

Vol. XXIX

December, 1950

No. 12

STUDIES
IN THE
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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REMEMBERING

New Year's Message, to be read on January 1

We propose to write now upon a twofold “remembering”—God’s of us, ours of Him. We need hardly point out that when the Scriptures speak of God “remembering,” such language is a gracious concession on His part—the Infinite accommodating Himself to the language of the finite. With the great I am, there is neither past nor future, but rather an ever-present *now*—“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Act 15:18) expresses far more than His bare omniscience. Thus there is no such thing as forgetting or recalling on God’s part, yet that does not mean the term is devoid of significance when it is referred to the eternal One; very far from it. When the Bible tells us God “remembers” His people, it means that He is mindful of them, that they are the objects of His favourable regard, that He has their welfare at heart. As might be expected, the first time the term occurs in Holy Writ, it is in connection with *God*: as a matter of fact, the first five references (the number of *grace*) are to the divine remembering—how significant and blessed! Equally anticipatively and suggestively, the first time it is used of man is in Genesis 40:23, “yet *did not* the chief butler remember Joseph,” who had befriended him—so fickle is the human memory.

“And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark” (Gen 8:1). In order to appreciate the blessedness of those words, we need to ponder the occasion and visualize the situation. To carnal reason and natural impatience, it would appear that the Lord had completely forgotten those within the ark. Not only days and weeks, but months had elapsed since He had “shut him in” (7:16). Previously, God had promised Noah that He would preserve him and all who were with him in the ark (6:14-20), and now no less than nine months had passed (8:5) and still they were confined therein! His faith had been put to a great test in the building of the ark, and now his hope was severely tried, for there is no record that God had informed him how long he would have to remain therein. How often it has been thus with the Lord’s people! For a season He seems to overlook them, yet in due course He appears for them. In “wrath” upon the wicked, God remembers “mercy” unto His elect (Hab 3:2). Let every saint who is in straits take comfort and fresh confidence from Genesis 8:1. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation” (2Pe 2:9). If not one sparrow is forgotten by God (Luk 12:6), He certainly will not forget one of His dear children!

“He hath remembered his covenant for ever” (Psa 105:8), the reference being unto that formal and solemn arrangement which God entered into with Christ before the foundation of the world, wherein, as the Head of His people, the Mediator¹ pledged Himself fully to discharge their obligations; and the Father, on His part, promised to bestow upon them the reward earned by their Surety.² That everlasting covenant is the basis of all God’s dealings with His elect, the ground of the divine procedure in all His dispensations with them. Exodus 2:23-25 supplies a blessed illustration thereof. When the Hebrews were being sorely oppressed in Egypt, and they sighed and cried by reason of the bondage, we are told “God heard their groaning, and God *remembered His covenant*...and God had respect unto them.” God cannot violate that gracious compact, for it is sacred to Him, being sealed by the blood of His Son (Heb 13:21). In Psalm 105:42, the covenant is termed “His holy promise,” and a holy God must make good His oath (Psa 89:4, 19). “He will ever be mindful of his covenant” (Psa 111:5), for He takes great care in acting always according to its engagement. It does not become obsolete by the lapse of time; it cannot be broken, for God is faithful. Zacharias recognized that the wonders God wrought in his day were the fulfillment of His covenant promises (Luk 1:68-72).

“For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psa 103:14). Blessed consideration is that! God is not forgetful of our mortality nor unmindful of our infirmities, and therefore does He deal gently with us. We too often overlook our frailty, unduly burdening ourselves and overtaxing our strength. Nor do we sufficiently bear in mind the infirmities of others—how many a husband fails to realize that his wife is “the weaker vessel” (1Pe 3:7), and, instead of giving honour unto her as such, imposes upon her. Not so the Lord: “He *remembereth* that we are dust.” He is no Egyptian taskmaster! Nor is the Lord Jesus: His yoke is easy and His burden light (Mat 11:30). The Lord is compassionate unto His feeble creatures. “Fee-

¹ **Mediator** – one who intervenes between two parties to bring reconciliation; a go-between.

² **Surety** – one who assumes the responsibilities or debts of another.

ble” we say, for though the world may talk of some men possessing “an iron constitution,” Scripture declares “*all flesh is grass*” (Isa 40:5). The measure of our natural strength is sovereignly allotted by our Maker. It is not those of the most powerful physique who live longest—witness Marshal Petain, King Gustav, G. B. Shaw. For the Lord to “remember” us is to be considerate of our frailty, to hear our cries (1Sa 1:19-20), to succour and help us (Gal 2:10).

“Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 10:17). Those words point one of the many contrasts which the apostle was here drawing between the old and new covenants as he set forth the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism, for in the latter there *was* “a remembrance again made of sins every year” (verse 3). How precious is this emphatic declaration! It signifies that God absolves those who savingly believe in Christ from the guilt of their sins, so that they will never more be brought against them for their condemnation. It means that the penal and eternal consequences of our sins have been annulled, and therefore that they will never be recalled by God as He exercises His office of Judge. It expresses the fixity and finality of divine forgiveness: that God will never revoke His pardon, that He has not only remitted our sins, but acts as though He had *forgotten* them. It is unspeakably blessed to observe how repeatedly and emphatically this truth is expressed in the Word. God has cast all our sins behind His back (Isa 38:17). He has removed them from before His face as far as the east is from the west (Psa 103:12). He has cast them all into the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19). He has blotted them out, as the sun completely dissipates a cloud (Isa 44:22). Beautifully is this illustrated by the fact that none of the failures and falls of the Old Testament saints are recorded in the New! Why? Because all their sins were under the blood of Christ!

“Thou shalt remember the LORD thy God” (Deu 8:18). At the beginning of a new year, beg Him to write this word upon your heart and make it effectual in your life. Does not your past show the need thereof? Alas, how quickly have His mercies faded from our minds. How transient the effects produced in our souls from His Word. Feelings stirred, but no lasting results, for truth loses its efficacy when not seriously thought upon. We listen to a powerful sermon or read an impressive article and receive the Word with joy, but the resultant emotions soon subside. For a brief moment only are we melted by a sense of the Lord’s goodness. Why is this? Because we meditate so little upon His favours: we do not take time to think gratefully upon them, and through our sinful neglect, they depart from our hearts (Deu 4:9). A sanctified remembrance is one where faith, fear, and love for God are active. In the scriptural meaning of the word, to “remember” God is to have heart-warming apprehensions of His perfections and the excellency of His will, as we are said to remember His commandments when we earnestly set ourselves unto the practice of them. Form the habit of daily pondering the wondrous works of God. “Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.”

“Remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee” (Deu 8:2). Most suitable word is this too at the beginning of the year. Some are dismally prone to dwell upon the rough parts of the path, others desire to recall only the smooth ones; but we are bidden to remember “*all the way.*” The places where we distrusted and murmured—that the recollection may humble us. The unpleasant sections when, because we followed a policy of self-will, God hedged up our way with thorns (Hos 2:6)—that we may profit from His chastenings. Remember too the testing parts, when providence so ordered your course that you were brought to wits-end corner, yet in response to your cries the Lord delivered you. Recall the trying stages of the journey, when visible supplies and outward means failed, and your wonder-working God gave you water out of the smitten Rock, so that you can acknowledge, “who remembered us in our low estate” (Psa 136:23).

Let these two things be fixed in your mind at the entrance of [the new year]: the fact that the Lord will never forget you, and your duty ever to remember Him. See that you are one of those whose holy resolution it is, “we will remember *thy love*” (Song 1:4). Say “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Psa 103:2), realizing that each of them issues from His love. Let the realization of His love ravish your heart, for it will greatly heighten your valuation of it. As you do so, it will make sin more odious, banish fear, tranquillize your mind, and make Christ more precious to you.



EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

12. Sins Confessed (1:9)

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

While our present verse be complete in itself, yet it is also a part of a larger whole, and an apprehension of its coherence with what precedes helps to a better understanding of it. It cannot be too frequently insisted upon that the Bible is not a collection of separate and unrelated texts, but rather a living body of truth, one member of which is connected with and dependent upon another—as the fingers (though each one be complete in itself) upon the hand, the hand upon the arm, and it with the trunk. The principal subject of 1 John 1 is that of fellowship with God in Christ: made possible by the divine incarnation (verses 1-2), producing a fullness of joy (verse 4), had with Him who is light (verse 5). In verses 6, 8, and 10, we are shown how certain types of godless professors are cut off from this privilege. How then are we to identify those who do enjoy it? That is a most pressing question: What are the clear and infallible marks by which Christians may know themselves to be among those in fellowship with God?

1. Walking in the light (verse 7).
2. Confessing their sins (verse 9).
3. Obedience (2:3, 5).
4. Love to the brethren (3:14), etc.

It is also to be noted that verses 7-10 all treat of some aspect of sin, for that is the great obstacle and hindrance to fellowship with the Holy One.

Coming now to the more immediate context, it is obvious that verse 9 supplies the second member of the general thought begun in verse 7, giving the opposite alternative to the one specified in verse 8. First, the believer is judicially cleansed from all sin; yet, second, the root of evil still remains within him. The questions may therefore be asked: Are we still affected by it? Does it at times occasion us to fall? If so, what must we do? Since the sin that indwells the believer is an active principle, it cannot but be that he will be under the partial influence of the same, and thereby moved to act unworthily of his Christian calling. Nor is this to be wondered at, when we consider the vileness and power of the flesh, the implacable enmity of Satan against him, the world laying its snares in his path, ever setting before him a multitude of objects to turn away his heart and mind from Christ. Nor can he deliver himself—even inherent grace or "the new nature" is insufficient for such a task. None but the Lord can give the victory. Yet at times He is pleased to leave us, in some respects and in a variety of ways, unto ourselves, so that we stumble in the mire and be-foul our garments. And why does He so act and withhold His supporting arm? That we may realize our weaknesses and have experiential proof that "without me ye can do nothing" (Joh 15:5).

That is a very humbling and painful lesson, yet it is one which God has ordained that all of His children shall learn. It is His will that they should have a fuller discovery of their ruined and corrupt condition by nature, and have a personal acquaintance with their weakness and impotency. It is His will that they feel, bewail, and own both the one and the other, that they may be more sensible alike of the disease and the remedy. When a real Christian sins, he smarts under it. He cannot but be affected and afflicted by it, for his peace and joy are temporarily lost, and his free access to God is broken into. That distresses his mind. Sometimes an old sin is revived, and he is greatly perturbed. Rightly so, for sin must never be regarded lightly or excused. Instead, it is to be loathed and lamented. Nevertheless, the saint must be careful that he does not confound his present case with his unchanging state. Though there be guilt on the conscience, pollution on the mind, grief in the heart, that is a very different thing from being in a sinful state—something which none of the Lord's regenerate can ever be in again, though they may be over and over again in a sinful case and circumstance.

But God has mercifully appointed a relief, exactly suited to this part of His people's spiritual distress. Marvel with us, fellow Christian, at the grace that has provided for the restoration of ungrateful and unduti-

ful children. In the verse now before us God has given us directions how we are to act when in and under such sinful cases.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

And, my reader, there is no relief for the burdened conscience, no restoration to real fellowship with God, until we do so. Alas, that we are so slow, so reluctant to avail ourselves of the same. But pride hinders us, and we are loath to humble ourselves before the One against whom we have transgressed. When we realize who it is we have offended and grieved, call to mind the privileges we have enjoyed and abused, think upon the profession and promises we have made, dwell upon the heinousness of the sins into which we have fallen, there is a sad tendency in us to keep silent, and then to excuse ourselves. But that is fatal both to our present peace and future spiritual prosperity. Unjudged sins produce a cold reserve in the heart toward the Holy One, and if that be persisted in, divine chastisement will be our sure portion.

What has just been said receives forcible illustration in Psalm 32:3-4, where David describes the painful experiences that befell him during those months when he had refused to acknowledge his foul offences. Said he, “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.” He was like a man in a fever—tossing about upon his bed, trying first one position and then another, but finding no rest. Such perturbation³ and disquietude of spirit in a believer is one of the surest signs that he is out of communion with the Lord. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isa 57:21), and such is the case of a backslider. There is nothing more distressing for one who has walked with God than to have a spiritual relapse; and if he be overcome again and again by his chief besetting sin, then is he most wretched—far more so than had he suffered a temporal loss, were afflicted bodily, or had encountered persecution. And there is no relief for him, no ease for his conscience, no joy in the Lord, no delight in His Word, no liberty in prayer, until he unburdens his heart unto Him by free and frank confession.

God has most graciously provided for just such emergencies. He is pleased to address Himself unto His people thus: “Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful...Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers...Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you” (Jer 3:12-14). “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God” (Jer 31:18). “Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips” (Hos 14:2). Such Scriptures are exactly suited to us when we are in particular cases and distressing spiritual circumstances arising from our inherent sinfulness and actual defilements. Let no Christian allow a lying devil to rob him of such precious and needed portions of God’s Word by listening to ‘dispensationalists’⁴ who say they are not for him. They are as much a part of his spiritual heritage as is Psalm 23.

Many such passages as the above would be meaningless to believers today were their experiences different from what they actually are. On God’s part they are blessed memorials of His grace; on our part they are solemn testifications unto sad wanderings of heart. Our cases vary much at different times. This morning I may be able to say, “Thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over”; but ere night falls I may have to lament, “Iniquities prevail against me” (Psa 65:3). When such be the case, the only thing to do is to pour out our hearts before the Lord. Not to conceal it in our minds, but to cry, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions” (Psa 51:1-3). He is the only one who can pardon us, and to Him we must go. “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Psa 32:5). Then will the restored soul have reason to

³ **perturbation** – inner turmoil or agitation.

⁴ **dispensationalists** – those who believe Dispensational theology, which divides the Word of God into arbitrary periods with supposed differences in the way God saves men from their sins. It proposes that the Old Testament saints were not a part of the Church of God, and that the Law has no bearing on the Christian as a guide to moral living.

exclaim, "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee" (Psa 86:5).

Confession is not optional but obligatory, a necessary thing. First, that God Himself may be honoured (Jos 7:19). Non-confession is a virtual and practical disowning of His rectoral⁵ office—"he confessed and denied not" (Joh 1:20). Second, that God may be obeyed. He has appointed that His children should daily acknowledge their sins and ask for His forgiveness (Luk 11:4). "God's justice is satisfied by Christ, but it must be glorified and owned by us" (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677). All through Scripture pardon presupposes confession (Lev 26:40; 1Ki 8:33; Jer 3:12-13; Luk 15:18). Nowhere is there a promise of forgiveness unless acknowledgment of sin is made. God requires us to sue out our pardon: as He said to the ascended Saviour, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance" (Psa 2:8). Third, that we may be affected and afflicted by our offences in a due manner, for genuine confession is an expression of hatred of sin and grief for it. Failure at this point is a bar to our advancement: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper" (Pro 28:13). Fourth, in order to the maintenance of our communion with the Holy One. "Only on the footing of sin daily confessed and pardoned can there be any fellowship between us and God this side of heaven" (Charles H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892).

Confession of sin is both the consequent and the condition of fellowship with God, as also is walking in the light. Communion with God produced frank and honest dealings with Him, bringing things out into the open. Such a one not only walks in the light, but he owns whatever in him is opposed unto the light. Yet it is much more than a bare admission that he has sin (in contrast with verse 8): it is the acknowledgment of individual and specific sins, which is the form that confession must ever take if it is to be real and valid. A merely general acknowledgment soon degenerates into an empty phrase. The God of truth will tolerate no pretence. The flesh would have us gloss over things and call them by a pleasanter name than "sins," but close dealing with God purges the spirit of guile. In the light, things are seen in their true colours; contact with God convicts of what is contrary to His holiness, and that leads to a contrite confession.

As Robert S. Candlish (1806-1873) discerningly remarked, the confession here is from those who are walking in the light, and "such confession is very different from that in which the natural conscience seeks a lightening of its guilty burden, and a lessening of its guilty fears." Rather does it proceed from an ardent longing of soul for everything to be put right between himself and his Beloved, refusing to hide anything from Him. The farther we proceed thus with God, the more intimate be our dealings with Him, the more discoveries do we make of what is displeasing to Him, and such discoveries are welcome to us. He desires truth in the inward parts, and we do so too, and therefore do we open our hearts fully to Him, and bring everything out into the light. Such confession is a spreading of our case before the Lord, concealing nothing, palliating⁶ nothing. It is the laying bare of our inner man to the loving and wise Physician, who alone knows how to deal with us. Of course, where sins are committed against our fellows, they must be confessed unto them too (Mat 5:23-24; Jam 5:16).

Confession is alike a sign and adjunct of repentance, since it proceeds from both conviction and contrition. It begins by owning the fact of sin (Jos 7:20), and then the fault of it—or as David called it, "the iniquity of my sin." He not only acknowledged his crime of adultery, but the foulness and enormity of it. So again when his heart smote him for his pride and presumption in numbering Israel, he not only admitted what he had done, but added "I have sinned greatly in that I have done...I have done very foolishly" (2Sa 24:10). The aggravations of our sins are to be declared: that they were committed against light, persuasions, warnings, conscience, the motions of the Spirit—for such things, especially after our being the recipients of countless privileges, mercies and blessings, greatly heighten the enormity of our iniquities, and are to be sorrowfully owned by us. Observe how Daniel did so when confessing the sins of his people: "Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets" (9:10). The guilt of our sins too must be confessed: what we should suffer did we receive our deserts (Ezr 9:13).

Confession of sins is to be made freely, owning every known offence, making no attempt to hide anything, either from God or ourselves. We are not to generalize but to particularize, and acknowledge sins of omission, some of which—such as failure to perform duty, lack of love, absence of zeal, unthankfulness—

⁵ **rectoral** – pertaining to a rector: a parish priest in the Church of England, responsible for shepherding the saints in that parish.

⁶ **palliating** – making an offense seem less serious by excuses.

are worse than many sins of commission. If we are definite and precise when making known our requests unto God, we should be equally so in specifying our sins. Contritely, with a due sense of the infinite evil of sin, as it is dishonouring to God's holiness, an opposition to His sovereign majesty, a contempt of His Law, a flying in the face of His Word, and a grieving of His Spirit. If there be a real apprehension of those things, a regenerate soul cannot but be filled with godly sorrow over his transgressions, and mourn before the Lord on their account. Sincerely, laying bare our case before God just as it stands, proffering no excuses, refusing to throw the blame upon others. Though an unpleasant exercise unto flesh and blood, nevertheless it is salutary to unburden the conscience, pour out our grief into the ears of One who is "very pitiful and of tender mercy."

Confession is to be accompanied with shamefacedness, lamenting our ingratitude unto Him who daily loads us with His benefits (Psa 68:19). The more we realize our base requital of God's wondrous love to us, the more shall we say, with Ezra, "I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God" (9:6). It is to be accompanied with hatred of sin and loathing of ourselves, such as marked those of whom the apostle could say, "Ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge" (2Co 7:11). It is to be made in faith, in the everlasting efficacy of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ—just as when Aaron confessed the sins of Israel, he did so with "both his hands upon the head of the live goat" (Lev 16:21)—asking the Father to pardon you for Christ's sake. It is to be done daily. Keep short accounts with God and suffer no cloud to remain between your heart and Him.

"He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Here is the grand encouragement for us to perform this painful duty: it makes way for blessing, for though confession be not the cause, yet it is the condition of divine forgiveness. That forgiveness is what the penitent soul seeks from God, and as he does so, let him bear in mind the fact that one of the titles which Deity has been pleased to take unto Himself is "the God of pardons" (Neh 9:17, margin)! Unto such we are to repair; unto Him who declares, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:34). "Let us therefore come boldly [unhesitatingly and freely] unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16). Unto us, considered in ourselves, divine forgiveness is always an act of pure mercy or clemency, for it is something we deserve not. But more—and oh, the preciousness of it!—God's forgiveness is also an act both of faithfulness and justice: faithfulness to His promises, His covenant engagements; justice unto Christ, in bestowing on His people what He purchased for them.

We are inclined to think the Spirit has designedly duplicated terms here for the comfort of distressed believers. "Faithful and just" are of much the same import, and while they may be distinguished (as above), yet both have a regard to the everlasting covenant, the latter being brought in to supply an additional ground of confidence for us—that the fulfillment of God's gracious promise is at the same time an act of strict righteousness on His part. As John Calvin (1509-1564) pointed out, "The penitent has here two of God's attributes, faithfulness and justice, to encourage and support him." Thus the contrite soul should have full and firm assurance of God's readiness to pardon. Personally we believe that both the forgiveness and the cleansing here include alike a judicial and an experiential one, an objective and a subjective, but lack of space now prevents our enlarging upon that statement. Admittedly the point is a difficult one: not only to apprehend, but more so to express—such is always the case when the finite mind is occupied with things that are infinite.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

64. *The Conqueror (Revelation 6:2)*

In our last, we pointed out that the unbroken series of military successes of Israel's leader recorded in the last fifteen verses of Joshua 10, typed out⁷ the spiritual victories of our Saviour. We showed how that both His bearing and His actions while on the cross gave clear demonstration that He was no weak and helpless victim, but in truth the conquering Christ. We argued therefrom that *such* a death, and more particularly the death of such a Person, could not possibly fail to accomplish all that it was designed to secure. That argument is greatly strengthened by Christ's triumphant resurrection and enthronement in heaven, and is definitely established by the promises made to Him in Isaiah 53:10-12. We also pointed out the striking fact that in Psalm 98, the Old Testament saints were required, by faith's anticipation, to celebrate the Victor's mighty performances and wondrous achievements. We now continue that same blessed subject by calling attention to Revelation 6:2, "And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer."

During our spiritual infancy, we were taught that the rider on that white horse was the Antichrist, aping the true Christ; and, taking it for granted that our instructors knew what they were talking about, we accepted the same and echoed it. But today, we regard such a concept as no more trustworthy than a nursery tale. For in the first place, it rests upon the bare word of the one asserting the same, being unsupported by any scriptural proof. In the second place, it is entirely out of accord with the *context*, for not only is the whole of the foregoing chapter concerned with the triumphant Lion-Lamb, but He is expressly mentioned by name in the verse immediately preceding the one quoted above, and since that opens with the word "And," it is a manifest wresting of Scripture to make verse 2 refer to an entirely different person from the One mentioned in verse 1, unless there were plain intimation to that effect. And in the third place, so to explain the terms of verse 2 is to throw into the utmost confusion the meaning of the symbols employed therein.

The word "white" occurs quite a number of times in the Apocalypse,⁸ and from its first reference (1:14) to its last (20:11), it is the emblem of *unsullied purity*. In its initial occurrence, it is used of the Lord Jesus, where it is said, "His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow" (1:14). Its second occurrence is in 3:4, where Christ makes promise to those who have not defiled their garments, "They shall walk with me in white." The twenty-four elders of 4:4 are seen in heaven "clothed in white raiment." Of others, we read "and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14); while of the Lamb's Wife, it is said, "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (19:8). Thus, to make the rider of the "white horse" of 6:2 to be such a vile monster as the Antichrist is to introduce discord, being entirely out of harmony with the uniform application of that term. Furthermore, it clashes with what is said of that evil character elsewhere in this book, for not only is Satan therein depicted as "a great *red* dragon" (12:3), but his chief vicegerent is spoken of as "a *scarlet* coloured beast" (17:3, 8).

No, it is not the Antichrist, but the Christ of God, who is portrayed in 6:2, as what is there said of Him plainly enough indicates: "He went forth conquering, and to conquer" is language that could not with any propriety be applied to anyone else, for those words obviously denote not only a successful course, but also a victorious *finish*. Men like Napoleon and Hitler carried all before them for a short season, but their careers terminated in defeat and disgrace. "The triumphing of the wicked is short," and that of the Antichrist is no exception, for so far from his ending as a conqueror, he is conquered—cast alive into the lake of fire (19:20)! It is also to be carefully noted that 6:2 is not the only passage in the Revelation which makes mention of a rider upon a white horse, and since Scripture must ever be interpreted by Scripture, a reference to the later passage unequivocally fixes the meaning of the earlier one. "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war...And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (19:11, 16).

⁷ **typed out** – portrayed in a figure; represented.

⁸ **Apocalypse** – transliteration from the Greek in Revelation 1:1, meaning "to disclose"; commonly used to refer to the end-time destruction of the world; *The Book of The Revelation*.

And let it be duly observed that this august Rider is “crowned” *before* He goes forth in His invincible might. Nor does that fact, or any other consideration, oblige us to regard this verse as pertaining to some future “millennium.”⁹ No indeed, for Christ is *now* possessed of royal authority, being King of kings to-day—not merely *de jure*, but *de facto*.¹⁰ All power has been given unto Him in heaven and in earth (Mat 28:18); all things have been put under His feet (Eph 1:22); He *is* “crowned with glory and honour” (Heb 2:9); seated upon the eternal throne (Psa 45:6); invested with the scepter of universal dominion, His mediatorial kingdom rules over all. Revelation 6:2, then, contains an emblematic portrayal of the conquering Christ, triumphing over all opposition; or as Thomas Manton expressed it, “This is a notable representation of the rise and progress of Christ’s kingdom.” A career of unchecked triumph is here predicated of the royal Warrior; victory after victory, without reverse or break, marks His course. Neither the enmity of the serpent, the malice of the unbelieving Jews, nor the persecution of a Nero could stay His progress. The rage of papists and the forces of Mohammedanism have been alike unable to withstand His power, for all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him.

But, says an objector, the history of Christianity during the centuries and the state of the world today are far from bearing out your interpretation. Our reply is: Not quite so fast, please—we have not yet completed our interpretation, for it rests not only on the signification of the symbols used in Revelation 6:2, but also on its *connection* with all that precedes. By no sound exegesis can 6:1-2 be divorced from the contents of chapter 5, and if Scripture be explained by Scripture, then in the light of Jeremiah 32:6-12, the “sealed book” of Revelation 5:1-7 can signify nothing else than the *title-deeds* to Christ’s purchased possession. This is clearly borne out by the dual character in which the Saviour is there viewed, namely the Lion-Lamb (verses 5 and 6), for redemption is both by the payment of a price (1Pe 1:18-19) and the putting forth of power (Exo 6:6); and the same is most surely confirmed by verse 9, for the new song which is there sung is the song of *redemption*. Revelation 6 begins by showing us the Lamb opening one of the seals of the book of redemption, or in other words, exercising His sovereign right to use the authority He has acquired.

Revelation 6:2, then, shows us the coronated Redeemer going forth to secure His inheritance, but it is just because the vast majority both of pre- and post-millenarians hold a false view of *the extent* of Christ’s inheritance that they misunderstand this verse, and much else in prophecy. They who deny the unconditional election and preterition¹¹ of a sovereign God, and the special design and restricted scope of Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice, are unsafe guides to follow on any subject, for they lack the principal keys to the interpretation of God’s oracles and His ways in providence. It was not because the sins of all mankind were laid upon Christ that the sword of divine justice awoke against Him, but “for the transgression *of my people* was he stricken” (Isa 53:8), declares God Himself. It was not for the goats but for the sheep that Christ laid down His life (Joh 10:15). It was not the human race which He loved and for which He gave Himself, but “the church” (Eph 5:25). The portion which Christ purchased for Himself is clearly defined for us in Ephesians 1:18, where we read of “the riches of the glory of *his inheritance in the saints*”—as they, in turn, have their inheritance in Him (1:11).

The inheritance of the Redeemer is His redeemed, and who *they* are Holy Writ leaves us in no doubt. Redemption is restricted to God’s people. “The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Act 20:28). It is limited unto the saved: “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Eph 1:7); “by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*” (Heb. 9:12). In Revelation 5:9, we hear the saints in heaven singing, “Thou art worthy to take the book [the title-deeds to the inheritance]...for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood *out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*”—*there* is particular or restricted, rather than indefinite or universal, redemption. Thus, when Revelation 6:2 shows us Christ going forth “conquering and to conquer,” there should be no uncertainty whatever in understanding what is in view. We need not be surprised that Arminians¹² should imagine it makes promise of Christ “winning the world

⁹ **millennium** – period of one thousand years.

¹⁰ **de jure...de facto** – *de jure*: by right or legal establishment; *de facto*: in actual fact, regardless of legal or official status.

¹¹ **preterition** – the passing over by God of those not elect.

¹² **Arminians** – followers of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), Dutch theologian, born in Oudewater, the Netherlands. He rejected the Reformers’ understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God’s predestination of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will.

unto Himself," but there is not the slightest excuse for any well-instructed Calvinist¹³ falling into such error, nor for him to cut the knot by making it refer to Christ's triumph in some future era.

"And I saw, and behold a white horse, and he that sat on him had a bow," which, as another has pointed out, is interpreted for us in Habakkuk 3:8-9, where, after saying "Thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of *salvation*," we are told, "Thy *bow* was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy *word*." "And a crown [emblem of His royal authority] was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer," for when Christ works, none can withstand His invincible power. But perhaps the one who has followed us critically from the opening of the previous article to this point will ask, How can Joshua's *slaying* of Israel's enemies suitably prefigure the Lord Jesus *saving* those whom He bought with a price? Surely the answer is obvious: because in their unregenerate state they are enemies both by nature and by practice—"when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom 5:10): "you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled" (Col 1:21). Christ slays their enmity, kills their love of sin, destroys their self-righteousness, delivers them from Satan, wins them to Himself.

Psalm 45:1-5 supplies a commentary on Revelation 6:2. There the saints beg their King, into whose lips "*grace* is poured," to gird upon Him His sword and make open display of His glory, by riding "prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness," saying: "Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee." As Spurgeon well remarked, "Our Captain aims at men's hearts rather than their heads... Jesus' arrows are sharp in the quiver of His Word, and sharper on the bow of His ministers, but they are most known to be so when they find a way into careless hearts." So too John Owen (1616-1683), "Let men be never so much His enemies; if He intend their conviction, He will so sharpen His Word upon their hearts as that they shall let go their enmity and fall in the acknowledgment of His power"—contritely confessing their sins and crying for mercy.

Each generation of mankind is inveterately opposed to the Lamb, but He overcomes those members of it that were given to Him by the Father. Since His ascension, Christ has been a merciful and pacific¹⁴ Conqueror, for His beneficent victories over those who oppose Him are gained in converting them by His Word and Spirit. "The victories of Jesus are all the more wonderful because they are accomplished by means to all appearance most inadequate: they are due not to physical but moral power—the energy of goodness, justice, truth" (Spurgeon). But, *at the close*, Christ will deal in a very different way with those who refuse to submit to the scepter of His grace: "taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel" (2Th 1:8-9). As the former is in view in Revelation 6:2, so the latter is solemnly depicted in 19:11-16. Those widely different actions of the Redeemer are again set forth in one of the Messianic Psalms. At the beginning of Psalm 110, we behold Christ enthroned on high and hear JEHOVAH saying unto Him, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool," and in what follows, we are shown *in what way* that promise is made good unto the glorified Redeemer, namely in a twofold manner.

"The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies." The rod of His strength is the same thing as the "report" of the Word accompanied by "the arm of the Lord" (Isa 53:1), namely the Gospel applied by the Spirit in demonstration and in power, which is mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds (2Co 10:4). There was a begun-fulfilment of this promise on the day of Pentecost, when the mighty power of Christ was gloriously manifested by subduing the hearts of three thousand to Himself. On "rule thou in the midst of thine enemies," Spurgeon said, "as He does whenever His mighty scepter of grace is stretched forth to renew and save them. Moses' rod brought water out of the flinty rock, and the Gospel of Jesus soon causes repentance to flow in rivers from the once-hardened heart of men." In contrast with the terrors of Sinai, that rod goes forth out of the spiritual Zion (Heb 12:22) unto a gracious end, for verse 3 tells us *how* Christ "rules" and conquers. "Thy people shall be *willing* in the day of thy power": He overcomes their native enmity and unbelief. Verse 4 divides the Psalm: verses 5 and 6 correspond with Revelation 19:11-15.

Little space is left for us to round off the subject by dwelling upon the conquering Church, which is a pity, for there is scarcely anything being written thereon today. Instead, the concept which now most wide-

¹³ **Calvinists** – those who believe, along with the French-born Swiss Reformer John Calvin (1509-1664), that the Bible teaches the supreme authority of the Scriptures, the sovereignty of God, predestination, and the doctrines of grace.

¹⁴ **pacific** – bringing peace.

ly prevails is that “the Church is a complete failure.” Such is the charge made by an unfriendly world and now echoed by not a few professing Christians; but it is just as anti-scriptural as is the notion of a frustrated and disappointed Christ. A victorious Christ has for its natural, yea, necessary, complement a victorious Church, for the members *must* share in the triumphs of their Head. To speak of the Church of Christ being defeated and disgraced is a contradiction in terms, for by the Church we allude not to what men term “organized Christianity,” but to that favoured company given to Christ by the Father, and who by regeneration are made one with Him vitally. We mean those seen in our type, for Joshua 10:29-43 is very express in referring six times over to “all Israel *with him*” being participants of Joshua’s military successes. No, the failure is rather in those who have erroneously supposed that it was the function of the Church or the mission of the Gospel to “win the world [i.e., every person] to Christ.”

But let it be clearly understood that a conquering Church is just as much an object of *faith* (a reality to the believing heart on the authority of God’s sure Word) as is the conquering Christ. To carnal reason and the eye of sense, it was a vanquished Christ who expired upon the cross (and the world never once saw Him after He rose triumphantly from the grave!), and thus it is with His mystical or unseen body. Nevertheless, it is far otherwise in fact. As the Redeemer so emphatically declared, “upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mat 16:18). Whether “the gates of hell” refers to death, which daily claims some of its members, or the powers of darkness which are ever opposing it, the perpetuity and triumph of the Church are here most definitely assured. It is built upon a rock that neither winds nor waves can destroy, namely Christ Himself, “who is both its foundation and founder” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714)—Peter’s confession being its *doctrinal* foundation. The spiritual mount Sion “cannot be removed, but abideth for ever” (Psa 125:1; Heb 12:22; Rev 14:1-3)—subsisting in the midst of the enemies, a little flock surrounded by wolves.

During the last nineteen centuries, it has often looked as though the gates of hell *had* prevailed against the Church of Christ, yet here too appearances were deceptive. God had sworn upon oath unto the covenant Head, “His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and His throne as the days of heaven” (Psa 89:29), and they *have*—as our own generation bears witness. Christ made promise to His disciples, “I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me” (Luk 22:29), and the united opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil cannot thwart that appointment; and even while left in this scene, their life “is hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). Well then could the apostle make challenge, “and who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” (1Pe 3:13). Hated by the serpent, persecuted by his minions, yet nothing can separate them from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35). Harassed by indwelling sin, receiving many a wound and temporary fall in their fight of faith, nevertheless they are victors (1Jo 2:14; Rev 12:11), for “whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world” (1Jo 5:4).

Faith views the entire election of grace *as God does*, and therefore is fully persuaded that a victorious Christ and a vanquished Church is an impossibility. It knows that the “shalls” of Psalm 45:14-15 are as infallibly certain as those of Isaiah 53:10-12. The Church of Christ is unconquerable, for though its enemies be implacable and mighty, yet they are neither invincible nor almighty, and therefore are they *incapable* of nullifying the divine decree that His elect shall *all* be “conformed to the image of his Son,” or of neutralizing His promise “whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom 8:29-30). Even now “we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom 8:37), though sense perceives it not.

*“His be the Victor’s name, Who fought our fight alone;
Triumphant saints no honour claim, Their conquest is His own.”*



INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 5

To say that all our interpretations must conform strictly unto the Analogy of Faith¹⁵ may sound very simple and obvious, yet it is surprising to find how many not only unskilled but experienced men depart therefrom. Of course those who covet “originality,” and have a penchant for bringing out something new or startling (especially from obscure passages) without regard to this basic principle, are sure to err. But as John Owen observed, “Whilst we sincerely attend unto this rule, we are in no danger of sinfully corrupting the Word of God, although we shall not arrive unto its proper meaning in every place.” For example, when we learn that “God is a spirit” (Joh 4:24), incorporeal and invisible, that prevents us from misunderstanding those passages where eyes and ears, hands and feet are ascribed unto Him; and when we are informed that with Him there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam 1:17), we know that when He is said to “repent” He speaks after the manner of men. Likewise, when Psalm 19:11 and other verses make promise of the saints being rewarded for their gracious tempers and good works, other passages show that such recompense is not because of merit, but is bestowed by divine grace.

No verse is to be explained in a manner that conflicts with what is taught, plainly and uniformly, in the Scriptures as a whole, and which whole is set before us as the alone rule of our faith and obedience. This requires from the expositor not only a knowledge of the general sense of the Bible, but also that he takes the trouble to collect and compare all the passages that treat of or have a definite bearing upon the immediate point before him, so that he may obtain the *full* mind of the Spirit thereon. Having done that, any passage that is still obscure or doubtful to him must be interpreted by those which are clear. No doctrine is to be founded on a single passage, like the Mormons base on 1 Corinthians 15:29, their error of members of that cult being baptized for their ancestors; or as the papists appeal to James 5:14-15 for their dogma of “extreme unction.” It is only in the mouths of two or three witnesses that any truth is established, as our Lord insisted in His ministry: John 5:31-39; 8:16-18. Care is to be taken that no important teaching is based alone on any type, figurative expression, or even parable; instead, they are to be used only in *illustrating* plain and literal passages.

Let it, then, be settled in the mind of the expositor that no Scripture is to be interpreted without regard to the relation in which it stands to other parts. Adherence to this fundamental rule will preserve from the wresting of many a verse. Thus, when we hear Christ saying, “My Father is greater than I” (Joh 14:28), attention to His previous declaration, “I and my Father are one” (Joh 10:31) will preclude any idea that He was, in His essential person, in any wise inferior; therefore the reference in John 14:28 *must* refer to His mediatorial office, wherein He was subservient to the Father’s will. “Must,” we say, for the Son is none other than “the mighty God” (Isa 9:6), “the true God” (1Jo 5:20). Again, such words as “be baptized, and wash away thy sins” (Act 22:16) must not be understood in a way that conflicts with “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1Jo 1:7), but regarded as a *symbolical* “washing” only. “To reconcile all things unto himself” (Col 1:20) cannot teach universalism, or every passage affirming the eternal punishment of the lost would be contradicted. 1 John 3:9 must be understood in a way consistent with 1 John 1:8.

Context

Fourth, the need for paying close attention to *the context* is also a matter of first importance. Not only must each statement of Scripture be explained in full harmony with the general Analogy of Faith, but more specifically, in complete agreement with the plain sense and tenor of the passage of which it forms a part. That “plain sense” must be diligently searched for. Few things have contributed more to erroneous interpretations than the ignoring of this obvious principle. By divorcing a verse from its setting or singling out a single clause, one may “prove” not only absurdities but real falsities by the very words of Scripture. For instance, “hear the church” is not an exhortation bidding the laity submit their judgments unto clerics, but, as Matthew 18:17 shows, the local assembly must decide the issue when a trespassing brother refuses to be amenable to private counsel. As another has pointed out, “An ingenious and disingenuous mind can select certain detached verses of Scripture, and then combine them in the most arbitrary manner, so that while

¹⁵ **Analogy of Faith** – method of biblical interpretation where clearer, related Scriptures are used to interpret a particular passage (Rom 12:6).

they indeed are all the very words of Scripture, yet, at the same time, they express the thoughts of the compiler and not the Holy Spirit's."

Much help is obtained in ascertaining the precise significance of certain expressions by observing the circumstances and *occasion* of their utterance. Through failure to do so, many a sermonizer has failed to perceive the real force of those well-known words "Open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise" (Psa 51:15). David's mouth had been closed by sin and non-confession, and thereby the Spirit quenched! Now that he had put matters right with the Lord, he longed for Him to unstop his shame-covered lips. The spiritual significance of an event is often perceived by noting *its connection*. A striking illustration of this is found in Matthew 8:23-26, which, be it borne in mind, has an application unto us. The key to it is found in the last clause of verse 23 and in reading verses 19-22. The order of thought there is very suggestive: the whole passage treats of "following" Christ, and verses 23-26 supply a typical picture of the character of the disciple's path through a stormy world: encountering trials, difficulties and dangers; and it often *appears* that the Lord is "asleep"—unmindful of or indifferent to our peril! In reality, it is a testing of faith, a showing us that He requires to be waited on, that He is our only recourse, sufficient for every storm!

The parable recorded in Luke 15:3-32 cannot possibly be interpreted aright if its context be ignored. What needless perplexity has been occasioned, and diversity among the commentators, concerning the *identity* of the ninety-nine sheep left in the wilderness (defined as "just persons who need no repentance") and the "elder son" (who complained at the generous treatment accorded his brother), through failure to use the key supplied at the beginning of the chapter. If its first three verses be noted, we observe that this one parable (in three parts) was not spoken by Christ to the disciples, but addressed to His enemies. It was given in reply to the Pharisees and scribes who had murmured because our Lord received sinners and ate with them. His design was to expose the condition of their hearts, and to vindicate His own gracious actions. He did so by portraying the lost condition of His carping critics, and by making known the ground on which He received sinners into fellowship with Himself, and revealing the divine operations which issue in that blessed result. Once those broad facts be apprehended, there is no difficulty in understanding the details of the parable.

Two distinct and sharply contrasted classes are set before us in Luke 15:1-2—the despised publicans and sinners who, from a deep sense of need, were attracted unto Christ; and the proud and self-satisfied Pharisees and scribes. In each of the three parts of the parable, the same two classes are in view, and in that order. First, the good Shepherd seeks and secures His lost sheep, for it is *His work* which is the basis of salvation; the ninety and nine, who in their own estimation needed no repentance, figured the self-righteous Pharisees—left in "the wilderness," in contrast with the sheep brought "home." In the second, the secret operations of the Spirit in the heart (under the figure of a woman *inside* the house) are described, and by means of the "light" the lost coin is recovered—the other nine being left to themselves. In the third, the one sought out by the shepherd, illumined by the Spirit, is seen with the Father; whereas the older son (who boasted "neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment") figures the Pharisee—a *stranger* to the feasting and rejoicing! Learn from this the importance of observing to whom a passage is addressed, the circumstances and occasion when uttered, the central design of the speaker or writer, *before* attempting to interpret its details.

Every verse beginning with the word "For" requires us to trace the connection: usually it has the force of "because," supplying proof of a preceding statement. Likewise the expression "For this cause" and words like "wherefore and therefore" call for close attention so that we may have before us the promise from which the conclusion is drawn. The widespread misunderstanding of 11 Corinthians 5:17 supplies an example of what happens when there is carelessness at this point. Nine times out of ten, its opening "Therefore" is not quoted, and through failure to understand *its* meaning, an entirely wrong sense is given to "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." That prefatory "therefore" indicates that this verse is not to be considered as a thing apart, complete in itself, but rather as closely connected with something foregoing. On turning back to the previous verse, we find it too begins with the word "wherefore," which at once shows that this passage is a didactic or doctrinal one, and neither a biographical one which delineates the experience of the soul, nor a hortatory¹⁶ one calling unto the performance of some duty.

It should be carefully noted that the "any man" of 11 Corinthians 5:17 shows it is not describing some exceptional attainment of a favoured few, nor depicting mature Christians only, but rather is postulating something which is common to *all* the regenerate. As a matter of fact, the verse is not treating of Christian

¹⁶ **hortatory** – exhorting.

experience at all, but of the new relationship into which regeneration brings us. It would take us too far afield now to supply detailed answers to the questions: What particular subject was the apostle writing upon? What required him to take it up? What was his special design on this occasion? Suffice it to say, he was refuting his Judaizing traducers¹⁷ and cutting the ground from under their feet. In 5:14-16, he insists that union with Christ results in judicial death to natural relations, wherein all fleshly distinctions of Jew and Gentile cease; yea, brings us on to new or resurrection ground, producing a new standing before God. As members of a new creation, we are under an entirely *new covenant*, and for us the limitations and restrictions of the old covenant are “passed away.” It is the principal design of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* to make *this* fact fully manifest.

Scope

Fifth, equally necessary is it for the interpreter to determine *the scope* of each passage, i.e., its coherence with what precedes and follows. Sometimes this can best be done by duly noting *the particular book* in which it is found. Notably is this the case with some in *Hebrews*. How many a Christian, who has had a bad fall or been stayed in a course of backsliding, has, after his repentance, needlessly tortured himself by such verses as 6:4-6 and 10:26-31! We say needlessly, for those verses were addressed to a very different class, one whose case was quite otherwise. Those Hebrews occupied a *unique* position. Reared under Judaism, they had espoused the Gospel; but later were distressed and shaken because of the non-realization of the carnal hopes they entertained of the Messiah, and the sore persecution they were then suffering, and were sorely tempted to abandon their Christian profession and return to Judaism. In the passages mentioned above, they were plainly warned that such a course would be fatal. Thus to apply those passages to backslidden Christians is entirely unwarrantable, making a use of them that is quite foreign to their scope and design.

Sometimes the key to a passage is to be discovered by observing *in which part* of a book it occurs. A pertinent example of this is found in Romans 2:6-10, which has been grievously wrested by not a few. The grand theme of that epistle is “the righteousness of God”—stated in 1:16-17. Its first division runs from 1:18 to 3:21, wherein the universal need for God’s righteousness is demonstrated. Its second runs from 3:21 to 5:1, in which the manifestation of God’s righteousness is set forth. Its third, the imputation of God’s righteousness: 5:1 to 8:39. In 1:18-32, the apostle establishes the guilt of the Gentile world, and in chapter 2, that of the Jew. In its first sixteen verses, he states the principles which will operate at the Great Assize,¹⁸ and in verses 17-24, makes direct application of them to the favoured nation. Those principles are as follows: (1) God’s judgment will proceed on the ground that man stands self-condemned (verse 1); (2) it will be according to the real state of the case (verse 2); (3) mercy abused increases guilt (verses 3-5); (4) deeds, not external relations or lip profession, will decide the issue (verses 6-10); (5) God will be impartial, showing no favouritism (verse 11); (6) full account will be taken of the various degrees of light enjoyed by different men (verses 11-15); (7) the judgment will be executed by Jesus Christ (verse 16).

From that brief analysis (which exhibits the *scope* of the passage), it is quite evident that the apostle was *not* making known the way of salvation when he declared, “Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life” (verses 6-7). So far from affirming that fallen men could secure everlasting felicity by their own well-doing or obedience to God, his design was the very opposite. His purpose was to show what the holy Law of God required, and that that requirement would be insisted upon in the Day of Judgment. Since his depraved nature makes it impossible for any man, Jew or Gentile, to render perfect and continual obedience to the divine Law, then the utter hopelessness of his case is made apparent, and his dire need to look outside himself unto the righteousness of God in Christ is plainly evinced.

Another passage where inattention to *its scope* has resulted in false doctrine being drawn from it is 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. Appeal is frequently made unto it in support of the dangerous delusion that there is a class of real Christians who have forfeited all “reward” for the future, having *no* good works to their credit; yet will enter heaven. Such a concept is grossly insulting to the Holy Spirit, for it implies that He performs a miracle of grace in the soul, indwells that person, yet that he brings forth no spiritual fruit. Such a grotesque idea is utterly contrary to the Analogy of Faith, for Ephesians 2:10 tells us that those whom God

¹⁷ **Judaizing traducers** – *Judaizing*: requiring professing Christians to first obey the Old Testament Laws; *tradicers*: slanderers.

¹⁸ **Great Assize** – the Last Judgment; *assize*: a periodic court session formerly held in each of the counties of England and Wales for the trial of civil or criminal cases

saves by grace through faith are “His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” Those who walk not in good works are *unsaved*, for “faith without works is dead” (Jam 2:20). Scripture declares, “Verily there is a reward for the righteous” (Psa 58:11), that “every [regenerated] man shall have praise of God” (1Co 4:5), which certainly could not be the case if some of them are but cumberers of the ground.

Not only is this erroneous interpretation highly dishonouring to God and at direct variance with the plain teaching of other Scriptures, but it is refuted by the *context*. In order to understand 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, verses 1-10 must be heeded—so as to determine *the subject* that the apostle is treating of. At the beginning of chapter 3, Paul returns to the charge he had made against the Corinthians in 1:11, where he reproveth them for pitting one servant of God against another, with the resultant divisions—the principal occasion of his writing to them. In 3:3, he points out that such conduct evinced their carnality. He reminds them that both himself and Apollos were “*but ministers*” (verse 5). He had merely planted and Apollos watered—it was God who gave the increase. Since neither of them was “any thing” unless God deigned to bless his labours (verse 7), what madness it was to make an idol of a mere instrument! Thus it is clear, beyond any doubt, that the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 3 treat of *the official ministry* of God’s servants. It is plainer still in the Greek, for the word “man” occurs nowhere in the passage, “every man” being literally “every *one*,” i.e. of the particular class referred to.

The same subject is continued in verse 8, though there be diversity in the work of God’s servants (one evangelistic, another indoctrinating), yet their commission is from the same Master and their mutual aim the good of souls; therefore it is sinful folly to array one against or exalt him above another. Though Christ has distributed different gifts to His servants and allotted them a variety of ministry, “each shall receive his own reward.” The building itself is *God’s*, ministers being the workmen (verse 9). In verse 10, Paul refers to the *ministerial* “foundation” he had laid (see Eph 2:20), and what follows concerns the *materials* used by builders who came after him. If those materials (their preaching) honoured Christ and edified saints, they would endure and be rewarded. But if instead, the preacher used for his themes the increase in crime, the menace of the bomb, the latest doings of the Jews, etc., such worthless rubbish would be burned up in the Day to come and be unrewarded. Thus it is *the materials used by preachers* in their public ministrations, and *not* the walk of private Christians, which is here in view.



THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

5. *Its Transmission*

Moral Principles

In introducing this aspect of our subject, we cannot do better than set before the reader what Archibald A. Hodge (1823-1886) pointed out are “the self-evident moral principles which must ever be certainly presupposed in every inquiry into the dealings of God with His responsible creatures. (1) God cannot be the Author of sin. (2) We must not believe that He could consistently with His own perfections create a creature *de novo* (anew, originally) with a sinful nature. (3) The perfection of righteousness, not bare sovereignty, is the grand distinction of all God’s dealings. (4) It is a heathen notion that the ‘order of nature’ or ‘the nature of things’ or ‘natural law’ is a real agent independent of God, limiting His freedom, or acting with Him as an independent concause in producing effects. (5) We cannot believe that God would inflict either moral or physical evil upon any creature whose natural rights had not been previously forfeited.

“State the two distinct questions thence arising, which, though frequently confused, it is essential to keep separate. First, *How* does an innate sinful nature originate in each human being at the commencement of his existence, so that the Maker of the man is not the cause of his sin? If this corruption of nature originated in Adam, how is it transmitted to us? Second, *Why*, on what ground of justice, does God inflict this terrible evil, the root ground of all other evils, at the very commencement of personal existence? What fair probation have infants born in sin enjoyed? When, and why, were their rights as new created beings forfeited? It is self-evident that these questions are distinct and should be treated as such. The first may possibly be answered on physical grounds. The second question, however, concerns the moral government of God and inquires concerning the justice of His dispensations. In the history of theology, of all ages and in all schools, very much confusion has resulted from the failure to emphasize and preserve prominent this distinction” (*Outlines of Theology*, A.A. Hodge).

The “why” has been discussed by us at some length in the preceding articles: the guilt of Adam’s offence was imputed to all his posterity because he served as their covenant head and federal representative. Since they were legally one with him, the punishment passed upon him falls on them too, involving them in all the dire consequences of his crime. One of the most terrible of those consequences is the receiving of a sinful nature, which brings us to consider the “how” of the great human tragedy. We do not propose to make any attempt to enter into a philosophical or metaphysical inquiry as to how God can be the Creator and Maker of our beings (Job 31:15), the “Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9), and yet *not* be the Author of the sin now inhering in our natures. Rather shall we confine ourselves to an examination of the bare facts that Scripture presents thereon. Nowhere in the Word is the pollution of fallen man ascribed unto the Holy One, rather is it uniformly attributed unto human propagation: that by natural generation a corrupt offspring is begotten and conceived by corrupt parents.

It was a divinely instituted law of the original creation that like should produce like, as plainly appears in that word “whose seed is in itself” (Gen 1:11-12), and that oft-repeated expression “after his kind” (verses 21, 24, 25)—and that law has never been revoked, as the biology of every department of nature demonstrates. Hence it follows that since the whole human race sinned in its covenant head, and since every member of it receives its nature from him, when the fountain itself became polluted, all the streams issuing therefrom were polluted too. A corrupt tree can bring forth nothing but corrupt fruit: since the root became unholy, its branches must also be unholy. All of Adam’s offspring do but perpetuate what began in him: from the first moment of their existence they become participants of his impurity. Though our immediate parents be the occasion of conveying a depraved nature unto their children, yet it is because that nature is derived originally from the first man. In other words, the present relation of sire and son is not that of cause and effect, but that of an *instrument* or channel, in transmitting the sinfulness of Adam and Eve.

In Genesis 5:3, we are told, “Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in *his own likeness*, after his image.” That occurred after his fearful defection, and the statement is in designed and direct contrast with the declaration of verse 1: “In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him.” Adam communicated not to his descendants the pure nature that he had originally by creation, but the polluted one that he acquired by the fall. It is very striking to note the precise *place* where this statement is

made in the sacred narrative: not at the beginning of Genesis 4, in connection with the begetting of Cain and Abel, but here as introducing a lengthy *obituary list*—showing that dying Adam could only beget mortals. The image of God included both holiness and immortality, but since Adam had lost them and become sinful and mortal, he could propagate none but those in his own fallen likeness, which had in it corruption and death (1Co 15:49-50, and cf. verse 22). The copy answered to the original. He could not beget in any other way than in his own image, for a clean thing will not issue from an unclean. A depraved parent could produce naught but a depraved child.

Psalm 14

Born in Adam's fallen likeness, not only in substance but in qualities also, all of his posterity are but a continuous repetition of himself. Remarkably is this intimated in the opening verse of that Psalm which has for its theme the awful depravity of the human race. As John Owen (1616-1683) pointed out, "There is a peculiar distinguishing mark put upon this Psalm, in that it is found twice in the book of Psalms. The fourteenth and fifty-third Psalms are the same, with the alteration of one or two expressions at most. And there is another mark put upon its deep importance in that the apostle transcribed a great part of it in Romans 3." That Psalm opens with the statement, "The fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God.*" The careful reader will have noticed that the words "there is" have been supplied by the translators, and we consider unwarrantably so in this instance. The fool says not "in his head" there is no God, but rather "in his *heart*—no God" for me: I decline allegiance to Him. It is not intellectual unbelief denying the existence of Deity, but the enmity of a rebel who refuses to practically own or be in subjection to God.

"The fool hath said in *his* heart—no God. *They* are corrupt, they have done abominable works" (Psa 14:1). Most significant and noticeable is that change of number in the pronouns, though for some strange reason it appears to have escaped the notice of the commentators—at any rate none whom we have consulted makes any reference thereto. As stated above, the verses which follow give a full description of the deplorable condition of all mankind, and that is prefaced with a statement about "the fool." Nor is there the slightest difficulty in identifying him. Were we to ask our readers carefully to ponder and answer the question, Who is *the fool* of all fools? We believe they would unanimously reply, *Adam*, for none has ever acted so madly and wickedly as he. This is confirmed by the fact that the Hebrew word for fool in Psalm 14:1 and 53:1 is nowhere else prefaced by the definite article—some render it "The apostate." Adam was the arch-fool: his heart had become not only devoid of wisdom, but filled with hatred against it. Such was now the father of our race, and what could his children be like? Our verse answers, "they are *corrupt*," and prove themselves to be so by doing abominable works.

Psalm 51

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa 51:5). Such is the sad confession which every one of us makes. Born in the likeness of Adam as a fallen creature, all of his descendants are but replicas of himself, and since moral corruption be transmitted by him to them by a fixed constitution or law of heredity, then that corruption dates from the very beginning of their existence. Because by being Adam's children they are depraved, it necessarily follows that they must be so as soon as they *are* his children. David was the son of lawful and honourable marriage, yet from his parents he received Adam's vitiated nature with all its evil dispositions. Note well that he was careful to intimate that it was not by divine infusion, but by natural generation and human propagation. He mentioned it not to excuse his fearful fall, but to aggravate the same. "Had I duly considered this before, I should not have made so bold with the temptation, nor have ventured among the sparks with such tinder in my heart" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). A realization that our whole being is horribly degenerated from its pristine purity and rectitude, should make us thoroughly distrustful of self and cause us to walk most warily.

Because our very nature is contaminated, we enter the world a mass of potential wickedness, which is one reason why Job declared, "I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister" (17:14). James Hervey (1714-1758) tells us the Hebrew word there for "worm" signifies a grub, which is bred by and feeds upon putrefaction. I commenced my existence with all sorts of impurity in my nature, with every cursed propensity to evil, with everything earthly, sensual, devilish in my mind. That depraved nature is the source of all our other miseries, the root from which proceed all evil actions. This solemn and sad fact is demonstrated by antithesis. Why was it necessary for Christ to be incarnated supernaturally, by the miracle of the Virgin birth? So that what was born of her should be "that

holy thing” (Luk 1:35), which had not been the case if He had been begotten by natural generation from a man. Though this doctrine of original sin, of ante-natal¹⁹ defilement, be purely a matter of divine revelation, yet it explains what nothing else does, namely that “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21)—in every instance, Christ alone excepted.

Psalm 58

“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent” (Psa 58:3-4). There are three indictments here made against fallen human nature. First, that from the beginning of his existence man is alienated from God, divorced from His favour, cut off from fellowship with Him. Second, that he evidences his deplorable state as soon as he enters this world, manifesting his sinfulness in the cradle. But, third, why is it that everyone turns to his own way, and the very first steps he takes are in that broad road which leads to destruction? Because his very being is poisoned and poisonous, malicious: at ill will with God and goodness, and his fellows—“hateful, and hating one another” (Ti 3:3). Our poison “is like the poison of a serpent.” The serpent does not acquire his venom, but is *generated* a poisonous creature. Poison, deadly poison, is its very nature from the outset, and when it bites, it only acts out that with which it was born. Though its poison be hid, it is there lurking, ready for use as soon as it be provoked.

“Antecedent to all trespasses and acts of sin, before any apprehension of good or evil has dawned upon our hearts, before any notion respecting God has been formed in our souls, before we have uttered a word or conceived a thought, sin—essential sin—is found to dwell within us. Bound up with our being, it enters into every sensation, lives in every thought, sways every faculty. If the senses, by means of which we communicate with the external world, had never acted: if our eye had never seen, and our ear had never heard; if our throat had never proved itself to be an open sepulcher, breathing forth corruption; if our tongue had never shown itself to be set on fire of hell—still sin would have been the secret mistress of that world of thought and feeling which is found within us, and every hidden impulse there would have been enmity against God” (Benjamin W. Newton, 1807-1899). When therefore Scripture speaks of men as sinners, it refers not to their practice alone, but chiefly to their evil nature—a nature that is entailed by Adam and transmitted from parent to child in successive generations.

Children in Proverbs

“Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it from him” (Pro 22:15). This foolishness is not merely intellectual ignorance, but a positive principle of evil, for in the book of Proverbs the “fool” is not the idiot, but the sinner. Deep-rooted is this corruption. It lies not on the surface, like some of the child’s habits, which may easily be corrected. That moral madness, as Matthew Henry pointed out, “is not only *found* there, but *bound* there; it is annexed to the heart.” It is rooted and riveted in him from the first breath he draws. This is the birthright of all Adam’s progeny. “A little innocent” is but the miscalled name of fondness and fancy. Said John Bunyan (1628-1688), “I do confess it is my opinion that children come polluted with sin into the world, and that oft-times the sins of youth, especially while they are very young, are rather by virtue of indwelling sin than by examples that are set before them by others; not but they may learn to sin by example too, but example is not the root, but rather the temptation to sin.” The rod of correction (not of caprice or passion) is the means prescribed by God, and under His blessing it will prevent many an outburst of the flesh.

“The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Pro 29:15). “Discipline is the order of God’s government. Parents are His dispensers of it to their children. The child must be broken in, to ‘bear the yoke in his youth’ (Lam 3:27). Let reproof be tried first; and if it succeed, let the rod be spared (Pro 17:10). If not, let it do its work” (Charles Bridges, 1794-1869). If parents fail to do their duty, sad will be the consequences—the “mother” only is mentioned as being brought to shame, because she is usually the most indulgent, and because she (normally) *feels* most keenly the affliction brought upon herself by her own neglect. But fathers too are disgraced. Eli gave reproof, but spared the rod (1Sa 2:22-25; 3:13), and paid dearly for his folly. What dishonour was brought upon David’s name and what poignant grief must have filled him because his perverted fondness brought his sons to their ruin—one palliated in the most aggravated sin (2Sa 14:28-33; 15:6; 18:33), another having been not even correct-

¹⁹ **ante-natal** – *ante* - prior to; *natal* - birth; prior to birth.

ed by a word (1Ki 1:5-9). As Ezekiel Hopkins (1634-1690) said, "Take this for certain, that as many deserved stripes as you spare from your children, you do but lay up for your own backs."

A child does not have to be taught to sin: remove all inhibitions and prohibitions and he will bring his parents to the grave in sorrow. If the child be humoured and no real efforts are made to counteract its evil propensities, it will assuredly grow more self-willed and intractable. How very far are the Scriptures from flattering us, my reader! A "transgressor from the womb" (Isa 48:8) is one of the hereditary titles of every-one entering this world. We are transgressors by internal disposition before we are so in external acts. Because every parent is the channel of moral contagion to his offspring, they are by nature "children of disobedience" (Eph 2:2). Original sin is transmitted as leprosy is conveyed to the children of lepers (2Ki 5:27). That is one reason why the corruption of nature is designated our "old man": it is coeval²⁰ with our beings. Our very "heart," the centre of our moral being, from which are "the issues [or outgoings] of life," is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked from the very first moment of its existence (Jer 17:9).

All Equally Corrupt?

It is argued against what has been advanced above that if corruption be derived unto all men from their first parents, then all will be equally corrupt; and this is quite contrary to known fact, for we see some who are subject to no inordinate affections, respectable and law-abiding citizens. A number of answers may be given in reply to that objection, though all of them may be reduced unto these two. First, that though, everything else being equal, such a conclusion is logical, yet even then it will not necessarily follow that all men will *manifest* the corruption in the same manner, nor even to the same extent. When we say "everything else being equal," we include such things as the watchful care of pious parents, the discipline of a good education, the demands and effects of a refined environment, the positions and circumstances in which one and another may be placed—for while none of these things, nor all of them combined, can produce any change in a person's nature, they are factors which exert an influence upon his outward conduct. Nevertheless, though one man may have less dissolute manners than another, yet his imaginations are not pure; and though his bodily lusts be under better control, he may yield more to the lusts of the mind. There are diversities in men's *lives*, but original sin has the same defiling effects upon all *hearts*.

Second, though all men be made in the likeness of fallen Adam, *God restrains*, in different ways and in varying degrees, the outbreakings of the corruption that has been transmitted to them. Nowhere is the sovereignty of God more evident than in His disposing of the lot of one and another: denying to some the opportunity to satisfy their evil desires, hedging up their way by poverty, ill-health, or putting them in isolated places; whereas others are given up to their hearts' lusts, and God so orders His providences that they fatten themselves as beasts for the slaughter. Some men's callings draw out their sins more than do those of their fellows, so that they are subject to frequent and fierce temptations. Various dispositions are excited to action by the conditions in which they are placed: as Jacob was induced to impose upon his father by an unscrupulous mother, or as a sight of the spoils of Jericho stirred up the cupidity of Achan. It was for this reason that holy Agar was moved to pray, "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee and say, Who is the LORD? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Pro 30:8-9).



²⁰ coeval – contemporary.

OUR ANNUAL LETTER

“This is the LORD’S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes” (Psa 118:23). Those words admit of a very wide application, for whatsoever is done by our wonder-working God should evoke our admiration and adoration. Certainly they should ever be the language of each of His people, for they have abundant *proof* thereof, both in their personal experience of His so-great salvation and in His providential dealings with them day by day. Yet there are times in their lives when His hand is more plainly perceived by them, and their hearts are drawn out in joyful acknowledgment of the same—times when they are more conscious of His supernatural interpositions on their behalf, or the sufficiency of His grace. Such is the case with the editor and his wife as they review God’s gracious dealings with them and this printed ministry through the course of yet another year. It is, in several respects, the best one we have had for the past decade; and not only are we fully assured that “this is *the LORD’s doing*,” but it is “marvelous in our eyes”—marvelous that He should deign to make any use of such unworthy instruments, marvelous that He is doing so in increased measure as the darkness deepens and the spiritual deadness of so much Christian profession becomes more and more apparent.

First, we have good reason to believe that a greater number of our readers have prayed more definitely during 1950 that the Lord would “enlarge our coast” (1Ch 4:10). Second, He has graciously answered their petition, and granted quite a marked improvement in our wee circulation. Third, more than the usual number of letters have come to hand, from near and far, telling of help and blessing received under God from these pages. Fourth, once more the Lord of the harvest has faithfully provided the sower with seed, enabling him to bring forth from His garner “things new and old,” so that we have experienced *no* anxiety wondering how to “fill up” this twenty-ninth volume. Fifth, despite such close concentration and confinement, we have again been preserved in health and strength—we are thoroughly convinced that a spiritual feeding on the Word of life has a vitalizing effect on the body! Sixth, our printers have again rendered us good service, and we trust our readers are pleased with the exceptionally white paper used this year. Seventh, the Lord has sent us in funds to meet every bill promptly and to leave a balance to the good.

We regard each and all of the above things as “the LORD’s doing,” and they are truly marvelous in our eyes (Psa 118:23). But we would now make separate mention of what has most impressed us. During the year, we have learned that, without any suggestion from us, a message which appeared in these pages two or three years ago entitled “A Word to Parents” has been translated into Chinese, and a 50,000 edition of it circulated in that unhappy land. A missionary in Central America has written to say, “I have translated several of the front-page articles and they appear from time to time in our Spanish paper.” Another missionary reader in Quebec has done the same for his French paper. In these and several other ways, the truth published in this little monthly is being circulated by others.

We sincerely trust that the above testimony will not only provoke much praise to our blessed Master, and encourage our fellow helpers to “continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (Col 4:2), but also that it may prompt many of our readers to be more attentive in observing “the LORD’s doing” *for them* (Psa 107:43). You may not be called to engage in public service to His people, yet it is your sacred privilege to expect Him to show Himself strong in your behalf (no matter how humble and inconspicuous be the place which He has given you to occupy), and to marvel at the gracious ways in which He is undertaking for you. These days are indeed dark and evil, yet on that very account they afford a golden opportunity for each of us to prove God’s sufficiency and discover afresh that “His hand is not shortened” (Isa 59:1). According unto your faith be it unto you: the more you expect from Him in the way of spiritual blessings, the more do you honour Him. And thus, by grace, the editor and his wife count upon the Lord’s continued goodness in supplying our every need, and to further increase our circulation. D.V.,²¹ the same themes will be continued next year.

By the mercy of God, not only have our receipts exceeded costs of publication, but a larger credit balance than usual remains...We regard readers as far more than mere names on our mailing list, namely personal friends in whose spiritual welfare we are interested, and therefore are glad that more of them are writing to us about their personal problems, asking for light thereon from God’s Word. With Christian love to all in Christ.—A. W. and V. E. Pink

²¹ D.V. – *Latin* Deo Volenti; “as God wills.”