reached “a very far country”! Thus, we are shown how far hypocrites will go in order to gain the friendship of God’s people.



## DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

### 2. *Its Extent*

What we are about to contend for in this article is very much more than a mere hypothesis or theological theory of old-fashioned extremists, namely a divine affirmation. Second Timothy 3:16 positively asserts that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God”; and since “scripture” consists of nothing but words, therefore, all Scripture is verbally inspired—there *is* no other kind! This at once sweeps away the fanciful distinctions drawn by philosophizing theologians, which have confused themselves and perplexed their readers. Such terms as “dynamical” and “mechanical” inspiration, and the inspiration of “illumination,” of “suggestion,” of “direction,” etc., are entirely arbitrary and man-made. Nowhere does the Bible itself authorize such distinctions; they are not only of human invention, but erroneous, utterly misleading, and deplorable in their results. They are misleading and mischievous, because they occupy us with the writers themselves, rather than with their writing; they direct attention to the human instruments, instead of to the One who employed them; they divert us from the grand fact of inspiration and seek needlessly to puzzle themselves over its *modus operandi*. Pretending to be wise beyond what is divinely revealed, they do but advertise their own folly.

To say that “all Scripture is God-breathed” is to affirm that every word in it is the very word which God chose in communicating to us what He designed that we should know. Every fragment of the Bible is equally inspired—no part more so than another. It is equally true of the language in which the simplest incident is narrated as of that in which the sublimest revelation is expressed. Not only does 2 Timothy 3:16 preclude *different degrees* of inspiration, but it tells us that the teachings of Moses are of the same authority as those of Christ. Our LORD Himself placed them on a par: “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (Joh 5:46-47). Through Moses, God fore announced concerning His Son, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words [not simply ‘word’!] in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Deu 18:18). And at the close of His ministry, when rendering an account thereof unto the Father, the Lord Jesus declared, “For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me” (Joh 17:8).

But alas, when spiritual conditions in Christendom—some two hundred years ago—began seriously to deteriorate, and as a century later, the deadly poison of infidelity (falsely labeled “higher thought,” “new light,” “Christian scholarship,” etc.) spread from Germany throughout the English-speaking world, a lower estimate of the Bible and its inspiration came into vogue and was propagated. The view was entertained that the prophets and apostles received a commission from God to write, but that the form in which they wrote—the actual clothing of their thoughts—was left entirely to their own judgment. It was affirmed that they were instruments, and illuminated in a general way, but permitted to exercise their own native ability. There seems to be little room for doubt that the principal reason why many, if not most, of those who admitted an inferior and general inspiration—but denied verbal—did so because of their reluctance to acknowledge anything more of the divine agency than a semblance of orthodoxy obliged. Therein we may behold the initial attempt to push *the supernatural* into the background—paving the way later for the total repudiation of it.

What has just been pointed out received sad exemplification in connection with many other branches of truth. Those who have an extensive acquaintance with the religious literature of the last two centuries are well aware that those men who held firmly to the verbal inspiration of Holy Writ were, generally speaking, sound on other subjects. Contrariwise, the lower a man’s views on inspiration, the less reliable and the more heretical was he upon other doctrines. And that is easily accounted for. The more we attribute to the Holy Spirit’s agency, the deeper our reverence for the Scriptures, the more do we feel their authority and tremble before them. But the larger place we accord to their penmen, the greater will be our tendency to resort to human reasoning, and the giving way to carnal prejudice and sentiment in our handling of them. This one consideration is sufficient to supply a strong argument in favour of the *verbal* inspiration of the Bible. Only as it is clearly recognized that the Spirit not only preserved the writers from all error—but also moved them to select every word they employed—will we stand in awe before God’s Word, and really receive it as the sole rule of our faith and standard of our conduct.

But we are not left to draw inferences or form our own conclusions on this all-important matter. Again and again, Scripture itself expressly declares that its actual words are the words of God Himself. How frequently are we told that “the word of God [the LORD]” came to such and such a one (1Ki 12:22; 1Ch 17:3; Luk 3:2): not simply that the Spirit of God came to him, but the very “word” of God—both the substance and the expression of it. Thus, David averred, “The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue” (2Sa 23:2): he was not only given the divine impulse to speak, but the very language he should utter. God indeed spoke in human speech, or He had not been intelligible to us, and we had been without a divine *revelation*; nevertheless, He Himself selected every term His instruments used. “Receive, I pray thee,” said Eliphaz to Job, “the law from *his* mouth, and lay up his *words* in thine heart” (Job 22:22). “Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book,” said the LORD God of Israel to Jeremiah (Jer 30:2). “Speak with my words unto them,” said He to Ezekiel (Eze 3:4). But “they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the *words* which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets” (Zec 7:12).

The same emphatic claim is made all through the New Testament: “This scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas” (Act 1:16). “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Act 2:4). “Which God hath spoken by the mouth [not the mind!] of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Act 3:21). “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth” (1Co 2:13)—there could be no stronger assertion of *verbal* inspiration than that! “When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1Th 2:13). “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (1Jo 4:6). “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book” (Rev 22:18).

That the language used by the prophets was the very words of JEHOVAH is demonstrated by the accomplishment of their predictions, which were not vague and general ones, but specific and detailed; and they were fulfilled not only in substance, but literally and minutely. Thus, by the pen of Moses, God made it known that the Vanquisher of that old serpent the devil should be the woman’s “seed” (Gen 3:15)—i.e. that He should be conceived and born of the virgin (Isa 7:14). It was further made known that the promised Deliverer should issue from the Japhetic branch of Noah’s family (Gen 9:27), and that He should be a direct descendant of Abraham (Gen 22:17-18). Still further was the compass narrowed by announcing that He should be of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of David (2Sa 7:12-13). His very birthplace was named (Mic 5:2). His gracious ministry (Isa 61:1-3) and miracles of healing (Isa 35:5-6) were particularized. His being despised and rejected of men (Isa 53:2-3), His being shamefully treated by them (Isa 50:6)—the very price His betrayer should receive for his perfidy (Zec 11:12). His death by crucifixion (Psa 22:16) were all foretold and fulfilled to the very letter! So too were His resurrection (Psa 16:10-11), ascension (Psa 68:18), and exaltation to God’s right hand (Psa 110:1).

Another conclusive proof of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is found in the attitude of the Son of God toward them. He so regarded, treated, and used them. Again and again, we find Him basing His argument upon a single word. Thus, when He would prove to the Pharisees by the Scriptures the Deity of the promised Messiah, He did so by insisting upon the title accorded Him in Psalm 110:1. They affirmed He would be David’s Son, but He reminded them, “For David himself said *by the Holy Ghost*, The LORD said to my *Lord*, Sit thou on my right hand” (Mar 12:36). Likewise, when refuting the Sadducees, He insisted on the truth of resurrection from the language of Exodus 3:6: “Have ye not read that...I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mat 22:31-32). Let young preachers especially mark attentively what weight every single word in the Book of God had for the One to whom they will in the day to come have to render an account of their stewardship (Heb 13:17; Jam 3:1). If they would ascertain the place which the Bible held in Christ’s esteem, let them ponder His emphatic assertion, “And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law [Scripture] to fail” (Luk 16:17).

As James A. Haldane (1768-1851) pertinently asked, “On what principle but that of the verbal inspiration of Scripture can we explain our Lord’s words, ‘Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him,

whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?' (Joh 10:34-36). Here, the argument is founded on one word—'gods'—which, without verbal inspiration, might not have been used; and if used improperly, might have led to idolatry. In proof of the folly of their charge of blasphemy, He referred the Jews to where it is written in their law, 'I said ye are gods.' The reply to this argument is obvious: the Psalmist, they might answer, uses the word in a sense which is not proper. But Jesus precluded the observation by affirming, 'the scripture *cannot be broken*'—that is, not a word of it can be altered, because it is the Word of Him with whom there is no variableness. Could this be said if the choice of words had been left to men? Here, then, we find our Lord laying down a principle which for ever sets the matter at rest."

Equally explicit is the testimony of the apostles. "But we [the apostles] have the mind of Christ" (1Co 2:16). When recording what they had heard from His lips, they were not left to their own fallible recollection of the same: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost...he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (Joh 14:26). Paul insisted that the Gospel which he preached was "not after man," neither did he receive it "of man," but "by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:11-12). He dogmatically affirmed to his detractors, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1Co 14:37). And again, "He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit" (1Th 4:8)—therein he made it clear that what he wrote was not his own opinions and views, but rather, that which had been given from above. When he foretold the great declension which should mark the closing days of the Christian era, he was most particular to disavow any perspicuity or foresight of his own, saying, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith" (1Ti 4:1).

Like their Master, the apostles revered the Old Testament as of divine authorship and authority. When the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews made reference to the Mosaic rites and pointed out that none of the priests was allowed to enter the inner chamber of the tabernacle, saving only the high priest, and he but once a year, the statement was made, "The Holy Ghost this [thereby] signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest" (Heb 9:8). When solemnly warning them against apostasy, ere citing the sad example of their fathers recorded in Psalm 95:8-11, he declared, "Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith...)" (Heb 3:7-11), thereby showing that that Psalm had been dictated by God Himself. So again, when quoting from the prophet Jeremiah, to prove that the old covenant had been displaced by the new, he affirmed, "Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us" (Heb 10:15). As G. Bishop so forcibly expressed it, "'God-breathed' sweeps the whole ground. God comes down as a blast upon the pipes of the organ—in voice like a whirlwind, or in still whispers like Aeolian tones, and saying the Word, He seized the hand, and makes that hand His own, the pen of a most ready writer."

Not only did the apostles bow to the divine authority of the Old Testament, but they regarded it as being verbally inspired. This is unmistakably clear from the use they made of it, for again and again, they too based their argument upon a single expression used therein. Let us turn again to the epistle to the Hebrews (where most use is made of the earlier Scriptures) for our illustrations: In Hebrews 2:8, after quoting, "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet," it is insisted that the one word "all" demonstrates the supreme dominion which has been accorded the coronated Redeemer. In Hebrews 2:11-12, it is shown from, "I will declare thy name unto my *brethren*" (Psa 22:22) that it behoved the Son of God to take upon Him human nature. In Hebrews 3:2-6, he takes his proof that Christ was the Servant of JEHOVAH, that He had a particular relation to the family of God, and that, because of His fidelity, He is worthy of the highest honour—all from a statement found in Numbers 12:7, where God said, "My servant Moses...who is faithful in all mine house." In Hebrews 3:7-19 and 4:2-11, where Psalm 95:7-11 is repeatedly quoted, the writer "proves his case" by an appeal to the expressions "to day," "I have sworn," and "my rest," which was further confirmed by "and he [God] *rested* on the seventh day" (Gen 2:2).



## EVANGELICAL OBEDIENCE

### *Part 2*

In our last article, we pointed out that God justly requires a perfect obedience from all rational creatures, and that under no circumstances will He lower His demand. Every regenerate soul concurs with God's holy claim, and deeply laments his inability to meet that claim. We also affirmed that under the moderation of the New Covenant constitution, God is graciously pleased to accept and approve of an obedience from His people, which—though sincerely desiring and endeavouring to measure up to His perfect standard—is, through their remaining corruptions and infirmities, a very defective one; and that He does so without any reflection upon His honour. We followed that brief averment by giving excerpts from some of the Puritans—the number of which might easily be multiplied—not for the purpose of buttressing our own teaching, but in order that it might be seen that we are not advancing here any dangerous or strange doctrine. Nevertheless, the majority of our readers will require something from an infinitely higher authority than that on which to rest their faith; and to it, we now turn.

In Genesis 26:5, we find the LORD declaring: "Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." Yet he did not do so perfectly, for he was a man "subject to like passions as we are"; nevertheless, God owned his obedience, and, as the context there shows, rewarded him for the same. Sincere obedience, though it be not sinless, is acceptable unto God; if it were not, then it would be impossible for any of His children to perform a single act in this life which was pleasing in His sight. Not only so, but many statements made in the Scriptures concerning saints would be quite unintelligible to us—statements which *oblige us* to believe that God receives the hearty, yet imperfect, endeavours of His people; yea, that He attributes unto the same a far higher quality than they do. Thus, He said of Job, "That man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1); yet, as we read all that is recorded of him, it soon becomes apparent that he—like ourselves—was "compassed with infirmity" (Heb 5:2).

When the LORD declared concerning David His servant that "he *kept* my commandments and my statutes" (1Ki 11:34), He was speaking relatively and not absolutely. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way" (Psa 37:23), notwithstanding that he often stumbles, yea, falls, in the same. There are but two classes of people in the sight of God: "the children of disobedience" (Eph 2:2), and "obedient children" (1Pe 1:14)—yet many a regenerate soul is fearful of classifying himself with the latter. But he ought not—his scruples are due to an insufficiently enlightened conscience. When the Lord Jesus said to the Father of those whom He had given Him, "They have *kept* thy word" (Joh 17:6), surely, it is obvious that He was not affirming that their obedience was perfect. "Evangelical keeping is filial and sincere obedience. Those imperfections, Christ pardoneth, when He looketh back and seeth many errors and defects in the life—as long as we bewail sin, seek remission, and strive to attain perfection. All the commandments are accounted kept when that which is not done is pardoned"—Thomas Manton (1620-1677). When the heart beats true to Him, Christ makes full allowance for our frailties.

With the Word of God in his hands, there is no excuse for anyone who has, by divine grace, been brought to hate sin and love God to stumble over the point we are now treating of. David had many failings—and some of a gross and grievous nature—yet he hesitated not to say unto God himself: "I [have] *kept* thy precepts" (Psa 119:56). In *what sense* had he done so? Inwardly: in spirit, in holy resolution, and earnest endeavour; outwardly, too, in the general current of his life; and wherein he failed, he deeply repented and obtained forgiveness from God. Christ will yet say to each one who has improved the talents entrusted to him, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Mat 25:21)—yet that is far from implying that therein he was without fault or failure. When Paul prayed for the Hebrew saints that God would make them "perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight," he was making request for those indwelt by sin, as his added acceptable "*through* Jesus Christ" (Heb 13:21) necessarily implied. "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments" (1Jo 3:22) would have no comfort for us, if God accepted only sinless obedience.

"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1Sa 16:7). Those words are capable of more than one legitimate application, but they are peculiarly pertinent here. True, God is very far from being indifferent to the *substance* of our obedience—yet the *spirit* in which it is performed is what He notices first. Duties are not distinguished by their external form, but by their internal frame—

one may perform the same duty from fear or compulsion, which another does freely and out of love. “Waters may have the same appearance, yet one be sweet; and the other, brackish. Two apples may have the same colour, yet one may be a crab; and the other, of a delightful relish. We must look to the Rule that the matter of our actions are suited to it; otherwise, we may commit gross wickedness, as those did who thought that they did God service by killing His righteous servants (Joh 16:2). We must look also to the face of our hearts; otherwise, we may be guilty of gross hypocrisy”—Stephen Charnock (1628-1680). The Pharisees kept the Sabbath with great strictness, yet their outward conformity unto that divine Law was far from being acceptable in God’s sight.

“The LORD weigheth the spirits” (Pro 16:2). That has a meaning which should make each of us tremble—yet it should also be of great comfort to the regenerate, and evoke thanksgiving. If, on the one hand, the omniscient One cannot be imposed upon by the most pious appearance and utterances of the hypocrite; yet on the other, He knows those “who *desire* to fear [His] name” (Neh 1:11), even though some of their actions proceed from a contrary principle. All the intentions and motives of our hearts are naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do; and full consideration is given thereto as God estimates our performances. Was not this very truth both the comfort and confidence of erring Peter when he declared to his Master: “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that [contrary to appearances] I [really and truly] love thee” (Joh 21:17). “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities [the shortcomings of Thy full and righteous demands],...who shall stand?” (Psa 130:3). Not one of His people. But, as the next verse goes on to assure us: “But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared” (verse 4)—yes, held in awe, and not trifled with. Blessed balance of truth!

“For if there be first a *willing mind*, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not” (2Co 8:12)—upon which Matthew Henry (1662-1714) says in his commentary: “The willing mind is accepted when accompanied with sincere endeavours. When men purpose that which is good and endeavour according to their ability to perform also, God will accept of what they have or can do, and not reject them for what they have not, and what is not in their power to do; and this is true as to other things besides the work of charity.” Yet it was prudently added: “But let us note here, that this Scripture will not justify those who think good meanings are enough, or that good purposes and the profession of a willing mind are sufficient to save them. It is accepted indeed, where there is a performance as far as we are able.” A readiness of disposition is what God regards, and that disposition is judged by Him according to the resources which are at its command. Our Father estimates what we render unto Him by the purity of our intentions. Little is regarded as much when love prompts it. If the heart be really in it, the offering is well pleasing to Him whether it be but “two young pigeons” (Luk 2:24), or tens of thousands of oxen and sheep (1Ki 8:63).

“The Covenant of Grace insists not so much upon the measure and degree of our obedience, as on the quality and nature of every degree—that it be sincere and upright”—Ezekiel Hopkins (1634-1690). In contrast with legal obedience, evangelical obedience consists of honest aims and genuine efforts, striving to live holily, and to walk closely with God—i.e. according to the rules He has prescribed in His Word, and, according to the gracious condescension, yet equity, of the Gospel, is received and rewarded by God for Christ’s sake. That holy purposes and sincere resolutions *are* accepted by God—though they be not really accomplished—is clear from what is recorded of Abraham: namely, that “he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar” (Jam 2:21), for he never actually “offered up” Isaac, except in intention and willingness. Upon which T. Manton said: “God counteth that to be done which is about to be done, and taketh notice of what is in the heart, though it be not brought to practice and realization. Yet not idle purposes when men hope to do tomorrow what should and can be done today.” “Wherefore we labour, that, whether present [at home in the body] or absent, we may be accepted of him” (2Co 5:9) must be our grand and constant endeavour.

Another example to the point is the case of David, who desired and planned to provide a more suitable dwelling-place for JEHOVAH in Israel’s midst. As Solomon, at a later date, declared: “But the LORD said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house for my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart” (2Ch 6:8). God graciously accepted the will for the deed, and credited His servant with the same. So it is with evangelical obedience: that which is truly sincere and is prompted by love unto God, though very imperfect, He graciously accepts as perfect. When He appeared before Abraham, the father of all them that believe, He declared, “I am the Almighty [all-sufficient] God; walk before me, and be thou perfect” (Gen 17:1)—which, in the margin, is accurately and helpfully rendered, “upright or sincere,” for absolute perfection is in this life impossible. Legal obedience was approved by *justice*; evangelical obe-

dience is acceptable unto *mercy*. The former was according to the unabated rigour of the Law, which owned nothing short of a conformity without defect or intermission; whereas the latter is received by God through Christ, according to the milder dispensation of the Gospel (Gal 3:8).

Second Chronicles 30:18-19 records a very striking instance where God accepted the will for the deed, and enforced not the full requirements of His Law: "For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary." Hezekiah apprehended God's mercy better than do some of His people to-day! "And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people" (verses 18-20). Ah, but note well that the king had restricted his request unto those who had "set [prepared] their hearts to seek" (2Ch 11:16)! Such uprightness was the very opposite of what we read of in Deuteronomy 29:19-20: "And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man."

Sincere obedience necessarily presupposes regeneration, for filial submission can proceed only from a real child of God. A spiritual life or "nature" is the principle of that obedience, for when we are renewed by God, there is newness of conversation. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (Joh 3:6)—disposed and fitted for spiritual things. Yet *after* renewal, there still remains much ignorance in the understanding, impurity in the affections, and perversity in the will yet—so as grace prevails over nature, holiness over sin, and heavenliness over worldliness. "But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days" (1Ki 15:14). Though God writes His Law on our hearts (Heb 8:10), yet as E. Hopkins pointed out, "This copy is eternally durable, yet it is but as writing upon sinking and leaky paper, which in this life is very obscure and full of blots." It is also termed, "obedience to the faith" (Rom 1:5), because "without faith it is impossible to please him [God]" (Heb 11:6)—yet how feeble our faith is! It is therefore an obedience which is performed in reliance upon Christ's mediation (Rev 8:3-4) and enablement (Phi 4:13).

But now we must endeavour to furnish a more definite and detailed answer to the pressing question: How am I to determine whether *my* obedience is really sincere and acceptable to God? By testing it with these criteria: First, is it one which, in its negative character, has a universal antipathy for sin? "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil" (Pro 8:13)—such is the purity of that nature communicated to God's child at the new birth. Though evil still cleaves to and indwells him, yet his heart loathes it. His hatred of evil is evidenced by dreading and resisting it, by forsaking it in his affections and denying self, by bitterly mourning when overcome by it and confessing the same unto God, by exercising the contrary graces and cultivating the love of holiness. Where there exists this fear of the LORD which abhors evil, it will make no reserve or exception, nor tolerate or "allow" any form or phase of it. Instead, it will aver with the Psalmist: "I hate every false way" (Psa 119:104, 128), because contrary to the God I love, and as polluting to my soul.

Second, is it one which diligently endeavours to regulate the inner man as well as the outer? God's requirement is: "My son, forget not my law; but let thine *heart* keep my commandments" (Pro 3:1). It was at this point that the hypocritical Pharisees failed so completely, for, said Christ: "For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Mat 23:27). The LORD has bidden us, "Keep thy heart with all diligence" (Pro 4:23)—and that calls for the checking of sinful thoughts and the mortifying of evil imaginations; the resisting of pride, self-will, and unbelief; the scrutinizing of our motives and aims; and making conscience of temptations and occasions to sin. Third, is it one which has the glory of God for its aim? The heart is very deceitful, and much of human religion is prompted by nothing higher than to be "seen of men" (Mat 6:5; 23:5) and gain a reputation for personal piety. How searching are those words: "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory" (Joh 7:18)! True piety is modest and self-effacing, aiming only at honouring the Lord and pleasing Him.

Fourth, is it one which has an appropriation of the whole revealed will of God, enabling me to say, "Therefore I esteem *all* thy precepts" (Psa 119:128)?—for the wilful rejection of one is the virtual of all. Though we fail miserably in some, and keep none of them perfectly, yet do our hearts approve of every duty enjoined? Fifth, is there a genuine willingness and honest desire to render full obedience unto God? If so, we shall not voluntarily and allowedly fall short of the highest perfection, but have an equal regard unto

every divine statute, not dispensing with, nor excusing ourselves from, the most severe and difficult. Sixth, is there a firm resolution (“I have sworn, and I will perform it”—Psa 119:106), a genuine effort (“I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway”—Psa 119:112), a persevering industry (“reaching forth unto those things which are before” and “pressing toward the mark”—Phi 3:12-14), and an assiduous striving to please God in all things? Seventh, is it accompanied by a conscience which testifies that though only too often I transgress, yet I loathe myself for it, and honestly endeavour to conform to the whole of God’s will? Such an obedience God accepts and accounts perfect, because the falls are due to the subtlety of Satan, the deceitfulness of sin, and the weakness of the flesh, rather than to a deliberate defiance and determined obstinacy.

Nowhere else in Scripture are the character and conduct of a saint so clearly and fully delineated as in Psalm 119, and the conscientious Christian should frequently compare himself with it. All through that Psalm, we find holy resolution and earnest endeavour side by side with conscious weakness and frailty, but dependence upon God: “Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently” (verse 4)—“O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes” (verse 5)—I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly” (verse 8)—“With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments” (verse 10)—“I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart” (verse 32)—“Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness” (verse 159)—“Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts” (verse 173). Thus, there are both holy yearning and activity, yet constant looking to God for strength and enablement.

Thus will it be seen that sincere obedience consists not of a sinless conformity to God’s will, but of genuine desires and proportionate efforts after it. It comprises two parts: the mortification of our corrupt affections, and the vivification of our graces, so that we increase in strength and make further advances in true piety. So also has it two adjuncts or attendants: repentance for past sins, and the exercise of faith for present grace. Failures are reflected upon with hatred and shame, are confessed to God with sorrow and contrition, while earnestly resolving and endeavouring to abstain from any further repetition of them. Faith looks to the merits of Christ, pleads the virtues of His blood, rests upon His intercession for us in heaven, lays hold of the promises, and counts upon God’s acceptance of our imperfect obedience for His Son’s sake—knowing that it deserves not His approbation, and is rewarded (Psa 19:11) not as a matter of debt, but of pure grace. Then let none conclude that they have no grace, because there are so many imperfections in their obedience: a child may be weak and sickly, yet a legitimate one! Renew your repentance daily, rely wholly on the mediation of Christ, and draw upon His fullness.



## OUR ANNUAL LETTER

“Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh 8:10, and compare Est 9:18, 22). It was a time of rejoicing in Israel, and after all the people had gathered together and the Book of the Law was read to them “from the morning until midday” (Neh 8:3), God’s servant bade them go and refresh their bodies—yet enjoined them not to overlook the poor, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. Like all Scripture, this verse has a spiritual and practical application unto us today, and contains a message for those who, by God’s blessing, receive help from these pages. Ours is markedly an age of selfishness, and probably all of us are more affected by its evil than we suspect. We know that a goodly number of our readers need not to have their attention drawn to it, but others perhaps require to be reminded of this word: “Send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared” (Neh 8:10). If you find food for *your* soul in these pages, would it not be pleasing unto the LORD if you had us send the “Studies” to some isolated or shut-in saint who is cut off from the public means of grace, that he too may feast thereon and rejoice with you? We are satisfied that there is a close connection between the two parts of this verse. Certain it is, God will be no one’s debtor; and if we be more lovingly solicitous for the good of others, we shall increasingly find that “the joy of the LORD is [*our*] strength” (Neh 8:10).

We have less space than usual for our letter, so must condense our remarks. We are thankful to report that our wonder-working God has maintained our small circulation, yea, granted us another slight increase. Once again, there will be at least two hundred who will not be entered upon next year’s mailing list till we hear from them, for we dare not waste the Lord’s money in sending this magazine to those who have lost interest in it. But we hope the majority of them will write us before 1949 expires. Beginning in the January 1950 issue (D.V.) will be the first installment of our long-awaited verse-by-verse exposition of the first epistle of John. Therein, we shall also start a *new* doctrinal series on “Human Depravity.” “The Life and Times of Joshua” is to be continued, and our articles on the divine inspiration of the Scriptures are to be followed by several on their *interpretation*, which, though somewhat technical, should be of special interest and importance to preachers. We sincerely trust that all who desire the 1950 issues will send in for them before copies of the earlier months are exhausted. Yet if hundreds write us during the next few weeks, we would ask them to please allow us a few days in acknowledging their letters.

It is very rarely that we make any reference to the financial side of this work, but the present situation seems to call for a word—a pleasant one, we trust. In view of the recent alteration in the value of the pound sterling in its relation to the dollar, will friends in Australia and New Zealand kindly note that 4/6 (English value) will fully cover the 1950 loose issues and 6/- the bound volume; and those in Britain 6/- for the loose issues and 7/6 for the bound volume. We shall incur no loss and make no profit at these figures. There will be no change for U.S.A. and Canadian readers—\$1.50 loose issues; \$1.75 bound volume. Promises today are unreliable, so we cannot state any definite date when the bound volumes will become available. But, all being well, they will be posted out within a few hours of their arrival. The January and February 1950 issues will not be mailed before mid or late February.

By the goodness of God, both of us have enjoyed our usual health throughout the year, and we close with a small credit balance. Praise God and continue in prayer. With hearty Christian greetings. Yours by divine mercy—A. W. and V. E. Pink.

