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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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

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A GOOD ENDING

The former article under this title was designed chiefly for those who have come under the baneful influence of a popular type of "Eternal Security" teaching, wherein the responsibility of the saints is utterly ignored. We therefore emphasized the Scriptural fact that to begin well and to continue well are absolutely indispensable if the believer is to end well. In this one, we propose to define more closely what is signified by a good ending, and then point out some of the duties which must be attended to by the Christian in order for him to experience the same. There is a sense in which everyone who continues to tread that narrow way which leadeth unto Life has a good ending; for whatever falls he had therein, he rose up again (Pro 24:16) and held on his way (Job 17:9), neither making shipwreck of the faith (1Ti 1:19) nor turning the grace of God into lasciviousness (Jude :4). Upon their removal from the world, such have ceased from all sin and sorrow, and that is indeed a good ending. But there is another sense in which many real Christians *do not* have a good ending to their earthly career: their growth in grace is arrested, their testimony for the Lord does not honour Him as it once did, they can no longer be described as burning and shining lights; rather are they more or less under a cloud ere they pass away from this scene—rusting, instead of wearing out.

It is often said that the young Christian is the one who most of all needs to tread warily in order to escape the snares of Satan, that it is the babes in Christ who are in the greatest danger of bringing reproach upon His holy name. But neither Scripture nor observation confirms this view. Was it in their earlier years or their later that Noah, Isaac, Moses, and David conducted themselves so carnally? On the other hand, how signally was the LORD honoured by Joseph, Samuel, Josiah, and Daniel in the days of their youth! The fact is that each stage of the spiritual life has its own peculiar temptations and perils; and there is just as urgent a need for the most mature saint to walk cautiously, as there is for the one who has only just commenced his spiritual pilgrimage. While it be true that the longer a believer follows on to know the Lord, the stronger he should become in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2Ti 2:1), yet the more on his guard must he be against becoming puffed up with his attainments. It is also true that old age is accompanied by infirmities of both mind and body; yet for the Christian, it should also be marked by an increasing dependence upon the Lord and a proving of the sufficiency of His grace.

There is abundant reason for the Christian to go "from strength to strength" (Psa 84:7) and "from glory to glory" (2Co 3:18). He has the infallible Word of God in his hands, so that he may be "perfect [complete], thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2Ti 3:17). He has access to the Throne of Grace where he may ever "obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16). He is divinely assured, "They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isa 40:31). He has the mediatorial fullness of Christ to draw upon (Joh 1:16). He has the comforting promises of the living God to rest in: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa 41:10). "And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Isa 46:4). "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phi 4:19). Then ought we not to exclaim, "I will trust, and not be afraid" (Isa 12:2) and "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (Psa 23:4).

While it be the case that the Holy Spirit has recorded—for our warning—the sad follies and falls committed by some saints in their old age, He has also described—for our encouragement and emulation—the good ending of others. "For before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb 11:5). Joshua's career finished as brightly as it commenced. "So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" (Job 42:12). To the close of his long life, Daniel glorified the LORD: he "prospered in the reign of Darius [as well as Nebuchadnezzar's], and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (Dan 6:28). How many a spiritual Gaddite has proved by experience, "a troop [of lusts and temptations] shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last" (Gen 49:19). "Mark the perfect [sincere] man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace" (Psa 37:37): probably most of us have personally witnessed such cases. Then why should not the writer and the reader receive fulfilment of that promise, "It shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light" (Zec 14:7). But in order thereto we must maintain fellowship with Him who is "light" (1Jo 1:5). "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Joh 8:12).

“But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phi 3:13-14). Those words were penned by Paul as he neared the end of his course, and they should be translated into prayer by all elderly saints. As we advance in years, there is a strong tendency to live too much in the past. As there is a sinful forgetfulness, so there is a hindering remembrance. It is indeed incumbent upon us to take notice, with thankfulness, of those portions of the wilderness through which the Lord has already led us, and to raise our Ebenezers for the same (1Sa 7:12). It is equally our duty to “[leave] the principles of the doctrine of Christ” and “go on unto perfection” (Heb 6:1). We should assuredly cherish in our hearts the previous deliverances and mercies which God has vouchsafed us; and yet there is a sense in which we should forget them. Keep them in mind in order to promote thanksgiving and deepen confidence in God; but do not suffer the recollection of them to produce slackness in diligently seeking further blessings from Him. Be not content with the measure of grace, knowledge, and growth already granted, but continue to “covet earnestly the best gifts” (1Co 12:31).

So far as remembrance of the past humbles and makes us walk more softly, such an exercise of the mind is helpful; but if it dispirits and enervates, it is harmful. Like all of our faculties, the memory can be cultivated or neglected, put to both a good and a bad use. We should frequently review the past in order to learn the lessons it may teach us, and to profit from our mistakes; but we must not become so cast down over the failures of yesterday that we are disqualified for the discharge of today’s duties. It is far from honoring the Lord if we suffer the sins of our youth to fill us with dejection and despair: if they have been repented of and confessed, we should leave them under the blood of Christ. Nor is it at all a healthy sign for the soul to be always harping upon and resting in the blissful experience of conversion; rather should he see to it that he is *now* in a right attitude toward the Lord, and rejoicing in Him. Losses and bereavements must not be dwelt upon by us so as to produce perpetual gloominess; seek to cheer other distressed souls with the comfort wherewith you have been comforted of God (2Co 1:4). The racer retards his progress by glancing back at the ground already covered: his task is to keep his eyes steadily on the winning post.

In John 15, when speaking of the branches of the true vine, Christ made mention of “fruit,” “more fruit” (verse 2), and “much fruit” (verses 5, 8): such proportions ought to characterize, respectively, the babes, young men, and fathers in Christ. A lengthy acquaintance with the Lord, and deepening experience in His goodness and mercy, should issue in increasing fruitfulness. That fruit is described, in part, in Galatians 5:22-23. As we grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, will there not be increasing love for, joy in, and peace from Him? Has not God promised, “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age” (Psa 92:14)? But, says the aged pilgrim, I feel so helpless and useless. Ah, patient submission to God’s will, contentment with His appointments, and gratitude for His provisions, are also a part of spiritual “fruit.” Nor need you be inactive though confined to your bed. You now have leisure, denied to those earning their bread, and mothers of young families, to engage in the holy work of *intercession*—for God’s servants and people. Seek to be an example of cheerfulness. Remember, “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (Pro 16:31), otherwise, it is a disgrace to Christ and a stumbling-block to the young.



THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

63. 1 Peter 1:3-4

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope” (1Pe 1:3). The Deity is here viewed as the covenant Head of the Mediator, and of God’s elect in Him, being accorded His distinctive *Christian* title (Eph 1:3, etc.). This title sets Him forth as *the God of redemption*. “Abundant mercy” is ascribed to Him. This is one of His ineffable perfections, yet the *exercise* of it—as of all His other attributes—is determined by His own imperial will (Rom 9:15). Much is said in Scripture concerning this divine excellency. We read of His “tender mercy” (Luk 1:78), that “great is thy mercy” (Psa 86:13), that He is “plenteous in mercy” (Psa 86:5), of His “ manifold mercies” (Neh 9:27), yea, of “the multitude of thy mercy” (Psa 5:7). Blessed be His name, “His mercy endureth for ever” (Psa 107:1). Well, then, may each believer join with the Psalmist in saying, “I will sing aloud of thy mercy” (Psa 59:16). To this attribute especially should erring saints look: “According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (Psa 51:1).

It requires to be pointed out that there is both a general and a special mercy. That distinction is a necessary and important one, yea, a vital one, for many poor souls are counting upon the former instead of looking by faith to the latter. “The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works” (Psa 145:9), and therefore, the discerning eye perceives, “The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy” (Psa 119:64); yet that is something very different from God’s benignity unto His elect. By way of eminency, Christ is denominated “to perform *the mercy* promised to our fathers” (Luk 1:72). “For thy mercy is great above the heavens” (Psa 108:4 and compare Eph 4:10), for *there* His “mercy seat” is found, upon which sits the exalted Saviour administering the fruits of His redemptive work. It is thither that the convicted and sin-burdened soul must look for saving mercy. To conclude that God is too merciful to damn any one eternally is a delusion with which Satan fatally deceives multitudes. Pardoning mercy is obtainable only through faith in the atoning blood of the Saviour: reject Him, and divine condemnation is inescapable.

Very expressly is the mercy here celebrated by Peter a particular and discriminating one. It is that of “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and it flows to its favoured objects “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”: between *those* two clauses is the statement, “Which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.” Thus it is covenant mercy, redemptive mercy, regenerating mercy. Rightly is it styled “abundant mercy.” It is so if we consider the Bestower: it issues from the self-sufficient Jehovah, who is infinitely and immutably blessed in Himself, and who had therefore incurred no personal loss had He abandoned the whole human race to destruction—it was of His mere good pleasure that He did not. It is seen to be “abundant mercy” when we view the character of its objects, namely, depraved rebels, whose minds were enmity against God. So, too, when we contemplate the nature of its blessings: not the common and temporal ones—such as health and strength, sustenance, and preservation—bestowed upon the wicked, but spiritual, celestial, and everlasting benefits, such as had never entered the mind of man to conceive.

Still more so is it seen to be “abundant mercy” when we contemplate *the means* through which those blessings are conveyed: the “resurrection of Jesus Christ,” which necessarily presupposes His incarnation and crucifixion. What other language could be appropriate to express the Father’s sending forth of His well-beloved to take upon Him the form of a servant, assume unto Himself flesh and blood, and be born in a manger, for the sake of those whose multitudinous iniquities deserved eternal punishment? That Blessed One came here to be the Surety of His people, to pay their debts, to suffer in their stead, to die the just for the unjust. Therefore, God “spared not his own Son,” but called upon the sword of justice to smite Him. He “delivered him up” to the curse that He might “freely give us all things” (Rom 8:32). Thus it is a *righteous* mercy, for as the Psalmist declares, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psa 85:10). It was at the Cross the seemingly conflicting attributes of mercy and justice, love and wrath, and holiness and peace, are all united, as the various colours of the light when separated by a prism are seen beautifully blended together in the rainbow—the token and emblem of the covenant (Gen 9:12-14; Rev 4:3).

But we must next consider, fifth, *the incitement* of this doxology: “Which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.” It was the realization that God had quickened those who were dead in sins which moved Peter to bless Him so fervently. The expression “hath begotten us” has ref-

erence to their regeneration: later in the chapter, the apostle describes them as being “born again” (verse 23), and in the next, addresses them as “newborn babes” (1Pe 2:2). A new and a spiritual life, divine in its origin, was imparted to them, wrought in their souls by the power of the Holy Spirit (Joh 3:6). That new life was given for the purpose of forming a new character and the transforming of the conduct. God sends forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, thereby communicating a holy disposition—termed “the Spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:15)—inclining them to love Him. It is styled a “begetting,” not only because it is then that the spiritual life begins and that a holy “seed” is implanted (1Jo 3:9), but also because an image or likeness of the Begetter Himself is conveyed. As fallen Adam “begat a son in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen 5:3), so at the new birth, the Christian is “renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col 3:10).

In the “begotten us *again*,” there is a twofold allusion: a comparison and a contrast. First, as God is the efficient cause of our being, so also of our wellbeing: our natural life comes from Him, and so too does our spiritual life. Second, to distinguish our new birth from the old one. At our first begetting and birth, we were conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity (Psa 51:5); but at our regeneration, we are “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). By the new birth, we are delivered from the reigning power of sin, for we are then made “partakers of the divine nature” (2Pe 1:4). Henceforth there is a perpetual conflict within the believer: not only “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit,” but “the Spirit against the flesh” (Gal 5:17). It is not sufficiently recognized and realized that the new nature or principle of grace makes war upon the old nature or principle of evil. This spiritual begetting is attributed to God’s “abundant *mercy*,” for it was induced by nothing in or from us. We had not so much as a desire after Him: in every instance He declares, “I am found of them that sought me not” (Isa 65:1 and compare Rom 3:11). As believers love Him because He first loved them (1Jo 4:19), so they did not become seekers after Christ until He first sought and effectually called them (Luk 15:4; Joh 10:16).

This begetting is “according to [the] *abundant* mercy” of God. Mercy was most eminently displayed here, for regeneration is the fundamental blessing of all grace and glory, being the first open manifestation which the elect receive of God’s love unto them. “But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Ti 3:4-5). As Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) so aptly expressed it, “God’s love is like a river or spring which runs underground, and hath done so from eternity. When breaks it forth first? When a man is effectually called, then that river, which hath been from everlasting underground, and through Christ on the Cross, breaks out in a man’s own heart too.” It is then we are experientially made God’s children, received into His favour, and conformed unto His image. Therein is a remarkable display of His benignity. At the new birth, the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and that is the introduction into, as well as the sure pledge of, every other spiritual blessing for time and eternity. As the predestinating love of God ensures our effectual call or regeneration, so that guarantees our justification and glorification (Rom 8:29-30).

Let us now retrace our steps, going over again the ground we have covered, but in the inverse order. Not until a soul has been begotten of God can he have any spiritual apprehension or appreciation of the divine mercy. Before that miracle of grace takes place, he is possessed more or less of a pharisaical spirit. To sincerely bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for His abundant mercy is the heartfelt acknowledgment of one who has turned away with loathing from the filthy rags of his own righteousness, and has no confidence in the flesh. Equally true is it that no unregenerate person ever has his conscience sprinkled with the peace-producing blood of Christ, for until spiritual life be imparted, evangelical repentance and saving faith are morally impossible, and therefore, there can be no realization of our desperate need of a Saviour or any actual trusting in Him. Still more evident is it that so long as a person remains dead in sin, with his mind enmity against God, there can be no acceptable obedience unto Him, for He will neither be imposed upon nor bribed by rebels. And certain it is that none who are of the world and in love with its painted baubles will conduct themselves as “strangers” in this scene.

“Begotten us again unto a lively hope.” This is the immediate effect and fruit of the new birth, and is one of the characteristic marks which distinguishes the regenerate from the unregenerate. Hope always respects something future (Rom 8:24-25), being an eager expectation of something desirable, an anticipation of a promised good—real or imaginary. The heart of the natural man is largely buoyed up and his spirits maintained by contemplations of some improvement in his lot that will increase his happiness in this world. But in the majority of instances, the things dreamed of never materialize, and even when they do, the result

is always disappointing, for no real satisfaction of soul is to be found in anything under the sun. If such disillusioned souls have come under the influence of "religion," then they will seek to persuade themselves of and look forward to something far better for them in the hereafter. But such expectations will prove equally vain, for they are but the fleshly imaginings of carnal men. The false hope of the hypocrite (Job 8:13), the presumptuous hope of those who neither revere God's holiness nor fear His wrath (but who count upon His mercy), and the dead hope of the graceless professor, will but mock their subjects.

In contradistinction from the delusive expectations cherished by the unregenerate, God's elect are begotten again unto a real and substantial hope—that is, *subjectively* so, for their objection hope is described in the next verse. In the majority of instances, the Greek adjective is translated "living," though in Acts 7:38 (as well as in our text), it is rendered "lively." We shall therefore give it both meanings. The Christian's hope is a "sure and stedfast" one (Heb 6:19), because it rests upon the Word and oath of Him that cannot lie. It is the gift of divine grace (2Th 2:16), the fruit of the Spirit, inseparably connected with faith and love (1Co 13:13). It is a living hope because it is exerted by a quickened soul, being an exercise of the new nature or principle of grace received at regeneration, and because it has "eternal life" for its object (Ti 1:1-2); whereas before we were begotten of God, there was "a certain fearful looking for of judgment" (Heb 10:27), through fear of death "being "all [our] lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb 2:15). It is also termed "a living hope," because it is imperishable, one which looks and lasts beyond the grave. Should death overtake its possessor, so far from frustration, hope then enters into its fruition.

This inward hope of the believer is not only a living but a "lively" one, for it is—like faith and love—an active principle in his soul, animating unto patience, steadfastness, and perseverance in the path of duty. Therein it differs radically from the dead hope of religious formalists and empty professors, for theirs never stirs to spiritual activity or produces anything to distinguish them from respectable worldlings who make no profession at all. It is the possession and exercise of this lively hope which affords demonstration that we have been "begotten...again." By divine begetting, a spiritual life is communicated, and that life manifests itself by desires after spiritual things, by seeking satisfaction in spiritual objects, and by energizing to the performance of spiritual duties. The genuineness and reality of that "lively hope" is, in turn, evidenced by its producing a readiness unto the denying of self and enduring afflictions, acting as "an anchor of the soul" (Heb 6:19) amid the storms of life. It further evidences itself by purging its possessor: "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1Jo 3:3). It is also a "lively hope" in that it cheers and enlivens its subjects, for as he views the blissful goal, courage is imparted and inspiration afforded for him to endure unto the end of his trials.

We come now to consider, sixth, *the acknowledgment* of this prayer, namely, "the resurrection of Jesus Christ." From the position occupied by these words, it is plain that they are related to and govern each of the preceding clauses, as well as the verse that follows. Equally obvious, it is that the resurrection of Christ implies His previous birth and death, though each possesses its own distinctive value and virtue. The connection between the resurrection of Christ and the exercise of the abundant mercy of God the Father, of His bringing us from death unto life, of His putting into our hearts a living hope, and of His bringing us into a glorious inheritance, is a very real and intimate one, and calls for our devout attention. The Saviour's rising again from the dead was the climacteric proof of the divinity of His mission and ratification of His Gospel. It was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies concerning Him, and thus evinced Him to be the promised Messiah. It was the accomplishment of His own predictions, and thus certified Him to be a true prophet. It determined the contest between Him and the Jews: they condemned Him to death as an impostor, but by restoring the temple of His body in three days, He demonstrated them to be liars. It witnessed to the Father's acceptance of His redemptive work.

There is, however, a much closer connection between the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the hope of eternal life which is set before His people. His emerging in triumph from the tomb furnished indubitable proof of the efficacy of His propitiatory sacrifice: that it had not only put away the sins of those for whom it was offered, but had brought in an everlasting righteousness, and therefore, had secured for them the award of a fulfilled Law. He who was delivered up to death for our offences was raised again for our justification (Rom 4:25). As John Brown (1722-1787) pointed out: "When God 'brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant' (Heb 13:20), He manifested Himself to be 'the God of peace,' the pacified Divinity. He 'raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God' (1Pe 1:21). Had Jesus not risen, our

faith had been in vain: we should have been still in our sins (1Co 15:17), and without hope. But now that He is risen:

‘Our Surety, freed, declares us free,
For whose offences He was seized;
In His release our own we see,
And joy to view Jehovah pleased.’

“But even this is not all. Our Lord’s resurrection is to be viewed not only in connection with His death, but with the following glory. Raised from the dead, He has received all power in heaven and on earth, that He might give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given Him. How *this* is calculated to encourage hope may be readily apprehended. Because He lives, we shall live also. Having the keys of death and the unseen world, He can and will raise us from the dead, and give us eternal life. He sits at the right hand of God. Our life is hid with Him in God, and when He who is our life shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory. We are not yet in possession of the inheritance; but He, our Head and Representative, *is*. We see not yet all things put under us; but we see Him, the Captain of our salvation, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour. The resurrection of Christ—when considered in reference to the death which preceded, and the glory which followed it—is the grand means of producing and strengthening the hope of eternal life.” “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to [the spiritual] Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Act 5:31)—i.e. to administer redemption.

Yet more specifically. The resurrection of Christ is not only the meritorious cause of the believer’s justification, but of his regeneration, too, with all that that ensures. This is a point of deep importance, though, like many a similar one, little understood today. The soul must be brought from its death in sin before the body can be raised in glory, and while the Holy Spirit is the One who quickens God’s elect; yet it must be remembered that He proceeds from the risen Christ as the reward of His finished work (Act 2:33). In James 1:18, the new birth is traced back to the sovereign will of the Father. In Ephesians 1:19, it is predicated of the working of His mighty power. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, it is attributed unto the gracious operation of the Spirit. Here in our text, while issuing from the abundant mercy of the Father, it is ascribed to the virtue of Christ’s triumph over death. It is to be observed that Christ’s own resurrection is termed a “begetting” of Him (Psa 2:7, compared with Act 13:33), while our resurrection is designated a “regeneration” (Mat 19:28). Christ is expressly called “the first begotten of the dead” (Rev 1:5); and He is so, because resurrection was a “begetting” of a new beginning—both for Him and for His people.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

43. Judgment

“So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes” (Jos 7:16). Here we behold his willingness and readiness in obeying the command he had received (verse 14). However painful the task, there was no delay. In Jos 3:1, we saw God’s servant rising early to engage in a pleasant duty; here, there was equal alacrity when a distressing one was to be performed. Though a sore trial to flesh and blood, yet Joshua’s heart was in this work, for he yearned to have the LORD’s honour vindicated, and for the nation to be restored to His favour. Therein we have a further adumbration of the antitypical Joshua, of whom we read that after announcing, “Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners,” at once added, “Rise, let us be going” (Mat 26:45-46). Yet here, as everywhere, the Saviour had the pre-eminence. There was no “rising early in the morning,” for there was no retiring to rest for Him that night! Through all the hours of darkness, He was hounded from pillar to post: from Gethsemane to appear before Annas, then sent from him to Caiaphas, from him to Pilate, from him to Herod, from him back to Pilate, from him to the Cross: all the while on foot, His body a mass of bleeding wounds, without His eyes closing in slumber! Nevertheless, He *advanced* unto those who thirsted for His blood (Joh 18:4), ready to be led as a lamb to the slaughter.

“So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of *Judah* was taken.” This must have come as a most painful shock to that tribe as a whole, as well as to Joshua himself. Wondrous things had been foretold of Judah. It was to be the royal and ruling tribe (Gen 49:10). The LORD had laid honour on it by supernaturally endowing one of its men for special skilled work in connection with the furnishing of the tabernacle (Exo 31:2-5). Of it sprang the illustrious Caleb (Num 13:6). Judah was the tribe which took the lead when the nation was on march across the wilderness (Num 10:14). His was to be the largest portion of Canaan (Deu 34:2). And here their name was disgraced! Nor was this the first time, as a reference to Genesis 38:2, 15, and 16 will show—Achan being a direct descendant of the Zarah or Zerah of Genesis 38:30, in Joshua 7:18. “This was an allay to their dignity and might serve as a check to their pride. Many there were who were its glories, but here was one that was its reproach. Let not the best families think it strange if there be those found in them and descended from them that prove their grief and shame. Since Judah was to have the largest lot in Canaan, the more inexcusable is one of that tribe if, not content to wait for his own share, he break in upon God’s property”—Matthew Henry (1662-1714).

Achan remained obdurate even now that it was made known that the guilty one belonged to the tribe of Judah. As he had not confessed his offence when Israel was repulsed at Ai and the hearts of the people melted and became as water (verse 5), so now he maintained silence, yea, continued doing so when his own “family” was singled out (verse 17) and when his particular “household” was identified (verse 18). But in a few more moments, he was to receive proof of that divine declaration, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num 32:23). He was also on the point of learning “he that covereth his sins shall not prosper” (Pro 28:13). To “cover sin” is a keeping of it within our own bosom, a refusing to bring it out into the light by a frank confession of the same unto God. *Pride* restrains many therefrom: they have such a high esteem of themselves that even though guilty, they are too self-opinionated to own their sins. With others, *unbelief* is what hinders: they who have no faith to be assured that God will cover repented sins, vainly attempt to do so themselves even while remaining impenitent. *Fear and shame* are what cause the majority to hide their sins. Sin is such a hideous monster that they will not own it as theirs. But whatever be the cause, they “shall not prosper.”

“And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken” (Jos 7:17-18). It should be borne in mind that all of the innocent were under a cloud of suspicion until the culprit himself was definitely recognized. Moreover, it was expedient for the benefit of future generations that no stigma should rest upon the guiltless. “The tribe, family, parentage of the offender were specified with exactness, that the infamy might not rest on the reputation of any other of the same name”—Thomas Scott (1747-1821). Achan “was taken” means that he was now identified by the “Urim,” singled out by the unerring judgment given through the high priest. It was now made manifest before the whole congregation that the divine justice had seized him. When the secret sins of men are brought to light, God should be owned in it,

and the perpetrator should acknowledge with the brethren of Joseph: "God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants" (Gen 44:16). "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known" (Luk 12:2).

"And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me" (Jos 7:19). Here again we must look beyond Joshua unto the One spoken of in Acts 17:31. "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained." God Himself will judge, yet not immediately, but mediately through Christ. So here: Achan was bidden to give glory to the LORD God, but Joshua at once added, "Tell *me* now what thou hast done; hide it not from *me*!" The expression "my son" was not here a term of tenderness or kindness (as it usually is with us), but a form of address used by one of eminence or authority unto an inferior, as Saul termed David "my son" (1Sa 24:16) and Joab designated Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, "my son" (2Sa 18:22); conversely, a superior was owned as "father" (2Ki 5:13; 6:21). Nevertheless, it is striking to note how mildly Joshua addressed Achan: "This is an example to all not to insult over those who are in misery, though they have brought themselves into it by their own wickedness, but to treat even offenders with the spirit of meekness, not knowing what ourselves should have been and done if God had put us into the hands of our own counsels"—M. Henry.

"And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him." Very striking and blessed is that: the honour of Jehovah was what was uppermost in His servant's heart and mind—as it ever was with the anti-typical Joshua (Joh 8:50; 12:23). But how could Achan's confession give glory to God? In many ways. It testified to the divine omniscience in detecting and exposing his profane and stealthy conduct, picking him out from that vast multitude as the guilty one. It acknowledged God's holiness in abhorring his wickedness, thereby setting to his seal that He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab 1:13) It witnessed to His justice, that God was righteous in being so displeased with him. It owned His veracity that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Eze 18:4). What is the glory of God but the sum of His perfections? It is by those perfections that He is made known to us both in the written and personal Word. And therefore, to glorify Him is for us to recognize, acknowledge, and be suitably affected by the divine attributes; as conversely we are guilty of slighting Him when denying—either in word or act—His perfections. When we trample upon His Law, we repudiate His authority. When we defy Him, we disclaim His power. When we think to conceal sin from Him, we disown His omniscience.

"My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him." It is all too little realized by any of us that this is one of the ways appointed by God in which we glorify Him. In connection with the confessing of sin, we are too apt to confine our thoughts unto the clearing of our conscience and being restored to fellowship. In other words, we are too much wrapped up in ourselves and too little occupied with the excellencies of the One we approach. A truly contrite soul will eye the dominion of God, acknowledging His right to rule over us and our duty to live in entire subjection to Him, and will bemoan his insubordination. He will eye God's righteousness and own that His "law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom 7:12), and therefore, that he is without excuse in breaking it. He will eye His long suffering, which has granted him space to repent instead of cutting him off in the commission of sin. He will eye the abundant mercy of God, which has opened a way for his pardon without compromising His holiness, laying hold of the promise: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jo 1:9). Failure to confess sin is not only to deprive ourselves of comfort, but is to withhold from God that which is His due.

Acceptable confession is very much more than an exercise of our lips: unless it issues from groanings within, our words are worthless and ineffectual. And there will be no inward groaning until we realize the sinfulness of our sins and are duly affected thereby. We shall never confess sin with a true sense of its infinite evil until we consider its contrariety to the nature and will of God, and perceive how it reflects dishonour upon the divine perfection, particularly as it is a contempt of His authority and a direct opposition to His purity. Nor shall we ever confess our sins with brokenness of heart and confusion of face, until we are sensible of the vile ingratitude of them, as they are committed by those who are under the strongest obligations to the contrary. There will be no confession of sin with self-abhorrence until we recognize that it is aggravated by the light and privileges, the goodness and mercy, and the exhortations and warnings, against which we have transgressed, for they greatly heighten our iniquities (Ezr 9:10-15). To affect our minds and consciences with the heinousness of sin, so as to be kept humble and filled with self-abasement,

we need to meditate frequently upon what it cost Christ to make atonement for the same. The sincerity and fervour of our confession evince the depth of our hatred of sin.

“And Joshua said unto Achan...tell me *now* what thou hast done; hide it not from me.” That “now” was a word of reproof and reproach because the offender had remained silent so long. Achan had delayed until it was impossible any longer to conceal his guilt—his confession being wrung from him by the preceding process. The earlier confession be made, the more God is honoured, and the sooner will peace be restored to the conscience; but, better late than never. It is the fool who procrastinates; the apostate who defiantly refuses to do so. Fearfully solemn is that warning: “Give glory to the LORD your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness” (Jer 13:16). Note that to “make confession” and “hide it not” are equivalent terms, and that not to confess is tantamount to a denial (Joh 1:20). Joshua’s “Tell me now *what* thou hast done; hide it not from me” (Jos 7:19) makes known unto us what confession of sin is to consist of—namely, a frank and full acknowledgment of the offence, without any attempt at concealment or self-extenuation, however humiliating it may be. By so doing, we bear witness that God’s prohibition was a righteous one and His punishment (or chastisement) is just.

“And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done” (Jos 7:20), which was no more a proof of his genuine contrition than was King Saul’s acknowledgement, “I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD” (1Sa 15:24), or the remorseful avowal of Judas, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood” (Mat 27:4). In what follows, we are shown that confession of sin must be in detail. “When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it” (Jos 7:21). The temptation entered through the eye, and that excited the concupiscence of his corrupt heart: as the prophet said in a different connection, “Mine eye affecteth mine heart” (Lam 3:51). How needful it is that we emulate the holy example of Job, who declared: “I made a covenant with mine eyes” (Job 31:1). How earnestly should we cry unto God daily, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way” (Psa 119:37)—make me to view a thing as *Thou* dost, and to esteem or disesteem them according to the teaching of Thy Word. Had Achan regarded those objects with the eyes of faith, he had looked upon them as “accursed things,” for so had God pronounced them!

“I saw...then I coveted them.” Having viewed them with the eyes of unbelief, he lusted after them. What a solemn warning for each of us to heed! Covetousness has in it a far greater degree of malignity and is more highly provoking to God than is commonly thought. Colossians 3:5 declares that covetousness “is idolatry,” for it is a bestowing upon the creature that respect and love which is due alone unto the Creator. When we mortify not our inordinate desire, we cherish a viper within our own bosom, for it gnaws at the very roots of contentment and gratitude (Heb 13:5). When our desire exceeds the present portion God has allotted us, we are no longer satisfied with the same and are unable to enjoy and give thanks for it. “I coveted them, and took them”: thus he followed precisely the same order as did Eve (Gen 3:6 and compare Jam 1:14-15). “And, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent” (verse 21). There we behold both the “deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13) and the anxiety it brings. “No sooner had he got possession of his plunder than it became his burden!...so differently do the objects of temptation appear at a distance to what they do when apprehended and when the infatuation ceases”—Thomas Scott (1747-1821). They who yield to a spirit of covetousness “pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1Ti 6:8-10).

“So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent” (Jos 7:22). The members of the congregation were as desirous and zealous to have Jehovah’s honour vindicated as was their leader. “And, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD” (verses 22-23). This was done in order that conclusive evidence of Achan’s guilt should be laid before the eyes of the whole nation, and thereby was brought to light the hidden things of darkness. By that procedure, a solemn warning was given the people (and us) of the utter futility of any attempt to conceal anything from the eyes of Him which are “in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Pro 15:3). “And laid them out before the LORD” (verse 23): that is, either at the feet of His representative, the high priest, or more probably immediately before the ark of the covenant. The accursed things were not poured out “unto the LORD” for His acceptance, but *before* Him for His destruction—they were never brought into His treasury for use in His service, but totally destroyed, as the sequel shows.

“And Joshua, *and all Israel* with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor” (Jos 7:24). Here was unity of action. The whole nation was required to dissociate itself from the trespass and take part in punishing the culprit. For any not to concur therein would be to condone the sin—just as when any church members refuse to take part in a similar action. Achan and all pertaining to him were taken outside the camp—compare “taken away from among you” (1Co 5:2)! Note how what followed gave force to, and shows an additional reason for, the “sanctify yourselves” of Joshua 7:13. For those who are themselves erring creatures to sit in judgment upon one of their fellows calls for unsparing self-judgment. Ere a church is in a meet condition to enforce a holy discipline, it is required that its officers and members humble themselves before God and clear their own consciences, by confessing every known sin, and pleading the cleansing blood of Christ. Only then can they act in godly fear and trembling. Only then will “he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone” (Joh 8:7) no longer prevent them performing a necessary but painful duty.

“And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones” (Jos 7:25). “By this severity against Achan, the honour of Joshua’s government—now in the infancy of it—was maintained; and Israel, at their entrance upon the promised Canaan, were minded at their peril, the provisos, and limitations of the grant by which they held it”—M. Henry. It is worthy of note that at the opening of the tabernacle worship, we behold an instance of the severity of divine judgment upon the two sons of Aaron (Lev 10:1-2), so here upon their entry into Canaan, and similarly at the dawn of Christianity in connection with the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Act 5), we have examples of the same thing: designed no doubt to increase godly fear, promote dutiful circumspection, and prevent general wickedness. Such solemn demonstrations before the eyes of the people would render it the less easy for them to forget that their God was “a consuming fire” (Deu 4:24), unto those who provoked Him.

“The severity of the punishment must be estimated by the relation of Achan’s crime to the whole plan of the conquest of Canaan. If the destruction of Canaan was indeed the execution of divine vengeance, it must be kept entirely clear of all human motives, lest men should say that Jehovah had given His people license to deal with the Canaanites as seemed best for themselves, The punishment of Saul (1Sa 15:21-23) and the repeated statement in Esther 9:10, 15-16 (notwithstanding the king’s permission in 8:11), ‘but on the spoil laid they not their hand,’ are illustrations of the same principle”—Charles John (C. J.) Ellicott (1819-1905). In addition, it is to be borne in mind that Achan deliberately transgressed the plain commandment of Deuteronomy 13:17, that he acted in contempt of the awful curse which Joshua had just previously denounced (Jos 6:17-19), that he defied Jehovah at a time when His presence was so conspicuously manifest among His people, that his crime was not only one of theft but sacrilege (converting to his own use what was devoted to the LORD), and that his offence resulted in the people of God being put to shame in the sight of the heathen.

Our remaining space permits us to do no more than briefly point out that the above incident shadows forth most of the principal features of the Last Assize. (1) It is then there will be a full and final display of God’s perfections and the divine glory will shine forth conspicuously. (2) As “all Israel” here, so all mankind there, will stand before the antitypical Joshua. (3) As the tribe of Judah was marked off from the others, so will the goats then be separated from the sheep. (4) The hidden things of darkness shall then be brought to light. (5) As the innocent were cleared before the guilty were charged, so the righteous will be vindicated before the unrighteous are condemned. (6) As Achan made no attempt to deny his guilt or demur at his punishment, so the damned will concur with the justice of their sentence. (7) As all Israel united in the stoning of Achan’s family, so “the saints shall judge the world” (1Co 6:2). (8) As the guilty were “burned with fire” (Rev 18:8) *after* their death, so everlasting fire will be the portion of the lost. (9) As there was a permanent “memorial” unto the grace of God (Jos 4:9), so unto His holiness (Jos 7:26): the redeemed will for ever exemplify God’s love, the reprobate His wrath.



THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

27. *In the Soul*

Fourth, it is a *humbling* knowledge. This is another unmistakable effect of an immediate and supernatural revelation of God to a person. That spiritual illumination and inward teaching lays the soul low before God. Therein it differs radically from self-acquired learning and the intellectual teaching we absorb from men, for that only serves to feed our conceit: such knowledge “puffeth up” (1Co 8:1). Truth itself when unapplied by the Spirit is only unsanctified knowledge, adding to our store of information, but producing no lowliness of heart. But when the Lord teaches a soul, the bladder of self-sufficiency is punctured, and there is a “casting down imaginations [or ‘reasonings’] and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (2Co 10:5). He now renounces his own wisdom and becomes as a “little child.” The soul is brought to realize not that he is lacking in instruction, but that he is incapable of making a good *use* of what he already knows. He is now sensible that he needs to be divinely taught how to effectually translate his knowledge into practice. The letter of God’s precepts may be fixed in his mind, but how to perform them he knows not, and therefore does he cry, “Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes” (Psa 119:33), “Teach me *to do* thy will” (Psa 143:10).

Of only too many Laodicean “Christians” must it be said, “Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee” (Isa 47:10) to turn away from the only One who can effectually anoint blind eyes. But the wisdom which is from above is a self-emptying one, making its possessor cry, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luk 11:1), and when he *does*, it is in a very different manner from the polished periods and eloquent language of what are termed pulpit “invocations.” The natural man will ask for relief when in temporal distress, though he has no sense of need for *spiritual* mercies. But one taught of God is painfully conscious of the fact that he “know[s] not what [he] should pray for as [he] ought” and has “groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26), and that makes him implore the help of the Holy Spirit. Such a one prays, “Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments,” “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies,” “Quicken me in thy righteousness,” “Teach me good judgment,” “Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Psa 119:73, 36, 40, 66, 133). Thus the soul is taught how perfectly suited is God’s Word to His deep need.

Fifth, it is a *transforming* knowledge. When God savingly reveals Himself to a person, a real and radical change is effected in him, so that the one alienated from Him is now reconciled to Him. The light of divine grace is a prevailing and overcoming one, producing an altered disposition toward God, so that the one who shrank from Him pants after Him. Not only is He now feared, but adored. Divine teaching not only slays enmity against God, but conveys to the soul an answerableness to His holiness. It is affirmed of all such “but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Rom 6:17)—i.e. the mould of teaching into which ye have been cast. At regeneration, the heart is made tender and the will tractable. The characters of the renewed are formed by the Truth, for a corresponding impression is made thereon. Their hearts and lives are modeled according to the tenour of the Gospel. Truth is received not only in the light of it, but in the love of it as well. The inward inclinations are changed and framed according to what the Word enjoins, the faculties being fitted to respond thereto. He delights in the Law of God after the inward man, and chooses the things that please God (Isa 56:4).

The sanctifying discovery of God to the soul not only slays its enmity unto Him, subdues the lusts of the flesh, removes carnal prejudices against His holy requirements, but stirs up the affections after them. No longer is there a murmuring against the exalted standard which God sets before us, but rather a reaching forth and striving to measure up to it. The Spirit’s effectual application of the Word is always accompanied by a drawing out of the heart unto God, so that its subject is sensibly affected by His majesty and authority, His love and grace, His forbearance and goodness. So great was the change wrought in those who had been converted under his ministry, the apostle could say of one company, “Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered [instrumentally] by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God” (2Co 3:3). And why? Because, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, they were “changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (verse 18): changed from pride to humility, from self-love to self-loathing, from self-seeking to Christ-pleasing.

Sixth, it is an *operative* knowledge. There are multitudes in Christendom today who “profess that they know God; but in works [not ‘words’] they deny him” (Ti 1:16). Much truth has entered their ears and eyes,

but it results only in idle notions, useless speculations, and frothy talk. Whereas those who by grace are made partakers of the divine nature have a disposition and impulse unto the performance of duty, and therefore, they not only long after communion with God, but diligently endeavour to please and glorify Him in their daily lives. At the new birth, God puts His Law into their souls and writes it upon their hearts (Jer 31:33), and that moves its favoured recipient to exclaim, "O how love I thy law!" (Psa 119:97), and to manifest that love by diligently seeking to comply with the divine precepts. The Spirit is given to the elect that He may "cause [them] to walk in [God's] statutes" (Eze 36:26-27). A saving knowledge of God constrains the soul unto obedience to Him: not perfectly so in this life, yet a *real* responding to His requirements. No sooner did the light of God shine supernaturally into the heart of Saul of Tarsus than he cried, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Act 9:6). "But now being made free from [the guilt and dominion of] sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Rom 6:22).

When the Holy Spirit effectually applies the truth into a person, he responds thereto: the soul is quickened and solemnized, God is revered, the affections are elevated, the will is given an inclination to deny self, renounce the world, resist the devil. Thus it was with the Thessalonian saints: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually *worketh also in you* that believe" (1Th 2:13). It effectually prevails over sloth, the fear of man, worldly interests, everything which stands in opposition to it. "[None] teacheth like him?" (Job 36:22). Divine teaching is both efficacious and intensely practical. As God's creative words were mighty and effectual (Gen 1), so are His teaching words (Joh 6:63; 15:3). "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (1Jo 2:3). Keeping His commandments is the evidence and proof of a saving knowledge of God. Though the obedience of a Christian be far from flawless, yet is it real, spontaneous, sincere, impartial. Where no such obedience exists, then "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments [by prayerful and genuine endeavour], is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1Jo 2:4).

Seventh, it is a *satisfying* knowledge. The language of every truly regenerated and converted soul is, I ask for no better Saviour than Christ, I desire no other peace than God's—which passeth all understanding; I need no superior Director through the mazes of this world than the infallible Scriptures. Though his station in life be the humblest and meanest, the one who has been divinely quickened would not change places with those in highest office. The one in whose heart the supernatural light of God has shone—making him wise unto salvation—counts all other knowledge as comparatively worthless. Though he be a financial pauper, yet the one who has had the scales of prejudice and unbelief removed from his eyes, and Christ "revealed" unto him, knows himself to be infinitely richer than the godless millionaire. The one who has had the divine Law effectually applied to his conscience, his sins set before him in the light of God's holiness, and has found cleansing and healing in the atoning blood of the Lamb, "had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of . . . God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psa 84:10). Joint heirs with Christ envy not the great of this world; those who are clothed with His righteousness look not with grudging eye upon those appareled in silks and flashing with diamonds.

Yes, this knowledge is a heart-satisfying one. It cannot be otherwise, for it is engaged with an all-sufficient Object. Nothing outside of Christ can suit the soul. Satisfaction is not to be found in ourselves, for we are mutable and dependent creatures. Nor in any of the things of time and sense, for they all perish with the using. Christ alone is the Fountain of life and happiness. He is all-sufficient for us, "for it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (Col 1:19), and therefore, can He amply supply our every want. He is "altogether lovely" (Song 5:16), the perfection of beauty. He excels all on earth, outshines all in heaven. The infinite mind of God Himself finds contentment in the Lord Jesus, declaring Him to be "mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isa 42:1). Every genuinely saved person readily set to his seal that Christ is true when He avers, "Whosoever drinketh of this water [the failing wells of earth] shall thirst again [as Solomon found, though he drank deeply from them all]: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (Joh 4:13-14). A divine discovery of the fullness, suitability, and excellence of Christ, meets every need and satisfies every longing of the soul.

Let every reader, as he values his soul and its eternal interests, carefully and honestly test himself by what has been set before him in this and the four preceding articles. As the sin of Adam could not hurt us unless he had been our head by way of generation, so the righteousness of Christ cannot enrich us unless He be our Head by regeneration. There must be union with Him before we partake of His benefits. The

bands of union are life, and the Spirit on His part, faith and love on ours. There is no coming and cleaving to Christ in a saving way until the soul has "learned of the Father" (Joh 6:45). We have described some of the characteristics and effects of that "learning." Speculative knowledge produces no spiritual fruit: no humility, no poverty of spirit, no broken-heartedness, no godly sorrow. Divine teaching is a heart-searching, sin-discovering, conscience-convicting, soul-humbling, Christ-magnifying one. When Isaiah beheld the Holy One, he exclaimed, "Woe is me! for I am undone" (Isa 6:5). Have *you* ever been brought to the place where you have made such a confession? When Daniel had a vision of the LORD with "his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire," he tells us, "my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength" (Dan 10:6, 8). Has anything resembling that been duplicated in your experience?

Try yourself we beseech you by what has been pointed out. Assume not that all is well with thee. Examine yourself, and your knowledge of divine things. You may not know the very day of your regeneration, nor how it was brought about, but the *evidences* of it are apparent. Which do you really love the more: the pleasures of sin or the beauty of holiness? Which do you genuinely value most: God or the creature? Which are you actually serving: self or Christ? A sanctifying knowledge of God results in the heart being divorced from the things formerly cherished and idolized, and to now cleave to objects disliked and shunned. When the Spirit shines into the heart and reflects His own light from the Word into it, the soul is for evermore out of conceit with itself. When the LORD fully discovered Himself unto Job, he cried, "Behold, I am vile" (Job 40:4). Have *you* ever been made conscious of the same thing before Him? Do you now perceive that, in yourself, you are a corrupt and polluted creature? Has the blessed Spirit made Christ real and precious to you? If so, there has been a radical change in your heart and life. When Christ was revealed to Paul, he had a contempt for all things else, ardent desires after Him, supreme delight in Him, and was willing to suffer the loss of all things for His sake (Phi 3:8-9). A saving knowledge of Christ gives us to prove the sufficiency of His grace, sustaining the soul amid trials (2Co 12:9).

"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phi 1:6). That which we have sought to describe is only *commenced* at regeneration and conversion: henceforth we are to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2Pe 3:18). Our native spiritual blindness is only partly cured in this life, so that we yet "see through a glass, darkly" (1Co 13:12). Believers are still completely dependent upon the Lord that He should open "their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luk 24:45). They need to beg Him to make good unto them that promise, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Pro 4:18). As the work of God is carried on in the soul, the Spirit shows him more and more what a hell-deserving wretch he is in himself, causes him to groan frequently over his corruptions and failures, makes him more deeply sensible of his need and suitableness unto Christ, brings him more and more in love with the Saviour, and stirs him unto an increased diligence in endeavouring to serve and honour Him. However far a saint may advance in an experiential acquaintance with Him, it is his privilege and duty to pray that he may be "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:10).

It is very necessary that the young Christian should clearly recognize that God's work of grace in the soul is not completed in this life. There are some of His people who look within themselves for a faith that is not hampered with unbelief, for a love that is ever warm and constant, for pantings after holiness that vary not in fervour and regularity, for an obedience which is wellnigh perfect, and because they are unable to find that this is *their* case, conclude themselves to be unregenerate. They fail to realize that the evil principle of "the flesh" is left in them, and remains unchanged unto the end. It is indeed their bounden duty to mortify its lustings and to make no provision for the same (Rom 13:12, 14); nevertheless, they will frequently have occasion to complain, "Iniquities prevail against me" (Psa 65:3), and daily will they need to avail themselves of that "fountain opened to [the LORD's people] for sin and for uncleanness" (Zec 13:1). If they do not, if they trifle with temptations, consort with the ungodly, allow unconfessed sins to accumulate on the conscience, they will soon relapse into a sickly state of soul, lose their relish for the things of God, have their graces languish, and then they will be *unable* to discern in their hearts and lives the seven marks named above. A backslider will not find the fruits of righteousness in his soul.

It also requires to be pointed out just here that there is a radical difference between the manner of the Spirit's working in regeneration and His operations subsequently. In the former, He wrought upon us as we were "dead in sins" (Eph 2:5), and consequently, entirely passive therein. But after He has quickened us into newness of life, we concur with Him. That is to say, we are required to use the means of grace, espe-

cially the reading of God's Word, meditating on its contents, and praying for grace to conform thereto. The blessed Spirit will set no premium on slothfulness. We are to work, and He graciously assists: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities" (Rom 8:26). As we are "led by the Spirit" to walk in the paths of righteousness, conscience testifies in our favour, and "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom 8:14, 16). But if we become careless and excuse ourselves therein, then the Spirit is grieved and obstructed, His comforts are withheld, and we taste the bitterness of our folly. The chastening rod falls on us till we repent of our waywardness and turn again unto the Lord. When matters are righted with God, the Spirit stirs us afresh to the use of means and again takes of the soul-satisfying things of Christ and shows them unto us.

Finally, let it again be emphasized that all the inward teachings of God are perfectly agreeable to the written Word. The revelations made by the Spirit to the souls of God's elect, and which constitute their own actual "experience," and the revelation which He has made in the sacred Scriptures, never conflict (Isa 59:21). When God speaks to the heart of man—whether it be in a way of conviction, consolation, or instruction in duty—He always honours the Bible by making express use of its words. Thus the written Word is the sole standard by which we must try all the teaching we have received: all must be weighed in the balances of the Sanctuary. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to *this* word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa 8:20). Without that divine safeguard, we lay ourselves open to gross fanaticism and fatal deception. Whatever spiritual knowledge you think you have received, if it accords not wholly with God's Word, it is not of divine revelation, but is either of human imagination or Satanic insinuation. "The Word contains the revelation of Christ; the Holy Spirit from the Word reveals Christ. In a spiritual apprehension of Him, eternal life is begotten in the soul, which, while it is full of Christ, yet we do not see and believe on Him to life eternal until the Lord the Spirit be our Teacher and Instructor"—Samuel E. Pierce (b. 1827).

In conclusion, let us draw a few inferences from all that has been before us. (1) Herein we behold the sovereignty of God, who divideth the light from the darkness as He pleases. Divine grace is discriminating (Rom 9:18). That particularity in which Christ dealt with souls still obtains: "It is given *unto you* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Mat 13:11). (2) Hence we see the deep importance of distinguishing between that knowledge of the things of God which is naturally acquired and that which is divinely taught the soul, and the need for ascertaining whether *my* knowledge be producing spiritual fruit in my life. It is a safe criterion to apply, that whatever originates with self always aims at and terminates on self; whereas that which is from the Spirit draws out the heart and will unto Christ. (3) That those upon whom the Sun of righteousness has arisen cannot be sufficiently thankful or praise Him enough. How grateful we should be if we "*know* the joyful sound" (Psa 89:15) and have found peace and joy in Christ! Well may we with wonderment exclaim, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto *us*, and not unto the world?" (Joh 14:22). (4) Why so few who hear the Gospel are truly saved under it. How different were the effects produced by the same Seed on the several soils (Luk 8:5-8): the heart must be ploughed and harrowed before it is made an "honest and good" one (verse 15). (5) Why so many keen-brained and well-educated people are left in spiritual ignorance, while simple and illiterate souls are made wise unto salvation. (6) How that the preacher is wholly dependent upon the Holy Spirit. The ablest minister of the Word can no more of himself win souls to Christ than experienced fishermen could catch a single fish until He gave success (Luk 5:5). Neither the gifted Paul nor the eloquent Apollos was "anything": it is *God* "that giveth the increase" (1Co 3:7). Often the most carefully prepared and earnestly delivered sermons produce no fruit, while a plain and ordinary one is blest of God. (7) How highly should the Christian prize the illumination of the Spirit and be looking continually to Him for instruction. He needs not a plainer Bible, but a clearer vision. I know no more of God to any good purpose than as I have been and am being taught *of Him!*



GLORIOUS SINAI

It is deeply important that Christians today should obtain a clear and correct concept of the nature and meaning of the august transaction which took place at Sinai. Unless they do so, they will lack the principal key which opens much of the Old Testament and which explains the providential dealings of God with the nation of Israel—not simply in judgment, but in long-sufference and mercy also. Not only so, but they will be without that which is essential to a right apprehension of its typical import, and therefore, are sure to err when attempting to trace out the antitypical fulfilment and application of the same unto themselves. We have already pointed out that the LORD God was not treating at Sinai with a people who were strangers to Him, but with those to whom He was intimately related; that it was not to aliens He there revealed His glory, but to the favoured seed of Abraham; that nothing occurred on that mount which to the least degree militated against His dealings with their fathers, but rather was the fulfilment of His promises to them. It is impossible to understand aright the contents of Exodus 19 and 20, unless they be viewed in their historical setting.

The promulgating of the Law from Sinai was not given independently, as though it laid the foundation of an entirely new relationship between Jehovah and Israel, for, as shown previously, the patriarchs themselves were under law (Gen 26:5). Nor should the proclamation of the Law be regarded as an isolated event: rather ought it to be contemplated as complementary of and the necessary sequel to the LORD's deliverance of Israel from their Egyptian bondage, His opening of the Red Sea for them and the destruction therein of their enemies, and His gracious provision of food from heaven and water from the smitten rock; while the Law itself needs also to be viewed in the light of what immediately *followed* its publication, namely, the erection of the tabernacle, the appointment of the priesthood, the assigning of sacrifices for the putting away of Israel's sins, and the LORD's taking up His abode in the midst of His people. Moreover, as we have shown in the preceding article, though God had dealt with the Hebrews in amazing grace, yet they too were under law before they came to Sinai: Exodus 15:26; 16:4, 27-28).

Nevertheless, it is obvious that a *further advance* was made at Sinai. As the eternal purpose of God is gradually unfolded before the eyes of men, its manifestation is seen to be according to the principle of orderly and progressive development, as in nature there is first the blade, then the ear, and later the full corn in the ear. It was thus on this memorable occasion. This appears in the very first words of Jehovah unto Israel upon the mount. After reminding them of what He had wrought on their behalf, and that He had borne them on eagles' wings and brought them unto Himself, He proposed unto them the terms of a covenant, promising that if they would abide by the same, they should be unto Him "a peculiar treasure...above all people," and that they should be unto Him "a *kingdom* of priests, and an holy *nation*" (Exo 19:4-6). Formerly, He had dealt first in sovereign grace with individuals, such as Abel and Enoch; then with households like Noah's (Gen 7:1) and Abraham's; but now He would organize and rule over Israel *nationally*. Moreover, an advance was made over all previous calls and appointments by the obligations which rested upon the heirs of promise being now cast into categorical and imperative form, which included the whole round of their moral and religious duty.

It was not that Israel might, by their obedience to the divine Law and their keeping of the covenant, win for themselves a new and more blessed relation to God, but rather that because they had been taken into the place of privileged nearness unto Him, they should walk worthily of the same and be filled with such fruits of righteousness as would alone evince their being the people of God or fulfil the calling which they had received from Him. Special nearness to God involves as its necessary corollary and consequence the knowledge and reflecting of His character, entering into His mind and will, striving to be holy as He is holy. That was the grand end unto which all was directed, the purpose for which they stood before the LORD as a separate people, and were here gathered at Sinai to hear the Law from His own mouth. If the Law had been aught else than a revelation of God's requirements from His people toward Himself and toward each other in the vital interests of righteousness and truth, it had neither been in accord with His own unchanging character, made known to them that homage and subjection which are His due, nor have set before Israel that holy standard which it was their calling to constantly endeavour to realize in their behaviour.

The particular character in which Jehovah announced Himself at Sinai is in full accord with all that has been said above: "I am the LORD ['Jehovah'] thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt,

out of the house of bondage” (Exo 20:2). First, “I am the LORD [‘Jehovah’]” which is the essential title of Deity, and signifies the eternal and unchanging One: “Him which is, and which was, and which is to come” (Rev 1:4). This Name is common to each Person in the glorious Trinity: Father (Psa 110:1), Son (Jer 23:5), and Holy Spirit (2Sa 23:2) who are one God; though it was Jehovah in the Person of the Son who promulgated the Law from Sinai (Psa 68:17-18; Act 2:37-38). Second, “I am the LORD [‘Jehovah’] *thy* God,” the latter greatly softening the former. The Jews deemed the title “Jehovah” so ineffably awful and sacred as never to utter it. The terror and majesty of His infinite greatness is indeed sufficient to amaze and affright all mankind, but when He adds, “I am God,” yea “even thy [own] God.” (Psa 50:7), that renders Him delightful and desirable unto the renewed heart. “Thy God” signifies thy *covenant* God (Exo 3:6; Heb 8:10). It was both a statement of fact, and a gracious assurance unto Israel. He had promised Abraham to be a “God” unto him and to his seed (Gen 17:7), and here He meets with his seed and declares Himself to be the same promising One.

“I am the LORD” affirmed His high sovereignty over His people; “thy God,” His condescending grace unto them. Such is His covenant name unto all generations (Exo 3:15-16). Christians also are to both acknowledge His scepter over them and rejoice in His benign relation unto them—we must not render asunder those two things. If we do not—in a practical way as well as with our lips—own Him as *our* “LORD,” then we do but deceive ourselves if we regard Him as our “God” in covenant with us. As one rightly said, “We must not reject the awful part for the amiable part.” Third, “which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”: therein the LORD their God presented Himself before them as their benevolent and mighty Redeemer, assuring them of His love; as well as reminding them of the additional obligation this laid upon them to glorify Him in their bodies and in their spirits which were *His* by ransom-price. Nor must this be severed from the former. They who have not surrendered themselves unto Christ as their Lord, and yet persuade themselves He is their Redeemer and Saviour, are deluded: note carefully the *order* in Luke 1:46-47; Act 5:31; 2Pe 2:20, 3:18! We must take upon us His yoke before He bestows upon us His rest (Mat 11:29).

God is alike the Ruler and Redeemer of His people, as He is their lover and Lord. While rejoicing in His tender pity and abundant mercy, we must also revere Him for His sovereign dominion and ineffable holiness; otherwise, we at once identify ourselves as belonging to the same class as the Jews of Christ’s day, who welcomed Him as a Healer of the Sick, but declared, “We will not have this [One] to *reign over* us” (Luk 19:14). Jehovah had not delivered the Hebrews from the land of Egypt in order for them to remain the slaves of sin and Satan, but rather that they should be made free to serve Him—walking according to His precepts is the only true *liberty* (Psa 119:45). In the call to obedience in Exodus 19:5, the whole of the divine Law was implied, so far as was concerned the ground of Israel’s obligation and the germ of its requirements; and what was actually promulgated in Exodus 20 was simply the utterances of that Voice which they had promised to heed. The Law was a revelation unto Israel of the righteousness which God required from them as His chosen people in the land of their inheritance. There, they were to be a witness *unto Him* before the surrounding nations, showing forth the glory of His government by exemplifying the same in their character and conduct.

But while the Law was an enforcing of Jehovah’s authority over His people, let us observe in the next place that it also issued from His *love* unto them. Proceeding from the LORD in His character as Israel’s Redeemer, it is only to be expected that it bears a benign aspect and aims at happy results. It was on that very ground Moses extolled the condition of Israel above all other people: “For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” (Deu 4:7-8). Very far indeed was he from entertaining the God-dishonouring idea that the Law was a tyrannical enactment, a cruel bondage imposed upon them, from which they might well hope to soon be delivered. The same sentiment was echoed by the sweet singer of Israel. Among the signal acts of mercy and lovingkindness, for which he praises the LORD in Psalm 103:7, is the fact that “he made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel”; or as explained in another Psalm, “He sheweth...his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation” (Psa 147:19-20).

The Law of Sinai issued from love, enjoined naught but love, and is fulfilled by love. How could it be otherwise? Like everything else which God has given to His people, the Decalogue was alike a manifestation of His holiness, a provision of His mercy, and an expression of His love—which ever seeks the good of its objects. Before bestowing his parting blessing upon the tribes of Israel, Moses reminded them, “the

LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them. Yea, he *loved* the people” (Deu 33:2-3): the juxtaposition of those two statements demonstrates that Law was a proof of God’s special love for them—as the giving up of a people unto lawlessness (their own evil lusts) is the surest sign of His hatred of them (Rom 1:21-28). It was designated “a fiery law” (Deu 33:2), because it was given to them out of the fire (Deu 4:33)—emblem of divine holiness, as the Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost in “cloven tongues like as of fire” (Act 2:3). Observe, Moses said, “a fiery law *for* them,” not “unto,” and still less “against”—“in favour to them”—Matthew Henry (1662-1714).

As the Law issued from divine love, so it requires naught but love from the recipients of it. This is clear from the Saviour’s words, for He summarized its claims thus: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mat 22:37-39). Furthermore, its requirements are met by love: “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10). That is, as love delights in the happiness of others, it effectually prevents from injuring its objects, and consequently leads to the doing of what Law requires—for it enjoins nothing which is not to the best interests of our fellows. It is love which influences and prompts unto a compliance with God’s commandments (1Jo 5:2). Then what must be the spirit of those who speak evil of God’s Law, and regard it as a harsh imposition on their liberty? Very different indeed was the mind of the apostle: “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22). God’s writing of His laws upon the hearts of His redeemed (Heb 8:10) is a sure evidence of His love toward them. “We must regard God’s Law as one of the gifts of His grace”—M. Henry.

There can be no adequate apprehension of the revelation of Law, nor of its real nature and place in the divine economy, without perceiving its relation to the grand principle of love—alike in those who receive it as in Him who gave it. Viewed apart from that, it is but a body without a soul, a call to obedience without the least likelihood of an acceptable response. The Law aims at a conformity of moral purpose and character between a redeeming God and a redeemed people; and not one of its precepts could reach the desired end, unless the love which had been exhibited as the governing principle in the One should find in the other a corresponding love which should be stirred and guided into proper action. To make this unmistakably plain, Moses, as soon as he rehearsed the Decalogue, declared, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart,” etc. (Deu 6:4-5).

We do not now propose to enlarge upon that divine declaration: “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12), by giving an exposition of the Ten Words (having done so on a previous occasion), but will next take notice of what is recorded in Exodus 20 immediately after their publication. “And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (Exo 20:18-19). That was a plain acknowledgement that they felt themselves to be utterly unfit to deal with the LORD directly on the ground of the Decalogue. They realized that some provision was required to be made for them, that a *mediator* was needed—Moses must treat with God on their behalf. Very far indeed was such language from evincing a proud and self-sufficient people. It not only repudiates the view of those who insist that their agreement to Jehovah’s proposal (Exo 19:5; 24:7) betrayed their carnality and presumption, but it manifested their spirituality and humility.

“And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not” (Exo 20:20). In those words, Moses explained unto them the design of the glorious, yet terror-provoking, attendants of the divine majesty, which they had just witnessed. Negatively, he assured them that those convulsions of nature did not portend that Jehovah was about to destroy them as He had the Egyptians, and therefore that He had no thought of slaying them; and thus, the Law had not been given for the purpose of condemning and cursing them. Positively, he informed them that God’s intention was to put them to the test, to ascertain whether they would acknowledge Him as their King and be subject to His government, and thereby give proof that they meant what they said when they declared, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (Exo 19:8). Further, those awe-inspiring phenomena were designed to fill them not with a slavish fear which gendereth to bondage, but rather to produce a godly reverence for the LORD in their hearts, while those displays of His mighty power were to act as a deterrent upon them from displeasing One who was not to be trifled with—as *we* are enjoined to “stand in awe, and sin not” (Psa 4:4).