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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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CONTENTS

Divine Blessings	3
Exposition of John's First Epistle <i>13. Sin Prohibited (2:1)</i>	5
The Life and Times of Joshua <i>65. Challenged (11:1-5)</i>	10
The Doctrine of Human Depravity <i>6. Its Nature, Part 1</i>	14
Interpretation of the Scriptures <i>Part 6</i>	18

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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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DIVINE BLESSINGS

"The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (Pro 10:22). Temporal blessing, as well as spiritual, comes from Him. "The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich" (1Sa 2:7). God is the sovereign Disposer of material wealth. If it be received by birth or inheritance, it is by His providence. If it comes by gift, He moved the donors to bestow. If it accumulates as the result of hard work, skill or thrift, He bestowed the talent, directed its use, and granted the success. This is made abundantly clear in the Scriptures. "The LORD hath blessed my master greatly...he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold" (Gen 24:35). "Isaac sowed in that land, and received the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him" (Gen 26:12). So it is with us. Then say not in your heart, "The might of my hand or brains has gotten me this temporal prosperity." "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deu 8:17-18). When riches are acquired by God's blessing on honest industry, there is no accusing conscience to sour the same, and *if* "sorrow" attend the use or enjoyment of them, it is due entirely unto our own folly. But it is upon the spiritual blessings which God bestows upon His people that we shall now write.

"Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts" (Psa 65:4). There is no doubt that the primary reference there (though not the exclusive one) is unto "the man Christ Jesus" (1Ti 2:5), for as God-man, He is what He is by the grace of election, when His humanity was chosen and fore-ordained unto union with one of the Persons in the Godhead. None other than JEHOVAH proclaimed Him "mine elect, in whom my soul delighted" (Isa 42:1). As such, He is "the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zec 13:7), the "Heir of all things" (Heb 1:2). Christ was not chosen for us, but for God: and we were chosen for Christ, to be His bride.

*"'Christ, be My first elect,' He said,
then chose our souls in Christ the Head."*

The essence of all blessedness is to be in Christ, and those who partake of it do so by the act of God—as the fruit of His everlasting love unto them. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:3-4). In that initial blessing of election, all others are wrapped up, and, in due course, we are made partakers of them.

"As the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psa 83:3), is both the duty and privilege of every sin-laden soul to come unto Christ to rest, nevertheless, it is equally true that no man can come to Him except the Father draw him (Joh 6:44). Likewise it devolves upon all who hear the Gospel to respond to that call, "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear and your soul shall live" (Isa 56:3), yet how can those who are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) do so? They cannot: They must first be divinely quickened into newness of life. A beautiful figure of that divine operation is here set before us. In eastern lands, the earth is hard, dry, barren—so our natural hearts. The "dew" descends from above silently, mysteriously, imperceptibly, moistening the ground, imparting vitality unto vegetation making the mountain-side fruitful. Such is the miracle of the new birth. Life is communicated by divine fiat. Not a probationary or conditional one, not a fleeting or temporal one, but spiritual and endless, for the stream of regeneration can never dry up. When God "commands," He *communicates* (cf. Psa 42:8; 68:28; 111:9); as the blessing is a divine favour, so the manner bestowing it is sovereign. That is solely His prerogative, for man can do nothing but beg. "Zion" is the place of all spiritual blessings (Heb 12:22-24).

"Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, LORD, in the light of thy countenance" (Psa 89:15). This is one of the blessed effects of divine quickening. When one has been born of the Spirit, the eyes and ears of his soul are opened to cognize spiritual things. Observe that it is not merely they "*hear the joyful sound,*" for many do that without any experiential knowledge of its charm; but "*know*" from its message being brought home in power to their hearts. That "*joyful sound*" is "*the glad tidings of good things*" (Rom 10:15), namely, "*that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*" (1Ti 1:15). Such souls as inwardly know that heavenly music are indeed blessed, for as they are assured of free access unto God through the blood of Christ, the beneficent light of the divine countenance is beheld by them. There is probably an allusion in Psalm 89:15. First, the sound which was made by Aaron as he went into the holy place and came out thereof (Exo 28:33-35), which was indeed a "*joyful sound*" unto the people of God, for it gave evidence that their high priest was engaged before the Lord on their behalf. Second, a general refer-

ence to the sound of the sacred trumpets which called Israel to their solemn feasts (Num 10:10). Third, a more specific one to the trumpet of jubilee (Lev 25:9-10), which proclaimed liberty to bondmen and restoration of their inheritance to them who had forfeited it. So the announcement of the Gospel of liberty to sin captives is music to those given ears to hear.

"Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (Psa 2:12). The critical reader will observe that we are following a strictly logical order. First, election is the foundation blessing, being "unto salvation" and including all the means thereof (2Th 2:13). Second, the bestowment of eternal life which capacitates the favoured recipient to welcome experientially the joyful sound of the Gospel. And now there is a personal and saving embracing thereof. It is to be carefully noted that the words of our present text are preceded by "Kiss the Son," which signifies: Bow in submission before His sceptre, yield to His kingly rule, render allegiance to Him (1Sa 10:1; 1Ki 19:18). It is most important to note that order—and still more so to put it into practice: for Christ must be received as "Lord" (Col 2:6) *before* He can be received as Savior: note the order in 2 Peter 1:11; 2:20; 3:18. They "put their trust in him" signifies to take refuge in—they repudiate their own righteousness and evince their confidence in Him by committing themselves to His keeping for time and eternity. His gospel is their warrant for doing so, His veracity their security.

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psa 32:1). This is an intrinsic part of the blessedness of putting our trust in Him. The "joyful sound" has assured them that "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6), and that He will by no means cast out anyone who comes unto Him (Joh 6:37). Therefore do they express their faith in Christ by fleeing to Him for refuge. Blessed indeed are such, for, having surrendered to His lordship and placed their reliance in His atoning blood, they now enter into the benefits of His righteous and benevolent government. More specifically, their "iniquities are forgiven and their sins are covered" (Psa 85:2)—"covered *by God*, as the ark was covered with the mercy seat, as Noah was covered from the flood, as the Egyptians were covered by the depths of the sea. What a cover that must be which hides forever from the sight of the all-seeing God all the filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit" (Charles H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892). Paul quotes those precious words of Psalm 32:1, in Romans 4:7, in proof of the grand truth of justification by faith. While the sins of believers were all atoned for at the cross and an everlasting righteousness then procured for them, they do not become actual participants of the same until they believe (Act 13:39; Gal 2:16).

"Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee: in whose heart are the ways of them" (Psa 84:5). This is another accompaniment of the new birth. The regenerated is given the spirit of "a sound mind" (2Ti 1:7), so that he now perceives himself to be not only without any righteousness of his own, but is conscious of his weakness and insufficiency. He has made the name of the Lord his strong tower, having run into it for safety (Pro 18:10), and now he declares "in the LORD have I righteousness and strength" (Isa 14:24)—strength to fight the good fight of faith: to resist temptations, to endure persecution, to perform duty. While he keeps in his right mind, he will continue to go forth not in his own strength, but in complete dependence upon and reliance in the strength that is in Christ Jesus, thereby proving the sufficiency of His grace. Those "ways" of God's strength are the divinely appointed means of grace for the maintenance of communion: feeding on the Word, living on Christ, adhering to the path of His precepts.

"Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways" (Psa 128:1). Here is another mark of those under the divine benediction—to have such a deep reverence on the spirit as results in regular obedience to Him. The fear of the Lord is a holy awe of His majesty, a filial dread of displeasing Him. It is not so much an emotional thing as a practical, for it is idle to talk about fearing God if we have no deep concern for His will. It is the fear of love which shrinks from dishonouring Him, a dread of forgetting His goodness, and abusing His mercy. Where *such* "fear" is, all other graces are found. The blessedness of such is not always apparent to carnal reason, nevertheless, it is a fact certified by the divine veracity.



EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

13. Sin Prohibited (2:1)

*"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye
sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate
with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"*

At the close of our last chapter we expressed the opinion that the forgiveness and cleansing of 1:9, includes both a judicial and experiential one, an objective and subjective, but that the same is difficult for the finite mind to grasp fully, and still more so to express clearly. It should ever be borne in mind that with God there is no such thing as past, present and future, though in condescension to our infirmities He sometimes so represents things in His Word. Time limitations do not exist with the eternal "I am": all is an ever-present now. This needs to be remembered in connection with the Atonement. In the view of God, Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and therefore the Old Testament saints, from Abel onwards, enjoyed all those benefits which His sacrifice procured as truly as do believers in this Christian era. Therefore, theologians are only creating their own difficulties when they wrangle among themselves as to whether or not the sins which believers commit after their conversion were blotted out from before God when Christ cried "It is finished." The important point to be concerned about is when do we enter into the good of Christ's redemption.

Certainly no one is saved by Christ's sacrifice until he be converted, that is until he repents of his sins and trusts in the cleansing blood. Equally certain is it that we cannot repent of sins before they be committed. Those who insist that it is dishonouring to the blood of Christ to speak of repeated applications thereof to those who contritely acknowledge their sins need to be told that it is most dishonouring to the holiness and government of God to talk of His pardoning sins before they are owned before Him. Both Old and New Testament alike distinguish between the blood shed (Heb 9:22) and the blood of sprinkling (12:24), and we must do so too, especially in connection with the antitypical fulfillment of Leviticus 16:21, and Numbers 19:2-9. As shed, the blood of Christ has met all the claims of God, so that He can now righteously pardon those who plead its merits. As shed, the blood of Christ has a cleansing virtue, and as sprinkled it actually removes defilement, as the apostle declares in Hebrews 9:13-14, where he shows the antitypical fulfillment of Numbers 19:9, in that the blood of Christ purges the conscience.

The question as to when the Christian's sins were put away from before God and he was discharged from the guilt and penalty of them admits of more than one answer. Vicariously the penalty of his sins was fully borne by Christ upon the cross, and the guilt of them was remitted when God raised his Surety from the dead. Yet personally he is not formally forgiven any sins until he savingly believes on Christ. The Lord Jesus purchased and procured a right unto God's elect receiving forgiveness, but they do not individually enter into the enjoyment of that blessing until their faith is placed in Him. At the cross the Saviour secured certain benefits for His people, but they do not become partakers thereof before they are converted. Distinction must also be made between that general pardon which is received the moment we first lay hold of Christ and the more specific and detailed forgiveness which we stand in need of repeatedly, daily. To say that there is no need for Christians to pray for forgiveness because all their sins were atoned for at the cross betrays great confusion of thought, and flatly contradicts Scripture. As well might an Israelite have argued against the offering of the daily lamb because all of his iniquities were remitted on the annual day of atonement (Lev 16:21). The satisfaction of Christ is indeed eternally valid before God and allows of no repetition or addition; but considering forgiveness as the act of God as the moral Governor of the world, it is continuous unto the same persons.

It is the inconformity of sin to the Law of God and its loathsomeness to His holiness, and as it is attended with defilement and shame to us, that has to be confessed. Our daily sins displease the Holy One, and it is our duty to acknowledge them. It becomes us to humble ourselves before Him on their account. The righteousness of God requires that we own our guilt and seek His remission of it. The Old Testament saints asked for pardon, "O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great" (Psa 25:11), and requested Him to "look upon the face of thine anointed" (Psa 84:9). And can New Testament saints do less? No, Christ Himself taught them to pray "Forgive us our debts" (Mat 6:12), and that prayer is assuredly suited unto

Christians today, for it is addressed “our Father!” In so making request, we ask Him to be gracious unto us for Christ’s sake and not to lay to our charge the sins we have committed (Act 7:60; 2Ti 4:16)—“enter not into judgment with thy servant” (Psa 143:2). Applying unto God for the forgiveness of our sins is a coming to the throne of grace “that we may obtain mercy” (Heb 4:16). “To the very end of life the best Christian must come for forgiveness, just as he did at the first—not as the claimant of a right, but as a supplicant of favour” (John Brown, 1722-1787).

We need to distinguish between the purchase of our pardon by Christ and its actual bestowment upon us by the Father. After David was assured “the Lord also hath put away thy sin” (2Sa 12:13), we find that he begged God’s forgiveness of the same (Psa 51:1). Let it be distinctly pointed out that in asking God for forgiveness we do not pray as though the blood of Christ had never been shed, or as though our tears and prayers made any compensation to divine justice. Nevertheless, renewed sins call for renewed repentance. While we do not need another Redeemer, we do need a fresh exercise of mercy unto us and a fresh application of the cleansing blood to our hearts. That, too, is included in the petition of Matthew 6:12: grant a gracious manifestation of Thy mercy. “Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice” (Psa 51:8). We ask for a comforting sense of His forgiveness, that we may again have “the joy of His salvation.” It is the assuring of our hearts of the divine forgiveness, the same being efficaciously made known to the mind and conscience.

As this writer understands 1 John 1:9, it is not a legal forgiveness of God considered as Judge which is in view, but the governmental pardon of God as the moral Governor of this world and the Father of His children. It necessarily follows from its language that if believers do not confess their sins, then those sins are neither forgiven nor cleansed. 1 Corinthians 11:31, appears to us a parallel passage: “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged,” and as the preceding verse shows, those who failed to do so brought down upon themselves sickness and death. As Robert S. Candlish (1806-1873) pointed out, the forgiveness and cleansing includes more than the remission of punishment: “Our sins are so forgiven as to ensure that in the forgiveness of them we are cleansed from all unrighteousness—all unfair, deceitful and dishonest dealing about them; all such unrighteous dealing about them, either with our own conscience or with our God. The forgiveness is so free, so frank, so full, so unreserved, that it purges our bosom of all reserve, all reticence, all guile; in a word, of all unrighteousness. And it is so because it is dispensed in faithfulness and righteousness.” God deals with us neither complacently nor indulgently, but as equally true to Himself and to us.

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man [“any one,” Greek] sin, we have an advocate with the Father” (2:1).

As we shall see, these words are intimately related to what precedes; but before dwelling upon that we will outline the contents of our verse and consider them in order. First, there is the apostle’s affectionate address unto those he was here dehorting.¹ Second, the immediate design which he had before him in now addressing them: that “ye sin not.” Third, the provision made in case there should be failure. Fourth, the striking balance of truth here presented.

“My little children.” Such indeed are all God’s people, metaphorically speaking, and it is divine grace which has made them so. It is the power of the Spirit which casts down proud reasonings, self-righteous pretensions, “and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (2Co 10:5), and makes us “become as little children.” And such in spirit we are to continue—dependent, trustful, conscious of our weakness and helplessness: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1Pe 2:2). There was, as others before us have pointed out, a peculiar pertinency in John’s thus addressing them.

“It is probable that he was the only surviving apostle when he wrote this epistle, and his old age and long-continued usefulness, faithfulness, and love for Christians must have given him a kind of parental authority over the whole Church, as far as it adhered to the pure Gospel of Christ. It was therefore peculiarly proper for him to address them as his spiritual family, whose welfare he had greatly at heart; and as most of them were young in years compared with this beloved and venerated disciple, who probably was the oldest Christian on earth at that time” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

The form of salutation “My little children” combines the two notes of tenderness and authority. As someone has reminded us, “It is a notable triumph of godliness when age is redolent with the earnestness

¹ dehorting – exhorting a person not to undertake a particular course of action; advising or counseling against.

and diligence, of youth.” Throughout the first chapter John had been presenting objective doctrinal statements, but now he was going to make practical application of the same and address himself to the conscience of his readers. “In this there is an example to all who would be teachers of others, whether pastors or parents, or any who would be to them ‘helpers in Christ.’ It shows the spirit in which they should labour, and the object at which they should aim. That spirit should be affectionately ‘speaking the truth in love,’ ever in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves” (James Morgan, 1799-1873). Yet care needs to be taken against suffering that tender and gentle spirit to degenerate into a servile timidity, which brings the teacher almost to apologize for presuming to exhort others. There are not a few ministers in this effeminate age who need to heed that word: “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee” (Ti 2:15).

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.” The “these things” makes it plain that the first two verses of chapter 2 are intimately related to what has been stated in the first, and thus in those words the Holy Spirit, through the apostle, emphasizes the need and importance of carefully observing the context. The real force of many a verse can only be perceived as we note and ponder its connection and coherence with what precedes. In this instance the reference looks back to all John had said from the opening of his epistle. First, he had set before his readers the glorious person of the Mediator as “the Word of life” and as the Author and Giver of eternal life. If, then, such be the Lord Jesus, and such His mission, what ought we to expect will issue therefrom? Surely that “he shall save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21). Second, he had shown that a saving knowledge of Christ produces fellowship and joy. And what but holiness must be the result thereof? Third, he had made clear his design and the tendency of his message by a presentation of the character of God and of those who enjoy communion with Him in Christ: they walk in the light, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses them from all sin. Thus, the purifying influence of such fellowship is obvious.

Finally, John had given a brief but comprehensive outline of the divine life in the soul of the believer. It is marked by the conviction of sin (1:8) and the confession of his sins (1:9). The effects of such exercises of soul must be the bringing forth of fruits meet for repentance, i.e. an increasing hatred of sin and godly sorrow for the same. In view of all this, the propriety of his applicatory injunction “sin not” is apparent. Between such things as he had mentioned and the practice or indulgence of sin there is an absolute contrariety: they are altogether incompatible with each other. Light and darkness are no more opposed than are fellowship with God and the allowance of sin. In view of all that I have said, this is the practical application you are to make. It might be summarized “therefore sin not.” By thus tracing the connection of his “these things write I unto you” and the dehortation “sin not” we perceive the fuller force of John’s “my little children,” in which, for the first time, he directly addressed his readers, namely that he was speaking of their responsibility, and therefore did he express both his warm love to them and his parental authority, and as Gill² said, “it might serve to put them in mind of their weakness in faith, knowledge and spiritual strength, that they might not entertain too high notions of themselves, as if they were perfect, without infirmity.”

More specifically our present verse is to be connected with 1:6-10, wherein a double proposition is presented. First, that fellowship with God is conditioned upon a repudiation of, and separation from, “darkness.” Second, that fellowship is accompanied by an owning of the principle of indwelling sin and confession of its works. John had a definite design before him when he made those statements, which is plainly expressed in 2:1, and that design is likewise twofold: to exhort and comfort—to deter from moral laxity and afford relief unto those who, despite their endeavours to the contrary, often failed to realize their ideal. First, “sin not,” second, if you should, there is an Advocate to plead your cause. But how do these practical consequences follow from the preceding doctrinal propositions? Why that 1:6-7, lead to the conclusion that believers ought not to sin; yet verses 8 and 9 presuppose they will do so. Even fellowship with Him who is light does not eradicate innate darkness; nevertheless, that is not to be condoned or excused by us, but diligently and unsparingly resisted. Yet our best efforts therein are but partly successful, and this is deeply distressing to a tender conscience.

“But though all sin that was pardoned, was pardoned upon the account of the blood of Christ, which had a property to cleanse from all sin, and that confession was a means to attain this forgiveness, purchased

² John Gill (1697-1771) – Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar. Author of *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity, The Cause of God and Truth*, and his nine-volume *Expositions of the Old and New Testaments*. Born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, England.

by our Saviour's blood, yet men might suck in this poisonous doctrine of licentiousness, believing that upon confession they should immediately have forgiveness, though they walked on in the ways of their own hearts. And, on the other side, many good men might be dejected at the consideration of the relics of sin in them, which the apostle asserts no man was free from in this life. In 2:1, therefore, he prevents these two mistakes which men infer from the former doctrine: that we may not presume by the news of grace, nor despond by a reflection of our sin. Though I have told you that forgiveness of sin is to be had upon confession, yet the intent of my writing is not to encourage a voluntary commission. If you do commit sin, you must not be so cast down as if the door of mercy were clapped against you; no, there is One above to keep it open for every one that repents and believes" (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680).

"These things write I unto you, that ye sin not." The standard of conduct which the Gospel sets before us is no less holy and perfect than that of the Law: no indulging of the flesh is permitted, no self-pleasing tolerated. When our Lord healed the impotent man His word to him was "sin no more" (Joh 5:14); and though it was not then His province to condemn to death the woman taken in adultery, so far from making light of her crime He said "go, and sin no more" (Joh 8:11). Nor was John the only one of the apostles who made this exacting demand upon the Lord's people. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21) said Paul; and again, "Awake to righteousness, and sin not" (1Co 15:34). Likewise Peter, in his first epistle: "But as he which called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1:15). And again, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (2:11-12).

Everywhere in Scripture the Gospel is represented to be "the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1Ti 6:3), which forbids us to regard sin as the normal element of the Christian life, or even to consider its commission as inevitable. Not only are we to reject with abhorrence the devilish idea that the grace of God and the sacrifice of Christ give license to sin, but we are not even to view them as a provision for the weakness of the flesh. "Sin not" is the peremptory and unqualified demand. It was as though the apostle had said, I would have you so narrowly watch your hearts and ways that no evil might slip into your lives, no wrong thoughts be allowed, no idle words be uttered. I would have you make this your serious and constant aim: not merely that you are to sin as little as you can, but that you are not to sin at all. Great care needs to be taken against lowering or whittling down the exalted standard of moral purity which God has set before us. "Sin not" is not to be restricted unto the commission of merely gross and flagrant offences, nor to open acts in the outward life, but to all inward sinning too.

Each statement of Holy Writ is to be given its full and fair meaning, and is never to be toned down or modified by us. "Sin not" is the standard of excellence which God has set before us, for the Holy One can claim nothing less, and our obligation fully to measure up to the same is beyond contradiction. It is the unabating requirement of the Gospel, for the object of Christ's death was not only to make atonement for the sins committed by His people, but to supply motives to fortify and restrain their souls against continuing therein (2Co 5:14-15). To sin not is the Christian's exalted ideal, the earnest pursuit of which is to engage all his faculties and powers. It is what every renewed heart ardently longs to attain unto. Few of our readers will be inclined to call into question the statement that nothing short of complete conformity to the image of Christ should be the daily endeavour of every saint, yet how few appear to make this their fixed resolution and purpose. Nothing short of abstaining from everything which is displeasing to Christ should be the task we set ourselves, and that without any secret reserve. Our eyes are to be fixed on our Rule and not on our infirmities. Say not beforehand a measure of failure is certain, but rather "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phi 4:13).

The Gospel is designed to inspire love to God and holiness, and every part of it reveals the malignant nature and evil effects of sin, and bids us hate, dread, and flee from it. "Sin not." To make anything less than that the daily business of our lives is opposed to divine grace, for it teaches its recipients to deny ungodly and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this world (Ti 2:12). It is antagonistic to saving faith in Christ, for that receives Him as Lord as well as trusts Him as Saviour, and if we are being ruled by Satan instead of rendering obedience to Christ we are not partakers of His salvation (Heb 5:9). It is presumption and not faith which trifles with temptation. It is contradictory to repentance, which includes both a godly sorrow for sin and the sincere purpose to forsake it. That spiritual repentance which is the gift of God (Act 5:31, 2Ti 2:25) not only turns the heart from sin, but against it, and therefore serves as a check against evil inclinations. It conflicts with sincere love to God, for that seeks to glorify Him in all things, and

makes duty a delight. It is contrary to the injunction which a renewed conscience imposes upon the will, for though the will may, and does, oppose the conscience and follow the impulses of the flesh, yet conscience never consents or condones, but judges and condemns.

Finally, for the Christian to allow himself in any sin is directly opposed to his redemption by the blood of Christ. What a word is that by the Spirit of God: "Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1Co 6:19-20).

"Your time is redeemed—use it as a consecrated talent in His cause. Your minds are redeemed—employ them to learn His truth and to meditate on His ways. Thus make them armouries of holy weapons. Your eyes are redeemed—let them not look on vanity; close them on all sights and books of folly. Your feet are redeemed—let them trample on the world and climb the upward hill of Zion, and bear you onward in the march of Christian zeal. Your tongues are redeemed—let them only sound His praise and testify of His love. Your hearts are redeemed—let them love Him wholly, and have no seat for rivals. A redeemed flock should live in redemption's pastures. The Redeemer's freedmen should evidence that they are called to holy liberty, and that their holy liberty is holy service. The chain of sin is broken. The chain of love now holds them" (H. Law of Wells, 1862).



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

65. Challenged (11:1-5)

One or two details in the closing verses of chapter 10, which lack of space prevented a consideration of in our last issue, must be noticed here. First, it is blessed to observe that all which is recorded from verse 28 onwards manifests how fully the faith expressed by Joshua in verse 25 was vindicated. There he had encouraged the captains of his men of war, for as they placed their feet upon the necks of the five conquered kings of the Amorites, he boldly said unto them, "Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the LORD do to *all* your enemies against whom ye fight." What implicit confidence in believing God did he there display! There is nothing in the context to show that Israel's leader had received a recent assurance from his Master to that effect; rather do we consider that his heart was resting upon that word he had long ago received through Moses—"Thine eyes have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto these two kings [namely, Og king of Bashan, and Sihon of the Amorites, who opposed Israel in the wilderness and were overthrown]: so shall the LORD do unto *all* the kingdoms whither thou passest" (Deu 3:21).

There can be no doubt that that promise became the "sheet anchor" of Joshua when he came to be elevated to the position of commander-in-chief of Israel's forces. He had "mixed faith" with the same (Heb 4:2) and it became the stay of his soul until his arduous and dangerous task had been completed. He had already received more than one definite "earnest" of the Lord's making good that word—Jericho and Ai had fallen before them, and the five kings of the Amorites had been utterly routed. But much heavier fighting now lay before them. They had barely made a beginning, and far more yet remained to be accomplished. But Joshua had no doubts, no fear of the outcome. His trust was in the Lord of hosts, and he was not afraid to commit himself *before others*. Fully assured of the divine fidelity, he boldly avowed his confidence therein before and unto his brethren. What an example for Christian leaders to follow! "My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall *hear thereof*, and be glad" (Psa 34:2). The confident language of those who are well acquainted with the Lord is an inspiration to those of their brethren of less experience. They who have proved the Lord's goodness should give free expression thereto that others may be confirmed in their trust of a faithful God. Thus it was here with Joshua.

"*And the LORD delivered Lachish into the hand of Israel, which took it on the second day*" (10:32). That detail marks a difference from the other Canaanitish towns captured by them. Libnah (verse 30), Eglon (35), Hebron (37) and Debir (39) were apparently mastered in a single attack; but not so Lachish. Spiritually, that teaches the Christian that some of his lusts are more powerful than others, and require a longer and more determined effort on his part to subdue them. And, too, an initial failure to enter into possession of a particular portion of our inheritance must not deter us from making a second effort to do so. Charles Ellicott (1819-1905) pointed out that it appears from other Scriptures too that Lachish was a fortress of considerable strength. When Sennacherib king of Assyria "came up against all the fenced cities of Judah" (2Ki 18:13), although he personally "laid siege against Lachish, and all his power with him" (2Ch 32:9), yet he had to abandon his attempt to reduce it (2Ki 19:7-8). At a later date, when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah in the reign of its last king, *Lachish* was one of the two places which were the last to be conquered: "for these defenced cities remained of the cities of Judah" (Jer 34:7).

Our reason for here calling attention to the above historical fact is twofold. First, because it supplies a striking illustration of the divine inspiration of the Bible from its minute accuracy and consistency. Those three passages, though lying so far apart, agree in showing that Lachish was a city of considerable strength and one which was more than ordinarily difficult to capture. It is one of innumerable evidences of the authenticity or genuineness of Holy Writ, which by silent testimony bears witness to its perfect harmony. This argument, drawn from unmistakable *coincidence without design*, will have greater weight with those best qualified to weigh evidence. In the mouths of three independent witnesses (Joshua, the writer of 2 Chronicles, and Jeremiah), the truth of what they wrote is hereby established, for their separate allusions unto Lachish are unstudied and without collusion, yet are they thoroughly consistent and concordant. Second, because by comparing Joshua 10:32, with those latter passages, we learn that Israel succeeded where such mighty warriors as Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar failed, which teaches the valuable lesson that under God His people are able to achieve what the natural man cannot!

"And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel" (10:42). Another indication of the divine authorship of the Bible are those words. There is no magnifying of the human instrument, no paying homage to a national hero, but, instead, a placing of the glory where it rightfully belongs. This is but one of a score of similar passages in which we may perceive the Holy Spirit's jealousy of the divine honour, wherein Israel's successes are attributed unto JEHOVAH's showing Himself strong in their behalf. This He does in a variety of ways, for when the Lord fights *for* His people, He fights *against* their enemies. In the case of Pharaoh and his army, He filled them with a spirit of madness, so that they rushed headlong to their destruction; in others, He instilled a spirit of fear so that they fled when no man pursued them (2Ki 7:6-7), and then is made good that word, "The flight shall perish from the swift...and he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith the LORD" (Amo 2:14-16). A true humility in Christ's servants today will recognize and readily acknowledge the same principle when their labours are made to prosper.

"And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal" (vs. 43), which seems to intimate that, during the lengthy campaign in which they had been engaged, none of the Hebrews were slain, but that their complete force returned safe and sound to their headquarters. It is not without reason that the Holy Spirit mentions by name the place where their camp was situated, for it points at least three most important and valuable lessons for us. *First*, Gilgal was, spiritually speaking, the place of self-judgment and conscious weakness (see our Joshua articles 27 and 28), for it was there that the Israelites were circumcised (4:19; 5:2-3), and that should ever be the place unto which the Christian has recourse *after his victories*, for only as he preserves a sense of his own nothingness will his strength be maintained. *Second*, Gilgal was the place of divine fellowship: "the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover" (5:10); only as communion with God is maintained, may we count upon Him granting us further success in the fight of faith. *Third*, Gilgal was the place where the tabernacle was erected (6:6), where the priesthood officiated, where sacrifices were offered, and where the Lord manifested His presence.

We would fain believe that when Joshua and all his men returned to Gilgal that, before acquainting their families with the details of how graciously and wondrously the Lord had wrought for them in their battles, they first offered sacrifices of thanksgiving unto Him, and rendered public praise for the notable successes which He had vouchsafed them. The least they could do was to acknowledge Him who was the Bestower of their conquest. And the same is true of us, my readers. The only fitting way in which we can celebrate our spiritual triumphs is to give the whole of the glory of them unto their Author, as that is likewise the best preparative for the further fighting which lies before us. We are diligent and earnest in making supplication unto the Lord when we are hard pressed by the foe, and we should be equally explicit and fervent before Him when He has granted us deliverance. He requires us to make known our requests *with thanksgiving* (Phi 4:6), and it is more and more our conviction that one chief reason why so many of our requests are refused is that we fail to appreciate sufficiently those He *has* granted. God will not set a premium upon ingratitude.

But even though the Christian returns to the place of self-abasement after his victories, enters into sweet communion with the Lord, and duly acknowledges His favours, he must not expect that henceforth all will be plain sailing for him. It was not so with Joshua and Israel, for the very next thing we read after their return to Gilgal is, *"And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor had heard those things, that he sent to Joab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph...And they went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many. And when all these kings were met together, they came and pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel"* (11:1-5)! Here is a throwing down of the gauntlet with a vengeance. Hitherto the Canaanites had acted on the defensive, for it was Israel who assaulted Jericho and Ai, and the attack of the five kings had not been against Joshua, but the Gibeonites; but now, they took the offensive, fiercely challenging Israel's right to remain in Canaan.

There is an old saying that "Any fool can make money, but it takes a wise man to *keep* it." Certainly it requires much diligence and care for the Christian to retain what he has acquired spiritually, to maintain the progress he has made, to consolidate that portion of his heritage which he has entered into, for the great enemy of souls will strive hard to deprive him thereof. He challenged our first parents in Eden while in their sinless condition, for it was abject misery unto him to see them happy. This principle runs all through Genesis. When God prospered Abraham in Canaan and his flocks and herds increased, such strife arose between his herdsmen and Lot's that they could no longer dwell together in peace. Later, the Philistines filled with earth the wells which his servants had dug (Gen 26:15), and when Isaac's men dug new ones,

the men of Gerar objected, challenging their right to the same, and striving with them (Gen 26:20-21). When JEHOVAH made known His purpose that Rebekah's elder son should serve the younger, she had the effrontery to contest His decision (Gen 25:23; 27:6, etc.). When by means of dreams it was made known that the rest of his brethren should be subservient to Joseph and pay him homage, they determined to prevent the fulfillment thereof.

Even Joseph challenged the desire of his dying father to bestow his principal blessing upon Ephraim (Gen 48:17). When the Hebrews were peacefully settled in Goshen, "there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph" (Exo 1:8), who was jealous of and fiercely assailed them. And all these things have been recorded for *our* instruction, to teach us to expect that attempts will be made to dispossess us of our rightful portion. Yea, we find that Satan blatantly and impiously assaulted the Holy One, challenging Him to supply proof of His deity—since you be the Son of God, "command that these stones be made bread." So too during His public ministry. Again and again he stirred up the priests and Pharisees to demand by what authority He did this and that. Such opposition is epitomized in the parable of the wheat and tares—no sooner had Christ sown the good seed in the field than His right thereto was challenged by Satan's sowing darnel therein.

The devil sought to rob the apostles of their portion, as is clear from the words of Christ: "Satan hast desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luk 22:31)—His use of the plural pronoun shows that more than Simon was involved. How long was it after Pentecost before the enemy stirred up Saul of Tarsus to persecute the primitive Christians and encompassed the death of Stephen? No sooner had Peter been divinely sent unto Cornelius and a blessed work of grace commenced among the Gentiles than there was determined opposition and an attempt made to bring the same to an end by denying Peter's rights to evangelize the Gentiles. The Book of Acts records instance after instance of attacks made upon the peace and prosperity of one church after another. What force do all the above examples give to our need of taking heed of that exhortation, "*Hold fast* that which is good" (1Th 5:21), for the flesh, the world, and the devil will combine in seeking to get us to relinquish the same. Because of the corruptions of our hearts, the temptations of Satan, the allurements of the world, we are in real danger of letting go what is more precious than rubies. Having bought the truth, we must resolutely see to it that we "sell it not" (Pro 23:23).

It is not without good reason that the Lord has bidden His people to "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering" (Heb 10:23), and never was it more imperative that they attended to that injunction. We must, despite all opposition and persecution, continue in and press forward along that narrow way which leads unto life, for only he that endures unto the end shall be saved (Mat 24:13). No matter how fiercely you be assailed, surrender not your ground, but steadfastly maintain your profession. That "hold fast" presupposes inducements to compromise and renounce. It signifies the putting forth of our utmost endeavours to remain steadfast. "Hold that *fast* which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev 3:11). Adhere firmly thereto in faith and with a good conscience; never was it more needful to do so. The character of these times demands unfailing loyalty and unswerving devotion to Christ and to all He has committed to us. "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain" (2Co 9:24)—it is not the *start* but the *end* which determines the fitness to wear the crown.

Thus it will be seen, once again, that the passage before us contains lessons of deep importance for the Christian, particularly regarding his spiritual warfare and present enjoyment of his heritage. The children of Israel had made quite a little progress in their conquest of Canaan, but now they were very seriously challenged as to their occupancy. A most formidable attempt was being made to dispossess them, yea, utterly to vanquish them. In chapter 10, only five kings united in their attack upon Gibeon, but here there was a federation of all the remaining kings of Palestine. The vastness of the forces deployed by them appears in "even as the sand that is on the sea shore," and with them were "horses and chariots very many" (verse 4). Ah, my reader, Satan will not readily admit defeat! He did not in connection with Job, but renewed his assault again and again. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return...Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first" (Mat 12:43-45)!

The believer must be prepared for such challenges being made to him, for if Satan opposed our invulnerable Head, it is not to be expected that he will leave alone the vulnerable members of His mystical body; and though at the command of Christ he departed from him, it was only "for a season" (Luk 4:13). So it is with us. We may be enabled by grace so to resist the devil that he will flee from us (Jam 4:7), yet we may be sure that it will not be long before he returns and resumes the conflict. Nor are his efforts confined to

individual saints—he assaults their assemblies too, as the New Testament and all ecclesiastical history of this Christian era shows—how many churches’ candles have been put out by him because of lack of watchfulness on their part, or through failure to take a firm stand against him! That word of the apostle to the church officers at Ephesus needs to be laid to heart by all holding a similar position today: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock...Therefore watch” (Act 20:28-31).

These paragraphs are not being written merely to fill up space, but in the endeavour to supply young believers with a timely warning, to put them on their guard against the onsets of their adversary. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and though we may not be ignorant of Satan’s devices, yet all of us need to be frequently reminded of them. At no one point does he more often assail than in seeking to take from us what is ours. In Matthew 13:19, our Lord solemnly pointed out that the wicked one is able to catch away that which was sown in the heart, yet the fault is our own if we suffer him to do so. He will endeavour to rob us of some divine promise which we are trying to rest upon, by denying our personal title to the same. He will challenge our warrant to some particularly helpful portion of the minister’s sermon, saying that it pertains not to us. He will call into question our right to peace of conscience and joy of heart. He will oppose us when reading the Word or engaged in prayer. In short, we must expect to be challenged by him at every point, and seek grace steadfastly to resist him.

In concluding this article, let us take note that Joshua 11 opens with the word “And,” which intimates that this formidable federation of the Canaanites took the field against Israel while they were at Gilgal (10:43), which is one reason why we have entitled this meditation “Challenged.” There is nothing which more enrages Satan than to behold the saints taking the place of conscious weakness before the Lord, or enjoying blessed communion with God as they feast with Him upon the Lamb; yet there is never a time when it is so certain that he will meet with no success as he attempts to vent his enmity against them, for it is impossible for him to injure any who “dwelleth in the secret place of the most High,” for of such it is declared, he “shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty,” and therefore can he confidently affirm, “I will say of the LORD, he is my refuge and fortress; my God; in him will I trust.” For the promise to him is “Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler” (Psa 91:1-3). Those who live a life of fellowship with God are assured of His protection, and may therefore preserve a holy serenity of mind, assured that He will repel their foes and defend them. Nevertheless, as Scott pertinently pointed out, “The believer must never put off his armour, or expect durable peace, till he closes his eyes in death.”



THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

6. *Its Nature, Part 1*

In our last article, we showed how Scripture casts light upon the great moral problem of how an inherently corrupt nature originates in each child from the beginning of its existence, *without* its Creator being the Author of sin. David declared, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa 51:5). Carefully did he describe his depravity as innate and not created, as derived from his mother and not his Maker, that defilement is transmitted directly from Adam through the channel of human propagation. The same fact was expressed by our Lord when He said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (Joh 3:6). In the Old Testament, the word "flesh" is used as a general term for human nature or mankind, "Let *all flesh* bless his holy name" (Psa 145:21)—that is, all men; "all flesh is grass" (Isa 40:6)—the life of every member of our race is frail and fickle. The term occurs in the New Testament in the same sense: "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved" (Mat 24:22); "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (Rom 3:20)—i.e. by his own obedience no man can merit acceptance with God.

But since mankind be fallen and human nature is depraved, the term "flesh" becomes the expression of that fact, and every time it is used in Scripture, in a moral sense, has reference to *the corruption* of our entire beings, without any distinction between our visible and invisible parts—body and mind. This is evident from those passages where "the flesh" is contrasted with "the spirit" or the new nature, Romans 8:5-6; 1 Corinthians 2:11; Galatians 5:17. When the apostle declared, "For I know that in *me* (that is, in *my flesh*,) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom 7:18), he had reference to far more than his body with its appetites, namely his entire natural man, with all its faculties, powers and propensities; the whole was polluted, and therefore nothing good could issue from him until divine grace was imparted. Again, when we find included in that incomplete list of the horrible "works of the flesh" supplied by Galatians, such things as "hatred, emulations, wrath, and envyings" (Gal 5:20-21), it is quite plain that the word takes in far more than the corporeal parts of our persons; the more so when we find that these works are set over against "the fruit of the spirit," each portion of which consists of the exercise of some *inward* quality or grace.

Thus it is clear that when Christ declared "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," He signified that that which is propagated by fallen man is depraved, that whatever comes into this world by ordinary generation is carnal and corrupt, causing the heart itself to be deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. It is evident also from the immediate context (verses 3-5), for what He affirmed in verse 6 was in order to demonstrate the absolute need of regeneration. Our Lord was there opposing the first birth to the new birth, and showing how imperative is the latter by the fact that we are radically tainted from the outset. All by nature are essentially evil, nothing but "flesh," everything in us contrary to holiness. Our very nature is vitiated, and by no process of education or culture can it be refined and made fit for the kingdom of God. The faculties which men receive at birth have a carnal bias, an earthly trend, a disrelish of the heavenly and divine, and are inclined only to selfish aims and groveling pursuits. In the most polished or religious society, equally with the vulgar and profane, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh" and can never be anything better. Prune and trim a corrupt tree as much as you will, it can never be made to yield good fruit. Every man must be born again before he can be acceptable to a holy God.

Coming more directly to our present subject, we shall now attempt to supply an answer to the still more difficult question: In what does the vitiation of man by the fall consist, precisely what is the nature of human depravity? That is far more than a question of academical interest which concerns none but teachers of theology. It is one of deep doctrinal and practical importance, and which it behooves all of us, especially preachers, to be quite clear upon, for a mistake at this point is very liable to lead to the most erroneous conclusions and serious consequences. Such has indeed proved to be the case—for not a few, who were sound and orthodox in many other respects, have answered this question in such a way as inevitably led them seriously to weaken, if not altogether to repudiate, the *full responsibility* of fallen man, and caused them to become hyper-Calvinists and Antinomians. We shall, therefore, endeavour most carefully to define and describe the present condition of the natural man, beginning with the negative side, under which will be pointed out a number of things in which human depravity does not consist.

1. The spirit is not extinguished.

First, the fall does not result in the extinguishment of that *spirit* which was a part of man's complex being when created by God—it did not either in the case of our first parents or in any of their descendants. It has, however, been argued from the divine threat made to Adam, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," that such was the case, that since Adam did not immediately die physically, he must have done so spiritually. That is certainly a fact, yet it requires to be interpreted by Scripture. It is quite wrong to suppose that because Adam's body died not, his spirit did. It was not something in Adam which died, but Adam himself—in his relation to God. The same is true of his offspring: they are indeed "dead *in* trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1) toward God, from the beginning of their existence, but nothing *within them* is positively dead, in the ordinary meaning of that word. In the scriptural sense of the term, "death" never signifies annihilation, but separation. At physical death, the soul is not extinguished but separated from the body; and the spiritual death of Adam was not the extinction of any part of his being, but the severance of his fellowship with a holy God.

The same is true of all his children. The exact force of the solemn statement that they are "dead in trespasses and sins" is divinely defined for us as "being *alienated from* the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph 4:18). When Christ represented the Father as saying, "This my son was dead, and is alive again" (Luk 15:24), He most certainly did not mean that he had ceased to exist, but that while the prodigal remained "in the far country," he was cut off from Him, and that he had not returned to Him. The lake of fire into which the wicked shall be cast is designated "the second death" (Rev 20:14), not in order to signify that they shall then cease to be, but because they are "punished with everlasting destruction *from* the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2Th 1:9). That fallen man *is* possessed of a spirit is clear from "the LORD, which...formeth the spirit of man within him" (Zec 12:1), from "what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him?" (1Co 2:11), and from "the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Ecc 12:7). Man was created a tripartite being, consisting of spirit and soul and body (1Th 5:23), and no part thereof ceased to exist when he fell.

2. None of man's faculties are lost.

Second, the fall did not issue in the loss of any of man's *faculties*. It did not divest man of reason, conscience, or moral taste, for that would have been to convert him into another species of being. As reason remained, he still had the power of distinguishing between truth and falsehood; conscience still enabled him to distinguish between what was right and wrong, between what was a duty and a crime; and moral taste capacitated him to perceive the contrasts in the sphere of the excellent and beautiful. It is most important that we should be quite clear at this point—the fall has not touched the substance of the soul—that remains entire with all its original endowments of intellect, conscience, and will. These are the characteristic elements of humanity, and to deprive him of them would be to unman man. They exist in the criminal as well as in the saint. They all have an essential unity in the unity of the human person, that is to say, they are co-ordinate faculties, though each has a sphere that is peculiar to itself. Collectively, they constitute the rational, oral, accountable being. It is not the mere possession of them which renders men evil or good, but the manner and motive of their exercise which makes their actions sinful or holy.

No, the fall deprived man of no mental or moral faculty, but it took from him the power to use them aright. They were all brought under the malignant influence of sin, so that he was no longer capable of doing anything pleasing to God. Depravity is all-pervading, extending to the whole man. It was not, as different theorists have supposed, confined to one department of his being—to the will as contradistinguished from the understanding, or to the understanding as contradistinguished from the will. It was not restricted to the lower appetites as contrasted with our higher principles of action; nor did it obtain in the heart alone, considered as the seat of the affections. On the contrary, it was a disease from which every organ has suffered. As found in the understanding, it consists of spiritual ignorance, blindness, darkness, folly. As found in the will, it is rebellion, perverseness, a spirit of disobedience. As found in the affections, it is hardness of heart, a total insensibility to and disrelish of spiritual and divine things. The entrance of sin into the human constitution has not only affected all the faculties so as to produce a complete disqualification for any spiritual exercise in any form, but it has crippled and enervated them in their exercise within the sphere of truth and holiness. They were vitiated in respect to everything bearing the image of God—of goodness and excellence.

3. Man's freedom is not lost.

Third, the fall has not resulted in the loss of man's *freedom of will*, or his power of volition as a moral faculty. Admittedly, this is a much harder point to treat of than either of the above, not because Scripture is ambiguous, but because of the philosophical and metaphysical difficulties it raises in the minds of those who give careful thought thereto. Certain it is that the fall did not reduce man to the condition of a stock or stone, or even into an irrational animal. He retained that rational power of volition which was a part of his original constitution, so that he was still able to choose spontaneously. Equally certain is it that man is not free to do as he pleases in any absolute sense, for then he would be a god, omnipotent. In his unfallen state, Adam was made subservient to and dependent upon the Lord. So it is with his children: their wills are required to be fully subordinated to that of their Maker and Governor. Moreover, their freedom is strictly circumscribed by the supreme rule of divine providence, as it opens doors for or shuts doors against them.

As pointed out above, though each distinct faculty of the soul has a sphere that is peculiar to itself, yet are they co-ordinate, and therefore the will is not to be thought of as an independent, self-determining entity, standing apart from the other faculties and superior to them, capable of reversing the judgments of the mind or acting contrary to the desires of the heart—rather is the will influenced and determined by them. As G. S. Bishop most helpfully pointed out, "The true philosophy of moral action and its process is that of Genesis 3:6. 'And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food [sense-perception, intelligence], and a tree to be desired [affections], she took and ate thereof [the will].'" Thus the freedom of the will is also limited by the bounds of human capabilities. It cannot, for example, go beyond the extent of knowledge possessed by the mind—it is impossible for me to cognize, love and choose any object I am totally unacquainted with. Thus, it is the *understanding*, rather than the will, which is the dominant faculty and factor. Hence, when Scripture delineates the condition of fallen men, it attributes their alienation from God to "the ignorance that is in them" (Eph 4:18), and makes regeneration to begin with "renewed in knowledge" (Col 3:10).

The limitations of human freedom pointed out above pertain alike to man unfallen or fallen, but the entrance of sin into the human constitution has imposed much greater limitations. While it be true that man is as *truly* free now as Adam before his apostasy, yet he is not so *morally* free as he was. Fallen man is free in the sense that he is at liberty to act according to his own choice, without compulsion from without; yet, since his nature has been defiled and corrupted, he is no longer free *unto* that which is good and holy. Great care needs to be taken at this point, lest our definition of the freedom of fallen man clashes with such Scriptures as Psalm 110:3, John 6:44, Romans 9:16, for he only wills now according to the desires and dictates of his evil heart. It has been well said that "The will of the sinner is like to a manacled and fettered prisoner within a cell: his movements are hampered by his chains and circumscribed by the walls that confine him. He is indeed free to walk, but in a manner so constrained and within an area so bounded that his freedom is bondage"—bondage to sin.

Whether we understand by "the will" simply the faculty of volition by which the soul chooses or refuses, or whether we regard the "will" as the faculty of volition together with all else within us which affects the choice—reason, imagination, longing—yet fallen man is quite free in *exercising volition* according to his prevailing disposition and desire at the moment. Internal freedom is here used in contrast with external restraint or compulsion, and where such be absent then the individual is at liberty to decide according to his pleasure. Where the Arminian errs so seriously on this point is to confound *power* with "will," insisting that the sinner is equally able to choose good as evil, for that is a repudiation of his total depravity or complete vassalage to evil. By the fall, man came under bondage to sin, and became the captive of the devil; yet, even so, he first yields *voluntarily* to the enticements of his own lusts before he commits any act of sin, nor can Satan lead him into any wrongdoing without his own consent.

The natural man does as he pleases, but he pleases himself only in one direction—selfward and downward, never Godward and upward. As Romans 6:20 says of the saints while in their unregenerate state, "For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free *from* righteousness." In all his sinning, man acts as a free agent, for he is forced neither by God nor Satan. When he breaks the law, he does so by his own option, and not by coercion from another. In so doing, he is freely acting out his own fallen nature. Thus it is a mistake to say that a bias of the mind or propensity of heart is destructive of his volition. Both must be self-moved. The murderer is not compelled to hate his victim. Though he cannot prevent his inward hatred by any mere exercise of will, yet he *can* refrain from the outward act of murder by his own volition, and therefore is he blameworthy when he fails to do so. These are indisputable facts of our own consciousness!

4. Man's responsibilities are not reduced.

Fourth, the fall has not resulted in any reduction, still less the destruction, of *man's responsibility*. If all of the above be carefully pondered, this should be quite evident. Human responsibility is the necessary corollary of divine sovereignty. Since God be the Creator, since He is supreme Ruler over all, and since man be but a creature and a subject, there is no escape from his accountability unto his Maker and rightful Lord. If we be asked to define more distinctly—responsible *for what?*—we reply that man is obligated to answer unto the relationship which exists between him and his Creator—he occupies the place of creaturehood, subordination, utter dependency for every breath he draws, and therefore must he acknowledge God's dominion, submit to His authority, and love Him with all his strength and heart. The discharge of human responsibility is simply the recognition of God's rights and acting accordingly, a rendering to Him of His due. It is the practical acknowledgment of His ownership and government. We are justly required to be in constant subjection to His will, to employ in His service the faculties He has given us, to use the means He has appointed, to improve the opportunities and advantages He has vouchsafed us. Our whole duty is to glorify God.

From the above definition, it should be crystal clear that the fall did not, and could not to the slightest degree, cancel or impair human responsibility. The fall did not change the fundamental relationship subsisting between the Creator and the creature. God is the Owner of sinful man as truly and as fully as He was of sinless man. God is still our sovereign, and we His subjects. Furthermore, as pointed out above, fallen man is still in possession of all those faculties which qualify for discharging his responsibility. Admittedly, the babe in arms and the poor idiot are not morally accountable for their actions, but, by parity of reason, those who have reached the age when they are capable of distinguishing between right and wrong *are* morally accountable for their deeds. Fallen man, though his understanding be spiritually darkened, is still possessed of rationality. Fallen man, though under the dominion of sin, has his power of volition, and is under binding obligation to make, every time, a right and good choice. To resist temptations and refrain from evil-doing, as every human court of justice worthy of the name rightly insists.

Whatever difficulties may be theoretically involved by the fact that man's nature is now totally depraved and that he is in bondage to sin, yet God has not lost His right to command because man has lost his power to obey. While the fall has cast us out of God's favour, it has not released us from His authority. It was not God who took from man his spiritual strength and deprived him of his ability to do that which is well pleasing in His sight. Man was originally endowed with power to meet the requirements of his Maker, and it was by his own madness and wickedness that he threw away his power. But as a human monarch does not forget his rights to allegiance from his subjects when they turn rebels, but rather maintains his prerogative by demanding that they cease their insurrection and return to their fealty, so has the King of kings an infinite right to demand that lawless rebels shall become loyal subjects. If God could justly require of us no more than we are now able to render Him, it would follow that the more we enslave ourselves by evil habits, the less our liability—a palpable absurdity!

Not only is man's responsibility insisted upon throughout the Scriptures from *Genesis* to *Revelation*, but it is also asserted by man's own conscience! Whatever quibbles the individual raises from depravity, and however he argues from his moral impotency that his deeds are not criminal, he repudiates such reasoning where his fellow sinners are concerned. When others wrong him, he neither denies their accountability nor offers excuse for them. If he be cruelly slandered, robbed of his possessions or maltreated in his body, instead of saying of the culprit, "Poor fellow, he could not help himself—Adam is to blame," he promptly applies to the police and seeks redress in the law courts. Moreover, when the sinner is quickened and awakened by the Holy Spirit, so far from complaining against God's righteous demands, he freely owns himself as deserving to be eternally damned for his vile rebellion, acknowledges that he was fully responsible for the same, that he is "without excuse" (Rom 1:20), feels the burden of his guilt, and lies in the dust before God in sincere repentance.



INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 6

The word "interpretation" has in this connection both a stricter or narrower meaning and a looser or wider one. In the former sense, it signifies to bring out the grammatical force of the passage; in the latter, to explain its spiritual purport. If the expositor confine himself rigidly unto the technical rules of exegesis, though he may be of some service to the pedant, he will afford little practical help to the rank and file of God's people. To discourse upon the chemical properties of food will not feed a starving man, neither will tracing out the roots of the Hebrew and Greek words (necessary though that be in its proper place) the better enable Christ's followers to fight the good fight of faith. That remark connotes neither that we despise scholarship on the one hand nor that we hold any brief for those who would give free rein to their imagination when handling the Word of God. Rather do we mean that the chief aim of the expositor should be to bring together the truth and the hearts of his hearers or readers, that the former may have a vitalizing, edifying, transforming effect upon the latter.

In the preceding articles of this series, it has been pointed out that the interpreter's task is to emulate those described in Nehemiah 8:8, of whom it is said, "They read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading," and to do *that* the preacher must needs spend many hours every week in his study. Each word in his text must be given its precise and definite meaning according to its general scriptural usage (unless there be very clear intimation to the contrary in the passage before him), or otherwise it would be arbitrary license, and he would expound God's oracles not by their own terms but by his own fancies or preconceived ideas. The laws of language must never be violated or the meanings of words changed to suit ourselves. We are not to evacuate the true force and import of any term, but to explain it on sound principles, and not by forced constructions of Jesuitical evasions.

The task of the interpreter is to determine, by strict exegetical investigation, the exact import of the words used by the Holy Spirit, and, as far as he possibly can, give forth God's thoughts in his own language. It is to ascertain and fix the exact meaning of the terms used in Holy Writ and scrupulously to avoid the interjection of his personal opinions. He must insert nothing of his own, but simply endeavour to give the real sense of each passage before him. On the one hand, he must not ignore, conceal, or withhold anything that is manifestly in it; on the other hand, he must not add to or twist anything therein to suit his own caprice. Scripture must be allowed to speak for itself, and it *does so* only so far as the preacher sets forth its genuine import. Not only is he to explain its *terms*, but also the nature of the *ideas* they express, otherwise he is apt to make use of scriptural terms and yet give them an unscriptural sense. One may discover with accuracy the meaning of each word in a passage, and yet, from some misconception of its scope or bias in his own mind, have a faulty apprehension of what the passage really teaches.

Carelessness which would not be tolerated in any other connection is, alas, freely indulged in with the Bible. Artists who are most particular in selecting their colours when painting a natural object are often most remiss when assaying to portray a sacred one. Thus Noah's ark is represented as having a number of windows in its sides, whereas it had but one, and that on the top! The dove, which came to him after the flood had subsided, is pictured with an olive *branch* instead of a "leaf" (Gen 8:11) in its mouth! The infant Moses in the ark of bulrushes is depicted with a winsome smile on his face instead of tears (Exo 2:6)! Let no such criminal disregard to the *details* of Holy Scripture mark the expositor. Instead, let the utmost care and pains be taken to ensure accuracy, by scrutinizing every detail, weighing each jot and tittle. The word for "*search* the scriptures" (Joh 5:39) signifies diligently to track out, as the hunter does the spoor of animals. The interpreter's job is to bring out *the sense* and not merely the sound of the Word.

In enumerating, describing, and illustrating some of the laws or rules which are to govern the interpreter, we have already considered: *First*, the need for recognizing and being regulated by the interrelation and mutual dependence of the Old and New Testaments. *Second*, the importance and helpfulness of observing how quotations are made from the Old in the New—the manner in which and purposes for which they are cited. *Third*, the absolute necessity for strictly conforming all our interpretations unto the general Analogy of Faith—that each verse is to be explained in full harmony with that system of truth which God has made known to us, and that any exposition is invalid if it clashes with what is taught elsewhere in the Bible. *Fourth*, the necessity of paying close attention to the whole context of any passage under consideration.

Fifth, the value of ascertaining *the scope* of each passage, and the particular *aspect* of truth presented therein. Through lack of space, we were unable to complete our treatment of this division, so will do so here.

There is not a little in the Sermon on the Mount which forcibly illustrates this rule, for many of its statements have been grievously misunderstood through failure to perceive their scope or design. Thus, when our Lord declared, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in her heart" (Mat 5:27-28), it has been supposed that He was setting forth a *higher standard* of moral purity than the one enunciated from Sinai. But such a concept is at direct variance with His design. After solemnly affirming (in verse 17) that so far from its being His mission to destroy the Law or the prophets, He had come to fulfil them (i.e. enforce and comply with their requirements), He certainly would not, immediately after, pit Himself against their teaching. No, from verse 21 onwards He was engaged in making known that righteousness which He required in the citizens of His kingdom, which exceed the righteousness "of the scribes and Pharisees" (Mat 5:20), who were retailing the dogmas of the rabbis, who had "made the commandment of God of none effect" by their traditions (Mat 15:6).

Christ did not say, "Ye know what *God* said at Sinai," but "ye have heard that it was said by *them* of old time," which makes it unmistakably clear that He was opposing the teaching of the elders who had restricted the seventh commandment of the Decalogue to the bare act of unlawful intercourse with a married woman; insisting that it required conformity from the inward affections, prohibiting all impure thoughts and desires of the heart. There is much in Matthew 5-7 which cannot be rightly apprehended except our Lord's principal object and design in this address be clearly perceived. Until then, its plainest statements are more or less obscure and its most pertinent illustration irrelevant. It was not the *actual* teaching of the Law and prophets which Christ was here rebutting, but the erroneous conclusion which religious teachers had drawn therefrom and the false notions based on them—and which were being so dogmatically promulgated at that time. The sharp edge of the Spirit's sword had been blunted by a rabbinical toning down of its precepts, thereby placing a construction upon them which rendered them objectionable to the unregenerate.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Mat 5:38-39) supplies another example of the need for ascertaining the scope of a passage before attempting to explain it. Through failure to do so, many have quite missed the force of this contrast. It has been supposed that our Lord was here enjoining a more merciful code of conduct than that which was exacted under the Mosaic economy. Yet if the reader turns to Deuteronomy 19:17-21, he will find that those verses gave instruction to Israel's "judges," that they were not to be governed by sentiment, but to administer strict justice unto the evil-doer—"eye for eye," etc. But this statute, which pertains only to the magistrate enforcing *judicial* retribution, had been perverted by the Pharisees, giving it a *general* application, thereby teaching that each man was warranted in taking the law into his own hands. Our Lord here forbade the inflicting of *private revenge*, and in so doing maintained the clear teaching of the Old Testament (see Exo 23:4-5; Lev. 19:18; Pro 24:29; 25:21-22, which expressly forbade the exercise of personal malice and retaliation).

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended and the floods came, and the wind blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (Mat 7:24-25). How many sermons have had read into them from those verses what is not there, and failed sadly to bring out what *is* in them, through not understanding their scope. Christ was not there engaged in proclaiming the Gospel of the grace of God and revealing the alone ground of a sinner's acceptance with Him, but was making a practical and searching application of the sermon He was here completing. The opening, "Therefore," at once intimates that He was drawing a conclusion from all He had previously said. In the preceding verses, Christ was not describing meritmongers or declaiming against those who trusted in good works and religious performances for their salvation, but was exhorting His hearers to enter in at the straight gate (verses 13-14), warning against false prophets (verses 15-20), denouncing an empty profession. In the verse immediately before (verse 23), so far from presenting Himself as the Redeemer, tenderly wooing sinners, He is seen as the Judge, saying to hypocrites, "Depart from Me ye that work iniquity."

In view of what has just been pointed out, it would be, to say the least, a strange place for Christ to introduce the Evangel and announce that His own finished work was the only saving foundation for sinners to rest their souls upon. Not only would that give no meaning to the introductory, "Therefore," but it would not cohere with what immediately follows, where, instead of pointing out our need of trusting in His atoning blood, Christ showed how indispensable it is that we *render obedience* to His precepts. True indeed that

there is no redemption for any soul except through “faith in His blood” (Rom 3:25), but that is not what He was here treating of. Rather was He insisting that not everyone who said unto Him, “Lord, Lord,” should enter into His kingdom, but “he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat 7:21). In other words, He was testing profession, demanding reality—that genuine faith produces good works. They who think themselves to be savingly trusting in the blood of the Lamb, while disregarding His commandments, are fatally deceiving themselves. Christ did not here liken the one who heard and *believed* His sayings to a wise man who built his house secure on a rock, but instead the one who “heareth and *doeth them*”—as in verse 26, the builder on the sand is one who hears His sayings “and doeth them not.”

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28). “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jam 2:24). Unless the *scope* of each writer be clearly apprehended those two statements flatly contradict each other. Romans 3:28 is a conclusion from what had been advanced in verses 21-27—all boasting before God being rendered impossible by the divine method of salvation. From the very nature of the case, if justification before God be by faith, then it must be by faith alone—without the mingling of anything meritorious of ours. James 2:24, as is clear from verses 17-18 and 26, is not treating of how the sinner obtains acceptance with God, but how such a one supplies *proof* of his acceptance. Paul was rebutting that legalistic tendency which leads men to go about and “establish their own righteousness” by works; James was contending against that spirit of licentious antinomianism which causes others to pervert the Gospel and insist that good works are not essential for any purpose. Paul was refuting meritmongers who repudiated salvation by grace alone; James was maintaining that grace works through righteousness and transforms its subjects: showing the worthlessness of a dead faith which produces naught but a windy profession. The faithful servant of God will ever alternate in warning his hearers against legalism on the one hand and libertarianism on the other.

6. *The need of interpreting Scripture by Scripture.* The general principle is expressed in the well-known words “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1Co 2:13), for while the preceding clause has reference more especially to the divine inspiration by which the apostle taught, as the authoritative mouthpiece of the Lord, yet both verses 12 and 14 treat of the *understanding* of spiritual things, and therefore we consider that the last clause of verse 13 has a double force. The Greek word rendered “comparing” is used in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament again and again to express the act of interpreting dreams and enigmas, and Charles Hodge (1797-1878) paraphrased “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” by “*explaining* the things of the Spirit in the words of the Spirit.” He pointed out that the word “spiritual” has no substantive connected with it, and thus most naturally agrees with “words” in the former sentence. For these reasons, we consider that 1 Corinthians 2:13 enunciates a most valuable and important rule for the understanding and interpreting of God’s Word, namely, that one part of it is to be explained by another, for the setting side by side of spiritual things serves to illuminate and illustrate one another, and thereby is their perfect harmony demonstrated. Something more than a confused or vague knowledge of the Scriptures is to be sought after—the ascertaining that one part of the truth is in full accord with other parts makes manifest their unity—as the curtains in the tabernacle were linked together by loops.

To a very large extent, and far more so than any uninspired book, the Bible is a self-explaining volume—not only because it records the performance of its promises and the fulfillment of its prophecies, not only because the types and antitypes mutually unfold each other, but because all the fundamental truths may be discovered by means of its own contents, without reference to anything *ab extra* or outside itself. When difficulty be experienced in one passage, it may be resolved by a comparison and examination of other passages, where the same or similar words occur, or where the same or similar subjects are dealt with at greater length or explained more clearly. For example, that vitally important expression “the righteousness of God” in Romans 1:17—every other place where it occurs in Paul’s epistles must be carefully weighed before we can be sure of its exact meaning, and having done so, there is no need to consult heathen authors. Not only is this to be done with each word of note, but its parts and derivatives, adjuncts and cognates, are to be searched out in every instance, for often light will thereby be cast upon the same. That God intended us to study His Word thus is evident from the *absence* of any system of classification or arrangement of information being supplied us on any subject.

The principal subjects treated of in the Scriptures are presented to us more or less piecemeal, being scattered over its pages and made known under various aspects, some clearly and fully, others more remotely and tersely in different connections and with different accompaniments in the seven passages where they occur. This was designed by God in His manifold wisdom to make us search His Word. It is evident that, if we are to apprehend His full-made-known mind on any particular subject, we must collect and col-

late all passages in which it is adverted to, or in which a similar thought or sentiment is expressed; and by this method we may be assured that, if we conduct our investigation in a right spirit, and with diligence and perseverance, we shall arrive at a clear knowledge of His revealed will. The Bible is somewhat like a mosaic, whose fragments are scattered here and there through the Word and those fragments have to be gathered by us and carefully fitted together if we are to obtain the complete picture of any one of its innumerable objects. There are many places in the Scriptures which can be understood only by the explanations and amplifications furnished by other passages.

