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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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## GOD'S GIFTS

A *giving God!* What a concept. Alas, that our very familiarity therewith should ever serve to dull our sense of wonderment at it. There is nothing in the least resembling such a thing in the religions of heathendom. Very much to the contrary: *their* deities are thought of and portrayed as monsters of cruelty and greed, ever exacting painful sacrifices from their deluded devotees. But the God of Scripture is portrayed as the Father of mercies “who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1Ti 6:17). It is true that He has His own rights—the rights of His holiness and proprietorship. Nor does He rescind them, but enforces the same. It becomes Him to do so, and right reason assents hereto. But what we would here contemplate is something which altogether transcends reason, and which had never entered our minds to conceive. The divine Claimer is at once the divine Meeter. He required satisfaction unto His broken Law, and *Himself* supplied it. His just claims are met by His own grace. He who asks for sacrifices *from* us made the supreme sacrifice *for* us! God is both the Demander and the Donor, the Requirer and the Provider.

1. *The gift of His Son.* Of old, it was announced by the language of prophecy: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given” (Isa 9:6)—given to be all that to us which our fallen state called for. Accordingly, the angels announced to the shepherds at the time of His advent: “For unto you is born this day... a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” That Gift was the supreme exemplification of the divine benignity. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1Jo 4:9-10). That was the guaranty of all other blessings. As the apostle argued from the greater to the less, assuring us that Christ is at once the pledge and channel of every other mercy: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him *also* freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32). God did not withhold His choicest Treasure, the Darling of His bosom, but freely yielded Him up; and the love that spared not *Him* will not begrudge anything that is for the good of His people.

2. *The gift of His Spirit.* The Son is God’s all-inclusive Gift. As Thomas Manton (1620-1677) said, “Christ cometh not to us empty-handed: His person and His benefits are not divided. He came to purchase all manner of blessings for us.” The greatest and chief of these is the Holy Spirit, who applies and communicates what the Lord Jesus obtained for His people. As God pardoned and justified His elect in Old Testament times on the ground of the atonement which His Son should make at the appointed time, so on the same basis, He communicated to them the Spirit (see Numbers 11:25; Neh 9:20, etc.)—otherwise none had been regenerated, fitted for communion with God, or enabled to bring forth spiritual fruit. But He *then* wrought more secretly, rather than in “demonstration” and in “power”; came as “the dew,” rather than was “poured out” copiously; was restricted to Israel, rather than communicated to Gentiles also. The Spirit in His fullness was God’s ascension gift to Christ (Act 2:33) and Christ’s coronation gift to His Church (Joh 16:7). The gift of the Spirit was purchased for His people by Christ: see Galatians 3:13-14, and note carefully the second “that” (in order that) in verse 14. Every blessing we receive is through the merits and mediation of Christ.

3. *The gift of life.* “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:23). There is a double antithesis between those two things: first, the justice of God will render unto the wicked that which is due to them for their sins, but His mercy bestows upon His people that which they deserve not. Second, eternal death follows as a natural and inevitable consequence from what is in and done by its objects: not so eternal life, for that is bestowed without any consideration of something in or from its subjects, being communicated and sustained gratuitously. Eternal life is a free bounty, not only unmerited but unsolicited by us, for in every instance, God has reason to say, “I am found of them that sought me not” (Isa 65:1, and compare Rom 3:11). The recipient is wholly passive: he does not act, but is acted upon when he is brought from death unto life. Eternal life—a spiritual life here and now, of glory hereafter—is sovereignly and freely bestowed by God; yet it is also a blessing communicated by Him unto His elect, because the Lord Jesus Christ paid the price of their redemption. Yea, it is actually dispensed by Christ: “And *I* give unto them [not merely ‘offer’] eternal life” (Joh 10:28, and see also 17:3).

4. *The gift of spiritual understanding.* “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true” (1Jo 5:20). That which is communicated to the saint when he is born again is wholly spiritual and is exactly suited for the taking in of the Scriptural knowledge

of Christ. It is not an entirely new faculty which is then imparted, but rather the renewing of the original one, fitting it for the apprehension of new objects. It consists of an internal illumination, a divine light shining in our hearts, enabling us to discern the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ (2Co 4:6). Though we are not now admitted into a corporeal sight of Christ, yet He is made a living reality unto those who have been quickened into newness of life. By this divine renewing of the understanding, we are enabled to perceive the peerless excellency and perfect suitability of Christ unto our case. The knowledge we have of Him is seated in the understanding, and that fires the affections, sanctifies the will, and raises the mind into a fixation upon Him. Such a spiritual understanding is not obtained or attained by any efforts of ours, but a supernatural bestowment, a divine gift conferred upon the elect, which admits them into the access of the Most High.

5. *The gift of faith.* The salvation of God does not actually become ours until we believe in, rest upon, and receive Christ as a personal Saviour. But as we cannot see without both sight and light, neither can we savingly believe until life and faith are divinely communicated to us. Accordingly, we are informed, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8-9). Arminians would make the second clause of verse 8 a mere repetition of the first—and in less expressive and emphatic language. Since salvation is by grace, it is quite superfluous to add that it is "not of yourselves." But because "faith" is *our* act, it was necessary—in order that the excellency of it should not be arrogated by the creature, but ascribed unto God—to point out that it is *not* of ourselves. The very faith which receives a gratuitous salvation is not the unassisted act of man's own will. As God must give me breath before I can breathe, so faith ere I believe. Compare also "faith which is by him" (Act 3:16); "who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph 1:19); "through the faith of the operation of God" (Col 2:12); "who by him do believe in God" (1Pe 1:21).

6. *The gift of repentance.* While it be the bounden duty of every sinner *to* repent (Act 17:30)—for ought he not to cease from and abhor his rebellion against God?—yet so completely is he under the blinding power and dominion of sin that a miracle of grace is necessary ere he will do so. A broken and contrite spirit are of God's providing. It is the Holy Spirit who illuminates the understanding to perceive the heinousness of sin, the heart to loathe it, and the will to repudiate it. Faith and repentance are the first evidences of spiritual life, for when God quickens a sinner, He convicts him of the evil of sin, causes him to hate it, moves him to sorrow over and turn from it, "Surely after that I *was turned*, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded" (Jer 31:19). "All the pious workings of our hearts toward God, are the fruit and consequence of His grace in us"—Matthew Henry (1662-1714). Compare "a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel" (Act 5:31); "then hath God also to the Gentiles *granted repentance* unto life" (Act 11:18); "if God peradventure will give them repentance" (2Ti 2:25).

7. *The gift of grace.* "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ" (1Co 1:4). Grace is used there in its widest sense, including all the benefits of Christ's merits and meditation, providential or spiritual, temporal or eternal. It includes regenerating, sanctifying, preserving grace, as well as every particular grace of the new nature—faith, hope, love, etc. "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph 4:7)—that is, according as He is pleased to bestow, and not according to our ability or asking; and therefore, we have no cause to be proud or boastful. Whatever grace we have—to resist the devil, patiently bear affliction, or overcome the world—is from Him. Whatever obedience we perform, devotion we render Him, or sacrifice we make, is of *His* grace. Therefore must we confess: "For all things come of thee, and of *thine own* have we given thee" (1Ch 29:14).



## THE EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

### 3. *The Life Manifested (1:2)*

It is very evident that John's first epistle was designed as the sequel to a companion of his Gospel (compare Joh 20:31, and 1Jo 5:13), and since it opened the one by a presentation of the deity of Christ, it was most fitting that he should commence the other with a setting forth of His humanity. That he does in the first verse, where most convincing proofs are supplied reliable witnesses. "That which"—namely our Lord's manhood—"was from beginning" (of this Christian era) (1Jo 1:1). That "which we have heard," speaking personally and audibly to us, and in power to our hearts. That "which we have seen with our eyes" in tangible form, furnishing conclusive evidence of the reality of His manhood. That "which *we* have looked upon" as none of the world did: the surpassing splendour of His countenance when He was transfigured upon the holy mount; His anguished face in Gethsemane, when His features were more marred than any man's; the marks of the Cross in the resurrection-body; His beloved form, as it gradually receded from our viewing the time of His ascension (Act 1:11).

"And our hands have handled" (1Jo 1:1). John, moved by the Holy Spirit, determined to certify unto his readers the verity and corporeality of the Master's manhood, that there might be no doubt whatever on that score. There was no possibility of the apostles being misled by an optical illusion. Peter had felt the firm grasp of Christ's hand when He caught hold of him and delivered him from sinking in the sea. John himself had actually reclined upon His bosom. Thomas and his fellows had been invited to handle Him after He came forth triumphantly from the tomb. It was something far more substantial than an ecstatic vision which John was here relating. "The nature which Christ took when He was born of Mary, He lifted out of the grave at His resurrection. We have, therefore, a Saviour, who not merely became a man, but *wears* His glorified humanity in heaven. His incarnation is thus associated with the redemption of man. He took our nature, stood in our place, and has taken possession of heaven as our Representative"—James Morgan.

"Of the Word of life"—or, more accurately, "[*concerning*] the Word of life": that is to say, what has been so much insisted upon in the preceding clauses is intimately related to Him—His manhood is an essential part of the Mediator's complex person. This title, "the Word of life" at once informs us that the One whom John had in view was more than a man, "Life" is one of the prominent terms of this epistle, occurring therein no less than fourteen times. Three different words are employed in the Greek: here, it is *zoe* (ζωή)—the one which has the fullest signification. It is used in John 1:4—"in him was life": all life resides in Him. But that hardly seems the thought here, for it is not the Word in His essential being, but as incarnate: "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (Joh 5:26)—to administer and impart unto others. John's design here is not so much to declare what the Saviour is in Himself, as to show what He is unto His people—the Communicator of life to them.

"The Word of life" in this verse, we regard as being almost parallel with His own averment in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life"—the *Giver* of life. As "the Word" (*Logos*), He is the highest expression of God's mind, the Revealer of the Godhead *unto* us; as "the Word of life," He is the Bestower of life *upon* us, and thus is the Link connecting us with God. If it be asked, What is the precise character of the "life" which Christ gives to His people? The answer is, Every kind that can be conceived. First, natural life, for He is the Author of our beings (Col 1:16). Second, spiritual life: "The hour is coming, *and now is*, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (Joh 5:25)—i.e. those dead in trespasses and sins shall be quickened by Him. Third, resurrection life: "...the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life" (Joh 5:28-29). Fourth, the life of glory: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col 3:4). Well may He be designated, "The Prince of life" (Act 3:15)!

We can see no reason whatever why 1 John 1:2 should be placed in parentheses, for it is obviously a continuation of the former one, though with most important additions. This is yet more evident in the Greek, for it opens with the word *kai*, (καί) which is usually translated, "and" and scarcely ever "for." "And the life was manifested"—a divine Person descended into the human domain. It was into a realm of darkness that the Light entered. It was unto a fallen and sinful people, a world which lay in the wicked one, that

the Son of God now came. It was in the midst of a scene where death reigned that the Life was manifested. This divine title is very emphatic. He is life essentially, He is life manifestatively, He is life communicatively. Christ may well be styled, "The Life," for the natural life of all creatures is in Him and from Him. He is the spiritual life of angels, as well as the Church. From heaven, He came to earth to exhibit a life which had no beginning, no limitation, no end; and for the express purpose of conquering death, and becoming eternal life to His people (Joh 17:2-3).

In the first two verses of his epistle, John sets before us Christ in His theanthropic character, His two-fold nature of deity and humanity. This was frequently the manner of New Testament writers. Mark commences his Gospel thus: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Paul began his treatise to the Romans by announcing that the Gospel unto which he was separated, the contents of which he was about to expound, concerned "his [God's] Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3). The epistle to the Hebrews opens with a setting forth of Christ as the final revelation of God in His sevenfold mediatorial glory. In the first chapter of his Gospel, John had affirmed the absolute deity of his Master (verses 1-4), and then spoke of Him as incarnate, tabernacling among men (verses 10-14). The reason for this is not far to seek. "The assumption of human nature by the Son of God is the most stupendous fact in the history of providence. Angels 'desire to look into it,' and are amazed at it. It will be the subject of devout inquiry and adoring wonder to the whole intelligent and holy creation of God throughout eternity. In the meantime, the salvation of the sinner is suspended upon it. In the incarnation of the Word, there is provided for him an all-sufficient Saviour"—J. Morgan.

In the first verse, the whole emphasis was thrown upon the visibility and tangibility of our Lord's humanity. But John, ever jealous of His dignity and glory, would not have his readers form a false or inadequate concept of Christ; so in the second verse, he makes clear his deity, both by the titles then accorded Him, and by affirming His equality "with the Father" (1Jo 1:2). In Christ, all the perfections of God shine forth resplendently: through Him, the whole Godhead is displayed. As another of His servants declared, the incarnate Son is "the brightness of his [God's] glory, and the express image of his person" (Heb 1:3). He is the Mirror in which all the divine perfections are exhibited to us. "God, that He might help our weakness, and attract our faith to Himself hath been pleased to come, as it were, out of His unapproachable light, and manifest Himself in attributes such as wisdom, holiness, justice, grace, mercy, and power, with the like. These rays of the divine perfections are let down (in Christ) that we might sanctify Him in our hearts, that our souls might be in a posture of holy humility, fear, love, joy, and obedience, suited to the excellencies in Him"—Edward Polhill (1622-1694), 1678.

"For the life was manifested" (1Jo 1:2) in flesh, in open view of men. Since fallen creatures could not ascend to heaven in their sins, the Son descended to earth to be a Saviour for the lost. In order for the Life to be evident and apparent, the Infinite took upon Himself the limitations of the finite. In order that the Invisible might become visible, He was clothed in flesh and blood. We considered that W. Lincoln, in his brief lectures on this epistle, brought out the most helpfully the thought here, by making the term "manifested" a *summary* of the preceding verse. "From the beginning" (verse 1) conveys the idea of *issuing forth* Christ coming from heaven to earth, from God to men. The four verbs then show us Christ, as it were, approaching nearer and nearer, in ever-clear manifestation. A person at a *distance* may be "heard." But "which we have seen with our eyes" means that person has come within the range of our vision. "Which we have looked upon" or attentively considered signifies he is nigh. "And [which] our hands have handled"—all distance is now obliterated. It is Christ drawing closer and closer, with ever-increasing intimacy, until He is clearly "manifested" (verse 2).

But while the primary reference in "the life was manifested" is to the divine incarnation, it is by no means to be restricted thereto. The Life was manifested not only in bodily form, and through His gracious ministry, but still more especially in His *salvation*. As previously intimated, this title speaks not so much of what Christ is in Himself essentially considered, but what He is unto His people. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Joh 10:10)—than what they originally had in Adam before the Fall. Christ indeed had life in Himself (Joh 1:4); and therefore, He was fully qualified to act the part of Mediator, interposing Himself between God and those who were dead in trespasses and sins, and thus, become a Source of new life to them. But that necessarily involved His death in their behalf and in their stead. Therefore, right after announcing He had come "that they might have life," He added, "I lay down my life for the sheep...I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (Joh 10:15-17).

These words, "The life was manifested," are to be regarded as condemnation of our Lord's statement in John 6: "I am the *living* bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of [appropriate to himself] this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give [by a sacrificial death] is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world... Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood [which necessarily implies the crucifixion of His flesh], ye have no [spiritual] life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (verses 51-56). Those verses bring out more definitely the *connection* between the vicarious sacrifice of Christ and the communication of life. The atonement stands in *causal relation* to our receiving life from Christ: His crucified flesh is the fountain from which we derive spiritual life. Thus, verses 1 and 2 make known how perfectly qualified Christ is to bestow life, and thus equip us for fellowship" (verse 3).

"And we have seen" Him. The apostle now proceeds to amplify the foregoing statement, for in this connection, "manifested" had the force of "to be made visible." The "we have seen" is reiterated here because Christ's tabernacling among men in tangible form was the most wonderful fact of all history: as Samuel E. Pierce (1746-1829) expressed it, "The greatest event which ever took place in the world." Yet, as that writer pointed out, "We are not so deeply sensible of this in our minds as we most certainly ought to be. The sufferings, agony, and bloody sweat of Christ—and His sustaining the very curse due to our transgressions—seem to fix a deeper impression of His love on our minds than His taking our nature. Yet there is more love expressed in the incarnation than we can ever possibly conceive. *Out of it*, the whole execution of our salvation proceeded. He could love us in heaven with as great a degree of love as He will to the ages of eternity; but He could not be made sin and a curse for us in heaven... The incarnation of Christ was a most astonishing proof of His love."

"We have seen." The senses of the body have their place and value, being given to us by God for the purpose (among other things) of imparting knowledge to the mind. They are therefore a means of information and verification. The apostles had beheld Christ in a manner that the patriarchs and prophets had not done, for they had seen Him only in prophecy and promise, in types and visions. Though He had occasionally appeared unto them in human form—the "theophanies"—they had not looked upon Him as actually incarnate, clothed with flesh and blood, and dwelling among and conversing with them, as He did with the apostles. Thus, as John Calvin (1509-1564) pointed out, there is "an implied contrast" in this "*we have seen*." Though the Old Testament saints were partakers of the same Life as us, and though their faith rested upon the sure promise of God, nevertheless, they were shut up under a hope yet to be revealed: whereas in the case of the apostles, that hope was manifested in bodily and visible form.

"We have seen it, and bear witness." It was not a second-hand report which they proclaimed, but something they had personally heard and seen for themselves. When Judas apostatized and another was needed to fill his office, it was required that he be "of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection" (Act 1:21-22). The apostles were eye-witnesses, as well as ear-witnesses, and therefore, did one of them declare, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2Pe 1:16). It is that very fact which render excuseless all those who refuse to receive their testimony, for "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was *confirmed* unto us by them that *heard him*?" (Heb 2:3).

Christianity fears not the light, but welcomes the most searching investigation, for not only are the historical facts on which it is based attested by the most reliable witnesses and "by many infallible proofs" (Act 1:3), but it is able to supply rational conviction and solid persuasion of its verity—both to the understanding and to the conscience. Many others indeed heard and saw Christ during the days of His flesh, yet they enjoyed not that constant closeness to Him as had the twelve. They were not only specially called, but supernaturally qualified, being given the power to work "both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will" (Heb 2:4). Thus, a peculiar dignity and position was theirs, for in the foundations of the new Jerusalem are "the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev 21:14). Hence, in the very nature of the case, they could have *no* "successors."

"And shew [better, 'report,' as the Greek word is rendered in the next verse] unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father." This is brought in to guard the glory of the One spoken of in the preceding

verse, telling us that “the Word of life” came from the bosom of the Father. Though He had only recently been “manifested,” it was not then that He began to be. On the contrary, He had ever been with the Father: hence the “which *was* with,” rather than “which *is*”—after the ascension. Thus, this declaration is parallel with the “*In* the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word was God” of John 1:1. “The life,” then, is a divine Person distinguishable from the Father, yet in eternal fellowship with Him: one as the undivided essence of the Godhead, but possessing distinct personalities. “That eternal life, which was with the Father”: His *duration* evidences His excellency and sufficiency. In our judgment, this statement indicates that “*from* the beginning” in verse 1 does *not* have the force of “from everlasting”: had it done so, there had been no need to say there that the Life was “eternal.”

“That eternal life, which was with the Father” “The preposition *pros* (πρός) is very significant. It might be translated ‘toward’ or ‘to,’ and suggests that the Eternal Life was face to face with the Eternal Father”—Levi Palmer. As Christ, speaking as “Wisdom,” informs us: “Then [when God appointed the foundations of the earth] I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him” (Pro 8:30). “Wonderful words! How can we apprehend their meaning and force? He dwelt with Him as His ‘Fellow,’ and partook in common with Him in eternal life. Christ, as the Son of God, is essentially possessed of life in the highest exercises and enjoyments. It is of Him John says in this epistle, ‘This is the true God, and eternal life’ (1Jo 5:20). Life is His to impart it to sinners. ‘And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son’ (verse 11). It is laid up in Him, in His mediatorial person, as in a fountain, to which sinners may ever come and receive out of His fullness”—J. Morgan.

“And was manifested unto us.” This is by no means a repetition of the first clause of the verse: that was general, this particular—as the qualifying “unto us” shows. The reference is to the peculiar privilege enjoyed by the twelve. All the Lord’s ministers—and in a lesser degree His people—are witnesses unto Him; but not all in the same way, or to answer the same end, for which the apostles were appointed. Christ prayed that, from His ascension till His return, all the election of grace might “believe on [Him] through their word” (Joh 17:20). The Church is said to be “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph 2:20). In them was specially fulfilled His promise, “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide *you* into all truth” (Joh 16:13), so that they could not but give an accurate and divine account of Christ in every particular which they delivered of and concerning Him. The apostles were under the immediate control of the Spirit. After the day of Pentecost, their conceptions of the truth were directly from Him. They were infallibly taught by Him. We may therefore rely on their testimony with absolute assurance of its integrity.

But something more is needed than a firm persuasion of the authenticity and trustworthiness of the apostolic report, namely, a personal knowledge of and saving acquaintance with Christ for ourselves. In reading and re-reading the first three verses of this epistle, one cannot fail to be struck by the earnestness of John, how evidently he longed that Christ might be truly apprehended by his readers; and it is equally clear from much that follows that he feared, notwithstanding all his plainness and urgency, they might still remain ignorant of Him. The manifestation of Christ in the flesh is one thing, the manifestation of Him to the heart, by His Spirit and Word, is another. Have *you*, dear reader, an experiential acquaintance with Him? Have you proved Him to be “the Word of life” (1Jo 1:1) by His effectual working in your *own* soul? “No man can [savingly] say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1Co 12:3). Unless you be taught by Him, you can neither discover your need nor discern the sufficiency of Christ to meet it. But if He be your Instructor, you will really feel and confess both. Pray, then, for His divine illumination and a fuller understanding of Christ.

Were we to sermonize the last clause of verse 1, together with the whole of verse 2, our title and divisions would be: The Life openly revealed. (1) The Person spoken of; (2) The titles accorded Him; (3) The manifestation made by Him; (4) His eternal pre-existence; (5) The witnesses thereto; (6) The peculiar privileges granted them.



## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

### 55. *The Oath*

“This we will do to them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we swore unto them” (Jos 9:20). In the preceding verses, we saw how Israel had been deceived by some of the Canaanites, who, by pretending to be from a very far country, posed as ambassadors authorized to entreat with Joshua and enter into a treaty of peace for their people. Those imposters had not only prepared a very plausible tale, but were carefully made up in keeping with the part they played, appearing in tattered garments and with mouldy bread as evidences of the long journey they had taken. Instead of seeking counsel at the mouth of the LORD, Joshua and the responsible heads of the nation walked by sight and relied upon their senses (verse 14). Instead of deferring their decision and taking the trouble to carefully investigate the claims of the Gibeonites, Israel hurriedly entered into a covenant with them to spare their lives. Instead of making them a conditional promise, the princes solemnly ratified the agreement by oath (verse 15). All of this should be regarded by us as a pointed warning to avoid precipitate action, and also showing the wisdom of heeding that injunction, “He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16).

Within three days, the folly of Israel was made manifest, for upon penetrating a little deeper into Canaan, they came to the cities of the Gibeonites (Jos 9: 16-17). It is to be duly noted that Israel’s discovery of the trick that has been played upon them was not made by any spiritual discernment of theirs—which had assuredly been the case had a “single eye” been maintained to God’s glory (Mat 6:22)—but by external means. Moreover, though the LORD did not allow them to be deceived for any length of time, He made evident, even if in a comparatively mild and gentle way, His displeasure against the princes through His providential dealings with them. The “murmuring” against them by the congregation, though “very natural under the circumstances,” should be regarded as a divine *chastisement*—God suffering the people to voice their discontent, instead of working in them a spirit of acquiescence. Thus, for the moment, the harmony of Israel was disturbed and their unity seriously threatened. But it is good to see that, with one accord, the princes feared God rather than men, and so far from desiring amity at any price, recognized that “the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable” (Jam 3:17).

Instead of yielding to the desire of the rank and file of the people, who obviously wanted to avenge themselves upon the Gibeonites, and plunder the cities, all the princes stood their ground, and said, “We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them” (Jos 9:19). Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pertinently remarked that they “did not apply themselves to Eleazar for a dispensation, much less did they pretend that no faith is to be kept with heretics—with Canaanites; no, they were strangers to the modern artifice of the Roman Church to elude the most sacred bonds and even to sanctify perjuries.” No, they were determined to honour the engagement into which they had entered. Happy the nation whose leaders and governors abide by their obligations. The *testing* of these princes was a very real one, but though their fidelity should occasion a mutiny of the people, they refused to go against their consciences. There can be little room for doubt that it was their unanimity which God used to pacify the murmuring congregation, teaching us that the best way to suppress discontent by the governed is for there to be a solid and firm front presented by the governors. Yet it was no mere policy of expedience which regulated these princes, but rather, the fear of God and their determination not to dishonour Him.

“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Exo 20:7). There is the original and fundamental law concerning oaths, and with it should be linked, “Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name” (Deu 6:13). An oath, then, is a solemn appeal to the dread name of JEHOVAH, which, by awakening the spirit of the swearer to a consciousness of the awe-inspiring presence and cognizance of the Most High, gives all its sanctity and power to it. Properly speaking, there are four things in an oath. First, a formal asseveration of the truth—which should always be spoken even though no oath be taken. Second, an acknowledgement of the presence of the thrice Holy One, who is solemnly called upon as a Witness in confirmation of the statement that we make. Third, an invocation, whereby we request God to testify unto our conscience that what we swear to is nothing but the truth (Rom 9:1). Fourth, an imprecation, in which the swearer calls upon God to be the Revenger of all lies, binding himself to divine punishment if he swear falsely. Since an oath be the invoking of God, it is an act of *worship*, an ascribing glory and owning Him as Judge.

It is therefore evident that the violation of an oath is a sin of the first magnitude, for it is a breach of the third commandment, a taking of God's name in vain, which He will not hold guiltless. As Leviticus 19:12 informs us, to commit perjury in the name of God is an act of profanity. From such awful considerations, it follows that an oath is to be feared (Ecc 9:2), and that once made, it is binding (Num 30:3)—a solemn example of which is seen in the case of Jephthah (Jdg 11:35). Consequently, it is not to be entered into lightly, nor should one be taken at all except in matters of real importance, and then only in the gravest spirit and manner. There are times, as Deuteronomy 6:13 shows, when it becomes our duty to appeal unto God by solemn oaths, for deciding matters which cannot be adequately settled without one (Heb 6:16). It is to be observed that, when occasion required and men were warranted in the taking of an oath, such obtained centuries *before* the giving of the Law at Sinai. Thus Abraham swore to Abimelech (Gen 21:23-24), and required an oath to be taken by his servant when seeking a wife for Isaac (Gen 24:8-9). Jacob swore to Laban, and Joseph to his father. Since these instances had no respect unto the legal institutes of Moses, they lead us to conclude that there would be nothing in the Gospel to forbid such a practice in this Christian era—again and again, Paul confirmed his testimony by calling on God as Witness (2Co 1:23; Gal 1:20).

“This we will do to them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we swore unto them” (Jos 9:20). One of the distinguishing marks given of those who shall abide in the LORD's tabernacle (enjoy intimate communion with Him) and dwell in His holy hill (spend eternity in heaven) is, “He that sweareth to his own hurt, and *changeth not*” (Psa 15:1, 4): that is, who will not go back on his oath no matter what temporal loss might be involved. On the other hand, “perjured persons” are classed with murderers of fathers and mothers, whoremongers, slave-dealers, etc. (1Ti 1:9-10). Very afar were these princes from now treating their engagement with the Gibeonites as “a mere scrap of paper”—the Kaiser Wilhelm, Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), and Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) brought down divine wrath upon themselves and their people by just such perfidy. It is exceedingly solemn to observe that this was one of the crimes which characterized Israel during the closing days of their Old Testament history—see Zechariah 5:4; Malachi 3:5; 2 Chronicles 36:11-13—“until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy” (2Ch 36:16). Only so long as Britain honours her treaty obligations—no matter what sacrifices be involved—is there any hope of “remedy” for its people.

“And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them” (Jos 9:21). These princes were twelve in number, one at the head of each of Israel's tribes (Num 1:15, 16, 44). That God was pleased with their sparing the lives of the Gibeonites is clearly evidenced from the sequel, for the very next chapter records how He gave them the most glorious victory in all their wars. Furthermore, we find that, centuries later, He severely avenged the wrong which Saul did unto the descendants of this tribe, manifesting His sore displeasure against that king's injuring of them in violation of this very league (2Sa 21:1)—mark how David, the “man after [God's] own heart” (Act 13:22), honoured *his* oath to Jonathan in this connection, exempting Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, from the just avengement (2Sa 21:7). Though the lives of these Gibeonites were spared, their liberty was taken from them, and they were made bondmen—not only tributaries, but under the yoke of servitude. To be “hewers of wood and drawers of water” (Jos 9:21, 23, 27) would not only be wearisome employment, but regarded as a very low and menial one (compare Deu 29:11).

From what has been before us in the above incident, as well as from its sequel, we may perceive how that we are never the ultimate losers by fearing the LORD and honouring His name. Folly was committed by Joshua and the princes in so hastily concluding a league with the Gibeonites, and it was too late to rectify it: nevertheless, God overruled the same to His own glory and the benefit of His people, providing both Himself and them with useful servants. God can, and in His own wondrous way often does, turn our mistake into advantages. That way will not be as good and glorious as His first best for us, yet it will not be without blessing. The same incident also teaches us the needlessness of taking things into our own hands and seeking to anticipate the divine appointment. The congregation suffered no injury by restraining their desire to seize and plunder the cities of the Gibeonites mentioned in Joshua 9:17, for if the reader will consult Joshua 18:25-28, he will find that in the end, when the land came to be divided, the first three cities there mentioned were obtained by them, and the fourth in Joshua 15:9. It is never to our detriment to wait the LORD's time!

“And Joshua called for them, and he spake unto them, saying, Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We are very far from you; when ye dwell among us?” (Jos 9:22). Let us duly observe and admire the

blessed restraining which Israel's leader here placed upon himself. Though these Gibeonites were now entirely at his disposal, he used not his power tyrannically. Nor did he give way to an outburst of temper because of their chicanery, and harshly denounce them as base liars. Instead, he mildly reproved them for their fraud and gave them opportunity to explain their conduct. As M. Henry rightly pointed out, "A just cause needs not anger to defend it, and a bad one is never made the better by it." The LORD forbids us rejoice (malignantly) when our enemy falls (Pro 24:17), and severely chastised the Edomites because they had "spoken proudly in the day of [Judah's] distress" (Oba :12). This was the sin of Shimei, scorning his humiliated sovereign (2Sa 16:5-9), for which he paid with his life (1Ki 2:9-10). How very differently was the Lord Jesus dealt with when *He* was arraigned before His judges! In Joshua's mild treatment of the Gibeonites, we may behold blessedly shadowed forth "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2Co 10:1).

"Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God" (Jos 9:23). Those words do not signify that Joshua now pronounced a curse upon them, but rather that it would henceforth be made to appear that they belonged to an accursed posterity. In a previous article, we pointed out that the reason why these Gibeonites are designated "Hivites" in Joshua 9:7-9 was to intimate that they were the descendants of Canaan (Gen 9:25; 10:5-6, 15, 17); and here, we have set before us an illustration of the sentence pronounced upon him because of his father's sin. By the spirit of prophecy, Noah had declared, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren" (Gen 9:25). The curse, then, consisted of *servitude*; and here, we behold one part of its fulfilment in these Gibeonites being made the manual servants of Israel. How mysteriously, yet wondrously, does God order His providences unto the fulfilment of His Word, guiding the princes to select or determine this particular form of punishment upon these men! In Joshua's *confirmation* of the sentence of the twelve princes, we have a striking adumbration of Christ making good His promise to the twelve apostles: "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound [ratified] in heaven" (Mat 18:18).

"And they answered Joshua, and said, Because it was certainly told thy servants, how that the LORD thy God commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, therefore we were sore afraid of our lives because of you, and have done this thing" (Jos 9:24). Let us first notice that in this part of their reply, they bore witness to God's having made good one of His promises to Israel and fulfilled a prophecy made through Moses, to the effect that such reports would reach their ears of the irresistible power of Israel's God, and the fame of His wondrous works on their behalf, that the inhabitants of Canaan would be filled with dismay and their hearts sink within them. "I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come" (Exo 23:27). "This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations" (Deu 2:25), JEHOVAH had declared, thereby fulfilling the prediction of Exodus 15:14: "The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina." Such terror would fill them that their spirits would sink completely and they would be panic-stricken at the prospect before them. Such was the case here.

"There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you" (Deu 11:25). God would strike such terror into the Canaanites, and make them so conscious of their impotency, that He would render the same subservient to the success of His people. Rahab had, previously, avowed the accomplishment of this, acknowledging that tidings of JEHOVAH's miracle-working power had reached them, that "your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you" (Jos 2:9). In like manner, will God yet make good every prophecy He has made and every promise that He has given. It is therefore to be duly noted that these Gibeonites freely testified that the nation of Israel was now acting according to the commandment of the LORD their God, and not from a spirit of personal bloodthirstiness and greed. They made no attempt to justify the lies which they had told, but frankly owned that they were in dread of losing their lives, and that the principle of self-preservation had moved them to resort to such a device.

"And now, behold, we are in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do" (Jos 9:25). That was tantamount to saying, We are fully in thy power and entirely at thy disposal, and readily submit ourselves to thy discretion. Their foregoing statement evinces that they had not only "heard," but also *believed* that God's promises to His people and threatenings to His enemies would certainly be fulfilled. They realized God's Word was inviolable and His power invincible, and therefore, nothing remained but for them to cast themselves upon His clemency. In their "as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do

unto us, do” unto Joshua, one can see they hoped for the best: treat with us according to the laws of justice and kindness, and especially act consistently with the league made and the oath taken. It is in precisely such a spirit and attitude that sinners are to come before God in Christ—convicted of their sins, convinced of the verity of God’s threatenings, casting themselves upon His good pleasure, hoping in His mercy, submitting unreservedly to His will, ready to take His yoke upon them.

“And so did he unto them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, that they slew them not. And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD” (Jos 9:26-27). How blessedly the anti-typical Joshua was there foreshadowed! Though the guilt of these men was established, and though they belonged to an accursed race, yet He spared their lives, and that on the ground of a covenant made by oath! Thus, he did what was both “good and right” (verse 25)—yea, he went beyond what they “asked or thought,” showing them favour and conferring honour upon them, by appointing them to minister unto the “altar of the LORD”; and thus, they would be taught the worship of the true God and delivered from idolatry. It is striking to note that the only ones who *acknowledged* what they “heard” about the LORD (Jos 2:10; 9:24) were *delivered* from His judgments. The descendants of these Gibeonites—termed “Nethinim,” or “devoted persons”—had a place of honour in the service of the temple centuries later (1Ch 9:2; Ezr 8:20; Neh 7:60).



## DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

### 3. *Its Corollaries, Part 2*

5. *Their vitality.* Since the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, it clearly and necessarily follows—as surely so as each of the other four consequences already considered—that it is a *living* Word. It is really deplorable that such a corollary needs to be pointed out in this magazine, and still more lamentable, that it requires to be laboured at some length. Yet such is the case, for Papists are not the only ones who disparage the Scriptures by terming them “a dead letter.” Others, who are at the opposite pole from Romanists on most things, make common cause with them here. A former editor of a magazine which prides itself upon its orthodoxy and fidelity made statements which must have caused grief to those who accord unto God’s Word that honour and reverence to which it is so justly entitled. It was another example of the pendulum swinging too far over to the opposite side. In his strictures against a merely notional and speculative knowledge of the truth, and his emphasis upon the necessity and importance of a vital and experiential acquaintance therewith, he magnified the Holy Spirit and His operations, but slighted the Instrument which He uses therein. We would not “rake up” this from the past were it not that some of his present admirers are injuriously affected by his teaching thereon.

The editor wrote: “It is, then, of the power of the written word that we have now to speak. But when we speak of the power of the Word of God, we do not mean thereby to convey the idea that it possesses any power of its own, any actual, original, innate force, which acts of itself on the heart and conscience. The Word of God is *but* the instrument of a *higher* and distinct power, even the power of that Holy and eternal Spirit, the revealer and testifier of Jesus, by whose express and immediate inspiration it was written. The power of an instrument is the power of him who uses it. This is true literally. The strength of the sword is in the hand of him who wields it. A child may take up a warrior’s sword, but can he use it as a warrior? If, then, the Word of God is ‘quick (or ‘living’ as the Word means) and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword’ (Heb 4:12), it is because he wields it... Thus we ascribe *no power* to the Word itself, but to the power of him who spake it... Before this entrance of the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God was not ‘quick’—that is, ‘living’ (Joh 6:63)—but *dead*” (all italics ours). We protest strongly against such belittling of the Word itself, though we fear some of our readers will see little wrong in it.

Comparisons are notoriously “odious” and to aver that the Holy Spirit’s power is “higher” than the Word which God has “magnified...above all [His] name” (Psa 138:2) is most odious. To deny that God’s Word has any power in itself is to repudiate the very passage which he quotes, for Hebrews 4:12 is not speaking of God’s Word in the hand of the Spirit, but describes its unique and divine characteristics. To say that God’s Word, abstractedly considered, is “but dead” is to degrade it to the level of human writings, which are indeed like their authors—dying creatures. It might just as well be affirmed that there is no light, no food, no comfort, no inherent blessedness in the Scriptures, as to say they possess no life. There *is* in them life and light, meat and drink, though we *be strangers unto* the same until we are regenerated. And in connection with regeneration, the Spirit and the Word must not be severed, nor more ascribed to one than the other; for if we are said to be “born of the Spirit” (Joh 3:6), equally so are we declared to be “born again...by the word of God, which *liveth* and abideth for ever” (1Pe 1:23). The same is true of all His subsequent operations: we are sanctified by the Spirit (1Co 6:11), yet by God’s “truth” (Joh 17:17). Never exalt the Spirit above the Word: Isaiah 34:16; 59:21.

It is an exceedingly solemn thing to disparage the Bible. Who has informed these men that the Scriptures are a “dead letter”? Most certainly God has not done so. “But,” they will reply, “did not His apostle say, ‘For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life’ (2Co 3:6)?” He did, but that is nothing whatever to the point. Paul was not there setting over against each other (to employ the language of another of this same school) “dead, but living truth: not the shell, but the kernel; not the shadow, but the substance; not the form, but the power.” If a little careful attention be devoted to what immediately precedes and follows 2 Corinthians 3:6, it will be found that a contrast is there drawn between the two covenants or economies, for the purpose of showing the superiority of Christianity over Judaism: the terms of the one being written upon tables of stone, the other upon the hearts of its beneficiaries. As verse 7 goes on to say, the Law was “the

ministration of death," so that even it—in "the letter" of it—was not a lifeless and ineffectual thing, for that which "killeth" is neither dead nor impotent! How men catch at shadows to support their delusions!

But must not the written Word be *applied* to us? Most assuredly: by supernatural divine power. Yet not because of any defect in the Word, but because of the state of our hearts. It is not the fault of a glorious sunset that the blind are unable to appreciate it. We must distinguish sharply between what the Word is in *itself*, and what it is *unto us*. If a farmer took a sack of wholesome wheat and scattered it on the streets of London, would you be justified in saying it was "dead cereal" because it produced no harvest? The Spirit indeed graciously prepares the heart for the entrance of God's Word (Act 16:14), yet that is no reflection upon the Word, and is far from implying that it is lifeless in itself. There is a vitality in the Scriptures which is found in no other writings: "Thy word hath quickened me" (Psa 119:50). A special blessing is pronounced by God upon those who tremble at His Word (Isa 66:2), but why should anyone fear or stand in awe of a lifeless book? In Proverbs 6:21-23, it is declared of God's Law or Word, "it shall talk with thee," upon which Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) pertinently remarked, "A dead book cannot talk, nor a drumbrook speak. It is clearly a *living* book then."

"The law of the LORD is perfect" (Psa 19:7), which could never be said if it were merely a "dead letter." Nevertheless, while we be unregenerate, we are incapable of appreciating its perfection. As a blind man with the sun shining in his face is in darkness, so it is spiritually (2Co 4:4). A faculty must be given suited to its object before its excellence can be realized. Even the incarnate Word profits us not until we savingly believe in Him, and before that is possible, we must be sanctified or separated from the dead by the Spirit (2Th 2:13). The Spirit opens and renews the heart, the Word informs and instructs. It is by the Word the Spirit convicts, converts, and comforts (Psa 19:7-8). John Bunyan (1628-1688) was better taught and gave more honour to God's Word than have some who have followed him. "I have sometimes seen more in a line in the Bible than I could well tell how to stand under; and yet at another time, the whole Bible hath been to me as dry as a stick: or rather, my heart hath been as dead and dry unto it, that I could not conceive the least dram of refreshment, though I have looked it all over"—*Grace Abounding* (1666). He placed the defect and fault where it belonged—in himself, and not in the Word.

Let us now set before the reader more specifically what the Bible itself says on this matter. It declares that "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2Ti 3:16). Now to inspire means to "inbreathe", and breath is both the means and the evidence of life, for breathing is that which distinguishes a living entity from a corpse—as soon as a person ceases to breathe, he is dead. That the breath is inseparably connected with the life is shown by the first mention of it in Scripture. "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen 2:7). In like manner, God has breathed into the sacred Scriptures the breath of divine and eternal life, constituting them a living Book. But more: observe well that 2 Timothy 3:16 does *not* say (as men would certainly have expressed it), "All scripture *was* given by inspiration," but "*is* given by inspiration of God." Not only *were* the Scriptures God-breathed, but they *are* so today! The Bible is instinct with the very life of God. The vitality of yours is ever in it, and its leaf withers not. Observe that when the Saviour repulsed the devil's temptation to turn stones into bread, He did not say, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that *proceeded* out of the mouth of God," but "that *proceedeth* [now, at this time] out of the mouth of God" (Mat 4:4).

Since, then, the written Word is vitalized by the very life of God, it is a living Book. Therein it differs radically and essentially from all the books of men. The Scriptures are not only "the oracles of God" (Rom 3:2), but "the lively [or 'living'] oracles" (Act 7:38); and those who deny them to be so will yet have to answer to their Author. The Holy Spirit distinctly designates them, "the word of life" (Phi 2:16); and for us, that settles the matter. Yet it is only fair that we should here point out that some have erred in another direction, permitting their love and zeal for God's Word to make statements which it does not warrant, and which as truly (by implication) dishonour the Spirit as others slight the Word. We refer to those who appear to think that the Scriptures possess, abstractedly, some magical power of their own. They say, "Give them the Word, it will do its own work. Since it is a living Word, it will itself impart life." Whether or not it *can* is quite beside the point. What has to be determined is, Has God appointed that it *should*? And to obtain the answer to that question, we must patiently and impartially search the Word and ascertain what it teaches thereon.

Logical inferences are not sufficient. The farmer may sow wheat in his field—good wheat, possessing a living germ. Will it "do its own work" and multiply itself? No, not of itself. If there be no rain, there will

be no grain. In like manner, the living Seed of Holy Writ (Luk 8:11) may be faithfully sown by the minister of the Gospel, and lie for years in the memory and heart of his hearer, but until the Spirit descends as the dew from heaven upon that soul, the Seed will not spring up into eternal life. There is a balance to be preserved here as well as everywhere. "Being born again...by the word of God" (1Pe 1:23) is indeed part of the truth, and it must not be denied. Howbeit, that fact must not be pressed to the exclusion of the complementary half—"born of the Spirit" (Joh 3:6, 8). Christ declared, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life," yet He prefaced that very statement with, "It is the spirit that quickeneth" (Joh 6:63). Let us be equally upon our guard on this side that we do not exalt the Word to the detriment of the Spirit.

6. *Their verdancy.* Since the Scriptures are God-breathed, "the word of life," it is evident that the bloom of youth is ever upon them, that their freshness and potency are unfading. The fact is most apparent to those who have had the longest and closest acquaintance with them. The best of men's writings soon pall upon us, and to continue reading any one of them over and over, year after year, would soon become a profitless and wearisome task. But not so with the Bible. Near the close of a lengthy life, Samuel E. Pierce (1746-1829) wrote: "I have completed reading the whole Bible through since January 1<sup>st</sup> last. I began it on the first day of the present year and finished it on October 26<sup>th</sup>. I have read it in that space four times, and not without real profit to myself. I always find in it something new; it being like its Author, infinite and inexhaustible." For upwards of forty years, the present writer has made the Bible his constant study, and he is unable to recall a single day when he had not occasion to say, "I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil" (Psa 119:162), and so far from having lost its charm, he still finds its teaching drops as the rain, its speech distils as the dew (Deu 32:2), and its springs to be overflowing founts of ever-fresh comfort.

The Bible is immortal in its life, perennial in its freshness, infinite in its fullness. Each soul who maintains communion with God finds constant cause to acknowledge with the Psalmist, "He maketh me to lie down in *green pastures*" (Psa 23:2)—pleasant, inviting, satisfying. They never wither and parch, but remain verdant and nourishing. No matter how frequently we feed therein, they cloy not. As the LORD furnished Israel with a new supply of manna throughout their lengthy sojourn in the wilderness, so does He the souls of His people today. The Bible never becomes stale nor diminishes in its power of response to the needy one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness. The devout student finds God's Word to be like the miraculous oil and meal which for so long sustained Elijah in the widow's house, for its contents cannot be exhausted. If it be approached in a humble yet expectant spirit, each fresh reading discovers precious gems never seen there before, and new delights are experienced, of which we have no previous acquaintance. Its refreshing stream never becomes stagnant or brackish, but is "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal" (Rev 22:1), and is in the believer "a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (Joh 4:14).

The Bible was completed more than eighteen hundred years ago, when the great majority of mankind were barbarians, yet it is very much more than an interesting relic of the past, namely, something which is exactly suited to our needs today. The literary productions of antiquity have no practical application to ourselves, the mere course of time having rendered them obsolete and worthless. They are mostly documents relating to a state of society, which has long since passed away and sunk into oblivion, and consequently, are of no real value to us. There is nothing in them to feed our souls, stir our pulse, or warm our hearts. Those of them which have been preserved are merely interesting curios, like the silent Sphinx and the lifeless mummies of the Egyptians. But since the Scriptures are the Word of the living God, it necessarily follows that they are ever timely and pertinent. God does not speak today what He means not tomorrow, nor will He in the future go back upon what He tells us now. Note well that when the apostle quoted Psalm 95:7-8 and pressed its solemn warning upon the wavering Hebrews, he was moved to write, "Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost *saith* [not '*said*'!], To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts" (Heb 3:7-8).

The Spirit speaks unto us today as freshly as He did unto Moses and David. "Now the Spirit *speaketh* expressly" (1Ti 4:1) as truly as He did in the days of the apostles. Therefore are we enjoined, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh [now] from heaven" (Heb 12:25)! Thus, the Bible is never out of date, for truth is timeless. It is exactly suited to every generation of men and to all nations, for it utters the voice of Him who is immutable in wisdom, and unerring in counsel, and because the spiritual and eternal needs of men are the same in every age and clime. The promises which God uttered from the beginning are fresh and comforting, because they fall from the everlasting lips today. The same One who upon the morn of creation said, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3), still gives forth through the pages of His

Word the same effectual fiat. As there was an ample surplus of food remaining after Christ had fed the multitudes with the loaves and fishes, so the commissariat of God's Word continues *undiminished* for the souls of each new generation.

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isa 40:8)—not only indestructible, but unfading, its pastures ever green and verdant. And such have His people ever found His Word. And such may His dear children now prove for themselves. Are they faced with perplexing and baffling problems? Then let them humbly but trustfully turn to the Scriptures for wisdom, and they will assuredly have cause to say with the Psalmist, "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psa 119:130). Are they faint and weary from the buffetings of life? Let them turn in faith and expectation to the Word, and their strength shall be renewed. Are they deeply distressed and their hearts sore from bereavement? Let them remember that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and *comfort of the scriptures* might have hope" (Rom 15:4). Do the assemblies of the saints desire to be regulated by the revealed will of God? Then let them "hear what the Spirit *saith* [not 'said' in the distant past] unto the churches" (Rev 2:7, 11, etc.). We can never outgrow God's Word—rather does it widen and deepen with experience. It scarcely needs pointing out that these last five paragraphs supply additional evidence that the Bible is a *living* Book.

7. *Their perspicuity.* It should at once be apparent that if the Bible be divinely inspired and couched in our mother tongue, it must be plain and lucid. To argue to the contrary would be an insult to its Author, charging Him with the inability to express Himself in simple human language. Moreover, anything less would defeat its own ends: a declaration of God's will must be given in plain and unambiguous terms—or of what use and practical value would it be to men? The Bible then is not an Apocrypha, but an Apocalypse—not a riddle, but a revelation. Since it be a communication of truth to be believed and a Law to be obeyed, its requirements are given in language which men can grasp. Therefore, it is to be made readily accessible unto the common people. But this is another of the characteristics of Holy Writ which is denied by Rome. The Papacy avers that the Bible is much too profound and obscure for the masses, and insists it is dangerous to place it in their hands. She therefore withholds it from the laity and claims that "holy mother church" is alone authorized and qualified to interpret it.

By doing so, Popery not only violates the dictates of common sense, but directly repudiates what the Scriptures affirm of themselves. "The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple...the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psa 19:7-8). "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light" (Pro 6:23), written as with a sunbeam. It declares, "The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" (Isa 35:8), yet not those fools who are "wise in their own craftiness [conceits]" (Job 5:13, 1Co 3:19), but such as are sensible of their ignorance and pray daily, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psa 119:18). When we insist upon the perspicuity of the Scriptures, we are far from saying that they are within the compass of man's intellect. There is much in them which transcends the grasp of human reason, as well as prophecies so enigmatical that they are unintelligible till the event. No, we simply assert that every essential article of faith and rule of practice is set forth in such terms that misconception of the same is rendered excuseless.

Those who humbly and prayerfully, daily and perseveringly, take God's Word for their counselor are able to say, "Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies...I have more understanding than all my teachers" (Psa 119:98-99). Since God has given us His Word to be "a lamp unto [our] feet, and a light unto [our] path" (Psa 119:105), it must needs be illuminating, revealing the snares of Satan, discovering to us our sins, making plain the way in which we should go. Nor need we ask God to give us light *on* His Word—as well think of turning a searchlight on the midday sun as it shines in a cloudless sky! The obscurity is always in us, and never in the Word—it is light *from* the Word we need! And here too there is a balance to be preserved. We are not independent of the Spirit: He is the One who "searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1Co 2:10), and is given to guide us into the truth (Joh 16:13). But as Thomas Manton (1620-1677) well said, "Light is not against Light." Then let us *seek* His help that He may shine upon our sin-darkened understandings.



## THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

### *2. Its Origin, Part 2*

Though Adam had been made in the image of God, taken into communion with Him, fitted to rejoice in all the manifestations of His wisdom and goodness which surrounded him in Eden, nevertheless, he was capable of falling. Since it is a point which has sorely puzzled many of the Lord's people—how it was possible for a holy person, devoid of any corruption, *to sin*—we will endeavour to explain. First, Adam's liability to fall lay in the fact that he was but a *creature*. As such, he was entirely dependent upon Him "which holdeth our soul in life" (Psa 66:9). As our natural life continues only so long as God sustains it, so it was with Adam's spiritual life: he stood only so long as he was divinely upheld. Moreover, as a creature, he was but finite, and therefore possessed of no invincible power with which to repel opposition. Nor was he endowed with omniscience, so that he had been incapable of being deceived or mistaking an evil for an apparent good. Thus, though man's original condition was one of high moral excellence—with no evil tendency in any part of his nature, yea, with nothing in him which in the least deviated from the moral law—yet, being but a creature, he was capable of falling.

Second, Adam's liability to fall lay in his *mutability*. Changeableness is the very law or radical characteristic of the creature, to distinguish it from the Creator. God alone is without "variableness, [or] shadow of turning" (Jam 1:17). Therefore, it is that "God cannot be tempted with evil" (Jam 1:13)—i.e. induced to sin: a statement which clearly implies that the creature as such *has* a capacity to be so tempted—not only a depraved creature, but even an unfallen one. Immutability and impeccability (non-liability to sin) are qualities which essentially distinguish the Creator from the creature—the angels possess neither, as the fall of at least one-third of their number (Rev 12:4) demonstrated. Further, as the excellent Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) pointed out, God alone acts from His own power, whereas, the creature acts by a power given to him which is distinct from himself. "God's own goodness and happiness is His ultimate end, therefore, He can never act but holily, for He acts by Himself and for Himself, and so cannot fail in acting, but is holy in all His ways and works, and cannot be otherwise." But man neither acts immediately by his own power nor is himself the legitimate end of his acting, but rather God. Thus, with all his faculties, man may falter when using them.

Third, Adam's liability to fall lay in the *freedom of his will*. He was not only a creature and a rational creature, but also a moral one. Freedom of will is a property which belongs to man as a rational and responsible being. As we cannot separate understanding from the mind, neither can we liberty from the will, especially in connection with things within its own sphere—and more especially still when considering that all the faculties of man's soul were in a state of perfection before the Fall. With Adam and Eve, the freedom of their will consisted in a power of choosing or embracing what appeared—agreeable to the dictates of their understandings—to be good, or in refusing and avoiding what was evil; and that without any constraint or force laid upon them to act contrary to the dictates thereof. Such freedom also supposed a power to act pursuant to what the will chooses; otherwise, it could not obtain the good desired, or avoid the evil detested; and in such case, its "liberty" would be little more than a name. Freedom of action is opposed to that which is involuntary or compelled, and the will is both self-inclining and self-determining in the acting—both internally and externally; for then only can it strictly speaking be said to be free.

Our first parents had that freedom of will, or power to retain their integrity. This is evident from the clearly revealed fact that they were under an indispensable obligation to yield perfect obedience unto God, and liable to deserved punishment for the least defect thereof: therefore, they must have been given a power to stand, a liberty of will to choose that which was conducive to their happiness. The same thing is also evident from the difference there is between man's primitive and present state. As fallen, man is now by a necessity of nature inclined to sin, and accordingly, he is denominated, "the servant of sin" (Joh 8:34)—a slave to it, entirely under its dominion—but it was far otherwise with Adam, whose nature was holy and furnished with everything necessary to his yielding that obedience demanded of him. Nevertheless, his will being free, it was capable of complying with an external temptation to evil, though so long as he made a right use of his faculties, he would defend himself and reject the temptation with abhorrence. It pleased God to leave our first parents without any immediate help *ab extra*, to the freedom and mutability of their

own will. But that neither made Him the author of their sin, nor brought them under any natural necessity of falling.

Before considering the probation under which Adam was placed and the test to which his loyalty and subjection to God was submitted, it should be pointed out that Scripture requires us to regard him as far more than a private person—the consequences of whose action would be confined to himself. As we purpose showing, that is made very plain from the event itself. Adam was more than the father of the human race. By divine constitution, he was made the *covenant head* of all his natural seed, so that what he did was divinely regarded and reckoned as being done by them—just as Christ came into the world as the covenant Head of all His spiritual seed, acting and transacting in their name and on their behalf. God willing, this will be considered more fully under the next division of our subject, when we shall treat of the imputation of his offence to all his posterity. Suffice it now to point out that in Romans 5:14, Adam is expressly called “the figure of him that was to come.” In what was he a type of the Redeemer? The principal respect in which he was distinguished from all other creatures lay in his being the federal head and legal representative of all his offspring. This is confirmed by 1 Corinthians 15:45-49, where the first Adam and the last Adam are designated “the first man” and “the second man,” for they were the only two who sustained that covenant and federal relation unto others before God.

“And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:8-9). That is the first mention of those two notable trees, and it is to be duly observed that, like all the others surrounding them, they were both pleasing to the eye and suitable for eating. Thus, God not only provided for Adam’s profit, but his pleasure also, that he might serve Him with delight. “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:16-17). This, as the following verses indicate, took place *before* Eve was created, and thus, the covenant of works was made with Adam alone as the head of our race. Far more was implied in those words than is actually expressed, as we hope to show when considering them more closely under our next division. Meanwhile, a few general remarks thereon may be of interest.

“The tendency of such a divine precept is to be considered. Man was thereby taught: (1) That God is LORD of all things—that it is unlawful for man even to desire an apple but with His leave. In all things, therefore, from the greatest to the least, the mouth of the LORD is to be consulted as to what He would or would not have done by us. (2) That man’s true happiness is placed in God alone, and nothing to be desired but with submission to God, and in order to employ it for Him. So that it is *He* only on whose account all other things appear good and desirable to man. (3) Readily to be satisfied without even the most delightful and desirable things, if God so command: and to think that there is much more good in obedience to the divine precept than in the enjoyment of the most delightful thing in the world. (4) That man was not yet arrived to the utmost pitch of happiness, but to expect a still greater good after his course of obedience was over. This was hinted by the prohibition of the most delightful tree, whose fruit was, of any other, greatly to be desired; and this argued some degree of imperfection in that state in which man was forbidden the enjoyment of some good”—Herman Witsius (1636-1708).

In forbidding Adam to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, his Maker asserted His dominion and enforced His authority. That it was proper for Him to do so cannot be lawfully questioned; and as the sole Proprietor of the Garden, it was fitting that He should emphasize His rights by this restriction. Moreover, man having been created a rational creature and endowed with freedom of will, he was a fit subject for command, and accordingly was placed under Law. Thereby, Adam’s loyalty and subjection to his Creator and LORD was put to the test. Trial of his obedience was made to discover whether the will of God was sacred to him. It was both meet and just that man should remain in the state of holiness in which God had made him, if he would continue to enjoy His favour. Thus, he was placed on probation, made the subject of divine government. Adam was not an independent creature, for he did not create himself: being made by God, he owed a debt to Him, he was a moral being, and therefore responsible to serve and please God. The commandment given to him was no arbitrary infliction, but a necessary injunction for making it evident and enforcing the relationship in which man stood to God.

The particular injunction laid upon our first parents (Gen 2:17) has been a favourite subject of ridicule by the opponents of divine revelation. Those who are wise in their own conceits have deemed it unworthy

of the Almighty to interpose His authority in a matter so trifling, and have insisted it is incredible to believe that He exposed Adam and Eve to the hazard of ruining themselves and all their progeny by eating the food of a particular tree. But a little reflection ought to show us that there was nothing in that prohibition unbecoming of God's wisdom and goodness. Since He had been pleased to give Adam dominion over all creatures here below, it was surely fitting that He should require some peculiar instance of homage and fealty to Him as a token of his dependence and an acknowledgement of his subjection to his Maker—to whom he owed the most absolute submission and obedience. And what mark of subjection could be more proper than being interdicted to partake of one of the fruits of Paradise? Full liberty was granted him to eat of all the rest; and that single abstention was well suited to teach our first parents the salutary lesson of self-denial and of implicit resignation to the good pleasure of the Most High.

In addition to what was noted by Herman Witsius, it may be pointed out that the character of this prohibition taught Adam and Eve to keep their sensitive appetites in subjection to the reasoning faculty. It showed them they must subordinate their bodily inclinations unto finding their highest delight in God alone. It intimated that their desire after knowledge must be kept within just bounds, that they must be content with what God deemed to be really proper and useful to them, and not presume to pry with an unwarrantable curiosity into things which did not belong to them, and which God had not thought well to reveal unto them. It was not sinful *per se* (in itself abstractedly considered) for Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but only because the LORD God had expressly forbidden them to do so. Accordingly, solemn warning of the dire consequences that would certainly follow their disobedience was given—for even in Eden, man was placed under the holy awe of divine threatening, which was a hedge placed around him for his protection. Man's supreme felicity lies in God Himself and the enjoyment of His favour, and in Eden, he was forbidden to seek satisfaction in any other object. In that single restriction upon his liberty was his integrity put to the proof.

So far from that arrangement being unworthy of the divine majesty, such an enforcing of His will and authority upon the creature of His hand was most becoming. It was not only necessary in the nature of the case if the responsibility of a free agent was to be enforced, and his subjection to the divine government insisted upon, but the very triviality of the object withheld from our first parents only served to give greater reality unto the trial to which they were subjected. As Professor John Dick (1764-1833) pointed out, "It is manifest that the prohibition did not proceed from malevolence or an intention to impair the happiness of man: because, with this single reservation, he was at liberty to appropriate the rich variety of fruits with which Paradise was stored. It is certain that, situated as he was, no command could be easier, as it properly implied no sacrifice, no painful privation, but simple abstinence from one out of many things; for who would deem it a hardship, while he was sitting at a table covered with all kinds of delicate and substantial foods, to be told that there was one and only one that he was forbidden to taste? It is further evident that no reason could be assigned *why* Adam should not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but the divine prohibition.

"The fruit was as good for food as that of any tree, and as pleasant to the eye; and there was nothing sacred in it which would have been profaned by human touch. Hence, you will perceive that if God had an intention to make trial of the newly formed subject, He could not have chosen a more proper method, as it indicated nothing like a harsh or tyrannical exercise of authority, and was admirably fitted to ascertain whether His simple command would be to him instead of all other reasons for obedience. It is not a proper trial of reverence for a superior when the action which he prescribes is recommended by other considerations. It is when it stands upon the sole foundation of his authority; when, having no intrinsic goodness, it becomes good only by his prohibition; when the sole inducement to perform it is His command. It is in these circumstances it is known whether we duly feel and recognize our moral dependence upon Him. The morality of an action does not depend upon its abstract nature, but upon its relation to the Law of God. Men seem often to judge of actions as they judge of material substances—by their bulk. What is great in itself, or in its consequences, they will admit to be a sin; but what appears little, they pronounce to be a slight fault, or no fault at all.

"Had Adam, it has been remarked, been possessed of preternatural power, and wantonly and wickedly exerted it in blasting the beauty of Paradise and turning it into a scene of desolation, men would have granted that he was guilty of a great and daring offence, for which a curse was justly pronounced upon him. But they can see no harm in so trifling a matter as the eating of a little fruit. Nothing, however, is more fallacious than such reasoning: the essence of sin is the transgression of a law; and whether that law forbids

you to commit murder or to move your finger, it is equally transgressed when you violate the precept. Whatever the act of disobedience is, it is rebellion against the Lawgiver: it is a renunciation of His authority, and it dissolves that moral dependence upon Him, which is founded on the nature of things, and is necessary to maintain the order and happiness of the universe. Therefore, the injunction to abstain from the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a proper trial of our first parent; and the violation of it deserved the dreadful punishment which was denounced and executed. He was put to the test whether the will of God was sacred in his eyes, and he was punished because he gave preference to his own will." Our apology for making a longer quotation than we are accustomed to do from the writings of others, but it is that this one just given is of particular weight and importance and greatly needed in this day. We hope the reader will give it a second and more careful perusal.

It only remains for us to add now that the foundation of Adam's obligation to render such obedience unto God lay, first, in his relations to Him. As his Maker, his Governor, his Benefactor, it behoved him to render full subjection to His revealed will. Second, in the privileges and favours bestowed upon him: these required that he should express his gratitude and thanksgiving by doing those things which were pleasing in His sight. Third, in his endowments, which qualified him so to do: created in God's image, with a nature that inclined his will unto obedience—ability and obligation then being co-extensive. Fourth, in the relation he sustained to the race: as the head and father of all his progeny, their welfare or ruin was bound up in how he conducted himself, thus greatly augmenting his responsibility to abstain from wrong-doing. Fifth, in that the command forbidding Adam to eat of the tree of knowledge was accompanied by a solemn threat of dire punishment to be inflicted in case of disobedience. Not only should that have acted as an effectual deterrent, but the penalty necessarily implied a promise: since death would be the sure result of disobedience, life would be the reward of obedience—not only a continuation of the blessedness and happiness which he then enjoyed in fellowship with his Maker, but such an augmentation of the same as He might be pleased further to make in the exercise of His bounty. That also ought to have served as a powerful incentive unto continued fidelity. Thus, there was every reason why Adam should have preserved his integrity.

