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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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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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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

EARLY

“Those that seek me early shall find me” (Pro 8:17). Possibly this article will come before the eyes of some who have long disregarded that gracious call, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him” (Isa 55:7). What a marvel that God has borne with your heedlessness, that He did not cut you off out of the land of the living and banish you into everlasting woe! But He has not! Your day of opportunity has not yet closed. Yet none can say how much longer it will last. Then, today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart. “Those that seek me early shall find me.” What a word is this for the young—to seek the Saviour *early in life*. Perhaps you object, “But youth is the time for mirth.” True, but not the mirth of madness, rather that of peace of conscience, rejoicing in the Lord, and running in the way of His commandments. Though your years are yet but few, your sins are many in number. “Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Pro 27:1). Ere 1953 ends, you may be in your grave. Then, delay not. “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not” (Ecc 12:1).

“Those that seek me early shall find me.” What a word is this for those who have left childhood and youth behind them! Though you be but a cumberer of the ground, the Lord in His longsuffering has spared you, permitting you to enter 1953. Then, ought you not to seek Him *early this new year*? How otherwise can you express your gratitude unto the One who has exercised such infinite patience with you than by throwing down the weapons of your rebellion against Him and laying hold of His promise, “shall find me.” Find Me exactly suited to your condition. Find Me full of compassion. Find Me able to save unto the uttermost. Say not within your heart, I am too great a sinner to approach unto the Holy One. The viler you are, the more glorious will He be in saving such a wretch—as the more desperate the disease, the more credit to the doctor who successfully prescribes for its

healing. Christ never yet turned away a single soul who cast himself on His mercy and trusted in His blood. His invitation and promise is, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mat 11:28). Then tarry not. Hearken no longer unto Satan, who is determined to keep you from enjoying that rest.

To defer this all-important matter is not only sinful but *highly injurious*, for the longer you delay the greater will be your disposition to embrace the ways of God. If you find it difficult today to surrender unto the claims of Christ, it will be more difficult tomorrow. It is increasing hardness of heart which makes spiritual exercises so hard. The more you close your ears to the divine call, the more will the clamorous voices of the world dull your perceptions. The longer you go on in sin, the farther off from God. Delay is *dangerous*, for you provoke the Lord more by resisting Him, and He will not be mocked with impunity. God will not wait indefinitely upon a procrastinator, but declares, "My spirit shall not always strive with man" (Gen 6:3). The Spirit strives for a long time with some, shaking them out of their false security, disturbing their peace, making them realize their unfitness for death, but that does not continue for ever. "Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2Co 6:2). Then slight not the offers of divine grace. "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa 55:6). There are certain seasons which are times of finding, because God then draws nearer to man than at others, and it is then that their hearts are most pliable.

"Those that seek me early shall find me" (Pro 8:17). Let us consider this word as it applies to the people of God, and more especially with their forming the habit of doing so *early in the day*. Of course, the word "early" is a relative one, for what would be an early hour for the merchant to rise would be late for the farmer. But whether you live in the city or in the country, it is your wisdom, duty, and privilege to *start the day with God*. In contradistinction from laziness and slothfulness, self-ease or reluctance, seeking God early expresses earnestness and enthusiasm. Nothing escapes the all-seeing eye of Him with whom we have to do, and it is impressive to observe how frequently He has made mention of the promptness of His servants in this respect. The Lord both noted and recorded the fact that "Abraham rose up early in the morning, taking with him Isaac his son and the wood for the burnt offering, and went unto the place of which God had told him" (Gen 22:3). There was no tardiness on his part in the performing of that painful duty, but as it were a "running" in the way of God's commandments (Psa 119:32). "And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it" (Gen 28:18), thereby manifesting the fervour of his worship.

"As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away" (Gen 44:3), to take back food to their families, for thus had Joseph given orders. Here the early hour denoted a sense of urgency. We are told of another eminent patriarch that, when his sons feasted in their houses, he "rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned" (Job 1:5). Thus did his alacrity give proof of his paternal concern for them. When God commanded His servant to deliver His mandate to Egypt's king, He bade him, "Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh" (Exo 8:20 and repeated in 9:13), teaching us that He requires promptness, and will brook no delay. Four times over, it is recorded to the credit

of Joshua that, "He rose up early in the morning" (Jos 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10) to perform his duty, thereby setting before the nation an example of briskness and intensesness. Nor was it lost upon them, for we are told that when Jericho was to be encompassed on the seventh day, the priests and men of war "rose early about the dawning of the day" (Jos 6:15), and richly did God reward such zeal. It is not the sluggard, but the diligent whom He blesses.

"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD" (Psa 5:3). Let that holy determination of David's be your resolve. Commence the day with God. Open your heart unto Him before opening your mouth unto any creature. Have you not cause to thank Him for His watch-care during the hours of darkness, and for renewing your strength with a refreshing sleep? Many spent the night tossing about in pain! The fruits of His fervour are said to be "new every morning" (Lam 3:23), so too should be our grateful acknowledgment of the same. Have you not real need for a season of communion with the eternal Lover of your soul before your mind is filled with the cares and concerns of the world? How can you expect His blessing upon you during the day if you slight Him? Do you not need wisdom for the tasks awaiting, to be guided through the maze of your affairs? Should you not seek His deliverance from temptations? Failure at this point is due to something far worse than carelessness. It betrays a sad spirit of independence and self-sufficiency—that you consider yourself able to go through the day *without* God's grace and help.

"Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early" (Psa 57:8). "My glory" may refer to the tongue, for the power of articulation is what elevates man above the beasts, or the allusion may be unto the soul from which the matter of speech proceeds. David was calling upon the noblest powers of his being to bestir themselves and hymn the Redeemer's praise. His "I myself will awake early" signified his ardour. Dull and drowsy devotions are not suited to the living God. Not only must the sacrifice be kindled with a holy fire, but ascend in a holy flame of warm devotion. Let us early and thoroughly awake ourselves for this sacred task. Over two hundred years ago Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury (1643-1715), wrote, "In the days of our fathers, when a person came early to the door of his neighbour and desired to speak with the head of the house, it was as common a thing for the servant to tell him, 'My master is at prayer' as it now is to say, 'My master is not yet up.'" Alas, how he would have to complain of this generation.

"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee" (Psa 63:1). Do likewise, and then you will "awake to righteousness, and sin not" (1Co 15:34), laying a good foundation for the hours to come. Remember that God is "a rewarder of them that *diligently* [not tardily or reluctantly] seek him" (Heb 11:6). Let the eyes of your heart open as soon as do those of your body. Suffer not the birds of the air, with their gladsome matins, to shame you. "Early will I seek thee," to yield myself afresh to Thee, that while the dew is on the ground, my soul may be bedewed. Only as we manifest such diligence are we justified in praying, "O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice" (Psa 90:14). To seek for my spiritual "daily bread"—Israel had to get up for theirs, *before* "the sun waxed hot" (Exo 16:21)—ere other things had time to occupy their thoughts. What a difference it would make if you formed the habit of feeding every morning on the Bread of life! Of the Saviour, we read that "In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out...into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mar 1:35 and see Joh 8:2), and those who followed His example were the first to behold Him after He was risen from the dead (Mar 16:9).

EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

37. *Our Anointing (2:27)*

“But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.”

In this verse and the next one the apostle continues and virtually completes what he had said upon the saints' abiding in Christ. Though our text be by no means free of difficulty, yet by carefully noting its coherence with the context, its meaning is more or less obvious. In view of the defection of so many (verse 19) and the continued activities of antichrists to draw away others, John had addressed their responsibility and bade them persevere in the faith, and heed not those who sought to entice them away from it. It was their duty to store the truth in their minds and treasure it in their hearts, to yield their entire beings to its sway and reduce its substance to practice. Abandon it not for any specious novelty (verse 24). In verse 25 an incentive was supplied to encourage and stimulate them in the performance of that duty. In verse 26 a solemn warning is added for the purpose of showing the necessity for their compliance therewith.

The apostle's design, then, in the verse now before us, is threefold: explanatory, consolatory, cautionary. *First*, he states the reason why believers had stood firm under the testing which had shaken and overthrown so many of their fellows. It was not because of any superior native sagacity,¹ but was to be attributed solely unto the gracious and effectual provision that God has made for the preservation of His children from the deceits of Satan. In verse 20, John had stated *implicitly* how it was that the saints had been delivered from serious error; now he affirms *explicitly* that they would continue to be kept from receiving lying vanities. Here, as everywhere else in the writings of the apostles, the grand end in view was to remove all ground for boasting from the saints and to move them to ascribe all the glory unto their Redeemer. Our security for abiding in God—in the Father and the Son—is here attributed to that which is imparted to us at regeneration: there is now that within us which preserves from the evil without us; we have been given a sure antidote against the poison of the serpent. At the new birth we received that which ensures our abiding in Christ.

Second, whereas that clear statement redounded to the honour of Christ, for it was from Him that the preservative benefit was received, it could not fail to comfort and assure the hearts of those to whom it was addressed. It must not be overlooked that, at that time, those believers were in special need of solace. They had been witnessing a most mysterious and distressing spectacle. They had seen a large number of their professing brethren forsaking the churches to which they belonged, and not a few of the ministers themselves apostatizing. That was enough thoroughly to discourage mature Christians, and much more so the babes of the family. How strengthening then to their faith to be divinely assured that

¹ **sagacity** – soundness of judgment; discernment.

the anointing which they had received from Christ was no temporary thing or evanescent experience, which would soon wear off, but a durable and effective one that would stand them in good stead unto the close of their earthly pilgrimage. How comforting to be authoritatively informed that the same divine illumination that taught them at the beginning and that had imparted to them the saving knowledge of Christ, would remain to instruct them so that they would be kept steadfast in the faith and would most certainly abide in Christ.

Third, the above declaration was also intended to animate them unto increased watchfulness and diligence. While our last-made remarks stand in need of no qualification, they do need amplification lest they be perverted to a wrong use. Such an assurance must not be abused to rashness and self-confidence. However sound and extensive their spiritual knowledge, they had real need of more. There is no remaining stationary in the Christian life; unless we progress, we retrogress. Unless we make good use of what God has given us, we are in real danger of losing what we seem to have (Luk 8:18). In order to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we are required to make daily use of the means that God has provided. This anointing is not given to slothfulness and laziness. It is a vile perversion of this heavenly privilege to make God the patron of negligence and the indulger of the ease of the flesh. This divine gift increases our obligations: "for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luk 12:48). Nor must it be abused unto pride and self-sufficiency, so that we look contemptuously upon the more ignorant, for we have nothing good but what we have received (1Co 4:7).

The nature of the "anointing"

But we must now inquire into the precise nature of this inestimable gift. Some have thought that by this "anointing" the truth itself is intended, that the doctrine of the Gospel which they had received would preserve them from the seducers warned against. But such a view accords not with either the text or the context, for the truth of the Gospel was the very thing which the antichrists were attacking, and it was a true and experiential knowledge thereof which constituted the saint's safeguard. This "anointing" is here said to *abide* in those who were the favoured recipients of the same, whereas strictly speaking we are said to abide in the truth. Again, this anointing is said to *teach* us all things, whereas the truth is that which we are taught: thus we must distinguish between that which instructs and that wherein we are instructed. Finally, it must be borne in mind that everywhere else in Scripture, the Holy Spirit is said to be the teacher of the saints, the One who establishes them in the truth, and there is nothing whatever in our text or the context which requires us to adopt any other signification.

The Greek word for "anointing" in our text is identical with the one rendered "unction" in verse 20, and has reference to one and the same thing. In our exposition of that verse we showed, first, that under the Old Testament economy prophets, priests and kings were appointed unto and confirmed in their office by being anointed with the holy oil, and that they typified the anointing of Christ Himself with the Holy Spirit (Isa 61:1; Act 10:38). It was from that enduement He was denominated "the Christ," which means "the Anointed One." At His incarnation His humanity received a fullness of the Spirit's grace, being born

“that holy thing” (Luk 1:35); at His baptism and entrance upon His public ministry He received a fullness of the Spirit’s gifts (Isa 11:2; Mat 3:17); while at His ascension He was anointed with the oil of gladness (Psa 45:7; Act 2:33). “And of his fullness have we all received, and grace for grace” (Joh 1:16)—the grace in us answering (according to our proportion) to the grace that is in Him—foreshadowed of old in the anointing of Israel’s high priest, concerning which we read, “It is like the precious ointment upon the head...that went down to the skirts of his garments” (Psa 133:2), reaching to the lowest of his members. In like manner, the believer’s anointing is an emanation from Christ.

Christ is our Anointer, and the anointing that believers receive from Him is the Holy Spirit, and thus are the members conformed to their glorious Head, yet with this difference: He was anointed with the Spirit without measure (Joh 3:34), we “according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (Eph 4:7). This “anointing,” then, is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit and supply of grace which is received from the Anointed One, who is “full of grace and truth” (Joh 1:14). It is an invaluable blessing which cannot be too highly esteemed. It is a divine gift “without repentance” (Rom 11:29), never to be recalled or rescinded. It is incorruptible, and cannot be destroyed, being that good part which shall continue with them and which none can take away. This is the “oil in their vessels” (that is, in their hearts) that distinguishes the wise virgins from the foolish ones (Mat 25:4). Both had the “lamp” in their hands; that which differentiates the gracious soul from the graceless professor is something within, namely the indwelling Spirit. By this divine unction the regenerate receive light into the sacred mysteries of the Gospel, so that they have a saving and satisfying acquaintance with and experience thereof, which effectually preserves them from being imposed upon by counterfeits.

The figure of “anointing” is a very comprehensive one, which more plainly appears when we compare all the passages where the holy oil was used under the Old Testament economy. It was employed with the design of dedicating a thing or a person unto God (Gen 22:18). It was provided for the purpose of illumination, to furnish light (Exo 25:6). It was designed to lubricate and refresh, “oil to make his face to shine” (Psa 104:15). Since it was compounded of sweet spices (Exo 30:24-25), it produced a fragrance in those using the same. In the blessing pronounced on Asher it was said, “Let him dip his foot in oil. Thy shoes *shall be* iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be” (Deu 33:24-25), which, in figurative language, signified the Spirit supplying power for the walk. Now in all these respects the antitypical substance is communicated by Christ through the unction of the Spirit. Thereby believers are set apart and consecrated to God, illuminated and instructed, quickened and comforted, made a sweet savour unto God and unto one another. There are two beautiful allusions unto the last in the Song of Solomon. First, the spouse says of her Beloved, “Thy love *is* better than wine. Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name *is as* ointment poured forth” (1:2-3); while He in turn declares, “How fair is thy love, my sister, *my* spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices” (4:10), where He admires the graces that the Spirit has wrought in her.

Observations about this anointing

“But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.”

Now it is the second aspect of the above that is principally in view in our text. No less than seven things are here predicated of this anointing. *First*, it was from Christ that it proceeded. Those unto whom John was writing had remained steadfast in the truth, unshaken by heresy, and he would have them know the reason for this or from whence their constancy originated: they were indebted to the Holy One for His unction. Thus were fulfilled the several promises that He made to His disciples ere He departed from this world. “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father...for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (Joh 15:26; 16:7). It was the bestowment of the risen Saviour, for when He ascended on high He “gave gifts unto men” (Eph 4:8)—an earnest of which was imparted when He “breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (Joh 20:22).

Second, this enduement was a subjective one: it “abideth *in* you.” It is a gracious experience in the inner man, which is entirely beyond the cognizance of the unregenerate. As the Lord Jesus had announced, “the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (Joh 14:17). This is made good when it can be said, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” (1Th 1:5). The external Word is now applied internally. The mind is divinely illumined, so as to receive a clear, convincing, contenting knowledge of the truth. At the same time the affections are purified and the heart turned unto God, so that it is fitted for spiritual and heavenly things; this is that “washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Ti 3:5). Then it is that the Word is received “in much affliction [as we are convicted of our sins], with joy of the Holy Spirit” (1Th 1:6), as He makes known to us our divine pardon. In the latter respect this anointing is “the oil of gladness” (Psa 45:7), for the Spirit is a Comforter as well as a Sanctifier. Combine divine illumination, purification, and consolation, and what a sure means are they for establishing in the truth!

Third, this anointing is a permanent blessing: it “*abideth* in you,” “that he [the Comforter] may abide with you for ever” (Joh 14:16). It is very much more than a fitful emotion or brief rapture of spirit which soon gives place to depression; namely, stable, and enduring. Therein it is to be distinguished from our varying frames and feelings. It is indeed exercised and manifested in different ways and directions: sometimes producing groans that cannot be uttered, sometimes bestowing sweet foretastes of celestial bliss. But beneath all surface perception it is exerting a steadying influence, keeping God and eternity before the soul, so that in the hour of temptation or tribulation it turns to Him for succour.

Fourth, this unction is, in itself, sufficient: so truly so that it is affirmed of its beneficiaries, “ye need not that any man teach you”—either to convey authority to the truth, to impart a saving knowledge of it to the soul, or to induce the regenerate to adhere firmly unto it in love and obedience. The Gospel carries its own witness, and when, through the Spirit’s anointing, it is applied to the heart in saving power, it is received “not

as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1Th 2:13).

Fifth, it instructs its recipients: "the same anointing *teacheth* you of all things." This is fulfillment of God's new-covenant promise: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD" (Jer 31:33-34). In the accomplishment of that promise the Lord works so effectually upon and within His elect that, to use the language of another apostle, they are made "partakers of the divine nature" (2Pe 1:4). There is a peculiar power accompanying the teaching of the Lord by His Spirit: "Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him?" (Job 36:22). So our Lord interpreted His promise, "All thy children *shall be* taught of the LORD" (Isa 54:13), as "every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (Joh 6:45). There is such an efficacy attending the divine teaching that whosoever is favoured therewith is positively assured that the same is of and from God Himself, for he now has the certifying evidence of its verity within his own soul.

The anointing of believers with the Spirit is for the purpose of giving them an experiential acquaintance and saving knowledge of the Gospel, enlightening their understandings and causing their hearts to receive the same with delight, casting their inner man into the holy image of the same (Rom 6:17). Thereby they are given the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God in Christ, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (Eph 1:17-18). Such impressions of the holiness, righteousness, goodness, and grace of God are indelibly left in their souls that Satan can no longer deceive them with lying substitutes. As another apostle said, "*Ye are* manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2Co 3:3). They have received the Spirit which is of God, that they may know the things which are freely given to them by God (1Co 2:12), that they may be assured of their reality, convinced of their value, appropriate, enjoy, and embody them in their lives. They now have a spirit of discernment, but flee from hirelings (Joh 10:5).

Sixth, it is genuine and wholesome: "and is truth, and *is no lie*"—no darkness mars the light. Thus it is simple or pure blessing, no heresy being mixed with it. Therefore it is reliable and trustworthy. The Spirit is like a seal, by which the truth is testified and certified to the soul. "For while faith ought to look to God, He alone can be a witness to Himself, so as to convince our hearts that what our ears receive has come from Him" (John Calvin, 1509-1564). The added words "and is no lie" signify that God has so endowed the regenerate with sound judgment and discernment that they will not be deceived by falsehoods, or even left in a state of uncertainty and vacillation about them. There is no danger, no possibility, of anyone being misled by what this holy unction teaches; no erring while we walk according to this direction. Therefore we are to measure everything by what the Spirit teaches in the Word. Thus not only is it thorough and complete—for "By this teaching of God Himself, they were instructed in all things essential to salvation, and could

not be deceived” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821)—it also conveys a conviction which cannot be called into question or shaken by man or devil.

“There is truth and no lie in what the Spirit shows you of the love of God in Christ, and sheds abroad in your heart of that love. Be sure of that, and be not afraid to act upon the assurance of it. There is truth and no lie in what the Spirit opens up to you of the freeness and fullness of the Father’s overtures of mercy in the Son. Be sure of that, and be not afraid to act upon the assurance of it. There is truth and no lie in what the Spirit would have you grasp of the peace that passeth understanding, the hope that maketh not ashamed, the joy unspeakable that is full of glory. Be sure of that, and be not afraid to act upon the assurance of it. There is truth and no lie in that which ye have heard from the beginning, so abiding in you that you abide in the Son and in the Father. That really is the anointing that is truth and no lie. Be sure of that, and be not afraid to act out and out upon the assurance of it” (Robert S. Candlish, 1806-1873).

Instead of now taking up the seventh thing that is here predicated of our anointing (namely that it ensures our abiding in Christ), we defer it to our next chapter, and instead proffer some further remarks upon the oft-misunderstood clause “and ye need not that any man teach you.” That language calls for the expositor, to explain the force of its terms, for some ignorant souls who fail to understand the sense have been misled by its sound. Certain fanatics suppose it means that the Christian is independent of all preachers, and therefore have contended for the exclusion of oral ministry from the churches. Now it is obvious that John wrote not to promote a spirit of presumption and unwillingness to be taught by others—his own example contradicted any such idea, for he was then engaged in instructing these very persons. Nor was there any inconsistency between his statement and his practice. He taught the disciples and they were grateful and much edified. Yet supposing him to be withdrawn from them and his pen silenced, it did not follow that they must remain ignorant. The Spirit would teach them, by him and without him as He pleased. The child of God, with the Bible in his hand and the Holy Spirit in his heart, is capable of all spiritual knowledge. Whereas divine teaching does not supersede ministerial instruction, it does surpass the same.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

89. Levitical Cities, Part 1

A year ago, we devoted three articles of this series to the Levites, wherein we considered their origin and history, their duties and functions, and the typical and spiritual significance thereof. On this occasion, it will be *the cities* which were divinely appointed them for residence which will engage our attention. Since it has pleased the Lord to devote a whole chapter, and a lengthy one, to the subject, it is evident that—whether or not we can discern it—there must be that in it which is of spiritual importance and practical value for us today. Nor shall we experience any difficulty in ascertaining its central message if we

bear in mind that the *ministers of the Gospel* are the counterparts of the Levites of old. In that chapter, we find it recorded that the heads of the tribe of Levi came before the assembled court of Israel and presented their claim for suitable places where they might settle with their families and possessions. Their petition was received favourably, and their request was granted. Forty-eight cities with their suburbs were assigned them—appointed by the “lot,” as had been the case with all the other tribes.

“Then came near the heads of the fathers of the Levites unto Eleazar the priest, and unto Joshua the son of Nun, and unto the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel; and they spake unto them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with the suburbs thereof for our cattle. And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their suburbs” (21:1-3). Aaron was a descendant of Levi, and in his official capacity as the high priest of Israel, he foreshadowed the Lord Jesus, who now, as the Son of God consecrated for evermore, is “a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb 7:28-8:2 and cf. Rev 3:5). The sons of Aaron, by natural generation, are types of Christians who are given to Christ to serve Him (Num 3:3), the brethren of Christ sharing by grace His double title of both king and priest (Rev 1:6-7). The priestly sons of Aaron and the ministering Levites were also a figure of the public servants of the Lord in the present dispensation, as is clear from 1 Corinthians 9, “Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1Cor 9:13-14).

In stating that ministers of the Gospel are present-day counterparts of Israel’s priests and Levites, it must be borne carefully in mind that (in keeping with the radical differences which characterize the old and the new covenants) there are marked features of dissimilarity as well as resemblance between them. It was the failure, or refusal, to recognize that fact which laid the foundation for the Judaizing and paganizing of public Christianity and the erection and development of “mystery Babylon,” with all its sacerdotal and ritualistic pretensions. While there is, as 1 Corinthians 9:13-14 shows, an analogy in the *provision* made for the support of the ministers respectively in both dispensations, there is none whatever in the *services* they render. The priests had no commission to go forth and evangelize (that fell more to the lot of the prophets—Jonah 1:2, etc.), nor is the preacher today called of God to act as an intermediary between others and himself, or in any way to offer satisfaction for their sins—only on the *essential* ground of his being a Christian (and not in an official character as a clergyman) may he intercede for his brethren or present a sacrifice of praise on their behalf.

Israel’s priests and Levites were, by their birth and calling, nearer to God than were those for whom they acted, and by virtue of their office, holier than they. But both nearness to God and sanctification are conferred in Christ, without any distinction, upon all who are called of God unto the fellowship of His Son, so that, fundamentally, saved ministers and the believers to whom they minister are equal before God. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female [and we may add, there is neither clergy nor laity]: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Whatever vital

privilege and spiritual dignity Christ purchased for one, He secured for all His redeemed alike. It is most important that we should be quite clear upon this point, for it gives the death-blow to all priestcraft. There is absolutely nothing of a sacerdotal character in true Christian ministry, and therefore, the whole system of Romanism is antichristian. Again, the Jewish priesthood was restricted to the limits of a single family—the Aaronic—whereas in the selection of those whom He calls to preach the Gospel of His Son, God is no respecter of persons, but acts according to His sovereign grace and power.

Stating it in its simplest terms, Joshua 21 sets forth the gracious provision which Jehovah made to meet the temporal needs of the Levites. They were the ones who served Him in the tabernacle and ministered to the congregation in holy things, and as such, suitably adumbrated the divinely called ministers of the Gospel, whose lives are devoted to Christ and His churches. Unlike all the other tribes, no separate portion of Canaan was allotted to the Levites upon the distribution of the land (Deu 10:8-9; Jos 13:14). In like manner, the good soldier of Jesus Christ is forbidden to entangle himself with the affairs of this life (2Ti 2:3-4), for it would ill become one who was the messenger of heaven to occupy his heart with earthly avocations. He is called upon to practise what he preaches, to be a living exemplification of his sermons, denying all fleshly and worldly lusts, and be “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” He is required to walk in entire separation from the world, and give himself “wholly” to the things of God and the welfare of souls, that his profiting may appear unto all (1Ti 4:12, 15). What mortification of corrupt affections and inordinate desires of earthly things and what spiritual mindedness are necessary if the preacher is to give a just representation of Him in whose name he ministers.

But though no separate portion of Canaan was to be apportioned to the Levites, that was far from signifying that they must in some way secure their own interests, or that they were left dependent upon the capricious charity of their brethren. It was not the divine will that they should earn their living by the sweat of the brow, or that they should beg their daily bread. Not so does the Lord treat His beloved servants. He is no Egyptian taskmaster, demanding that they make bricks but refusing to provide them with straw. Instead, He is “the God of all grace” (1Pe 5:10), who has promised to supply their every need. Thus it was with the Levites. Full provision was made for their temporal sustenance. The Lord had not only appointed that a liberal part of the heave and wave offerings was to be their food, as well as the best of the oil, and the wine, and the first-fruits, with the tithes of the children of Israel (Num 18:9-19, 24), but He had also given a commandment that the other tribes should give unto the Levites, out of their own inheritance, cities to dwell in and the suburbs round about them (Num 35:2-5). In like manner, God has stipulated that those of His people who are indebted to the spiritual ministrations of His servants should, in turn, minister to their temporal subsistence. This is clear from 1 Corinthians 9:13-14, and, though it may be somewhat of a digression, we will take a closer look at that passage.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul was vindicating his apostleship (verse 3), which his traducers denied. They objected that he had not personally seen Jesus Christ (verse 1), as had the twelve. That he did not live like other men, going without the ordinary comforts of life (verse 4), being unmarried (verse 5). That he and his companion Barnabas were obliged to support themselves by their own manual labours (verse 6), and therefore, that he knew they

were not entitled to count upon the gifts of believers for their sustenance (verse 12). The main drift of his reply was that, though he acted voluntarily on the principle of self-denial, yet that, by no means, disproved that he was sent of God, or that he had not a right to be maintained by the saints. So far from that being the case, he was clearly and fully warranted in claiming their support. This he demonstrates by a number of plain and irrefutable arguments, educed from a variety of cogent considerations. Those arguments lay down principles which are applicable to the servants of Christ in all generations, and therefore, are pertinent for today, making known as they do the revealed will of God on this practical matter. It, therefore, behoves the Lord's people carefully to weigh the same and be regulated by them.

He began by asking, "Have not we power to forbear working?" (1Co 9:6). The word "power" there signifies right or authority, being used in the same sense as it is in John 1:12. Though in the interrogative form, it has the force of an emphatic affirmative—such is our legitimate prerogative, if we choose to exercise it—to abstain from earning our own living, and to count upon the saints ministering to our bodily needs. This he proceeded to prove by three obvious analogies. First, this accords with the universally recognized rule, "Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges?" (1Co 8:7). As it is the bounden duty of the State to provide for its defenders, equally so of the churches to care for the soldiers of Christ. Second, this is in keeping with the well-established principle that the workman is entitled to remuneration, "Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof?" (1Co 9:7). Third, this is exemplified by the law of nature, "Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not the milk of the flock?" (1 Co 9:7). The husbandman, by virtue of his calling, has a right to a livelihood from the same. But, conclusive as was such reasoning, the apostle did not conclude at that point.

Paul then proceeded to show that the duty he was contending for—the temporal maintenance of Christ's servants—was not only required by the law of nations, and the dictates of nature, but was urged by the law of God, "For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn" (cf. Deu 25:4)—an example of the humanity which marks the statutes that God gave to Israel (cf. Exo 23:19, twice repeated; Deu 22:6). Labouring for its owner, the ox was worthy of its food, and must not be deprived thereof. Upon which the apostle asks, "Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether [i.e. assuredly] for our sakes?" (1Co 9:9-10). If He be so solicitous about the welfare of animals and requires that they be treated justly and kindly, is He indifferent as to how His honoured servants be dealt with? Surely not! "For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope, and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (1Co 9:10). The Mosaic precept was designed in its ultimate application to enforce the principle that labour should have its remuneration, so that men would work more cheerfully. In the next verse, the obvious conclusion is drawn.

"If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" (1Co 9:11). If it be right and meet that those who cultivate the earth should be encouraged to do their work diligently by the assurance that they shall themselves be permitted to enjoy the fruit of their labours, then surely, those who engage in the far more important and exacting task of toiling in Christ's vineyard, endeavouring to advance His cause, proclaim His Gospel, feed His sheep, should be recognized and rewarded. The same

precept is enforced again in 11 Timothy 2:6, “The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.” Still more plainly is the exhortation given, “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal 6:6-7). Thus, it is laid down as an unchanging principle that spiritual benefits demand a temporal return. Not that any price can be put upon the invaluable ministry of the Gospel, but that those whom God has set apart to preach it have a just claim for generous compensation. And that not in the way of charity or gratuity, but as *a sacred debt*—a debt which professing Christians fail to discharge at the peril of their souls. For let none be deceived, if they fail to support the Gospel, God will severely chastise them.

Such a statement as that in verse 11 rebukes and shames any spirit of miserliness or stinginess on the part of those who participate in the privileges of a Gospel ministry, but fail to do their fair part in supporting the same. If God’s servants have been used of Him to bestow one class of benefits, is it unreasonable or unequal that they should receive another class of benefits in return? Why, there is no proportion between the one and the other. They dispense that which is spiritual and concerns the eternal interests of the soul, whereas, you are required to contribute only that which is material for the needs of the body. If they have faithfully executed their office, will you consider it burdensome to discharge your obvious obligations? Shame on you if you feel that way! Instead, it should be regarded as a holy privilege. “On every principle of commutative justice, the minister’s right to a subsistence must be conceded” (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878). But the apostle did not conclude his appeal even at this point, but clinched his argument by citing scriptural proof that God had ordained this very thing.

“Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?” (1Co 9:13). Here the testimony of God’s own institution is quoted, linking all that has been before us in 1 Corinthians 9 with the theme of Joshua 21, for the reference has directly in view the provision made by the Lord for the maintenance of Israel’s priests and Levites. They were supported in their work by the offerings of the people, being divinely permitted to eat a portion of the animals which had been presented to God in sacrifice. “The priests, the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance” (Deu 18:1 and cf. Num 5:9-10). “A part of the animal offered in sacrifice is his support, and thus, the altar and the priest become joint participators of the sacrifice. From these offerings, the priests derived their maintenance” (Albert Barnes, 1798-1870, to whom we are indebted for not a little of the above). Thus, that for which the apostle was contending was sanctioned by divine authority.

“Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1Co 9:14). Here, by divine inspiration, the apostle declares that Christ has made the same ordinance for this dispensation as obtained under the old one. He who provided that those who served Him in His earthly temple should be partakers of the altar has also willed that those who minister His Gospel should be duly cared for. This is not optional, but obligatory. It is a divine command, which demands obedience. If on the one hand, the minister is entitled to support, on the other hand, his hearers are not at liberty to withhold

the same. It is both a duty and a privilege to comply. It is not a matter of charity, but of right, that the preacher should be compensated for his labours. "The maintenance of ministers is not an arbitrary thing, left purely to the good will of the people, who may let them starve if they please. No, as the God of Israel commanded that Levites should be well provided for, so has the Lord Jesus, the King of the Church, ordained, and a perpetual ordinance it is" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). Devotion to the Lord, the spirit of gratitude, the claims of love, and the workings of grace should make the duty a delight. The honour of Christ's cause, the usefulness of His servants, yes, the happiness of His people (Act 20:35), are bound up in heeding this rule.

A beautiful illustration of compliance with the divine requirement is found in Philippians 4. There, we have the apostle expressing his appreciation and gratitude unto an assembly of the saints for the practical way in which they had manifested their love to him and their fellowship in the Gospel, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful [solicitous], but ye lacked opportunity" (Phi 4:10). They were not among that large class of professing Christians who deem themselves willing to profit from a Gospel ministry, but who have very little concern for the temporal welfare of Christ's servants. On the contrary, they had been mindful of His minister, and as occasion arose and opportunity was afforded, they had sent of their substance to him while he was away labouring in other parts. This brought back to his memory similar kindnesses which they had shown him years before, "Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel [when he commenced his evangelistic career], when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity" (Phi 4:15-16). So far from being a case of "out of sight, out of mind," he was constantly in their thoughts.

During Paul's extensive travels, the Philippians had lost touch with him—though not their interest in him, as the "wherein [i.e. during the lengthy interval] ye were also careful" attests, but they had no "opportunity" to communicate with him. But now that they learned that he was a prisoner in Rome for the truth's sake, they sent to him a further token of their affection and esteem by Epaphroditus (Phi 4:18). Most blessed is it to mark the spirit in which the apostle received their gift. First, while gratefully acknowledging their present (Phi 4:14), he looked above them to the One who had put into their hearts the desire to minister unto him, "I rejoiced *in the Lord* greatly" (Phi 4:10). Second, he was made happy too on *their* behalf, "Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account" (Phi 4:17)—it furnished proof of the workings of the spirit of grace within, evidencing that they were in a healthy condition spiritually. Third, he declared that their gift met with the approval of his Master, that it was "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God" Phi 4:18). Fourth, he assured them that they would be no losers by caring for him, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phi 4:19).

PROFITING FROM THE WORD

1. The Scriptures and Sin

There is grave reason to believe that much Bible reading and Bible study of the last few years has been of no spiritual profit to those who engaged in it. Yea, we go farther. We greatly fear that in many instances it has proved a curse rather than a blessing. This is strong language, we are well aware, yet no stronger than the case calls for. Divine gifts may be misused, and divine mercies abused. That this has been so in the present instance is evident by the fruits produced. Even the natural man may (and often does) take up the study of the Scriptures with the same enthusiasm and pleasure as he might of the sciences. Where this is the case, his store of knowledge is increased, and so also is his pride. Like a chemist engaged in making interesting experiments, the intellectual searcher of the Word is quite elated when he makes some discovery in it, but the joy of the latter is no more spiritual than would be that of the former. So, too, just as the successes of the chemist generally increase his sense of self-importance and cause him to look with disdain upon others more ignorant than himself, such, alas, is often the case with those who have investigated the subjects of Bible numerics, typology, prophecy, etc.

The Word of God may be taken up from various motives. Some read it to satisfy their literary pride. In certain circles, it has become both the respectable and popular thing to obtain a general acquaintance with the contents of the Bible, simply because it is regarded as an educational defect to be ignorant thereof. Some read it to satisfy their sense of curiosity, as they might any other book of note. Others read it to satisfy their sectarian pride. They consider it a duty to be well versed in the particular tenets of their own denomination and so search eagerly for proof-texts in support of "*our* doctrines." Yet others read it for the purpose of being able to argue successfully with those who differ from them. But in all this, there is no thought of *God*, no yearning for *spiritual* edification, and, therefore, no real benefit to the *soul*.

Of what, then, does a true profiting from the Word consist? Does not 11 Timothy 3:16-17 furnish a clear answer to our question? There we read, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Observe what is here omitted. The Holy Scriptures are given us not for intellectual gratification and carnal speculation, but to furnish unto "all good works," and that, by teaching, reproof, correcting us. Let us endeavour to amplify this by the help of other passages.

1. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word *convicts him of sin*. This is its first office—to reveal our depravity, to expose our vileness, to make known our wickedness. A man's moral life may be irreproachable, his dealings with his fellows faultless, but when the Holy Spirit applies the Word to his heart and conscience, opening his sin-blinded eyes to see his relation and attitude *to God*, he cries, "Woe is me, for I am

undone” (Isa 6:5). It is in this way that each truly saved soul is brought to realize his need of Christ. “They that are whole need not a physician, but they who are sick” (Mar 2:17). Yet, it is not until the spirit applies the Word in divine power that any individual is made to feel he *is* sick, sick unto death.

Such conviction that brings home to the heart the awful ravages which sin has wrought in the human constitution is not to be restricted to the initial experience which immediately precedes conversion. Each time that *God* blesses His Word to my heart, I am made to feel how far, far short I come of the standard which He has set before me, namely, “Be ye holy in *all* manner of conversation” (1Pe 1:15). Here, then, is the first test to apply. As I read of the sad failures of different ones in Scripture, does it make me realize how sadly like unto them I am? As I read of the blessed and perfect life of Christ, does it make me recognize how terribly unlike Him I am?

2. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word makes him *sorrow for sin*. Of the stony-ground hearer, it is said that he “heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself” (Mat 13:20-21). But of those who were convicted under the preaching of Peter, it is recorded that “they were *pricked* in their heart” (Act 2:37). The same contrast exists today. Many will listen to a flowery sermon, or an address on “dispensational truth” that displays oratorical powers or exhibits the intellectual skill of the speaker, but which, usually, contains no searching application to the conscience, and it is received with approbation, but no one is humbled before God or brought into a closer walk with Him through it. But let a faithful servant of the Lord (who by grace is not seeking to acquire a reputation for his “brilliance”) bring the teaching of Scripture to bear upon character and conduct, exposing the sad failures of even the best of God’s people, and, though the crowd will despise the messenger, the truly regenerate will be thankful for the message which causes them to mourn before God and cry, “Oh, wretched man that I am” (Rom 7:24). So it is in the private reading of the Word. It is when the Holy Spirit applies it in such a way that I am made to see *and feel* my inward corruptions that I am really blessed.

What a word is that in Jeremiah 31:19: “After that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded”! Do you, my reader, know anything of such an experience? Does your study of the Word produce a broken heart and lead to a *humbling* of yourself before God? Does it convict you of your sins in such a way that you are brought to *daily* repentance before Him? The paschal lamb had to be eaten with “bitter herbs” (Exo 12:8). So as we really feed on the Word, the Holy Spirit makes it “bitter” to us *before* it becomes sweet to our taste. Note the order in Revelation 10:9, “And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.” This is ever the experimental order—there must be mourning before comfort (Mat 5:4), humbling before exalting (1Pe 5:6).

3. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word leads to *confession of sin*. The Scriptures are profitable for “reproof” (2Ti 3:16), and an honest soul will acknowledge its faults. Of the carnal, it is said, “For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (Joh 3:20). “God be merciful unto me a sinner” (Luk 18:13) is the cry of a renewed heart, and every time we are quickened

by the Word (Psa 119:25, 50, 107), there is fresh revealing to us and a fresh owning by us of our transgressions before God. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Pro 28:13). There can be no spiritual prosperity or fruitfulness (Psa 1:3) while we conceal within our breasts our guilty secrets; only as they are freely owned before God, and that in detail, shall we enjoy His mercy.

There is no real peace for the conscience and no rest for the heart while we carry the burden of unconfessed sin. Relief comes when it is fully unbosomed to God. Mark well the experience of David, "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" (Psa 32:3-4). Is this figurative, but forcible language, unintelligible unto you? Or does your own spiritual history explain it? Ah, there is many a verse of Scripture which no commentary save that of personal experience can satisfactorily interpret. Blessed indeed is the immediate sequel here, "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).

4. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word produces in him *a deeper hatred of sin*. "Ye that love the LORD, hate evil" (Psa 97:10). "We cannot love God without hating that which He hates. We are not only to avoid evil, and refuse to continue in it, but we must be up in arms against it, and bear towards it a hearty indignation" (C. H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892). One of the surest tests to apply to the professed conversion is the heart's attitude towards sin. Where the principle of holiness has been planted, there will necessarily be a loathing of all that is unholy. If our hatred of evil be genuine, we are thankful when the Word reproves even the evil which we suspected not.

This was the experience of David, "Through Thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Psa 119:104). Observe well, it is not merely "I abstain from," but "I hate," not only "some," or "many," but "*every* false way," and not only "every evil," but "*every false way*." "Therefore I esteem all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way" (Psa 119:128). But, it is the very opposite with the wicked, "Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee" (Psa 50:17). In Proverbs 8:13, we read, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil," and this godly fear comes through reading the Word, see Deuteronomy 17:18-19. Rightly has it been said, "Till sin be hated, it cannot be mortified; you will never cry against it, as the Jews did against Christ, Crucify it, Crucify it, till sin be really abhorred as He was" (E. Reyner, 1635).

5. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word causes *a forsaking of sin*. "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2Ti 2:19). The more the Word is read with the definite object of discovering what is pleasing and what is displeasing to the Lord, the more will His will become known, and if our hearts are right with Him the more will our ways be conformed thereto. There will be a "*walking in the truth*" (3Jo 1:4). At the close of 11 Corinthians 6, some precious promises are given to those who separate themselves from unbelievers. Observe, there, the *application* which the Holy Spirit makes of them. He does not say, "Having therefore these promises, be comforted and become complacent thereby," but, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us *cleanse ourselves* from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2Co 7:1).

“Now ye are *clean* through the word which I have spoken unto you” (Joh 15:3). Here is another important rule by which we should frequently test ourselves, Is the reading and studying of God’s word producing a *purging* of my ways? Of old, the question was asked, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” (Psa 119:9) and the divine answer is “By taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psa 119:9). Yes, not simply by reading, believing, or memorizing it, but by the personal application of the Word to our “way.” It is by “taking heed” to such exhortations as “*flee* fornication” (1Co 6:18), “*flee* from idolatry” (1Co 10:14), “*flee* these things” (1Ti 6:11)—a covetous love for money (1Ti 6:10), “*flee* also youthful lusts” (2Ti 2:22), that the Christian is brought into practical separation from evil, for sin has not only to be confessed but “*forsaken*” (Pro 28:13).

6. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word *fortifies against sin*. The Holy Scriptures are given to us not only for the purpose of revealing our innate sinfulness, and the many, many ways in which we “come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), but also to teach us how to obtain deliverance from sin, how to be kept from displeasing God. “Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I *might not sin* against thee” (Psa 119:11). This is what each of us is required to do. “Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thine heart” (Job 22:22). It is particularly the commandments, the warnings, the exhortations, we need to make our own and treasure, to memorize them, meditate upon them, pray over them, and put them into practice. The only effective way of keeping a plot of ground from being overgrown by weeds is to sow good seed therein, “Overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21). So the more Christ’s Word dwells in us “richly” (Col 3:16), the less room will there be for the exercise of sin in our hearts and lives.

It is not sufficient merely to assent to the veracity of the Scriptures. They require to be received into the affections. It is unspeakably solemn to note that the Holy Spirit specifies as the ground of apostasy, “because the *love of the truth they received not*” (2Th 2:10, Greek). “If it lie only in the tongue or in the mind, only to make it a matter of talk and speculation, it will soon be gone. The seed which lies on the surface, the fowls in the air will pick up. Therefore, hide it deeply. Let it get from the ear into the mind, from the mind into the heart. Let it soak in further and further. It is only when it hath a prevailing sovereignty in the heart that we receive it in the love of it—when it is dearer than our dearest lust, then it will stick to us” (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677).

Nothing else will preserve from the infections of this world, deliver from the temptations of Satan, and be so effective a preservative against sin, as the Word of God received into the affections. “The law of his God is in his heart: none of his steps shall slide” (Psa 37:31). As long as the truth is active within us, stirring the conscience, and is really loved by us, we shall be kept from falling. When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar’s wife, he said, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9). The Word was in his heart, and therefore, had prevailing power over his lusts—the ineffable holiness, the mighty power of God, who is able both to save and to destroy. None of us knows when he may be tempted. Therefore, it is necessary to be prepared against it. “Who among you will give ear...and hear *for the time to come*?” (Isa 42:23). Yes, we are to anticipate the future and be fortified against it, by storing up the Word in our hearts for coming emergencies.

7. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word causes him to *practise the opposite of sin*. "Sin is the transgressing of the law" (1Jo 3:4). God says, "Thou shalt." Sin says, "I will not." God says, "Thou shalt not." Sin says, "I will." Thus, sin is rebellion against God, the determination to have my own way (Isa 53:6). Therefore, sin is a species of anarchy in the spiritual realm, and may be likened unto the waving of the red flag in the face of God. Now, the opposite of sinning against God is submission to Him, as the opposite of lawlessness is subjection to the law. Thus, to practise the opposition of sin is to walk in the path of obedience. This is another chief reason why the Scriptures were given—to *make known* the path which is pleasing to God for us. They are profitable not only for reproof and correction, but also for "instruction in righteousness" (2Ti 3:16).

Here, then, is another important rule by which we should frequently test ourselves. Are my thoughts being formed, my heart controlled, and my ways and works regulated by God's Word? This is what the Lord requires, "Be ye *doers* of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (Jam 1:22). This is how gratitude to and affection for Christ are to be expressed, "If ye love me, *keep* my commandments" (Joh 14:15). "We need not only light to know our way, but a heart to walk in it. Direction is necessary because of the blindness of our minds, and the effectual impulsions of grace are necessary because of the weakness of our hearts. It will not answer our duty to have a naked notion of truths, unless we embrace and pursue them" (Thomas Manton). Note, it is "the *path* of thy commandments" (Psa 119:35), not a self-chosen course, but a definitely marked one, not a public "road," but a private "path."

There are other ways of being spiritually profited from God's Word than those we have named, and some of them we hope to consider (D.V.) in a future article. But let both writer and reader honestly and diligently measure himself, as in the presence of God, by the seven things here enumerated. Has your study of the Bible made you more humble, or more proud—proud of the knowledge you have acquired? Has it raised you in the esteem of your fellow men, or has it led you to take a lower place before God? Has it produced in you a deeper abhorrence and loathing of self, or has it made you more complacent? Has it caused those you mingle with, or perhaps teach, to *say*, I wish I had your *knowledge* of the Bible, or does it cause you to *pray*, "Lord give me the faith, the grace, the *holiness* Thou hast granted my friend, or teacher?" "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting *may appear* unto all" (1Ti 4:15).

SIN

Have we not well-nigh lost our sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin? We refer not merely to “crime,” though it is to be feared that many are becoming so familiar with the records thereof that their sensibilities are being blunted. Not only the profane world, but the professing world too, looks upon it with little or no deep concern. Sin is far too lightly regarded by our careless and heedless generation. We need a fresh realization of it as awful and abhorrent, as cursing and damning. We ought to recoil from sin as we would from a deadly serpent. We ought to avoid sin as we would the repulsive filth in which the sow wallows, and as the vomit of a dog. And we would, if we really perceived that it is sin which gave death its throne and the right to reign as universal monarch (Rom 5:14)—that it is sin which has totally *ruined the soul* (Eph 4:18)—that it is sin which exposes all unto “*everlasting destruction* from the presence of the Lord” (2Th 1:9).

Now, we are entirely dependent upon the Holy Scriptures for an accurate and adequate conception of sin. They alone make known how it first entered into this world. They alone acquaint us with how sin appears in the eyes of the thrice Holy One, as that “abominable thing” which He “hates” (Jer 44:4). They alone tell us of the nature of the “wages” it pays (Rom 6:23), only the first small installments of which are received in this life. They alone reveal how salvation from it is obtainable. The writings of the ancients and the works of modern heathen will be searched in vain for any real light upon these momentous facts. And is it not because the present generation is getting farther and farther away from the written Word of God that it views sin so lightly and has such an altogether inadequate conception of its enormity?

What is sin? It is that in the fallen creature which ever works against God, and against the soul’s own interest and comfort. It is not only a disease, but a crime—the transgression of God’s righteous law—and therefore, it has done more than pollute our being. It has brought us under the just condemnation of God. The least variation and deviation from the revealed will of God is *sin*. It is a species of self-love—pursuing those gratifications and fulfilling those desires that make self our chief end and aim. Sin is an internal evil, though it is manifested in many external effects. The whole seat of sin is in the will, though it spreads its evil influence throughout every faculty and member of the entire man. Sin, then, is an aversion of God, a turning away from the Chief Good unto evil. Sin is open opposition to God, not only a turning from but a turning against Him. It is the soul hating God as a Lawgiver.

None can perfectly know the utmost evil there is in sin but God Himself. Sin entails *infinite guilt* because it is committed against an infinite Object, and therefore, a finite mind is incapable of fully grasping its magnitude. It needs to be most carefully considered that the vileness and guilt of sin lie in its being committed against *God*. Let us endeavour to exhibit the force of this. Were I to approach a stranger and, without the slightest

provocation, spit in his face, knock him down, and trample upon him, that would be a grave offence. But suppose that instead of being a stranger, he was one who had often befriended me. Then, my guilt would be so much the greater. But suppose that it was my own dear father and that he had ever treated me with the utmost consideration and kindness. My guilt would be that much the more aggravated, for in proportion to my obligation to show him respect would be the enormity of my disrespect.

Let us labour the point a little further. The enormity of an offence is not only increased by my obligations to the person against whom it is committed, but also by the status and authority of that person. The difference is at once perceived between my committing an uncalled-for assault upon a private citizen and upon an officer of the law. But, how much greater would be the criminality were I to smite the person of the king! The dignity of the person against whom an offence is committed vastly augments the guilt. Now, combine the two thoughts. God is vested with supreme authority, being the King of kings, and therefore, having the right to demand complete subjection from us. Moreover, He is our Creator and Benefactor—the One who gave us being and has cared for us every moment of our lives. We are, therefore, under the deepest obligation to love, honour, and serve Him. Because He is endowed with infinitude, we are under infinite obligation to Him, and therefore, all sin against Him involves infinite guilt.

God is infinitely perfect, the sum of all excellency, and it is infinitely more criminal not to love and respect *Him* than to have no love or regard for all creation. It is an infinitely greater criminality to oppose and hate God, in any way and to the slightest degree, than to oppose and hate all His creatures. If it were possible for a man to be so bloodthirsty, and with the power so to execute his murderous intentions, that he succeeded in slaying the entire human race, and could he do so without any rebellion against or opposition to God, even that incalculable crime would be far less than the least degree of opposition to God Himself. It was the realization of this awful truth which broke the heart of convicted David, making him to cry out, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Psa 51:4). The realization that he had defied the authority of heaven and trampled upon the laws of the Almighty dwarfed all other considerations.

The heinousness of sin, then, is not to be gauged by the littleness or greatness of the act itself, but by the offence which is done unto *God*, and that, in turn, is measured by the light with which we are favoured, the opportunities granted us, and the privileges we have enjoyed. What are all the sins of the heathen world in comparison with those of Christendom? “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee” (Mat 11:23-24). But, who is there today that really believes this? The same fearful truth is emphasized in, “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much *sorer punishment*, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Heb 10:28-29).

But descending to a lower plane, we may see the heinousness of sin with regard to ourselves, by what it has done for and wrought in us. It has *defiled our nature*, “But we are all as an unclean thing” (Isa 64:6), and this to such an extent that as God said concerning Israel of old, “From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is *no soundness* in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores” (Isa 1:6). And as the apostle to the Gentiles declared, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18). It has *degraded our nature*, “Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish” (Psa 49:12). Man fell from the fair estate in which his Maker placed him, and has become like the beasts—void of spiritual understanding, guided only by natural instincts. It has *enslaved our nature*, bringing us into bondage more cruel than the Hebrews suffered in Egypt. As it is written, “His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins” (Pro 5:22).

How deeply important it is that we should have a scriptural conception of the *nature* of sin, and perceive that it is nothing less than contempt of the Almighty, the defying of His will, the disregarding of His authority, to the ruination of ourselves. Nothing is as truly humbling as a right view of sin, as plainly appears from the case of the convicted publican—smiting upon his breast and not daring to raise his eyes to heaven (Luk 18:13). Nothing will bring us into the dust, our true place before God, as a keen sense of our sinnership. The more we are awakened to the heinousness of sin, the greater check will that be upon us, causing us to act with more caution and conscience, and moving us to pray with increased earnestness for deliverance. The deeper be our realization of the vileness of sin, the higher will be our appreciation of the cleansing blood of Christ. Then, see to it, brother preacher, that you preach not only *against* sin, but (frequently) *upon* sin itself—the fact that it is flaunting the red flag of lawlessness in the face of the King of kings.

It remains to be pointed out that we are entirely dependent upon the Holy Spirit for a vital and experimental knowledge of sin. One may read the Scriptures all his life and be able to quote accurately the various declarations about sin, and yet, have naught but a mental grasp of the subject. One may be thoroughly acquainted with the most solemn facts about sin, and yet, the heart be entirely unmoved. The Spirit alone can open our Satan-blinded eyes to see sin in its true hideousness. The Spirit alone can so convict us of depravity that our self-righteousness receives its death wound. The Spirit alone can make us so hate evil that we depart therefrom. The Spirit alone can make us conscious of the fatal malady which sin has inflicted upon us, so that we betake ourselves to the great Physician for cleansing and healing.

SALVATION

We concluded our previous article upon “Sin” by affirming that “the Spirit alone can make us conscious of the fatal malady which sin has inflicted upon us, so that we betake ourselves to the great Physician for cleansing and healing.” This presents an aspect of our

present theme which now receives scant attention in many quarters, namely, the imperative necessity of a work of divine grace being wrought by the Holy Spirit before any sinner recognizes his dire need of or is really willing to come to Christ for salvation. Those who dissent from that statement must fail to perceive either the actual condition of the sinner—alienated from God, at enmity against Him, the captive of Satan, and thoroughly in love with his bondage—or the nature of God’s salvation—changing the sinner’s heart, imparting to him a love of holiness, causing him to walk in the paths of righteousness as well as pardoning his transgressions.

“Salvation” is a very comprehensive term, and that which it connotes needs to be looked at from two chief viewpoints—the divine and the human. The divine side includes what the Father purposed, what the Son purchased, and what the Spirit performs in the sinner. That is only another way of saying that salvation has both a judicial and an experimental aspect—Christ satisfying the demands of the Law for all who truly believe in Him, the Spirit working within the soul so that we are enabled to comply with the terms of the Gospel. The human side includes what God requires from the sinner in order to his being pardoned, and in order to his reaching heaven, for the two things are not synonymous. At conversion, there is a right-about-face, so that the old course of self-pleasing and self-gratification is forsaken, but subsequently, there is the narrow way to be traversed if the pilgrim is to reach the promised inheritance.

It requires to be pointed out in this day that Christ is far more than a “fire-escape.” He is the great Physician, too. In its exposition of “salvation,” Scripture throws the emphasis upon Christ delivering from sin. The very first declaration of the New Testament thereon is, “Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from [not the wrath to come, but] their sins” (Mat 1:21), and it is the business of the evangelist to make clear how He does so. It is a very inadequate and one-sided declaration to say that Christ saves us from the penalty of our sins by enduring that penalty in our stead. Yea, if we say no more than that, we seriously misrepresent the matter. Christ is not a dead, but a living Saviour, who “is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25)—save from the love, the dominion, the pollution of sin.

Christ did not come to rescind God’s claims upon us, or to lower the standard of righteousness which He has set before us. Rather does the salvation He has provided begin by bringing us to realize how wickedly we have disregarded God’s claims, and how woefully we have failed to measure up to His standard, and by working in us a godly sorrow for sin and a desire and seeking after holiness. The sinner is first made conscious of his dire need of a divine salvation, and this, by bringing him to see and feel that he has been a lifelong rebel against the moral Ruler of the universe, and that, despite his present horror at and grief over such wicked conduct, he has no power of his own to live a new life. Thereby does he discover that Christ is our only hope, and that He alone can heal him of the terrible wounds which sin has inflicted on his soul, and supply that grace that will enable him to walk in the paths of righteousness.

Man, then, must be told of his disease before he is ready to hear of God’s remedy. In other words, the demands of the Law must be pressed upon him before the provisions of the Gospel are set before him, for “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). This is

the order of the New Testament. The preaching of John the Baptist preceded that of Christ. The "axe" must be "laid unto the root of the tree" (Mat 3:10). The demand for repentance (with all that that term connotes) pressed upon the conscience. The terms of the Gospel are to be defined before the promises of the Gospel are proclaimed. The Gospel announces terms of peace to those who are in revolt against God, and they are "Be ye reconciled to God" (2Co 5:20), which signifies not only a willingness to be saved by grace alone, but the throwing down of the weapons of our warfare against Him. There can be no truce, no peace, between God (considered as Ruler and Judge) and the sinner while he deliberately harbours a traitor in Mansoul.

It is very necessary to proclaim that salvation is entirely of divine grace and in no wise of human merit. We must counteract man's legal spirit by insisting that salvation is not of works or of creature performances. Yet, it is equally necessary to counteract man's antinomian spirit by insisting that none can be saved without works, and that he who leads an unholy life will never reach heaven. Even conscience tells a man that he must abandon his evil course before a holy God will pardon him. Scripture emphatically confirms this, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Pro 28:13). "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought: and let him return [having departed in Adam] unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him" (Isa 55:7). One cannot continue revelling in his lusts and obtain pardon from a holy God.

"Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him" (Psa 85:9). Yes, and not to those who trifle with Him. "Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes" (Psa 119:155). Alas, how rarely is this side of the truth now presented. Should it be objected that these are Old Testament passages, while we do not grant that there is any force to such a quibble, let it be pointed out that the teaching of the New Testament is exactly the same. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Act 3:19). "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators...nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1Co 6:9-11). None but a madman supposes that God would befriend one who remained a rogue, that He would pardon one who refused to forgive those who wronged him. Christ is no Saviour for those who are determined to persevere in sin. If a person clings to sin, he clings to destruction.

We cannot be partakers of Christ and drink the cup of Belial at the same time. Right hands must be cut off and right eyes plucked out—fleshly lusts mortified—if we would enter the kingdom of God. Not that reformation itself will save anyone, or even help to do so. Nevertheless, a genuine desire to be saved is a genuine desire to be yielded up to God's will. "But first gave their own selves to the Lord" (2Co 8:5). There must be complete surrender of ourselves to Him. No person has any right to say that he is saved while he continues in sin as he did before. How can he be saved from sin when he is still living in it? As well talk about a drowning man having been saved while he is sinking in the water.

Lest the reader conclude that the writer is too legalistic, consider well these quotations from one of the soundest and most widely used evangelists of the centuries. "I have these things to propound to the sinner that would know if he may be so bold to venture himself upon this grace. Dost thou see thy sins? Art thou weary of them? Wouldest thou with all

thy heart be saved by Jesus Christ? I dare say no more. I dare not say less” (*The Jerusalem Sinner Saved*, by John Bunyan, 1628-1688). Again, “They that miss of life perish because they will not let go their sins, or because they take up a profession short of the saving faith of the Gospel” (*The Strait Gate*, by John Bunyan).

“There are some who stumble at Christ because of His holiness. He is too strict for them. They would be Christians, but they cannot renounce their sensual pleasure. They would be washed in His blood, but they desire still to roll in the mire of sin. Willing enough the mass of men would be to receive Christ if, after receiving Him, they might continue in their drunkenness, their wantonness, and self-indulgence. But Christ lays the axe at the root of the tree. He tells them these things must be given up, for ‘because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience’ and ‘without holiness no man shall see the Lord.’ Human nature kicks at this” (C. H. Spurgeon on Rom 9:33). And again, “You say you do not care much about death unto sin. Well, then, there is nothing for it but you shall have your choice. If you will not have death unto sin, you shall have sin unto death. There is no alternative. If you do not die to sin, you shall die for sin. If you do not slay sin, sin will slay you. As surely as you live, my unsaved hearers, you cannot harbour any sin and go to heaven. Let no man deceive you” (C. H. Spurgeon on Rom 6).

It seems to be little recognized that the love of sin keeps far more away from Christ than does self-righteousness. Before there can be a receiving of Him, there must be a renouncing of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Sin cherished in the heart is an effectual hindrance to the exercise of faith. None but a contrite heart, softened and broken by repentance, will savingly trust in the Lord Jesus. Make no mistake on this point, dear reader, any “faith” which issues from an unhumbled and unsubdued heart is a delusion. God’s salvation removes the guilt of sin from the conscience, dethrones the love and power of sin in the heart, and the dominion of it in the life. If you really wish to be saved from selfishness, pride, uncleanness, worldliness, seek deliverance and cleansing from Christ.

