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STUDIES
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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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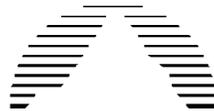
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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PRAYER SIGHS

Those who are unconscious of and unconcerned about the sins which they commit when at their devotions will not be able to enter into the meaning of this piece, for it treats of that which is quite foreign to their experiences. But they who make conscience of the surgings of pride, the promptings of carnality, the workings of unbelief, and the exercise of self-will, when supplicating the Lord, will—if He deigns to bless it unto them—find here something to help and comfort them. “The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy” (Pro 14:10). Each regenerate person has deep exercises of soul and painful pangs of heart which those dead in trespasses and sins have no acquaintance with; yet have they their own peculiar hopes, comforts, and delights, which strangers to Christ know nothing of. Those exercises of soul and pangs of heart find expression in sighs and sobs, in moans and groans, yet such as mere nature never produced.

The word “sigh” has a much stronger force in its Scriptural usage than in our ordinary conversation—or, we should say, in more modern speech—for three hundred years ago, it signified a lament rather than a mark of peevishness. Though not quite so intense as a “groan,” yet it approximates very closely thereto, as appears from the fact that the Hebrew *anach* is translated both “sigh” and “groan,” as also is the Greek word *stenazo*. Its first occurrence at once intimates its force: “And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage” (Exo 2:23)—the meaning of which is explained in the next verse, “And God heard their groaning.” Their “sighing” expressed their suffering and sorrow under the oppression of their Egyptian taskmasters. So again, we read that the sorely afflicted Job declared, “For my sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters” (Job 3:24). So by prayer sighs, we intend those agitations and breathings of soul which are virtually synonymous with groans.

A “sigh” is an inarticulate declaration, an indistinct cry for deliverance. The saints are sometimes so opposed and troubled that they cannot find language suited to their emotions: where words fail them, the thoughts and feelings of their hearts find expression in sighs and cries. The workings of a Christian’s heart under the pressure of indwelling sin, the temptations of Satan, the opposition of the ungodly, the burden of uncongenial society, the wickedness of the world, the low state of the Cause of Christ on earth, are variously described in Scripture. Sometimes he is said to be “in heaviness” (1Pe 1:6), to cry “out of the depths” (Psa 130:1), to roar (Psa 38:8), to be “overwhelmed” (Psa 61:2), to be “distracted” (Psa 88:15). The tossings and anguish of his soul are depicted as “groanings” (Rom 8:26). The groanings of the believer are not only expressive of sorrow, but also of hope, of the intensity of his spiritual desires, of his panting after God, and his yearning for the bliss which awaits him on high (2Co 5:2, 4).

Such exercises of soul are peculiar to the regenerate, and by them the Christian may identify himself. If the reader now be the subject of sorrows and sighs to which he was a total stranger while in a state of nature, then he may be assured he is no longer dead in sins. If he finds himself groaning over the infection of his heart and those workings of inward corruption which prevent his perfectly loving and uninterruptedly serving God as he longs to do, that is proof that a principle of holiness has been communicated to his soul. If he mourns over the lustings of his flesh against that principle of holiness, then he must be alive unto God. The worldling will groan over the common troubles of life—such as financial loss, pain of body, the death of a loved one—but that is only the voice of nature. The Christian, too, will groan over such sorrows, for grace does not destroy the feelings of nature, though it both regulates and sublimates them. But the worldling never weeps in secret over the coldness of his heart or the workings of unbelief.

Where one groans over the workings of indwelling sin, over manifold temptations, over his comparative barrenness, over his being so little like what he longs to be (fully conformed to the image of Christ), those “groans” or “sighs” are the evidences of spiritual life, the pantings of holiness, hungering and thirsting after righteousness. They are, as Octavius Winslow (1808-1878) expressed it, “The muffled chimings of Heaven.” They are the sure pledges of deliverance (2Co 5:4). They are the marks of the Christian’s union with Him who was “The Man of sorrows.” Before Christ healed the deaf man, we read that “he sighed” (Mar 7:34), which expressed His deep sympathy with the sufferer, as one “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb 4:15). And again, when the Pharisees came to Him, “tempting him” by asking a sign from heaven, we are told that Christ “sighed deeply in his spirit” (Mar 8:11-12), which denoted His holy indignation at their sin, godly sorrow for their persons, and grief within His own soul, for He “suffered” when He was “tempted” (Heb 2:18)—His holiness *felt* contact with evil.

The more the Christian's light and love increase, the heavier does the burden of indwelling sin become, and the more ardently does he long for deliverance from his body of death. There are sighs and groans which issue not only from sorrows, but from obstructed desires and delayed hopes. The groanings of 2 Corinthians 5:4—for the glorified state—breathes the fervency and intensity of our longing for the same, in contrast with a stolid indifference or cold formality. The stronger be that longing, the more groaning until it be realized. "The more we grow in faith and spiritual light, the more sensible are we of our present burdens, and the more vehemently do we groan for deliverance into the perfect liberty of the sons of God...The nearer anyone is to heaven, the more he desires to be there, because Christ is there. For the more frequent and steady are our views of Him by faith, the more do we long and groan for the removal of all obstructions and hindrances. Groaning is a vehement desire, mixed with sorrow, for the present want of what is desired" (John Owen, 1616-1683).

Now the spiritual sighs and groanings of the Christian are interpreted by God as *prayers*! Those sacrifices which are acceptable to Him are "a broken and a contrite heart" (Psa 51:17). Sobblings of soul are of great price in His sight (Psa 56:8). The believer's moans are intelligible language to heaven: "The LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping" (Psa 6:8)—that "weeping" possesses an appeal unto Him which the flowery eloquence of professional praying does not. "Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee" (Psa 38:9). Those who wish to be reputed as very humble and holy by professing Christians may go about talking of their corruptions and proclaiming their vileness, but the truly broken-hearted will mourn in secret before God. Romans 8:23 says we "groan *within* ourselves": our groans may be inaudible not only to other men's ears, but to our own; yet not so to God's. "He knoweth the secrets of the heart" (Psa 44:21) and among those "secrets" are those aspirations of the soul which are expressed in sighs and groans.

Yes, God interprets the unexpressed exercises of a renewed heart. An illustration of that occurs in Exodus 14:15. When Moses was confronted with the Red Sea, his soul was deeply stirred before God. Nothing is recorded of his praying or audible groaning, yet the Lord asks, "Wherefore criest thou [inwardly] unto me?" Poor Eli supposed that Hannah was drunken because he observed the moving of her lips, but heard not her voice; but the Lord heard, for "she spake in her heart" (1Sa 1:13). What comfort is *there* for deeply tried saints? You may be one who feels utterly incapable of praying in public (as was the case with the godly father of the writer), and may lament the fact that at times, you cannot find words to express yourself before God in private; nevertheless, if you sigh and groan within yourself, He understands the longings of your heart, and in due time will satisfy them. Those sighs are as acceptable unto Him as the songs of "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb 12:23).

Very remarkable are those words in Romans 8:26: "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." The deep longings and agitations of heart experienced by the saint for relief are the work of the blessed Comforter, and therefore does God give ear to them. The Holy Spirit excites longings in our souls for deliverance from the power of sin within and the world without. He it is who inspires yearnings after holiness and heavenly mindedness such as are greater than words can express, and, as verse 27 tells us, they are "according to the will of God."

Blessed be His name, God reads every longing caused by His grace within us. He recognizes the symptoms and diagnoses the case of our soul with infinitely more accuracy than the best physician does that of the body. Our tears speak to Him of godly sorrow, our moans as the breathings of a contrite spirit. "From heaven did the LORD behold the earth; To hear the groaning of the prisoner" (Psa 102:19-20)—such "groaning" as that of Romans 8:14, 19, 23. They are "*his* prisoners" (Psa 69:33), and therefore, the "prisoners of hope" (Zec 9:12). Here then is consolation: God is privy to our secret sighs, Christ is touched with them (Heb 4:15), they ascend as petitions to heaven, and are the sure pledges of deliverance.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

46. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, Part 2

The word “sanctify” has a twofold meaning: primarily, it signifies the bare setting apart of a thing. In Scripture, it usually, though not always, has reference to setting apart unto a sacred use, as the seventh day to be the Sabbath. Exceptions are found in such passages as Isaiah 66:17, where we read of men setting themselves apart to do evil, and Isaiah 13:3, where the Lord terms the Medes “my sanctified ones” when about to employ them in the destruction of Babylon. In the majority of cases in the Old Testament, to “sanctify” means to separate some object from a common use to a sacred one, consecrating the same unto God—yet without any change being effected in the object itself, as with all the materials and vessels used in the tabernacle. But in its secondary meaning (not “secondary” in importance, but as a derivative), “sanctify” is used in a moral sense, signifying *to make holy*, rendering what was set apart *meet* for the end designed: first by a cleansing (Exo 19:10), second by an anointing or equipping (Exo 29:36). In the case of God’s elect, to sanctify is to change or purify their dispositions, which brings us to the third main branch of our subject.

The Father’s sanctification of His people in His eternal decree, and the Church’s sanctification in and by the Son, federally and meritoriously is made good to and in them personally by God the Spirit: “Being sanctified by the Holy Ghost” (Rom 15:16). It is not until the Comforter takes up His abode in their heart that the Father’s “will” (Heb 10:10) begins to be actualized, and the Son’s “blood” (Heb 13:12) evidences its efficacy towards us. It is not to be supposed for a moment that the perfect standing before God, which the work of Christ secured for His people, leaves their *state* unaffected; that their position should be so gloriously changed, and their condition remain unaltered; that holiness should be imputed to them, but not also imparted. The redemptive work of Christ was a means to an end—namely, to procure for His people the Holy Spirit, who should make good in them what He had done for them. It is by the Spirit’s quickening operation that we obtain vital union with Christ—by means of which the benefits of our federal and legal union with Him actually becomes ours. The “sanctification of the Spirit” (2Th 2:13) is an integral part of that “salvation” unto which the Father chose us and which the incarnate Son purchased for us. Thus, the Christian is sanctified by the triune Jehovah.

Our *union with Christ* is the grand hinge on which everything turns. Divorced from Him, we have nothing. During our unregeneracy, we were “without Christ” and therefore “strangers from the covenants of promise” (Eph 2:12). But the moment the Spirit makes us livingly one with Christ, all that He has becomes ours, we are henceforth “joint-heirs with [Him]”—as a woman obtains the right to share all that a man has once she is wedded to him. By virtue of our union with the first Adam, we not only had imputed to us the guilt of his disobedience, but we also received from him a sinful nature which vitiated all the faculties of our souls; and by virtue of our federal union with the last Adam, we not only have imputed to us the merits of His obedience, but we receive from Him a holy nature which renews all the faculties of our souls. Once we become united to the Vine, the life and virtue which is in Him flows into us, and brings forth spiritual fruit. Thus, as soon as the Spirit unites us to Him, we are “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1Co 1:2). “For by one Spirit are we all baptized [spiritually] into one body [of which Christ is the vital and influential Head],...and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1Co 12:13).

“But of him [by no act of ours] are ye in Christ Jesus” (1Co 1:30). It is by the quickening operation of the Spirit that the elect are supernaturally and vitally incorporated with Christ; and it is then God makes Him to be unto us “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” “For we are his workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10): that new creation is effected by the Spirit and issues in our union with Christ’s person. Just as both our standing and state were radically affected by our union with the first Adam, so are they completely changed by virtue of our union with the last Adam. As the believer has a perfect standing in holiness before God because of his federal union with Christ, so his state is perfect before God, because he is now vitally one with Christ—he is in Christ and Christ is in him: “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1Co 6:17). The moment they were born of the Spirit, all Christians were sanctified in Christ with a sanctification to which no growth in grace, no attainments in holiness, can add one iota. He is then a “saint in Christ Jesus” (Phi 4:21) one of the “holy brethren” (Heb 3:1); and it is just because he is such, he is called upon to live a holy life.

Our relationship to God is changed when the Spirit sanctifies us by His quickening power, for we are then consecrated to God by the Spirit's indwelling us and making our body His temple. As He came upon the Head ("without measure"), so in due time, He is given to each of His members: "Ye have an unction [the Spirit] from the Holy One"—Christ; "the anointing [the Spirit] which ye have received of him [Christ] abideth in you (1Jo 2:20, 27). It is from that very blessing we derive our name, for "Christian" means "an *anointed* one"—the term being taken from the type in Psalm 132:2. It is the indwelling Spirit which constitutes a believer a holy person. Our relationship to Christ is changed when the Spirit quickens us, for instead of being "without" Him in the world, we are now "joined to" Him. Our actual state is radically changed, for a principle of holiness is planted in the soul, which powerfully affects all its faculties. God now occupies the throne of the heart, the affections are purged from their love of sin, the Law is delighted in, so that the will chooses its precepts as its regulator. Nevertheless, the "flesh," or evil principle, remains unchanged.

In one sense, the believer's sanctification by the Spirit is complete at the new birth, so that he will never be made any holier than he was at that moment; in another sense, his sanctification was incomplete and admits of progress. It was complete in that by virtue of the great change effected in him by the miracle of regeneration, he was *then* "made...meet to be [a partaker]...of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col 1:12), vitally and personally united to Christ, and by the Spirit's taking up His abode in his heart, consecrated unto God. It was incomplete in that indwelling sin was not then removed, in that the babe in Christ needs to grow in grace, and in that he is henceforth required to "put off the old man" (Col 3:9) and "put on the new man" (Col 3:10) in a practical way, cleansing himself "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2Co 7:1). To enable him thereto, the Spirit renews him daily (2Co 4:16), subdues his iniquities in part (Mic 7:19), stirs him up to the use of means, quickens his graces, draws forth his spiritual life unto spiritual acts upon Christ; and thereby He continues and completes that "good work" (Phi 1:6), which He wrought in the soul at regeneration.

To sum up. Sanctification is first a *blessing* unto which the Father predestinated His people (Eph 1:3-4). Second, it is a *gift*—an inalienable and eternal one—which they have in and through Christ. Third, it is a *moral quality*, a holy principle or "nature" communicated by the Spirit. Fourth, it is a *duty* which God requires from us (1Pe 1:15-16). Or, again, we may say that sanctification is a *relationship* into which we are brought with the thrice holy God. Second, it is a *status* we have by virtue of our union with Christ. Third, it is an *endowment* which we experience by the Spirit's operation within us. Fourth, it is a lifelong *work* unto which *we* are called, but for which we are in constant need of "more grace" (Jam 4:6). "Perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2Co 7:1) by no means intimates that the holiness the Christian now possesses is defective and needs supplementing by his own efforts, but signifies that he is to carry out to its proper use and end that perfect holiness which *is his* in Christ—compare 1 John 2:5, which means that by keeping God's commands, the design of His love in us is reached; and "by works was [Abraham's] faith made perfect" (Jam 2:22), i.e. achieved its design or intended result. He is to be "in behaviour as becometh holiness" (Ti 2:3).

"Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (1Th 5:22-23). Both the immediate context and the particular character in which God is here addressed serve to show *which aspect* of our sanctification is in view, namely, our practical holiness or purity of heart and conduct. It is a prayer for divine enablement to keep the foregoing commands: full sanctification for full obedience. To the preceding exhortations the apostle subjoined earnest supplication, knowing well that only the efficacious grace of God could supply either the will or the power to comply. The standard in verse 22 is an exceedingly high and exacting one: to abhor everything which carries even the appearance of uncleanness, to abstain from everything tending thereto. The more we eye that standard, the more we make conscience of its purity, the more shall we realize the need of much grace to measure up to it, and the more shall we perceive the suitability of this prayer to our case. We are still the subjects of sin—the arch-enemy of God—and the indulging of it not only separates us from God (Isa 59:2) and causes dissensions among the saints, but it also produces disorder and confusion among all the faculties of our being. To prevent such warfare, the "God of *peace*" (1Th 5:23) is invoked.

The indulgence of our lusts and the allowance of sin derange all the faculties of our being, so that the soul usurps the throne of the spirit (emotions and impulses directing us instead of our understanding or judgment), and the body seeks to dominate both spirit and soul—carnal affections opposing reason. But experimental and practical sanctification puts all into a right order again, and causes peace and harmony. But only the "God of peace" can *so* sanctify us. This is emphasized in our text: The "God of peace" Him-

self, which points a contrast between the feeble efforts after holiness, which we are capable of in our own spiritual strength and the all-mighty power which He can exert, and because of the peace and order which His sanctification brings to our whole being. The Christian is indeed sanctified, yet the work of grace begun in him at regeneration is not then completed: there is “first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear” (Mar 4:28). The heart needs to be increasingly cleansed from the pollution of sin, the soul more fully conformed to the divine image, the daily walk to be more “worthy of the Lord” (Col 1:10). Yet all the advances we make in the Christian life are but the effects, fruits, and evidences of the Spirit’s sanctifying us at the new birth. Growth in grace is a *manifestation* of our holiness.

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly” (1Th 5:23) is to be taken in its widest latitude. First, as a request that all the members of the Thessalonian church, the entire assembly, might be thus sanctified. Second, that each individual member might be unreservedly devoted to God in the whole of his complex being. Third, that each and all of them might be energized and purified more perfectly, strengthened, and stirred up to press forward unto complete holiness. Thus, 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is almost parallel with Hebrews 13:20-21. The apostle prayed that all the parts and faculties of the Christian might be kept under the influence of efficacious grace, in true and real conformity to God; that they might be so influenced by the truth as to be fitted and furnished for the performance of every good work. Though this be our bounden duty, yet it is the work of our reconciled God, by His Spirit in and through us; and this is to be the burden of our daily prayers. The exhortation of verse 22 makes known our duty; the prayer of verse 23, how to be enabled thereto. By nature, our hearts were antagonistic to God’s holy requirements, and only His power produces an abiding change.

It is the *practical* aspect of sanctification which this prayer is concerned with: that the saint should be divinely enabled to make manifest in his daily life that sanctification which he has in Christ and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit’s indwelling him and the principle of holiness imparted at regeneration; that he should be constantly “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts” and live “soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope” (Ti 2:12-13). As to our standing and state before God, sanctification extends to the whole man—every part of our human nature being the subject of it—and so must it in our devotedness unto God; our body, as well as spirit and soul, is to be dedicated to Him (Rom 12:1), and its members employed in the works of righteousness (Rom 6:13). “In your whole nature or persons, in all that ye are and do, that ye may—not in this or that part, but—be every whit clean and holy throughout” (J. Owen).

Fourth, *its design*. “And...[your] whole spirit and soul and body be preserved” (1Th 5:23). It is difficult (and perhaps not necessary) for us to determine the precise relation of this clause to the previous one—whether it be an additional request, an explanatory amplification of the word “wholly,” or whether it expresses the apostle’s design in making that request—but personally, we consider it includes the last two. The American Revised Version gives, “And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Bagster’s Interlinear reads, “Now himself the God of peace sanctify you wholly; and entire your spirit and soul and body blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ may be preserved.” Whatever rendition be preferred, it is clear the verse as a whole teaches that sanctification extends to our entire persons. Equally clear is it that man is a tri-partite being, consisting of an intelligent spirit, a sensual or sensitive soul, and a material body. Man, with his customary perversity, *reverses* this order (witness the motto of the Y.M.C.A.) and speaks of “body, soul, and spirit”: putting the body first because *it* occupies most of his care!

Since the tri-partite nature of man has been so widely denied, we will make some brief observations thereon. That man is a threefold (and not merely twofold) entity is definitely established by the fact that he was created in the image of the Triune God (Gen 1:26). It is intimated in the account given of the Fall: “The woman saw that the tree was good for food”—it appealed to her bodily appetites; “and that it was pleasant [margin, ‘a desire’] to the eyes”—it appealed to her sensitive soul; “and a tree to be desired to make one *wise*”—it appealed to her intelligent spirit (Gen 3:6). It is a serious error to say that when man fell, his spirit ceased to be, and only at regeneration is a “spirit” communicated. The leader of an English denomination in his *Manual* quotes with approval one who said, “The soul of a regenerate man remains unaltered. Its guilt, unbelief, and enmity are the same as before. Its desires, affections, feelings are what they were.” Had he said “the flesh” or indwelling corruption, he had been correct; but to affirm that of the *soul* of a regenerate man, denies the miracle of grace. Equally erroneous was his statement “that God has implanted a new essence, which is spirit.” No “new essence” is added.

Fallen man is possessed equally of “soul *and* spirit” (Heb 4:12). God “formeth the spirit of man within him” (Zec 12:1), and at death, “the spirit shall return unto God” (Ecc 12:7). We agree with Jerome Zanchius (1516-1590), the Reformer, that “the spirit includes the superior faculties of the mind, such as reason, and understanding; the soul, the inferior faculties—will, affections, desires.” By means of the “soul,” we *feel*; by the “spirit” we *know* (Dan 2:3, etc.). “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with [1] all thine heart [spirit], and [2] with all thy soul, and [3] with all thy might [or physical energy]” (Deu 6:5) corresponds with Paul’s threefold distinction in our text. The constitution of man *as man* was once for all demonstrated when the Son of God became incarnate, and assumed both “spirit” (Luk 23:46) and “soul” (Mat 26:38). Yet in saying that unregenerate man possesses a spirit, we do not affirm he has a *spiritual nature*, for his spirit has been defiled by the Fall, though it was not annihilated, and therefore, is capable of being “washed and renewed” (Ti 3:5).

The whole nature of man is the subject of the Spirit’s work in regeneration and sanctification, and this is to be manifested by the Christian in a practical way: by every disposition and power of his spirit, each faculty and affection of his soul, all the members of his body. His body has been made a member of Christ (1Co 6:15) and is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Co 6:19). Since his body be an integral part of his person, and since its inclinations and appetites seek to usurp the functions of his spirit and soul and dominate his actions, the believer is required to bring his body under the control of the higher parts of his being, so that it is regulated by a Scripturally enlightened reason and not by its carnal passions, and thereby, “That every one of [you] should know how to possess his vessel [body] in sanctification and honour” (1Th 4:4). As in unregeneracy, we yielded our members to sin, now we are to yield them as servants to righteousness unto holiness (Rom 6:19). As one has said, “perfect holiness is to be the *aim* of saints on earth, as it will be the *reward* of the saints in heaven.”

Christians *are* “sanctified wholly” in their desires and intentions; and that brings us to the meaning of “preserved *blameless*.” It is not that blamelessness which the covenant of works required, but that of the covenant of grace, wherein God accepts the will for the deed (Neh 1:11; 2Co 8:12). “God expresseth the deed by the will. He interpreteth him to be a perfect man who would be perfect, and calls that person perfect who desires to have all his imperfections cured” (J. Caryl, 1602-1673). Alas, that in this day of darkness so few have been taught to distinguish between legal and evangelical blamelessness. When it is said that the parents of John walked “in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luk 1:6), it does not mean they lived sinlessly, as verse 20 shows; but that such was their sincere desire and earnest endeavour, and that they habitually walked in a course of conscientious obedience and behaved in such a manner in the general tenor of their conduct that none could charge them with any open sin.

The word “blameless” in such passages as 1 Corinthians 1:8, Philippians 2:15, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, should be compared with “Blessed are the *undefiled* in the way” (Psa 119:1), which is to be understood according to the tenor of the new covenant, which does not exclude (as the covenant of works did) God’s exercise of mercy and the pardon of sin—see Psalm 130:3-4! The prayer which Christ has given us to use bids us ask not only for deliverance from temptation, but daily pardon. If God dealt with us according to the strict rigour of His Law and required an absolute undefiledness, none would escape His condemnation. It must be understood of evangelical undefiledness, the *sincerity* of our obedience, and refraining from that which would give occasion for others to justly charge us with wrongdoing. While the Christian honestly and earnestly endeavours to show himself approved unto God, while he is truly humbled for his failures and penitently confesses them, while he diligently seeks to walk in the law of the Lord, he is *accounted* “blameless” or “undefiled” in the Gospel sense of those words.

Fifth, *its assurance*. “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1Th 5:24). Regeneration guarantees sanctification: our effectual call by God is the earnest of our preservation. Divine grace will complete our experimental and practical holiness. “The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever” (Psa 138:8). Whether we translate “be preserved blameless *unto* [or ‘at’] the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ” matters not, for as the “till” in Philippians 1:10, and the “in” of 1 Corinthians 1:8, show, both are equally the case. Thus, the confidence of verse 24 is parallel with “he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phi 1:6).

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

26. *The Memorials, Part 3*

The very fact that God saw fit to devote two whole chapters of His Word unto a description of Israel's crossing of the Jordan is more than a hint that the narration of that memorable incident embodies teaching of much importance and value for His people in succeeding generations. Christians are greatly the losers if they concentrate their attention chiefly upon the New Testament and regard the Old Testament as containing little of vital moment for their souls. If on the one hand, the New Testament often illuminates and explains the Old; yet on the other hand, there is not a little in the New Testament which cannot be properly understood apart from the old. In the last two or three articles, we sought to indicate the typical and spiritual significance of Israel's passage through the river of death and judgment; on this occasion, we propose to point out some of the practical lessons to be learned from the things there recorded. We shall not give a complete exposition of chapter 4, but single out various details for comment, and intimate the many useful truths inculcated by the memorial erected in Gilgal.

“For the priests which bare the ark stood in the midst of Jordan, until every thing was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua: and the people hastened and passed over” (Jos 4:10). There are three things here which are worthy of our observation and admiration. First, the implicit obedience and patient fortitude of the priests. They were the ones who occupied the place both of honour and of danger. They were the ones who bore the ark, before whose presence the waters had risen up like a heap, held by an invisible hand. Advancing to “the midst of Jordan,” they remained stationary for many hours, until all the vast host of Israel had crossed to the far shore. It was a severe test both of their courage and patience. Therein an example is left the ministers of the Gospel to continue steadfast in their duty, to be a model unto their people of uncompromising fidelity, of undaunted courage, of patient endurance. Second, we see again how that Joshua closely followed the orders he had received from Moses, doing nothing without a divine command; while the priests, in turn, were required to be regulated by Joshua's orders—the ministers of the Gospel are to be governed solely by Christ.

Third, the deportment of “the people” on this occasion exemplified that which should ever characterize the rank and file of the saints in connection with those who minister unto them in spiritual things. We are told that they “*hastened* and passed over.” That denoted their thoughtful consideration of the priests, so that they would not be put to unnecessary delay and strain through their dilatoriness—the slower their movement, the longer the priests would have to stand bearing the ark! The practical lesson is that God's people should do everything in their power to make the spiritual lot of God's servants easier. That can be done by promptly responding to their instructions, by supporting them through earnest prayer, and by being thoughtful of their comfort. That is something which particularly needs to be laid to heart in this day of selfishness and lack of concern for the comfort of others. It is both solemn and blessed to note how *God* took note of this detail, that the Holy Spirit has specifically recorded this thoughtful “haste” of the people. The Lord not only marks *what* we do, but *how* we do it: as in “his princes gave *willingly*” (2Ch 35:8), “their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord... Zabbai earnestly repaired the other piece” (Neh 3:5, 20).

“And the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, passed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses spake unto them: About forty thousand prepared for war passed over before the LORD unto battle, to the plains of Jericho” (Jos 4:12-13). Here is a case in point how that one part of Scripture is dependent upon another for its explanation and interpretation. We have to go back to Numbers to discover why *these* particular ones constituted the fighting force of the nation. Those two and a half tribes, who were rich in cattle, desired to have for their portion the fertile lands of Jazer and Gilead, rather than any part of Canaan (Num 32:1-5). When Moses demurred, they agreed to build sheepfolds for their cattle and fenced cities for their little ones, and then they would go armed before the children of Israel until the remaining tribes had secured their inheritance (Num 32:16-17). Moses agreed to their proposal, and they ratified that arrangement; and Moses then gave command to Eleazar and Joshua to see that their promise was made good. Here in Joshua 4, we are shown the fulfilment of the same. Those two and a half tribes were the only ones unencumbered with their families and flocks, and thus, we see *how suited* they were to be the fighting force, and how graciously God made all things work together for good unto His people.

“On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life” (Jos 4:14). Therein we may see how the Lord made good unto Joshua the word He gave him in Joshua 3:7. “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1Th 5:24). That detail has been placed upon imperishable record for the encouragement of every servant of the Lord. Ministers of the Gospel may prosecute their labours with absolute confidence in the promises of their Master: not one of them shall fail. He has said of His Word, “it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa 55:11); then he need not entertain the slightest doubt about the same. He has declared, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me,” that they “*shall* believe on me through their [His ministers’] word (Joh 6:37; 17:20); then neither the perversity of human nature, nor the opposition of Satan can prevent it. He has promised His servants, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Mat 28:20), then let them conduct themselves accordingly. Let them also learn from Joshua 4:14, and its context that the surest way for them to gain the respect and observation of their people is to be diligent in personally honouring and obeying God, and caring for their welfare.

“And the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying, Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan. Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan” (Jos 4:15-17). That is indeed striking: the priests did not take a step until they were divinely authorized. There they stood hour after hour, and there they still remained after the vast concourse had passed through, and reached the other side in safety! Patiently they waited until leave was given them to move. They did not act on their own impulse or initiative, but meekly waited God’s time. “The priests did not quit their station till Joshua, who had commanded them hitherto, ordered them from thence: nor did he thus order them till the Lord commanded him: so obedient were all parties to the Word of God, and so entirely confident of His protection” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). It is ours to render unquestioning obedience to God, and leave the consequences with Him; nor need we have the least fear of hesitation in so doing—we shall not be losers, but the gainers. “Them that honour me I will honour” (1Sa 2:30) is more certain than that night shall follow day, as the writer has often proved.

“And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before” (Jos 4:18). No sooner did the priests with the ark step upon the shore of Canaan than the Jordan resumed its normal flow, or rather its abnormal condition, for it was then in flood. That at once accentuated the miracle which had just been wrought, making it the more apparent that the stopping of its flow was not from any abnormal natural cause, but that it was the will of their Creator which had temporarily suspended the laws of nature, for the display of His glory and the fulfilment of His promise unto His people. As Israel beheld the upper waters which had been invisibly dammed, and the lower ones that had stood up in a heap now suddenly acting as formerly, how apparent it would be unto them that it was the presence and power of their covenant God which had wrought so gloriously for them!

Bearing in mind the meaning of “Jordan,” the spiritual application of verse 18 is apparent. It was the presence in its midst of the priests who bore the ark which stayed its course: and it is the godly example and faithful ministry of God’s servants which, under the divine blessing to His people, and through their moral influence upon others, which hold back His judgments upon the world. They are the salt of the earth, which prevents the carcass of the unregenerate mass turning into complete putrefaction. But that “salt” has steadily *diminished* during the last two centuries. As the population of the world has increased, the proportion of the righteous—despite a widespread “profession”—has decreased, and therefore sin has abounded more and more; and so too have the judgments of God. As the entrance of righteous Noah and his family into the ark was the signal for the flood to commence, as the removal of just Lot from Sodom was at once followed by the fire and brimstone from heaven, so the removal of God’s eminent servants and saints from the earth (the places of few being filled) has been followed by the divine judgments which we have witnessed and are still witnessing. Dispensationally, Joshua 4:18 foreshadowed the awful fact that when the Day of grace is concluded, the world will be completely inundated by the storm of God’s wrath.

“And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho” (Jos 4:19). There is nothing meaningless or valueless in the Scriptures, and we are the losers if we ignore or pass hurriedly over its *time marks*. The carnal critic would say, what interest is it unto me which particular day of the month this event occurred; but far different should be the spirit of the

believer. But *how* is he to ascertain the significance of this detail? By looking up the marginal references, and if they do not furnish what he needs, by consulting his concordance, where he will find that the first reference to “the tenth day” of the first month (Exo 12:2-3) supplies the key. It was the day when the paschal lamb was selected!—to be slain on the fourteenth (Exo 12:6, and see Jos 5:10). How wonderfully God times everything for His people! “He so ordered things here that Israel entered Canaan four days before the annual solemnity of the Passover, and on the very day when the preparation for it was begun, for He would have them enter into Canaan graced and sanctified with that religious feast, and would have them to be reminded of their deliverance from Egypt that, combining the two together, God might be glorified as the Alpha and Omega of their blessing” (M. Henry).

“And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch [i.e. ‘erect’] in Gilgal” (Jos 4:20). Probably those large stones were placed on some eminence where there was none other, for they were to be “a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever” (Jos 4:7). Some surmise—and we think with considerable probability—that when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John’s baptism, and he said unto them, “And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of *these stones* to raise up children unto Abraham” (Mat 3:9), he pointed to the very cairn¹ erected by Joshua. Confirmation of this appears to be furnished by John 1:28, which informs us that he baptized in “Bethabara beyond Jordan,” for “bethabara” means “the house of passage,” i.e. the place where Israel passed over the river.

“And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over” (Jos 4:21-23). Normal children have inquiring minds and ought not to be snubbed or even discouraged when they ask their parents questions. Rather should parents seek to improve their curiosity as an opening for instruction, *directing* the same into profitable channels. The very inquisitiveness of little ones affords their elders an opportunity to make known unto them the wonderful works of God, that their minds may be informed and their hearts awed by His perfections. But note well, it is *the father* (the “head” of the home) upon whom the main responsibility devolves, to see to it that his children are taught by him the things of God (Eph 6:4). Let him not pass on this task to his wife, still less to “Sunday-school teachers.”

“That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever” (Jos 4:24). God’s miraculous deliverances of His own people have a message for all the world; and when He is pleased to sanctify the same unto the unregenerate, they are deeply impressed thereby (Dan 3:29; 6:25-27). The effects produced by the Jordan miracle are recorded in Joshua 5:1, which properly ends chapter 4: “And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites, which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel.” The Canaanites were completely dispirited and cowed, realizing their utter incompetency to successfully oppose a people who had the Almighty for their Friend and Benefactor. But we must now seek to formulate the various lessons which we should learn from the memorial erected at Gilgal to mark the miraculous passage of the Jordan.

First, the wonderful works of God are worthy of treasuring in our memories, and He requires that pains be taken by us to see that they are so. It should be carefully noted that Joshua, even in the midst of a most exacting business, was not permitted to neglect the promotion of the Lord’s honour. While superintending the passage through the river’s bed of that vast concourse of people, with all their baggage (tents, etc.) and cattle, God bade him see to it that he took a man from each tribe and bid them select the twelve stones which were to be carried to Gilgal (Jos 4:2-3). Nor did he demur or ask for a more convenient season.

Second, God’s ordering of this memorial is a solemn reminder of how prone our hearts are *to forget* His past interpositions on our behalf. Of Israel, we are told they “forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them”; and again, that “they soon forgot his works” (Psa 78:11; 106:13). Alas, is not the same true of us? Even of the apostles Christ asked, “Do ye not yet understand, neither *remember* the five loaves...ye took up?” (Mat 16:9).

¹ **cairn** – a heap of stones piled up as a memorial or landmark.

Third, because of our proneness to forget, suitable means are to be used in assisting us. We are to make conscience of the fact that God has bidden us *to* “remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee” (Deu 8:2), and that precept should be turned into earnest *prayer* that we may not be negligent therein. We should frequently call to mind our previous experiences of God’s faithfulness and tender care of us. This will strengthen the spirit of thanksgiving and cause us to praise God anew. It will deepen our confidence in Him to count upon Him in present emergencies and trust Him for future deliverances. The more we do so, the less shall we fear the experience of death, assured that God will undertake for us as we are called upon to pass through the valley of the shadows, as certainly as He conducted Israel safely through the Jordan (see 2Co 1:10)!

Fourth, not only God’s past deliverances of us are to be treasured up in our memories, but also His mercies unto His people in times gone by. Faith is to look back to what the arm of the Lord hath done “in the ancient days, in the generations of old,” and say, “Art thou not [He] which hath dried the sea...that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?” And what will be the consequence of such exercise of believing memories? This: “Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion” (Isa 51:9-11). Why has God recorded the deliverance of Noah from the flood, and of Lot from Sodom, but to assure us that “the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2Pe 2:5-9). Not only is what was “written aforetime were written for our learning...and comfort” (Rom 15:4), but what God did aforetime is to teach us what He can and will now do for His own. “I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself” (Psa 119:52).

Fifth, the monument erected at Gilgal teaches us that we should take thought of and seek to make provision for the rising generation. That cairn of stones was erected with the express desire of evoking inquiry from those who should later behold it. God would have the wonders of His power and mercy preserved for posterity. There was to be a permanent witness of what God had wrought for His people: that no impotency or weakness of theirs prevented them reaching the shores of Canaan. It was meant as a sure pledge that God would continue to show Himself strong in Israel’s behalf and would overthrow those then in occupation of the land. Thus, we rejoice when readers of this magazine purchase the bound volumes with this design before them. At least one is now thankfully reading those volumes which his mother (now in heaven) purchased from us twenty years ago, when he was unconverted. We cherish the hope that the bound volumes will be read by many long after we are called Home.²

Sixth, in the *nature* or character of the two monuments which Joshua was instructed to set up, we see how different are the thoughts and ways of the Lord from those of men. No costly shrine, with useless ornamentations and affected splendour, was to mark the event, but only that which, though impressive, was simple and plain. “Never did triumphant column or arch, with all the magnificence of architecture, form so proper a monument of some celebrated victory as the twelve rude stones from Jordan’s channel recorded the miraculous passage of Israel into Canaan under the conduct of the ark of the Lord.” Equally true is this of the two signs and memorials which God has appointed for this dispensation. When divested of all priestly and parsonic trappings, how plain and simple, yet how significant and impressive, are the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper. The same principle was exemplified by Christ in the choice of His ambassadors—for the most part, unlettered fishermen.

Seventh, that monument teaches us that we should recognize and own the corporate *unity* of God’s people. It was comprised of twelve stones, taken up by one man from out of each tribe (Jos 4:2) and erected in Gilgal. That is the more noticeable since two and a half of the tribes had received their inheritance on the eastward side of the Jordan. Yet this cairn on the western shore must have in it not nine or ten, but twelve stones, to signify the oneness of Israel. We behold the same thing again in 1 Kings 18, when, centuries later, the division between the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel obtained, and Elijah “took *twelve* stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD” (1Ki 18:31-32) on Mount Carmel, resting by faith on God’s Word when what was visible to sight clashed with the same. They were all the elect of God and brethren. So *we* should view God’s children, separated as they now are by party partitions and denominational walls, as members of the same family, and sharing a common interest. Let our hearts embrace and our prayers include the entire household of faith.

² It is a great joy that today the *Studies in the Scriptures* are still available in reprints, with a subscription list exceeding 2,200, which does not include hundreds of online downloads worldwide. In Pink’s day the subscriptions peaked at about 1,000, although averaged about 500.

DIVORCE

Part 2

There is but one passage in all the Old Testament which requires us to qualify anything we have said in the earlier paragraphs, only one which taught that a man might divorce his wife for something less than adultery—namely Deuteronomy 24:1-4—and to it we now turn.

“When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man’s wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD.”

In pondering the contents of those verses, it should be obvious to all impartial minds that they must be interpreted in strict harmony with the Analogy of Faith, that we undoubtedly *err* if our understanding of them clashes with other passages in the Pentateuch. That single, but necessary, consideration at once obliges us to regard the words, “some uncleanness in her” as something other than *moral* uncleanness. “Obliges us,” we say, for the Mosaic Law had passed sentence of death upon both the adulterer and the adulteress (Lev 20:10; Deu 22:22; Joh 8:4-5). Nor could it refer to a serious suspicion of unfaithfulness to the marriage bed, for that would require that the husband should make trial of his wife according to the statute of Numbers 5:12-31, which was expressly given to meet the case of “jealousy” or suspicion. Nor does it seem at all likely that this “uncleanness” was merely of a ceremonial nature, for it was liable to persist so that her second husband “hated” her. Thus, by a process of elimination, it would appear that the allusion was unto some physical defect or disease which caused her to “find no favour” in her husband’s eyes.

Furthermore, if we are to be preserved from drawing wrong inferences from Deuteronomy 24:1-4, we must cast upon it the light supplied by our Lord in Matthew 19. There we read that the Pharisees came to Him, “tempting him” by asking the question, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for *every* cause?” (Mat 19:3). Their design was to discredit Christ in the eyes of a section of the Jewish nation, for there were two conflicting “schools” of teaching among them on the subject, and His enemies imagined that by His answer, they would force Him to antagonize one of them: the one holding that nought but marital infidelity constituted a legitimate ground for divorce; the other affirming that the husband has the right, according to his own pleasure or caprice, to put away his wife for the most trivial offence. In His reply, Christ took His interrogators back to the original institution of marriage by God in Eden, and added, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mat 19:6): no human authority has any right to change or tamper with a divine ordinance.

“They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?” To which our Lord replied, “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so” (Mat 19:7-8). Observe, first, that the Pharisees erred in styling Deuteronomy 24:1 a “command”—for it was no part of the Moral Law, but instead pertained to the judicial instructions for Israel’s magistrates. So far from God *ordering* the Hebrews to put away their wives for something less than adultery, He merely “suffered” them to do so; it was a concession made only under special circumstances. What those “circumstances” were, our Lord broadly hints at in His “because of the hardness of your hearts.” It was a providential permission, allowing the magistrate to authorize the putting away of wives in order to spare them from brutal treatment, and perhaps murder, at the hands of their callous husbands. Thus, Deuteronomy 24:1 enunciated no general rule for all times and every occasion, much less did it supply warrant for husbands to put away their wives “for every cause.”

It is to be duly noted that in such a case where a Jewish husband “found some uncleanness” in his wife, he was not permitted, in a fit of temper, to act hurriedly and immediately turn her out of the home, but must wait while a legal instrument (which would require a minimum of two witnesses) was drawn up for “a bill of divorcement.” In permitting this arrangement, God did not “wink at” or connive at a husband’s harshness, but mercifully arranged that the wife should be “divorced” rather than be slain because he wished to be free of her. God’s attitude unto the matter is plainly revealed in Malachi 2:16, where He emphatically

declares, “For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he *hateth* putting away.” That same verse (“for one covereth *violence* with his garment...therefore take heed to your spirit [passions], that ye deal not treacherously”) also supplies confirmation of what we have said above, and explains what Christ had in mind when He attributed the arrangement of Deuteronomy 24:1 unto Israel’s “hardness of [their] hearts”—namely, the husband’s brutality.

Return now to Matthew 19:3-9. In this fundamental passage, we find that our Lord, first, affirmed the inviolability of covenant (Mat 19:4-6). Second, that He showed Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was not an actual “command,” as the Pharisees supposed (Mat 19:7), but only a merciful concession to meet a particular case, a “sufferance” (Mat 19:8). Third, He revealed why that special permission had been given, namely, “because of the hardness of...hearts” of certain Jewish husbands (Mat 19:8). It was to prevent cruelty and bloodshed. That was also clearly imported by the fact that no such license was accorded the wife, for she being “the weaker vessel” (1Pe 3:7), the life of her husband (speaking generally) would not be endangered by a wife who despised him. Fourth, from His emphatic words, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication [adultery], and shall marry another, committeth adultery” (Mat 19:9), Christ taught that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is for ever set aside, that no man may now put away his wife merely because “she find no favour in his eyes.”

Here, then, is the answer to our first question: a higher and holier standard obtains under Christianity than was tolerated under Judaism. In view of which the disciples said unto Christ, “If the case of the man be so with his wife [that he cannot divorce her for “incompatibility of temperament,” or anything else, short of adultery], it is not good to marry” (Mat 19:10)—better remain single. To which our Lord answered, “All men cannot receive this saying, save [only] they to whom it is given” (Mat 19:11)—i.e. those upon whom God bestows the gift of continency. The single state is the ideal one for a Christian (1Co 7:7, 32-34), though in most cases it is fraught with great moral danger, and therefore “it is better to marry than to burn” (1Co 7:9) with consuming lust. Moreover, “marriage is honourable in all” (Heb 13:4), being a divine institution. It is a gracious provision of the Creator’s for the avoidance of fornication (1Co 7:2) and for the lawful producing of children (Rom 7:4).³ N.B.⁴—It is our studied *opinion* that in view of “the present distress” (1Co 7:26), it is the part of wisdom and mercy for married couples to conduct themselves as per 1 Corinthians 7:29, for the time may be near when they shall again say, “Blessed are the barren” (Luk 23:29).

“But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication [adultery], causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Mat 5:32). Here we have the divinely authoritative and unambiguous answer to our second question. In the Scriptural meaning of the words, “to put away” one’s wife is to legally divorce her, the two expressions being used interchangeably in this very verse. But to put away one’s wife is expressly forbidden by the divine Law, marriage being for life. One exception, and one only to the general rule, is authorized by Christ, as is plain from His “saving for [except only] the cause of fornication”—for since *that* sin be itself the breaking of the marriage contract, it constitutes a valid ground for divorce. In modern terminology, “fornication” is a sin committed by an unmarried person (“adultery” only by one joined in wedlock); but in Scripture, “fornication” is sometimes used as a generic term for *any* moral uncleanness. In Ezekiel 16:29-32, the Lord charges His “Wife” with *both* crimes; and in Revelation 2:20, 22, it is clear that “fornication” and “adultery” are used interchangeably.

It is to be duly noted that in Mathew 19:9, our Lord *repeated* what He had laid down so specifically in Mathew 5:32, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marieth her which is put away doth commit adultery”! Those words are too plain to be misunderstood: nothing but death or unchastity severs the marriage bond. The courts of men may pretend to legalize other grounds for divorce, but they cannot sanctify them, or take away the brand of infamy which the Son of God has placed upon the one who marries another that has not a Scripturally warranted divorce. Something infinitely superior to human legislation must govern and regulate those who fear the Lord. The Word of God, and not our feelings, is to be our sole Rule and Guide in this matter, as in everything else pertaining to our conduct. Neither separation by mutual consent nor desertion dissolves the marriage tie between husband and wife. One thing alone, short of death, does or can do that: namely, *proven* adultery, and not merely suspected.

³ Most conservative commentators understand Romans 7:4 to refer to spiritual fruit; a better reference may be Genesis 1:28.

⁴ **Nota Bene** – a note of importance.

Any man who declares that because a wife has been abandoned by her husband, she has a legal ground to sue for a divorce, is guilty of the heinous sin of adding to the Word of God, and constitutes himself a liar. Any man who lives with a woman previously married to another and whose husband is not dead, or who has not obtained a legal divorce because adultery was committed, is himself guilty of adultery in the sight of God. Consequently, it follows of necessity that any preacher who recognizes and countenances any pretended or unscriptural divorce is guilty of contravening the Law of Christ. In his earlier days, the writer was put to the test. One evening, a young man, accompanied by a girl, called at the house where we lodged and asked us to marry them. Seeing a marriage license in his hand, we foolishly assumed that all was in order, and went and called two people to witness the ceremony. But before beginning it, we asked to examine the "certificate," and then discovered the man was divorced, and merely on the ground of "incompatibility of temperament." The situation was an embarrassing one, but we told the couple they were not eligible for marriage, and would be sinning before God if they lived together; and we refused to "marry" them.

One of the main proofs that the "Apocrypha"⁵ is not inspired of God is its teaching on this subject, for so far from agreeing with Holy Writ, it embodies the loose ethics of the carnal mind. Among the vaporizings of the son of Sirach concerning married women is the following: "If she go not as thou wouldest, have her cut off from thy flesh" (Ecclesiasticus 25:26)—that is, if she displeases thee in any respect, thou art free to put her away. But what better might be looked for when that same book avers, "Almsgiving will make atonement for sins" (Ecclus. 3:20)? Nor need we be surprised that such a system as Romanism, which exalts "human tradition" to the same level of authority as the Word of God (and follows the former when the latter clashes with them!), allows divorce for other causes than the one specified by Christ—even authorizing them for *religious* reasons. But to the Law and the Testimony: "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth" (Rom 7:2), even though he mistreats her, refuses to provide for her, or completely deserts her.

It is to be greatly regretted that not a few good men, leaders among the Lord's people, have taught otherwise; yet highly as we may esteem them, they are not to be regarded as "rabbins"⁶ or "fathers." We are under divine bonds to "*prove* all things," to weigh every utterance of the most eminent of God's servants in the balances of the Sanctuary, and to hold fast only "that which is good" (1 Th 5:21). Many have concluded that another cause, in addition to adultery, is sufficient to procure the dissolution of the conjugal tie—namely, the willful *desertion* of one of the parties. Cruel and ungodly as is such a course, and most pitiable the woman's case when left in ignorance for years whether her husband and protector be dead, yet the marriage is not annulled thereby. As J.C. Philpot (1802-1869) pertinently asked, "How long must that absence or desertion be to have this effect? Shall it be a week's, a month's, or a year's absence, that shall do it? And if those terms be too short, where are we to put the limit? If one year's desertion cannot break the marriage tie, can it be broken by ten or twenty years' absence?...."

"The number of years that he has deserted her, her ignorance where he is, the belief she entertains that he is dead, her desolate condition, her poverty and necessity, her unprotected condition—all these pitiable circumstances do not, cannot, alter the Law of God. He is her husband, and she is his wife till death or divorce dissolve the tie...And though this may occasion individual hardship, yet what a general benefit to married women accrues from it! If desertion could dissolve marriage, thousands of unprincipled husbands would avail themselves of it, and no wife could be sure, as now, that she should continue such till her own or her husband's decease" (*The Gospel Standard*, 1853). The very evil which the editor of that magazine pointed out now obtains widely in our midst. But our appeal must be to a higher authority, to the divine. The Lord Jesus took no notice of desertion as a just cause when speaking on divorce, nor did any of His apostles refer to it as a valid ground. *That* must be for us the Final Court of Appeal, and nothing must be allowed to counter its decision.

But some have supposed that 1 Corinthians 7:15 authorizes a divorce for something short of adultery. It ought to be sufficient to point out that such a supposition is utterly untenable, for the Scriptures do not contradict themselves. It is an exceedingly grave matter to say that the apostle taught something quite different from his Master. But he did not. It is his interpreters who failed to understand the scope and meaning of 1 Corinthians 7:10-17, and have read into the apostle's language what is not there, yea, have made him

⁵ **Apocrypha** – Greek: *hidden*. The name given to the 14 books written during the period between the Old and New Testaments, and included in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). Some branches of professing Christianity include them now in their versions of the Holy Bible, but they should never be considered as the inspired Word of God.

⁶ **rabbins** – the chief Jewish authorities on matters of law and doctrine.

to contradict himself, for he could not intend by verse 15 ("But if the unbelieving depart"—desert the Christian partner—"let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases") that the believer is then free to sue out a divorce, and upon obtaining it, marry again; and then expressly affirm, "The wife is *bound* by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (1Co 7:39)! A careful and critical examination of the apostle's drift in that passage seems to be called for.

From the opening words of 1 Corinthians 7—"Now concerning the things whereof *ye wrote unto me*"—it is evident that not a little in this epistle was written in answer to various questions which had exercised the Corinthian saints during the apostle's absence, concerning which they asked his elucidation, and which he here resolved for them. Though Paul does not quote their particular inquiries in so many words, yet the topics he took up in this epistle indicate the nature of those matters whereon they had sought his counsel, namely, those problems that were raised by their conversion from heathenism to Christianity. Confining ourselves now to the seventh chapter, it is clear that the Lord's people at Corinth had desired light from the apostle on three points. First, should young Christians marry? Second, what was the duty of a Christian whose husband or wife remained an idolater? Third, what was the duty of a Christian slave? The first question is dealt with in verses 1-9, and resumed in verses 25-40; the second, in verses 10-17; the third, in verses 18-24, which is outside the range of our present subject.

We should not be in the least surprised at the Corinthians seeking help on such matters, for be it remembered that scarcely anything more of the New Testament than the first three Gospels had then been written. Let the reader try and imagine himself to be a young Christian in the Corinthian church with none of the Epistles to hand! During the brief stay of Paul in your city, you had been converted under his preaching, separated from the world, and given as your blessed hope the coming of Christ to receive His people to Himself. Your whole outlook upon life had been radically changed. But the apostle had left for labours in other parts. You begin to wonder how the great blessings and privileges of which you have recently been made the recipient are to affect and regulate the details of your conduct. Such questions as these now deeply exercise you: would my falling in love with a woman and marrying her cast a serious reflection upon my love for Christ? Does devotion to Him require me to remain in the single state, so that *He* may completely fill my heart? If you, my reader, had no written guidance from God thereon, and had been left to yourself, had you decided rightly or wrongly upon the point?

Continuing the same flight of imagination, suppose a rather different case in Corinth. God has recently brought you out of darkness into His marvellous light, but so far from being a single person, you are already married, united to an idolater! Will not the question now be seriously raised in your heart, What is my duty? Can it be pleasing and honouring to Christ that I should continue to co-habit with one who despises and rejects Him? I have sought to present the Gospel to her (or him), but instead of duly weighing the claims of the Lord Jesus, she ridicules and opposes me, and persists in attending the idol's temple. True, I still love her dearly, yet in view of the Saviour's words ("If any man come to me, and *hate not* his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple"—Luke 14:26), must I not separate from her? Had *you* been left to your own understanding, yea, had you followed your "spiritual instincts," had you not determined wrongly? How thankful we should be for the completed Word of God in our hands, by which we are "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2Ti 3:17) and not left in uncertainty of the divine will upon such important matters as these!

Not only had it been "natural" for those young Gentile converts to conclude that it was their duty to separate from their heathen partners, not only would their "spiritual inclinations" prompt them thereto, but if they had conferred with the Hebrew Christians in their assembly, they had assuredly counseled them to do so—for they would at once have appealed unto Ezra 10:3, where those Jews who, during the captivity, had married in Babylon were required to "put away all [their] wives," and their children also. Even though they wavered on the ground that Judaism was obsolete, and consulted the Gospels to see if Christ had uttered any definite word on the subject, they would discover He had said nothing about *mixed* marriages wherein believers and unbelievers were unequally yoked together. Thus, in their perplexity, they sought help from the apostle. In view of Ezra 10:3, there was a real need for him to authoritatively resolve the matter once for all, so that others (such as the newly converted in India or China) might know whether God required them to leave their unconverted partners in marriage, or whether He allowed them to continue living with the same.

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

10. *The Holy Bible, Part 2*

That the Living Oracles of Truth are addressed to the *reason* of men as well as their conscience is definitely established by the fact that God Himself appeals to *prophecy* in proof of the unrivalled character of the communications He made through His servants. Their messages were retrospective, as well as prospective, in treating of things of the remotest antiquity, as well as of those which lay centuries ahead and thus commanded the entire horizon of history past and future. Their divine Author places such peculiar value and attaches such importance to those supernatural disclosures as an evidence of inspiration that not less than seven times in the prophecy of Isaiah alone He challenges any false faith or idolatrous cult the world over to produce any revelations like unto His. "Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let *them* bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come" (Isa 41:21-22).

"Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isa 42:9). "Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? [such as the creation of the earth, and everything else recorded in the book of Genesis]: let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified [in their claims]: or let them hear, and say, It is truth" (Isa 43:9). "I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass" (Isa 48:3). None of the seers of false religion can show either "the former things" or the "latter things": their outlook is restricted to the *present*. Only the Omniscient One can endow His messengers with a vision which reaches back before history began and which looks forward to ages not yet historic.

Again: that the Word of God is addressed to the reason of men is proven from the fact that appeal is made to *the miracles* recorded therein. "And many other signs [i.e. miracles—Acts 2:22] truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples [who have recorded many of them], which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (Joh 20:30-31). The record of the various wonders wrought by God are given in Scripture not merely to furnish information, but to convince us that He is the Author of the Book which chronicles the same, and to bring our hearts and lives in full submission to His authority; and that we receive as our personal Lord and Saviour the One who is Himself God manifest in flesh, and therefore, the final Spokesman from heaven. Those whom God employed as His penmen gave to the world a divine revelation; and He accredited the same with due evidences, so that any receiving them are left without excuse if they despise and reject them.

Now it should be quite evident that if God is to give a personal communication unto fallen man, who is full of unbelief and scepticism, it will be supported with something more than the ordinary evidence of human testimony, that it will be supplemented by extraordinary evidence. A divine revelation will be confirmed by divine insignia. If God is to speak audibly to those who forsook Him, it can only be in a way out of the common course. If He commissions messengers to declare His will, they must possess such credentials as demonstrate that they come from Him. Each prophet sent from Him must be authenticated by Him. Those bearing supernatural messages will reasonably be expected to possess supernatural seals and be accompanied with supernatural phenomena. If God directly intervenes to instruct and legislate for the children of men, then clearly, revelations and miracles must co-operate and combine. But here, the infidel will at once demur and deny that miracles are either possible or credible.

Nothing is easier than for an atheist to affirm that since the universe exists by eternal necessity and is subject to no change, that miracles cannot take place; but it is impossible for him to make anything approaching a satisfactory demonstration of that assertion. We do not propose to enter upon a lengthy discussion of the subject, deeming it sufficient to appeal to what has been presented in the previous articles in proof that God is, that He created the universe, and is now presiding over it. And then to point out, first, that what men term "the course of nature" is nothing but the agency of God. To declare that either a suspension or an alteration of the laws of nature is impossible, is to endow those laws with the attributes of Deity, and to be guilty of the absurdity of saying that the Lawgiver is subordinate to His own laws. The workman is ever superior to his works; and if God be the Creator and Governor of heaven and earth, then

He must be free to interfere in His own works whenever He pleases; and to make such interference manifest, by suspending or altering those laws by which He is pleased normally to regulate them.

“What is called the usual course of nature, then, is nothing else than the will of God, producing certain effects in a continual, regular, constant, and uniform manner; which course or manner of acting being in every moment arbitrary, is as easy to be altered at any time as to be preserved... To assert the impossibility of a miracle is absurd, for no man can prove, nor is there any reason to believe, that to work a miracle is a greater exercise of power than those usual operations which we daily witness. To restore life to a dead body and to bring it forth from the grave is not attended with any more difficulty than to communicate life to a fetus, and to bring it forth from the womb. Both are equally beyond the power of man; both are equally possible with God. In respect of the power of God, all things are alike easy to be done by Him. The power of God extends equally to great things as to small, and to many as to few; and the one makes no more difficulty or resistance to His will than the other” (Robert Haldane, 1764-1842).

To proceed one step farther. In a world which is upheld and governed by the living God, miracles are not only possible but *credible*, because probable. If the arrangement of nature be designed for the glory of its Maker and the good of His creatures, then it becomes in the highest degree likely that when any end of extraordinary importance is to be attained, that the laws of nature in their uniform course should be altered and made subservient to that event, that it should be heralded and evinced by extraordinary manifestations. Not only will the laws of the natural world become subservient to any great moral end, but they will be made to promote it. Since the laws of nature be under the direct management of their own Legislator, then not only may He moderate those laws at His own pleasure, but it is reasonable to conclude that He will make those modifications palpable and visible to His creatures when He purposes to effect some unusual influence upon them. Miracles could only be incredible if they were contrary to God’s known perfections, or contradicted some prior revelation of His will.

“Every thing we see is, in one sense, a miracle: it is beyond our comprehension. We put a twig into the ground, and find in a few years’ time that it becomes a tree; but how it draws its nourishment from the earth, and how it increases, we know not. We look around us, and see the forests sometimes shaken by storms, at other times yielding to the breeze; in one part of the year in full leaf, in another naked and desolate. We all know that the seasons have an effect on these things, and philosophers will conjecture at a few immediate causes; but in what manner these causes act, and how they put nature in motion, the wisest of them know not. When the storm is up, why doth it not continue to rage? When the air is calm, what rouses the storm? We know not, but must, after our deepest researches into first causes, rest satisfied with resolving all into the power of God. Yet, notwithstanding, we cannot comprehend the most common of these appearances, they make no impression on us, because they *are* common, because they happen according to a stated course, and are seen every day. If they were out of the common course of nature, though in themselves not more difficult to comprehend, they would still appear more wonderful to us, and more immediately the work of God.

“Thus, when we see a child grow into a man, and, when the breath has left the body, turn to corruption, we are not in the least surprised, because we see it every day; but were we to see a man restored from sickness to health by a word, or raised to life from the dead by a mere command, though these things are not really more unaccountable, yet we call the uncommon event a miracle, because it *is* uncommon. We acknowledge, however, that both are produced by God, because it is evident that no other power can produce them. Such, then, is the nature of the evidence which arises from miracles; and we have no more reason to disbelieve them, when well attested and not repugnant to the goodness or justice of God, only because they were performed several ages ago, than we have to disbelieve the more ordinary occurrences of Providence which passed before our own time, because the same occurrences may never happen again during our lives. The ordinary course of nature proves the being and providence of God; these extraordinary acts of power prove the divine commission of that person who performs them” (Thomas Hartwell Horne, 1780-1862).

Finally, miracles are not only possible and credible, but, as indicated in an earlier paragraph, in certain circumstances, they are *necessary*. If there was to be a restoration of that intercourse with God which men had severed and forfeited by their defection, it must obviously be by supernatural means. Divine revelation, being of an extraordinary nature, requires extraordinary proofs to certify it. Since it was not to be a revelation made separately to every individual, conveyed to his mind in such a way as should remove all doubting, but rather a revelation communicated to a few, and then published to the world, it follows that miracles were called for to confirm the testimony of the messengers of God, to convince others that they

spoke by higher authority than their own—and therefore, the necessity of miracles was in proportion to the necessity of a revelation being made. By the miracles performed through His servants, God gave proof to those who heard them, that they were not being imposed upon by fraud when they claimed to utter a “Thus saith the LORD.”

A miracle is a supernatural work. It is something which could not be produced by the laws of nature, and it is therefore a deviation from their normal operations. A miracle is an extraordinary divine work, where an effect is produced contrary to the common course of nature. God was pleased to perform such prodigies to testify His approbation of those who acted as His mouthpieces, to avouch their messages—the miracles they performed were their letters patent. Whatever God has confirmed by miracles is solemnly and authoritatively ratified. The miracles wrought by Moses and Elijah and by the apostles of the New Testament were such as manifestly beyond the powers of any creature to produce, and therefore, they attested the divine origin of their messages. Obviously, God would not work such wonders through imposters, or in order to confirm lies, but only to witness unto the truth of a divine revelation—see Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4.

Though miracles were both probable and necessary to authenticate unto men a revelation from God, yet it could not reasonably be expected that such sensible tokens or marks of divine interposition should be renewed in every age or to each individual in the world, for that would completely subvert the regular order of things which the Creator has established. Nor was there any need for such a continual repetition of miracles. Once Christianity was established in the world, those extraordinary interventions of God ceased. It was fitting that they should, for God doth nothing unnecessarily. The Jews, every time they heard the Law read to them, did not expect a recurrence of the supernatural happenings of Sinai: those were one solemn confirmation of the Ten Commandments, which were to serve for all generations. Likewise, the Christian doctrine is the same now as it was in the first century, and will remain unchanged to the end of the world: we have a sure and authentic record of it in the Bible. Miracles, like any other facts, may be certified by reliable testimony.

It is by means of testimony that we obtain by far the greater part of our knowledge, and the trustworthiness of such testimony may be as conclusive as sense or mathematical demonstration. Evidence is necessary to establish the fact of revelation, though revelation existed before a line of Scripture came to be written. Those to whom the revelation was not personally made are required to believe it on the testimony of those who received it from the mouth of God. And it is just as unreasonable and illogical not to credit those witnesses as it would be to decline the trustworthiness of the atlas. I might as well refuse to believe there is any such country as New Zealand, because I have never seen it for myself or personally spoken to those who have lived there, as reject the Bible as a divine revelation, because I did not personally witness the miracles God wrought to attest its original penmen, nor have had personal converse with them. It is only by the evidence of testimony of their contemporaries, and then through historians, that we know such men as Alexander and Napoleon ever existed.

“On the same grounds of historical testimony—but furnished to us in a measure far more extensive, and connected moreover with a variety of other kinds of evidence—we are assured of the fact that Jesus Christ appeared in the world and that He was born, and lived, and died, in the country of Judea. This is attested by contemporary historians, and no man acquainted with history can be so absurd as to admit the reality of the existence of Julius Caesar, and at the same time deny that of Jesus Christ. This is admitted by the greatest enemies of Christianity; and it is also acknowledged on all hands that the Christian religion which is professed at this day took its rise from Jesus Christ, and in the age in which He lived. Till then it is never mentioned; but from that period it begins to be noticed by historians; and shortly after becomes the subject of public edicts; and later produces revolutions in government, both more important and more permanent than that which Julius Caesar effected” (R. Haldane).

