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**STUDIES**  
**IN THE**  
**SCRIPTURES**

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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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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# STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

## OUR DELIGHTS

*New Year’s Message — to be read on January 1, 1953*

What are really the objects of your greatest delights? What are the things which afford you the most solid and lasting pleasure? Wherein does your heart find satisfaction? The truthful answer to those questions reveals the state of your soul, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. If your affections be set upon things below, if it affords you more joy than anything else to see your bank balance growing, or to receive the honours, or revel in the pleasures of this world. If you see in Christ no beauty as to make you desire Him, then, you are a lost soul. That which we most delight in is our “God.” To rejoice more in our own wisdom, strength, or possessions, than in the Lord, is to idolize them. To take more delight in parents, wife, children, is to worship them. Yet, that is the common sin of the unregenerate the world over—as it was the Christian reader’s when he was dead in sin—to prefer the creature to the Creator.

Now, if the Lord takes such pleasure in His people (as was shown in the companion article), how much more so ought they to take pleasure in Him! Such is His injunction to the saint, “Delight thyself also in the LORD” (Psa 37:4). All things that are excellent and lovely upon earth or in heaven—all the graces of time and all the blessings of eternity—center in Him as their source and flow from Him as their fountain. Then, make Him the joy and rejoicing of your soul. Fix your thoughts upon Him and let your affections flow out to Him. Drink deeply from this Fountain of living water. Revel in your substantial portion. “My soul followeth hard after thee” (Psa 63:8). Let that be your determined resolve and supreme business. The whole spiritual life is but a pursuit of the soul toward God, and the more constantly and earnestly we seek Him, to enjoy more of His saving graces and benefits, the more we have of the love of God in us. Therefore did David express this longing as exceeding all others, “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the

beauty of the LORD” (Psa 27:4)—to commune and converse with Him, to taste the ravishing sweetness of His presence.

“Delight thyself also in the LORD” (Psa 37:4). In His peerless *person*. He has everything in Him which the renewed soul can desire, for He is “altogether lovely.” All excellencies are found in Immanuel, without defect or excess, everything in perfect harmony and in exact proportion. Delight in His holiness, for it is “glorious” (Exo 15:11); in His wisdom, for it is “manifold” (Eph 3:10); in His faithfulness, for it is “great” (Lam 3:23); in His goodness, which “endureth continually” (Psa 52:1); in His power, for it is “exceeding great” (Eph 1:19); in His mercy, which is “abundant” (1Pe 1:3); for He is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever (Heb 13:8). Delight thyself also in His *offices*, which are all exercised in thy behalf—a Prophet to instruct and direct thee (Mat 21:11), a Priest who ever liveth to make intercession for thee (Heb 7:17, 25), and present to God thy petitions and praises, and a King to rule over thee (1Ti 6:15), to subdue thine enemies (1Ch 17:10), to regulate thine affairs, and to make all things work together for thy good (Rom 8:28).

Delight thyself also in His *titles* and relationships. Is He not thy Father (Isa 9:6), thy Redeemer (1Co 1:30), thy Comforter (2Th 2:16-17)? If thou be a born-again soul, then the Lord is thy strong Rock (1Co 10:4), and thou art built upon Him (1Co 3:11), and the gates of hell shall never prevail against thee (Mat 16:18). He is thy shepherd (Heb 13:20), who maketh thee to lie down in green pastures and leadeth thee beside the still waters (Psa 23:2). He is thy Light (Joh 8:12), to illumine the understanding, and make His way plain before thy face. He is thy Shield and exceeding great Reward (Gen 15:1). Though there be much in this world to distress and depress, yet a believing contemplation of the glory of the Lord will lift our hearts and minds above it. This is the grand remedy for all our ills, the only effectual balsam for our diseases. By delighting ourselves in the Lord, comfort and support are administered to us. This is the way and means of conveying a deeper sense of God’s love unto our souls, causing us to “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1Pe 1:8).

This delighting of ourselves in the Lord is very much more than having vague and casual wishes, namely, the outgoings of our innermost and deepest longings. According as we thus delight ourselves in Him will all other objects pale. They disappoint, but He satisfies the soul. They soon vanish, but He remains. According as we make the Lord our Portion (Lam 3:24), life is imparted and vigour is infused, so that we find the joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh 8:10). This will make duties not only easy, but pleasant, giving a relish to them. This will make sorrows easier to endure, for His peace will flow into the soul and sustain it in the darkest hour. If we be daily and truly delighting ourselves in the Lord, then death will be welcome, and we shall be carried into and through it comfortably and cheerfully. Who can fear to commit his parting spirit into the hands of his Beloved!

Delight thyself in those things that delight Him, and the more wilt thou abound in those fruits which please Him. In proportion as you do will Psalm 119:47 express the language of your heart, “I delight myself in *thy commandments*, which I have loved.” By nature, we deemed His commandments burdensome, because they were contrary to the desires of the flesh, but when we were renewed by grace, another bias was given to our affections, God

writing His commandments upon our hearts (Heb 8:10), inclining us thereto, so that obedience becomes cheerful and holiness our happiness. Note well the order in Psalm 119:47. God's commandments are loved before they be delighted in, for it is love that sweetens duties, making it our meat and drink to do God's will. Thus, this is an infallible mark of a gracious soul, and therefore did David make it the character of the blessed man (the one who is happy in his soul, and on whom the divine benediction rests), "His delight is in the law of the LORD, and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psa 1:2). Paul also avers this as a sure evidence of his sincerity amid all his infirmities, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom 7:22).

The graceless professor may relish God's promises and build an unsanctifying and delusive hope upon them, but he delights not in His precepts, for he has no love for their Author. But the saint regards it as both his privilege and safety to "long after" God's precepts (Psa 119:40) in dependence on His promises, expecting a fulfillment of the promises in the way of obedience to His precepts. "Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments" (Psa 112:1), for obedience procures a good conscience and obtains the approbation of God, and thus, we find that "in keeping of them there is great reward" (Psa 19:11)—in this life as well as in the next. In times of adversity and tribulation, we should turn to God's precepts for counsel and comfort, "Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights" (Psa 119:143). "A good understanding have all they that *do* his commandments" (Psa 111:10).

If we would please the Lord, then we must also remember *the Sabbath day* and keep it holy. "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob" (Isa 58:13-14). In that way is the Sabbath to be sanctified—withdrawing the mind from temporal things, abstaining from all secular work and fleshly gratification, allowing not ourselves that liberty of speech as on other days, but setting our affections on things above, performing holy duties, and rejoicing in what that day celebrates (Psa 118:22-24). Then shall we be lifted above this world, anticipate heaven, and be favoured with blessed foretastes thereof. The saint should be most in his element when he is wholly at leisure to joy in the Lord.

"I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste" (Song 2:3). If that language marked the strength of the Church's faith in and love to Christ centuries before He became incarnate, then how much greater reason have Christians today to make it theirs! Let it never be said that they, who beheld their Beloved only through "the shadow of good things to come" (Heb 10:1) and the prophecies and promises of Scripture, were more filled with ecstasy in Him than we are, now that the promises are fulfilled and the substance is ours. Christ is the Tree of life, who not only affords shade and shelter for the weather-beaten saint, but whose branches are laden with delectable fruit, to regale and satisfy His people. Then come and sit down before Him, to enjoy His presence, obtain sweet discoveries and manifestations of His grace and love, admire and feast upon His

perfections, and rest in the Lord. The better He be known, the more goes out the heart unto Him.

In proportion as the Christian reader delights himself in the Lord, in His Word, in His Sabbath, and communes and converses with Him, the more will 1953 prove to be a happy, yea, *delightful*, year.

## EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

### *36. Seducers (2:26)*

*"These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you."*

#### ***Why this is important***

It is likely that quite a number of our readers will consider that there is little or no occasion for us to devote a chapter to our present subject, or, at any rate, that they feel in no need of anything thereon. If so, they are lamentably ignorant of their own hearts. Anyone who imagines himself to be so well taught and established in the truth as to be immune from being imposed upon by error is in a dangerous state of mind, for he is possessed by a spirit of pride and self-sufficiency, and therefore very liable to fall a victim to the wiles of the devil. It is written, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Pro 16:18). There is nothing that God hates more than pride; and where it be allowed, He humbles. Pride is "the condemnation of the devil" (1Ti 3:6), being that which brought about his ruin. It was the insensate pride of our first parents—the desire to be as God—that plunged the whole race to destruction. Pride or self-confidence was the cause of Peter's sad fall. Those who think highly of themselves affront God, and will be brought low. "Be not high minded, but fear" (Rom 11:20), dear reader. "When Majesty humbled Himself, shall the worm swell with pride?" (Bernard).

The Christian is exhorted to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1Th 5:21)—to examine carefully and critically everything which he hears or reads, testing it by the Word of God. There is pressing need for him to do so, for there is much error, cleverly disguised, abroad today. As another has pointed out, "We may know a straight line, and be assured that there is in it no curve, or twist, or angle; and yet much that appears straight will be found to be irregular, bent, and twisted, when tested by a measuring rod. In like manner we may know the truth, and yet much that appears to be true will be found false when tested by the truth Himself. The only perfect line of rectitude is Christ. All who are opposed to Him, in thought, word, or deed, are liars; even as all watches are false that contradict the sun." The Christ of many a pulpit is radically different from the Christ of God, yet because the preacher invests the figment of his own imagination with the name of "Christ," many unlearned and unstable souls are deceived into supposing that it is the Christ of Scripture that is being set before them. It was so in John's day, and that is why he

devoted this section of his epistle to an exposure of the same, and warning the saints against them.

The apostle was very jealous of the spiritual welfare of Christ's sheep, and anxious to secure them from the fierce wolves. In his other epistles he revealed the loving spirit that animated him when he declared, "I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth" (2Jo 1:4), and "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3Jo 1:4). How greatly distressed, then, must he have been to discover that some had forsaken the same and espoused error (1Jo 2:19)! He therefore wrote to instruct and warn those who might be wavering. He knew that in the most enlightened there is much ignorance. In the most determined there is yet irresolution. In the most spiritual there is still corruption. Especially in the case of the newly converted was there a need for precept upon precept, line upon line. His long experience had shown him how many defects and dangers encompassed the most favoured and advanced believers, and how requisite it was ever to address unto them the word of exhortation. In the case before us it appears that he was very hopeful of success in thus addressing them. In verse 21, he intimates that he set the truth before them encouraged by the belief that there would be found in them a readiness of mind to receive it; while in verse 27 he expresses the confidence that the anointing they had received would ensure their abiding in Christ.

### ***Definition***

A "seducer" is one who, by means of his blandishments or sophistries, seeks to allure another from the path of rectitude. The ungodly are allured by their own lusts. "The righteous *is* more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them" (Pro 12:26). Even in this life the righteous are "more excellent" than others, in their character, their spiritual possessions, and their privileges. But the worker of iniquity is deceived by the way of the world, which tempts and cheats him by its promises of temporal gains, honours, and pleasures, and blinds his mind to his eternal undoing. "He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside [from the paths of wisdom and holiness], that he cannot deliver his soul" (Isa 44:20). On the other hand, professing Christians are seduced by false teachers, who seek to corrupt their minds and turn them away from the truth. They tacitly repudiate the total depravity of man, concealing the fact that he is dead in trespasses and sins, completely incapacitated to perform a single spiritual act; and flatter him by assuring him of his "free will," and that he has power to decide his own eternal destiny. They pervert God's way of salvation, omitting that which is abasing to pride, and substituting that which is pleasing to the flesh. They preach "another gospel" than that of Christ. By "cunning craftiness...they lie in wait to deceive," and "allure through the lusts of the flesh" (Eph 4:14; 2Pe 2:18).

Of old God declared, "Mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies...Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar" (Eze 13:9-10).

"The peculiar guilt of these prophets consisted in seducing the worshippers of God into idolatry and iniquity, and encouraging them to harden themselves in impenitence; by assuring them of peace and prosperity at the very time when divine judgments were about

to be poured on them...Thus they acted as if a man were to build a wall with loose stones or bricks of earth without cement; and others should seek to give an appearance of stability by daubing it over with mortar made of bad materials and not properly mixed; and should then expect that such a wall would protect them” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

And those men were not heathen soothsayers, but Israelites who claimed to be the mouthpieces of Jehovah. So it is in Christendom: many have entered the sacred ministry as a means to worldly advancement and applause. They pretend to speak in the name of Christ, but they are strangers to Him. They love money rather than souls, and prefer the praise of men to the approbation of God.

“All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2Ti 3:12-13). The seducers and the persecutors of God’s people are two very different types. The former seek to turn them away from the truth, whereas the latter oppose them because of their fidelity unto the truth. The former conceal their real character, but the latter come out in their true colours. The one feign themselves to be friends and helpers, the other make no attempt to disguise the fact that they are enemies and antagonists. The former are harder to detect, and we are very apt to be less on our guard against them. Constant vigilance is required lest we be deceived by their “good words and fair speeches” (Rom 16:18). Let us not overlook, but rather be awed by, the striking accuracy of this prophecy. It is not that persecutors would become fiercer and fiercer as the Christian era proceeded, but that evil men and seducers should wax worse and worse. And so it has been historically. Nothing comparable, either in scale or ferocity, has equaled the persecutions of the saints by Nero and others of the Roman emperors who followed him. On the other hand, efforts to corrupt the truth and beguile Christians by those claiming to be the servants of Christ have increased in number, daring, and subtlety.

The arch-seducer is Satan, who beguiled Eve through his wiles. He pretended to have her best interests at heart and to sympathize because of the restriction placed upon her liberty. He made her imagine that she was mistaken in supposing that she would be injured by eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, that such a thing was quite incompatible with God’s goodness and His interest in her well-being. He assured her that, on the contrary, she would be the gainer by partaking of its fruit. The gilded bait was swallowed, and fatal was the result. That was the beginning of his trade in seducing souls, and he has plied it energetically ever since. The devil is the instigator of innumerable devices to cheat the unwary and ruin their souls. He often appears as an angel of light, and his ministers are disguised as those of righteousness (2Co 11:14-15). Such abounded at the commencement of this Christian era. The Lord revealed their method and aim in the parable where He spoke of the evil leaven being surreptitiously introduced into the meal (Mat 13:33). The epistles contain many warnings against them. Paul declared, “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ” (2Co 11:13). It is so today.

### ***The ways of seduction***

The wicked one has many of his seducing emissaries in Christendom, who pose as men of superior enlightenment, with great spiritual zeal and love for souls, yet are engaged in

stealthily propagating error and undermining the fundamentals of the faith. And, as we have seen, it was divinely foretold that these evil men and seducers should wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. The word “evil men” signifies wicked, being the same one as used in “the wicked one” (1Jo 2:14). They have vile designs, though they appear under “a form of godliness” (2Ti 3:5). They are dissemblers, assuming a character which does not belong to them. They are tricksters, beguiling many by their arts to receive as good and true that which is pernicious and false. They are themselves deluded by the father of lies. They jettison the Law of God under the pretence of magnifying His grace. They set aside the duty of the sinner to repent and believe, by over-stressing his moral impotence. The most searching and humbling sections of Scripture are shelved by an erroneous system of what is termed “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Ti 2:15). Eternal punishment is represented as being incompatible with the goodness and mercy of God.

In other instances, these seducers of souls and corrupters of the truth introduce, gradually, practices not sanctioned by Scripture, until there is a fully developed system of superstitious observances. Such wax worse and worse both in principle and practice. They grow increasingly ambitious and audacious. An awful example of this is seen in the ever-advancing blatancy and blasphemy of Romanism. In 1854 the dogma of “The Immaculate Conception” was invented and announced; Pope Pius proclaiming that the Virgin Mary was absolutely pure and sinless from the womb, and declaring the same to be “the established doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church”—thereby ascribing to her body what pertained alone to the Lord Jesus Christ. In 1870 the Vatican Council declared that the Pope was infallible in the execution of all that pertained to his pontifical functions, thus investing him with a divine attribute. In 1951, amid unprecedented pomp and pageantry, the Pope published the dogma of Mary’s Assumption, wherein it was averred that she had been taken “body and soul into the glory of heaven,” placing her on a par with the Saviour. The same increasing wickedness is seen in thousands of non-papish churches, whose pulpits are now occupied by men voicing the skepticism (the denial of miracles) of infidels and agnostics.

***Background: Review of verses 18-25***

“*These things I have written unto you concerning them that seduce you,*” or, as the American Revised Version (often more literal and accurate in translating the Greek verb) has it, “*These things have I written unto you concerning them that would lead thee astray.*” The “these things” refers to what is contained in verses 18-25, and probably many would be helped if we briefly reviewed their contents. First, it is to be noted that John was here addressing the youngest in the family, the “little children,” or “babes” as the word properly signifies. It is the newly converted who, in their ignorance and simplicity, most need to be warned against false teachers. They are informed that this Christian dispensation is “the last time” or concluding era of the world’s history, so that no further revelation from God is to be expected, and therefore any who claim to be favoured with such are impostors. The character and will of God have been fully and finally made known in and by His incarnate Son (Heb 1:1-2). The presence of “many antichrists” furnished evidence that “the last time” had even then begun, for their activities demonstrated that the true Christ had come, and since He had ushered in the final age, and they were opposing Him, naught remained but the judgment of God.

Then the apostle intimated that there was no occasion for those young Christians to be stumbled because some of their fellows had given ear to the antichrists and had apostatized from the faith, for he assured them that those renegades were never anything more than nominal disciples. Though they had made a profession, had much head knowledge of the truth, and appeared to be full of zeal for the Gospel, nevertheless they were graceless souls, strangers to the saving operations of the Holy Spirit. They “were not of us”; though members of the churches, they never had vital union with Christ and His people. Their going out made it “manifest that they were not all of us” (verse 19). While it cannot but be a distressing and disturbing experience unto God’s people to behold some of those deserting the assemblies and proving to be traitors with whom they had enjoyed outward fellowship, yet it should not shatter their own faith, for God often suffers the chaff to be thus sifted and separated from the wheat. The Scripture gives plain warning that there are thorny-ground hearers as well as fruitful ones, that the Gospel net encloses bad fishes besides good ones, that many shall follow the pernicious ways of false prophets.

Next, in verse 20, he assured the babes, “But ye have an unction from the Holy One,” which distinguished them radically from the apostates. That “unction” is God’s gracious provision for His own people, to preserve them from embracing fatal error. That unction or “anointing” is the coming of the Spirit from Christ upon those for whom He shed His blood; it is both the communication of a spiritual gift and a divine operation that separates the recipient from the world and all that is opposed to God, consecrating him to Him. The first benefit that believers have by this anointing is an illumination of the mind: “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.” The knowledge imparted to the Christian by the gift of the Spirit and His effectual application of the truth unto the heart is radically different from the wisdom of the natural man, or any mental apprehension of spiritual things that he may obtain. It is a supernatural, spiritual, and saving acquaintance with divine things. It is an experiential and certifying knowledge, by which the soul is infallibly assured of the verity of God’s Word. It is a humbling and conforming knowledge, casting the heart into the mold of divine doctrine (Rom 6:17). It is therefore a *preservative* knowledge, which prevents its possessor being fatally deceived by error. It is an *operative* knowledge which stirs the soul unto holy action.

It was because these babes in Christ were savingly acquainted with the truth that John thus addressed them, and because they knew “that no lie is of the truth” (verse 21). When the eyes of the understanding be opened by God, there is the capacity to distinguish between light and darkness. Because the sheep recognize the voice of the shepherd, they refuse to follow the call of a stranger. Nevertheless, it was needful for the apostle to put them on their guard against false prophets, that they might be still further established in the faith and fortified against specious<sup>1</sup> error. Error often has a very plausible appearance, and many are deceived thereby; since they have no inward and saving experience of the truth, they are unable to discern that which is opposed to it. But those who know and are established in the Gospel are assured that no lie can be found in or deduced from it; as well expect foul water from a clean fountain as heresy in the pure Word of God. Whatever be contrary to the Gospel of Christ cannot be sound and wholesome.

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<sup>1</sup> **specious** – having the ring of truth, but actually false; deceptive.

From that general principle John proceeded to point out that anyone who denied that Jesus is the Christ was a liar and an antichrist, and no matter what be his pretensions “the same hath not the Father” (verses 22-23)—a repudiator of the truth, an antagonist of God’s Son, a seducer of souls, and therefore a deadly enemy of the saints. By such fearful names of opprobrium<sup>2</sup> does God stigmatize the corrupters of His Gospel and warn His people against them. In view of such a menace John made a practical application of the foregoing, exhorting the saints to persevere in the faith and heed not those who sought to entice away from it (verse 24). It is only by means of the truth abiding in our hearts and operating in our lives that we are rendered immune to the devil’s lies and kept from apostasy. A cherishing of that which was blessed to our conversion, and the conforming of our characters and conduct thereto, maintains the soul in communion with the Lord, and that will make us turn a deaf ear unto those siren voices that seek to draw us from Him and bring about our eternal ruin.

Finally, to encourage these young converts to hold fast the truth and shun lying novelties, the apostle reminded them, “And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life” (verse 25). “Eternal life” is both a present possession and a future prospect. It is received by faith’s laying hold of the Gospel offer, and it is realized in the soul just so far as fellowship with Christ is practically maintained by subjection to His will. But the full possession and fruition of “eternal life” (the sum of the believer’s blessedness and the climax of his bliss) awaits the world to come, and it is by hope’s anticipation thereof—through faith’s keeping steadfastly in view the joy set before him—that the believer is strengthened to run the race set before him and kept from straying. Now there is nothing more pleasing to God than our making a good use of His promises. First, by collecting them, storing them in our minds, meditating much upon them, and making them our spiritual food. Second, by faith’s laying hold of the same and pleading them before the throne of grace: “do as thou hast said” (2Sa 7:25; and cf. Psa 119:49; Act 27:25). Third, by cleansing ourselves from everything contrary to holiness (2Co 7:1).

### ***Conclusion***

“These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.” From which we may see, *first*, that all teachers of error are beguilers of souls—what terrible appellations: liars, antichrists, seducers! How they should be feared and shunned! *Second*, how needful it is that we be well informed and instructed from the Scriptures that we may be enabled to detect and reject everything that is contrary thereto. The welfare of our souls and the glory of God demand that we thoroughly familiarize ourselves with the Word of truth. *Third*, “it is the duty of a good and diligent pastor not only to gather a flock, but also to drive away wolves; for what will it avail to proclaim the pure Gospel, if he connive at the impostures of Satan?” (John Calvin, 1509-1564). Error must be exposed and refuted if the minister is to “take the stumblingblock out of the way of my people” (Isa 57:14). Finally, we see how that, humanly speaking, we are beholden to the seducers of the first century for not a little in the Epistles, their attacks giving occasion to warn against them. Thus God can bring light out of darkness, and by error make way for a more complete discovery of the truth.

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<sup>2</sup> **opprobrium** - reproach mingled with contempt or disdain.

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

### 88. *Cities of Refuge, Part 2*

In his comments upon Numbers 35, Thomas Scott well remarked, “This remarkable law, expressive of the deepest detestation of murder, yet providing most effectually against the innocent being punished with the guilty, is likewise an instructive typical representation of the salvation of the Gospel. ‘The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men’ (Rom 1:18). If it is appointed unto men once to die, and after death the judgment, with the eternal consequences, in the meanwhile a Refuge is provided and revealed in Christ Jesus. His ministers warn sinners to flee from the wrath to come, and instruct and exhort them to ‘flee for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them’ (Heb 6:18). All things are prepared for the reception of those who obey this call. By faith they discern both their danger and refuge. Then fear warns and hope animates. Should death, like the avenger of blood, find them *without*, destruction is inevitable.” The fact that the cities of refuge are described at more or less length in no fewer than *four* of the Old Testament books—Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua—denotes the importance of them, as well as adumbrating the delineation which we have of the antitypical Refuge in the *four* Gospels.

When we bear in mind how much the Holy Spirit delighted in shadowing forth the Lord Jesus under the Old Testament, in type and figure, and when we observe how closely and strikingly the various things said of the cities of refuge point to the Saviour, we must conclude that they were divinely designed to foreshadow Him. In seeking to understand and interpret the types, two dangers need to be guarded against—first, the giving way to an unbridled imagination, and second, ultra-caution and conservatism. On the one hand, we must not indulge in the fanciful allegorizing of Origen. On the other, we must eschew the rationalizing of the Higher Critics. In the past, too many have been chargeable with the first. But today, when the divine element is either denied or pushed into the background, the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme—to assume that we are unwarranted in regarding anything in the Old Testament as possessing a spiritual significance unless the New Testament expressly says so is as unjustifiable as to insist that there are no prophecies there except those specifically termed such in the New Testament—for instance, Genesis 3:15.

Concerning the subject now before us, there are, in the judgment of this writer, at least two passages in the Epistles which confirm the view that the cities of refuge are to be regarded as having a spiritual meaning and reference. The first is in Philippians 3:9, where the apostle, after announcing and then renouncing all his natural advantages as a Hebrew, counting them but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, expresses the desire that he might be “*found in him*, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is

of God by faith.” There the proud Pharisee forsook his own righteousness, which was condemned by the law—as the manslayer fled from the avenger of blood—and he betook himself to the righteousness of Christ as the homicide did within the city of refuge from the sword of justice. The second passage is a still more manifest allusion to this Old Testament figure, for there the heirs of promise are assured that God has provided strong consolation unto those who have “*fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us*” (Heb 6:18), i.e. in the Gospel—reminding us of the prayer of David, “Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: *I flee unto thee to hide me*” (Psa 143:9).

The manslayer is an apt representation of the sinner, who is a soul-slayer, “Thou hast destroyed thyself” (Hos 13:9). But more particularly, he sets before us *the awakened sinner*. Previously, the man had lived in quietness and comfort, but when he slew another, though unintentionally, his peace was shattered. Everything was suddenly changed. There was danger without, and fear within. He now discovered himself to be in a very evil case. There lies the body of another, dead by his own carelessness. Who can conceive the distress and dismay which overwhelm his mind? He knows that the next of kin has the right to take vengeance and slay him. He is no longer safe in his own home. He is unable to find security in any building of his own hands. He must perforce flee for his life. Thus it is with the unconverted. In his natural condition, a false serenity is his, and he finds contentment in the things of this world and the pleasures of sin. Then, unawares, the Holy Spirit arouses him from the sleep of spiritual death, convicts him of sin, makes him realize that the wrath of God is upon him, and his soul exposed to eternal death. Oh, what unspeakable anguish is his as he now realizes himself to be a rebel against the Most High, lost and undone.

Intolerable dread now fills him as the fire of hell is felt in his spirit and the undying worm gnaws at his conscience. What must I do? How shall I escape?—are his urgent inquiries. Proud reason can furnish no answer. His outlook appears to be hopeless, his case beyond the reach of mercy. Now it is that the message of the Gospel receives welcome attention. He has heard it, perhaps, many times before, but without any personal interest or deep concern. So with the manslayer. Hitherto he gave little or no thought at all to what he had read or heard about the cities of refuge—having no need of them, they possessed no special interest for him. But matters are very different with him now. Having become a homicide, those places become of the utmost importance in his esteem, and he is greatly relieved by the knowledge that a merciful provision has been made with God to meet his desperate case, that shelter is available from the avenger. Thus it is with the sinner. He may be informed about God’s way of salvation, but he never sets his heart upon it, labours to understand it clearly, and appropriate it unto his own deep need, until he is made sensible of his ruined condition.

“Men do not flee for refuge when they are in no distress. The vessel puts not into the harbor of refuge when winds and waves all favour her. A man does not escape out of a city, like Lot from Sodom, unless he be persuaded that the city is to be destroyed, and that he is likely to perish in it. Ah! Indeed, we who are saved confess with gratitude to Him that has delivered us that we were once in danger. In *danger*, my brethren, is the word strong enough? In danger of eternal burnings! It was worse than that, for we are brands plucked out of the fire; we already burned with that fire of sin, which is the fire of hell” (C. H.

Spurgeon, 1834-1892). It is one thing to be in deadly danger—as are all who lie under the condemnation and curse of God’s broken law—but it is quite another to have a feeling sense of the same in our souls. A man is satisfied with his condition until he sees his vileness in the light of God’s holiness. He has a good opinion of his own character and righteousness until his eyes be divinely opened to perceive that he is a moral leper. He is self-complacent and self-confident until he is given a terrifying sense of the wrath of God pursuing him for his sins, and that there is but a step between him and eternal death.

But mark it well, my reader, it is not sufficient for the manslayer to recognize his peril, nor to have the knowledge that God has provided relief for him. He must flee to the city of refuge and personally avail himself of its shelter. Not until he actually passed within the portals of that sanctuary was he safe from the avenger of blood. His case was so desperate that it admitted of no delay. If he valued his life, he must flee in haste. A dilatory and trifling spirit would evince that he had no real sense of his peril. So it is with the sinner. No matter how deep or long-protracted be his convictions, until he really betakes himself to Christ and closes with His gracious offer he is a lost soul. He is either under the wrath of God or under the atoning blood of Christ. There is no middle place between the two. He is this very day “condemned already” (Joh 3:18), waiting for execution, or he is absolved, so that vengeance cannot strike him. As it was something more than a momentary alarm, which could easily be shaken off, that seized the manslayer—deepening in its intensity the more he pondered it—so something more than a temporary fright that soon passes away is required to make the sinner come to Christ.

“The manslayer left his house, his wife, his children, everything, to flee away to the city of refuge. That is just what a man does when he resolves to be saved by grace. He leaves everything he calls his own, renounces all the rights and privileges which he thought he possessed by nature. Yea, he confesses to having lost his own natural right to live, and he flees for life to the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The manslayer had no right to live except that he was in the city of refuge, no right to anything, except that he was God’s guest within those enclosing walls. And so we relinquish, heartily and thoroughly, once and for ever, all ideas arising out of our supposed merits. We hasten away from self that Christ may be all in all to us. Fleeing for refuge implies that a man flees from his sin. He sees it and repents of it” (Spurgeon). There has to be a complete break from the old self-pleasing life. Sin must be made bitter before Christ will be sweet. Fleeing for refuge implies earnestness, for the manslayer dared not dawdle or saunter. He ran for his life. It implied unwearied diligence, so that he loitered not till shelter and safety were reached.

It is just at this point that the convicted sinner needs to be most careful. When Satan cannot prevail with a person to reject wholly the imperative duty of his fleeing to Christ, his next attempt for the ruination of his soul is to prevail with him at least to put off the performing of it. Many who have been shaken from their unconcern are easily persuaded to defer a wholehearted seeking of Christ until they have taken their fill of the things of this world, until they are warned by serious illness or the infirmities of old age that soon they must leave it, hoping that a season of repentance will be given them before they die. But such postponing shows they are unwilling to repent and believe until they be forced by necessity, and that they prefer the world to Christ. Thus, they unfit themselves more and more for this urgent duty by continuing in sin and wasting the time which is now theirs.

Others persuade themselves they are not yet sufficiently convicted of sin, and must wait till God assures them more fully that the Gospel is suited to their case, and thus, those who are wrongly termed “seekers,” misspend their day of grace.

It is quite evident from what has been before us that in this type there is an enforcing of *the sinner's responsibility*. A merciful provision had been made to meet the dire need of the homicide, yet *he* was required to exert himself in order to benefit thereby. The city of refuge was graciously available for him, but he must flee thither and enter it if he would be safe. If under any pretext he failed to do so, and was slain by the next of kin, his blood was upon his own head. As another has said, “It is not at all likely that anyone would be so blind or so infatuated as to fold his arms in cold indifference and say, “If I am fated to escape, I shall escape. *My efforts* are not needed. For if I am not fated to escape, I cannot escape, my efforts are of no use.” We cannot fancy a manslayer using such silly language, or being guilty of such blind fatuity as this. He knows too well that if the avenger could but lay his hand upon him all such notions would be of small account. There was but one thing to be done, and that was to escape for his life—to flee from impending judgment, to find his safe abode within the gates of the city of refuge.”

The cities of refuge were a manifest type of Christ as He is presented and offered to sinners in the Gospel.

1. They were *appointed by God Himself*. They were not of man's devising, as the Gospel is no human invention. They were an expression of the divine mercy. And how rich the grace thus evidenced, for it provided not merely one, but no less than six of these cities! They anticipated the urgent situation. The Lord did not wait until an Israelite had unwittingly slain one of his fellows, and then arrange for his deliverance from the sword of justice. No, He is ever beforehand in supplying what we lack. Those cities were available ere they were made use of. In like manner, God's appointing of Christ to be the Saviour of sinners was no afterthought to meet an unlooked-for emergency. In the divine purpose and plan, Christ was the Lamb “slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8).

2. Those cities were given *to provide shelter from the avenger*. That was the outstanding feature in this lovely evangelical picture. Sought by one who was determined to execute judgment upon him, the manslayer turned unto this haven of peace. To attempt to brazen things out was futile. Equally so is it for the sinner to imagine he can successfully defy Him whose justice is even now pursuing him. Thus, there was no other alternative but death. In like manner, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Act 4:12). To delay was madness. “He shall flee unto one of those cities, and live” (Deu 19:5) was the peremptory requirement. It was dangerous for Lot to linger in Sodom, lest fire and brimstone destroy him (Gen 19:17) So God bids us, “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb 3:7-8).

3. Those cities were *placed on an eminence*, being built upon hills or mountains, as several of their names and the locations of others plainly intimate. This made them the more readily seen and kept in sight by those who were fleeing to the same. As such, they blessedly prefigured Him whom “God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Act 5:31). So too, when

the Gospel is faithfully preached, the antitypical Refuge is held forth, so that it may be said of the hearers, "before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently [plainly] set forth" (Gal 3:1). For the same reason, the ministers of Christ who lift Him before their congregations are likened to "a city that is set on an hill" (Mat 5:14).

4. The road to the city was *plainly marked out*. "Thou shalt prepare thee a way...that every slayer may flee thither (Deu 19:3). Jewish writers say it was a law in Israel that one day in every year there were persons sent to repair the roads leading to them, to remove all stumbling-stones which might by time have fallen in the way, and to see also that the signposts which were set up at every corner leading to the city were carefully preserved, and the name *Miklac* (that is, Refuge) was legible upon them. Whether or not that was the case, certain it is that in the Gospel, God has fully and plainly made known the way of salvation, so the "wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" (Isa 35:8). See also Romans 10:6-8.

5. They were *easy of access*. Those cities were so situated that when a person had need of such, one was near at hand. Express instructions were given that they were to be "in the midst of the land" (Deu 19:2-3), and not in remote corners which had been difficult to approach. The land had to be divided "into three parts," one city of refuge in each, so that it could be reached within a single day's journey, no matter where the manslayer resided—what a touching proof of God's tender mercy! Everything was done to facilitate the homicide's escape. The application is obvious. "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart" (Psa 34:18). Unto such He says, "My righteousness is near" (Isa 51:5). The way to Christ is short. It is but a simple renunciation of self and a laying hold of Him to be our all in all.

6. The city of refuge provided *protection only for the homicide* from the revenger of blood. The deliberate murderer was excluded, to teach us that there is no salvation in Christ for *presumptuous* sinners who still go on deliberately in their trespasses. Those who persist in willful sin, and continue to defy God and trample upon His law, bar themselves from His mercy. There is no shelter in a holy Christ for those who are in love with sin, but unto those that flee to Him *from* their sins, there is "plenteous redemption" (Psa 130:7). In Christ, the penitent and believing sinner is secure from the curse of the broken law and the wrath of God, for the Lord Jesus endured them in his stead. In Christ, he is safe also from the fury of a raging devil and is delivered from the accusations of a guilty conscience.

7. Nevertheless, the one who took refuge in that city *had to remain there*. If he was foolish enough at any time to forsake its bounds, the revenger of blood had the right to slay him (Num 35:26-27). As it was his duty to flee into it, so he was obliged to continue therein. That imports the responsibility of the believer to make use of Christ not only at the time of his conversion, but all through his life. There is as much emphasis placed upon our abiding in Christ as there is upon our coming to Him (Joh 8:31; Col 1:23; Heb 3:6, 14; 1Jo 2:28).

8. They were *available for Gentiles* as well as Jews (Num 35:15). How thankful we should be that "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Rom 10:12).

9. It was *the death of the high priest* which secured full and final deliverance (Jos 20:6). It is indeed striking to observe how the procuring cause of the believer's redemption was prefigured in this many-sided type, though some expositors experience a self-created difficulty in connection therewith. All the days that Israel's high priest lived and the manslayer abode within the city, no condemnation could come upon him—and since the Christian's High Priest is "alive for evermore," they are eternally secure. Still, it was upon the death of Aaron or his successor that the homicide was made free, as we owe our emancipation to the death of Christ—thus the double figure of the city (safety) and the high priest's death (propitiation) was necessary to set forth both aspects, as were the two goats of Leviticus 16:7-8. There may also be a designed dispensational hint here. Saints were saved of old, but not until the death of Christ was the full liberty of sonship enjoyed (Gal 4:1-7).

10. *The names* of these cities (Jos 20:7-8) spoke of what the believer has in Christ. Kadesh signifies "Holy," and Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God, is made unto the believer sanctification as well as righteousness (1Co 1:30)—how deeply suggestive that this is the first mentioned, that in the Redeemer we have a sanctuary of holiness. Shechem means "Shoulder," which is the place of strength (Isa 9:6) and of safety (Luk 15:5)—under the government of Christ the believer finds security. Hebron means "Fellowship," and through Christ His people are brought into communion with the Father and with the holy angels. Bezer means "A fortified place" and "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble" (Nah 1:7). Therefore, "I will say of the LORD, he is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (Psa 91:2). Ramoth means "Height" or "Exaltation." In Christ, we are elevated above the world, made to sit in heavenly places (Eph 2:6). Golan means "Exultation" or "Joy," and "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom 5:11).

## THE DOCTRINE OF MORTIFICATION

### 2. *An Outline, Part 2*

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom 8:13). The whole of this verse pertains and belongs to believers, who are "debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh" (verse 12), but, instead, debtors to Christ who redeemed them, and therefore, to live unto His glory. Debtors to the Holy Spirit who regenerated and indwells them, and therefore, to live in subjection to His absolute control. In our last, we sought to supply answers to the several questions raised by us in the second paragraph on the former part of our text. We turn now to consider those relating to its latter half.

On this occasion, we will state very briefly what is signified by "mortify," leaving for a later article (D.V.) a fuller explanation of the precise nature of this duty. First, from its being here placed in apposition with "live after the flesh," its negative sense is more or less

obvious. To “live after the flesh” is to be completely controlled by indwelling sin, to be thoroughly under the dominion of our inbred corruptions. Hence, mortification consists in a course of conduct which is just the reverse. It imports, “Comply not with the demands of your old nature, but rather subdue them. Serve not, cherish not your lusts, but starve them, ‘Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof’” (Rom 13:14). The natural desires and appetites of the physical body require to be disciplined, so that they are our servants, and not our masters. It is our responsibility to moderate, regulate, and subordinate them unto the higher parts of our being. But the cravings of the body of sin are to be promptly refused and sternly denied. The spiritual life is retarded just in proportion as we yield subservience to our evil passions.

The imperative necessity for this work of mortification arises from the continued presence of the evil nature in the Christian. Upon his believing in Christ unto salvation, he was at once delivered from the condemnation of the divine law, and freed from the reigning power of sin. But “the flesh” was not eradicated from his being, nor were its vile propensities purged or even modified. That fount of filthiness still remains unchanged unto the end of his earthly career. Not only so, but it is ever active in its hostility to God and holiness, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit [or new nature], and the Spirit against the flesh” (Gal 5:17). Thus, there is a ceaseless conflict in the saint between indwelling sin and inherent grace. Consequently, there is a perpetual need for him to mortify or put to death not only the actings of indwelling corruption but also the principle itself. He is called upon to engage in ceaseless warfare and not suffer temptation to bring him into captivity to his lusts. The divine prohibition is “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness [enter into no truce, form no alliance with], but rather reprove them” (Eph 5:11). Say with Ephraim of old, “What have I to do any more with idols?” (Hos 14:8).

No real communion with God is possible while sinful lusts remain unmortified. Allowed evil draws the heart away from God, and tangles the affections, discomposes the soul, and provokes the Holy One to close His ears against our prayers: “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?” (Eze 14:3). God cannot, in any wise, delight in an unmortified soul. For Him to do so would be denying Himself or acting contrary to His own nature. He has no pleasure in wickedness, and cannot look with the slightest approval on evil. Sin is a mire, and the more miry we are, the less fit for His eyes (Psa 40:2). Sin is leprosy (Isa 1:6), and the more it spreads, the less converse will the Lord have with us. Deliberately to keep sin alive is to defend it against the will of God, and to challenge combat with the Most High. Unmortified sin is against the whole design of the Gospel—as though Christ’s sacrifice was intended to indulge us in sin, rather than redeem us from it. The very end of Christ’s dying was the death of sin. Rather than sin should not die, He laid down His life.

Though risen with Christ, their life hid with Him in God, and they certain to appear with Christ in glory, the saints are, nevertheless, exhorted to mortify their members which are upon the earth (Col 3:1-5). It may appear strange when we note what particular members the apostle specified. It was not vain thoughts, coldness of heart, unwary walking, but the visible and most repulsive members of the old man, “fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence.” And in verse 8, he bids them again,

“Put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication” and lying. Startling and solemn it is to find that believers require calling upon to mortify such gross and foul sins as those. Yet it is no more than is necessary. The best Christians on earth have so much corruption within them, which habitually disposes them unto these iniquities (great and heinous as they are), and the devil will so suit his temptations as will certainly draw their corruptions into open acts, unless they keep a tight hand and close watch over themselves in the constant exercise of mortification. None but the Holy One of God could truthfully aver, “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (Joh 14:30) which could be enkindled by his fiery darts.

As the servants of God urge upon the wicked that they slight not any sin because in their judgment it is but a trivial matter, saying, “Is it not a little one? and my soul shall live” (Gen 19:20), so the faithful minister will press it upon all of God’s people that they must not disregard any sin because it is great and grievous, and say within themselves, “Is it not a great one? And my soul shall never commit it.” As we presume upon the pardoning mercy of God in the committing of the least sins, so we are apt to presume upon our own strength to preserve us from the committing of great and crying sins. It is because of their self-confidence and carelessness that sometimes the most gracious and experienced suddenly find themselves surprised by the most awful lapses. When the preacher bids his hearers beware that they murder not, blaspheme not, turn not apostates from their profession of the faith, none but the self-righteous will say with Hazael, “But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” (2Ki 8:13). There is no crime, however enormous, no abomination, however vile, but what any of us are capable of committing, if we do not bring the cross of Christ into our hearts by a daily mortification.

But why “mortify the deeds of *the body*”? In view of the studied balancing of the several clauses in this antithetical sentence, we had expected it to read “mortify the flesh.” In the seventh chapter and the opening verses of the eighth, the apostle had treated of indwelling sin as the fount of all evil actions, and here he insists on the mortifying of both the root and the branches of corruption, referring to the duty under the name of the fruits it bears. The “deeds of the body” must not be restricted to mere outward works, but be understood as including also the springs from which they issue. As John Owen (1616-1683) rightly said, “The axe must be laid to the root of the tree.” In our judgment, “the body” here has a twofold reference. First, to the evil nature or indwelling sin, which in Romans 6:6 and 7:24 is likened unto a body, namely, “the body of the sins of the flesh” (Col 2:11). It is a body of corruption which compasses the soul. Hence, we read of “your members which are upon the earth” (Col 3:5). The “deeds of the body” are the works which corrupt nature produces, namely, our sins. Thus, the “body” is here used objectively of “the flesh.”

Second, the “body” here includes the house in which the soul now dwells. *It* is specified to denote the degrading malignity which there is in sin, reducing its slaves to live as though they had no souls. It is mentioned to import the tendency of indwelling sin, namely, to please and pamper the baser part of our being, the soul being made the drudge of the outward man. The body is here referred to for the purpose of informing us that, though the soul be the original abode of “the flesh,” the physical frame is the main instrument of its actions. Our corruptions are principally manifested in our external

members. It is *there* that indwelling sin is chiefly found and felt. Sins are denominated “the deeds of the body,” not only because they are what the lusts of the flesh tend to produce, but also because they are executed by the body (Rom 6:12). Our task then is not to transform and transmute “the flesh,” but to slay it—to refuse its impulses, to deny its aspirations, to put to death its appetites.

But who is sufficient for such a task—a task which is not a work of nature but wholly a spiritual one? It is far beyond the unaided powers of the believer. Means and ordinances cannot of themselves effect it. It is beyond the province and ability of the preacher. Omnipotence must have the main share in the work. “If ye through the Spirit do mortify,” that is “The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ” of Romans 8:9—the Holy Spirit. For He is not only the Spirit of holiness in His nature, but in His operations, too. He is the principal efficient cause of mortification. Let us marvel at and adore the divine grace which has provided such a Helper for us! Let us recognize and realize that we are as truly indebted to and dependent upon the Spirit’s operations as we are upon the Father’s electing and the Son’s redeeming us. Though grace be wrought in the hearts of the regenerate, yet it lies not in their power to act it. He who imparted the grace must renew, excite, and direct it.

Believers may employ the aids of inward discipline and rigour, and practice outward moderation and abstinence, and while they may for a time check and suppress their evil habits, unless the Spirit puts forth His power in them, there will be no true mortification. And *how* does He operate in this particular work? In many different ways. First, at the new birth He gives us a new nature. Then, by nourishing and preserving that nature. In strengthening us with His might in the inner man. In granting fresh supplies of grace from day to day. By working in us a loathing of sin, a mourning over it, a turning from it. By pressing upon us the claims of Christ, making us willing to take up our cross and follow Him. By bringing some precept or warning to our mind. By sealing a promise upon the heart. By moving us to pray.

Yet, let it be carefully noted that our text does not say, “If the Spirit do mortify,” or even “If the Spirit through you do mortify,” but, instead, “If ye through the Spirit.” The believer is not passive in this work, but active. It must not be supposed that the Spirit will help us without our concurrence, as well while we are asleep as waking, whether or not we maintain a close watch over our thoughts and works, and exercise nothing but a slight wish or sluggish prayer for the mortification of our sins. Believers are required to set themselves seriously to the task. If, on the one hand, we cannot discharge this duty without the Spirit’s enablement, on the other hand, He will not assist if we be too indolent to put forth earnest endeavours. Then, let not the lazy Christian imagine he will ever get the victory over his lusts.

The Spirit’s grace and power afford no licence to idleness, but rather call upon us to the diligent use of means and looking to Him for His blessing upon the same. We are expressly exhorted, “Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2Co 7:1), and that makes it plain that the believer is not a cipher in this work. The gracious operations of the Spirit were never designed to be a substitute for the Christian’s discharge of duty. Though His help be indispensable, yet it releases us not from our obligations. “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1Jo 5:21) emphasizes our accountability and evinces that God requires much more than our

waiting upon Him to stir us unto action. Our hearts are terribly deceitful, and we need to be much upon our guard against cloaking a spirit of apathy under an apparent jealous regard for the glory of the Spirit. Is no self-effort required to escape the snares of Satan by refusing to walk in those paths which God has prohibited? Is no self-effort called for in separating ourselves from the companionship of the wicked?

Mortification is a task to which every Christian must apply himself with prayerful diligence and resolute earnestness. The regenerate have a spiritual nature within that fits them for holy action, otherwise there would be no difference between them and the unregenerate. They are required to improve the death of Christ, to embitter sin to them by His sufferings. They are to use the grace received in bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. Nevertheless, it is a task which far transcends our feeble powers. It is only "through the Spirit" that any of us can acceptably or effectually (in any degree) "mortify the deeds of the body." He it is who presses upon us the claims of Christ—reminding us that inasmuch as He died *for* sin, we must spare no efforts in dying *to* sin—striving against it (Heb 12:4), confessing it (1Jo 1:9), forsaking it (Pro 28:13). He it is who preserves us from giving way to despair, and encourages us to renew the conflict. He it is who deepens our longings after holiness, and moves us to cry, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psa 51:10).

"If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body" (Rom 8:9). Mark, my reader, the lovely balance of truth which is here so carefully preserved. While the Christian's responsibility is strictly enforced, the honour of the Spirit is as definitely maintained, and divine grace is magnified. Believers are the agents in this work, yet, they perform it by the strength of Another. The duty is theirs, but the success and the glory are His. The Spirit's operations are carried on in accordance with the constitution which God has given us, working within and upon us as moral agents. The same work is, in one point of view, God's; and in another, ours. He illumines the understanding, and makes us more sensible of indwelling sin. He makes the conscience more sensitive. He deepens our yearnings after purity. He works in us both to will and to do of God's good pleasure. Our business is to heed His convictions, to respond to His holy impulses, to implore His aid, to count upon His grace.

"If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, *ye shall live.*" Here is the encouraging promise set before the sorely tried contestant. God will be no man's debtor. Yea, He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6). If then, by grace, we concur with the Spirit, denying the flesh, striving after holiness, richly shall we be recompensed. The promise unto this duty is opposed unto the death threatened in the clause foregoing—as "die" there includes all the penal consequences of sin, so "shall live" comprehends all the spiritual blessings of grace. If by the Spirit's enablement and our diligent use of the divinely appointed means, we sincerely and constantly oppose and refuse the solicitations of indwelling sin, then—but only then—we shall live a life of grace and comfort here, and a life of eternal glory and bliss hereafter. As we have shown in the November article on 1 John 2:25, "eternal life" is the believer's present possession (Joh 3:36; 10:28) and also his future goal (Mark 10:30; Gal 6:8; Ti 1:2). He now has a title and right to it. He has it by faith and in hope. He has the seed of it in his new nature. But he has it not yet in full possession and fruition.

“The promises of the Gospel are not made to the work, but to the worker—and to the worker, not for his work, but according to his work, for the sake of Christ’s work. The promise of life, then, is not made to the work of mortification, but to him that mortifies his flesh, and that not for his mortification, but because he is in Christ, of which this mortification is the evidence. That they who mortify the flesh shall live is quite consistent with the truth that eternal life is the free gift of God—and in the giving of it, there is no respect to the merit of the receiver. This describes the character of all who receive eternal life, and it is of great importance. It takes away all ground of hope from those who profess to know God and in works deny Him” (Robert Haldane, 1764-1842). The conditionality of the promise, then, is neither that of causation nor uncertainty, but of coherence and connection. A life of glory proceeds not from mortification as the effect from the cause, but follows merely upon it as the end does the use of means. The highway of holiness is the only path which leads to heaven.

## JOHN THE BAPTIST

### *Part 2*

The grand mission of this eminent character was clearly announced by the word of prophecy centuries before he appeared upon the stage of human history. Its nature and design were defined by Isaiah and Malachi, and later by an angel, “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isa 40:3). That those words pertain to John is evidenced by the Holy Spirit’s application of them to him in each of the first three Gospels, and by his own express appropriation of the same in John 1:23. There was a peculiar propriety in designating him “the voice,” for that is to be heard and not seen. His mission was addressed solely to the ear and in no wise to the eye, for he wrought no miracles. Therein it differed from that of his Master—note the “see” in Matthew 11:4. But more particularly, as the voice is the medium by which the message is enunciated, so the Baptist was but the instrument to proclaim Him who is *the Word* itself. He was “the voice of him that *crieth*,” not whispereth or muttereth—publicly, fervently, powerfully, importunately, as he preached repentance and proclaimed the advent of the Saviour.

“Crieth in the wilderness.” What a position for the Messiah’s forerunner to occupy! Surely the place that befitted him was *Jerusalem*. Such indeed ought to have been the case, for not only was the temple—the grand centre of divine worship—situated there, but it was also the site of the royal residence, “the city of the great King” (Mat 5:35). But spiritual conditions precluded any such thing. John was sent to a nation that had grievously departed from JEHOVAH. Judaism was but a hollow shell. Its ritual was maintained, but there was no life and reality. Pharisaism and Sadduceeism were in the saddle. The masses were blind to their awful condition before God, boasting that they were the children of Abraham, yet neither exhibiting his faith nor bringing forth his works. It was, therefore, in perfect

keeping with their moral state that the sphere of John's ministry was in the desert rather than in the temple courts, for God would not condone their pride and self-righteousness, nor own their formality and hypocrisy. His messenger was, therefore, assigned a place *outside* the apostate camp (Heb 13:13), later ministering in the vicinity of the Jordan. The "wilderness" symbolized the spiritual barrenness of all around him.

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord." In olden times, when a king or some eminent person was about to visit a place, a herald preceded him, announcing his coming and making the necessary arrangements for his entertainment. Such was the honourable task assigned John. He proclaimed to Israel the approach of Christ as the Lord their God. A spiritual preparation was necessary ere the kingdom of Christ could be set up. "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (Isa 40:4). That described in figurative language the process of preparation. Those who were bowed down by a sense of their guilt, and made little in their own eyes, should be raised up; but the haughty and self-sufficient should be humbled; that which was obscure in the typical rites would be understood, mysteries would be cleared. John prepared his Master's way by disposing men's minds for His person and message, particularly by his calling upon them to repent. When the ministry of John had inclined the hearts of many for the reception of the Messiah and had engaged the attention of the people at large, Christ appeared and John soon disappeared. "This my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease" (Joh 3:29-30), he declared—as the morning star vanishes when the sun has risen.

"And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it" (Isa 40:5). God's design in the sending of John and the mission of the Messiah—as in all His other works in creation, providence and grace—was the manifestation of the divine glory. But in order to make way for the display of that glory in Christ and His salvation, there must be the blighting and blasting of all that glory wherein man boasts. The flesh was made to appear in its true nature, as corrupt and having sentence of death upon it, so that the grace of God should alone be exalted. "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass" (Isa 40:6-7). That expresses, in figurative language, what was to be the burden of the Baptist's message and the work the Spirit should accomplish through him.

John's ministry was but a preliminary one. His task was not that of sowing and planting, but of ploughing and harrowing, a preparing of the ground for the Gospel seed. He was not a builder, but a hewer down. What a shattering word was his to the religious leaders, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?...And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Mat 3:7, 10). He was called to oppose a carnal Judaism, and expose its vain pretensions. He was sent to arouse and alarm a deluded nation, to humble their pride, to blow upon their worldly expectations, to show the need of a *spiritual* redemption. John's commission was not to foster, but to dispel their hopes of a restoration of Judaism, the freeing of Palestine from the invader, and the re-establishment of the throne of David. Christ would procure for His people

something infinitely better than Palestine, even an eternal inheritance. The transitory economy of Moses would be displaced by the enduring Christian dispensation. The former, in which the Jews gloried, had served its purpose, and “that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13).

The character of John’s mission and ministry was further described as “He shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias” (Luk 1:17). So closely did he resemble the Tishbite, that in the language of prophecy, he was actually denominated Elijah (Mal 4:5-6 and see Mat 11:13-17; 17:10-13). Elijah appeared at a time when Israel was being dominated by an alien, when the nation’s spirituality was at an appallingly low ebb, and only an insignificant remnant remained true to God. Similar was it in the days of John. Elijah came not with a message of grace on his lips, but rather of judgment, enforcing the righteous claims of God. Stern as the prophet of Gilead, the work of Christ’s forerunner was to level mountains and lay low every lofty imagination. Each of them was a man of retirement from the world, a denouncer of those in high places, an uncompromising rebuker of sin. The one was clad in similar garb to the other (2Ki 1:8; Mat 3:4) and subsisted on equally plain fare.

“Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple” (Mal 3:1). That was the divine answer to the contemptuous question of Mal 2:17. The promised Messiah was about to appear in judgment, though not to condemn and destroy, “For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind” (Joh 9:39). But before He was publicly manifested, John opened the door for Him (Joh 10:2-3). By office, John was a “messenger,” his mission was to prepare Christ’s way. Observe that the herald was our Lord’s (for the “my” refers to Christ), sent by Him, thereby showing His authority in the sending forth of His ministers. His superiority to John, His existing before him—all so many proofs of His deity. Hence, the prefatory, “Behold,” to fix attention upon and intimate the importance of what follows, to arouse the nation. Christ would appear “suddenly” after His forerunner had accomplished his task.

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD [in A.D. 70, when the temple was razed, Jerusalem trodden down of the Gentiles, and the Jews scattered to the four winds]. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Mal 4:5-6). That was still another Old Testament prediction regarding Christ’s harbinger. John was not Elijah in person (any more than Ezekiel 34:23 has reference to the literal David, or Revelation 2:14, 20 to the literal Balaam and Jezebel), but he came in the spirit and power of that prophet, to perform an Elijah-like work. There was a great likeness in their mission and circumstances, their austerity of living, courage, and integrity in rebuking vice, holiness of life, zeal in the cause of God, and in both being feared and persecuted by the reigning king. That the above prophecy referred to John is unmistakable from Luke 1:17, “He was to go before the Lord for the purpose of effecting a reconciliation between the degenerate seed of Israel and their pious forefathers—making them again of one heart and soul, so that the fathers might not be ashamed of their children, nor the children of their fathers: in a word, that he might effect a real reformation

by turning ‘the disobedient [offspring] to the wisdom of the just [ancestors]’” (Patrick Fairbairn, 1805-1874).

After describing the extraordinary circumstances which attended his birth, excepting in Luke 1:80, nothing is told us about John until his work began. He drank neither wine nor strong drink, being mortified to all of earth’s pleasures. It was at the age of thirty that he appeared, for that was the time of entrance upon office (Num 4:3; Luke 3:23). “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mat 3:2). The “kingdom of heaven” signifies that sphere where the rule of God is professedly owned, being in contrast with the kingdom of Satan (Mat 12:29). It is the Gospel dispensation, which is entered by a confession of repentance and faith. The demand for repentance shows it was a *spiritual* kingdom. To call upon the Jews to repent was the denouncing of their self-righteousness and confidence in ceremonialism. Repentance is the soul passing sentence of unsparing judgment upon itself, a bowing to God’s verdict of its lost and ruined condition, owning itself to be dead in sin. By taking their true place before God, they would be prepared to receive Christ.

Matthew 3:4 describes his dress and food. As Christ had no form nor comeliness in the sight of men (Isa 53:2), so His forerunner was mean in the eyes of the world. He was homely in his attire, frugal in his diet, being wholly intent on matters of more importance. Thereby, he exemplified his teaching. He could but mourn over a condition of things without God. His very food and dress called for fasting and mourning. His baptism confirmed his preaching, for it was one “of repentance” and in the Jordan—the river of death. Those who responded to his call came “confessing their sins” (Mar 1:5), of which death was their due. “Ye must die and be buried, even as He who is to come will save by death and burial. This was the meaning of the emblem which he set before the crowd” (C. H. Spurgeon).

Ere passing on, it requires to be pointed out that the mission of John exemplified one of the “ways” usually employed by God with souls in preparing them to receive the Gospel. That was intimated in Isaiah 40:7, “The Spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it.” There is a withering work of the Spirit before a comforting one. The pride of man has to be abased ere the grace of God is exalted. It is the Spirit’s office to convict of sin, and when He does so the comeliness of the flesh is blighted, its beauty fades as the flower, all our righteousnesses are seen as filthy rags, and boasting is silenced. The Spirit wounds before He heals, breaks to pieces before He mends, calls to repentance before He says, “Behold, the Lamb of God” (Joh 1:29). Christ will never be precious to those who are pleased with themselves. Only the sick welcome the physician. We have to discover our filthiness ere we cry, “Wash me” (Psa 51:2). We have to see ourselves as utterly undone and driven to self-despair ere we value the Gospel.

Attracted by the novelty, great multitudes flocked to John’s preaching and were baptized by him. But instead of rejoicing, the religious leaders of that day were displeased, regarding him as an interloper. A deputation of priests and Levites was sent from Jerusalem to ask, “Who art thou?” (Joh 1:19). He had not been trained in their schools, and was outside all denominations. Whence then had he received his authority? Who had commissioned him to preach and baptize? One can readily surmise the contemptuous tone

of their “Who art *thou?*”—confirmed by his reply, “He confessed, and denied not” (Joh 1:20). He refused to be intimidated by them, boldly standing his ground. Not satisfied, they continued to interrogate him until they asked, “What sayest thou of thyself?” (Joh 1:22). A searching question! The answer to which revealed his state of heart. He might have replied, “The most remarkable character God ever raised up to Israel,” or, more modestly, “The son of Zacharias the priest.” Instead, he merely said, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness” (Joh 1:23). Thus, he answered in the language of Scripture, and indicated that his office was vested with divine authority.

A real trial had been made of John’s sterling character by those officials, but a still more exacting test of his piety soon followed. “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him” (Mat 3:13). This was the One of whom he had testified, “He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear” (Joh 1:27). That was said by John before the multitude at the height of his fame. But so far from being puffed up by the dignified position he occupied and the high esteem in which he was held, he was not ashamed to own that he felt himself utterly unfit to perform the meanest service for such an august Person. Suitable representative of One who was “meek and lowly in heart” (Mat 11:29) was this modest and diffident forerunner. “But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?” (Mat 3:14). He was completely overwhelmed by the unique honour that Christ would confer upon him. “And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now... Then *he suffered him*” (Mat 3:15). For praiseworthiness, that act of obedience deserves to be ranked with Abraham’s offering up of his son Isaac.

John’s final testing came soon afterwards at the hand of Herod. That king heard him preach and was deeply impressed (Mar 6:20). Instead of feeling flattered and fawning upon him, John faithfully rebuked him for cohabiting with his brother’s wife (Mar 6:18). That gave great offence to the tetrarch, who cast him into prison—it is no new thing for God’s ministers to suffer ill for doing well. The world ever hates those who testify that its works are evil. While languishing in prison, the faith of John wavered (Mat 11:2-3), for there has been only One who was “without blemish and without spot” (1Pe 1:19). As Matthew Henry remarked, “Where there is true faith, yet there may be a mixture of unbelief.”

The outstanding grace in John was his *lowliness*, for the most eminent saints have ever been the most humble. Lovely climax to his modesty was his “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Joh 3:30)—willing to be eclipsed that Christ might be all. Blessed is it to behold the Lord honouring the one who so honoured him, “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least [we strongly prefer “less” as all the older versions rendered it] is greater than he” (Mat 11:11), for the Son of God took a still more lowly place—“I am a worm, and no man” (Psa 22:6). And again He testified of John, “He was a burning and a shining light” (Joh 5:35) in doctrine and deportment, full of zeal for God, and love for souls. Burning inwardly, shining outwardly. He hid not his light under a bushel, thus leaving the Jews without excuse.

## ANNUAL LETTER

It was Mr. Pink's wish that we list his library (greatly reduced from what it once was) in *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES* so that the books would be available to the readers. Each one desiring a book or books, please make choice and communicate with me and we will discuss price by letter.

I have been much exercised in my mind about continuing publishing *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES* after I have used the articles Mr. Pink left with me to print before closing down. There is much in old volumes which I could reprint and at least complete 1953. After much prayer and waiting on the Lord for guidance that I make no mistake, I have decided, God willing, to venture to attempt it, especially in view of what Mr. Pink said last time we were speaking on the matter, "Probably you had better close down when this is printed." My heart aches for those who have looked to the magazine for spiritual food so long and know not where to turn now.

The Lord has favoured us with such a kind printer. He is making it as easy for me as possible, and as I put my hand to the plough years ago to be an instrument in His hand of doing the mechanical part of putting out what His servant supplied, I cannot, with peace of mind, withdraw my hand when I still have in my possession material which I feel would be helpful to those who have never had access to it.

I am hoping for the co-operation of the readers who have gone along with us all the past years. The bound volume for 1952 will (D.V.) be ready early in the New Year. Will those desiring one please send in their order as usual? The price will likely be the same as 1951—7/6 and \$1.75 U.S.A., etc.

The late Editor's death has delayed things somewhat, but we trust soon to get the posting-out date more normal again.

"All is well." "He hath done exceeding abundantly above all that we could ask or think." "Brethren, pray for us." My needs are provided for. Ever yours by His wondrous mercy,

Vera E. Pink

