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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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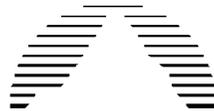
CONTENTS

All Things	3
The Prayers of the Apostles	5
<i>48. 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, Part 2</i>	
The Life and Times of Joshua.....	9
<i>28. Circumcision, Part 2</i>	
Divorce, Part 4	13
The Doctrine of Revelation.....	16
<i>12. The Holy Bible, Part 4</i>	
Our Annual Letter	20

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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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ALL THINGS

Those two words supply an example of something to which we allude in these pages every once in a while, and which requires to be frequently emphasized in this age of shallowness, namely, the danger there is of being misled by the *sound* of certain expressions in the Scriptures through failing to ascertain their real sense. Among professing Christians, there are not a few superficial people who imagine that the bare quoting of a verse is sufficient to prove their point and silence an opponent, whether that verse be relevant or no, whether the letter of it accord with or contradict other passages. There are others who, in a mistaken zeal for the integrity and authority of the Word, suppose it would be a perversion or denial of it to place a different meaning upon what appears to be its obvious signification. Luther's tenacious insistence that Christ's words concerning the sacramental bread—"this is my body"—must be understood literally, is a case in point. In like manner, it is supposed that when a verse says "*all men*" or "*all things*," it "*means what it says*" and is to be understood universally.

"Behold, I have foretold you *all things*" (Mar 13:23): surely it is obvious that those words are not to be taken without any limitation. "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did" (Joh 4:29) is not to be understood absolutely. "All things are lawful unto me" (1Co 6:12) would flatly contradict many passages if it were regarded without any qualification. When the apostle said, "I am made all things to all men" (1Co 9:22), his words must be explained in the light of what immediately precedes. "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (1Jo 2:20) surely does not mean *everything* knowable; for if it did, it would be affirming that those Christians were omniscient. The words "*all things*," like all others in Scripture, require *interpreting*!

"With God all things are possible" (Mat 19:26). Doubtless, it will appear to some of our readers that we rob the statement of much of its preciousness if we affirm that it cannot be taken without any limitation, yet such is the case. God Himself has plainly told us in His Word that there are some things which He cannot do. "God *cannot* be tempted with evil" (Jam 1:13), He "*cannot deny*" Himself (2Ti 2:13), He "*cannot lie*" (Ti 1:2)—and thankful we are that He cannot. That He is unable to do so only demonstrates His ineffable holiness and absolute perfection. "With God all things are possible" is the same as "Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" (Gen 18:14). No, it is not. Nothing can baffle His wisdom, nothing can impede His power, nothing can prevent the outworking of His eternal purpose. The context is speaking of the difficulty of a rich man entering the kingdom. But God can change the heart of a miser, incline the will of the covetous. No sinner is beyond the reach of His grace.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom 8:28). That too must be understood in the light of its context. From verse 16 to the end of the chapter, Paul showed that the *afflictions* to which the saints are exposed in this life are in no wise incompatible with the favour of God unto them. Their sufferings bring them into fellowship with Christ (Rom 8:17). There is no proportion between them and the future glory (Rom 8:18-25). Suitable aids are furnished them (Rom 8:26-27). They contribute to our weal. They do not and cannot separate from the love of God (Rom 8:29-39). Thus the "*all things*" has reference to the "*sufferings of this present time*" (Rom 8:18). "God hath not made a promise that all the *sins* of believers shall work for their good" (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677)—to have done so had opened a wide door for carelessness and presumption. Such would be contrary to the analogy of the Word, where threatenings are uniformly made against sin. It would be opposed to the qualification here: "love to God" is our duty and is exercised in obedience and not in sinning. As a fact, the sins of believers *are not* always overruled for "*good*" (Jer 5:25; 1Co 3:15).

"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 has not only given His own Son *for* His people to discharge their obligations, but He has also given Him *to* them (as the "*with him*" clearly implies) to enrich them. They are made partakers of His life (Col 3:4), of His righteousness (Jer 23:6, Rom 5:19), of His Spirit (Rom 8:9). Christians are "*accepted in the beloved*" (Eph 1:6) and have been given Christ's own status and standing before God (1Jo 4:17). Christ is the "*appointed heir of all things*" (Heb 1:2) and believers are "*joint-heirs with Christ*" (Rom 8:17). God has given Christ to us as a "*Covenant*," as a "*head*" of influence, as our great High Priest. Christ is both the security and the channel of every mercy: God supplies our every need "*according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus*" (Phi 4:19). The "*all things*" of Romans 8:32 is the "*all things*"

that pertain unto life and godliness" (2Pe 1:3). Of Christ's fullness "have all we received, and grace for grace" (Joh 1:16). We shall yet share His "glory" (Joh 17:24).

"For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's" (1Co 3:21-23). The Corinthians had yielded to a narrow and sectarian spirit and were pitting one apostle against another, when in reality, their respective ministries were designed for the good of all God's people alike (Eph 4:11-13): the epistles of "Cephas," (Peter) are as truly the property of the Gentile saints as those of Paul's belong to Hebrew believers. From that, the apostle proceeds to make a larger inventory of the Christian's riches. Not only are all ordinances and the ministries of all God's servants the common property of His whole family, but so is "the world," for it exists for their sakes (2Co 4:15) and is to be "used"—though not "abused"—by them (1Co 7:31). "Life" is theirs, in contrast from the unregenerate who merely exist (1Ti 5:6). "Death" is theirs, for it gives entrance into unclouded bliss. "Things present, or things to come" (1Co 3:22) are theirs (1Ti 4:8).

"For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom 11:36). This is one of the few passages where "all things" is to be understood without any restriction. That is not an arbitrary assertion of ours, but one required by the general tenor of Scripture, and by the immediate context. In Romans 9-11, God is set forth as the sovereign Determiner of all creatures and events, and the supreme Disposer of them, who "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph 1:11). Everything that happens in the universe is of God's ordination, is through His operation, and is unto His glory in its termination. As Creator, God is the originating cause of all creatures, as Provider, their sustaining cause, as Governor, the determining cause of their end.

"Be obedient in all things" (2Co 2:9): do not pick and choose between God's commandments, but "have respect unto all thy commandments" (Psa 119:6). "Grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph 4:15): be symmetrical Christians, flourishing in *every* grace—in knowledge, faith, love, humility, meekness, patience, self-denial, gentleness, temperance. "Giving thanks always for all things unto God" (Eph 5:20): happily recognize and gratefully acknowledge that the very things which cross our wills, and which nature dislikes, are appointed by unerring Wisdom and infinite Love. "I can do all things [appointed by God] through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phi 4:13): His grace is sufficient for every need.

How much confusion is avoided, how many erroneous understandings obviated, if we only go to the trouble of ascertaining the subject under discussion, attend carefully to the context, and, especially, compare one part of Scripture with another. To cite only one more case in point: "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mar 11:24). They are sadly mistaken who suppose that promise has no restrictions: it must be qualified by James 1:6-7; 4:3; 1 John 3:22, 5:14.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

48. 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, Part 2

In all of his prayers for the saints, Paul sought from God further supplies of grace on their behalf; and this, in order that they might be the more fully furnished and stirred up unto the performing of their duty. God has called His people unto a life of holiness, requiring them to be so “in all manner of conversation” (1Pe 1:15). At regeneration, He imparts to them a holy nature or principle, and then bids them to “now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Rom 6:19). Yet that holy nature or principle is but a *creature*, and therefore, far from being a self-sufficient entity. Like all other creatures, it is dependent upon God: for its life, development, and motions. But like all other rational creatures, its possessor is endowed with the instinct of self-preservation, and therefore, he is responsible to use all suitable means and measures for its well-being. Nevertheless, that responsibility can only be effectually discharged by divine enablement; and therefore, it is both our duty and privilege to seek from God all needed grace, and trustfully count upon His goodness supplying the same. The particular grace needed will be determined by our varying cases and circumstances.

In our last, we saw that the Thessalonians were being sorely oppressed by their enemies: so much so that Paul had sent Timothy to establish and comfort them concerning their faith, and to urge “that no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto” (1Th 3:3). Note well that holy balance: though God had ordained those trials, their spiritual father did not conclude there was no reason for him to be concerned about the outcome; rather did he deal with them as moral and accountable agents. So, too, though they had exercised much patience and faith “in all [their] persecutions and tribulations” (2Th 1:4), yet the apostle was mindful of their frailty and the very real danger of them wavering and backsliding; and therefore, he prayed much that persevering grace might be granted them; that they might walk worthy of their calling, hew steadfastly to the line of God’s revealed will, and thereby, glorify their Master. Such supplication on their behalf was intensified as he eyed the Day of punishment and reward (2Th 1:6-9).

If any readers experience a difficulty in our statement that the apostle here prayed for persevering grace to be granted those sorely-tried saints, seeing that the eternal security of all Christians is infallibly guaranteed by the divine promises, then it is because of their one-sided and defective views of the subject. And since we shall not be able to complete our exposition of this prayer in the present article, we propose to devote our remaining space to showing that difficulty is a fancied rather than real one. Before proceeding further, let us point out that by “persevering grace,” we intend divine quickening, strengthening, empowering, to enable the Christian to hold on his way and run the race which is set before him—without which he would make total shipwreck of the faith and be eternally lost. Thus, in seeking from God food for the soul, deliverance from temptation, the help of His Spirit to mortify our lusts, that is, really, asking Him for grace to enable us to persevere in faith and holiness.

There has been a deplorable lack of Scriptural *balance* in the presentation of this subject. Calvinists have thrown their emphasis almost entirely upon God’s preservation of His people, whereas Arminians have insisted only upon the necessity for their persevering. Since the great majority of our readers have been influenced far more by the former than the latter, let us point out, first, that God’s Word teaches *both*. While it must be insisted upon that it is the power of God, and that alone, which preserves the saints from apostasy (total and final)—and not in any degree their own grace, wisdom, strength or faithfulness—yet we must not fail to press the fact that Christians are responsible to keep themselves: that is, to avoid and resist temptations, abstain from everything injurious, and make a diligent use of all those means which God has appointed for their well-being. The Christian is exhorted “to *keep himself* unspotted from the world.” (Jam 1:27). We are bidden “keep yourselves from idols” (1Jo 5:21), yea, to “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1Th 5:22), and “keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude :21). It is criminal for preachers to ignore such passages as these.

God’s Word not only enjoins the saints to preserve themselves, but the Holy Spirit has not hesitated to affirm they actually *do so*. He moved David to aver, “by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer” (Psa 17:4). “I kept myself from mine iniquity” (Psa 18:23) and “I have refrained my feet from every evil way” (Psa 119:101). Those were not the boastings of self-righteousness, but rather testimonies to the sufficiency of God’s enabling grace. The apostle Paul, jealous as he ever was of the glory of

God—after exhorting the saints, “so run, that ye may obtain” the incorruptible crown, and pointing out that the mastery over physical lusts calls for being “temperate in all things” (1Co 9:24-25)—affirmed, “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But *I keep* under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1Co 9:26-27). While another wrote, “he that is begotten of God keepeth himself” (1Jo 5:18).

But it may be objected, Does not this attribute too much to the creature, and divide the honours, by ascribing the work of preservation partly unto God and partly unto ourselves? Our first answer is, God’s Word is to be received with childlike simplicity, and not quibbled over: received as a whole, and not merely those parts which appeal to us, or accord with our own views. We have not set forth our *personal ideas* in the last two paragraphs, but have quoted the Scriptures—verses which alas have no place whatever in the preaching of most Calvinists today. If the reader be unable to fit those verses into his doctrinal system, then it is evident there is something wrong with his system. But our second answer is an emphatic denial of such an imputation. For, *our use* of the means God has appointed, our greatest diligence and efforts will all be unavailing, unless *God blesses* the same: yea, our utmost watchfulness and industry would avail us nothing whatever if God left us to ourselves.

Our own wisdom and strength, even as Christians, is altogether inadequate for the task assigned to us; and unless the Holy Spirit Himself energized us and afforded success to our efforts, our case would be like unto Gehazi’s, who laid his staff upon the dead child (2Ki 4:31)—but there was no quickening until his *master* came and acted! Though Christians do indeed keep themselves (and to deny that is to repudiate the passages quoted above); nevertheless, it is wholly from and by the power of God, so that they freely acknowledge, “by the grace of God I am what I am” (1Co 15:10). Yet observe well, the apostle added, “and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all”: nevertheless, he disavowed all credit for the same—“yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” So again, “I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily” (Col 1:29). Grace is given us to make use of, yet grace is required *to* use it.

We must therefore press upon another class of professing Christians, that we are entirely dependent upon God: we can only “work out” our “own salvation with fear and trembling,” as He works in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:12-13). The axe cannot cut unless it is wielded. The keeping ourselves from evil and destruction is not a distinct and separate work from God’s preserving us, but a subordinate, though a concurrent one. It is not as though He were one partial cause and we another, as when two persons unite in lifting one burden—but our keeping is from Him, by Him, and under Him, [just] as the little child writes as the hand of his teacher guides his. Therefore, there is no ground for boasting, no occasion for self-gratulation; all the praise belongs alone to our Enabler. Thus, while the responsibility of the Christian is duly enforced and his accountability preserved, yet the glory of our preservation belongs entirely unto God.

As the miraculous power of God is absolutely necessary to the beginning of a work in anyone’s soul, so it is equally necessary for its continuation and progress. Unless God renewed the Christian daily, he would perish eternally. Only its Giver can “holdeth our soul in life” (Psa 66:9). God preserves His people by breathing into them holy thoughts and quickening meditations, which keep them in His fear and love—by stirring up His grace in us so that we are moved to holy action, by drawing us so that we run after Him, by inclining our hearts to love His law and walk in its statutes, by giving us a spirit of prayer so that we are moved to seek fresh supplies of strength from Him, by restraining us from sin and delivering out of temptations, by working in us godly sorrow and causing us to penitently confess our sins, by His consolations when we are cast down, which puts new heart into us, by granting us foretastes of the glory awaiting us so that the joy of the Lord energizes us (Neh 8:10).

If unfallen Adam was incapable of keeping himself, certain it is that *we* cannot do so independently of God: indwelling sin is too potent, Satan too powerful to overcome in our own strength—our falls demonstrate the need of God’s preserving us. Nevertheless, Adam was responsible for keeping himself, and was justly condemned because he did not do so. Likewise, believers are responsible to avoid every path which leads to death, and steadfastly tread to the very end that “narrow way” which alone “leadeth unto life” (Mat 7:13-14). As a rational creature is morally responsible to shun known danger, to abstain from poisons, and to eat nourishing food for the sustaining of his body; so a spiritual creature is accountable to do likewise concerning his soul. If he is to guard against the spirit of self-confidence and self-sufficiency, so also he is to beware of acting presumptuously. When the devil tempted Christ to cast Himself down from the pinnacle

of the temple, assuring Him that the angels would preserve Him, He immediately denounced such recklessness with "thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Mat 4:7).

We must never divorce the precept from the promise, or what God requires from us and what He has purposed for us. God has inseparably connected means and ends, and woe be unto us if we put them asunder. The same God who has predestinated a certain end shall be accomplished, has also predestinated it shall be accomplished via the employment of certain means. Thus, His people are told, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through [1] sanctification of the Spirit and [2] belief of the truth" (2The 2:13). Our "sanctification of the Spirit" is by His own operation, but "belief of the truth" is the act required *of us*; and we are not saved, nor ever will be, till we perform it. Likewise, we are told that the saints "are kept by the power of God"—yet not to the setting aside of their concurrence, for it is at once added "through faith" (1Pe 1:5). The duty of keeping his faith healthy and vigorous devolves upon the Christian—seeking from God its strengthening, feeding upon suitable food. The duty of exercising that faith rests upon him: "whom resist [the 'roaring lion' who seeks to devour him] stedfast in the faith" (1Pe 5:8-9).

There is a deadly and damnable heresy being widely propagated today to the effect that, if a sinner truly accepts Christ as his personal Saviour, no matter how he lives afterwards, he cannot perish. That is a satanic lie, for it is at direct variance with the teaching of the Word of Truth. Something more than believing in Christ is necessary to ensure the soul's reaching heaven. "If ye *continue* in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (Joh 8:31). "My sheep," said Christ, "hear [heed, obey] my voice, and I know them, and they *follow* me: And I give unto them eternal life; and *they* [those who plainly evidence themselves to be of His 'sheep' by yielding to His authority and following the example which He has left them—and none others] shall never perish" (Joh 10:27-28). It is not honest to generalize the promise of verse 28: it must be restricted to the characters described in verse 27! "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col 1:23) was how the apostle guarded and qualified his statement in verse 22!

Different far from the soothing opiates now being ministered by the false prophets was the holy balance of truth preserved by that prince of theologians among the Puritans, John Owen (1616-1683). Yea, far more candid and faithful was he than those hyper-Calvinists who profess to admire his teachings. Said he when exposing the sophistries of one who opposed the certainty of God's preservation of His people unto eternal glory, on the ground that it encouraged loose living: "Doth this doctrine promise, with height of assurance that under what vile practices so ever men do live, they shall have exemption from eternal punishment? Doth it teach men that it is vain to use the means of mortification because they shall certainly attain the end, whether they use the means or no? Doth it speak peace to the flesh, in assurance of blessed immortality, though it disport itself in all folly in the meantime?...The perseverance of the saints is not held out in the Scriptures on any such ridiculous terms: carry themselves well, or wickedly miscarry themselves; but is asserted upon the account of God's effectual grace preserving them in the use of the means and from all such miscarriages."

On Hebrews 3:14, J. Owen said, "Persistency in our subsistence in Christ unto the end is a matter of *great endeavour and diligence*, and that unto all believers. This is plainly included in the expression here used by the apostle: 'If we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.' The words denote our utmost endeavour to hold it fast and keep it firm. Shaken it will be, opposed it will be; kept it will not, it cannot be, without *our* utmost and diligent endeavour. It is true, persistency in Christ doth not, as to the issue and event, depend absolutely on our diligence. The unalterableness of our union unto Christ, on the account of the faithfulness of the covenant of grace, is that which doth, and shall eventually, secure. But yet, our own diligent endeavour is such an indispensable means for that end, *as without it*, it will not be brought about."

Finally, in his remarks on Hebrews 10:23: J. Owen said, "The apostle spends the whole remainder of the Epistle in pressing and confirming of this exhortation, on a compliance wherewith the eternal condition of our souls *doth depend*. And this he doth, partly by declaring the means whereby we may be helped in the discharge of this duty, partly by denouncing the eternal ruin and sure destruction that will follow the neglect of it, and partly by encouragements from their own former experiences and the strength of our faith, and partly by evidencing to us in a multitude of examples how we may overcome the difficulties which would occur to us in the way." How far removed from this teaching is that of those who pass for "high Calvinists" today! How little or how much of it is made plain and emphatic in their sermons, we must leave the

reader to judge. John Owen would now be denounced as an "Arminian" in many a so-called "place of truth."

It may be thought that we have wandered far from the subject of our opening paragraphs. But have we? Our endeavour has been to demonstrate the very real need there is to *pray for persevering grace*, both for ourselves and for our brethren. Some ask, Why should we, since God has solemnly promised the eternal security of all His people? First, because our great High Priest has taught us (by His example) to do so: "Holy Father, *keep* through thine own name those whom thou hast given me...I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst *keep* them from the evil" (Joh 17:11, 15). Second, as an acknowledgment of our dependency and a confession of our helplessness. Third, as our concurring with God's revealed will, seeking grace to use the appointed means. We place a very large question-mark after the Christian profession of any man who is unconscious of his frailty and who deems not such a prayer as, "Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation" (Psa 27:9) as unsuited to *his* case. The present writer frequently cries, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe" (Psa 119:117), knowing that the converse would be, Leave me to myself, and I shall assuredly perish.

N.B. A more detailed exposition of 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 follows (D.V.) in the January and February issues.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

28. Circumcision, Part 2

In our last, we pointed out that the circumcising of all the male Israelites at Gilgal was a type of the circumcision of the Church. First, that all believers were *legally* circumcised in Christ: that at the Cross, the “body [or totality] of the sins of the flesh” was put off, completely and forever removed from the sight of God’s law and justice—for such is the blessed meaning and teaching of Colossians 2:11. God’s elect had a federal being, a representative existence in their Head, so that when He died unto sin, they died unto sin; and it is both the duty and privilege of faith to appropriate that truth, and rest upon that fact. Therein, we have revealed the Gospel method of mortifying sin—in blessed contrast from the fleshly devices of the Papists. It must flow from our union and communion with the Lord Jesus in His death, and faith’s receiving of the virtue and efficacy of it. The fountain of all true and spiritual mortification was opened at the Cross, and God is very jealous of the honour of the person and work of His beloved Son; and every departure from Him and it, every attempt of the carnal mind to devise some other remedy for any of the wounds which sin has inflicted upon and within us, is doomed to certain failure. Christ alone must be looked to for deliverance, not only from the guilt of sin, but from its power and pollution; yes, and from its presence too.

But it must now be pointed out that as Christ is the federal Head of His people, so also is He their vital or life-giving Head. As the natural head of the physical body influences all its members, imparting life and motion to them (for when one side of the brain becomes paralyzed, one whole side of the body does too), so Christ imparts life unto and influences the members of His mystical body, the Church. This He does by sending down His Spirit into their hearts, who communicates *to* them what Christ did and purchased *for* them. Thereby, they are “circumcised” *spiritually and experimentally*. That brings us to the second branch of our subject. “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom 2:28-29). There is much of deep importance in those two verses, yet they are little understood today, especially by Dispensationalists and writers on “Prophecy”; but it would be outside our present scope to give an exposition of them, or even show the apostle’s line of argument in that passage; rather, we must confine ourselves to that in them which bears directly upon our present theme.

“Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter [flesh]” (Rom 2:29). There we are plainly taught that real “circumcision,” the circumcision which God most approves, is an *internal* one. Even that is little understood by our moderns, and has no real place in their teaching. We wonder how many of our own readers have any definite and clear-cut conception of what is meant by *spiritual* “circumcision.” Very few, we fear. All the more need, then, for us to take up this subject here, instead of seeing how swiftly we can get through the book of Joshua by merely offering generalizations upon its contents. It should be apparent to all who have read the Scriptures with any degree of attention and care that He who “desirest truth in the *inward* parts” (Psa 51:6) required very much more from Israel, even in Old Testament times, than obedience to the outward ordinance of circumcision. The call, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deu 10:16) is too plain for misunderstanding. It is quite clear from Leviticus 26:41 and the last clause of Jeremiah 9:26 that the Lord punished Israel because they were “uncircumcised in the heart.” The same fault Stephen charged upon the Jews of his day (Act 7:51).

“Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart” (Jer 4:4) was His just demand. John Gill (1697-1771) acknowledged that “men are exhorted to this” (alas that so many of his admirers refuse to do so), though he rightly added, “yet elsewhere He promises to do this for them.” God has ever required reality, and not simply outward profession; inward, and moral purity, and not merely external and ceremonial. “O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness” (Jer 4:14). This spiritual circumcision—or cleansing of the heart—is the negative side of regeneration, or as the older writers more aptly expressed it, “the privative” side. Strictly speaking, there is no English word which accurately defines it, but “privative” is the nearest—that which results in a privation through the absence of something, the withholding or taking of it away. This is one aspect or part of “the great change” which takes place in a person when he is made the subject of a miracle of grace. Since we recently dealt with that in considerable detail, there is the less need to be lengthy on this occasion; but as spiritual circumcision is included in the general term, “regeneration,” we must not altogether ignore it.

As we emphasised in our articles upon “The Great Change,” far too many writers when treating of regeneration confine their attention unto but a single aspect of the same—the communication of a new life or “nature.” But *that* contemplates only one angle of it, even from the positive side. There is a negative or privative side too. There is travail and pain in connection with a birth. Perhaps the reader will find it easier to grasp what we are saying and the better understand our terms when we remind him that justification has *two* parts to it: a privative and a positive—something removed and something bestowed. The cancellation or removal of the guilt and penalty of all sins is the privative side of justification, for remission (forgiveness) means “sending away.” The imputation of the meritorious obedience of Christ to the account of the believing sinner is the positive side, for “justify” signifies to declare a person (not merely innocent, but) *righteous*. The two things are brought together in that lovely type in Zechariah 3:4, “Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee”—that is the privative side; “and I will clothe thee with change of raiment” (the “best robe” of Luke 15:22) is the positive.

Now at regeneration, something is *removed*, as well as something imparted: “I will *take away* the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Eze 36:26). Though that be metaphorical language, yet is the figure easily understood. The affections are divorced from evil and united to that which is good. By the miracle of grace, God takes away the love of sin and implants a love of holiness. And how is fallen man’s radical and inveterate love of sin removed from him? By the Holy Spirit’s illumination, revealing to him the exceeding sinfulness of sin; by His convicting him of the enormity and heinousness of sin, striking his conscience with terror and horror at having waged war against the Almighty; by bringing him to realize that it was *his* sins which caused the Lord of glory to bleed and die. Then it is that the love of sin receives its death-wound in his soul. Then it is that he is “pricked in [his] heart” and cries out in anguish and despair “what shall [I] do?” (Act 2:37)—which is only another way of saying, Then it is that his soul is spiritually and experimentally *circumcised*; when so far as his love of it is concerned, he puts off “the sins of the flesh” (Col 2:11).

The work of the Holy Spirit within the saint is many-sided, but its grand design and accomplishment is to make good *unto* him what Christ did *for* him: or to state it in other words, the Spirit imparts to the soul an actual acquaintance and effects with it a spiritual experience of what he has in Christ federally and legally. Christ died unto sin, for He was “made...sin [judicially] for us” (2Co 5:21), and His death was the penal death of our sin. Consequently, when the Holy Spirit is given to us, He first works death in our hearts: that is, He both slays our self-righteousness, and gives a death-wound to sin in our affections—as the apostle tells us when relating one aspect of his own conversion, “when the commandment came, sin revived, and *I died*” (Rom 7:9). That is, when those words, “thou shalt not covet”—thou shalt not even lust after or desire any unlawful object—was applied in divine power to his soul, the awful nature and extent of his sin became a living reality in his conscience, and he died to all good opinions of himself. By the spiritual slaying of our self-righteousness and making us loathe sin, the soul is experimentally “made conformable unto his [Christ’s] death” (Phi 3:10).

“And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed [which is to be taken *generally* as “all” and “the world” in the New Testament] to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart” (Deu 30:6). There we have the two principal aspects of regeneration or the miracle of grace brought together: the privative side, the circumcising of the heart, when it is made willing to part with its cherished sins, when its affections are severed from all evil. That is in order to the positive side, namely, the heart’s being brought to love the Lord with all its faculties and strength. That love to God John Gill rightly pointed out is “the duty of every man,” and thus, of the unregenerate: so, contrary to his followers, Gill not only taught “duty faith,” but “*duty* love”! Nevertheless, none performs this duty until God Himself circumcises the heart. Then it is that the soul of the elect is transformed from a natural man into “a new creature” (Gal 6:15). That moral change of putting “off the old man with his deeds” (Col 3:9) was prefigured by the fact that literal circumcision was required to be performed on the “*eighth day*” (Lev 12:3)—the numeral which always signifies a new beginning, and thus of “the new creature.”

There is yet another aspect of this subject which calls for careful attention: namely, that circumcision of the Christian which is *practical and manifestative*. What Christ accomplished for His people, His Spirit effects within them, and they are required to make the same apparent in their daily lives and actions. Our federal and legal circumcision in Christ was in order to our vital and experimental circumcision, for by His meritorious work on their behalf, the Lord Jesus procured the gift and grace of the Spirit unto His people (Gal 3:13-14). Our inward circumcision by the operations of the Spirit unto His people was in order to the

better qualifying us for the discharge of our responsibility and the glorifying of our God. While at regeneration, the Spirit gives a death-wound unto sin in the affection of its favoured subject, and while at the same time, He implants in his heart an imperishable love of and longing for holiness, yet He does *not* then remove from him the evil principle—"the flesh" remains in his soul unto the end of his earthly pilgrimage. Consequently, there is now a ceaseless conflict within him (Gal 5:17), and therefore, he is henceforth called upon to "fight the good fight of faith" (1Ti 6:12): to swim against the stream of his corruptions, "deny himself" (Luk 9:23), and "mortify [his] members which are upon the earth" (Col 3:5).

The foes against which the Christian is called to wage conflict are mighty and powerful. That evil trinity—the flesh, the world, and the devil—are relentlessly determined to destroy him. How then is he to successfully engage them in mortal contest? A great variety of answers have been returned to that question, all sort of rules and regulations prescribed; but most of them proceeded from "physicians of no value." It is too generally overlooked that *this* is "the good fight of *faith*" (1Ti 6:12). The devil can only be successfully resisted as we remain "stedfast in the faith" (1Pe 5:9). "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1Jo 5:4). And there can be no victory over indwelling sin except by the actings of faith. And faith, my reader, always has to do with Christ: *He* is its grand Object (Heb 12:2), its Sustainer (Phi 1:21), its Strengtheners (Phi 4:13). That is according to the appointment of the Father, who has determined that His people should be beholden to His beloved Son for everything, that they may ascribe their all unto Him, that they may place the crown of honour and glory upon His Head. Christ is the alone Saviour—not only from the guilt and pollution of sin, but likewise from its power and ragings within us.

In this matter of practical circumcision, our mortifying of sin, man's thoughts and ways, are as far below God's as in everything else—as far as the earth is below the heavens. Man supposes he must do this in order to obtain that, avoid this in order to enjoy that, abstain from evil so as to enter into good. But he knows not where to obtain strength *for* the doing! Contrastively, God's way is to furnish that which equips for the performance of duty: to bestow freely, that gratitude will respond gladly; to lavish love upon us, that we cannot but love Him in return; to make known what He has made Christ to be unto us, and then bids us walk worthily of such a Saviour. He first makes us "light in the Lord," and then bids us "walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8). He first makes us saints, then bids us act "as becometh saints" (Eph 5:3). He makes us holy, then calls us to be "in behaviour as becometh holiness" (Ti 2:3).

Immediately after Christians are bidden "likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord," they are exhorted, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Rom 6:11-12). Though they have died unto sin legally, sin is far from being dead within them. Though they are no longer "in the flesh" (Rom 8:9) so far as their standing before God is concerned, yet "the flesh" is still in them. Though Christ has put away the whole of the guilt and pollution of their sins, He has not yet fully delivered them from its power—that they might prove the sufficiency of His grace, the marvels of His forbearance, and the reality of His keeping power; and that there might be opportunity for the trial, exercise, and development of their graces. But though the evil principle (or "nature") be not eradicated, the Christian is exhorted, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body" (Rom 6:12). In that "therefore," we have an example of the apostle's evangelical method when urging Christians to perform their duty: not in order to obtain some further blessing, but because of what they already have in Christ.

That "therefore" looks back generally over the whole preceding section (from Romans 5:1), but has a more particular reference to Romans 6:10-11. The "Let not sin therefore reign" is far more than an appeal for us to exercise our wills: it is a call for faith to make one's own all that standing and state which is ours by virtue of our legal and vital union with Christ. Faith is urged to apprehend and appropriate our sinlessness in Christ by our death and resurrection in Him. *That* is the only right way of approach unto gaining the victory over sin in our daily lives. God will set no premium upon unbelief, but He will honour *faith*. Faith is called upon to recognize and reckon that sin was vanquished by Christ, and therefore, it has no right to lord it over us. We are to refuse obedience to its desires and behests. We are to yield no subserviency unto the dethroned adversary of Christ, but strive constantly against every effort it makes to gain the ascendancy over us. And in order unto strength *for* such striving, we are to draw motives and encouragement from the love of Christ who suffered and died for us. Strength to resist sin comes from faith's eyeing Christ and love's drawing from Him incentives to mortify that which slew Him.

It is "the love of Christ" which is ever to *constrain* the Christian in all things (Rom 8:35). But I must first be assured of His love for me, before my affections will flow out to Him in grateful submission and

service. Any service which issues from fear, or is prompted by reward, is either legal or mercenary, and unacceptable to Him. Without a realization of pardoning mercy in the soul, we can gain no victory over indwelling sin. In Christ, we are not only dead to sin legally, but victors over it. As faith beholds sin perfectly conquered by Christ judicially, it seeks to have fellowship with Him therein in a practical way. To repudiate long-cherished sins, relinquish beloved idols, is a cutting and painful experience to nature, and therefore, it is designated a circumcision and mortifying of our members; yea, so distressing is such work, our Lord likened it unto plucking out a right eye and cutting off a right hand (Mat 5:29-30). Yet such is not only a needful and profitable duty, but it becomes a desirable and *longed-for* one by those who truly love the Lord. The more their minds be spiritually occupied with Christ's love, the more are their affections drawn forth unto Him, and the more are their hearts brought to hate sin; and the more we hate sin, the more are we *dying to* it in our affections!

In our last, we pointed out the importance of observing the opening words of Joshua 5:2 when seeking the spiritual and practical application unto ourselves of what God required from Israel at Gilgal. "At that time": as soon as they had passed through that river which spoke of death and judgment, they were required to be circumcised. Likewise, it is immediately after the Christian is assured of his union with Christ in death and resurrection that he is enjoined, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body" (Rom 6:12). It is by faith's realization of that union we draw motives to resist sin's solicitations and derive strength against it. And as stated in our last, we cannot serve God trustfully and joyously, unless we are assured we are forever beyond condemnation (Rom 8:1); so it must now be added, there can be no progress in the Christian life, unless we heed Romans 6:12. That is amplified in the next verse: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but [1] yield *yourselves* unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and [2] your *members* as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom 6:13). Because you have been made "alive" (Rom 6:11), put away all the trappings of death, "put off the old man" (Col 3:9), mortify the lusts of the flesh (Rom 8:13). Give up yourselves to God without any reserve.

Yet, we repeat, obedience upon Romans 6:12-13 is possible only as we maintain the assurance of our perfect standing in Christ (Rom 6:11), drawing motives and strength therefrom for practical holiness, and by constantly seeking help from Christ by drawing upon His fullness (Joh 1:16). That is ever the evangelical order, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake *hath* forgiven you" (Eph 4:32). "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Why? "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God... *Mortify therefore* your members which are upon the earth" (Col 3:1-5). "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another." Why? "Seeing that *ye have* put off the old man with his deeds" (Col 3:8-9). "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God:...when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." And what is the effect of faith's appropriation thereof? This: "And every man that hath this hope in him *purifieth himself* [not merely ought to do], even as he is pure" (1Jo 3:1-3).

But, says the Christian reader, notwithstanding my best efforts to keep my heart occupied with Christ and my faith fixed steadfastly on Him, sin daily gets the better of me. And what is the effect upon you? Are you pleased thereby? No, the very reverse: you are cut to the quick. That, too, is an integral part of practical "circumcision." Not only is every denying of self, every striving against sin, an element of mortification or practical circumcision, but equally so is all godly sorrow, all evangelical repentance, all contrite confession of sin. Blessed are they that "mourn" over their backslidings and falls, for it evidences they belong to those whose "circumcision is that of *the heart*, in the spirit, and not in the letter" (Rom 2:29)—real and effectual, in contrast from the formal and ceremonial.

DIVORCE

Part 4

“But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace” (1Co 7:15). So far as we are aware, this is the *only* verse in all the Bible appealed unto by those who insist that the case of desertion or abandonment constitutes a valid ground for divorce. It therefore calls for the closest scrutiny, in order to determine whether there be anything in it which obliges us to take such a view, or even offers weighty support thereto. Before recording our own understanding of its terms, let the reader give the verse a careful perusal and seek to supply his or her own answer to the question, What is there in it which definitely and unequivocally favours such an idea? We say “definitely and unequivocally,” for surely something more solid and satisfactory than uncertain conjectures or vague interferences are required in such a solemn and radical matter—a matter which involves pitting the teaching of the apostle against that of the Lord Jesus! Be not carried away by what any “great and godly men” have said thereon, but form your own judgment of what the verse really teaches.

Above, we have said, that to make 1 Corinthians 7:15 mean that desertion severs the marriage tie, sets the apostle at direct variance with the ringing declaration of his Master; and so far as we are concerned, that single consideration settles the question, and compels us to reject the common interpretation of that verse. The words of Christ are too plain to be misunderstood: “But I say unto you [against all who aver otherwise], That whosoever shall put away his wife, *saving* [only] for the cause of fornication [adultery], causeth her to commit adultery [should she cohabit with any other man]: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced [on any other ground] committeth adultery” (Mat 5:32). He repeats the same thing in Matthew 19:9. Christ is both the Prophet and the Head of His Church, and beyond *His* authoritative decision, there is no appeal. That is abundantly clear from the commission which He has given His servants: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe *all* things whatsoever I have *commanded* you” (Mat 28:19-20).

But again, the popular view of 1 Corinthians 7:15 is entirely against the scope and method of the passage in which it occurs. In the preceding paragraphs, we have been at some pains to make clear Paul’s line of thought therein, and have considered, first, his directions unto those who were contemplating a divorce (1Co 7:10-11), affirming that being united unto an idolater did not constitute a ground for such. And second, that such a situation did not even call for a separation (1Co 7:12-14). Thus, to regard verse 15 as treating of something which supplied cause for a *divorce*, is to suppose the apostle guilty of a literary lapse, and what is worse, make verse 15 flatly contradict what he said in verse 11. But the apostle is to be charged with no such confusion as that: it is the minds of his expositors which are befogged. In verse 15, Paul does *not* go back to the matter dealt with in verses 10 and 11, but instead, continues and completes the subject under discussion in verses 12 to 14.

The question resolved in 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 is, Does a Christian married to a heathen call for a separation, as is clear from the apostle’s “But to the rest speak I, not the Lord”—i.e. Christ Himself had given out no decision thereon. In verses 12 and 13, orders were given that where the unbelieving partner *is willing* for the Christian mate to continue cohabiting, there must be no separation. In verse 14, he amplifies that injunction. First, by showing that a separation is needless; and second, that it would be disastrous for the children. Then in verse 15, he contemplates the other alternative, namely, Suppose the idolater is *unwilling* for the Christian mate to remain, then what shall the latter do? Most probably there were cases where a devout heathen was bitterly opposed to Christianity, and therefore, violently hostile to the idea of continuing to live with a husband or wife who had become an avowed Christian. When this was the case, and no appeal of either reason or affection had any effect, then what policy ought the believing partner to adopt? *That* is the question to which the apostle here furnishes answer, nor does there appear to us the least ambiguity in his language.

“But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart” (1Co 7:15). If he has deliberately deserted you because of a difference of religion, you must bow to the will of God. If it has not pleased Him to subdue the prejudice of your husband and soften his heart toward you, you must acquiesce with the divine providence. The onus rests upon him, and you must accept the situation with good grace. “A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases” is explained by the words that immediately follow: “but God hath called us *to peace*.” In such a case, the believing wife is not to have recourse unto litigation and insist that the deserter

be compelled by law to return unto her. The Christian wife is under no moral bonds to pursue her husband into the courts and demand that he make provision for her support, for that would be to follow a policy the very reverse of that "peace" which God has enjoined upon His children (Rom 12:18, 14:19; Heb 12:14). Believers are the sons "of peace" (Luk 10:6), followers of the Prince of peace, and where no principle is involved, they must avoid all contention and strife.

Not a word does the apostle say in 1 Corinthians 7:15 about desertion or dissolving the marriage tie; still less that in such a case, the believer is free to marry again—that is *man's* presumptuous *addition* to the Word of God. Furthermore, that which immediately follows militates against such an idea. "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" (1Co 7:16). The opening "for" obviously has the force of "because" and introduces an important consideration to *deter from* all precipitate and extreme action. Unmistakably, it makes directly against the erroneous view taken of the preceding verse, for if the wife *has* divorced the husband, what hope could there be of God making use of her in winning him! Verse 17 supplies an additional reason why neither divorce nor separation should be insisted upon: "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so *ordain I* [proving it was far more than a mere personal advice which the apostle was here proffering!] in all churches." Paul was averse from breaking up the conjugal relation or any social position the Christian had occupied before conversion. Christianity is not a revolutionary and disorganizing element, but is designed to promote the general good. Loyalty to Christ does not forbid, but requires, husbands and wives to dwell together in peace, servants to obey their masters, subjects to honour the king.

It is little to be wondered at that the profane world now entertains such lax views on the sanctity of marriage, when so many professing Christians advocate such an anti-Scriptural sentiment as the permissibility of divorce merely for desertion. It is greatly to be regretted that so many good men during the last three centuries taught that error, for they but paved the way for the well-nigh total moral breakdown which obtains today. When the leaders of Christendom sowed such seed, no other harvest could be expected. Better taught were the early Puritans. One equal in spirituality and scholarship to any member of the Westminster Assembly wrote fifty years earlier, "A man with a good conscience cannot give a bill of divorcement for any cause but adultery, and therefore, those laws which permit divorce for other causes are greatly faulty before God. If any should ask whether men's laws may not make more causes of divorcement than this one? I answer, No, for marriage is not a mere civil thing, but partly spiritual and divine, and therefore, God only hath power to appoint the beginning, the continuance, and the end thereof"—William Perkins (1558-1602), 1587.

Turning now to the last division of our subject. When the marriage bond has been broken by one party, is the innocent one, after a divorce has been obtained, free—in the sight of God, we mean—to marry again? Or is he or she shut up unto a life of celibacy? This question need not detain us very long, yet it is one that calls for a brief consideration at least, for Christendom by no means returns a uniform answer thereto. Probably many of our readers are aware that one of the errors of the Mother of harlots concerning marriage is that it is *unlawful* for a man who has repudiated his wife for adultery to marry again. Nor is that view entirely peculiar to Romanists, for some Protestants have entertained the same idea, being misled by our Lord's words in Mark 10:11, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her," regarding that as an unqualified and absolute restriction. But that is a mistake, through failing to read this verse in the light of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

Scripture must be explained by Scripture, and briefer statements read in the light of fuller ones, and never must one be pitted against the other. Particularly is this the case with the first three Gospels; parallel passages should be consulted, and the shorter one read in the light of the longer one. Thus, when Peter asked Christ, "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" our Lord's answer "Until seventy times seven" (Mat 18:21-22) must not be taken to signify that we are to condone wrongs and exercise grace at the expense of righteousness, for He had just previously said, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear [heed] thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (Mat 18:15). No, rather, must His language in Matthew 18:22 be interpreted by His amplified declaration in Luke 17:3-4, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and *if he repent*, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him"! God Himself does not forgive us until we repent (Act 2:38; 3:19). While we must not entertain any bitterness or malice in our hearts against those who

wrong us, yet not until they acknowledge their offence are we to fellowship with them as if no offence had been committed.

So, too, in order to obtain a right conception of the great commission which the Redeemer has given to His ministers, we need to bring all three accounts thereof together, and not confine ourselves unto only one of them: "That *repentance* and remission of sins should be preached in his name" (Luk 24:47) is equally essential as bidding sinners, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Act 16:31). Thus with the matter we are now discussing: Mark 10:11 is to be interpreted by Matthew 5:32: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced [for any other cause] committeth adultery"—repeated by Christ in Matthew 19:9. In those words, Christ propounded a general rule ["*Whosoever* putteth away his wife causeth her to commit adultery, and he that marrieth her committeth adultery"]; and then He put in *an exception*, namely, that for adultery, he *may* put her away, and such a one *may* marry again. As He there teaches the lawfulness of divorce on the ground of adultery, so He teaches it is lawful to marry again after such a divorce, without contracting the guilt of adultery.

In his comments on Matthew 19:9, rightly did John Owen (1616-1683) point out, "Hence it is evident, and is the plain sense of the words, that he who putteth away his wife for fornication and marrieth another *does not* commit adultery. Therefore, the bond of marriage in that case is dissolved, and the person that put away his wife is at liberty to marry. While He denies putting away and marrying again for every cause, the exception of fornication allows both putting away and marrying again in that case. For an exception always affirms the contrary unto what is denied in the rule, whereto it is an exception; or denies what is affirmed in it in the case comprised in the exception. For every exception is a particular proposition contradictory to the general rule: so that when the one is affirmative, the other is negative; and on the contrary. The rule here in general is affirmative: he that putteth away his wife and marrieth another committeth adultery; the exception is negative: he that putteth away his wife for fornication and marrieth another does not commit adultery."

Consider the alternative. If the husband prove unfaithful to his marriage vows, is it in accord with God's revealed character of righteousness and mercy to penalize the innocent wife to remain in the single state the rest of her life? If she has divorced her husband, does God now inflict upon her the sentence of perpetual widowhood because of the infidelity of her partner? For her to be deprived of her right by the sin of another is against the very law of nature, and in such case, it would lie within the power of every wicked husband to deprive his wife of her natural right. The right of divorce specified by Christ for the injured party to make use of is manifestly designed for his or her liberty and relief; but on the supposition that he or she may not marry again, then it would prove a snare and a yoke. As J. Owen also pointed out concerning such a supposition, "It may, and probably will, cast a man under the necessity of sinning. For suppose he has not the gift of continency, it is the express will of God that he should marry for his relief." Surely 1 Corinthians 7:2 and 9 make it clear that God would not have the injured one exposed to a life of immorality.

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

12. *The Holy Bible, Part 4*

If the Bible be the Word of God, if it immeasurably transcends all the productions of human genius, then we should naturally expect it to be attested by marks which evince its divine origin. That such an expectation is fully realized, we shall, at some length, seek to show. Those marks are of no vague and uncertain kind, but definite and unmistakable, and are of such a character as man could not be the author of them. The indications that the Bible is a divine revelation are numerous, various, and conclusive. They are such as appeal severally to those of different tastes and temperaments, while taken together, they represent a case which none can invalidate. The Bible is furnished with such credentials as only those blinded by prejudice can fail to recognize it is a messenger from heaven. They are of two kinds: extraordinary [miracles and prophecies] and ordinary; and the latter may be distinguished again between those which are objective and subjective—the one addressed to reason, the other capable of verification in experience. Each has the nature of a distinct witness, yet there is perfect agreement between them; united, yet independent.

1. *Man's Need.* We may well draw our first argument *for* an intelligible and authoritative revelation of God *from* our imperative requirement of the same. In earlier articles, we have presented evidence to show God exists, that He created man a rational and moral being, endowed with the power to distinguish between good and evil, and therefore, that he was [originally] capable of knowing God, obeying Him, and worshipping Him. But man could neither intelligently obey nor acceptably worship God, unless he first had a direct revelation from Him of *how* He was to be served. In order for there to be intercourse between man and his Maker, he must first receive from Him a communication of His mind prescribing the details of his duty. Accordingly, we find that immediately after the creation of Adam and Eve, God gave them a particular statute. He first informed them what they might do (Gen 2:16), and then specified what they must do. Thus, from the outset, man was made dependent upon his Creator for a knowledge of His will; and thus, too, was his fidelity unto Him put to the proof.

If such was the case with man in his pristine glory, as he was made in the moral image of God, how much greater is his need of a divine revelation since he has left his first estate, lost the image of God, and become a fallen and depraved creature! Sin has defiled his soul: darkening his understanding, alienating his affections, vitiating all his faculties. Should a critical objector here say, But you are now *assuming* what has not yet been proved, for you are taking for granted the authenticity of Genesis 3 [wherein the defection of man from his Maker is recorded], it should be sufficient reply at this stage to ask, What other alternative remains? Only this: that God created man in his present woeful plight, that he has never been in any better condition. But is not such a concept abhorrent even to reason? Surely, a perfect God would not create so faulty a creature. Could One who is infinitely pure and holy make man in the awful state of iniquity in which we now behold him? How, then, has man become such a depraved being?

Why is it that, the world over, mankind are so intractable and wayward, that so many are regulated by their lusts rather than reason, that if the restraints of human law and government were removed and every one given free rein, the earth would speedily become a charnel-house? During the first half of this twentieth century, despite our vaunted education and civilization, enlightenment, and progress, we have witnessed the most appalling proofs of human depravity, and that on a scale of enormous magnitude. So far from beholding any indication that man is slowly but surely *ascending* from the ape to the divine, is abundant evidence to show that the larger part of our race has *descended* to the level of the beasts. But how comes this to be, if man at the beginning was a sinless and holy creature? Apart from the Bible, no satisfactory answer is forthcoming: neither philosophy nor science can furnish any satisfactory explanation. Here again, we see the urgent need of a revelation from God: that divine light may be cast upon this dark mystery, that we may learn how man forfeited his felicity and plunged himself into misery.

What has just been pointed out makes manifest yet another aspect of man's deep *need* of a plain revelation from God. Man is now a fallen and polluted creature—no one who reads the newspapers or attends the police courts can question that. How, then, do the ineffable eyes of God regard him? How is it possible for fallen creatures to regain their former glory? Reason itself tells us that one who has rebelled against God's authority and broken His laws cannot at death be taken into His presence, there to spend a blissful eternity, without his sins being first pardoned and his character radically changed. The convictions of conscience reject any such anomaly. But apart from divine revelation, how are we to ascertain what will satisfy

the thrice holy God? In what way shall a guilty soul be pardoned, a sinful soul be purified, a polluted creature made fit for the celestial courts? All the schemes and contrivances of human devising fail utterly at this vital point: at best, they are but a dream, a guess. Dare you, my reader, risk your *eternal* welfare upon a mere peradventure?

Turning back from the future to the present: how is God to be *worshipped* by man? Such a question is necessarily raised by the being and character of God and of man's relationship to Him as His creature. That the Deity should be acknowledged, that homage ought to be rendered unto Him, has been owned by the majority of our fellows in all climes and ages. True, their conceptions of Deity have varied considerably, and so too their ideas of how to honour Him; yet the conscience of all nations has convicted them that some form of worship is *due* unto God. It has been generally felt and avowed that there should be an acknowledgement of our dependency upon God, that supplications for His favour should be offered, that confessions of sin should be made, that thanksgivings for His mercies should be returned. Low as man has fallen, yet until he be steeped in vice, the dictates of reason and the promptings of his moral nature have informed him that God ought to be worshipped. Yet without a special revelation from God, how is it possible for any man to know that he worships *aright*, that his efforts to honour God are *acceptable* to Him? The crude and debasing idol worship of those who are ignorant of or have spurned God's Word will clearly evince the need for such a revelation.

From the works of creation, the voice of conscience, and the course of Providence, we may learn enough of God and of our relation to Him as to make us the accountable creatures of His government; but of that knowledge which is necessary to our *salvation*, we can discover nothing whatever. Unwritten revelation is inadequate to meet the needs of a sinner. We need a further revelation in order to learn our real character and ascertain how we may be acceptable unto God. Creation as such exhibits no Saviour, announces no redemption, and supplies not the least indication that the forgiveness of sins is possible, much less likely. If we break the laws of nature, we must suffer the penalty. Ignorance will not exempt us, nor will penitence remit the suffering. Nature's laws are inexorable and are no respecter of persons. A child falling into the fire will be burned as surely as the vilest criminal. If we had nothing more than the visible world from which to draw our conclusions, we could never infer a hope of mercy for the transgressor of law. Nor would our moral instincts hold out any prospect of future relief, for conscience condemns us and informs us that punishment is just.

Religion [from *re-ligo* "to bind back"] must have something to tie to. It must have a foundation, a basis, an ultimate appeal. What is that appeal? Many say *tradition*: to the teaching of "the Fathers," to the decree of Councils, to an authority lodged in the Church as a divine corporation, indwelt and made infallible by the presence of the Holy Spirit. That is the doctrine of Rome—a doctrine which binds to a system assumed to be supernatural, but which is "as shifting as the decrees of councils have shifted, contradictory as the statements of church fathers have been conflicting; blind and confusing; a congeries of truths and errors, of affirmations, and denials, of half lights and evasions from Origen (A.D. 185-254) to Bellarmine (1542-1621)"—G. S. Bishop. The Papacy's claim to be the seat of divine authority is refuted by historic fact and personal experience. Her career has been far too dark and chequered, her influence on human life, liberty, and progress, much too unsatisfactory, for any impartial investigator to be deceived by such an arrogant pretension.

Others make their own *instincts* the supreme arbiter. That which commends itself to their "intuitions" or appeals to their sentiments is accepted, and whatever accords not therewith is spurned. But since temperaments and tastes differ so widely, there could be no common standard to which appeal may be made, and by which each one might test the rightness or wrongness of his preferences. Each separate individual would become a law unto himself: nay, if nothing be right or good save what I approve of, then I am my own God. This may be termed the religion of nature; and it accounts for every vagary from the myths of Paganism to the self-delusion of mis-called "Christian Science," for everything put forth from Homer¹ to Huxley (1825-1895). Such self-limitation exposes its utter poverty. Self cannot advance beyond the bounds of an experience which is limited by the present. How can I know anything about the origin of things, unless I be taught by One who existed before them. Apart from a special revelation from God, what can I possibly know of what awaits me after death?

¹ **Homer** – a legendary ancient Greek poet, placed around 850 B.C.

Human reason is the ultimate court of appeal for the majority of this generation. But reason is not uniform: what appears to be logical and credible to one man, seems the very opposite to another. Most of what was pointed out in the last paragraph obtains equally here—reason can know nothing of what it has no experience. The great subject of controversy between infidels and Christians is whether reason [the intellect and moral faculties] be sufficient to enable us to attain all that knowledge which is necessary for bringing us to virtue and happiness. That question is not to be answered by theorizing, but by experiment; not by conjectures, but facts. It must be submitted to the test of history. What conclusions did the reason of the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans arrive at? So far from formulating any adequate conception of Deity, they worshipped birds and beasts, and invented “gods” of the most revolting character. There was no agreement among their most renowned thinkers. Their systems of moral philosophy were woefully defective, and their framers notoriously profligate. Even today where the Bible is rejected, reason rises no higher than agnosticism: *I know not*—whether there be a God, a soul which survives the death of the body, or what the hereafter may hold.

If it be asked, What purpose does reason serve in connection with spiritual things? We answer, first, its province is to form a judgment of the evidence of Christianity: to investigate and to estimate the grounds on which it claims to be a divine revelation. Its duty is to weigh impartially and determine the force of such arguments, as we have advanced in the preceding articles and those we purpose presenting in future ones. Second, its office is to examine carefully the contents of Scripture, to acquaint ourselves with its teachings, to attentively consider the demands they make upon us—which we could not do if we had no more understanding than the irrational beasts. Third, its function is to subordinate itself unto the authority of divine revelation—the absurdity of the opposite is self-evident. Reason is certainly to constitute the judge of what God says, but is rather to consider and test the evidence which demonstrates that He *has* spoken. The wisdom of God is not placed on trial before the bar of human foolishness. Man is the scholar, and not the Teacher; his reason is to act as a servant and not a lord. We act most *reasonably* when we thankfully avail ourselves of the light which God has vouchsafed us in His Word.

Having shown the limitations and inadequacy of man’s own faculties—manifested everywhere in the records of history, both ancient and modern—we return to our opening postulate: man’s *need* of a special and infallible revelation from God. He needs such in order to deliver him from a state of spiritual ignorance—a state which is fraught with the utmost peril to his soul. Consider how prone is the mind of man to embrace error, how ready and fertile to invent new religions. Even when unfallen, man required that his path of duty be made known to him by his Maker. Much more so does man, considered as a fallen creature, require an unerring Mentor to instruct him in spiritual things, one outside himself, infinitely above him. In a world of conflicting opinions and ever-changing theories, we must have a sure Touchstone, an unvarying Standard, an ultimate Authority to which appeal can be made. Amid all the sins and sorrows, the problems and trials of life, man is in urgent need of a divine Guide to show him the way to present holiness and happiness and to eternal glory.

2. *A presumption in its favour.* This follows logically from all that has been before us above. Since man sorely needs such a revelation from God, and He is able to furnish it, then there is a strong probability that He *will* do so. He who endowed man with his intellectual faculties is certainly capable of granting him a further degree of light by some other medium. “Revelation is to the mind what a glass is to the eye, whether it be intended to correct some accidental defect in its structure, or to enlarge its power of vision beyond its natural limits” (Professor John Dick, 1764-1833). To argue that we should be *uncertain* whether such a revelation be genuine or no would be tantamount to saying that because there is so much imposture in the world, therefore, there is no truth; that because so many are deceived, none can be sure that he is right. It is both presumptuous and unreasonable to affirm that God is unable to supply a communication unto mankind, which is lacking in those marks that would authenticate it as coming from Himself. Cannot Deity legibly inscribe His signature on the work of His own hand?

We might indeed draw the conclusion that since man is so vilely apostatized from his Maker that God will justly abandon him to misery. Yet we perceive that—notwithstanding the criminal conduct of His creatures—God still makes His sun to shine and the rain to fall upon them, providing them with innumerable blessings. Thoroughly unexpected as it might well be, we behold God exercising *mercy* unto the sinful sons of men, ameliorating those evils which they have brought upon themselves, and providing means by the use of which their sufferings are much alleviated. Though we could not from those things warrantably draw the conclusion that God would proceed any further in our behalf, yet, if He should be pleased to extend His

care unto our souls as well as our bodies, it would only be an enlargement of the scope of that benevolence already displayed in His provisions for us. It would be in perfect accord with the method He *has* employed with His creatures, if He further interposed to rescue fallen men from ignorance, guilt, and perdition.

“From man at the head of creation, down to the lowest organized structure, there is not a necessity for which provision has not been made, and that in exact proportion to its wants. You yourself came into this world a poor, helpless, naked infant, full of necessities, and must have perished from the womb, unless provision had been made for them. Who filled for you your mother’s breast with milk and your mother’s heart with love? But you have a soul, as well as a body—no less naked, no less necessitous. Shall then the body have its necessities, and those be provided for; and shall the soul have its necessities too, and for them there be no provision made? Is there no milk for the soul, as well as the body? No ‘sincere milk of the word’ (1Pe 2:2) that it may grow thereby?” (J. C. Philpot, 1802-1869). The goodness of God, the benevolence of the Creator, the mercy of our Governor, all point to the likelihood of His ministering to this supreme need of ours, without which ministrations every one of us must assuredly perish.

The writer last quoted draws a further argument in support of this conclusion from the relations which God sustains to us as our sovereign Master and our Judge, pointing out that a master’s will must be known before it can be obeyed, that a judge’s law must be declared before it can be transgressed. Why are theft and murder punished? Because the law of the land expressly forbids those crimes under a prescribed penalty; but since no human statute prohibits ingratitude, none are penalized in human courts for the same. It is a recognized principle that “where no law is, there is no transgression” (Rom 4:15). Then does it not clearly follow from this that God will give unto us His laws—direct, positive, authoritative law, binding upon us by divine sanctions? How could He justly punish what He has not forbidden? And if He has forbidden sin, how and when has He done so? Where is the statute book, written by His dictation, which makes known His will to us? If it be not the Bible, we are left without any!

If it would be a far greater tax upon our credulity to believe that the universe had no Maker, than that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”; if it involves immeasurably greater difficulty to regard Christianity as being destitute of a divine Founder, than to recognize that it rests upon the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ; then is it not far more unreasonable to suppose that God has left the human race without a written revelation from Him, than to believe the Bible is such? There are times when the most thoughtful are uncertain as to which is the right course to pursue, when the most experienced need a guide their own wisdom cannot supply: will the One who furnishes us with fruitful seasons deny us such counsel? There are sorrows which rend the hearts of the stoutest: will He who has given us the beautiful flowers and singing birds to regale our senses withhold that comfort we so much need in the hour of bereavement? Which is the more reasonable: that the Maker of sun and moon should provide a Lamp for our feet, or leave us to grope our way amid the darkness of a ruined world!

OUR ANNUAL LETTER

“Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word” (Psa 119:65). There are times when such language as that fitly expresses even our natural feelings, when sight and sense have no difficulty in perceiving that God has ordered things favourably for us; and at such seasons, we may not be slack in owning the Hand which has provided so freely for us. But there are other occasions when the sun is hidden, dark clouds mask the sky, and our frail barque is tossed upon a heavy sea; and then we are apt to imagine God is dealing ill with us. Yet it is not so, nor should the Christian ever give place to such evil thoughts, still less to murmuring. Instead of judging the Lord by feeble sense, he should confide in His love and trust in His unerring wisdom. Nor should the voice of praise be stilled: “Giving thanks *always* for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:20).

“Forget not all his benefits” (Psa 103:2), both in grace and providence. But the saint should do more than remember; he should bear testimony to them and record God’s goodness unto him. Gratitude is to be expressed. “Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD” (Psa 119:65) is the language of a thankful soul, sensible of God’s kindness to him, and making hearty acknowledgement of the same. However adverse circumstances appear to be unto carnal reason, if faith be in exercise, this will be its testimony. When death suddenly smote the young son of the woman who had befriended Elisha, and she was asked, “Is it well with the child?” she answered, “It is well” (2Ki 4:26). That was not merely the language of resignation, but of undiminished confidence in the Lord’s goodness. If our hearts be right with God, we shall have no hesitation in saying, “He hath done all things *well*” (Mar 7:37). Grace triumphs over the flesh and can produce songs of praise even in a dungeon (Act 16:25).

“Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, *according unto thy word*” (Psa 119:65). God has engaged Himself to do so: “There is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing” (Psa 34:9-10). He has declared that “all things work together for good to them that love” Him (Rom 8:28). Make much of God’s promises, Christian reader, for they are exactly suited unto all the circumstances in the personal history of each saint. Act like those of Hebrews 11:13. God is faithful and makes good His promises, but faith must be in operation if the comfort of them is to be enjoyed, if the heart is to be sustained while awaiting their fulfilment. The divine promises are a sure foundation for faith to rest upon, for God cannot belie them. Plead them in prayer, and then bear testimony to God’s fidelity as He makes them good unto you.

As we come to the close of still another year, the above Scripture is our own witness. God has dealt well with us: mercifully, favourably, bountifully. He has borne with our waywardness and has been patient with our infirmities. He has heard our cries and made good His Word. No good thing have we lacked. Through another twelve months, He has granted both of us a goodly measure of health and strength. Once more, He has furnished Seed for the sower. Funds have come in freely, so that every bill was promptly paid. Our circulation has again shown a slight increase. Despite paper shortage and labour difficulties, though the first four copies were very late, we have been privileged to send the twelve issues again to our readers. Many have lovingly remembered us at the Throne of Grace, though we wish more would pray about paper, the printing, and an increased number of readers. Thanksgiving is due unto God for the much improved service by our new printers.

In such evil days as these, when so many empty professors have discarded their religious masks and appeared in their true characters, and not a few of God’s own children are in such a sad case spiritually that they prefer what is either soothing or sensational to that which searches the heart and calls to a closer walking with the Lord, it is “marvellous in our eyes” that the One whom we are seeking to serve still provides sufficient readers to enable us to continue this magazine. Nevertheless, since this be a “work of *faith*” (1Th 1:3), faith has to be tested; and it is no small trial having to cut down our wee mailing-list so drastically when preparing the new one for next year. Though it stands at less than *one* thousand at the close of 1947, more than two hundred now upon it will be dropped, unless we have word from them to the contrary. That means that at least an equal number of new ones are required during the next few months to replace the dropped ones, if we are to continue publishing. We have no doubt whatever that God will, in answer to believing and importunate prayer, supply them. Yet, it is also our responsibility to beg every interested reader who has, under God, received real help from these pages to prayerfully consider if there are any Christians known to him or her who would be likely to welcome the “Studies”; and if so, to kindly drop a

few lines urging them to write us for them—this is more effectual than *our* sending sample copies to those unacquainted with us.

The series on “The Prayers of the Apostles” have already extended beyond our original intention, but since we know of nothing more needed today by the members of the household of faith, we purpose prolonging them for another year. Our progress in Joshua has been slow, though no slower than the vitality important contents of its opening portion called for: the next few chapters contain that which is likely to be of more general interest, and better pace is expected to be made. We purpose continuing for some months to present more of the varied and convincing evidence that the Bible is divinely inspired, so let us hear from you before the January and February 1948 issues are exhausted; though they will not be printed before March. God willing, the bound volumes will again be available (in January) to those who took last year’s issues in their loose form; and through the generosity of a few friends, they are sold at below cost price—7s. 6d (\$1.75) each, post paid. Heartily thanking all our friends for their prayer help and financial fellowship

—Yours by God’s abounding mercy, *A. W. and V. E. Pink.*

P.S. The second half of Matthew 28:20 will be our motto text (D.V.) for 1948.



