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STUDIES
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SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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

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A GOOD BEGINNING

(*New year's message. Read not before December 31st.*)

What a mercy it is to enter this world with a healthy body and sound constitution; how severely handicapped for this life where the opposite be the case! What a blessing to be born into a Christian home, to receive our earliest impressions from pious parents, to be trained from infancy to walk in "the way of the LORD" (Gen 18:19)! What a difference it makes in the marital life whether or not it opens with a consecration of the same to the Lord, and where the "family altar" is erected from the outset! It is sadly true that a good beginning will not of itself ensure a good ending; yet if the former obtains not, it is unlikely that the latter will be attained. If the foundation be faulty, the superstructure erected thereon is insecure. Though it be not everything, a good beginning is much to be desired. The indolent youth rarely amounts to much subsequently. Certain it is that as we sow in our earlier days, we are made to reap later on. The same law holds good in the Christian life: the formation of good spiritual habits at an early stage does much to mould future character and conduct.

It is customary in the early days of January for our friends to wish us a happy New Year, but what ground have we to expect that such a hope will be realized unless we *begin the year aright*? Certainly we are not justified in looking for the smile of God upon us if its dawn be celebrated with carnal gluttony and worldly jollification. *That* is to act as the heathen do. Nor may we count upon the providential blessing of the Lord if He be not duly honoured by us. This is not to inculcate the doctrine of human merits, as though by any good deeds of ours, the Lord can be brought into debt to us. No indeed: rather is it a pointing out of our duty and an enforcing of God's rightful claims upon us. All of the Lord's dealings with His people are in grace, yet grace ever works "through righteousness" (Rom 5:21) and never at the expense of it. God has plainly declared, "them that honour me I will honour"; but on the other hand, "they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1Sa 2:30). Ponder well those words, my reader, at the opening of 1949, and remember that "the hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him" (Ezr 8:22). Earnestly seek *His* glory, and you will enjoy His blessing.

Let us point out two or three things which are essential if the Christian reader is to make "a good beginning" in the new year. First, he must *start it with a clean slate*. Alas, says the reader, that is impossible. I cannot undo the past. Obligated am I to say, "What I have written, I have written," and I cannot erase it. True, but God can! If your conversion was a genuine one, in the day of it, the Lord said, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions" (Isa 44:22). And what made such a miracle of grace legally possible? The atoning sacrifice of the Redeemer: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1Jo 1:7). And that precious blood is ever available for faith's appropriation. Then spend part of the closing hour of 1948 in putting your sins under the blood of Christ. Make a general confession, and then a particular one of every known sin, and make use of God's promise: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jo 1:9). Plead the efficacy of Christ's blood. Make full use of that Fountain which has been "opened to the house of David [i.e. 'the beloved'] and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem [and every believer belongs to the 'Jerusalem which is above' (Gal 4:26)] for sin and for uncleanness" (Zec 13:1).

By sincere and penitent confession, all sin may be purged from the conscience; and by a fresh application of the atoning blood of Christ, all sin will be cleansed before God. Thus, you may and should begin the new year with a clean slate. That is your holy privilege, Christian friend. Nor is that statement any invention of ours, for in substance, it is clearly taught in the Scriptures. See it illustrated in Exodus 12. When the Lord's time had come for the children of Israel to leave the land of Egypt and enter upon a new stage of their history, what did God require them to do? Three things: First, "ye shall put away leaven out of your houses" (Exo 12:15)—"leaven" is one of the Scriptural emblems of evil (1Co 5:6; Gal 5:9); and the Christian puts it away when he abhors, mourns over, and confesses his sins before God, for it is then cast out of his affections. Second, they placed themselves under the shed blood of the Lamb. Third, they fed upon it "with bitter herbs" (Exo 12:8). Christ is only truly appropriated by a contrite soul, to whom sin is a bitter thing. Then the Lord gave orders: "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months" (Exo 12:2). Was not *that* "a good beginning"—to start the year under the blood of the Lamb?

Second, *thankfulness for past mercies*. If we be not grateful for the blessings and bounties which God has already bestowed upon us, how can we look for a continuation of them? Is it likely that the Holy One

will place a premium upon ingratitude? It becomes us to make hearty acknowledgement of the favours—both spiritual and temporal—which the Lord has lavished upon us. Alas that so many receive them as a matter of course and with hearts unaffected by the divine goodness. It is one of the foretold marks of graceless professors that in the “perilous times” they should be “unthankful,” to which is immediately added, “unholy” (2Ti 3:1-2). It behoves us, then, as we enter upon another period of life, to render praise to the Lord for past supplies and deliverances. See that illustrated in the case of Noah. As soon as he and his family emerged on to the new earth, which had been swept clean by the besom of destruction, he “builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar” (Gen 8:20). Was not *that* “a good beginning”: to express thanks for their gracious preservation from the flood? And we are told: “And the LORD smelled a sweet savour” (Gen 8:21): it was acceptable to Him. Then do *you* open 1949 by offering to Him a sacrifice of praise?

Third, *a renewal of his consecration to God*. The Christian life begins with a personal dedication to Him. They “first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us” (2Co 8:5), which means that they made a complete surrender of themselves to Him, as the only suitable response to that great debt which can never be fully paid. There was an entire consecrating of themselves and all that they had to God in Christ, and a yielding of themselves to His accredited servants to be taught and directed by them—the latter being the evidence of the former. Nothing less than that would give proof that they were genuinely devoted to His cause and interests here on earth. But alas, how treacherous are our hearts! How soon is the “love of [our] espousals” (Jer 2:2) chilled! How quickly the things of this world draw us away from Christ, or the cares of this life unduly absorb us! How soon does the average Christian give the Lord cause to complain, “thou hast left thy first love”—the freshness and fervour which marked your conversion! And what is the remedy? “Repent [mourn over, confess, turn away from what has occasioned the sad failure], and do the first works” (Rev 2:4-5)—that is, renew your dedication, make a fresh surrender of yourself to the Lord. Do so at the dawn of 1949, and that will indeed be “a good beginning.” Definitely acknowledge afresh the everlasting claims which the love of Christ has upon you, and determine to spend and be spent for Him.

Fourth, *a renewed resolve to live wholly for the honour of your Master*. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1Co 10:31). Make *that* your motto, your constant aim, your earnest endeavour during 1949. That is the principal mark which distinguishes the Christian from the non-Christian: that he serves not self but Christ, seeks not the praise of men but the approbation of God, aims not at his own advancement but at the magnifying of the Lord and the promoting of His interests. His opportunity for so doing in this scene of His rejection will soon be over. The night swiftly hastens on when writer and reader will no longer have this privilege. Then let us seek grace to redeem the time (Eph 5:16) and enter the new year determined to do so. Our Master has left us an example so to do: “Christ pleased not himself” (Rom 15:3). “I seek not mine own glory” (Joh 8:50), He declared. Completely and constantly devoted was He to the One whom He delighted to serve. How that was evinced in His *first* recorded utterance: “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?” (Luk 2:49). Was not *that* “a good beginning”? Then cry to Him for enablement to “follow his steps” (1Pe 2:21) more closely during 1949 than ever before.



THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

60. Hebrews 13:20-21, Part 2

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20). We must now carefully consider that act of God toward the Saviour which the apostle here used as his plea for the petition that follows. In the great mystery of redemption, God the Father sustains the office of supreme Judge (Heb 12:23). He it was who laid upon their Surety the sins of His people. He it was who called for the sword of vengeance to smite the Shepherd (Zec 13:7). He it was who richly rewarded and highly honoured Him (Phi 2:9). “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that *God* hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Act 2:36, and compare 10:36). So it is in the verse now before us: the restoring of Christ from the grave is there viewed not as an act of divine power, but of rectoral justice. God is there seen exercising His judicial authority, as is clear from the term used. We are ever the losers if, in our carelessness, we fail to note and duly weigh every single variation in the language of Holy Writ. Our text does not say that God “raised,” but “*brought* again from the dead our Lord Jesus,” which sets before us a very different yet most blessed aspect of truth, namely, the legal discharge of our Surety from prison.

There was a formal legal process against Christ. Jehovah laid upon Him all the iniquities of His elect; and thereby He was rendered guilty in the sight of the divine Law. Therefore, He was justly condemned by divine justice. Accordingly, He was cast into prison. God was wroth with Him as the Sinbearer: “It pleased the LORD to bruise him” (Isa 53:10) to exact full satisfaction from Him. But the debt being paid, the penalty of the Law inflicted, justice was satisfied, and God was pacified. In consequence, He became “the God of peace” both toward Christ and toward those whom He represented (Eph 2:15-17). God’s anger being assuaged and His Law magnified and made honourable (Isa 42:21), He then exonerated the Surety, set Him free, and justified Him (Isa 50:8; 1Ti 3:16). Thus it was foretold: “He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation?” (Isa 53:8). In his most excellent exposition of Isaiah 53 (1683)—virtually unobtainable today—James Durham (1622-1658) showed conclusively that verse 8 described Christ’s exaltation following upon His humiliation. He demonstrated that the term “generation” there has reference to His duration or continuance (as it does in Joshua 22:27): “As His humiliation was low, so His exaltation was ineffable: it cannot be declared, nor adequately conceived—the continuance of it being for ever.”

Condensing it into a few words, J. Durham gave as his analysis of Isaiah 53:8: “1. Something is here asserted of Christ: ‘He was taken [or ‘lifted up’] from prison and from judgment.’ 2. Something hinted which cannot be expressed: ‘Who shall declare his generation’ [or ‘continuance’]? 3. A reason given in reference to both: ‘For he was cut off out of the land of the living.’” “He was taken from prison and from judgment” referred not only to the Saviour’s imprisonment and coming to judgment before men, but also and primarily to the straits He was brought into and arraignment before *God’s* tribunal, because His suffering “for the transgression of my people” was not the cause of His censure before men, but was the procuring cause of what He met with from and before God. The word “prison” may there be taken more largely for those straits and pressures of spirit which the Lord Jesus endured while suffering the curse of the Law, and “judgment” for the awful sentence inflicted upon Him. To the one Christ referred when He said: “But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luk 12:50); and to the other is to be attributed His agony in the Garden and His cry of anguish on the Cross. Ultimately, the “prison” has reference to the grave.

The Hebrew word for “He was *taken* [laquash] from prison” sometimes signifies “to deliver” or “to free,” as a captive is liberated—Isaiah 49:24-25. From both prison and judgment, the Surety was taken or freed, so that “death hath no more dominion over him” (Rom 6:9). Christ received the sentence of divine absolution, as one who has paid his debt is discharged by the court. Christ not only received absolution, but was actually delivered from prison, having paid the utmost farthing demanded of Him. Though He was brought into prison and judgment, when the full demands of justice had been met, they could not detain Him: as the apostle declared, “Whom God hath raised up, having *loosed* the pains [or ‘cords’] of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Act 2:24). As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) expressed it, “He was by an extraordinary order of heaven taken out of the prison of the grave; an angel was sent on purpose to roll away the stone and set Him at liberty, by which the judgment against Him was re-

versed, and taken off.” Likewise, Thomas Manton (1620-1677) insisted that the clause, “Who shall declare his generation?” (Isa 53:8) meant “declare the glory of His resurrection, as the previous words do His humiliation, suffering, and death.”

As T. Manton rightly pointed out, “While Christ was in the state of death, He was in effect a prisoner, under the arrest of divine vengeance; but when He rose again, then was our Surety let out of prison.” In a most helpful way, he went on to show that the peculiar force of the term, “*brought* again from the dead” is best explained by the dignified carriage of the apostles when they were unlawfully cast into prison. The next day, the magistrates sent serjeants to the prison, bidding their keeper let them go. But Paul refused to be “thrust...out privily” and remained there until the magistrates themselves formally “*brought* them out” (Act 16:35-39). So it was with Christ: He did not break prison. As God had “delivered him up” to death (Rom 8:32), so He “*brought* [Him] again from the dead.” It was as it were an acquittal from those debts of ours which He undertook to pay: as Simeon was dismissed when the conditions were performed, and Joseph was satisfied with a sight of his brother, he ‘*brought* Simeon out unto them’ (Gen 43:23)—T. Manton. It was God, in His official character as “the Judge of all” (Gen 18:25) who righteously freed our Sponsor.

Let us now briefly observe that it was *as* “the God of peace” He here acted when He “*brought* again from the dead our Lord Jesus.” The perfect obedience and atoning oblation of Christ had met every requirement of the Law, put away the iniquities of those for whom it was offered, had placated God and reconciled Him to them. While sin remained, there could be no peace, but blotted out by the blood of the Lamb, God was propitiated, and Christ had “made peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20); but so long as He continued in the grave, there was no open proclamation thereof. It was by His bringing of Him forth from the dead that God made it known to the universe that His sacrifice had been accepted, and thereby, He publicly declared that enmity was at an end and peace established. *There* was the grand evidence and proof that God was pacified toward His people. Christ had made an honourable peace, so that God could be both “just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:26). Take note also of *the relation* Christ sustained when God delivered Him from the dead: not as a private person, but as the federal Head of His people, as “that great shepherd of the sheep,” so that they were then legally delivered with Him (Eph 2:5-6).

It is very blessed to learn from the Psalms—where much light, not given in the New Testament, is cast upon the heart-exercises of the Mediator—that Christ supplicated God for deliverance from the tomb. In Psalm 88 (the sole subject-matter of which is the soul-suffering of the Lord Jesus), we find Him saying: “Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave” (Psa 88:2-3). Since the transgressions of His people had been imputed to Him, those “troubles” were the sorrows and anguish which He experienced when what was due to sin was inflicted and executed upon Him. He went on to exclaim to God: “Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves” (Psa 88:6-7). There we are granted an insight of what the Saviour felt in His soul under the stroke of God, as He endured all that which was in His holy curse upon sin. He could not be in a lower state. He was in total darkness, the sun for a season refusing to shine upon Him, as God hid His face from Him. The sufferings of Christ’s soul were tantamount to “the second death” (Rev 20:14). He sustained the whole of what was equivalent to the same.

The smitten Redeemer went on to say: “I am shut up, and I cannot come forth” (Psa 88:8). None but the Judge could lawfully deliver Him. “Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee?” (Psa 88:10). In his remarkable exposition, Samuel E. Pierce (b. 1827) declared: “Those questions contain the most powerful plea Christ Himself could urge before the Father for His own emerging out of His present state of suffering and for His resurrection from the power of death. ‘Shall the dead arise and praise thee?’ (Psa 88:10). Yet in Me Thou *wilt* show wonders in raising My body from the grave, or the salvation of Thine elect cannot be completed, nor Thy glory in the same fully shine forth. Thy wonders cannot be declared: the elect dead cannot rise again and praise Thee, as they must, but on the footing of My being raised up.” “But unto thee have I cried, O LORD” (Psa 88:13). What light this Psalm casts on “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and *was heard*” (Heb 5:7)! As He was required to “ask of [God]” for His inheritance (Psa 2:8), so, first, for His deliverance from the prison of the tomb; and it was in answer thereto that God “*brought* him forth.”

In the last place, consider that the act of God is here said to be “through the blood of the everlasting covenant.” As to exactly what is connoted by those words, there has been no little confusion in the minds of different writers on this epistle, and while a full canvassing of this interesting question is really outside the scope of the present article, yet some of the more erudite of our readers would be displeased if we failed to make a few remarks thereon, so we will ask others kindly to bear with us while we treat of a somewhat technical detail. A careful reading through of the epistle shows that mention is made therein of “the covenant” (Heb 10:29), “a better covenant” (Heb 8:6), “a new covenant” (Heb 8:8), and here to “the everlasting covenant.” Not a few able men have concluded that reference is made to the same thing throughout, but with them, we cannot agree. It is quite clear from Hebrews 8:6-13, that the “new” and “better” covenant made with the *spiritual* “Israel” and “Judah” stands in opposition to the “first” (Heb 8:7) or “old” (Heb 8:13) covenant, which the Lord made with the nation of Israel at Sinai—with Israel “after the flesh”. In other words, the contrast is between Judaism and Christianity under two different covenants or economies, whereas “the everlasting covenant” is the antithesis of the covenant of works made with Adam as the federal head of his race.

Though the covenant of works was first in manifestation, the everlasting covenant or covenant of grace was first in origination. In all things, Christ must have the pre-eminence, and God entered into compact with Him before Adam was created. That compact has been variously designated as the “covenant of redemption” and the “covenant of grace.” In it God made full arrangements and provisions for the salvation of His elect. That everlasting covenant has been administered, under different economies, throughout human history, the blessings of the same being bestowed on favoured individuals all through the ages. During the “old covenant,” or Judaism, the requirements and provisions of the everlasting covenant were shadowed forth under the moral and ceremonial law; under the “new covenant,” or Christianity, its requirements and provisions are proclaimed by the Gospel. In every generation, repentance, faith, and obedience were required from those who should partake of its inestimable blessings (Isa 55:3). As a renowned theologian pointed out, “The phrase ‘Mediator of the covenant’ is applied to Christ three times in the New Testament (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), but as in each case, the term for covenant is qualified by either the adjective ‘new’ or ‘better.’ It evidently here is used to designate *not* the covenant of grace properly, but that new *dispensation* of that eternal covenant which Christ introduced in person, in contrast with the less perfect administration of it, which was instrumentally introduced by Moses”—*Outlines of Theology*, by Archibald A. Hodge (1823-1886).

Thus we take those words, “the blood of the everlasting covenant,” at their face value as referring to the eternal compact which God entered into with Christ. In the light of the preceding clauses of Hebrews 13:20, it is evident that “the blood of the everlasting covenant” has a threefold reference. First, the divine title here employed: God became “the God of peace” when Christ made propitiation and confirmed the eternal compact with His own blood (Col 1:20). From before the foundation of the world, God had purposed and planned that “peace” which Christ was to make: everything connected with the same had been eternally agreed upon between Them. Second, to the action there ascribed to Him: the shedding of His precious blood was the procuring cause of the restoration of our Lord Jesus from the grave by the Judge of all. Since the Surety had fully carried out His part of the contract, it behoved the Ruler of this world to deliver Him from prison as that which was righteously due to Him. Third, to Christ’s office: it was by the shedding of His blood for them, according to covenant agreement, that our Lord Jesus became “that great shepherd of the sheep”—the One who should seek out God’s elect, bring them into the fold, and there minister to, provide for, and protect them.

God’s bringing back of our Lord Jesus from the dead was not done simply by contract, but also by His merits; and therefore, it is attributed not barely to “the covenant” but to “the blood” of it. As God the Son, He merited or purchased it not, for honour and glory were His due; but as God-man Mediator, He earned His deliverance from the grave as a meet reward. Moreover, it was not as a private person, but as the Head of His people that He was delivered, and that ensured their deliverance also. If *He* was restored from the tomb “through the blood of the everlasting covenant,” equally so must *they* be. Scripture ascribes our deliverance from the grave to the death of Christ, as well as to His resurrection: “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (1Th 4:14). Thus, assurance is given to the Church of its full and final redemption. God expressly made promise to the Shepherd of old: “As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water”—the grave (Zec 9:11). As it was “by his own blood he entered in once into the holy

place" (Heb 9:12), so on the ground of the infinite value of the same do we (Heb 10:19); and as He declared," because I live, ye shall live also" (Joh 14:19).

We turn now to the petition itself: "Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ" (Heb 13:21). This verse is intimately related to the whole of the preceding one, and the blessed connection between them inculcates a lesson of great practical importance. It may be stated, simply, thus: God's wondrous working in the past should deepen our confidence in Him and make us to seek at His hand's blessings and mercies for the present. Since He so graciously provided such a Shepherd for the sheep, since He has been pacified toward us and not a frown now remains upon His face, since He has so gloriously displayed both His power and His righteousness in bringing back Christ from the dead, a continuance of His favour may be safely counted upon, and we should expectantly look to Him day by day for all needed supplies of grace. The One who raised our Saviour is well able to quicken us and make us fruitful to every good work. Eye "the God of peace" and plead "the blood of the everlasting covenant" in every approach to the mercy seat.

More specifically: God's bringing back Christ from the dead is our *security* that He will fulfil all His promises to the elect, even all the blessings of the everlasting covenant. This is clear from Acts 13:32-34: "And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again... And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead... he said [by that action], I will give you the sure mercies of David." By restoring Christ from the dead, God fulfilled the grand promise made to the Old Testament saints (in which all His promises were virtually contained) and gave pledge for the performance and accomplishment of all future ones, thereby giving virtue to them. The "sure mercies of David" are the blessings which God swore to in the everlasting covenant (Isa 55:3). The shedding of Christ's blood ratified, sealed, and established for ever every article in that covenant. By bringing Him back from the dead, God has ensured to His people that He will infallibly bestow upon them all those benefits which Christ obtained for them by His sacrifice. All those blessings of pardon, cleansing, reconciliation, sanctification, and preservation were given to Christ for His redeemed, and are safe in His hand.

By His mediatorial work, Christ has opened a way whereby God can consistently with all the glory of His perfections, bestow all the good thereof. As His death was necessary that believers might receive those "sure mercies" (Isa 55:3) according to the divine counsels, so His resurrection was equally indispensable, so that living in heaven He might impart them to us as the fruits of His travail and the reward of His victory. God has fulfilled to Christ every article which He engaged for in the everlasting covenant: He has brought Him from the dead, exalted Him to His own right hand, invested Him with honour and glory, seated Him upon the mediatorial throne, and given Him the name which is above every name. And what God has done for Christ, the Head is the guarantee that He *will perform* all that which He has promised to Christ's members. It is a most glorious and blessed consideration that our all, both for time and eternity, depends wholly upon what passed between the Father and Jesus Christ: that He remembers and is faithful to His engagements to the Son, and that we are in His hand. When faith truly apprehended that grand fact, all fear and uncertainty is at an end; all legality and talking about our unworthiness silenced. "Worthy is the Lamb" (Rev 5:12) becomes our theme and song!

It is a most tranquilizing and stabilizing subject for the minds of Christians to dwell upon: that they are personally interested in all the eternal acts which passed between God the Father and Christ on our behalf ere man was made, as well as in all those acts which were transacted between the Father and the Son in and throughout the whole of His mediatorial work which He wrought and finished here below. It is this covenant-salvation, in its full blessedness and efficacy, apprehended by faith, which alone can lift us out of ourselves, above all our spiritual enemies, enable us to triumph over our present corruptions, sins, and miseries. It is wholly a subject for *faith* to be engaged with, for feelings have no place here. It is the objective side of the truth, the divine counsels of wisdom and grace made known in the Scriptures. As faith is exercised thereon, as the record of the eternal engagements of the Father and Son are received into the spiritual mind, peace and joy will be our experience. And the more faith feeds upon objective truth, the more are we strengthened subjectively. Faith regards every path in fulfilment of God's promises as a certain evidence of His fulfilling all the rest of His promises to us, in His own good time and way. Especially will faith regard God's fulfilment of His promise to bring back our Lord Jesus from the grave in this light: Has the Shepherd Himself been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father? As surely will all His sheep be delivered from death in sin and quickened into newness of life.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

40. Prayer

In our last issue, we contemplated Joshua after Israel's humiliating defeat at Ai, on his face before the ark of the Lord. There he lay, with rent garments and dust upon his head, in a posture of self-judgment and abasement. Not until the hour of the evening sacrifice did he open his mouth to God, and then he might have said, "I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble" (Psa 142:2). Those words present to us an aspect of prayer all too little dwelt upon by preachers and writers. It is wrong to think that we should approach God only when our hearts are composed and in a spiritual frame. It is our privilege to come to the Throne of Grace for "*mercy*" and to sob out our griefs when deeply distressed. David tells us he did so "when my spirit was overwhelmed within me" (Psa 142:3). It is for our relief that we tell out our woes to One who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb 4:15). When none other can enter into our case or assuage our grief, we should present ourselves before the divine footstool as objects of compassion, remembering that "the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (Jam 5:11), and therefore, He will not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax (Isa 42:3; Mat 12:20).

When it lies in his line of duty for an expositor to comment upon a recorded instance of an outpouring of heart by a troubled soul, his task is neither an easy nor a pleasant one; for not a little scum rises to the surface when the spirit reaches boiling point. The Hebrew word for "complaint" in Psalm 142:2 does not mean fault-finding, but signifies, rather, that which causes pain and anguish, as in Job 7:13 and 9:27. We may indeed complain *to* God and unburden ourselves before Him, yet we ought never to complain *of* Him or murmur at any of His dealings. But where shall we find one clothed with flesh and blood who is guiltless in this respect? Where indeed! Only in Him who, amid "strong crying and tears" (Heb 5:7) said, "nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luk 22:42). If one of our "complaints" be examined, in a captious spirit, it will not be difficult for another to find in it expressions which are inadvisable. Let us not then scrutinize this prayer of Joshua's in a pharisaic spirit, but rather, let us approach it with that word before us, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone" (Joh 8:7). On the other hand, we must not gloss over the faults, nor deliberately condone what is reprehensible in it.

Not a little of human infirmity was discovered by Joshua's language on this occasion, and though that be easily accounted for, yet it must not be rendered an excuse for justifying *our* failures. As is so often the case with us, especially when deeply perturbed, there was a strange mingling of the flesh and the spirit seen in the prayer which is now to engage our attention. While some of its expressions cannot be approved, yet it should be borne in mind that Joshua was not here murmuring against any direct dealing of the Lord with himself, but was venting his sore distress over what had just befallen his nation, and was deeply grieved at the reproach which the same must bring upon the name of the Lord. While those considerations might modify his fault, yet they by no means absolve him. The truth is that Joshua too was a sinner saved by sovereign and amazing grace, and that fact was made to appear clearly in this incident. Let us then admire once more the impartiality and fidelity of the sacred historians in narrating this blemish in Joshua's conduct, and behold therein another proof of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, which painted each character in the colours of truth and reality, concealing not the defects of its greatest heroes.

The temporary breakdown of Joshua in heeding the presumptuous counsel of the spies, instead of seeking guidance from the LORD through the high priest (Num 27:21), and in slighting the ark instead of according it the place of honour, was not further betrayed by his mouth and the hard thoughts which he entertained against God. "And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!" (Jos 7:7). In this failure of so honoured a character as Joshua let both writer and reader see his own deep need of walking humbly before God and clinging to Him in conscious weakness. An object lesson is here set before us of how quickly faith fails its possessor when it be not sustained by its Author and Giver. The trouble was that Joshua's heart was no longer occupied with the plain and sure promises he had received from God. And why? Because he was walking by sight, viewing things with the eyes of carnal reason. He rashly concluded from the setback at Ai that it was the harbinger of total defeat. Unbelief is unable to see things in their proper perspective and proportions: thirty-six men and not the whole of the three thousand had been slain!

It was not without good reason that the apostle was moved by the Spirit to say to those who were partakers of the heavenly calling, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief" (Heb 3:12). There is a very real danger of our doing so, and we need to be ever on our guard against it, walking circumspectly (Eph 5:15). Even the faith of him who is designated "the father of all them that believe" (Rom 4:11) failed, for when there arose a famine in the land, instead of trusting God to supply all his need (as Elijah did), he "went down into Egypt to sojourn there" (Gen 12:10). That breakdown in Abraham's faith was due to the same cause as that of Joshua's! He was out of communion with God. First, he had left Bethel ("the house of God"), where he had built an altar to the LORD, and then he journeyed "toward the south" (Gen 12:7-9)—i.e. Egyptwards. And thus, as we have seen with Joshua, instead of inquiring of the LORD, he had hastily adopted the carnal policy of his underlings. Disaster followed, and now a spirit of unbelief possessed him. Learn, then, dear reader, that faith will only be preserved in a healthy condition as we maintain close communion with God through those means of grace which He has appointed.

"And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?" (Jos 7:7) Very sad indeed is it to hear Joshua now using the very language which had been employed forty years previously by that generation of Israel whose carcasses fell in the wilderness. Of them it is recorded that they "murmured in [their] tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of *the Amorites, to destroy us*"; the explanation of such despondency being, as Moses charged them, "in this thing ye did not believe the LORD your God" (Deu 1:27, 32). And now Joshua is guilty of expressing the same unbelief. This is the more lamentable since he (together with Caleb) had rebuked the scepticism of the congregation, saying, "Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not" (Num 14:9)—that was the language of confidence in God. But as faith in Him will make the weak and timid strong and courageous, so will unbelief fill the stoutest heart with terror.

Observe how inconsistent and incoherent is the language of unbelief. Joshua acknowledged that it was the LORD who had brought Israel over Jordan, and then asked if He had done so only for them to be destroyed at the hands of the heathen. It is ever thus. Though the wise of this world look upon the children of faith as a company of credulous simpletons, yet really, "the shoe is on the other foot." Nothing is so reasonable as to believe the Bible, for it is the Word of Him who cannot lie. But none so imposed upon and irrational as those who reject a revelation from heaven that is attested by "many infallible proofs" (Act 1:3): to scorn what is authenticated by unimpeachable evidence is a mark of madness and not intelligence. And when a child of God gives way to unbelief, his spiritual understanding becomes deranged, and the conclusions he then draws are faulty and absurd. Behold another example of this is in the case of David, when he "said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1Sa 27:1). How could he possibly do so, when God Himself had assured him of the throne? He, too, had failed to ask counsel of the LORD, and now that he talks with his own deceitful heart, he utters the language of a fool.

What need is there for the Christian to cry, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mar 9:24). And if that prayer be sincere, so far from his excusing unbelief, he will mourn over it; so far from regarding it as an innocent infirmity for which he is to be more sympathized with than blamed, he will strive against its evil workings. We have no patience with those who well-nigh exalt the carnal fears and doubts of God's people into spiritual graces and evidences of humility and "deep experience." Any teaching which makes light of the distrust of God, or which causes His children to pity themselves for their failures and falls, is to be condemned and shunned. To call into question the divine promises is to make God a liar, and that is a heinous offence by whomsoever committed. As faith honours God, so does unbelief dishonour Him. Faith is said to glorify God (Rom 4:20); and therefore, unbelief is a failing to render to Him the glory which is His due. Unbelief in His people is the sin against which God has most proclaimed His displeasure. Moses and Aaron were excluded from Canaan because of their unbelief (Num 20:12). The father of John the Baptist was stricken dumb for not believing what God had revealed (Luk 1:20). Christ chided His disciples for nothing so much as He did for their unbelief (Mat 8:26; Luk 24:25). "Lord, Increase our faith" (Luk 17:5) must be our daily request.

"Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!" (Jos 7:7). Surely this cannot be the language of one who was on his face before the ark of the Lord! Ah, my reader, no fictitious history had contained such an unthinkable anomaly as that. Nevertheless, it is true to life, as many a saint discovers

by sad experience. Just previously, "So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country" (Jos 6:27); here disgracing himself, by complaining of the LORD's dealings with Israel. Then in the posture of self-abasement, he is now uttering the language of self-will. For how many of God's own people do those words of Jacob's concerning Reuben apply: "Unstable as water" (Gen 49:4). Humbly seeking for light from the Word, and puffed up with conceit when it be granted. Praying for more patience, and then fretful when the divine providences are working it in us (Jam 1:2). Intrepidly contending, single-handed, against eight hundred and fifty false prophets (1Ki 18), and immediately after fleeing in terror from the threats of a woman (1Ki 19:2-3). Ephraim was not the only one like "a cake not turned" (Hos 7:8)—baked on one side, dough on the other. Oh, what a compound of inconsistencies and contradictions is the Christian as "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (Gal 5:17)! Oh, the long-suffering of the Lord!

The best of God's children (if there be any best!) are frequently affected with fits of unbelief and chillings of love. Today, they find themselves earnestly proposing and resolving to do those things which are good, but tomorrow, they may discover their zeal has somewhat abated, so uncertain and inconstant are their affections. Now hopeful, anon despondent; now singing God's praises, anon their harps upon the willows; now walking obediently in the path of the divine precepts, anon straying off into bypath meadow. None differ so much from them as they often differ from themselves! Nay, in the very graces for which they are eminent, how have they failed! Moses was the meekest man upon the earth, yet in what a froward passion was he when he struck the rock twice and spake unadvisedly with his lips! Peter was the most zealous and courageous of the apostles, yet he yielded to sinful fear in the presence of a maid. Some will glorify God in one condition, but dishonour Him in another. They may conduct themselves becomingly while God keeps them low, and then become fretful against Him when they are exalted. On the contrary, others who tread softly in a time of prosperity are filled with murmuring when the cold winds of adversity smite them.

"Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!" Alas, what is man? What is a saint when left to himself? What will not his inbred corruptions produce unless divine grace suppress them! How the evil leaven was working! How horribly Joshua himself was affected by Achan's sin! Yet that in no wise excused his own unseemly language. Joshua was here taking direct issue with the Most High, openly quarrelling with His dispensations, complaining at His providential dealings. And has the writer and the reader, even after becoming a Christian, never been guilty of the same black offence? Ah, have we not cause to hang our heads in shame? And should not the remembrance of past risings up of a rebellious spirit cause us to beg God to subdue our iniquities and bring our will into fuller subjection to His? Instead of marveling at the sad language of Joshua, see in it a portrayal of our own wayward hearts and our deep need of crying, "Hold thou me up" (Psa 119:117).

"Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!" Most assuredly that was not the utterance of "a sound mind" (2Ti 1:7), least of all as now issuing from one who had recently passed through such an experience as Joshua's: he had just witnessed a whole generation of his nation *discontented* with the wilderness, repeatedly lusting after the "flesh pots" of Egypt (Exo 16:3). It was the height of folly to express such a wish. Moreover, it was not at all a matter of "contentment" (1Ti 6:6): they had left the wilderness at the command of God, and not because they were dissatisfied with it. Mark well the sad process which preceded that frenzy. First, a severance of communion with God, then giving way to an evil heart of unbelief, then quarrelling with God's providential dealings, and now bereft of spiritual sanity, for surely it was nothing less to prefer the wilderness to Canaan! But is it not ever thus when fellowship with the Lord is broken and unbelief actuates us? The barren wilderness is a figure of this perishing world, and when a Christian is out of touch with Christ and a spirit of distrust possesses him, he is infatuated with the things of earth and, unless divine grace restores him to his senses, becomes more attached to them than the things which are above.

"O LORD, what shall I say!" It seems to us that these words mark return to sanity. The wild outburst of the preceding verse is checked. It is almost as though he now felt ashamed of his rash utterances as he began to realize to Whom he was speaking. Yet he is still quite disturbed and scarcely knows how to express himself. "O LORD, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!" (Jos 7:8). Israel was beloved of him, yet he could think of nothing to say on their behalf which excused their cowardly defeat. Nevertheless he *should* have known how to answer his question. The Lord does not act capriciously, nor does He "afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men" (Lam 3:33), but only as they

give Him occasion; and therefore, Joshua ought to have humbly begged the Lord to make known to him the reason for His afflicting judgment. Should he not have asked, "O LORD, why doth Thine anger burn against Thy people? Wherein have we provoked Thee?" When they were defeated in battle by the Philistines, the elders of Israel inquired, "Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day?" (1Sa 4:3). When there was a famine in the land for three years, "David enquired of the LORD" (2Sa 21:1), and He at once made known the cause of the same.

What has just been pointed out presents a lesson which we do well to heed. "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but [rather] that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Eze 33:11). Much less has the Lord any pleasure in smiting His own people. Yet He must maintain His own honour, and deal with them according to His holiness as well as His grace. And *they* must "hear...the rod" (Mic 6:9) if they would profit from it and "be partakers of his holiness" (Heb 12:10-11). Closing our eyes to the providential signs God gives us of His displeasure will not improve matters; nor will wringing our hands in despair when things go wrong get us anywhere. While on the one hand God has said, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord," yet on the other, He bids us, "nor faint when thou art rebuked of him" (Heb 12:5). What then should we do and say? Humble ourselves beneath His mighty hand and pray "cause me to understand wherein I have erred...shew me wherefore thou contendest with me" (Job 6:24; 10:2) that I may put right what is wrong, and once more that Thy smile upon me. Such an inquiry, if it be sincere and humble, will not be in vain.

"O LORD, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!" Let us apply those words to ourselves. What should be the believer's reaction to the sad state which the religious world is now in? As he beholds the awful declension of the outward cause of Christ on earth, and realizes that the Spirit has been quenched, what ought he to do and say? First, solemnly examine himself and his ways, and seek to ascertain how far his *own* sins have contributed to the present absence of the Lord's blessing from the church. During "the desolations of Jerusalem," Daniel sought the Lord, and he tells us, "I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said...*We* have sinned, and have committed iniquity" (Dan 9:2-5, etc.). Let each of us do likewise. Second, we should be deeply affected by the present situation and mourn before God because of the reproach which prevailing conditions in Christendom cast upon His name: see Psalm 119:53:136; Jeremiah 9:1. Third, we should turn the exhortation of Revelation 3:2 into earnest prayer, and beg the Lord to "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die," and revive His work in the midst of the years. Fourth, we should plead before Him the promise, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him" (Isa 59:19). "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" (Jon 3:9).

"For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?" (Jos 7:9). Here the supplicant becomes more intelligible, for the first half of this verse is to be regarded as a plea, being tantamount to asking the Lord to remember that Israel were the sheep of His pasture, and therefore, to spare them from falling, a prey to the wolves. Then Joshua pointed out the danger Israel were now in, thereby taking the place of weakness; next, he looked to the love and pity of the LORD: Israel's name, which is dear to Thee, will be blotted out if the heathen completely destroy them—which was an indirect appeal to the promises God had made to the fathers (Gen 15:18, etc.). Finally, he points out the reproach which would be cast upon God were the Canaanites to triumph completely. Thus, when we penetrate beneath the surface agitations of Joshua, we see that at heart, it was concern for the divine glory which had prompted this prayer! He could not endure a prospect which reflected upon the fidelity and power of their covenant God. Herein he foreshadowed the antitypical Joshua. He, too, when in deep trouble of soul, had asked, "What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour"? No, rather, "Father, glorify *thy name*" (Joh 12:27-28)! Let that be *our* plea, and it will prove a prevailing one.



THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

24. *In the Soul, Part 2*

Our urgent need for something more than an *external* revelation from God, even though it be a written communication from Him, inspired and inerrant, was intimated in our last issue in a general way. Now to be more specific: Our need of an immediate and inward discovery of God in the soul, or for a supernatural work of grace to be wrought in the heart in order to fit us for a saving knowledge of Him and the receiving of His truth, arises from *the power which sin has* upon man. Sin has such a hold upon the affections of the unregenerate that no human arguments or persuasions can divorce their heart from it. Sin is born and bred in man (Psa 51:5), so that it is as natural for fallen man to sin as it is for him to breathe. Its power over him is constantly increased by long-continued custom, so that he can no more do that which is good than the Ethiopian can change his skin (Jer 13:23). It is his delight: "It is as sport to a fool to do mischief" (Pro 10:23). Sinners have no other pleasure in this world than to gratify their lusts, and therefore, they have no desire to mortify them. It has such a maddening effect upon them that their hearts are "fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc 8:11). Nothing but the might of God can change the bent of man's nature and the inclination of his will.

The impossibility of a sinner's coming to Christ without an effectual call from God, or His quickening application of the Word to his heart, appears again from the *indisposedness* of fallen man. "Three things must be wrought upon a man before he can come to Christ. His blind understanding must be enlightened, his hard and rocky heart must be broken and melted, his stiffly fixed and obstinate will must be conquered and subdued; but all these are effects of supernatural power. The illumination of the mind is the peculiar work of God (2Co 4:6). The breaking and melting of the heart is the Lord's own work: it is He that giveth repentance (Act 5:31). It is the Lord that 'takes away the heart of stone, and giveth an heart of flesh' (Eze 36:26); it is He that poureth out the spirit of contrition upon man (Zec 12:10). The change of the natural bent and inclination of the will is the Lord's sole prerogative (Phi 2:13)"—John Flavel (1627-1691). None but the Almighty can free sin's slaves or deliver Satan's captives. It is a work of infinite power to impart grace to graceless souls, to make those who are carnal and worldly to become spiritual and heavenly. The call of God is to *holiness* (1Th 4:7), and nothing but omnipotence can make the unholy respond thereto.

The like must be said of the nature of that *faith* by which the soul comes to Christ. Everything in faith is supernatural. Its implantation is so (Joh 1:12-13). "It is a flower that grows not in the field of nature. As the tree cannot grow without a root, neither can a man believe (savingly) without the new nature, whereof the principle of believing is a part"—Thomas Boston (1676-1732). No vital act of faith can be exercised by any man until a vital principle has been communicated to him. The objects of faith are supernatural—divine, heavenly, spiritual, eternal, invisible—and such cannot be apprehended by fallen man: his line is far too short to reach to them. The tasks allotted faith lie not within the compass of mere nature: to deny self (Mat 16:24), to prefer Christ before the dearest relations of flesh and blood (Mat 10:37-38), to adopt His Cross as the principle of our lives (Mar 8:34), to cut off the right hand and pluck out right-eye sins (Mat 5:29-30), are contrary to all the dictates of natural sense and reason. The victories of faith bespeak it to be supernatural: it overcomes the strongest oppositions from without (Heb 11:33-34), purges the most deep-seated corruptions within (Act 15:9), and resists the most charming allurements of a bewitching world (1Jo 5:4). Nothing short of that mighty power which raised Christ from the dead and exalted Him to the right hand of God can enable a depraved creature to savingly believe (Eph 1:19-20).

Divine teaching is absolutely essential for the reception and learning of divine things, and without it, all the teaching of men—even of God's most faithful and eminent servants—is inefficacious. God Himself cannot be apprehended merely by the intellectual faculty, for He is Spirit (Joh 4:24), and therefore, can only be known *spiritually*. But fallen man is carnal and not spiritual, and unless he be supernaturally brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light, he cannot see Him. This divine teaching is promised: "Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way" (Psa 25:8). Sinners are subjects on whom He works, elect sinners on whom He works savingly: "And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD" (Isa 54:13). In them God makes good His assurance, "And I will give them an heart *to know me*" (Jer 24:7), and until He does so, there is no saving acquaintance with Him. No book learning can acquire it: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2Pe 1:3). That divine power communicates

life to the soul, light to the understanding, sensitivity to the conscience, strength to the affections, a death-wound to our love of sin.

That "knowledge of him" (2Pe 1:3) consists of such a personal discovery of God to the heart as conveys a true, spiritual, affecting perception and recognition of His surpassing excellency. God is revealed to it as holy and gracious, clothed with majesty and authority, yet full of mercy and tender pity. Such a view of Him is obtained as causes its favoured subject, in filial and adoring language, to exclaim, "I *have* heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but *now* mine eye seeth thee" (Job 42:5). God Himself has become an awe-inspiring but blessed reality to the renewed soul. He is beheld by the eye of faith, and faith conveys both a demonstration and an inward subsistence of the objects beheld (Heb 11:1). The Father is now *revealed* to the heart (Mat 11:27). The word "reveal" means to remove a veil or covering, and so exhibit to view what before was hidden. The blessed Spirit, at regeneration, removes that film of enmity which sin has produced, that blinding veil which is upon the depraved mind (2Co 3:14), that "covering" which is "cast over all people" (Isa 25:7).

The saving revelation which is made to an elect sinner is not a creating of something which previously had no existence, nor is it *ab extra* to the Word: nothing is ever revealed to the soul by the Holy Spirit which is not in the Scriptures. It is most important that we should be quite clear on this point, or we shall be in danger of mysticism on the one hand or fanaticism on the other. "To expect that the Spirit will teach you without the Word is rank enthusiasm, as great as to hope to see without eyes: and to expect the Word will teach you without the Spirit is as great an absurdity as to pretend to see without light; and if any man says the Spirit teaches him to believe or do what is contrary to the written Word, he is a mad blasphemer. God has joined the Word and the Spirit, and what God has joined together, let no man put asunder"—Rev. William Romaine (1714-1795). "The Spirit of God teaches and enlightens by His Word as the instrument. There is no revelation from Him but what is (as to our perception of it) derived from the Scriptures. There may be supernatural illumination and strong impressions upon the mind in which the Word of God has no place or concern, but this alone is sufficient to *discountenance* them, and to prove they are not from the Holy Spirit"—John Newton (1725-1807).

There is real need to labour this point, for not a few highly strung people and those with vivid imaginations have been deceived thereon, supposing that strange dreams, extraordinary visions, and abnormal sights and sounds, are the means or manner in which the Holy Spirit is made manifest to the soul. Those who look for any suchlike experience are far more liable to be deluded by Satan than enlightened by the Spirit. The Spirit supplies no new and different revelation today from that which He has already made in the written Word. God indeed spoke to His servants of old by dreams and extraordinary means, and made known to them hidden mysteries and things to come; but all "vision and prophecy" is for ever sealed up (Dan 9:24). Through Paul, it was announced that prophecies should "fail" (be given no more) and tongue should "cease" (1Co 13:8), and they did so when the Canon of Scripture was completed. All of the divine will, so far as it can be of any use to us in the present life, is already clearly made known to us in the Old and New Testaments. The testimony of the Spirit in the Scriptures is "a more sure word" (2Pe 1:19) than any voice from heaven!

The most fearful curse is pronounced upon those who presume to add to or diminish from the testimony of God in the Scriptures (Rev 22:18-19). It is plain to the Christian that Abdullāh Mohammed (c. 570-632), John Smith (1832-1911), and Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) who pretended to be the recipients of special revelations from God, were lying impostors. Others who claim to have received any divine communications for their own souls, over and above what is contained in or may be rightly deduced from God's infallible Word, are themselves deceived, and on highly dangerous ground. "God does not give the Spirit to His people on purpose to abolish His Word, but rather to render the Word effectual and profitable to them"—John Calvin (1509-1564) on Luke 24:45. The Holy Scriptures "are able to make...wise unto salvation" (2Ti 3:15), yet not apart from the Spirit; the Spirit illuminates, yet never apart from the Word. The Spirit has first to open our sin blinded understandings before the light of the Word (2Pe 1:19) can enter our souls. He alone can seal the truth upon the heart. The things revealed in the Bible are real and true, but the natural man cannot perceive their spiritual nature, nor is he vitally affected by them, for he has no inward experience of the realities of which they treat.

By means of religious education and personal application to the study of the same, the natural man can obtain a good understanding of the letter of Scripture, and discourse fluently and orthodoxy thereon; yet the light in which he discerns them is but a merely natural or mental light; and while that be the case, his expe-

rience is the same as that of those described in 2 Timothy 3:7—“Ever learning, and never able to come to the [spiritual, divine experiential] knowledge of the truth.” The religion of the vast majority in Christendom today is one of tradition, form, or sentiment—destitute of one particle of vital and transforming power. Unless the Spirit of God has regenerated and indwells the soul, not only the most pleasing ritual but the most orthodox creed is worthless to him. Reader, you may be an ardent “Calvinist,” subscribe heartily to the soundest “Articles of Faith,” assent sincerely to every sentence in the Westminster Confession and Catechism, and yet be dead in trespasses and sins. Yea, such *is* your sad condition at this very moment, unless you have really been “born of the Spirit” (Joh 3:6-8) and God has revealed His Son *in* you (Gal 1:15-16).

“A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven” (Joh 3:27). How little is that statement understood by the majority of professing Christians! How unpalatable it is to the self-sufficient Laodiceans of this age, ignorant as they are of their wretchedness, poverty, and blindness (Rev 3:17). Though the wisdom and power of the Creator manifestly appear in every part of His creation, yet when the first Gospel preacher was sent to the Gentiles, he had to declare, “the world by wisdom knew not God” (1Co 1:21). Though the Jews had the Holy Scriptures in their hands and were thoroughly familiar with the letter of them, yet they knew neither the Father nor His Son when He appeared in their midst. Nor are things any better today. One may accept the Bible as God’s Word and assent to all that it teaches, and still be in his sins. He may believe that sin is a transgressing of God’s Law, that the Lord Jesus is alone the Saviour of sinners, and even be intellectually convinced that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, and yet be entirely ignorant of God to any good purpose. Until a miracle of grace is wrought within them, the state and experience of all men—spiritually speaking—is “Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive” (Act 28:26). They cannot do so until the veil of pride and prejudice, carnality and self-interest be removed from their hearts.

The soul must be divinely renovated before it is capable of apprehending spiritual things. The careful reader will have noticed that the marginal rendering of John 3:27 is: “A man *can take unto himself nothing*, except it be given him from heaven.” He must first be given a disposition in order to do so. What a word was that of Moses to the Israelites: “Ye *have seen* all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt... Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart *to perceive*, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day” Deu 29:2-4—they took not to them the implications of what God had done so as to profit therefrom. Many have “the *form* of knowledge and of the truth in the law” (Rom 2:20) in their heads, but are total strangers to the power of it in their hearts. Why is this the case? Because the Spirit has not made an effectual application of it to them: they have received no inward revelation of it in their souls. Let us furnish a specific illustration: “For I was alive [in my own esteem] without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom 7:9). From earliest childhood, Saul of Tarsus had been thoroughly acquainted with the words of the tenth commandment, but until the hour of his spiritual quickening, they had never searched within and “pricked him in the heart” (Act 2:37).

Hitherto, that “Hebrew of the Hebrews” was proud of his orthodoxy, for had he not been “brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God” (Act 22:3)? Conscientious in the performing of duty, living an irreproachable life, “touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phi 3:6) in his outward walk, he was thoroughly pleased with himself. But when the Spirit of God applied to his conscience those words, “thou shalt not covet,” his complacency was rudely shattered. When God gave him to perceive and feel the spirituality and strictness of the divine Law, that it prohibited *inward* lustings, all unholy and irregular desires, he was convicted of his lost condition. He now saw and felt a sea of corruption within. He realized he stood condemned before the bar of a holy God, under the awful curse of His righteous Law, and he died to all self-esteem and self righteousness. When the Law was divinely brought home to his conscience in shattering power, it was like a bolt from the blue, smiting him with compunction: he became a dead man in his own convictions, a justly sentenced criminal.

Have *you*, my reader, experienced God’s Word to be “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit”? Have you found it to be “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12)—of *your* heart? You have not merely, by the reading of it, nor by the hearing of it. That Word must be applied by an Almighty hand before it cuts a soul to the quick: only then is it “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph 6:17)—when *He* directs it. It is only by the blessing and concurrence of the Spirit that the Word is made to produce its quickening, searching, illuminating, convicting, transforming, and comforting effects upon the soul of any man. Only by the Spirit is the su-

premacyp of the Word established in the soul. It is by His teaching that there is conveyed a *real apprehension* of the truth, so that the heart is truly awed and solemnized, by being made to feel the authority and majesty of the Word. Only then does he realize the vast importance and infinite value of its contents. By the inward work and witness of the Spirit, the regenerate have a personal and infallible source of evidence for the divine inspiration and integrity of the Scriptures to which the unregenerate have no access.

Spiritual life is followed by divine light shining into the heart, so that its favoured subject perceives things to be with him exactly as they are represented in the Word. The Spirit makes use of His own Word as a vehicle for communicating instruction. The Word is the instrument, but He is the Agent. The holiness of God, the spirituality of His Law, the sinfulness of sin, his own imminent peril, are now discovered to the soul with a plainness; and certainly which as far exceed that mental knowledge, which he previously had of them, as ocular demonstration exceeds a mere report of things. By the Spirit's teaching, he obtains radically different thoughts of God, of self, of the world, of eternity, than he ever had before. Things are no longer general and impersonal to him: "*Thou art the man*" has become the conviction of his conscience. He no longer challenges that awful indictment, "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom 8:7), for he is painfully aware of the awful fact that he has been a lifelong rebel against heaven. He no longer denies his total depravity, for the Spirit has given him to see there is "no soundness" (Psa 38:7; Isa 1:6) in him, that there is nothing in him by nature but deadness, darkness, corruption, unbelief, and self-will.

Those who are inwardly taught of God discover there is abundantly more of evil in their defiled natures and sinful actions than ever they realized before. There is as great and real a difference between that general notion which the natural man has of sin, and that experiential and intuitional knowledge of it which is possessed by the divinely quickened soul, as there is between the mere *picture* of a lion, and being confronted by a living lion as it meets us roaring in the way. In the light of the Spirit, sin is seen and felt to be something radically different from how the natural man conceives it. None knows what is in the heart of fallen man but God. He has delineated the same in His Word, and when the Spirit opens the eyes of the sinner's understanding, he sees himself in its mirror to be exactly as God has there portrayed him—with a heart which is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9). His secret imaginations are now discovered to him; his pride, his presumption, and his awful hypocrisy are beheld in all their hideousness. The sight and sense which the illumination of the Spirit gives him of his wickedness and wretchedness is overwhelming: he realizes he is a leprous wretch before a holy God—irreparably ruined, *lost*.



THE WORK OF THE LORD

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1Co 15:58). In the November portion of this article, we did little more than give a topical treatment of this verse: let us now furnish a contextual exposition of it. In verses 55 and 56, the apostle asked, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”—to which he replied, “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.” Then he exultantly cried: “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (verse 57). The tense of the verb should be closely observed: it is not “hath given” nor “will give,” but “giveth us the victory.” It is also to be carefully noted that the “victory” here referred to is one over death and the grave viewed in connection with sin and the Law, and that it is shared by all saints and is not some peculiar experience which only a few fully consecrated souls enter into. Obviously, that victory will only be fully and historically realized on the resurrection morning; yet even now, it is apprehended by faith and enjoyed by hope, and, in proportion as it really *is* so, will the believer know practically something of “the power of Christ’s resurrection.”

“Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” is the language of joyful *faith*, in response to the revelation given in the previous fifty-six verses. Christ’s triumph over death as the wages of sin and the penalty of the Law ensures the resurrection of all His sleeping saints, for it was as their federal Head (verses 20-22) that He suffered for their sins and bore the Law’s curse, as it was that as “the last Adam” (verse 45), He was victorious over the tomb. As faith lays hold of that blessed truth, and its possessor appropriates a personal interest therein, he realizes that he *himself* has (judicially) passed from death to life—that sin cannot slay, nor the Law curse him, and that he is justified by God “from all things” (Act 13:39). Such a realization cannot but move him to exclaim, “Thanks be to God.” By virtue of his union with Christ, for him, death’s sting has been extracted, and therefore, it has been robbed of all terror. It is sin which gives power and horror to death, but since Christ has made full atonement for the believer’s sin and obtained remission for him, death can no more harm him than could a wasp whose venomous sting had been removed—though it might still buzz and hiss and attempt to disturb him.

“The strength of sin is the law” (1Co 15:56): its power to condemn was supplied by the transgressing of it. But since Christ was made a curse for us, we are released therefrom. The entire threatening and penalty of the Law was executed upon the Surety, and therefore, those in whose stead He bore it are exempted from the same. But more: because in Eden, sin violated the holy commandment of the Lawgiver, the Law received a *commanding power* over the sinner, making sin to rage and reign in him, compelling him to serve it as a slave. That was but just. Since man preferred the exercise of self-will to submission to the authority of his Maker, the Law was given both a condemning and commanding power over him. In other words, the enthralling power or strength which sin exerts over its subjects is an intrinsic part of the Law’s curse. The Law commands holiness, but by reason of man’s depravity, its very precepts exasperate his corruptions—as the sun shining on a dunghheap stirs up its filthy vapours. God punishes sin with sin: since the commission of sin was man’s choice, the strength of sin shall be his doom. But Christ has not only delivered His people from the penalty of sin, but from its reigning power, too, so that His promise is, “For sin shall not have dominion over you” (Rom 6:14).

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”: let *that* be your response to mercies so great. Manifestly, the apostle is here drawing a conclusion from all that precedes, particularly from what is said in verses 56 and 57. Divine grace, through the death and resurrection of Christ, has *judicially* delivered the believer from both the guilt and dominion of sin, and from the whole curse of the Law. How then shall he answer to such blessings? Why, by seeing to it that those mercies are now made good by him in a practical way. And how is he to set about the same? First, by complying with Romans 6:11: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord”; which in the light of the previous verse signifies: By the exercise of faith in what the Word declares, regard yourselves as having legally passed from death to life in the person of your Surety. Second, by heeding Romans 6:12: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof”; which means, Suffer not indwelling sin to lord it over you. Since you be absolved from all you did in the past, yield obedience to God and not to your corruptions.

We cannot rightly interpret 1 Corinthians 15:58, unless its connection with verses 56 and 57 be duly noted. Its opening "Therefore" is as logical and necessary as the one in Romans 6:12, and what follows that passage enables us to understand our present one. "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God": that is, conduct yourselves *practically* in harmony with what is true of you (in Christ) *legally*. Another parallel passage, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind" (1Pe 4:1), where the doctrinal fact is first stated and then the practical duty enjoined. Legally, "victory" is ours *now*, as our justification by God demonstrates. Experientially, we have been freed from the dominion of sin, and are delivered, in measure, from its enticing power, for there is now that in us which hates and opposes it. At death, sin is completely eradicated from the soul; and at resurrection, its last trace will have disappeared from the body. From his exposition of the grand truth of resurrection, the apostle made practical application, exhorting the saints to "walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4).

In view of our participation in Christ's victory, we are here informed of the particular duty which is incumbent upon us, namely, to strive against sin, resist temptation, overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb, and bring forth the fruits of holiness to Him. But, in order thereto, we must be "stedfast" in the conviction of our oneness with Christ in His death and resurrection, and "unmovable" in our love and gratitude to Him. The Greek for "*always abounding in the work of the Lord*" conveys the idea of quality more than quantity, progressive improvement rather than multiplicity of works: "Continually making advance in true piety"—Matthew Henry (1662-1714). *Excel in it* is the thought: rest not satisfied with present progress and attainments, but each fresh day, endeavour to perform your duty better than on the previous one. This life-long task of mortification and sanctification is called "the work of the Lord," because it is the one which He has assigned us, because it can be performed only in His strength, and because it is that which is peculiarly well pleasing in His sight.

That duty can only be discharged in a right spirit as faith apprehends the Christian's union with Christ, and then thankfully acts accordingly. There cannot be any Gospel holiness without such a realization. There can be no evangelical obedience until the heart is really assured that Christ has removed death's "sting" for us and has taken away from the Law the "strength of sin" (verse 56). Only then can the believer serve God in "newness of spirit" (Rom 7:6): that is, in loving gratitude, and not from dread or to earn something. Only then will he truly realize that as in the Lord he has "righteousness" for his justification, so in Him he has "strength" (Isa 45:24) for his walk and warfare. Thus the opening, "Therefore" of our verse not only draws a conclusion which states the obligation entailed by the inestimable blessings enumerated in the context, but also supplies powerful *motive* for the performance of that obligation—a performance which is to be regarded as a great privilege. Since "Christ died for our sins" (1Co 15:3), since He be "risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (verse 20), since we shall be "raised in glory" (verse 43) and "bear the image of the heavenly" (verse 49), let our gratitude be expressed in a life of practical holiness.

A second motive to inspire the performance of this duty is contained in the closing clause of our verse: "Forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." He will be no man's Debtor: every sincere effort of gratitude—however faulty its execution—is valued by Him and shall be recompensed. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name" (Heb 6:10). The Christian should be fully assured that a genuine endeavour to do God's will and promote His glory will receive His smile, produce peace of conscience and joy of heart here, and His "well done" (Mat 25:21-23) hereafter. In the keeping of His commandments, "there is great reward" (Psa 19:7-11). This was the motive which animated Moses in his great renunciation (Heb 11:24-26): "He had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

"Forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." "Labour" is a stronger word than "work," signifying effort to the point of fatigue. "In the Lord" means in union with and dependence upon Him. Such labour shall not be strength spent for naught. Yet *that* is exactly what it appears to be to the Christian. To him, it seems his efforts to mortify his lusts and develop his graces are utterly futile. He feels that his best endeavours to resist sin and bring forth the fruits of holiness are a total failure. That is because he judges by sight and sense! God, who looks at the heart and accepts the sincere will for the deed, reckons otherwise. "Ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord": such an assurance is ours in exact proportion to the measure of faith. The more confident our hope of reward, the more determined will be our efforts to mortify sin and practise holiness—the only "labour" God has assured us "is not in vain"!

OUR ANNUAL LETTER

“In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good” (Ecc 11:6). We have now entered upon what must be at least the beginning of “the evening” of our life, for forty years have passed since the editor preached his first sermon. It was on the words, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ” (Rom 1:16), etc., and to a congregation of over seven hundred people. Though it was not the first time we had spoken in public, yet it was quite an ordeal, especially as it was in our home-town—Nottingham. Since then, without any break, it has been our holy privilege, yet solemn responsibility, to sow the good seed, either orally or by the pen—the latter exclusively the last twelve years. Let the preacher observe that in the verse with which we have opened, it is not “sow the seed,” but “sow *thy* seed”—that which we have, by grace, made our own, and verified by personal experience. *That* enables us to sow it with greater confidence, and often to better effect!

The discriminating hearer (and reader) can usually perceive whether the message is spoken from the heart or mechanically delivered like a gramophone; whether its author can say, “That which...we have seen with our eyes, which *we* have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life...declare we unto you” (1Jo 1:1-3), or whether he be merely discussing something with which he has only a theoretical acquaintance. The figure of “sowing seed” is a very suggestive one—among other things, implying the exercise of *faith*, for to outward sight, so far as immediate results are concerned, it seems to be love’s labour lost. For the same reason, it is an act of *hope*, performed with the expectation of a future yield. So it should ever be with the servant of God. After making sure he has a message from the Lord and has first taken it unto and preached it to himself, he is to deliver the same in humble dependence upon his Master, and in the unshakable assurance that His Word will not return unto Him void, but shall indeed accomplish that which He pleases (Isa 55:11).

“Thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good” (Ecc 11:6). Sometimes the servant of God is permitted to see fruits from his labours at an early date; at others, he may toil all through a long night and take nothing. That may be ascribed to the sovereignty of God, though we are persuaded that “according to your faith be it unto you” (Mat 9:29) has not a little to do with it—“without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb 11:6) applies as much to preaching as to anything else. Sometimes a message upon which extra pains were taken, and which was delivered with unusual earnestness and liberty, appears to be lost on the air; while another which seemed far more commonplace is made a definite blessing to souls—which may be God’s way of humbling the pride of His servant. In our experience with this magazine, we have been particularly favoured by God, for during the course of the year, scarcely an article appears when some write in to say it has been blessed to them. Even the one on “Counsels re Marriage” in the August issue was found especially timely by one reader about to wed—though when inserting it, we knew that not.

Though this year has not been without testings and anxieties—for as Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) well said, “Joy and trial go hand in hand”—yet it has been a most encouraging one. An increasing number are kindly making this written ministry a matter of more definite prayer. *That* should be the chief recourse of all God’s people in these evil days. The Lord changes not, and nothing is too hard for Him. We greatly fear that conditions both in the churches and in the world will still further deteriorate, and that the spiritual and moral darkness upon Christendom will become denser. Yet, while that is cause for grief and exercise of heart, it is no reason why we should panic or lose hope. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psa 46:1). “Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed [the most stable forms of government] and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea [kings and emperors deposed]; the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psa 46:2,7).

During 1948, several old friends, both personal and of this magazine, have been called Home. On the other hand, we have good reason to believe that more than one of our readers who were “church members” have passed from death unto life while taking unto themselves some of the more searching parts of our articles; while others have been influenced to withdraw from places where error is taught, going forth unto Christ outside the apostate camp. The number of our ministerial readers is being maintained, and we feel increasingly desirous of seeking to help them and strengthen their hands—especially the younger ones. Though we had to drop well over two hundred from our 1947 mailing list (and shall have to do the same

this time!), the Lord graciously gave us new ones to take their places, and some fifty more for “good measure.” The smallness of its circulation is still our acutest problem. Had it not been that more than one hundred sent an annual donation which permits us to mail them an extra copy, we had been obliged to cease publishing years ago. Will U.S.A. readers take note that \$5 fully covers a bound volume and *two* of the loose monthly issues for next year.

So many have written to tell of the help and blessing received from the “Prayers of the Apostles” articles that we have decided to prolong them throughout 1949, D.V. It had been our intention to take up a verse-by-verse exposition of the first epistle of John, and thus meet the wish of scores who read our work on John’s Gospel, but that must be postponed for another year. Under the “Doctrine of Revelation,” after two or three more on the saving discovery which God makes of Himself in the soul, we hope to write several articles on the beatific vision of the revelation of the Lord unto His saints *in glory*, which is, of course, the climax of the subject; after which we expect to turn to the more technical side and take up the “verbal inspiration” of the Scriptures, their interpretation, and application: much grace will be required for the former, and wisdom for the latter. In addition to those on Joshua, a new but shorter series will begin in the January issue, entitled “Glorious Sinai,” which, though somewhat controversial, is most blessed and deeply important: we beg for them a prayerful and unprejudiced perusal.

If we are preserved in health, such a programme, in addition to writing many letters every week, will keep us constantly busy—far busier than many realize. Our articles consist not of the first things which come to mind, but each one is the outcome of many hours’ hard work. It is only by adhering strictly to a systematic schedule the editor is able (by grace) to produce so much month by month from his own pen. Such intense and prolonged application makes it impracticable for us to do any visiting or receive any visitors: the hour we might spend in conversing with a single person is spent in seeking to help a thousand by our pen; so friends will understand why we cannot see any callers. One reason why we remain in this secluded isle is that we can prosecute our labours in undisturbed privacy.

Notwithstanding our having had no break—not so much as a single day’s holiday the past eight years—we are thankful to say that (except for slight colds) we have both been preserved in health and strength through another year. In spite of a further ten per cent increase in costs of production, we close 1948 with a small credit balance. We were ashamed of the “workmanship” on the 1947 bound volume, but were unable to secure better. This year, our printers have kindly agreed to do the job, and we hope for a more satisfactory one. Through the generosity of a few friends, the 1948 volume will be available to regular readers for 7s.6d. (\$1.75), but we reserve the right to select customers at that price. Please read the December cover-page article on December 31, and pray that it may be made good in both writer and reader. *Prayer for us, for God’s blessing on this magazine, and an increased circulation is earnestly solicited.*

With Christian greetings, yours by divine mercy—A. W. and V. E. PINK.

