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

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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**Arthur W. Pink** was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886, and born again by God's Spirit in 1908. He studied briefly at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago before his pastoral work in Colorado, California, Kentucky, and South Carolina, USA, and in Sydney, Australia. In 1934, he returned to his native England, taking his final residence on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, in 1940, where he remained until his death in 1952.

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

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# STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

## A PERSONAL WORD

From the beginning of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES, it has been the custom of the late Editor to give a little message of a more or less intimate nature at this time of year. It has fallen to me to finish and bring to a close the magazine. Therefore, it seems an attempt should be made to send forth a word for this last time. An attempt is all it can be, for what can I say? It is all the harder since it falls at the first anniversary of his being taken home to glory. Oh, what a year it has been. A year of sorrow and loneliness. A year of thankfulness and rejoicing. A year of marvel, truly. There is no word which so suitably expresses my experience throughout the year than, “I was brought low, and he helped me” (Psa 116:6). Going through the waters of bereavement brings one into the depths, but how wonderful that, “When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee” (Isa 43:2), and as “The angel of my presence shall go before thee” (Exo 33:14). I have been marvelously helped to go on from day to day. Without His help, I could not have borne it. When He has taken from us “the desire of our eyes” (Eze 24:16) and life does not seem worth living, He has such a wonderful way in giving His cordial—the bitter is caused to bring forth sweetness.

In the December issue of the magazine, I committed myself to carry on throughout 1953. Mr. Pink left everything in such wonderful order that it was an easy task. There were funds to meet the needs for 1952 and a nice little balance to begin 1953. He kept the account in our joint names so that each could draw upon it in an emergency. But the Solicitor took the whole of the fund for probate, leaving me with an overdraft after paying the November and December invoice. So, “I was brought low” (Psa 116:6)—very low indeed. Yet when January and February invoice came to hand, there was not only sufficient to meet it, but also to meet the binder’s invoice and a balance again in hand. Did He help me? “Marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well” (Psa 139:14). So, for

the magazine and the unworthy and undeserving instrument, I do thankfully own "He helped me" (Psa 116:6).

Just here, I would like to add a further word. As Mr. Pink was free with you, it makes it easier for me. Since he retired from the ministry to give himself wholly to writing, we have lived on the interest of his father's bequest to him. He never paid insurance, so drew no benefit. He could not, for he felt he was not entitled to the provision made for tradesmen, especially since he was getting what met our needs. God willing, I shall receive the same during my lifetime, but the complicating difficulties in making transference to me have taken very long. But since the "God of Jacob is our refuge," STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES and I have been carried honourably through. Mr. Pink has repeatedly informed you that we never touched so much as a penny from STUDIES' funds for ourselves before he retired from the ministry or since.

No less wonderful is it to relate that near the middle of December, "I was brought low" when stricken in my body—never strong at best—and lay prostrate for a time with no feeling whatever in my right side from head to foot. It came on insensibly while sitting in my chair after typing the last article—"The Manna, a Type of Christ." Upon reading it through, I put the sheets on the table and attempted to rise, but found I was helpless. Many things played their part in bringing this about, no doubt, but to me it was most wonderful that the Lord in His goodness put me to bed to rest, for rest I could not. He took everything from me—grief, worry, and corruptions—into His own loving hands, leaving me without a care in peace and quietness to rest. I trust I can say to God's glory that, before this trouble came upon me, He had for some days, particularly that night, while reading through the above-mentioned article, graciously filled me with His holy presence, which was a great strength and comfort during those critical days which followed. "His way is in the deep, and his footsteps are not known" (Psa 77:19)—to carnal sense, but faith perceives them as it hears His voice, "*Follow thou me.*" Oh, the wonder that He never requires His people to go along a path He has not first trodden.

Oh, how "He helped me." Alone in the world, a widow, broken-hearted, helpless, and near death, He gave me the kindest of kind hearts and hands to minister unto me night and day and take over the care of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES during those weeks. Royalty could not have had more untiring and faithful attendance from physician, nurse, and friends than I was privileged to receive. Why, oh, why me? "There is nothing in me that can merit esteem, or give my Redeemer delight. 'Tis even so, Father! I ever must sing. For so it seemed good in Thy sight." It was at this time that the Lord turned the hearts of many of His dear people to pray for me. To me, it has all been too wonderful for words. Some felt I was in "dire" need and prayed with more earnestness—they knew not what for, but it was sufficient to realize the Lord knew and is ever mindful of the needs of His people. "Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord! Who can show forth all His praise?" Oh, what wonder that He should be pleased to put me on the hearts of His people, the highest honour this side of glory. From a heart filled with gratitude, I would humbly thank one and all who ministered unto me and who had thoughts of me during my prostration and since. From the depths of my being I desire to praise Him for restoring me to a goodly measure of strength.

The evening of life has come. The shadows are gathering round. Oh, that His presence may so light the path before that it may shine more and more unto the perfect day. "And He shall be as the light of the morning. When the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds: as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain" (2Sa 23:4). Meanwhile, I seek to go on in weakness desiring a like experience with Jacob. "And the sun rose upon him, and he halted on his thigh." Oh, that "The Sun of righteousness would arise with healing in His wings" and all the maladies inherent to nature caused by sin and corruption shall be for ever cured. Then, we shall regard the "halt" as lightly as Jacob appears to have done. He knew what it meant to be "alone with God." He knew "the path which no vulture's eye hath seen." He knew what conflict was, for he had a night of combat with the Angel.

I trust I have not been too tedious and wearisome. I have written freely as I would have spoken individually—from the heart looking forward to eternity. If spared, I do trust you who have been accustomed to write personal letters all these years will think upon me in my loneliness and write from time to time. I dare not let my mind think of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES coming to an end—or perhaps I should say closing down. I seek to go on from day to day knowing that He, who helped me in the hardest of all, will graciously help me in this also. It is good to recall the happy years in which we were privileged to "send portions unto those for whom nothing was prepared." How blessed to know that He changes not. He is "The same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." All things change here and come to an end. He remains—to help.

God willing, a final word will be a brief annual letter in December. I leave other things for it. I feel the readers would like to know that Mr. Pink's works can be had from the publisher in U.S.A.—Mr. I. C. Herendeen, Swengel (Union Co.), Pennsylvania. Mr. Pink wrote many works other than STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES. The publisher is going ahead to print Hebrews in book form—probably be on sale next year. Will readers in Britain kindly communicate with me if they desire Hebrews or any of Mr. Pink's works? God willing, I hope to supply all who wish his works. VERA E. PINK.

## SAVING FAITH

### *3. Its Difficulty*

Some of our readers will probably be surprised to hear about the *difficulty* of saving faith. On almost every side today, it is being taught, even by men styled orthodox and “fundamentalists,” that getting saved is an exceedingly simple affair. So long as a person believes John 3:16 and “rests on it,” or “accepts Christ as his personal Saviour,” that is *all* that is needed. It is often said that there is nothing left for the sinner to do but direct his faith toward the right object. Just as a man trusts his bank or a wife her husband, let him exercise the same faculty of faith and trust in Christ. So widely has this idea been received that, for anyone now to condemn, it is to court being branded as a heretic. Notwithstanding, the writer here unhesitatingly denounces it as a most God-insulting lie of the devil. A natural faith is sufficient for trusting a human object; but a supernatural faith is required to trust savingly in a divine object.

While observing the methods employed by present-day “evangelists” and “personal workers,” we are made to wonder what place the Holy Spirit has in their thoughts. Certainly they entertain the most degrading conception of the miracle of grace which He performs when He moves a human heart to surrender truly unto the Lord Jesus. Alas, in these degenerate times, few have any idea that saving faith *is* a miraculous thing. Instead, it is now almost universally supposed that saving faith is nothing more than an act of the human will, which any man is capable of performing. All that is needed is to bring before a sinner a few verses of Scripture which describe his lost condition, one or two which contain the word “believe,” and then a little persuasion for him to “accept Christ,” and the thing is done. And the awful thing is that so very, very few see anything wrong with this—blind to the fact that such a process is only the devil’s drug to lull thousands into a false peace.

So, many have been *argued into* believing that they are saved. In reality, their “faith” sprang from nothing better than a superficial process of logic. Some “personal worker” addresses a man who has no concern whatever for the glory of God and no realization of his terrible hostility against Him. Anxious to “win another soul to Christ,” he pulls out his New Testament and reads to him 1 Timothy 1:15. The worker says, “You are a sinner,” and his man assenting, he is at once informed, “Then that verse includes *you*.” Next, John 3:16 is read, and the question is asked, “Whom does the word ‘Whosoever’ include?” The question is repeated until the poor victim answers, “You, me, and everybody.” Then he is asked, “Will you believe it? Believe that God loves you, that Christ died for you?” If the answer is, “Yes,” he is at once assured that he is now saved. Ah, my reader, if *this* is how you were “saved,” then it was with “enticing words of man’s wisdom” and *your* “faith” stands only “in the wisdom of men” (1Co 2:4-5) and not in the power of God!

Multitudes seem to think that it is about as easy for a sinner to purify his heart (Jam 4:8) as it is to wash his hand—to admit the searching and flesh-withering light of divine truth into the soul, as the morning sun into his room by pulling up the blinds—to turn from idols to God, from the world to Christ, from sin to holiness, as to turn a ship right round by the help of her helm. Oh, my reader, be not deceived on this vital matter. To mortify the lusts of the flesh, to be crucified unto the world, to overcome the devil, to die daily unto sin and live unto righteousness, to be meek and lowly in heart, trustful and obedient, pious and patient, faithful and uncompromising, loving and gentle—in a word, to be a Christian, *to be Christ-like*, is a task far, far beyond the poor resources of fallen human nature.

It is because a generation has arisen which is ignorant of the *real nature* of saving faith that they deem it such a simple thing. It is because so very few have any scriptural conception of *the character* of God's great salvation that the delusions referred to above are so widely received. It is because so very few realize *what* they need saving from that the popular "evangel" (?) of the hour is so eagerly accepted. Once it is seen that saving faith consists of very much more than believing that "Christ died for me," that it involves and entails the complete surrender of my heart and life to His government, few will imagine that they possess it. Once it is seen that God's salvation is not only a legal but also an experimental thing, that it not only justifies but regenerates and sanctifies, fewer will suppose they are its participants. Once it is seen that Christ came here to save His people not only from hell, but from sin, from self-will and self-pleasing, then fewer will desire His salvation.

The Lord Jesus did not teach that saving faith was a simple matter. Far from it! Instead of declaring that the saving of the soul was an easy thing, which many would participate in, He said, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Mat 7:14). The only path which leads to heaven is a hard and laborious one. "We must through *much tribulation* enter into the kingdom of God" (Act 14:22). An entrance into that path calls for the utmost endeavours of soul—"Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luk 13:24).

After the young ruler had departed from Christ, sorrowing, the Lord turned to His disciples and said, "How *hard* is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a *rich* man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mar 10:24-25). What place is given to such a passage as this in the theology (if "theology" it is fit to be called) which is being taught in the "Bible institutes" to those seeking to qualify for evangelistic and personal work? None at all. According to their views, it is just as easy for a millionaire to be saved as it is for a pauper, since *all* that either has to do is "rest on the finished work of Christ." But those who are wallowing in wealth think not of God, "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me!" (Hos 13:6).

When the disciples heard these words of Christ's, "They were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?" (Mar 10:26). Had our moderns heard them, they had soon set their fears at rest, and assured them that anybody and everybody could be saved, if they believed on the Lord Jesus. But not so did Christ

reassure them. Instead, He immediately added, "With men it is *impossible*, but not with God" (Mar 10:27). Of himself, the fallen sinner can no more repent evangelically, believe in Christ savingly, come to Him effectually, than he can create a world. "With men it is impossible," rules out of court all special pleading for the power of man's will. Nothing but a *miracle of grace* can lead to the saving of any sinner.

And *why* is it impossible for the natural man to exercise saving faith? Let the answer be drawn from the case of this young ruler. He departed from Christ sorrowing, "for he had great possessions." He was wrapped up in them. They were his idols. His heart was chained to the things of earth. The demands of Christ were too exacting—to part with all and follow Him was more than flesh and blood could endure. Reader, what are *your* idols? To him the Lord said, "One thing thou lackest." What was it? A yielding to the imperative requirements of Christ, a heart surrendered to God. When the soul is stuffed with the dregs of earth, there is no room for the impressions of heaven. When a man is satisfied with carnal riches, he has no desire for spiritual riches.

The same sad truth is brought out again in Christ's parable of the "great supper" (Luk 14:16). The feast of divine grace is spread, and through the Gospel, a general call is given for men to come and partake of it. And what is the response? This, "They all with one consent began to make excuse" (Luk 14:18). And why should they? Because they were more interested in other things! Their hearts were set upon land (verse 18), oxen (verse 19), domestic comforts (verse 20). People are willing to "accept Christ" on their own terms, but not on His. What His terms *are* is made known in the same chapter—giving Him the supreme place in our affections (verse 26), the crucifixion of self (verse 27), the abandoning of every idol (verse 33). Therefore did He ask, "Which of you, intending to build a tower [figure of a hard task, of setting the affections on things *above*], sitteth not down first, and *counteth the cost*?" (Luk 14:28).

"How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (Joh 5:44). Do these words picture the exercise of saving faith as the simple matter, which so many deem it? The word, "honour," here signifies approbation or praise. While those Jews were making it their chief aim to win and hold the good opinion of each other, and were indifferent to the approval of God, it was impossible that they should come to Christ. It is the same now, "Whomsoever therefore will be [desires and is determined to be] a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jam 4:4). To come to Christ effectually, to believe on Him savingly, involves turning our backs upon the world, alienating ourselves from the esteem of our godless (or religious) fellows, and identifying ourselves with the despised and rejected One. It involves bowing to His yoke, surrendering to His lordship, and living henceforth for *His* glory. And *that* is no small task.

"*Labour* not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you" (Joh 6:27). Does this language imply that the obtaining of eternal life is a simple matter? It does not. Far from it. It denotes that a man must be in deadly earnest, subordinating all other interests in his quest for it, and be prepared to put forth strenuous endeavours and overcome formidable difficulties. Then, does this verse teach salvation by works, by self-efforts? No, and yes. No, in the sense that anything we do can *merit* salvation—eternal life is a "gift." Yes, in



the sense that whole-hearted seeking after salvation and a diligent use of the prescribed means of grace are demanded of us. Nowhere in Scripture is there any promise to the dilatory. Compare Hebrews 4:11.

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44). Plainly does this language give the lie to the popular theory of the day that it lies within the power of man’s will to be saved any time he chooses to be. Flatly does this verse contradict the flesh-pleasing and creature-honouring idea that anyone can receive Christ as his Saviour the moment he decides to do so. The reason why the natural man cannot come to Christ till the Father “draw” him is because he is the bondslave of sin (Joh 8:34), serving divers lusts (Ti 3:3), the captive of the devil (2Ti 2:26). Almighty power must break his chains and open the prison doors (Luk 4:18) ere he *can* come to Christ. Can one who loves darkness and hates the light reverse the process? No, no more than a man who has a diseased foot or poisoned hand can heal it by an effort of will. Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? No more can they do good who are accustomed to do evil (Jer 13:23).

“And if the righteous with difficulty is saved, the ungodly and sinner where shall they appear?” (1Pe 4:18, Bagster’s Interlinear). Matthew Henry (1662-1714) said, “It is as much as the best can do to secure the salvation of their souls. There are so many sufferings, temptations, and difficulties to be overcome, so many sins to be mortified. The gate is so strait, and the way so narrow, that it is as much as the righteous man can do to be saved. Let the absolute necessity of salvation balance the difficulty of it. Consider your difficulties are the greatest at first. God offers His grace and help. The contest will not last long. Be but faithful to the death and God will give you the crown of life (Rev 2:10).” So also John Lillie (1812-1867), “After all that God has done by sending His Son, and the Son by the Holy Spirit, it is only with difficulty, exceeding difficulty, that the work of saving the righteous advances to its consummation. The entrance into the kingdom lies through much tribulation—through fightings without and fears within—through the world’s seductions and its frowns—through the utter weakness and continual failures of the flesh, and the many fiery darts of Satan.”

Here, then, are the reasons why saving faith is so difficult to put forth. 1. By nature, men are entirely ignorant of its real character, and therefore are easily deceived by Satan’s plausible substitutes for it. But even when they are scripturally informed thereon, they either sorrowfully turn their backs on Christ, as did the rich young ruler when he learned His terms of discipleship, or they hypocritically profess what they do not possess. 2. The power of self-love reigns supreme within, and to *deny* self is too great a demand upon the unregenerate. 3. The love of the world and the approbation of their friends stands in the way of a complete surrender to Christ. 4. The demands of God that He should be loved with *all* the heart and that we should be “holy in all manner of conversation” (1Pe 1:15) repels the carnal. 5. Bearing the reproach of Christ, being hated by the religious world (Joh 15:18), suffering persecution for righteousness’ sake, is something which mere flesh and blood shrinks from. 6. The humbling of ourselves before God, penitently confessing *all* our self-will, is something which an unbroken heart revolts against. 7. To fight the good fight of faith (1Ti 6:12) and overcome the devil (1Jo 2:13) is too arduous an undertaking for those who love their own ease.

Multitudes desire to be saved from hell (the natural instinct of *self*-preservation) who are quite willing to be saved from *sin*. Yes, there are tens of thousands who have been deluded into thinking that they have “accepted Christ as their Saviour,” whose lives show plainly that they *reject* Him as their Lord. For a sinner to obtain the pardon of God, he must “*forsake his way*” (Isa 55:7). No man can turn *to God* until he turns *from idols* (1Th 1:9). Thus insisted the Lord Jesus, “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luk 14:33).

The terrible thing is that so many preachers today, under the pretence of magnifying the grace of God, have represented Christ as the Minister of *sin*; as One who has, through His atoning sacrifice, procured an indulgence for men to continue gratifying their fleshly and worldly lusts. Provided a man professes to believe in the virgin birth and vicarious death of Christ, and claims to be resting upon Him alone for salvation, he may pass for a real Christian almost anywhere today, even though his daily life may be no different from that of the moral worldling who makes no profession at all. The devil is chloroforming thousands into hell by this very delusion. The Lord Jesus asks, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and *do not* the things which I say?” (Luk 6:46), and insists, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth* the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat 7:21).

The hardest task before most of us is not to learn, but to unlearn. Many of God’s own children have drunk so deeply of the sweetened poison of Satan that it is by no means easy to get it out of their systems. And while it remains in them, it stupefies their understanding. So much is this the case that, the first time one of them reads an article like this, it is apt to strike him as an open attack upon the sufficiency of Christ’s finished work, as though we were here teaching that the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb needed to be plussed by something from the creature. Not so. Nothing but the merits of Immanuel can ever give any sinner title to stand before the ineffably holy God. But what we are now contending for is, “*When* does God impute to any sinner the righteousness of Christ?” Certainly not while he is opposed to Him!

Moreover, we do not honour the work of Christ until we correctly define *what* that work was designed to effect. The Lord of glory did not come here and die to procure the pardon of our sins, and take us to heaven, while our hearts still remain cleaving to the earth. No, He came here to prepare a way to heaven (Joh 10:4; 14:4; Heb 10:20-22; 1Pe 2:21), to call men into that way, that by His precepts and promises, His example and Spirit, He might form and fashion their souls to that glorious state and make them willing to abandon all things for it. He lived and died so that His Spirit should come and quicken the dead sinners into newness of life, make them new creatures in Himself, and cause them to sojourn in this world as those who are not of it, as those whose hearts have already departed from it. Christ did not come here to render a change of heart, repentance, faith, personal holiness, loving God supremely, and obeying Him unreservedly, as unnecessary, or salvation as possible *without* them. How passing strange that any suppose He did!

Ah, my reader, it becomes a searching test for each of our hearts to face honestly the question, “*Is this* what I really long for?” As John Bunyan (1628-1688) asked (in his, *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved*), “What are thy desires? Wouldest thou be saved? Wouldest thou

be saved with a *thorough* salvation? Wouldest thou be saved from guilt, and from filth too? Wouldest thou be the *servant* of the Saviour? Art thou indeed weary of the service of thy old master, the devil, sin, and the world? And have these desires put thy soul to flight? Doest thou fly to Him that is a Saviour from the wrath to come, for life? If these be thy desires, and if they be unfeigned, fear not.”

“Many people think that when we preach salvation, we mean salvation from going to hell. We do mean that, but we mean a great deal more. We preach salvation from *sin*. We say that Christ is able to save a man, and we mean by that that He is able to save him from sin and to make him holy, to make him a new man. No person has any right to say, ‘I am saved,’ while he continues in sin as he did before. How can you be saved from sin while you are living in it? A man that is drowning cannot say he is saved from the water while he is sinking in it. A man that is frost-bitten cannot say, with any truth, that he is saved from the cold while he is stiffened in the wintry blast. No, man, Christ did not come to save thee *in* thy sins, but to save thee *from* thy sins, not to make the disease so that it should not kill thee, but to let it remain in itself mortal, and, nevertheless, to remove it from thee and thee from it. Christ Jesus came, then, to heal us from the plague of sin, to touch us with His hand, and say, ‘I will, be thou clean’” (C. H. Spurgeon, on Mat 9:12, 1834-1892).

They, who do not yearn after holiness of heart and righteousness of life, are only deceiving themselves when they suppose they desire to be saved by Christ. The plain fact is, all that is wanted by so many today is merely a soothing portion for their conscience, which will enable them to go on comfortably in a course of self-pleasing, which will permit them to continue their worldly ways without the fear of eternal punishment. Human nature is the same the world over; that wretched instinct which causes multitudes to believe that paying a papist priest a few dollars procures forgiveness of all their past sins, and an “indulgence” for future ones, moves other multitudes to devour greedily the lie that, with an unbroken and impenitent heart, by a mere act of the will, they may “believe in Christ,” and thereby obtain not only God’s pardon for past sins but an “eternal security,” no matter what they do or do not do in the future.

Oh, my reader, be not deceived. God frees none from the condemnation but those “which are *in Christ Jesus*” (Rom 8:1), and “If any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*: old things are [*not* “ought to be”] passed away; behold, *all things are* become new (2Co 5:17). Saving faith makes a sinner come to Christ with a real soul-thirst, that he may drink of the living water, even of His sanctifying Spirit (Joh 7:38-39). To love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to pray for them that despitefully use us, is very far from being easy, yet *this* is only one part of the task which Christ assigns unto those who would be *His* disciples. *He* acted thus, and He has left us an example, that we should follow His steps. And *His* “salvation,” in its *present* application, consists of revealing to our hearts the imperative need for our measuring up to His high and holy standard, with a realization of our own utter powerlessness so to do, and creating within us an intense hunger and thirst after such personal righteousness, and a daily turning unto Him and trustful supplication for needed grace and strength.

## PROFITING FROM THE WORD

### 7. *The Scriptures and the World*

Not a little is written to the Christian in the New Testament about “the world” and his attitude towards it. Its real nature is plainly defined and the believer is solemnly warned against it. God’s holy Word is a light from heaven, shining here “in a dark place” (2Pe 1:19). Its divine rays exhibit things in their true colours, penetrating and exposing the false veneer and glamour by which many objects are cloaked. That world upon which so much labour is bestowed and money spent, and which is so highly extolled and admired by its blinded dupes, is declared to be “the enemy of God” (Jam 4:4). Therefore are His children forbidden to be “conformed” (Rom 12:2) to it and to have their affections set upon it.

The present phase of our subject is by no means the least important of those that have already been before us, and the serious reader will do well to seek divine grace to measure himself or herself by it. One of the exhortations which God has addressed to His children is, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may *grow* thereby” (1Pe 2:2), and it behoves each one of them honestly and diligently to examine himself so as to discover whether or not this be the case with him. Nor are we to be content with an increase of mere head-knowledge of Scripture. What we need to be most concerned about is our *practical* growth, our experimental conformity to the image of Christ. And one point at which we may test ourselves is, “Does my reading and study of God’s Word make me less worldly?”

1. We profit from the Word when our eyes are opened to *discern the true character of the world*. One of the poets wrote, “God’s in His heaven—all’s right with the world.” From one standpoint, that is blessedly true, but from another, it is radically wrong, for, “The whole world lieth in wickedness” (1Jo 5:19). But it is only as the heart is supernaturally enlightened by the Holy Spirit that we are enabled to perceive that that which is highly esteemed among men is really “abomination in the sight of God” (Luk 16:15). It is much to be thankful for when the soul is able to see that the “world” is a gigantic fraud, a hollow bauble, a vile thing, which must one day be burned up.

Before we go farther, let us define that “world” which the Christian is forbidden to love. There are few words found upon the pages of Holy Writ used with a greater variety of meanings than this one. Yet careful attention to the context will usually determine its scope. The “world” is a system or order of things, complete in itself. No foreign element is suffered to intrude, or if it does, it is speedily accommodated or assimilated to itself. The “world” is fallen human nature acting itself out in the human family, fashioning the framework of human society in accord with its own tendencies. It is the organized kingdom of the “carnal mind” which is “enmity against God” and which is “*not* subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). Wherever the “carnal mind” is, there is “the world”—so that worldliness is the world without God.

2. We profit from the Word when we learn that the world is *an enemy to be resisted and overcome*. The Christian is bidden to “Fight the good fight of faith” (1Ti 6:12), which implies that there are foes to be met and vanquished. As there is the Holy Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—so also is there an evil trinity—the flesh, the world,

and the devil. The child of God is called unto a mortal combat with them. "Mortal" we say, for either they will destroy him or he will get the victory over them. Settle it, then, in your mind, my reader, that the world is a deadly enemy, and if you do not vanquish it in your heart, then you are no child of God, for it is written, "For whatsoever is born of God *overcometh* the world" (1Jo 5:4).

Out of many, the following reasons may be given as to why the world *must* be "overcome." First, all its alluring objects tend to divert the attention and alienate the affections of the soul from God—necessarily so, for it is the tendency of things seen to turn the heart away from things unseen. Second, the spirit of the world is diametrically opposed to the Spirit of Christ, therefore did the apostle write, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God" (1Co 2:12). The Son of God came into the world, but "The world knew Him not" (Joh 1:10), therefore did its "princes" and rulers crucify Him (1Co 2:8). Third, its concerns and cares are hostile to a devout and heavenly life. Christians, like the rest of mankind, are required by God to labour six days in the week. But while so employed, they need to be constantly on their guard, lest covetous *interests* govern them rather than the performance of *duty*.

"This is the victory that *overcometh* the world, even our faith" (1Jo 5:4). Naught but a God-given faith *can* overcome the world. But as the heart is occupied with invisible, yet eternal realities, it is delivered from the corrupting influence of worldly objects. The eyes of faith discern the things of sense in their real colours, and see that they are empty and vain, and not worthy to be compared with the great and glorious objects of eternity. A felt sense of the perfections and presence of God makes the world appear less than nothing. When the Christian views the divine Redeemer dying for his sins, living to intercede for his perseverance, reigning and overruling things for his final salvation, he exclaims, "There is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."

And how is it with *you*, dear reader? You may cordially assent to what has just been said in the last paragraph, but how is it with you *actually*? Do the things, which are so highly valued by the unregenerate, charm and enthrall you? Take away from the worldling those things in which he delights, and he is wretched. Is this so with you? Or, are your *present* joy and satisfaction found in objects which can *never* be taken from you? Treat not these questions lightly, we beseech you, but ponder them seriously in the presence of God. The *honest* answer to them will be an index to the real state of your soul, and will indicate whether or not you are deceived into supposing yourself to be "a new creature in Christ Jesus."

3. We profit from the Word when we learn that Christ died *to deliver us from* "this present evil world" (Gal 1:4). The Son of God came here not only to "fulfil" the requirements of the law (Mat 5:17), to "destroy the works of the devil" (1Jo 3:8), to deliver us "from the wrath to come" (1Th 1:10), to save us from our sins (Mat 1:21), but also to free us from the bondage of this world, to deliver the soul from its enthralling influence. This was foreshadowed of old in God's dealings with Israel. They were slaves in Egypt, and "Egypt" is a figure of the world. They were in cruel bondage, spending their time in "making bricks" for Pharaoh. They were unable to free themselves. But JEHOVAH, by His mighty power, emancipated them, and brought them forth out of the "iron furnace" (Deu 4:20). Thus does Christ with His own. He breaks the power of the world over their

hearts. He makes them independent of it, that they neither court its favours nor fear its frowns.

Christ gave Himself a sacrifice for the sins of His people that, in consequence thereof, they might be delivered from the damning power and governing influence of all that is evil in this present world—from Satan, who is its prince—from the lusts which predominate in it—from the vain conversation of the men who belong to it. Now the Holy Spirit, indwelling the saints, co-operates with Christ in this blessed work. He turns their thoughts and affections away from earthly things to heavenly. By the working of His power, He frees from the demoralizing influence which surrounds us, and conforms to the heavenly standard. And as the Christian grows in grace, he recognizes this, and acts accordingly. He *seeks* yet fuller deliverance from this “present *evil* world” (Gal 1:4), and begs God to free him from it completely. That which once charmed him now nauseates. He longs for the time when he shall be taken out of this scene where his blessed Lord is so grievously dishonoured.

4. We profit from the Word when our *hearts are weaned from it*. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1Jo 2:15). “What the stumbling-block is to the traveler in the way, the weight to the runner, the lime twigs to the bird in its flight, so is the love of the world to a Christian in his course—either wholly diverting him from, greatly enticing him in, or forcibly turning him out of it” (Nathanael Hardy, 1618-1670). The truth is that until the heart be purged from this corruption, the ear will be deaf to divine instruction. Not until we are lifted above the things of time and sense can we be subdued unto obedience to God. Heavenly truth glides off a carnal mind as water from a spherical body.

The world has turned its back upon Christ, and though His name is professed in many places, yet will it have nothing to do with Him. All the desires and designs of worldlings are for the gratification of *self*. Let their aims and pursuits be as varied as they may, self being supreme, everything is subordinated to the pleasing thereof. Now, Christians are in the world, and cannot get out of it. They have to live their Lord’s appointed time in it. While here, they have to earn their living, support their families, and attend to their worldly business. But they are forbidden to *love* the world, as though it could make them happy. Their “treasure” and “portion” are to be found elsewhere.

The world appeals to every instinct of fallen man. It contains a thousand objects to charm him. They attract his attention. The attention creates a desire for and love of them, and insensibly, yet surely, they make deeper and deeper impressions on his heart. It has the same fatal influence on *all* classes. But attractive and appealing as its varied objects may be, all the pursuits and pleasures of the world are designed and adopted to promote the happiness of *this life only*—therefore, “What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” The Christian is taught by the Spirit, and through His presenting of Christ before the soul, his thoughts are diverted from the world. Just as a little child will readily drop a dirty object when something more pleasing is offered to it, so the heart, which is in communion with God, will say, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord...and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Phi 3:8).

5. We profit from the Word when we *walk in separation from* the world. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jam 4:4). Such a verse as this ought to search every one of us through and through, and make us tremble. How can I fraternize with or seek my pleasure in that which condemned the Son of God? If I do, that at once identifies me with His enemies. Oh, my reader, make no mistake upon this point. It is written, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1Jo 2:15).

Of old, it was said of the people of God that they "shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num 23:9). Surely the disparity of character and conduct, the desires and pursuits, which distinguish the regenerate from the unregenerate *must* separate the one from the other. We who profess to have our citizenship in another world, to be guided by another Spirit, to be directed by another rule, and to be journeying to another country, cannot go arm in arm with those who *despise* all such things! Then let everything in and about us exhibit the character of Christian *pilgrims*. May we indeed be "men wondered at" (Zec 3:8) because "*not conformed to this world*" (Rom 12:2).

6. We profit from the Word when we *evoke the hatred of* the world. What pains are taken in the world to save appearances and keep up a seemly and good state! Its conventionalities and civilities, its courtesies and charities, are so many contrivances to give an air of respectability to it. So too its churches and cathedrals, its priests and prelates, are needed to gloss over the corruption which seethes beneath the surface. And to make good weight, "Christianity" is added, and the holy name of Christ is taken upon the lips of thousands of those who have never taken *His* "yoke" upon them. Of them, God says, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Mat 15:8).

And what is to be the attitude of all real Christians toward such? The answer of Scripture is plain, "From such turn away" (2Ti 3:5), "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2Co 6:17). And what will follow when this divine command is obeyed? Why, then we shall prove the truth of those words of Christ's, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world *hateth* you" (Joh 15:19). *Which* "world" is specifically in view here? Let the previous verse answer, "If the world hate you, ye know it hated me before it hated you." *What* "world" hated Christ and hounded Him to death? The *religious* world, those who pretended to be most zealous for God's glory. So it is now. Let the Christian turn his back upon a Christ-dishonouring Christendom, and his fiercest foes and most relentless and unscrupulous enemies will be those who claim to be Christians themselves! But "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you...for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad" (Mat 5:11-12). Ah, my brother, it is a healthy sign, a sure mark that you are profiting from the Word, when the religious world hates you. But if, on the other hand, you still have a "good standing" in the "churches" or "assemblies," there is grave reason to fear that you love the praise of men more than that of God!

7. We profit from the Word when we are *elevated above* the world. First, above its *customs and fashions*. The worldling is a slave to the prevailing habits and styles of the day. Not so the one who is walking with God. His chief concern is to be "conformed to the image of his Son." Second, above its *cares and sorrows*. Of old, it was said of the saints

that they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had “in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb 10:34). Third, above its *temptations*. What attraction has the glare and glitter of the world for those who are “delighting themselves in the Lord”? None whatever. Fourth, above its *opinions and approvals*. Have you learned to be independent of and defy the world? If your whole heart is set upon pleasing God, you will be quite unconcerned about the frowns of the goddess.

Now, my reader, do you really wish to measure yourself by the contents of this article? Then, seek honest answers to the following questions. First, what are the objects before your mind in times of recreation? What do your thoughts most run upon? Second, what are the objects of your *choice*? When you have to decide how to spend an evening or the Sabbath afternoon, *what* do you select? Third, which occasions you the most sorrow, the loss of earthly things, or lack of communion with God? Which causes greater grief (or chagrin), the spoiling of your plans, or the coldness of your heart to Christ? Fourth, what is your favourite topic of conversation? Do you hanker after the news of the day, or to meet with those who talk of the “altogether lovely” One? Fifth, do your “good intentions” materialize, or are they nothing but empty dreams? Are you spending more or less time than formerly on your knees? Is the Word sweeter to your taste, or has your soul lost its relish for it?

## COMING TO CHRIST

### *Part I*

By way of introduction, let us bring before the readers the following Scriptures. (1) “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (Joh 5:40). (2) “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mat 11:28). (3) “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44). (4) “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37). (5) “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luk 14:26-27). (6) “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious” (1Pe 2:4). (7) “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).

The first of these passages applies to every unregenerate man and woman on this earth. While he is in a state of nature, no man can come to Christ. Though all excellencies both divine and human are found in the Lord Jesus, though He is “altogether lovely” (Song 5:16), yet the fallen sons of Adam see in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. They may be well instructed in “the doctrine of Christ,” they may believe unhesitatingly all that Scripture affirms concerning Him, they may frequently take His name upon their lips,



profess to be resting on His finished work, sing His praises, yet their *hearts* are far from Him. The things of this world have the first place in their affections. The gratifying of self is their dominant concern. They surrender not their lives to Him. He is too holy to suit their love of sin. His claims are too exacting to suit their selfish hearts. His terms of discipleship are too severe to suit their fleshly ways. They *will not* yield to His lordship—true alike with each one of us till God performs a miracle of grace upon our hearts.

The second passage contains a gracious invitation, made by the compassionate Saviour, to a particular class of sinners. The “all” is at once qualified, clearly and definitely, by the words which immediately follow it. The character of those to whom this loving word belongs is clearly defined. It is those who “labour” and are “heavy laden.” Most clearly, then, it applies not to the vast majority of our light-hearted, gay-hearted, pleasure-seeking fellows, who have no regard for God’s glory and no concern about their eternal welfare. No, the word for such poor creatures is rather, “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, for all these things God *will* bring thee into judgment” (Ecc 11:9). But to those who have “labored” hard to keep the law and please God, who are “heavy laden” with a felt sense of their utter inability to meet His requirements, and who long to be delivered from the power and pollution of sin, Christ says, “Come unto me, and I will give you rest” (Mat 11:28).

The third passage quoted above at once tells us that, “coming to Christ,” is *not* the easy matter so many imagine it, nor so simple a thing as most preachers represent it to be. Instead of its so being, the incarnate Son of God positively declares that such an act is utterly impossible to a fallen and depraved creature unless and until divine power is brought to bear upon him. A most pride-humbling, flesh-withering, man-abasing word is this. “Coming to Christ” is a far, far different thing from raising your hand to be prayed for by some Protestant “priest,” coming forward, and taking some cheap-jack evangelist’s hand, signing some “decision” card, uniting with some “church,” or any other of the “many inventions” (Ecc 7:29) of man. Before anyone can or will “come to Christ,” the understanding must be enlightened, the heart must be supernaturally changed, the stubborn will must be supernaturally broken.

The fourth passage is also one that is unpalatable to the carnal mind, yet is it a precious portion unto the Spirit-taught children of God. It sets forth the blessed truth of unconditional election, or the discriminating grace of God. It speaks of a favoured people whom the Father gives to His Son. It declares that every one of that blessed company shall come to Christ—neither the effects of their fall in Adam, the power of indwelling sin, the hatred and untiring efforts of Satan, nor the deceptive delusions of blind preachers, will be able finally to hinder them—when God’s appointed hour arrives, each of His elect is delivered from the power and darkness and is translated into the kingdom of His dear Son. It announces that each such one who comes to Christ, no matter how unworthy and vile he be in himself, no matter how black and long the awful catalogue of his sins, He will by no means despise or fail to welcome him, and under no circumstances will He ever cast him off.

The fifth passage is one that makes known the terms on which alone Christ is willing to receive sinners. Here, the uncompromising claims of His holiness are set out. He must be

crowned Lord of all, or He will not be Lord at all. There must be the complete heart-renunciation of all that stands in competition with Him. He will brook no rival. All that pertains to “the flesh,” whether found in a loved one or in self, has to be hated. The “cross” is the badge of Christian discipleship—not a golden one worn on the body, but the principle of self-denial and self-sacrifice ruling the heart. How evident is it, then, that a mighty, supernatural, divine work of grace *must* be wrought in the human heart if any man will even *desire* to meet such terms!

The sixth passage tells us that the Christian is to *continue as he began*. We are to “come to Christ” not once and for all, but frequently, daily. He is the only One who can minister unto our needs, and to Him we must constantly turn for the supply of them. In our felt emptiness, we must draw from His fullness (Joh 1:16). In our weakness, we must turn to Him for strength. In our ignorance, we must apply to Him for wisdom. In our falls into sin, we must seek afresh His cleansing. *All* that we need for time and eternity is stored up in Him—refreshment when we are weary (Isa 40:31), healing of body when we are sick (Exo 15:26), comfort when we are sad (1Pe 5:7), deliverance when we are tempted (Heb 2:18). If we have wandered away from Him, left our first love, then the remedy is to “repent, and do the *first* works” (Rev 2:5). That is, cast ourselves upon Him anew, come just as we did the first time we came to Him—as unworthy, self-confessed sinners, seeking His mercy and forgiveness.

The seventh passage assures us of the eternal security of those who do come. Christ saves “unto the uttermost” or “for evermore” those who come unto God by Him. He is not of one mind today and of another tomorrow. No, He is “the same yesterday, and today, and for ever” (Heb 13:8). “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (Joh 13:1), and “He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Inasmuch as *His* prayers are effectual, for He declares that the Father hears Him “always” (Joh 11:42), none whose name is indelibly stamped on the heart of our great High Priest can ever perish. Hallelujah!

Having thus sought to introduce some of the leading aspects of the subject which is to engage our attention, we now propose to enter into some detail as the Spirit of truth is pleased to grant us His much-needed assistance.

### *I. Obstacles in coming to Christ*

Under this head, we shall try to show *why* the natural man is *unable* to come to Christ.”

1. Let us again quote John 6:44, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” The reason why this is such a “hard saying,” even unto thousands who profess to be Christians, is that they utterly fail to realize the terrible havoc which the fall has wrought, and, it is greatly to be feared, because they are themselves strangers to “the plague” of their own hearts (1Ki 8:38). Surely if the Spirit had ever awakened them from the sleep of spiritual death, and given them to see something of the dreadful state they were in by nature, and they had been brought to feel that the carnal mind *in them* was “enmity against God” (Rom 8:7), then they would no longer cavil against this solemn word of Christ’s. But the spiritually dead can neither see nor feel spiritually.

Wherein lies the total inability of the natural man? It is *not in the lack of the necessary facilities*. This needs to be plainly insisted upon, otherwise fallen man would cease to be a

responsible creature. Fearful as were the effects of the fall, they deprived man of none of the faculties with which God originally endowed him. True it is that the coming of sin took away from man all power to use those faculties aright, that is, to employ them for the glory of his Maker. Nevertheless, fallen man possesses identically the same threefold nature of spirit and soul and body, as he did before the fall. No part of man's being was annihilated, though each part was defiled and corrupted by sin. True, man died spiritually, but death is not extinction of being. Spiritual death is *alienation from God* (Eph 4:18). The spiritually dead one is very much alive and active in the service of Satan.

No, the inability of fallen man to "come to Christ" lies in no physical or mental defect. He has the same feet to take him unto a place where the Gospel is preached as he has to walk with to a picture-show. He has the same eyes with which to read the Holy Scriptures as he has to read the world's newspapers. He has the same lips and voice for calling upon God as he now uses in idle talk or foolish song. So too he has the same mental faculties for pondering the things of God and the concerns of eternity as he now uses so diligently in connection with his business. It is because of this that man is "without excuse." It is the *misuse* of the faculties with which the Creator has endowed him that increases man's guilt. Let every servant of God see to it that those things are constantly pressed upon his unsaved hearers.

2. We have to search deeper in order to find the seat of man's spiritual impotency. His inability lies in *his corrupt nature*. Through Adam's fall, and through our own sin, our nature has become so debased and depraved that it is impossible for any man to "come to Christ," to "love him and serve him," to esteem Him more highly than all the world put together and submit to His rule, until the Spirit of God renews him, and implants a new nature. A bitter fountain cannot send forth sweet waters, nor an evil tree produce good fruit. Let us try to make this still clearer by an illustration. It is the *nature* of a vulture to feed upon carrion. True, it has the same bodily members to feed upon the wholesome grain the hens do, but it lacks the disposition and relish for it. It is the nature of a sow to wallow in the mire. True, it has the same legs as a sheep to conduct it to the meadow, but it lacks the desire for the green pastures. So it is with unregenerate man. He has the same physical and mental faculties as the regenerate have for the things and service of God, but he has no love for them.

"Adam...begat a son in his own likeness, after his image" (Gen 5:3). What an awful contrast is found here with that which we read two verses before, "God created man, in the likeness of God made he him." In the interval, Adam had fallen, and a fallen parent could beget only a fallen child, transmitting unto him his own depravity. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" (Job 14:4). Therefore do we find the sweet singer of Israel declaring, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa 51:5). Though, later, grace made him the man after God's own heart, yet by nature, David (as we) was a mass of iniquity and sin. How early does this corruption of nature appear in children. "Even a child is known by his doings" (Pro 20:11), the evil bias of its heart is soon manifested—pride, self-will, vanity, lying, averseness to good, are the bitter fruits which quickly appear on the tender but vitiated twig.

3. The inability of the natural man to "come to Christ" lies in *the complete darkness of his understanding*. This leading faculty of the soul has been despoiled of its primitive

glory, and covered over with confusion. Both mind and conscience are defiled, "There is none that understandeth" (Rom 3:11). Solemnly did the apostle remind the saints, "Ye were sometimes darkness" (Eph 5:8), not merely "in darkness," but "darkness" itself. "Sin has closed the windows of the soul. Darkness is over all the region. It is the land of darkness and shadow of death, where the light is as darkness. The prince of darkness reigns there and nothing but the works of darkness are framed there. We are born spiritually blind and cannot be restored without a miracle of grace. This is thy case whoever thou art, that art not born again" (Thomas Boston, 1676-1732). "They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge" (Jer 4:22).

"The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). There is in the unregenerate *an opposition* to spiritual things and an aversion against them. God has made a revelation of His will unto sinners touching the way of salvation, yet they will not walk therein. They hear that Christ alone is able to save, yet they refuse to part with those things that hinder their coming to Him. They hear that it is sin which slays the soul, and yet they cherish it in their bosoms. They heed not the threatenings of God. Men believe that fire will burn them, and are at great pains to avoid it. Yet they show by their actions that they regard the everlasting burnings as a mere scarecrow. The divine commandments are "holy, just and good," but men hate them, and observe them only so far as their respectability among men is promoted.

4. The inability of the natural man to "come to Christ" lies in *the complete corruption of his affections*. "Man as he is, before he receives the grace of God, loves anything and everything above spiritual things. If ye want proof of this, look around you. There needs no monument to the depravity of the human affections. Cast your eyes everywhere—there is not a street, nor a house, nay, nor a heart, which doth not bear upon it sad evidence of this dreadful truth. Why is it that men are not found on the Sabbath day universally flocking to the house of God? Why are we not more constantly found reading our Bibles? How is it that prayer is a duty almost universally neglected? Why is Christ Jesus so little beloved? Why are even His professed followers so cold in their affections to Him? Whence arise these things? Assuredly, dear brethren, we can trace them to no other source than this, the corruption and vitiation of the affections. We love that which we ought to hate, and we hate that which we ought to love. It is but human nature, fallen human nature, that man should love this present life better than the life to come. It is but the effect of the fall, that man should love sin better than righteousness, and the ways of this world better than the ways of God." (C. H. Spurgeon, sermon on John 6:44).

The affections of the unrenewed man are wholly depraved and distempered. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and *desperately wicked*" (Jer 17:9). Solemnly did the Lord Jesus affirm that the affections of fallen man are a mother of abominations, "For from within [not from the devil], out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness" (Mar 7:21-22). The natural man's affections are wretchedly misplaced. He is a spiritual monster. His heart is where his feet should be, fixed on the earth. His heels are lifted up against heaven, which his heart should be set on, Acts 9:5. His face is towards hell, his back towards heaven, and therefore, God calls to him to turn. He joys in what he ought to mourn for, and mourns for what he should rejoice in, glories in his

shame, and is ashamed of his glory, abhors what he should desire, and desires what he should abhor, Pro 2:13-15 (from Thomas Boston's *Fourfold State*, 1676-1732).

5. The inability of the natural man to "come to Christ" lies in *the total perversity of his will*. "Oh," said the Arminian, 'men may be saved if they will.' We reply, 'My dear sir, we all believe that, but it is just the, *if they will*, that is the difficulty.' We assert that no man *will* come to Christ unless he be drawn. Nay, *we* do not assert it, but *Christ* Himself declares it, 'Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life' (Joh 5:40). And as long as that, 'Ye will not come,' stands on record in Holy Scripture, we shall not be brought to believe in any doctrine of the freedom of the human will. It is strange how people, when talking about free will, talk of things which they do not at all understand. 'Now,' says one, 'I believe men can be saved if they will.' My dear sir, that is not the question at all. The question is, are men ever found naturally willing to submit to the humbling terms of the Gospel of Christ? We declare, upon scriptural authority, that the human will is so desperately set on mischief, so depraved, and so inclined to everything that is evil, and so disinclined to everything that is good, that without the powerful, supernatural, irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit, no human being will ever be constrained towards Christ" (C. H. Spurgeon).

"Now here is a threefold cord against heaven and holiness, not easily to be broken—a blind man, a perverse will, and disorderly, distempered affections. The mind, swelled with self-conceit, says the man should not stoop. The will, opposite to the will of God, says he will not. And the corrupt affections rising against the Lord, in defence of the corrupt will, says he shall not. Thus, the poor creature stands out against God and goodness, till a day of power come, in which he is made a new creature" (T. Boston). Perhaps some readers are inclined to say, "Such teaching as this is calculated to discourage sinners and drive them to despair." Our answer is, first, that it is according to God's Word! Second, oh that it may please Him to use this article to drive some to despair of all help from themselves. Third, it makes manifest the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit's working with such depraved and spiritually helpless creatures, if they are ever to come savingly to Christ. And until this is clearly perceived, *His* aid will never be *really* sought in earnest!

## HEART WORK

### *Part 1*

"Do you think you came into this world to spend your whole time and strength in your employments, your trades, your pleasures, unto the satisfaction of the will of the flesh and of the mind? Have you time enough to eat, to drink, to sleep, and talk unprofitably—it may be corruptly—in all sorts of unnecessary societies, but have not enough time to live unto God, in the very essentials of that life? Alas, you came into the world under this law, 'It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment' (Heb 9:27), and the end (purpose) why your life is here granted unto you is that you may be prepared for that

judgment. If this be neglected, if the principal part of your time be not improved with respect unto this end, you will yet fall under the sentence of it unto eternity" (John Owen, 1616-1683).

Multitudes seem to be running, but few "pressing toward the mark" (Phi 3:14). Many talk about salvation, but few experience the joy of it. There is much of the form of godliness, but little of the power of it. Oh, how rare it is to find any who know anything experimentally of the power that separates from the world, delivers from self, defends from Satan, makes sin to be hated, Christ to be loved, truth to be prized, and error and evil to be departed from. Where shall we find those who are denying self, taking up their cross daily, and following Christ in the path of obedience? Where are they who hail reproach, welcome shame, and endure persecution? Where are they who are truly getting prayer *answered* daily, on whose behalf God is showing Himself strong? Something is radically wrong somewhere. Yes, and as surely as the beating of the pulse is an index to the state of our most vital physical organ, so the lives of professing Christians make it unmistakably evident that their *hearts* are diseased!

"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2Ch 16:9). Ah, do not the opening words indicate that those with "perfect" hearts are few and far between, that they are hard to locate? Surely it does, and it has ever been the case. David cried, "Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men" (Psa 12:1). The Lord Jesus had to lament, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought" (Isa 49:4). The apostle Paul declared, "I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phi 2:20-21). "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (2Ti 1:15). And things are neither better nor worse today. But, my reader, instead of talking about the "apostasy of Christendom," instead of being occupied with the empty profession all around us, what about your own hearts? Is *your* heart "perfect"? If so, even in these so-called "hard times," God is "showing himself strong" in your behalf. That is, He is working miracles for you, and ministering to you in a way that He is not to the empty professors. But if God is not so doing, then *your* heart is *not* "perfect" toward Him, and it is high time for you to take stock and get down to serious soul business.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Pro 4:23). The pains which multitudes have taken in religion are but lost labour. Like the Pharisees of old, they have been tithing anise and mint and cumin, but neglecting the weightier matters. Many have a zeal, but it is not according to knowledge. They are active, but their energies are misdirected. They have wrought "many wonderful works," but they are rejected of God. Why? Because their employments are self-selected or man-appointed, while the one great task which God has assigned is left unattended to. All outward actions are worthless while our hearts be not right with God. He will not so much as hear our prayers while we regard iniquity in our hearts (Psa 66:18)! Let us, then, endeavour further to point out what is signified by this supremely important exhortation.

To "keep" the heart signifies *to have the conscience exercised about all things*. In numbers of passages, "heart" and "conscience" signify one and the same things—see 1 Samuel 24:5; 2 Samuel 24:10; 1 John 3:21, etc. The apostle Paul declared, "Herein do I

exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Act 24:16), and herein he sets before us an example which we need to emulate. After the most careful and diligent manner, we must strive to keep the conscience free from all offence in the discharge of every duty that God requires, and in rendering to every man what is due him. Though this is never perfectly attained in this life, every regenerate soul has a real concern for such a state of conscience. "A good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly" (Heb 13:18) is worth far more than rubies.

This is to be something more than an empty wish which gets us nowhere. The apostle said, "Herein do I *exercise* myself" (Act 24:16). It was a matter of deep concern to him and one to which he assiduously applied himself. He labored hard in seeing to it that his conscience did not flatter, deceiving and misleading him. He was conscientious over both his outer and inner life, so that his conscience accused and condemned him not. He was more careful not to offend his conscience than he was to displease his dearest friend. He made it his daily business to live by this rule, abstaining from many a thing into which natural inclination drew him, and performing many a duty which the ease-loving flesh would shirk. He steadily maintained a care not to break the law of love toward either God or man. And, when conscious of failure, he saw to it that by renewed acts of repentance and faith (in confession), each offence was removed from his conscience, instead of allowing guilt to accumulate thereon.

"Now the end of the commandment is charity [love] out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (1Ti 1:5). The "commandment" is the same as the "holy commandment" of 2 Peter 2:21, namely, the Gospel, as including the moral law, which enjoined perfect love both to God and to our neighbour. The "end" or design—that which is enjoined and whose accomplishment is prompted thereby—is *love*. But spiritual "love" can proceed only from "a pure heart," that is, one which has been renewed by grace, and thereby delivered from enmity against God (Rom 8:7), and hatred against man (Ti 3:3), and cleansed from the love and pollution of sin. Spiritual "love" can proceed only out of a "good conscience," that is, a conscience which has been made tender and active by grace, which has been purged by the blood of Christ, and which sedulously avoids all that defiles it and draws away from God. Its possessor being influenced to act conscientiously in the whole of his conduct. It is solemn to note that those who "put away" a good conscience soon make "shipwreck of the faith" (1Ti 1:19).

To "keep" the heart means to "*set the LORD alway before*" us (Psa 16:8). Some may object that those words spoke, prophetically, of the Lord Jesus. True, but remember He has "left us an example *that we should follow* his steps." What, then, is it to "set the LORD alway before" us? It means to remember that we must render to Him a full account of our stewardship, and to let this fact constantly influence us. It means that we are ever to have *His* honour and glory in view, living not to please ourselves, but acting according to His revealed will. It means that we should strive, especially, to have *God* before our souls whenever we engage in any religious exercises. The omniscient One will not be imposed upon by outward forms or empty word. They who worship Him "*must worship him in spirit and in truth*" (Joh 4:24). "Seek ye my face." Oh to respond with David, "*My heart said unto thee, thy face, LORD, will I seek*" (Psa 27:8).

“The well is seldom so full that water will, at first pumping, flow forth, neither is the heart commonly so spiritual—even after our best care in our worldly converse—as to pour itself into God’s bosom freely, without something to raise and elevate it. Yea, often the springs of grace lie so low, that pumping only will not fetch the heart up to a praying frame, but arguments must be poured into the soul before the affections rise” (William Gurnall, 1617-1679). Does not this explain why, after saying, “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name,” the Psalmist *added*, “Bless the LORD, O my soul” (Psa 103:1-2)?

Ah, note well those words, dear reader, “Bless the LORD, O my *soul*,” and not merely by the lips. David dreaded lest, while the outward was awake, his inner man should be asleep. Are you equally careful as to this? David labored so that no dullness and drowsiness should steal over his faculties. Therefore did he add, “*And all that is within me, bless his holy name*”—understanding, conscience, affections, and will. Oh that we may not be guilty of that awful sin about which Christ complained, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth; *but their heart is far from me*” (Mat 15:8). Again, we would note the repetition in verse 2, “Bless the LORD, *O my soul*” (Psa 103:2). How this shows us that we need to bestir ourselves repeatedly when about to approach the Majesty on high, seeking with all our might to throw off the spirit of sloth, formality, and hypocrisy.

Of old, God’s servant complained, “There is none that calleth upon thy name, that *stirreth up himself* to take hold of thee” (Isa 64:7). Are we any better, my friends? Do we really bestir ourselves to “take hold” of God? We shall never be like Jacob—successful “wrestlers” with Him—until we do. There is little wonder that so few obtain answers to their petitions unto the throne of grace. It is not simply prayer, but “the effectual *fervent* prayer of a righteous man that availeth much” (Jam 5:16). Before seeking to approach the Most High, we need to “prepare” our heart (Job 11:13), and beg God to “strengthen” it (Psa 27:14), so that we may trust in Him with all our hearts (Pro 3:5), love Him with all our hearts (Mat 22:37), and praise Him with the whole heart (Psa 9:1).

Oh, the frightful impiety which is now to be witnessed on almost every side, of heedlessly rushing into the holy presence of God (or rather going through the form of doing so), and gabbling off the first things that come to mind. And all of us are more affected by this evil spirit than we imagine, for “evil communications corrupt good manners” (1Co 15:33). We need definitely to seek grace and fight against so grievously insulting God. We need to fix our minds steadily on the august perfections of God, reminding ourselves of *who* it is we are about to approach. We need to seek deliverance from that half-hearted, ill-conceived, careless, and indifferent worship which is offered by so many. We need to ponder God’s grace and goodness unto us, and lay hold of His encouraging promises, that our affections may be inflamed, and our souls brought into that gracious temper which is suited unto Him to whom we owe our all.

But we need diligently to watch our hearts not only when about to approach God in prayer or worship, but also when turning to His holy Word. All ordinances, helps, and means of grace are but empty shells unless we meet with God in them, and for that, He must be sought, “Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jer 29:13). We are not at all likely to obtain any more soul profit from reading of the Scriptures than we are from the perusal of men’s writings if we approach them in the



same spirit as we do human books. God's Word is addressed unto the conscience, and it is only as we strive to have our hearts suitably affected by what we read therein that we may justly expect to be helped spiritually.

God has bidden us, "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: bind them continually upon thine heart" (Pro 6:20-21). And again, "Keep my commandments, and live: and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart" (Pro 7:2-3). This cannot be done by reading the Bible for a few minutes, and then an hour later, forgetting what has been read. Shame on us that we should treat God's Word so lightly! No, we must "meditate therein day and night" (Psa 1:2). Unless we do so, we shall never be able to say, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa 119:11), nor shall we be able to say, "I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always" (Psa 119: 112).

To "keep" the heart signifies *attending diligently to its progress or decay in holiness*. What health is to the body, holiness is to the soul. "I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search" (Psa 77:6). This is absolutely essential if a healthy spiritual life is to be maintained. A part of each day should be set aside for the study of the heart and the cultivation of its faculties. The more this is done, the less difficulty shall we experience in knowing *what* to pray for! Shame on us that we are so diligent in thinking about and caring for our bodies, while the state of our souls is so rarely inquired after! Emulate the example of Hezekiah, who "humbled himself for the pride of his heart" (2Ch 32:26). Peter's heart was lifted up with self-confidence. His fall was preceded by "a haughty spirit."

It is *in the heart* that all backsliding begins. Observe closely your affections, and see whether God or the world is gaining ground in them. Watch whether you experience increasing profit and pleasure in reading God's Word, or whether you have to force yourself to it in order to discharge a duty. Observe the same thing in connection with prayer—whether you are finding increased or decreased liberty in pouring out your heart to God—whether you are having more freedom in so doing, or whether it is becoming an irksome task. Examine well your spiritual graces, and ascertain whether your faith be in lively exercise, feeding upon the precepts and promises of God—whether your hope is lively, anticipating the glorious future—whether your love be fervent or cold—whether patience, meekness, self-control be greater or less.

To "keep" the heart signifies *to store it well with pure and holy things*. As the most effective way of getting a child willingly to drop some dirty trifle is to proffer it an apple or orange, so the best security for the soul against the allurements of Satan is to have it engaged with a lovelier and more satisfying object. A heart which is filled and engaged with good is best protected against evil. Note well the order in Philippians 4:6-8. "Be anxious for nothing: but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *think on these things*." The heart which casts all its care upon God is well guarded from anxiety by His peace; but a pure

atmosphere must be breathed if the soul is to be kept healthy, and that is best promoted by thinking about wholesome, lovely, and praise-provoking things.

Commune frequently with Christ. Dwell upon His loveliness, stay in the sunshine of His presence, refresh your soul with those gifts and graces He is ever ready to bestow, and you shall have in yourself “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Joh 4:14). “Were our affections filled, taken up, and possessed with these things [the beauty of God and the glory of Christ], as it is our duty that they should be, and as it is our happiness when they are, what access could sin—with its painted pleasures, with its sugared poisons, with its envenomed baits—have upon our souls? How we should loathe all its proposals, and say unto them, Get you hence as an abominable thing” (John Owen, 1616-1683).

## THE SUPREMACY OF GOD

In one of his letters of Erasmus, Luther said, “Your thoughts of God are too human.” Probably that renowned scholar resented such a rebuke, the more so since it proceeded from a miner’s son, nevertheless, it was thoroughly deserved. We too, though having no standing among the religious leaders of this degenerate age, prefer the same charge against the vast majority of the preachers of our day, and against those who, instead of searching the Scriptures for themselves, lazily accept their teachings. The most dishonouring and degrading conceptions of the rule and reign of the Almighty are now held almost everywhere. To countless thousands, even among those professing to be Christians, the God of Scripture is quite unknown.

Of old, God complained to an apostate Israel, “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether as thyself” (Psa 50:21). Such must now be His indictment against the apostate Christendom. Men imagine that the Most High is moved by sentiment, rather than actuated by principle. They suppose that His omnipotency is such an idle fiction that Satan is thwarting His designs on every side. They think that if He has formed any plan or purpose at all, then, it must be like theirs, constantly subject to change. They openly declare that whatever power He possesses must be restricted, lest He invade the citadel of man’s “free will” and reduce him to a “machine.” They lower the all-efficacious atonement, which has actually redeemed everyone for whom it was made, to a mere “remedy,” which sin-sick souls may use if they feel disposed to, and then enervate the invincible work of the Holy Spirit to an “offer” of the Gospel which sinners may accept or reject as they please.

The supremacy of the true and living God might well be argued from the infinite distance which separates the mightiest creatures from the almighty Creator. He is the Potter, they are but the clay in His hands, to be moulded into vessels of honour, or to be dashed into pieces (Psa 2:9) as He pleases. Were all the denizens of heaven and all the inhabitants of earth to combine in open revolt against Him, it would occasion Him no uneasiness, and would have less effect upon His eternal and unassailable throne than has the spray of the Mediterranean’s waves upon the towering rocks of Gibraltar. So puerile and powerless is the creature to affect the Most High that Scripture itself tells us that when

the Gentile heads unite with apostate Israel to defy Jehovah and His Christ, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall *laugh*" (Psa 2:4).

The absolute and universal supremacy of God is plainly and positively affirmed in many Scriptures. "Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all...and thou reignest over all" (1Ch 29:11-12)—note "reignest" now, not "will do so in the millennium." "O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? And rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none [not even the devil himself] is able to withstand thee?" (2Ch 20:6). Before Him, presidents and popes, kings and emperors, are less than grasshoppers.

"But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, *even that* he doeth" (Job 23:13). Ah, my reader, the God of Scripture is no make-believe monarch, no mere imaginary sovereign, but King of kings, and Lord of lords. "I know that thou canst do every thing, and that *no* thought of thine can be hindered" (Job 42:2, margin), or as another translator, "no purpose of thine can be frustrated." All that He has designed, He does. All that He has decreed, He perfects. All that He has promised, He performs. "But our God is in the heavens: He hath done *whatsoever* he hath pleased" (Psa 115:3). And why has He? Because, "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD" (Pro 21:30).

God's supremacy over the works of His hands is vividly depicted in Scripture. Inanimate matter, irrational creatures, all perform their Maker's bidding. At His pleasure, the Red Sea divided and its waters stood up as walls (Exo 14), the earth opened her mouth, and guilty rebels went down alive into the pit (Num 16). When He so ordered, the sun stood still (Jos 10), and on another occasion, went *backward* ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz (Isa 38:8). To exemplify His supremacy, He made ravens carry food to Elijah (1Ki 17), iron to swim on top of the waters (2Ki 6:5-6), lions to be tame when Daniel was cast into their den (Dan 6), fire to burn not when the three Hebrews were flung into its flames (Dan 3). Thus, "Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Psa 135:6).

The absolute and universal supremacy of God is affirmed with equal plainness and positiveness in the New Testament. There we are told that God "worketh *all* things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph 1:11)—the Greek for "worketh" means "to work effectually." For this reason, we read, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom 11:36). Men may boast that they are free agents, with wills of their own, and are at liberty to do as they please, but Scripture says to those who boast, "We will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell...Ye ought to say, *if the Lord* will" (Jam 4:13, 15)!

Here then is a sure resting-place for the heart. Our lives are neither the product of blind fate nor the result of capricious chance, but every detail of them was ordained from all eternity, and is now ordered by the living and reigning God. Not a hair of our heads can be touched without His permission. "A man's heart deviseth his way: *but the LORD* directeth his steps" (Pro 16:9). What assurance, what strength, what comfort this should give the real

Christian! “My times are in *thy* hand” (Psa 31:15). Then, let me “*rest in the LORD*, and wait patiently for him” (Psa 37:7).

