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**STUDIES**  
**IN THE**  
**SCRIPTURES**

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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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

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## IDENTIFICATION OF THE GODLY

The natural man is wrapped up in himself and his own interests, and so long as things go well with him and his affairs prosper, he is well-pleased. He cares nothing about the cause of Christ, the success of His Gospel, or the good of His redeemed. Consequently, he is quite unmoved when God is dishonoured and Zion languishes. But it is far otherwise with the regenerate. A miracle of grace has been wrought within them, for the stony heart of enmity against God has been taken out of them, and a heart of flesh which loves Him has been given to them. They have a tender sympathy with and a deep regard for the interests and concerns of their best Beloved—far more so than for anything which pertains immediately to themselves—and, therefore, are they deeply grieved over anything which grieves and dishonours Him, whether it be in themselves or in others. It cannot be otherwise, for since the self-same Spirit which is in Christ dwells within them, then what He loves they love, and what He hates they hate. Even in the natural, we find that members of the same body are so animated by one and the same life that “whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it” (1Co 12:26). Much more so is this the case between Christ and the members of His mystical body, for the bonds between them are more intimate and vital.

Now Christ Himself is not impervious to the troubles and miseries of His people. So far from it, we are told that “in all their affliction he was afflicted” (Isa 63:9). Those words most blessedly express His love for His redeemed, His sympathy with and tender concern for them. Their groans and cries in Egypt moved Him to deliver them, and when they were assaulted by Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea, He bared His mighty arm on their behalf. The New Testament saints are informed, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb 4:15). So much to the contrary

that, when Saul of Tarsus was harrying His sheep, the good Shepherd exclaimed, "Why persecutes thou *me*?" (Act 9:4), while they, in turn, declare, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me" (Psa 69:9), for though that was pre-eminently so of the Saviour Himself, yet in their measure it is true of the saved too. Since the Spirit of God indwells them, they cannot be without a tender and afflicted sense of the contempts and dishonours that are done to Christ. Those are, as the Psalmist said, as it were a sword in their bones (Psa 42:10), piercing them to the very quick.

The hearts of the regenerate are all cast in the same mould, the glory of God being very dear unto each of them. One cannot esteem God as his King and not be pained when he beholds others flouting His authority and trampling His laws beneath their feet. Lot was troubled by the evil behavior of those around him, and "In seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds" (2Pe 2:7-8). Moses reminded the Israelites how that when they were guilty of worshipping the golden calf, "I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins" (Deu 9:18), so much was he affected by their idolatrous conduct. How deeply was Joshua grieved when his soldiers brought reproach upon the name of JEHOVAH by their defeat at Ai (Jos 7:6-9)! When the wife of Phinehas received tidings of the death of her father-in-law and of her husband, and learned that the ark of God had been captured by the Philistines, she was overwhelmed, and with her dying breath said, "The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken" (1Sa 4:19-22), feeling the loss of the latter more than of the former.

When God informed His servant that because of Saul's public disregard of His commandment, it repented Him that He had set up Saul to be king. We are told that, "It grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night" (1Sa 15:11). David averred, "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law" (Psa 119:53). When Ezra was informed of the priests and Levites doing according to the abominations of the heathen, so that "the holy seed" had mingled themselves with the idolatrous Gentiles, he said, "And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished....And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness" (Ezr 9:3-5). Jeremiah was so deeply affected by the hard-heartedness of the people in his day that, after announcing a fearful threat from the Lord, he declared, "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the LORD's flock is carried away captive" (Jer 13:17).

"And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (Eze 9:4). This chapter contains a vision of the destruction of the idolatrous Jews and the presence of a godly remnant among them. The former were flagrant transgressors of the divine law, and thereby treated the glorious majesty of God with contempt, denied His propriety in them, and were guilty of shameful ingratitude for all His mercies. The fact that those outrageous sins were committed in Jerusalem was particularly offensive to God. Such conduct was a sore grief unto the pious minority. They had a high regard for the honour and glory of God, and this would not suffer them to be the unconcerned spectators of impiety and iniquity. Who can prevent himself

sorrowing over that which is in direct opposition to the One he most loves? Believers love and pant after holiness, and unless they be temporarily stupefied by Satan, they can scarcely bear themselves for what they find contrary to it in their own breasts, and, therefore, they cannot be indifferent to the unholiness of others, but must mourn over the same.

As the pious remnant in Israel beheld the wickedness of their fellows, they “sighed and cried”. Sighed in themselves as those who were in pain and distress. Cried unto God as those who were in deadly earnest. Though they wept and prayed in secret, those mourners in Zion were taken notice of by the Lord. Hated and scorned by the reprobate, they were esteemed by the Most High. Clear proof of this was here made, for God gave orders that those sorrowing ones would first have a mark set upon them, before His vengeance was executed upon the wicked. In the midst of His wrath, God ever remembers mercy (Hab 3:2) unto His own. The deluge came not until Noah and his family were safe in the ark (Gen 7:16-17); the angel was instructed to secure Lot before Sodom was fired (Gen 19:16). And so it was here. The setting of that “mark” upon them signified at least four things. First, it was the sign of distinction, setting them apart from the ungodly. Second, it was the pledge of God’s owning of them, showing they were His peculiar people. Third, it was designed to give them assurance, a token of good from God, so that they might know for themselves that they were numbered among the living in Jerusalem. Fourth, it was a director unto the destroyer to pass by them—as the angel of death when slaying the firstborn of the Egyptians passed over the houses of the Hebrews which bore the mark of the lamb’s blood (Exo 12:23; Rev 7:3).

Here, then, is another mark by which the godly may be identified, a plain one which distinguishes the regenerate from the unregenerate. They are those who, when in their right minds, say with David, “I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word” (Psa 119:158). Such a grief the divinely quickened soul feels when he is sensible of his own vile corruptions, and such he must feel as he beholds the dishonour done to God by those bearing His name. Christ Himself, though full of compassion and tenderness, yet “looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts” (Mar 3:5). And those selfsame emotions are stirred within His redeemed when they see the hedge broken down between the churches and the world, when the goats are permitted and encouraged to herd with the sheep, when hirelings take the place of divinely called and qualified pastors, when the public worship of God is corrupted, false doctrine tolerated, and souls fatally deceived thereby. They will be “sorrowful for the solemn assembly” (Zep 3:18).

But it may be asked, “Are there not those with a mere head knowledge of the truth, who are concerned about the present state of the cause of Christ, who deplore the inroads of infidelity and Romanism, and are distressed over the widespread desecration of the Sabbath?” Undoubtedly, yet while they may *talk about* such things, they do not sigh and cry over them in secret. It is only when their *own* interests are injured that they are deeply affected. In like manner, graceless professors may be sorrowful when they see their own church or denomination decaying, but they suffer no loss of sleep by grieving over the general dishonour done to the name of Christ. Those who have a feeling sense of the same give evidence of a new, of the divine, nature within them. Their language is, “My soul is among lions” (Psa 57:4); “Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech” (Psa 120:5). As one has

well remarked, "Our joys and our sorrows are the pulse of the soul." If a Christian joins with the angels in rejoicing over the repentance of sinners, he also has fellowship with Him who wept over Jerusalem because of its sins and approaching judgment, by grieving over the hardness of those who repent not. It is a testimony of their love for God that they rejoice when He is glorified and mourn when He is vilified.

## EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

### 28. *The Last Time (2:18)*

*"Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time."*

Why is this verse prefaced with the particular address, "little children?" What is meant by "the last time"? What is signified by "antichrist"? Who are referred to by the "many antichrists"? In what way did the presence of many antichrists make it evident that the last time had even then begun? Why is this statement brought in at this point? What is the precise importance and value of it unto us today? In seeking to answer these questions and expound our present verse we are mindful of the fact that we shall clash with the teaching many of our readers have sat under, and therefore they will not readily accept a part of what we are about to advance. Moreover, it will differ from the prophetic outlook, which we held personally in the early days of our Christian life. But we must write according to the measure of light God has vouchsafed for us, and request our friends to heed prayerfully the injunction, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1Th 5:21).

Why does our present verse open with the words "little children"? The term ought to have been translated "babes" in order to distinguish it from that which is used in 2:1, 12, etc. There the one employed is a term of endearment, being a general one in its scope, applied to the whole family of God. But the one found in our text is a descriptive and distinguishing one, being used only of the lowest grade of God's children, namely spiritual infants. It will be remembered that in 2:12, John had employed the comprehensive term "*teknion*" when expressing his tender regard for all the saints. Then in verse 13 he had graded them into three distinct classes: "fathers," "young men," and "babes," designating the last "*paidion*," which term occurs again in this epistle only in the verse now before us. In verse 14 the "fathers" and in verses 15-17 the "young men" were each addressed a second time. Now in verses 18-27 the "babes" are again written to. Thus we perceive once more what care the apostle devoted to the structure of his epistle, and how particular he was to follow a strict and logical order. In 2:28, the general designation "*teknion*" is again found, to denote a resumption of address to the whole company. Hence it is apparent that, through failure to observe the plan followed in the context, the Revised Version erred in beginning a new paragraph with verse 18.

Not only did the due balancing of this section (the speaking twice to each of the three classes) require that verse 18 should be directed to the “babes,” but in view of its contents there was a peculiar propriety in addressing it to the third and youngest group. It was really a word of warning to them. As the young men are most in danger of being allured and spoiled by “the world,” so the babes are the ones most liable to be beguiled and poisoned by the “antichrists.” It was therefore peculiarly pertinent to put the young converts on their guard, for being more inexperienced and less established in the Faith, they were apt to give ear unto those who were desirous of corrupting them. Though not so pointed, it was indirectly the equivalent of Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (4:14). It is sad to see how little taken to heart are those words of Christ, “Take heed what ye hear” (Mar 4:24). Many professing Christians are as careless in this matter as ignorant children playing with sharp and dangerous weapons.

“*Little children, it is the last time.*” The order of words in the Greek expresses it still more emphatically: “Little children [the] last time it is.” The word here translated “time,” *hora*, signifies an indefinite period, be it long or short. It is rendered “season,” “day,” “hour,” “instant.” The Revised Version gives “it is the last hour.” Personally, we prefer “the last time.” By affirming that it is the last time we consider the apostle was announcing that the Jewish economy had passed away—the temple lay in ruins, its priesthood no longer functioned, Jerusalem was trodden down by the Gentiles. Still more definitely, he was averring that this Christian economy is the final one. John Calvin (1509-1564, in his *Institutes*) pointed out, “And for this reason the dispensation under which we live is designated in the Scriptures as ‘the last time,’ ‘these last times’ (1Pe 1:20), ‘the last days’ (Act 2:17), that no one might deceive himself with a vain expectation of any new doctrine or revelation.” This Christian dispensation is the one during which the history of this world will be brought to a close: whether or not it will include within its scope and be terminated by what is known as “the millennium” we are not prepared either to affirm or deny; but this we must believe, that no separate and distinct age will follow the present one.

The coming of God’s Son to this earth in human nature introduced the concluding season for this world, in which all its affairs will be wound up. But as Albert Barnes (1798-1870) pertinently remarked, “The apostle does not, however, say that the end of the world would soon occur, nor does he intimate how long this dispensation would be. That period might continue through many ages or centuries, and still be the last dispensation.” The concluding era of God’s gracious government over men had arrived. “The world’s history is divided into two sections. The first is the preparatory, and the second is the final. The incarnation of Christ is the goal of the first, and the starting point of the second. John the Baptist, who closed the first period, might have written, ‘It is the first hour.’ And yet the life of John the Baptist was synchronous with the life of John the Apostle, who said, ‘It is the last hour.’ But between those two Johns there stood the milestone that divided the world’s history. To pass that way-mark was to pass from the preparatory to the final, from the old to the new, from law to grace, from prophecy to fulfillment. Before Christ one day had been as a thousand years, but now a thousand years were as one day” (Levi Palmer). So mighty and revolutionizing the change effected by the advent of God’s Son, that hence-

forth time is measured more by events than by duration. The birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, were events which represented more than all the previous “hours” or seasons of human history.

The proofs for the Scripturalness of the above assertions are many and decisive. It was “when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman” (Gal 4:4), as it is in this “dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one [“family,” 3:15] all things in Christ, both which are in heaven [the holy angels], and which are on earth [redeemed sinners]; even in him” (Eph 1:10). “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1Co 10:11): not the end of the material world, but (as the Greek means) of the ages. All previous ones were but introductory: they furnished the types, this one has the substance. The last of those periods which God has assigned to the duration of this earth is the present order of things: no new administration of it will follow this era. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son” (Heb 1:1-2). Finality has been reached: God has nothing further to communicate unto mankind. Christ is His ultimate revelation (compare “last of all he sent unto them his Son,” Mat 21:37): in Him there is the finishing of the unfolding of God’s mind, the conclusion of the making known of His will. There will be nothing higher, nothing further; what God has spoken through Christ will continue unaltered to the end of time.

Another apostle declares that Christ was “foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1Pe 1:20). The Messianic age was at once the consummation of all that preceded it and itself the ultimate divine economy. So also Jude reminded the saints that they had been forewarned how that there should be “mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts” (verse 18), and that this prediction was being fulfilled before their very eyes. Some have wrongly concluded from 1 Peter 1:5, that “the last time” is yet future. There Christians are informed that they are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.” While the “salvation” there mentioned is still future, for it has reference to the completion of their redemption (their resurrection and glorification) when the Lord Jesus shall “appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb 9:28), when the open vision of Him will perfectly conform us unto His holy image (1Jo 3:2); yet that blessed hope will be realized and that glorious event will take place “in the last time” and not in some subsequent age lying beyond the close of this present one.

“John announced ‘that it was the last time’ or the last dispensation, which God intended to introduce on earth, under which He would establish the kingdom of His Son...and this kingdom should continue till all enemies were put under His feet” (T. Scott).<sup>1</sup>

As indicated above, this Christian dispensation is designated “the last time” for two reasons: first, in relation to former times, which were introductory, paving the way for it; second, in relation unto the remainder of human history, for at the end of it the curtain will fall. There is nothing in the expression itself to determine the length thereof, nothing to in-

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<sup>1</sup> **Thomas Scott** (1747-1821) – Anglican minister, born in Lincolnshire, England. He served for some years as parish priest before conversion during correspondence and mentoring from John Newton (1725-1807). He is best known for his *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, his autobiography *The Force of Truth*, and being a founder of the *Church Missionary Society*.



time that it might not last longer than any previous one or be even more protracted than all others put together. Certainly Christ gave no intimation that His absence would be a brief one. Instead, He foretold that “while the Bridegroom tarried” all would slumber and sleep. He spoke of His departure as “travelling into a far country,” and said that “after a long time” He would return and reckon with His servants (Mat 25:14, 19).

“Since then nineteen centuries have dragged their weary round, but compared to what happened in John’s day, they would not make one hour. And time’s hour glass may yet contain other centuries, or millenniums, or even half an eternity, but compared to what took place in the first century of the Christian era, they can only be as moments or minutes. It is the last hour (or time), although its moments may be centuries, and its minutes millenniums” (Levi Palmer).

We shall give here only the briefest of answers to the third question, reserving our fuller remarks thereon for verse 22 (D.V.).<sup>2</sup> Suffice it now to say that an “antichrist” is an antagonist of Christ and a corrupter of His doctrine. From those words “ye have heard that antichrist shall come,” it is clear that the saints of those days, even the youngest of them, were taught to expect that, so far from Christianity making a speedy and complete conquest of the world, there would be fierce opposition against it; that the servants and followers of Christ would be no more acceptable to the unregenerate than was their Master. Yet it must not be supposed that they were entertained with a cheap sensationalism under the guise of “expounding prophecy,” but rather were they informed that it was God’s will that the enmity which He put between the serpent’s seed and Christ’s seed would continue until the end. Therefore they must be prepared to encounter false prophets, and persecution if they withstood them. Implicitly, this “ye have heard that antichrist shall come” was a solemn and urgent exhortation unto believers to contend earnestly for the Faith, and to instruct new converts in the duty of watchfulness against deceivers.

Nor is there any need for us to say much upon the “many antichrists” of the apostle’s day, the chief reference being to the Gnostics<sup>3</sup> and to such men as Hymenaeus and Philetus (2Ti 2:17-18). In view of the faithful instruction and warnings, which Christians were then receiving from the ministers of God, there was no excuse for any of them being taken unawares and imposed upon. But alas, how sadly were such warnings, generally disregarded is only too evident from history. The Christ-hated doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes (Rev 2:14-15), and the suffering of one who called herself a prophetess to seduce His servants (2:20) were the precursors of many others in the next three hundred years, and by the close of the sixth century almost the whole of Christendom was as completely deceived as though God had given no warning against the anti-christ, and for almost a thousand years there followed what are known as the “dark ages.” Concerning antichrist, Calvin remarked, “They who suppose that he would be only one man are indeed greatly mistaken,” and then pointed out that such influential heretics as Cerinthus, Marcion, Ebion, etc., “were members of that kingdom which the devil afterward raised up [in the papacy] in opposition to Christ.”

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<sup>2</sup> D.V. – *Latin* Deo Volenti; “as God wills.”

<sup>3</sup> Gnostics – (from Greek *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge”) a group of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century heresies that taught escape from the material world through gaining secret knowledge.

The question, In what way did the presence of many antichrists make it evident that "the last time" had even then begun? also admits of a short and simple answer. As increasing infirmities and failing faculties are sure signs that old age is upon us, so the presence of antichrists was proof that the true Christ had come, and since He had ushered in the final era for this earth, naught remained but the judgment of God—His long-sufferance alone postponing the same. The outstanding characteristic of all former ages was the rejection of the truth, not only in man's refusal to be subject to God's Law but particularly that revelation which He had made through the prophets concerning His Son; whereas the most prominent feature of this dispensation is the reception of error, especially seen in the corrupting of the Gospel. As the presence of counterfeit money argues the existence of the genuine, so those who set up themselves against the person and kingdom of Christ are tacit but real witnesses unto the same. The fact, that those false prophets received such a welcome and favourable hearing in John's day was proof that, to use the language of 1 Peter 4:7, "the end of all things is at hand."

As to why John brought in 2:18 at this point in his epistle, several reasons may be suggested. First of all, it gave point to his preceding statement. In verse 17 he had said, "the world passeth away," and now he declares, "it is the last time"—its harvest was ready for the sickle. Thus, second, it was a note of imminency and urgency. In the whole context John had made it clear that the world in which believers are left as witnesses for Christ is a very evil one, and here they are informed that it has entered upon the final stage of its history. It must be "the last time," for the lowest depths of human depravity have been exhibited in the world's treatment of God's Son: the climax of its sinfulness appeared in His precious blood being despised and trampled upon by man's unbelief. Moreover, the presence of the "many antichrists" was a fearful omen that the final catastrophe was impending, for their evil activities made unmistakably plain the determined and continued antagonism of the world unto Christianity. How evident it is that our present verse, so far from beginning a new paragraph, is a continuation of what went before. In verse 16 we behold how the "darkness," mentioned in verses 9 and 11, had corrupted the world; here we see the darkness opposing the truth.

Third, verse 18 was brought in for the special benefit of babes in Christ, who are less suspicious of false prophets, and not yet able to say of Satan "we are not ignorant of his devices" (2Co 2:11). Therefore they needed to beware of teachers of error lest they make shipwreck of the Faith, for the words of such "will eat as doth a canker" (2Ti 2:17). The very name "antichrists" should awaken the deepest horror and concern, for it imports that they are opposed to Christ and all who adhere to Him, ready to rob them of every blessing enjoyed in Him. The fact that there were many of them intimated that on every side were deadly enemies unto faith and holiness. Of this they "had heard." No truth, which was profitable had been kept from them; everything the apostles had heard from the lips of Christ they faithfully committed to their converts. It therefore behoved them to make a proper use of such instruction, especially since so much contrary to sound doctrine was prevailing. Finally, since this era is the completion of all previous ones, great are the privileges and obligations of the saints.

The practical importance and value of verse 18 for us today lies, principally, in our noting and taking to heart its moral connection with verses 15-17, where a number of reasons

are advanced why we must not love the world, while here we are warned against anti-christs. There is a far more intimate relation between the state of our hearts and the receptivity or repulsion of our minds to error than is commonly supposed. Yet that relation is not far to seek nor difficult to understand. The doctrine of Scripture "is according to godliness" (1Ti 6:3), and therefore just so far as the heart be in a sound and healthy state will the holy and searching truth of God be acceptable to it. As John points out a little later concerning the false prophets, "They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them" (4:5). Such charlatans quote (and misquote) sufficient of the Bible to deceive the unwary, but they are careful to omit everything unpalatable to the unregenerate, which rebukes carnality or calls to a closer walking with God. They deliberately tone down the truth and prophesy "smooth things." And "the world heareth them," because their rotten hearts fully accord with such preaching.

As we pointed out in a previous article, the world is the sphere where the darkness reigns, and therefore the more a believer comes under its influence the less spiritual perception will he have and the less ability to "try things that differ" (Phi 1:10). It is in God's light that we see light (Psa 36:9), and morally speaking we are far from Him when our affections be set upon things on earth. It is only so long as the sheep follow Christ (walk according to His example, in obedience to His commandments) that "a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him" (Joh 10:4-5). In proportion as the soul finds its satisfaction in Christ will the world repel it; but when the heart grows cold unto Him, the things of the world appeal to it. The first century supplies numerous examples of that sad fact, and not a few wonder how it was possible for so many of the early churches to be corrupted (Rev 2:14-15, 20); the explanation is found in "thou hast left thy first love" (2:4). When a soul or church does that, the door is open for the entry of every possible abomination.

We have an illustration in the case of Isaac of a believer being deceived when his heart is not right with God. How came it that he was tricked by so clumsy a device as Jacob's? He knew that the voice was Jacob's; were then his neck and hands a surer test? Surely not! Then how are we to account for his being imposed upon in a way that no man of the world, with common sense, would be? The answer is, because he was out of communion with the Lord, and when that be the case with any saint he is likely to be deceived by the grossest of shams. It is quite clear from the preceding record that the eye of faith in Isaac was as dim as his natural ones, otherwise he would have discerned the sinfulness and madness of trying to fight against the Most High. He was displeased at God's appointment regarding his two sons, that the elder should serve the younger (Gen 25:23). He deliberately sought to turn the purpose of God into another channel, and in his intention gave to Esau the blessing, which God had said should be Jacob's. It was the flesh and not the Spirit which was dominating him, and that dulled even his natural judgment.

First, Isaac had done wrong in making Esau his favourite, and that because of the venison he provided for him (25:28). Second, he condoned Esau's act in marrying a Hittite (26:34), for as 27:1 indicates, he continued to show partiality unto him. Third, in his old age and as death drew near, he yielded to the lusts of the flesh, determining to gratify his carnal appetite by eating of his savoury meat. No wonder his judgment was blinded. But later, when he was made conscious of his failure to recognize Jacob and of his attempt to set aside God's choice, he "trembled very exceedingly" (27:33). Then it was that his slum-

bering faith awoke, and the scales fell from his eyes. Now he bowed to the divine will, and in spite of natural prejudice said of the one who had tricked him, "yea, and he shall be blessed."

Now as the allowing of carnality dulls the judgment of a believer, so does the entry into his heart of a spirit of worldliness; consequently he is likely not only to be imposed upon by natural things, but to mistake error for truth. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" (Joh 7:17). In order to spiritual perception there must be a steadfast refusal to follow the ways of the world. Error always flourishes most in the soil of worldliness, and it is there that the antichrists meet with success.

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

### *80. Our Inheritance, Part 2*

In our last, we pointed out some of the principal respects in which the distribution of the land of Canaan unto the tribes of Israel adumbrated the blessings and glory which the spiritual Israel obtain in and by Christ. We saw that, in the first place, our eternal portion is distinctly termed an "inheritance" (1Pe 1:4). Second, that our inheritance is bestowed upon us on the ground of a covenant (Luk 1:72). Third, that our inheritance too is an allotted one (Eph 1:11), and that the very faith which is necessary to give us a personal and saving interest therein is bestowed upon us by divine lot (1Pe 1:2). Fourth, that our glorious heritage is conveyed to us by the exercise of Christ's priesthood (Heb 9:11-15). Continuing to ponder the analogies between type and antitype, we note, in the fifth place, that responsible princes of Israel's tribes attended when Canaan was divided, for there were present with Eleazar the priest and Joshua "the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel" (Jos 14:1). Nothing is told us of the particular part they played in that important transaction, but it appears that they were appointed to act as overseers or supervisors on that occasion.

"And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mat 19:28). That, in our opinion, is what answers to and corresponds with that particular detail in Joshua 14:1. If "the saints shall judge the world," yea, "judge angels" (1Co 6:2-3), we need not be surprised to learn that the twelve shall sit upon thrones judging the tribes of Israel. The apostles were closest to Christ and shared most in His humiliation, and, therefore, in the day of His manifested glory, they will be distinguished from and honoured above all their brethren. Since they were so fiercely persecuted by the Jews, they will be Christ's assessors in their judgment. A further dignity is bestowed upon them by the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb being in the twelve foundations of the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:12). In each instance—Joshua 14:1; Matthew 19:28; 1 Corinthians 6:2-3—the bare fact is stated without any ex-

planation or amplification, and, therefore, any attempt to speculate thereon is not only useless, but impious.

In the sixth place, our inheritance is *a reward*. As we have so frequently pointed out in these articles, while Canaan was the land of promise, Israel had to *fight* for it. Even Jacob spoke of one portion therein, “which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow” (Gen 48:22). It was bequeathed unto Abraham and his seed, nevertheless it became theirs only by their own prowess. Notwithstanding its being theirs by divine donation, in a subordinate but very real sense, their actual entrance into and possession thereof was the result of their own efforts. Whether or not we can perceive the “consistency” and congruity of those different principles, they are the plain facts of the case. Nor should they present any difficulty to us, for they are complementary to each other, and not contradictory. God’s sovereignty lies at the foundation of all things, yet in His dealings with men—His own people not excepted—He ever treats with them as moral agents, enforces their accountability, and causes them to reap as they have sown, whether it was evil or good seed.

Now what pertained to the bestowment and acquirement of the earthly Canaan holds good in connection with the heavenly Canaan. It could not be otherwise, for God made the type to shadow forth accurately the antitype. Therefore we read, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive *the reward of the inheritance*: for ye serve the Lord Christ” (Col 3:23-24). Nothing can be more free or a matter of bounty than an inheritance. Then since it be an inheritance, with what propriety term it a “reward”? If a reward, how can it be, at the same time, an “inheritance”? The two things seem to be quite incompatible, especially since the inheritance is also designated “the purchased possession” (Eph 1:14)—bought with the blood of Christ. Yet such language is no more antithetical than that of the Saviour when He exhorted the Jews to “labour not for the meat which perisheth, but *for* that meat which endureth unto everlasting life,” and then added, “which the Son of man shall *give* unto you” (Joh 6:27), nor that of His apostle, who declared, “For we which have believed *do enter* into rest,” and then enjoined, “Let us labour therefore *to enter* into that rest” (Heb 4:3, 11).

There is much in the Scriptures which appears to the infidel to be contradictory—as that “the LORD our God is one LORD” (Deu 6:4), yet is three distinct persons. That “His mercy endureth for ever” (Psa 136:1), yet that He will send many of His creatures to everlasting punishment. That Christ should affirm, “I and my Father are one” (Joh 10:30), yet also declared, “My Father is greater than I” (Joh 14:28). And though the Christian perceives the perfect harmony of those statements, yet there are some things which greatly puzzle him. As for instance, that since God has predestinated everything which comes to pass, what room is left for free agency and the discharge of human responsibility? If the fall has deprived men of all spiritual strength, how can they be justly held blameworthy for failing to perform spiritual duties? If Christ died for the elect only, how can He be freely offered to every creature? If the believer be Christ’s “free man,” then why is he required to take upon him His yoke? If he has been set at liberty (Gal 5:1), how can he be “under the law” (1Co 9:21)? If he be preserved by God, then how can his own perseverance be necessary in order to the attainment of eternal bliss? If sin does not have dominion over him (Rom 6:14), why do “iniquities prevail against” him so often (Psa 65:3)?

Whatever difficulties may be involved, the fact remains that Scripture has not a little to say about God's rewarding the obedient and crowning the overcomer. "In keeping of them there is great reward" (Psa 19:11). "To him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward" (Pro 11:18). "Then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Mat 16:27). "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou has been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many" (Mat 25:23). "They [the poor] cannot recompense thee: for thou shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" (Luk 14:14). There are other declarations that God will take special note of the fidelity of His servants, and amply compensate them for the sufferings which they have endured in His behalf. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven" (Mat 5:11). "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev 2:10). Now all such passages as these must be allowed their obvious and legitimate force, and be given a due place in our hearts and minds.

In a brief and incidental statement on this subject, Calvin beautifully preserved the balance, "The Scripture shows *what* all our works are capable of meriting when it represents them as unable to bear the divine scrutiny, because they are full of impurity. And in the next place, what would be merited by the perfect observance of the Law if this could anywhere be found, when it directs us, 'when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants' (Luk 17:10), because we shall not have conferred any favour on God, but only have performed the duties incumbent upon us, for which no thanks are due. Nevertheless, the good works which the Lord has conferred on us, He denominates *our own* to be animated by so great a promise, and to stir up our minds that we 'be not weary in well doing' (Gal 6:9), and to be truly grateful for so great an instance of the divine goodness.... Good works, therefore, are pleasing to God and not unprofitable to the authors of them, and they will moreover receive the most ample blessings from God as their reward: not because they merit them, but because the divine goodness has freely appointed them this reward" (*Institutes*, book 3, chapter 5).

If it were "inconsistent" with the divine perfections for God to bestow any *future* rewards on His people, both for Christ's sake (primarily and meritoriously) and because of their own obedience (according to the terms of the new covenant and the governmental principles of God), then it would be equally so for Him to grant any *present* ones, for no difference in time or place can make any change in the essential nature of things. That He does richly recompense them in this world is clear from many passages. "Great peace have they which love thy law" (Psa 119:165, and cf. Isa 58:13-14). The peace and joy which are the believer's now flow originally from the mediation of Christ, but subordinately from his own obedience and fidelity—if he pursues a course of disobedience, then peace of conscience will not be his. Those who deny themselves for Christ's sake and the Gospel's are assured of a grand reward, "an hundredfold now in this time," as well as "in the world to come eternal life" (Mar 10:30). "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1Ti 4:8).

He who was outstandingly the apostle of grace declared, "I press toward the mark for *the prize* of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phi 3:14). Whatever that "prize" may consist of, the fact remains that the Holy Spirit moved him to use that term. Nevertheless,

it is evident that our rewards, whether present or future, are not due to us as a wage is to a hired servant who has properly fulfilled his duty, rather are they entirely a matter of divine bounty. This is clear from the following considerations. First, it is divine grace which alone *produces* our good words, "Thou also hast wrought all our works in us" (Isa 26:12). Second, it is divine grace which *approves* of them, despite their defects, for our gifts or benevolences (Phi 4:18), and our worship are "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1Pe 2:5). Yea, our prayers are heard by God only because of the "much incense" of Christ's merits being added to them (Rev 8:3-4). Third, there is no proportion between our performances or sufferings and the "exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2Co 4:17) which they "worketh for us."

Rewards are in no sense the recognition of personal worthiness, for we can deserve nothing good at the hands of God. Therein they differ radically from the punishment which shall be meted out unto the reprobate. The penalty inflicted on the wicked is an act of strict justice, the paying to them the wages of sin. But the rewarding of the righteous is entirely a matter of divine bounty, and therefore all room for boasting is excluded. It is impossible for any creature to bring God under obligation to him or make Him in any wise his debtor. Nevertheless, He is graciously pleased to recognize, own, and recompense all that is done with an eye to His glory. Promises of reward are among the incentives to industry (Psa 126:6), the encouragements of fidelity (Heb 11:26), and the motives to inspire us in unwearied well doing (Gal 6:9)—it was for "the joy set before him" that the Lord Jesus endured the cross (Heb 12:2). Finally, it is to be pointed out that in signifying His approval of the services of the saints, God, at the same time, is owning the Spirit's work in them, for they are the "fruits" of His gracious operation.

In the seventh place, there will be *degrees of glory* among the saints when they enter into their final inheritance, though there are those who call this into question. It is objected that, since all believers are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and are equal in that respect, all have title to an equal inheritance. But that does not follow. Varying degrees or measures of grace are bestowed upon one and another of them in this life. But since they all stand in the same relation to God, and are His dear children, will they not enjoy the same honours and dignities? Not necessarily, for even in this world they are not all of the same spiritual stature. Some are babes in Christ, while others are young men and fathers (1Jo 2:12-14), and, no matter how long they be left here, some of the first-mentioned never attain unto the level of the others. Some argue that since all be of *grace*, distinctions could not obtain. All *is* of grace, and every crown will be cast at the feet of Christ, yet it does not follow that they shall be in all respects alike. Paul's crown of rejoicing will greatly consist in the salvation of those among whom he laboured (1Th 2:19), yet that will not be the case with every inhabitant of heaven.

Others insist that the saint's title to eternal life is the meritorious work of the Mediator, being "the gift of God...through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 6:23), and that since all of His redeemed have His obedience imputed to them, that must ensure equality in glory. Not so, for Revelation 14:13 tells us that, from henceforth, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, that they may rest from their labours, and then adds, "their works do follow them." Note, *not* "precede" as the ground of their justification, but "follow" as intermediate causes of their felicity. Since the amount of their works varies, so will they contribute to

different degrees in augmenting their bliss. But since all be loved with the same love, called by the same calling, and are heirs of the same inheritance, it must be concluded that all will possess it in the same degree. If that reasoning proves anything, it “proves too much,” for in such case all would be on a spiritual equality now. Whereas, it is an incontrovertible fact that God distributes His gifts and graces unevenly among His people.

All of the redeemed will be entirely content and perfectly happy in heaven, rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Yet while every cup of bliss will be full, they will not all be of the same size. All the saints will participate in celestial and eternal felicity, but not on an equality, “Otherwise there would be no suitableness in God’s dispensations....There are higher degrees of glory for those who have done and suffered most” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). This too was definitely foreshadowed in the distribution of Canaan. Joshua did not divide the land into twelve equal parts, for the Lord had given orders, “To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance: to every one shall his inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him” (Num 26:54), and so it came to pass. That also had a spiritual significance and application to us. “A believer’s *state* of happiness is determined by his faith, but the *measure* of his happiness in that state depends upon the fruits of faith. Faith alone saves a Christian, but his crown is brighter according as his faith works more abundantly by love” (John Berridge, 1716-1793).

As we have shown above, Scripture repeatedly informs us that the services and sufferings of the saints shall be rewarded in the day to come. Though that reward be not of debt, but of grace, yet it *is* a “reward”—which could not be if what is enjoyed in the life to come had no relation to and bore no proportion to what was done in this life. As the different portions allotted Israel were determined by the size of their tribes, so that of the saints will be regulated by the number of their good works, in proportion as they use their talents. “Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour” (1Co 3:8)—according to the extent to which he exercised his grace and holiness here. As there are different measures of fruitfulness among believers, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold (Mar 4:8), so there will be differences of reward. Though an eternity of bliss will be the portion of both the repentant thief and the apostle Paul, it is inconceivable that the latter will receive no more from the hands of Christ than the former. “To deny degrees in glory is to say that God will not suit men’s wages to works” (Thomas Brooks, 1608-1680).

“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly: and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2Co 9:6). “As there is a difference in the kind of crop according to the kind of seed (Gal 6:7-8), so according to the degree. Some well, others better—so some fare well, others better—are more bountifully rewarded. For God will deal more liberally with those who shall accordingly with greater diligence acquit themselves in well doing. There is a proportionate observance” (Thomas Manton 1620-1677). “Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord” (Eph 6:8). “That is, shall be particularly and punctually considered by God for it. He shall receive the same, not for kind, but for quantity and proportion” (Manton). The moral government of God will thus be honoured, and the equity of His procedure manifested. All will be of grace, yet then too shall it be seen that grace works “through right-



eousness” (Rom 5:21). “Ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ” (Col 3:24), who is not only a bountiful Master, but a faithful one. “For God is *not unrighteous to* forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb 6:10).

It is in His office as moral Governor that the Lord will act in the day to come, and therein He will display not only His benevolence, but His righteousness. It will become Him to exhibit His approbation of holiness, put honour upon virtue, and crown fidelity. “If heavenly bliss bear any relation to the labours and sufferings of the present life on behalf of Christ, which the Scriptures assure us it does, these being diverse, that must also be the same” (Andrew Fuller, 1754-1815). Different degrees of glory accords most with God’s ways in creation, which is everywhere marked by diversity rather than uniformity. There are differences and disparities in everything among men—in wisdom and rank, in abilities and riches. Among the angels also there are “principalities and powers, thrones and dominions.” It accords with God’s dealings with His saints here. He gives the greatest spiritual blessings to those who most eminently glorify Him. Various measures of glory accords too with different degrees of punishment for the wicked (Mat 11:22; Luk 12:47-48; Heb 10:29). “Heavenly bliss will consist in ascribing glory to God and the Lamb: but this can be proportioned only in proportion as we have glory to ascribe. When Paul acknowledges ‘by the grace of God I am what I am’ (1Co 15:10), there is a thousand times more meaning in the expression, and a thousand times more glory redounds to God, than in the uttering of the same words by some men, even though they be men of real piety” (A. Fuller).

## THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

### *11. Its Corollaries, Part 2*

Since man be totally depraved it necessarily follows that if ever he is to be saved it can be only *by divine grace and power*. Grace is a truth which is peculiar to divine revelation. It is a concept to which the unaided powers of the human mind can never reach. Proof of that is found in the fact that where the Bible has not gone, it is quite unknown. But not only is grace taught in God’s Word, it is given great prominence there. Holy Writ declares that salvation is by grace from first to last. It issued from grace, it is received by grace, it is maintained by grace, it is perfected by grace. Divine grace is bestowed upon those who have no merits, and from whom no recompense is demanded. Nay, more, it is given to those who are full of demerit and ill-desert. How thoroughly grace sets aside every thought of worthiness in its object is evident from a single quotation, “Being justified *freely* by his grace” (Rom 3:24). The Greek word is yet more impressive and emphatic, and might be rendered “gratuitously,” “for nothing,” the same term being translated “for nought” in 2 Thessalonians 3:8 and “without a cause” in John 15:25. There being nothing whatever in the beneficiary to attract it, but rather everything to repel it. “None eye pitied thee...to

have compassion upon thee...when I passed by thee and saw thee polluted in thy blood, I said unto thee...Live" (Eze 16:5-6).

Divine grace is the sinner's only hope, for it is not searching for good men whom it may approve, but the guilty and lost whom it may save. It comes not to those who have done their best and are quite presentable, but rather to those who have done their worst, and are in rags and tatters. Grace ever draws near to the sinner with his condition fully exposed. Grace recognizes no distinctions either social or moral. The chaste virgin is on the same level as the confirmed harlot, the religious professor with the wildest profligate. Grace is God's provision for those who are so corrupt that they cannot better their conduct, so averse to God that they cannot turn to Him, so dead that He must open their graves and bring them on to resurrection ground. Unless men be saved by grace, they cannot be saved at all. Equally true is it that the salvation of sinners must be by divine power. Their crass stupidity and insensibility is irremovable by any human means. Nothing but God's might can dispel the darkness from their minds, take away their hearts of stone, or free their sin-enslaved wills. All the faculties of the natural man are opposed to the offers and operations of divine grace until divine power saves him from himself. None ever yet turned unto God but who was turned by Him.

From all that has been before us, it should be quite apparent that *the sinner lies entirely at God's disposal*. If He sees fit to leave him in his sins, he is undone for ever—yet God has a perfect right so to do. Had He precipitated the whole race to hell, as He did the fallen angels the day they sinned, it would have been no excess of severity, but simply an act of justice. For they deserved eternal damnation. In its ultimate analysis, salvation is a matter of God's choice and not of ours, for we are merely clay in His hands to be moulded into a vessel of honour or dishonour entirely as He pleases (Rom 9:21). Sinners are in the sovereign hand of God to save or to destroy them according to His own will. That is His divine prerogative. "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom 9:18). And so far from offering any apology, He bids us observe and ponder that solemn fact, saying, "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand" (Deu 32:39). Such a One is not to be spoken lightly about, but held in the utmost awe.

In the very nature of the case, mercy is not something which can be claimed as a right—least of all from Him whom we have wronged far above all others—but lies entirely at the discretion of the one who is pleased to exercise it. "Because He is a sovereign God, infinitely happy in Himself without us, it is at His option to manifest mercy or not, to save or not, as much as it was His option to make man or not" (Ralph Erskine, 1685-1752). "He doeth according to *his will* in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan 4:35). Therefore He exercises sovereignty in the cause *why* He shows mercy, even because He "will show mercy". Sovereign not only in the ones He saves, but in the time when, the instrument by whom, and the means by which He saves them. Such teaching alone accords to God His proper place, as it likewise cuts away all ground of creature merits and boasting of his free will; and, at the same time, deepens the wonderment and gratitude of the redeemed. God can never act unjustly, but He can and does bestow His favours on whom He pleases, and

in so doing exercises His high prerogative. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" (Mat 20:15).

The exemption of any sinner from the everlasting burning is an act of sovereign mercy and free grace, and, therefore, God consults none, but exercises His own mere good pleasure as to those on whom He bestows the same. "Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias...when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luk 4:25-27). If some are brought to believe in Christ, while others are left in their unbelief, it is sovereign grace alone which makes the one to differ from the other. And if it be right for God to make such a difference in time, it could not be wrong for Him to purpose doing so from eternity. They who balk at sovereign and unconditional election believe in neither the total depravity of man nor the God of the Bible. On the one hand, He hides these things from those who are wise and prudent in their own conceits. On the other, He reveals them to babes (Mat 11:25). There cannot be an election without a rejection, "the one shall be taken, and the other left" (Mat 24:40-41); "the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Rom 11:7); "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom 9:13).

Inasmuch as the sinner's will is enslaved by sin, then *God must overcome his opposition* before he will submit to Him. But both Scripture and observation make it evident that He does not bring all rebels into subjection, but only a favoured few. As Psalm 110:3 declares, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." Though "by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph 2:3), equally depraved and guilty, yet even in their unregenerate state "God's people." They are His by sovereign election, His by eternal decree, His by covenant relationship. He loved them with an everlasting love (Jer 31:2), chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), predestinated them to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). Accordingly, in the day of His power, He quickens them into newness of life, puts the soul into a condition to receive the truth and cordially embrace it. That putting forth of divine power upon and within the vessels of mercy takes place at a definite season, for there is a "set time" for God to show favour unto the members of Zion (Psa 102:13). As the length of Israel's captivity in Babylon was so divinely fixed that none could any longer detain them when that time had expired, likewise must His elect be delivered from their bondage to sin and Satan when the appointed moment arrives. He who ordered the day of our birth and death (Ecc 3:2) does not leave us to decide the day of our conversion—still less whether we shall be converted or not.

"Thy people shall be willing" (Psa 110:3) unto whom? To do what? Willing unto that to which previously they were completely averse. Willing to submit their intellect wholly to God's Word, so that they receive with childlike simplicity all that is revealed therein. Willing to lean no more unto their own understanding, but to accept without question the mysteries of the Faith. High imaginations and lofty reasonings against the knowledge of God are now cast down, and every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2Co 10:5). Miracles which infidels scoff at, aspects of truth which Arminians term contradictory, precepts which run counter to the lusts of the flesh, are meekly accepted. Willing to bow to God's way of salvation, so that they freely abandon their idols, renounce

the world, repudiate all merits of their own, and come as empty-handed beggars, acknowledging themselves to be deserving only of hell. Willing to receive Christ as Prophet to instruct, as Priest to atone for their sins, as King to rule over them. Willing to receive Him as their Lord, to take His yoke upon them, to follow the example He has left them. Willing to bear reproach for His sake, to be given the cold shoulder, to be hated and persecuted. Willing to be on the side of the minority, to be cast out of the synagogue if need be, to lay down their very lives rather than deny Him.

Obviously, a miracle of grace must be wrought within them before they will choose what is so contrary to fallen human nature. That wonderful change from unwillingness to willingness is not the result of creature effort, but of divine operation. It is not of self-improvement, but the effect of God's work in the soul. Thus, we read of "the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph 1:19). That forthputting of His power does not violate man's constitution or responsibility. Instead of destroying the freedom of his will, it liberates it from its native bondage. God's people are not dragged to Christ, but "drawn" (Joh 6:44), and by "the bands of love" (Hos 11:4). That acting of His power has reference to that blessed time when the effectual inworking of the Spirit delivers the soul from the dominion of sin and Satan, when the influences of grace prevail over the corruptions of the flesh, when the Lord opens the heart to receive His Word (Act 16:14), when the affections are turned from the world to Christ, and the soul gladly gives up itself to Him. It is life-giving and liberating power which delivers from death in sin. It is the communicating of a new disposition which causes its recipient cordially to yield himself to God. It is convincing power which convicts the individual of his wickedness, wretchedness, and need. It is God working in him "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phi 2:13).

The Lord made the Egyptian jailer show kindness unto His servant. How? By giving "him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Gen 39:21). When Saul had been anointed king, as he returned to his home, "there went with him a band of men." And who were they? Men "whose hearts God had touched" (1Sa 10:26). When the appointed time of Israel's captivity expired, "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus" to make a gracious decree inviting the Jews to return unto Jerusalem. But a small minority accepted. Who were they, and why did they act differently from their fellows? They were those "whose spirit God had raised, to go" (Ezr 1:1-5). In like manner, in the day of His power, God gives the antitypical Joseph favour in the eyes of His people who formerly had seen no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. He touches their hearts, so that they willingly submit to follow the One whom He has anointed to be King over them. He raises up their spirit, which previously had been sunk in bondage, so that now they desire a better country (Heb 11:16). Unless He did so, none would be saved. "Except the Lord of Saboath had left us a seed, *we* had been as Sodoma" (Rom 9:29). It is by their willingness to deny self, take up their cross, and follow Christ that God's people are distinguished from the children of the devil. As the Christian looks back to the time of God's power, he sings:

*“O happy day that fixed my choice  
 On Thee, my Saviour and my God!  
 Well may this glowing heart rejoice,  
 And tell its raptures all abroad.  
 ’Tis done, the great transaction’s done,  
 I am my Lord’s, and He is mine;  
 He drew me, and I followed on,  
 Charmed to confess His voice divine.”*

The vile condition of mankind *heightens the marvel of Christ’s mediation*. It was by no means incumbent upon God to recover those who had turned their backs upon Him. As He was not obliged to prevent their defection, neither was He obliged to restore any of those who had revolted. When He permitted the whole human race to offend in Adam, it had been no undue severity on His part had He left them to be buried in the ruins of their fall, and to sink utterly beneath the weight of their iniquities. He might well have reserved all in those chains which they fully deserved, and left them to feed upon the fruits of their evil doings, without lifting a finger for their deliverance. Nay, to go farther back—As God might for ever have left men in their nothingness without bringing them into being, so He could have left them all in their contracted misery. There was no more reason why the Lord should save any of Adam’s posterity than there was for Him to bring back the fallen angels to their original obedience and bliss. The blessedness of God Himself had no more been infringed by the eternal destruction of our entire race than it was by the everlasting ruin of devils. It was wholly at His own option whether He provided a Saviour or withheld Him.

There was no reason why God should not have abandoned all mankind. He certainly was not bound in justice to intervene on their behalf, for as the righteous Governor of the world, He might well have proceeded to uphold the majesty of His law by executing its penalty on the disobedient, thereby making them an example of vengeance to all other intelligences in the universe. Nor did His *goodness* oblige Him to rescue His refractory subjects from their misery. For He had previously given full proof of that in their creation, as it is still made manifest in the happiness enjoyed by all His loyal subjects. Nor did any consideration of *His glory* require that He should show them mercy. “The glory of God does not depend upon the manifestation of any particular attribute, but upon the manifestation of them all on proper occasions and in full harmony. He is glorified when He bestows blessings upon the righteous, and is equally glorified when He inflicts punishment upon the wicked” (John Dick, 1764-1833). What would the loss of this world be unto Him in whose sight it is nothing, yea, less than nothing and vanity? The provision of a Saviour was a matter of His free grace, and *grace* is something which none can claim as a right.

God was pleased to act in a manner which will cause both the holy angels and redeemed sinners for ever to marvel and adore. His way of salvation is the wonder of all wonders, whether we consider the dignity of the Mediator’s person, the nature of His work, the things it accomplished, or the beneficiaries thereof. The Saviour was none other than the Lord of glory, the co-equal and beloved of the Father. His work necessitated a journey from heaven to earth, the assumption of human nature, the being made under the Law, and the enduring of unspeakable humiliation. It required Him to become the Man of sorrows,

so that the whole of His life in this scene was one of suffering and grief. It involved His becoming the Substitute of His people, so that the iniquity of them all was placed upon Him, and He paid the wages due them. It entailed His laying down His life to ransom them, dying a cruel, shameful and accursed death, during which He was separated from God Himself. So infinitely meritorious and efficacious was Christ's death that it appeased the wrath of God against His people, satisfied every demand of His justice, removed the guilt of their transgressions from them as far as the east is from the west, conquered Satan and spoiled him of his dominion over them, procured the Spirit to quicken and indwell them, opened heaven for them, so that they have access to and fellowship with God, ensured their preservation in time, and fullness of joy for eternity.

And on whose behalf did the Son of God suffer such awful indignities? Not for the fallen angels, whose original habitat was heaven, but for creatures of the earth, who are but breathing dust and animated clay. The best of men compared with Christ are less in His sight than a worm is in ours. Yea, in Job 25:6, He actually terms them worms. It is for the unworthy, the unholy, the unlovely, that such was ordained. Oh, what an amazing thing that the Lord should set His heart upon them! Upon those who in their fallen estate were quite incapable of doing anything to please or honour Him. The objects of His mediation were despicable not only in their beings, but in their actions also. As man is nothing comparatively, so he can do nothing to glorify Christ, though much to provoke and dishonour Him. How can one who is lame and blind, walk or work, or one who is dead, act? Such were His people when He entertained thoughts of mercy toward them. Destitute of any good qualities or fruit, and lacking any spiritual principle or nature to yield the same. And when Christ has bestowed such upon His people, they cannot act, but as they are acted. They cannot stand, except He uphold them. They cannot move, unless He draws them. Christ must work all their works in them (Isa 26:12).

Not only impotent, but poverty-stricken. Man is nothing, can do nothing, and has nothing. He not only has "no money" (Isa 55:1), but is heavily in debt. He is in a famishing condition, feeding on nothing but wind and husks, for such are the vanities and pleasures of this world. He has not so much as to cover his shame, for though he may, like the Laodiceans, imagine himself to be rich and in need of nothing, yet in God's sight he is poor and naked. He cannot rightly say that his soul is his own, for he has given it over to Satan, sold himself to work wickedness. What a marvel that Christ should love such forlorn creatures! But more. Man is not only a bankrupt, but a hideous object. Poverty alone will not hinder love, especially if there be beauty, but who can admire deformity? Yet such is the sinner in the eyes of holiness—full of revolting loathsomeness—no human pen can depict the obnoxiousness of defiled man. Created fair and very good, adorned with the beauty of God's image, but not only is all of that erased, but the horrible image of Satan has displaced it. His light has been turned into darkness, his comeliness into corruption. Instead of sweet savour, there is a stench, and burning instead of beauty (Isa 3:24).

That which makes the soul most unlovely is its being *dead*. When life expires, all beauty expires with it. Abraham loved Sarah dearly while she lived, but when she was dead, he could not endure the sight of her. A dead soul is as repulsive to God as a dead body is to us. But men are not only hateful to Christ, but *haters of Him*. They hate His person, His offices, His precepts. They hate His very image, and the more resemblance to Him any of

His followers have, the more are they detested. Yet, there is not in Christ the least occasion of hatred. He is altogether lovely—divinely glorious, humanly perfect. Nor does He give any cause to be hated. All His administrations are righteous, so that His justice ought to be admired as much as His mercy. It is an unmixed hatred, without any degree of love. Yea, without the slightest inclination or tendency to it. It is a deadly hatred, so that when He was delivered into their hands, they murdered Him. It is an unvarying and inveterate hatred, firmly rooted in their hearts, expressed by continual acts of rebellion against Him. Oh, what a truly amazing thing it is that Christ should voluntarily lay down His life for such creatures! Yet the Spirit tells God's people, "When we were *enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom 5:10). Behold, what manner of love. Behold, and wonder!

## INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

### *Part 21*

The first time that centre of man's moral nature—the heart—is mentioned in the Scriptures, we have an infallible forecast of all later teaching thereon. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). Remarkably full is the outline here furnished us. Observe first the words "and God saw," intimating that He alone is fully conversant with this inward spring from which proceed the issues of life. Second, that it is upon the same His eyes are fixed, "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1Sa 16:7). Third, that what is here said of man's heart is *explanatory* of his wicked conduct. Since the fount itself be foul, filthy must be the streams flowing therefrom. Fourth, that man's heart is now radically evil, and that continually, being "deceitful [the Hebrew word is rendered "crooked" in Isaiah 40:4 and "polluted" in Hosea 6:8]...and desperately [incurably] wicked" (Jer 17:9); out of which, as Christ declared, proceed all the abominations committed by fallen man (Mar 7:21-23). Fifth, that the "heart" equals the whole of the inner man, for the marginal rendering of "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart" is "the purposes and desires," and, thus, it is not only the seat of his thought, but that of his affections and will.

"And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth" (Gen 6:6-7). This is the initial reference to *repentance*, and though its language be indeed metaphorical—for by a figure of speech (anthropopathia) the Lord ascribes to Himself human feelings—yet it contains all the essential elements thereof. First, it is striking to find that this grace is here attributed not to the creature, but to the Creator, telling us that repentance originates not in one whose mind is enmity against God and whose heart is hard as a stone, but is a divine gift (Act 5:31; 11:18; 2Ti 2:25), wrought in him by the Holy Spirit. Second, that repentance has *sin* for its object, for it is the wickedness of men which

is here said to make JEHOVAH repent. Third, *its nature* is clearly defined as a change of mind (God's repenting that He had made man) and a grief of heart. Fourth, that the genuineness of repentance is evidenced by *reformation*, or an alteration of conduct, a resolve to undo (as far as is humanly possible) that which is sorrowed over—seen in the Lord's decision to destroy man from off the face of the earth.

In Genesis 15:6, we find the earliest mention of three of the most important words which are used in connection with the sinner's salvation and most significant and blessed is it to see them here joined together. "And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." What a remarkable anticipation was this of the fuller unfolding of the Gospel which is to be found in the Prophets and the New Testament! It records the response made by "the father of all them that believe" (Rom 4:11) unto the amazing promise which JEHOVAH made unto him—that, despite his being so old (almost one hundred years), he should not only beget a son, but ultimately have an innumerable seed, and that from the same should spring the Messiah. As Romans 4:19-20 states, "He considered not his body now dead...he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." First, here we have the simplest definition of faith to be found in the Bible, "He believed in the LORD." More literally, "He *amened* JEHOVAH." That is to say, his heart gave the answering assurance, "It shall be so." In other words, by implicitly receiving the divine testimony, he "set to his seal that God is true" (Joh 3:33). He realized that it was the word of Him "that cannot lie" (Ti 1:2)

Second, we here learn what was God's gracious response unto that childlike confidence which so honoured Him. "He counted it to him for righteousness." The word "counted" means accounted or placed to his credit. The same Hebrew word being translated "imputeth" (Psa 32:2). "Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity"—charges it not against him. It is *not the act* of Abraham's faith which is here referred to, but the glorious Object to which it looked, namely his promised Seed and Son—his Saviour. Third, we are here taught how a believing sinner is legally constituted just before God. By nature, he has no righteousness of his own, for so long as he be without Christ, his best performances are but as filthy rags in the sight of divine holiness (Isa 64:6). Not only was Abraham destitute of righteousness, but he obtained it not by any efforts of his own. His faith was the sole means or instrument which linked him to a righteousness outside of himself. After citing his case, the apostle went on to say, "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness *without works*" (Rom 4:6), "for with the heart man believeth *unto* righteousness." (Rom 10:10).

Since the above treats of such a vital aspect of truth, we will link with it and consider briefly Deuteronomy 25:1. "If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall *justify* the righteous, and condemn the wicked." That is the first occurrence of this important word, and its setting more than hints at its meaning. First, justification is entirely a judicial matter, being the sentence or pronouncement of the Judge of all the earth. Second, it is the opposite of condemnation, and when one is condemned in the law courts he is not made wicked, but adjudged guilty. Third, he is regarded as "righteous," that is the Law has nothing against him—because in the believer's case, all its requirements have been fully met by his Surety. We may also consider in this connection, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will



show to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever" (Exo 14:13). How deeply significant is that first mention of "salvation," containing as it does all the prime elements of our spiritual deliverance. It was the Lord's salvation, in which they had no part or hand. Yea, they had to cease from all activity in order to see the same. It consisted of a miraculous deliverance from death. It was a present thing, which they experienced that day. It was complete and eternal, for they would see their enemies again "no more for ever."

Most suggestive is the initial reference to the *lamb*. "And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (Gen 22:7-8). How blessed and significant to observe, in the first place, that this conversation was between a loving father and an only begotten son (Heb 11:17). Second, how remarkable to learn that the lamb would not be demanded from man, but supplied by God. Third, still more noteworthy are the words, "God will *provide himself* a lamb," because it was for the meeting of *His* requirements, the satisfying of His claims. Fourth, the lamb was not here designed for food (for that was not the prime thought), but "for a burnt offering." Fifth, it was a substitute for the child of promise, for, as verse 13 exhibits, "the ram" (a male lamb in the prime of its strength) was not only provided by God, but was also offered by Abraham "in the stead of his son"! How significant it is to discover that the word *worship* is mentioned for the first time in connection with this scene, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and will come again to you" (verse 5). Worship calls for separation from unbelievers, as Abraham left his two young men behind him. It is possible only on resurrection ground ("the third day" verse 4), and it consists of offering unto God our best—our Isaac.

How indicative are the opening words of the Bible, "In the beginning God" (Gen 1:1). Here man is taught the first grand truth which he needs to know—that God is first and foremost, the Author of all things, the source and spring of all good. The first appearance of Satan in Scripture reveals to us his subtle character, the methods he employs, that God's Word is the chief object of his assaults, and stamps him as the arch-liar. How the first recorded words of the Redeemer, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luk 2:49), summed up His mission and all His subsequent teaching, as well as intimated that such would be neither appreciated nor understood by men. Many other illustrations of this law of first mention might be given, but the above are amply sufficient to exemplify its reality and value. They reveal how important it is to trace things back to their source, and show that God has hung the key on the door for us to make use of. And how they demonstrate the divine authorship of the Bible, displaying as they do that the later books invariably employ terms and phrases with uniform significance and in perfect harmony with their initial mention. What proofs that He who knew the end from the beginning inspired holy men of old in the very words they selected and the use which they made of them.

29. *The law of progress.* Since the Scriptures be the "word of life" (Phi 2:16), they are "quick [living], and powerful" (Heb 4:12). So far from being "a dead book" as the papists blasphemously assert, and "a dead letter" as some Protestants have ignorantly averred, the Bible is instinct with the very life of its Author. This fact is plainly exemplified in the principle of *growth* which marks all its parts and itself as a whole. This can be tested and verified by any competent person who will take the trouble to read the Scriptures systematically, or trace out a subject from start to finish. As this be done, he will perceive

that truth is unfolded orderly and gradually, progressively and climactically. That there is presented to us first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. While the first mention of a thing intimates its scope and more or less anticipates what is to follow, the subsequent references amplify the same, each one making its own contribution unto the whole, and thereby we obtain both a clearer and a fuller understanding of the same. The path of truth is like that of the just, it "shineth more and more" (Pro 4:18).

As we pointed out nearly forty years ago, the above-named principle is strikingly and blessedly illustrated in connection with the lamb. In Genesis 22:8, the lamb is *prophesied*, "God will provide Himself a lamb." In Exodus 12:5, the lamb is clearly *typified*, as "without blemish," whose blood provided shelter from the destroying angel, and whose flesh was to be the food of God's people. In Isaiah 53:7, the lamb is definitely *personified*, "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter." In John 1:29, we find the lamb *identified*, as, pointing to Him, Christ's forerunner announced, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." In 1 Peter 1:19, mention is made of Him as the lamb that was *crucified*, "But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." In Revelation 5:6, we see the Lamb *glorified*, for the seer of Patmos was privileged to behold in heaven, standing, "a Lamb as it had been slain." While in Revelation 22:1, we see the Lamb *satisfied*, "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." With these we may link the progressive scope seen in the validity of Christ's sacrifice. In Genesis 4:4, for the individual; in Exodus 12:3, for the "house" or family; in Leviticus 16:21, for the nation; in Ephesians 5:25, for the Church or the whole election of grace.

Another example of this law of progress may be seen by tracing out the Messianic prophecies and observing how there is "line upon line" (Isa 28:10) until the picture is complete. The subject is too vast to deal with comprehensively here, but let us look at a single aspect of it, namely those which respect His *birth*. In Genesis 3:15, it was intimated that the destroyer of Satan would be a member of the human race—the woman's seed. Genesis 9:27 revealed which of the three main divisions of the human race He would descend from, "He [God] shall dwell in the tents of Shem." In Genesis 22:18, it was made known that He should be an Israelite—Abraham's seed. Second Samuel 7:12-13 announced that He should be of the tribe of Judah—issuing from David. Isaiah 11:10 defined His ancestry yet more definitely. He would spring from the family of Jesse. Isaiah 49:1 predicted that He would be *named*, and by God Himself, *before* His birth, as indeed He was. While Micah 5:2 specified the very place where He would be born—Bethlehem. Such examples as these not only demonstrate clearly the divine inspiration of the Bible, but evidence that the canon of Scripture, as we now have it, has been superintended by God Himself, for its order is not so much chronological as logical.

There is a steady advance observable in the respective purposes and scope of *the four Gospels*. Obviously, Matthew's must come first, for its chief design is to present Christ as the Embodiment of the Old Testament promises and the Fulfiller of the prophecies there made concerning the Messiah. For much the same reason, Mark's comes second. For whereas in the former, Christ is seen *testing* the old covenant people, here He is viewed as *ministering to* them. But Luke's Gospel has a much wider scope, being far more Gentile in its character. In it, Christ is contemplated in connection with the human race, the Son of

man related to yet contrasted with the sons of men. John's Gospel conducts us to much higher ground, for whereas in the first three He is depicted in human relationships (as the Son of Abraham, the Servant of God, and the perfect Man), here, His divine glory shines forth, and we behold Him as the Son of God in relation to the family of God. This same principle is also exemplified in what is recorded in *their closing chapters*. Matthew takes us no farther than the resurrection of Christ. In Mark 16:19, mention is made of His ascension. In Luke 24:49, promise is given of the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. While John's Gospel ends with a reference to His second coming!

The predictive announcements which the Saviour made to His disciples of His forthcoming sufferings observe this principle, being *cumulative* in their respective revelations. "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed" (Mat 16:21). That supplied a general outline—in keeping with the law of first mention. "And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: and they shall kill him" (Mat 17:22-23). Here the additional fact of His being betrayed was mentioned. "And the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him" (Mat 20:18-19). Here, He enlarged upon the horrible indignities which He would suffer. "Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night" (Mat 26:31). There the perfidy of His own disciples was foretold. How like the Saviour it was to break the sad news to them gradually! What consideration for their feelings!

It is to be noted that in those announcements, as in all the other references which He made to His passion, the Lord spoke only of the *human* side thereof, being entirely silent upon the Godward aspect. In perfect accord with this law of progress, we have to proceed beyond the Gospels (which give a historical account of the external facts) to the Epistles, where the Spirit (sent to guide the apostles into "all truth") makes known the spiritual design and internal meaning of the Cross. There, we are informed that the death of Christ was both a propitiatory and an expiatory one—a satisfaction unto divine justice, a sacrifice which put away the sins of God's people. So too, in the Epistles themselves, we find that, while in the earlier ones the *individual* effects and blessings of redemption are more in view, in the latter ones, the individual is no longer prominent, rather is he seen as a part of a greater whole—a member of the body of Christ. True, in the latter ones, the individual is not ignored, but the *proportion* of the two aspects has changed. What is primary in the former becomes secondary in the latter. That is the natural order in the development of truth.

