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*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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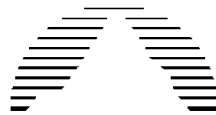
## CONTENTS

Forbidden Subjection .....	3
The Prayers of the Apostles .....	5
<i>29. Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 5</i>	
The Life and Times of Joshua.....	9
<i>9. His Response (1:10-18)</i>	
Spiritual Growth or Christian Progress.....	13
<i>12. Its Evidences</i>	
The Doctrine of Reconciliation.....	17
<i>10. Its Results</i>	

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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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## FORBIDDEN SUBJECTION

“And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ” (Mat 23:9-10). This passage supplies a pertinent illustration of something we make reference to every once in a while in these pages—namely, the danger of being misled by the sound of a verse through failing to ascertain its *sense*, and understanding it in a way which is contrary to the Analogy of Faith. According to the sound of its *words*, this passage prohibits the believer from designating his sire “father,” or his employer “master”; and by parity of reason, forbids him to be so addressed by others. But obviously, that cannot be its meaning; for if it be divorced from its context, and its terms taken absolutely at their face value, Scripture would be made to contradict itself. Christianity does not set aside the ordinary relations of life, but ennobles them. Christian sires are specifically called “fathers,” and their responsibilities as such are enforced (Eph 6:4-5). As Matthew 23:9 is not a rescinding of the child’s duty unto his parents, neither is it to be regarded as repressing believers from having respect and affection for their spiritual “fathers” (2Ki 2:12; 1Co 4:15).

In Ephesians 6:5 and Colossians 4:1, the Holy Spirit expressly terms Christian employers “masters” and presses their duties upon them; while in 1 Timothy 6:1 and Titus 2:9, servants are instructed how they are to conduct themselves unto them. Thus, in the light of these passages, it cannot be wrong for workmen to address their employer as “master,” or for a Christian employer to allow his men to call him such. Having pointed out what Matthew 23:9-10 does *not* mean, let us explain what it *does* signify. As a father is one to whom God has given authority over his children and is required to nurture and discipline them, so also a master is one who has the right to give orders to those whom he employs and to apportion the work of those men whom he hires—that is, in the natural sphere: in the home and workshop. But it was concerning the *religious* realm that Christ was here legislating, forbidding His disciples to look up to any man who posed as a pope, to subject themselves unto a tyrant who sought to have dominion over their faith, or regulate their conduct. Suffer none to usurp authority and rule over you is the force of Christ’s injunctions.

The key to Matthew 23:9-10 is found in the context. The Lord Jesus, who came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it, was giving instructions “to the multitude, *and* to his disciples” (Mat 23:1)—to the former in verse 3; to the latter in verses 8-11. “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat” (Mat 23:2); that is, they occupy positions of authority and demand full and implicit subjection from their followers. Whatsoever they enjoined—which was a legitimate enforcing of the Mosaic law—must be dutifully complied with. But they exceeded their rights, usurped authority, and set themselves up as tyrannical dictators, binding “heavy burdens and grievous to be borne” and laid them “on men’s shoulders” (Mat 23:4). By their self-devised enactments and traditions, such as the washing of hands, etc. (Mat 15:2), they invented a system of outward and ceremonial sanctity, which was stricter and more irksome than the Levitical law—their design being to gain a reputation of super-eminent piety before men (Mat 15:4-7). Now, says Christ to His disciples, Be ye not like unto such hypocrites in any of these respects, and refuse allegiance or submission to any who imitate them.

Such a word of warning has ever been needed by the Lord’s people, who are, for the most part, simple and unsophisticated, trustful, and readily imposed upon. And in each succeeding generation, there have appeared men of an officious and domineering spirit, who aspired to leadership and demanded subservieny from their fellows. Such men, when endowed with natural gifts above the average, become founders of new sects and parties, and insist upon unquestioning obedience from their disciples. *Their* interpretations of Scripture must not be questioned, their punctilios of piety must not be challenged, their dicta are final; in a word, they demand subjection to themselves as “fathers” and “masters.” Everyone must believe precisely what *they* teach, and regulate their conduct in all details according to their rules, or be branded heretics and condemned for gratifying the flesh. There have been, and still are, many little “popes” in the Protestant circles who consider themselves entitled to implicit credence and submission, whose decisions must be accepted without question.

“But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren” (Mat 23:8). No Christian—whatever be his gifts or graces—has any right to set himself up as an authoritative “rabbi” and give orders to his fellow-believers, for all of them are brethren—equal in rights, in privileges, and in their standing before God. For one to act as a Diotrephes (3Jo 9) is to usurp the prerogative of Christ (Col 1:18). Therefore, any who would affect lordship over those whom Christ purchased by His blood are to be

steadfastly opposed, their pretensions ignored, and their claims disallowed. "And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Mat 23:9). Suffer no man to be the director of your faith, or the governor of your life, any further than he produces a plain and decisive, "Thus saith the Lord" as the foundation of his appeal. "Not for that we have dominion over your faith" (2Co 1:24), said the chief of the apostles unto the saints: Faith rests not on the testimony of man, nor is it subject to any man, but to God alone.

"Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ" (Mat 23:10). All Christians are equally dependent upon and subject to one common Lord; and any man who sets himself up as a spiritual dictator is demanding that honour to which none—save the Redeemer—is entitled; and we are a party to his wicked presumption, if we yield deference to him and submit to his rule. To give place to his whims and wishes is to renounce our Christian liberty and to become serfs. To illustrate: If your pastor requires you to abstain from eating meat on Friday, or prohibits the lawful use of things (such as wine) which God had not interdicted, and yield to his demands, then you are "calling" him—owning him—as your "master." Romans 14:3-4 helps us to interpret Matthew 23:10. Certain Judaisers sought to bind burdens on Gentile saints which God has not appointed, and condemned them for a non-compliance with their demands. To them, Paul said, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?": He is not under your dominion, he owes no subjection to *you*. Then he added, "to his own master [which you are not] he standeth or falleth."

Thus, the simple meaning of Matthew 23:8-10 is, Let no Christian arrogate unto himself the right to frame laws and rules, and then require the submission of his fellows to them, for that is to usurp the right which belongs alone unto Christ. Allow no man to have dominion over your faith, to lord it over your conscience, to dictate unto you how you shall order the details of your life. "Ye are bought with a price [and belong to the Purchaser]; be not ye the servants of men" (1Co 7:23). Suffer none to bring you into the bondage of "the commandments and doctrines of men" and "Touch not; taste not; handle not..." (Col 2:21-22). "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Gal 5:1). Be regulated solely by the precepts of God's Word. Allow no pope or sect to rob you of the right of private judgment, and infringe not on the right of your brother.

More than once in the past, we have pointed out that the conditions which obtain in the profane world are but a repercussion of those which prevailed first in the professing world; that the state of things in the political, industrial, and social realm, is only a reflection of things in the ecclesiastical. God's Law was banished from the pulpit, and the assembly before lawlessness became rife in the community. Discipline ceased to be enforced in "the house of God" (the local church), before it disappeared from the home. Religious infidelity between those bearing the name of Christ and His open enemies was widespread ere martial infidelity became so general. A famine of hearing the Word of God preceded the world-wide food shortage, which we are now witnessing. And those who set up themselves as "masters" and "fathers" over the saints were the forerunners of national and international dictators. Christians at large took the line of least resistance and yielded much of their spiritual liberty; and now the rank and file of people are "directed" and "controlled" by the state. Having sown the wind, it is inevitable we should reap the whirlwind (Hos 8:7).

*Now read "Commanded Subjection" in the next issue.*

## THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

### 29. *Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 5*

Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679), the eminent Puritan, began his exposition of verse 17 by declaring, "This prayer of Paul's for the Ephesians is according to the utmost elevation and height of his own experience of what he could pray for." A later writer—for whose heavenly mindedness and spiritual judgment we have a high regard—said, "In this prayer of Paul's, he prayed like an apostle indeed, for he begged here for the greatest blessings which believers can, in this life, enjoy, or God Himself can bestow upon them. It may be said of this prayer that it is the greatest prayer which is to be found in the New Testament, that of our Lord in the seventeenth chapter of John only excepted" (Sam E. Pierce). While one nearer our own day pointed out, "In no part of Paul's letters does he rise to a higher level than in his prayers, and none of his prayers are fuller of fervour than this wonderful series of petitions. They open out one into the other like some magnificent suite of apartments in a great palace-temple, each leading into a loftier and more spacious hall, each drawing nearer the presence chamber, until at last we stand there" (Alexander Maclaren, 1826-1910).

With the above opinions and sentiments, we are entirely in accord. O that we had the capacity to—humanly and relatively at least—do this prayer, something like justice, as we attempt to "open" its sublime contents. That the apostle was here making request for no ordinary blessings is at once apparent by its opening sentence—for he there asks the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant unto His people, "according to the riches [not only of His "grace," but] of his *glory*" (Eph 3:16). That is, he besought the Father to bestow in accord with that rule or standard of measurement, asking for the most valuable and glorious things that the renewed mind can conceive. Four particular favours he here requested, and the order in which he preferred them is a strictly logical and necessary one; and therefore, one which cannot be changed without doing violence and damage to it. That order is both doctrinal and practical, experimental and climactic. They are distinguished from each other by the recurring, "that ye"; and the force of that "that" ("in order that") is causative and preparative.

There is a most intimate relation between the several petitions, each of them rising above and being a consequence of the preceding; the second being suggested by and leading out from the first; and the second in turn being both the condition and occasion of the third; and so with the subsequent one. They are like four steps of an ascent, each of which has to be trodden before the next can be reached. At the summit or top of the ascent is the petition that the saints might be "filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:19), for there can be nothing above or beyond that. *There* is the climax of all prayer, of all spiritual experience, of all soul bliss; and we make so bold to say that no uninspired mind had ever conceived of such a favour or experience. Yet that very experience is what writer and reader should earnestly covet; and that very favour is what *we* are fully warranted in asking for! But bear carefully in mind that the prayer does not begin there: that is the summit, and an ascent has to be claimed in order to reach it.

The first step—the initial favour sought—is "that...[ye may] be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph 3:16); and that is not only an indispensable requirement if we are to take the second step, but it is equally necessary as a preparation unto the third and fourth—only by the energizing enablement of the blessed Spirit are we capacitated to move forward and upward. The next step toward the summit—the second favour sought—is "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith"; and the consequence of our being believingly occupied with His perfections is our "being rooted and grounded in love" (Eph 3:17)—i.e. the Christian's life of devotedness and obedience to Christ thus growing out of and being based upon his love for Him—the reflex of His love to us. The third step of spiritual ascent and blessing sought is "that ye...May be able to comprehend...And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph 3:17-19). Love begets love. Love is reciprocal. First, faith centering upon the person and work of Christ stimulates love to Him, and that in turn fits the heart to enter more deeply into an understanding and enjoyment of His love. Such, in brief, is how we understand the ground covered to this point. Now to proceed.

"That ye...May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph 3:17-19). It is of prime importance for the nourishment, health, and fruitfulness of his spiritual life that the believer should be constantly occupied with the love of Christ. It has been well designated, "A subject altogether wonderful, mysterious, and

Divine, so great and so immense that the more real saints think of it, the more the Holy Spirit is pleased at any time to give them spiritual conceptions of it, the more they are swallowed up in admiring and adoring thoughts of it and crying out, *O the depth!*" (S. Pierce). Or as Thomas Goodwin expressed it: "It is a sea of love, a sea that knoweth neither shore nor bottom." There is nothing in nature which illustrates it, nothing in human history or experience which exemplifies it. Only in the Divine relations can we find any analogy; and there, one is given to us, which—though it fills the heart with joy and satisfaction—is nevertheless far above the grasp of our finite minds. Said the Lover of our souls, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you" (Joh 15:9). *That is such* a love as we can neither express nor conceive, yet it should be the one subject on which our hearts are continuously set and from which we daily drink.

"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you" (Joh 15:9). "As the Father loved Him from everlasting, so did He love them; as His Father loved Him with a love of complacency and delight, so did He love them; as the Father loved Him with a special and peculiar affection, with an unchanging, invariable, constant love, which would last forever, in like manner does Christ love His people" (John Gill, 1697-1771). Christ has loved His Church with all His soul from everlasting. His heart was fixed upon His Bride before all worlds. He loved her as the gift of the Father's love to Him. He loved her as presented to Him by the Father in all her beauty, glory, and excellency, in which she was forever to shine forth as His Wife in the kingdom of glory. He loved her as His mystical body, in whom all His glory was to be displayed and admired. He loved her as His "peculiar treasure" (Exo 19:5; Psa 135:4), as "the travail of his soul" (Isa 53:11), as His very own. He was to be her life, her light, her holiness, her righteousness, her perfection and glory—for she was to receive all from Him as her eternal Head and Husband. The origin and spring of Christ's love to His beloved is high and incomprehensible—for it originated in the Father's everlasting love to Him as God-man, and to them as the Spouse which He had chosen, loved, beautified, and bestowed on His dear Son.

The love of Christ unto His people and His heart in heaven towards them transcends all conception. His divine person stamps eternal perfection on His love, as well as everlasting worth, virtue, and efficacy on all His mediatorial acts. He who is the Son of the living God—as considered in His distinctive person in the Trinity, who is the God-man in His theanthropic person—is the One in whom the Church was loved, chosen, and accepted before the foundation of the world. His people were Divinely-appointed to partake with Him in all His communicable grace and glory, to share in all His honours, titles, and dignities, so far as they are shareable. Nothing would satisfy the heart of Christ, but that His redeemed should live with Him in heaven, to behold Him in His glory, and to be perfected in felicity by seeing Him as He is. The wonders contained in it are such as can never be fully explored. All that is contained in His love will never be comprehended by the saints; no, not in glory. That which hath been manifested of it in His incarnation, and in His obedience and suffering, is altogether beyond what saints can ever sufficiently appreciate and bless Him for. It is cause for deepest gratitude that we have been brought to know it, to believe it, and to enjoy it.

But since the love of Christ is so transcendent and mysterious, so infinite and incomprehensible, how can it be comprehended and known by us? Completely and perfectly it cannot, yet truly and satisfyingly, it may be. Christ's love to us is discovered in the Word of Truth; and as the Holy Spirit enlightens our understandings, we are capacitated to apprehend something of its wonders and blessedness. As the Holy Spirit strengthens us within and calls our faith into exercise, we are enabled to take in some spiritual views of it. Faith is to the soul what the eye is to the body—the organ or faculty by which light is admitted, and by which objects are seen and known. "Through faith we understand" (Heb 11:3) that which is beyond the comprehension of mere reason. Though we cannot fathom the love of Christ, we may drink into it. "We may know how excellent, how wonderful, how free, how disinterested, how longsuffering, how manifold, and constant it is, and that it is *infinite*. And this knowledge is the highest and most sanctifying of all knowledge. Those who thus know the love of Christ towards them purify themselves even as He is pure" (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878). Though we shall never be able to exhaust its unsearchable fulness; nevertheless, it is our privilege to know very much more of it and have a fuller enjoyment thereof than any of us have yet attained unto.

It should be the chief spiritual employment of the Christian to live in consideration and admiration of the wondrous love of Christ: to dwell upon it in his thoughts until his heart is warmed, his soul overflows with praise, and his whole life is constrained or influenced thereby. He should meditate daily on its *characteristics*: its freeness, its pureness, its untaintedness, its immutability—that Christ loves us more than we

love ourselves, that He loved us even while we hated Him, that nothing can change His love for us. We should ponder the *manifestations* of His love. First, in His acceptance of the Father's proposals in the everlasting covenant, whereby He freely consented to become the Sponsor of His fallen people and serve as their Surety. And then in His actual carrying out of that engagement. View Him leaving the holy tranquility and ineffable bliss of Heaven, where He was so worshipped and adored by all the celestial hosts and coming down to this scene of sin, strife, and suffering! What love was that!

Consider Jehovah's condescending to take upon Him a nature that was inferior to the angelic, so that when the Word became flesh, His Divine glory was almost completely eclipsed. Contemplate the unspeakable humiliation into which the Son of God descended, a humiliation which can only be gauged as we measure the distance between the throne of Heaven and the manger of Bethlehem. Bear in mind that—even as the incarnate One—He made Himself of no reputation, that instead of appearing in pomp and splendour, He “took upon him the form of a servant” (Phi 2:7). That He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, deeming not the most ignominious acts as beneath Him. Remember that *He knew* from the beginning the kind of treatment He would receive from those He befriended; that instead of being welcomed, appreciated, loved, and worshipped, He would be despised and rejected of men. That though He went about doing good, healing the sick, relieving the needy, preaching the Gospel to the poor, He would be opposed and persecuted by the religious leaders, hated without a cause, and misunderstood and ultimately deserted even by His own disciples. What love was that! Love indeed which passeth knowledge. Love which should ceaselessly occupy our hearts and shape our lives.

Reverently contemplate the unparalleled and unmeasureable sufferings which the eternal Lover of thy soul endured. Remove the shoes of carnal curiosity from thy feet and enter the dark shades of Gethsemane, and behold thy Saviour in agony of soul so intense that He shed great drops of blood. Then observe Him led as a Lamb to the slaughter and treated as the vilest of criminals. Ponder afresh the horrible insults which were heaped upon the Holy One, as wicked hands smote Him, spat in His face, plucked off His hair, and scourged Him. Behold the blasphemy of that mock coronation when they put a purple robe upon Him, placed a reed in His hand, and a crown of thorns on His head, and cried, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (Mat 27:29). View Him suspended upon the cross between two malefactors, mocked with vinegar and gall when He said, “I thirst” (Joh 19:28), and derided by the spectators. But more: Contemplate Him there, made sin for His people, made a curse for them, and accordingly smitten by the sword of Divine justice, so that He exclaimed, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46). In view of which, must we not say, “Christ also hath *loved* us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour” (Eph 5:2).

But the love of Christ for His people did not cease at His death, nor did the manifestations and evidences of it. His love was as fresh, as intense, and as active when He ascended on high, as it was when He was here below. It was with the interests of His people before Him that He ascended, entering heaven in their name: “Whither the forerunner is *for us* entered” (Heb 6:20). Having purged our sins with His own precious blood, Christ sat down upon the mediatorial throne; and having been given a name which is above every name, He was crowned with glory and honour *as* the Head of the Church, as the triumphant Conqueror of Satan and the grave. There, in His exalted state, He now shines forth within the veil before the saints—“the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23)—His heart filled with the same love towards His people as it ever was. As of old, Aaron wore a breastplate on which were inscribed all the tribes of Israel (Exo 28:29-30), so our great High Priest bears all the names of His people on His heart, as He appears before God on their behalf. The exercise of His love to them is seen in that “he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). So tender is His heart unto His own that, even in the Glory, He is still “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb 4:15).

Manifestations of the infinite and unchanging love of Christ are made to His people while they are left in this wilderness of sin: by His supplying their every need, by His making all things work together for their good, by His personal communings with them. The gift of the Holy Spirit was an outstanding evidence of His love to them (Joh 16:7; Act 2:33). Nor was that all: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). Are you favoured, dear reader, to sit under the ministry of a faithful pastor, who breaks to you the Bread of life, feeds you with knowledge and understanding, and stimulates you to run with patience the race that is set before you? Then you should look upon that pastor as the love-gift of your ascended Saviour. Do you find a book written by a servant of

God, or even a monthly magazine, edifying to your soul, made a blessing to your heart, supplying motives unto a godly walk, and affording comfort and encouragements amid the difficulties of the way? Then you should look upon the same as a gracious provision made for you by the *love* of Christ.

It is to be carefully noted that the apostle did not here pray that the saints might comprehend, absolutely, the love of Christ itself; but rather the *dimensions* of it. First, "*what is the breadth*" (Eph 3:18). This writer has long been impressed with the fact that *that* comes first—for is it not *there* our thoughts are most faulty? Are not many of us so wrapped up in the consideration of Christ's wondrous love to *me*, that we fail to appreciate its wider scope and blessed extent? Is it not, then, to correct this selfish tendency that the Holy Spirit mentions as the breadth of Christ's love first? And is it not also to counteract that sectarian spirit, which cramps the affections of so many of God's own people? It is also opposed to the modern error of dispensationalists, who would restrict the riches of Christ's love unto New Testament believers. No doubt it was immediately intended for the instruction of the Jewish saints, who were so slow to realise the love of Christ reached also unto sinners among the Gentiles. Christ's love extends to all the elect, in every age, in every place, in every state and case. It is a love which embraces the *whole* family of God, from the least to the greatest.

"*And length*" (Eph 3:18). Is not the order of these measures quite different from how an uninspired writer had arranged them?—different from the natural and logical order? Would we not—as so many of the commentators and sermonizers actually do, even with this verse before them—have gone from "breadth" to "depth"? But the Holy Spirit places first what we are apt to put last. If we are slow to grasp (in an experimental way) the compass of Christ's love, many are most tardy in apprehending (in a doctrinal way) the *eternity* of it. How many suppose that Christ only began to love them when they set their own affection upon Him: But "we love him, because he first loved us" (1Jo 4:19); and as His love knows no end, so it has no beginning, being from everlasting to everlasting. Says the Lord unto each of His people, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer 31:3)—His drawing us unto Himself is the effect of His love. Nor can our infirmities or even our iniquities quench it: "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them *unto the end*" (Joh 13:1)—nothing can separate us from it (Rom 8:35-39).

"*And depth*" (Eph 3:18). That can indeed be best comprehended by considering the amazing love of Christ to me personally—for if I have been made the subject of an inward work of grace, then I realise to some extent, actually and experimentally, the horrible pit in which I lay, and the awful moral distance to which my sins had separated me from the Holy One. I can apprehend better my own sad case than I can the plight of others; and therefore, I am better able to comprehend the amazing love of Christ in stooping so low as to lift me out of the miry clay, than I can the cases of others. The depth of Christ's love is to be contemplated in the light of the abject wretchedness unto which the fall plunged the Church, for its members are "by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph 2:3). It is to be contemplated in the light of our individual history, when as unregenerate, we departed farther and farther from God. It is to be contemplated in the light of the unparalleled depth of abasement and suffering, into which the Lord of glory descended to effect the deliverance and salvation of His people.

"*And height*" (Eph 3:18). If the breadth of Christ's love be boundless, its length endless, its depth fathomless, then assuredly its height is measureless. The "height" to which the love of Christ has elevated His redeemed is to be viewed in the light of two things: Their present privileges, and their future felicity. Both of which are best set forth in the language of Holy Writ itself: "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory" (1Sa 2:8). "Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off" (Isa 56:5). "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:16-17). "And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev 22:4-5).



## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

### 9. His Response (1:10-18)

“Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it” (Jos 1:10-11). It is striking to note the iteration of this word, “commanded.” First, the Lord declared unto Joshua, “Have not I commanded thee?” (Jos 1:9); then he commanded his officers, and they, in turn, commanded the people: The exercise of Divinely-given authority and the requirement of implicit obedience were essential, if success was to be theirs. And those two things are indispensable today, if we would have the Lord show Himself strong on our behalf. If the minister of the Gospel be required to “exhort, and rebuke with all authority” (Ti 2:15), those committed to his care are bidden, “Obey them that have the rule over you” (Heb 13:17). God requires from His people a subjection to the ministerial office, as truly as he does to the magisterial in the civil realm (Rom 13) and to the husband and parent in the domestic (Eph 5:22; 6:1). Discipline must be maintained in the house of God.

“*Prepare you victuals*” (Jos 1:11). A journey lay ahead, a strenuous campaign was before them, but the one thing enjoined by way of anticipation was “prepare you victuals.” The spiritual significance and application of that unto ourselves is obvious. If we would be strong and stout-hearted—and therefore equipped for our warfare—we must be well-fed: “Nourished up in the words of faith” (1Ti 4:6). The “victuals” are furnished us by God, but *we* must “prepare” them. At no point does God encourage slothfulness. Unless we give good heed to this injunction, we shall not be able to overcome our foes. That word is addressed as directly to us today as it was unto Israel in the time of Joshua. We are guilty of flagrant dishonesty if we appropriate to ourselves the promises, “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee...for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Jos 1:5, 9), and disregard the precepts, “Meditate therein day and night...Observe to do according to all that is written...Be strong and of a good courage...Prepare you victuals” (Jos 1:8, 9, 11).

“*Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan*” (Jos 1:11). One had naturally expected that order to “prepare you *boats*”—for there was no bridge across the river. There had been none over the Red Sea, yet Israel had crossed it safely, dryshod—and that without recourse to boats or rafts. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out, “He that brought them out of Egypt on eagle’s wings, would in like manner bear them into Canaan.” Such was evidently Joshua’s expectation on this occasion. He was fully assured that if he and those under him rendered obedience to the Divine Will, they would count upon God’s help; hence, his contemptuous “*this Jordan*”—it would present no difficulty to Omnipotence, nor need it dismay them. “Within three days ye *shall* pass over this Jordan”—not “ye may” nor “ye shall attempt to do so”: It was the language of full confidence—not in them, nor in himself, but in the living God. Such must be the spirit of those who feed and lead God’s people today; otherwise, they will depress rather than hearten.

There is an important typical and spiritual truth contained in that “three days”: It is the number of resurrection. It is only as the Christian conducts himself as one who is risen with Christ that he can overcome the flesh, the world, and the Devil; and that requires two things from him: The exercise of faith and of obedience. Faith seeing myself as God sees me, faith viewing myself as one with Christ in His death and resurrection, faith appropriating His victory over sin, death, and Satan. “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). That is the “reckoning” of faith—for feelings have nothing whatever to do with it. It is taking our stand on the infallible Word of God, irrespective of our conscious “experience.” In the reckoning of the Divine Law, the one who trustfully commits his soul unto Christ has “passed from death unto life” (Joh 5:24), and faith is to accept that blessed truth on the bare but all-sufficient authority of God. The believer is legally and vitally united to a risen and triumphant Saviour.

What has just been pointed out is of first importance. There can be no real peace for the conscience, no substantial rest of soul, no lasting joy of heart, until the Christian is assured on the authority of Him who cannot lie that “our old man is [Greek “was”] crucified with him” (Rom 6:6); and that we are “risen with Christ” (Col 3:1). The believer cannot *walk* on resurrection ground, until it is a settled and glorious fact in his mind that he is *on* resurrection ground, legally one with his risen Surety, rejoicing that “there is there-

fore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1); yea, glorying in the fact that the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to his account. When that is received by faith, then "the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh 8:10). I cannot possibly go forward and "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Ti 6:12), nor expect any success in overcoming the Canaanites, so long as I doubt my acceptance before God and fail to realise my union with Christ. That is foundational; and we repeat, feelings have nothing whatever to do with it.

But something more than the exercise of faith—resting on the declarations of Holy Writ—is required if I am to enter experimentally and practically into the good of my being legally one with Christ; and that is, the rendering of obedience to Him. "He died for all [His people], that they which live [legally] should not henceforth live [practically] unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2Co 5:15). "But now we are delivered from [the curse of] the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit" (Rom 7:6)—from a spirit of gratitude and joy. Henceforth the Christian is to "walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4): A new principle is to actuate him—love; a new design is to regulate him—honouring his Master. The self-will which dominated him while unregenerate is to be displaced by seeking to please Christ in all things. *That* is to "walk in newness of life," on resurrection ground.

The antitypical Canaan is ours. It is the "purchased possession" (Eph 1:14) bought by Christ's precious blood. That inheritance is to be enjoyed *now*: by faith, by hope, by fixing our affection upon things above. As we do so, we experimentally "possess our possessions." "The upright shall have good things in possession" (Pro 28:10)—not merely in prospect, but in actual possession. But there are powerful foes seeking to keep us from enjoying our heritage! True, but we may obtain victory over them, as Israel did over theirs. We may, we shall, in proportion, as faith is in exercise and as we walk obediently. Note the precision and meaning of Joshua's language: "To go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God *giveth* you to possess it" (Jos 1:11). God had given Canaan in promise long before (Jos 1:3), but that promise was to be realised by *that* generation, according as they submitted themselves to Him. So it is with us: God will give us a present possession, if we meet His requirements.

The Lord God had sworn unto their fathers, "to give them" the land Canaan (Jos 1:6), yet that did not preclude strenuous efforts on their part. Hitherto He had furnished them with manna—for there was nothing in the wilderness they could live upon—but now His command was, "Prepare you victuals" (Jos 1:11); and that was indicative of what was required from *them*: They must discharge their responsibility. The Lord never panders to laziness: It is the one who is out and out for Him who enjoys most of His smile. A protracted conflict had to be waged, and success therein was made dependent upon their implicit compliance with God's orders through Joshua—only thus would He give the land into their possession. That is the central message of this book: Unreserved obedience, as the condition of God's putting forth His power against our enemies and bringing us into the enjoyment of our inheritance.

*"And to the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, spake Joshua, saying, Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you"* (Jos 1:12-13). The reference is to what is recorded in Numbers 32. Upon Israel's conquest of the kingdoms of the Amorites and Bashan (Num 32:33), the two and half tribes who had "a very great multitude of cattle" (Num 32:1) came to Moses and asked, "Let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan" (Num 32:5). At first, he was very displeased, regarding their request as proceeding from unbelief and from an unwillingness to bear their share in the fighting which lay ahead. But being assured that on permission being granted them to build sheepfolds for their cattle and dwellings for their children, their men-folk would accompany the other tribes and fight with them until Canaan was conquered (Num 32:16-19), Moses consented to their proposal (Num 32:20-24).

If careful attention be paid to Moses' words on that occasion, we see how that incident supplied a striking illustration of what is dominant in this book. Numbers 32:33 says, "he *gave* unto them" that portion of country, yet it was not an absolute grant but a provisional one, which turned upon the faithful discharge of their responsibility. If the reader does not like the sound of that statement, if it clashes with his "belief," let him pay extra diligence to what follows, and if needs be, *correct* his "beliefs." "And Moses said unto them, *If ye will do* this thing, if ye will go armed before the LORD to war...until...the land be subdued before the LORD: *then* afterward ye shall return [to your side of the Jordan], and be guiltless before the LORD, and before Israel; and this land *shall be* your possession before the LORD" (Num 32:20-22). They agreed: "Thy servants will do as my lord commandeth" (Num 32:25).

Then we are told, "So concerning them Moses commanded Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun" (Num 32:28). Accordingly, now that Moses was dead and the Lord's time had come for Israel to enter Canaan, Joshua said unto those two and a half tribes, "*Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you*" (Jos 1:13). In so doing, he complied with his commission, for Jehovah had bidden him, "observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee" (Jos 1:7); and this was one of those things (Num 32:28)! It was not natural prudence or a spirit of expediency which actuated Joshua to seek their co-operation; still less was it from fear that the remaining tribes would be insufficient for the task confronting them—but it was obedience to his Master which regulated his action.

Joshua did not take it for granted that the two and a half tribes would now carry out their agreement, but he definitely reminded them of the same and held them to it. But note *how* he did so. He did not beg for their compliance as a favour unto himself—I hope you will be willing to serve under *me*. Nor did he appeal on behalf of their brethren—the other tribes will be encouraged if you are willing to help them. Nor did he bid them to remember their promise to Moses. No, he pressed upon them the *Word* of God! That is another lesson for the servants of God to heed today: If we would honour Him, *we* must honour His Word, by enforcing its requirements. "God...now *commandeth* all men every where to repent" should be their language to the unsaved.

"Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land. Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle, shall remain in the land...but ye shall pass before your brethren armed, all the mighty men of valour, and help them; Until the LORD have given your brethren rest, as he hath given you, and they also have possessed the land which the LORD your God giveth them: then ye shall return unto the land of your possession, and enjoy it" (Jos 1:13-15). There are a number of things here on which we can but briefly touch. That word "remember" signifies "heed" and is invariably a call to obedience. The fact that their portion had *already* been "given," it placed an additional obligation on them—gratitude demanded their compliance. As M. Henry reminds us, "When God by His providence has given us rest, we ought to consider how we may honour Him with the advantages of it, and what service we may do to our brethren."

Once again, we would call attention to the truth here exemplified: We cannot enter into our inheritance without fighting. See how the two aspects combine: The eastern country of the Jordan had already been allotted and given to the two and a half tribes—but *they* must now bear their share in the conquest of Canaan. Nay, they must take the lead in the fighting: "*Ye shall pass before your brethren armed*" (Jos 1:14)—they were to form the 'spearhead' of Israel's army. See the meetness and justice of that arrangement: They had obtained their inheritance *before* any of their brethren, and so they must be in the van.<sup>1</sup> And thus, it came to pass: When the Jordan was crossed, the two and a half tribes "passed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses spake unto them" (Jos 4:12). Observe it was "the mighty men of valour" (Jos 1:14) who did so—there were no women in the 'forces'!

"*And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the LORD thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses*" (Jos 1:16-17). If we wrote a separate article on these verses, we should entitle it, "Joshua's encouragement" and dwell upon the relation between this incident, and that which precedes. It is ever God's way to honour those who honour Him. Joshua had promptly complied with his commission and had magnified God's Word; and now He moved those two and a half tribes to willingly serve under him. In his words, "Until the LORD have given your brethren rest...and they also have possessed the land" (Jos 1:15), he had spoken in unwavering faith as to the outcome; and now the Lord graciously inclined these men to fully co-operate with him.

Those two and a half tribes might have pleaded that their agreement had been made with *Moses*; and that since death cancels all contracts, his decease released them from their engagement. But instead, they averred their unqualified readiness to accept Joshua as their leader and yield to his authority. Their promise to him went beyond what they had pledged unto Moses. Joshua had received the assurance, "Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Jos 1:9); and in His moving those two and a half tribes to loyal subjection unto Joshua, He gave the initial manifestation and earnest of His fulfilment of the same. Their promise to Joshua on this occasion was no idle boast, for as

<sup>1</sup> **van** – the front line of an army in battle (vanguard).

Joshua 22:1-6 shows, they faithfully kept their word. "Only the LORD thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses" (Jos 1:17) should be regarded as their prayer for him.

*"Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage"* (Jos 1:18). They suggested that this military edict should be enacted in order to prevent cowardice and disloyalty on the part of others in the army, implying their readiness to co-operate in the enforcing of the same. It is probable that they had in mind the Lord's word unto Moses, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will *require it of him*" (Deu 18:18-19). We know that prophecy received its ultimate fulfilment in Christ, but Joshua was a type of Him. "Only be strong and of a good courage" was tantamount to their declaring, "We, for our part, will do nothing to weaken thy hands, but on the contrary, will do all in our power to make thy lot easier!" Such should ever be the attitude of the Christian unto both magistrates and the ministers of the Gospel.

## SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

### *12. Its Evidences*

What are the principal marks of spiritual growth? What are the outstanding characteristics of the Christian's progress? To some of our readers, that may appear a simple question, admitting of a ready answer. From one standpoint, that is so; yet if we are to view it in its proper perspective, careful consideration is called for ere we make reply. If we bear in mind the real nature of spiritual growth and remember it is like that of a tree—downward as well as upward; inward as well as outward—we shall be preserved from mere generalisations. If, too, we take into account the three grades under which Christians are grouped, we shall be careful to distinguish between those things which, respectively, evidence growth in the “babes,” in the “young men,” and in the “fathers” in Christ. That which is suited to and marks the growth of a babe in Christ applies not unto one who has reached a more advanced form in His school; and that which characterizes the full-grown Christian is not to be looked for in the immature one. It follows, then, that certain distinctions must be drawn, if a definite and detailed answer is to be furnished unto our opening inquiry.

But since we have already written at some length on the three grades of Christian development, and have sought to describe those features which pertain more distinctively unto those in the stage of the “blade,” the “ear,” and “the full corn in the ear,” there is no need for us now to go over the same ground. If it be borne in mind that growth is a *relative* thing, we shall see that the same unit of measurement is not applicable to all cases—as the yardstick is the best means for gauging the growth of children, but the weighing-scales for registering that of adults. Then, too, if we take into consideration, as we should, differences of privilege and opportunity, of teaching and training, of station and circumstances, a uniform progress should not be expected. Some believers have much more to contend against than others. It is not that we would limit the grace of God, but that we should recognise and take into account the distinctions which Scripture itself draws. The relative growth of one who is severely handicapped may be much greater in reality than that of another who, in more favourable circumstances, makes greater progress.

The man who plants a fruit tree in a fertile valley is warranted to expect a better yield from it than one which is set in the soil of an exposed hillside. When a young Christian is favoured with pious parents, or brothers and sisters who encourage him both by counsel and example, how much more may be looked for from him than another who dwells in the home of the ungodly. An unmarried woman who does not have to earn her living has much more opportunity for reading, meditation, prayer, and the nurture of her spiritual life, than one who has the care of a young family. One who is privileged to sit regularly under an edifying ministry has better opportunity for Christian progress, than another who is denied such a privilege. Again, the man with two talents cannot produce as much as another with five, yet if the former gain another two by them, he does just as well proportionately as the one who makes his five into ten. The Lord Himself takes note of such differences: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luk 12:48).

Let us also point out that we are not now going to write upon the marks or signs of spiritual life as such, but rather, of the evidences of the *growth* of spiritual life—a much harder task. When we endeavour to examine ourselves for them, it is of great importance that we should know *what* to look for. If the Christian expects to find an improvement in the “old man,” he will most certainly be disappointed: If he looks for a waning of natural pride, a lessening of the workings of unbelief, a cessation of the risings within him of rebellion against God, he will look in vain. Yet how many Christians *are* bitterly disappointed over this very thing and greatly cast down by the same. But they ought not to be—for God has nowhere promised to sublimate or spiritualise the “flesh” nor to eradicate our corruptions in this life—yet it is the Christian's duty and privilege to so “walk in the Spirit” that he “shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). Though we should be deeply humbled over our corruptions and mourn for them, yet our painful awareness of the same should not cause us to conclude we have made no spiritual growth.

An increasing realization of our native depravity, a growing discovery of how much there is within us that is opposed to God—with a corresponding despising of ourselves for the same—is one of the surest evidences that we are growing in grace. The more the light of God shines into our hearts, the more are we made aware of the filth and wickedness which indwell them. The better we become acquainted with God

and learn of His ineffable purity, the more conscious do we become of our base impurity and bewail the same. That is a growing downwards, or becoming less in our own esteem. And it is *that* which makes way for an increasing valuation of the atoning and cleansing blood of Christ, and a more frequent betaking of ourselves to that Fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness. Thus, if Christ is becoming more precious unto you, if you perceive with increasing clearness His suitability for such a vile wretch as you know yourself to be, and if that perception leads you to cast yourself more and more upon Him—as a drowning man does to a log—then that is clear proof you are growing in grace.

Growth is silent, and at the same time, imperceptible to our senses—though later, it is evident. Growth is gradual; and full development is not reached in a day, nor in a year. Time must be allowed before proof can be obtained. We should not attempt to gauge our growth by our feelings, but rather, by looking into the glass of God's Word and measuring ourselves by the standard which is there set before us. There may be real progress, even where there be less inward comforts. Am I denying myself more now than I did formerly? Am I less enthralled by the attractions of this world than I used to be? Are the details of my daily life being more strictly regulated by the precepts of Holy Writ? Am I more resigned to the blessed will of God, assured that He knows what is best for me? Is my confidence in God growing, so that I am more and more leaving myself and my affairs in His hands? Those are some of the tests we should apply to ourselves, if we would ascertain whether or not we be growing in grace.

1. Consider *the work of mortification* and seek to ascertain what proficiency you are making therein. There can be no progress in the Christian life while that work be unattended to. God does not remove indwelling sin from His people, but He does require them to make no provision unto its lusts, to resist its strivings, and to deny its solicitations. His call is: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth" (Col 3:5). "Put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph 4:22). "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1Pe 2:11). "Keep yourselves from idols" (1Jo 5:21). That is the lifelong task God has assigned us: For as long as we remain in this body, the flesh will oppose from within; and the world, from without. If we become slack in the performance of this duty, sin and Satan will gain more and more of an advantage over us. But if we be faithful and diligent therein, our efforts—by the Spirit's enablement—will not be altogether in vain.

But most of our readers—perhaps all of them—will exclaim, But his is the very matter in which I meet with most discouragement; and if I am honest, it appears to me that my efforts are utterly in vain. Despite my utmost endeavours, my lusts still master me, and I am repeatedly brought into captivity by sin. Though such be the case, that goes not to show your efforts were useless. God has nowhere promised that if you do so and so, indwelling sin shall become inoperative, or that your lusts shall become weaker and weaker. There is widespread misunderstanding on this subject. The word "mortify" signifies "put to death," but it must be carefully borne in mind that it is used *figuratively* and not literally—for it is a physical term applied to what is immaterial. Through no possible process can the Christian—not with the Spirit's help—render his lusts *lifeless*. They may at times appear so to his consciousness, yet it will not be long ere he is again aware that they are vigorous and active. The holiest of God's people, in all ages, have borne testimony to the power and prevalency of their corruptions; and that, to their last hour.

It needs then to be carefully defined what is meant by the word "mortify." Since it does not signify, "slay or extinguish indwelling sin" nor "render lifeless your lusts," what is intended? This: Die unto them in your affections, your intentions, your resolutions, your efforts. We mortify sin by detesting it: "Who-soever *hateth* his brother is a *murderer*" (1Jo 3:15); and just so far as we really hate our corruptions, have we morally slain them. The Christian evidences his hatred of sin by mourning when it has gained an advantage over him. If it be his sincere intention and honest resolution to subdue every rising of his native depravity and the commission of every sin, then in the sight of Him who accepts the will for the deed, he *has* "mortified" them. Whenever the believer contritely confesses his sins unto God and "forsakes" them, so far as any purpose to repeat them is concerned, he *has* "mortified" them. If he truly loathes, grieves over, and acknowledges his failures unto God, then he can say, "that which I do I *allow not*" (Rom 7:15).

"The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1Sa 16:7) needs to be borne in mind on this subject. "If a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die" (Deu 22:25). In the verses which follow, we read, "there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death" (Deu 22:26). Not only did she not consent hereto, but we are told "the betrothed damsel cried, and there was none to save her" (Deu 22:27). Now, that has a spiritual application to us. If a believer be suddenly surprised by a temptation

which is unto something forbidden by God, and his heart agrees not thereunto—but he offers a resistance, which is, however, unavailing—though he be not guiltless therein, yet his case is very different from that of the unregenerate who found the temptation agreeable and responded heartily thereto. Note how the Spirit has recorded of Joseph of Arimathea, that though he was a member of the Sanhedrin which condemned Christ to death, yet “the same had *not consented* to the counsel and deed of them” (Luk 23:51)!

“What is sanctification? Sanctification is a work of God’s grace, whereby they whom God hath before the foundation of the world chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of His Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life and all other saving graces put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased and strengthened, as that they *more and more die unto sin* and rise unto newness of life” (Westminster Catechism). The words we have emphasized have occasioned much grief and anxiety unto many—for measuring themselves by them, they concluded they had never been sanctified. But it should be noted, it is not there said that “*sin* is more and more dying in them,” but that *they* “more and more die *unto sin*”—which is a very different thing. Christians do, as pointed out above, die more and more unto sin in their affections, intentions, and efforts. Yet we fail to find any warrant in Scripture for saying, “the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened.”

Having sought to show what the word “mortify” does not denote in its application to the Christian’s conflict with sin—and what it does signify—let us, in a few words, point out wherein the believer may be said to be making progress in this essential work. He is progressing therein when he girds himself more diligently and resolutely unto this task, refusing to allow seeming failure therein to cause him to give up in despair. He is making progress therein as he learns to make conscience of things which the world condemns not, by being regulated by God’s Word, rather than public opinion, or leaning unto his own understanding. He is making progress therein when he obtains a clear insight of spiritual corruptions, so that he is exercised not only over worldly lusts and gross evils, but over coldness of heart, unbelief, pride, impatience, self-confidence; and thus, he would cleanse himself from all filthiness of “spirit,” as well as “of the flesh” (2Co 7:1). In short, he is growing in grace, if he be maintaining a stricter and more regular watch over his heart.

2. Consider *the work of living unto God* and seek to ascertain in what proficiency you are making therein. The measure and constancy of our yieldedness and devotedness unto God is another criterion by which we may ascertain whether or not we be really growing in grace—for to lapse into a course of self-pleasing is a sure symptom of backsliding. Am I increasingly giving up myself unto God, employing my faculties and powers in seeking to please and glorify Him? Am I endeavouring, with intensified earnestness and diligence, to act in accordance with the surrender I made of myself to Him at my conversion, and to the dedication of myself to His service at my baptism? Am I finding deeper delight therein, or is His service becoming irksome? If the latter, then that is clear proof that I have deteriorated—for there has been no change in Him, nor in His claims upon me. If love be healthy, then my greatest joy will be in making Him my chief Object and supreme End; but if I seek to do so only from a sense of obligation and duty, then my love has cooled.

“Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). Probably that means, in part at least, Let no compartment of your complex being be reserved or retained for *self*, but desire and pray that God may possess you wholly. Is that the deepest longing and endeavour of your heart? Are you finding increasing pleasure in the will and ways of the Lord? Then you are following on to know Him. Are you making a more determined and continuous effort to “Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10)? Then that evidences you are growing in grace. Are you less influenced than formerly by how others think and act, and requiring nothing less than a “Thus saith the Lord” for your monitor? Then you are becoming more rooted and grounded in the Faith. Are you more watchful against those things which would break, or at least chill, your communion with God? Then you are going forward in the Christian life.

To be increasingly devoted unto God requires that I be increasingly occupied and absorbed with Him. To that end, I need to daily study the revelation which He has made of Himself in the Scriptures, and particularly in Christ. I need also to meditate frequently upon His wondrous perfections: His amazing grace, unfathomable love, His ineffable holiness, His unchanging faithfulness, His mighty power, His infinite long-sufferance. If I contemplate Him thus with the eyes of faith and love, then shall I be able to say, “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD [the

place of nearness and fellowship with Him] all the days of my life, to behold the *beauty* of the LORD” (Psa 27:4). The one who can do that must perforce exclaim, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25). That, my reader, is not a mere rhetorical utterance, but the language of one whose heart has been won by the Lord.

3. Consider *the Word of God* and seek to measure yourself by the degree in which you really *honour it*. What place do the contents of the Sacred Volume have in your affections, thoughts, and life: a higher one than formerly, or not? Is that Divine communication more valued by you today than when you were first converted? Are you more fully assured of its Divine inspiration, so that Satan himself could not make you doubt its Authorship? Are you more solemnly impressed by its authority, so that at times, you tremble before it? Does the Truth come with greater weight, so that your heart and conscience is more deeply impressed by it? Are more of its very words treasured up in your memory and frequently meditated upon? Are you really feeding upon it: appropriating it unto yourself, mixing faith therewith, and being nourished by it? Are you learning to make it your Shield, on which you catch and quench the fiery darts of the wicked? Are you like the Bereans (Act 17:11), bringing to this infallible Scale and weighing therein all you read and hear?

Carefully bear in mind the purpose for which the Scriptures were given to us, the particular benefits they are designed to bestow. They are “profitable for doctrine” (2Ti 3:16), and *their* doctrine is far more than a theological treatise addressed to the intellect or a philosophical system which furnishes an explanation of man’s origin, constitution, and relation to God. It is “the doctrine which is according to *godliness*” (1Ti 6:3)—every part of which is designed to exalt God and abase man according to Him, His rightful place over us, and our dependence upon and subjection to Him. It is profitable “for reproof,” to acquaint us with our innumerable faults and failures, and to admonish us for the same. It is “a *discerner* of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12), probing into our innermost beings and condemning all within us which is impure. It is profitable “for correction,” to teach us what is right and pleasing unto God; and such is its potency that the more we are regulated by it, the more are our souls renovated and purified. It is profitable “for instruction in righteousness,” for producing integrity of character and conduct. It is for the enlightening of our minds, the instructing of our consciences, the regulating of our wills.

Now, my reader, test yourself by those considerations, fairly and impartially. Are you finding the Scriptures increasingly profitable for “the doctrine which is according to godliness”? If so, they are producing in you a deeper and more extensive piety. Are you more and more opening your heart unto their “reproof,” not confining yourself to those portions which comfort, and avoiding those parts which admonish and condemn you? If so, then you are cultivating closer dealings with God. Are you increasingly desirous of being “corrected” by their searching and holy teachings? If so, then you diligently endeavour to promptly put right whatever they show is wrong in you. Are they really instructing you in righteousness, so that your deportment is becoming in the fuller conformity to their standard? If so, you are more shunned by worldlings and less esteemed by empty professors. Do you frequently examine yourself by God’s Word and test your experience by its teaching? If so, you are becoming more skilled in the Word of Righteousness (Heb 5:13) and more pleasing unto its Author.



## THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

### 10. *Its Results*

In the previous articles, we have shown at some length the need for and the nature of reconciliation being effected between God and those who have broken His Law. We have dwelt upon the amazing fact that, though He was the One wronged, yet God took the initiative and is the Author of recovering the rebellious unto Himself. We have seen how that project engaged His eternal counsels in the Everlasting Covenant; and that therein, His wisdom found a way whereby His love might flow forth unto the guilty without any sully of His holiness or flouting of His justice, and how that the Son fully concurred in the Father's counsels and voluntarily performed the stupendous work in order to their accomplishment. We have already considered that which God requires from sinners, if they are to become actual participants of the good of Christ's mediation and personally "*receive the atonement*" (Rom 5:11), or reconciliation. We are, therefore, now ready to contemplate the "results" or fruits of that reconciliation—the consequences which follow from the new relation to God and His Law, which the sinner enters into upon his repentance and saving acceptance of the Gospel.

Causes and their effects need ever to be distinguished if we are to obtain something more than a vague and general idea of the things with which they are concerned. It is by confounding principles and their products that so many are confused. As we have shown in previous articles, reconciliation is one of the principal results which issue from the sacrifice of Christ. Strictly speaking, it has a fourfold cause. The will of the Father, or His eternal counsels, was its *originating* cause. The mediation of the incarnate Son is its *meritorious* and procuring cause. The work of the Spirit in the souls of the elect is the *efficient* cause—for it is by His gracious and invincible operations they are capacitated to do that which God requires of them, before they become actual partakers of the benefits of Christ's mediation. The repentance and faith of the awakened and convicted sinner is the *instrumental* cause, whereby he is reconciled to God. We say that reconciliation is one of the principal results from Christ's sacrifice—redemption, remission, and sanctification are others; and they are all so intimately related that it is not easy to prevent an overlapping of them in our thoughts. But in what follows, we shall treat, mainly, not of the effect of Christ's redemptive work, but rather the results of reconciliation itself.

Perhaps the most comprehensive of any single statement in Holy Writ concerning the outcome of reconciliation is found in that brief, but pregnant word: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might *bring us to God*" (1Pe 3:18). "Bring us to God" is a general expression for the whole benefit which ensues from reconciliation, including the removal of all obstacles and impediments, and the bestowment of all requisites and blessings. Formerly, there was a legal hostility and moral dissimilarity between God and us, with the want of intercourse and fellowship; but now, those who were once "far off are made nigh" (Eph 2:13). In consequence of what Christ did and suffered, His people have been enslated into life, brought into the favour of God, become partakers of the nature of God, have restored to them the image of God, are given access to God, are favoured to have communion with Him, and will yet enjoy the eternal and ineffable vision of Him. Let that serve as our outline.

1. The initial consequence of our reconciliation to God by Christ is that we have life: *a life in Law*. That is an aspect of our subject, which, fundamental though it be, has received scarcely any attention from theologians and Bible teachers. It is one which is familiar to few of God's people, and therefore, calls for both explanation and elaboration. By our sin and fall in Adam, we died legally, our life-in-law was lost, for we came under its curse. The Divine Judge had threatened our federal head: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17) and "in Adam all die" (1Co 15:22). The case of each descendant of his upon entering this world is like that of a murderer in the condemned cell—awaiting the hour of execution, unless he be reprieved. We are, by nature, "the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3); and until we savingly believe in the Son, "the wrath of God abideth" (Joh 3:36) on us. We have no life in Law, no title to its award, but are transgressors; and as such, under its death sentence—"condemned already" (Joh 3:18).

The consequence of Adam's dying legally was that he also died spiritually; that is, his soul became vitiated and depraved: he lost the moral image of God, and the capacity to enjoy Him or please Him. Legal death and spiritual death are quite distinct (Joh 5:24); the latter being entailed by the former. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men" (Rom 5:12)—not simply "entered into" all men, but "passed upon" them as a judicial sentence. "By the offence of

one judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (Rom 5:18): The guilt of the federal head was imputed unto all he represented—evidenced by so many dying in infancy, for since even physical death is part of the wages of sin and infants having not personally committed any, they must be suffering the consequences of the sin of another. But Adam died spiritually, as well as legally; and his depravity is imparted to all his descendants, so that they enter this world both legally and spiritually “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18).

Now it is only by Christ, “the last Adam” (1Co 15:45), that we can regain life, either legally or spiritually. That they obtain *spiritual* life from Christ, is well understood by the saint; but His having secured for them a life *in Law*, most of them are quite ignorant about. Yet Romans 5 is very emphatic on the point: “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one [i.e. a single transgression]; much more they which receive abundance of grace [to meet not only the original, but their own innumerable transgressions] and of the gift of righteousness [i.e. the imputed obedience of Christ] shall *reign in life* by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification *of life*” (Rom 5:17-18)—note well that last clause: *not* “the free gift entered into all men unto regeneration of life.” Justification is entirely a *legal* matter and concerns our status before the Lawgiver. As God’s elect lost their life in law through the disobedience of their first federal head, so the obedience of their last Federal Head has secured for them a life in law.

Christ is the Fountain of life unto all His spiritual seed; and that, not as the second Person in the Trinity, but as the God-man Mediator. “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell” (Col 1:19), which has reference to Christ *officially*, and not essentially. Failure to grasp that truth has resulted in some verses of Scripture being grievously misunderstood and misinterpreted, to the dishonouring of our blessed Lord. For instance, when He declared, “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (Joh 5:26), He was there speaking of Himself as incarnate. As God the Son, co-essential and co-glorious with the Father, He *always had* “life in himself”—“in him *was* life” (Joh 1:4), which refers to His essential person *before* He became incarnate. But as God-man Mediator, the Father gave Him “*to have* life in himself” (Joh 5:26): He gave Him a mediatorial life and fulness of His people. “As thou hast *given him* power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him” (Joh 17:2) presents the same aspect of Truth—Christ was there speaking as the Mediator, as is evident from His high priestly prayer which immediately follows.

“As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me” (Joh 6:57). That title, “the living Father” respects Him in connection with the economy of redemption and expresses His supremacy over the *office* of His Son, as the One who covenanted and set Him forth on His grand mission. In His Godhead, the Son has life—has it essentially, originally, independently in Himself, as a Person co-eternal with the Father. But as Mediator, the life which Christ lived and lives unto God—and which, in the discharge of His mediatorial office, He bestows on His people—is *derived* from and is *dependent* upon the will of the Father; for in office, the Son is lower than and inferior to the Father—in *that* respect, and in that *only*, “my Father is greater than I” (Joh 14:28), He declared. In affirming that “I live *by* the Father” (Joh 6:57), Christ signified that His mediatorial life was *sustained* by the Father. Let it be clearly understood that in John 6:57, the Lord Jesus was speaking of Himself *officially*, mediatorially, and not essentially as God the Son.

“I live by the Father” (Joh 6:57). The Father prepared a body for Him (Heb 10:5), and all the days of His flesh was upholding Him by the right hand of His righteousness. Christ definitely acknowledged this again and again, both by the Spirit of prophecy and by His ministerial utterances: “Thou *maintainest* my lot...I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psa 16:5, 8). “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will *help* me; therefore shall I not be confounded” (Isa 50:6-7). “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (Joh 6:38). “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (Joh 14:10). “As the Father gave me commandment, even so I do” (Joh 14:31). In all these passages, He spake as the dependent One, the Mediator.

By purchase, Christ *ratified* His title to the mediatorial life: “Now the God of peace [the propitiated and the reconciled One], that brought again from the dead [not “the” but] *our* Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep” (Heb 13:20). It was neither as God the Son, nor as the God-man considered as a *private*

person, that God raised Him; but as the God-man Mediator and Surety of His people—by His own essential power (also) Christ emerged from the tomb: John 2:19; 10:17. By the right of conquest, Christ *secured* the mediatorial life, being made a royal priest “after the power of an endless life” (Heb 7:16). “He *asked* life of thee” (compare Psalm 2:8!): “Thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever” (Psa 21:4). He had an official right and title to life, because He had magnified the law and made it honourable (Isa 42:21)—magnified it by rendering to it a personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience in thought, word, and deed; and that, as the God-man Mediator. “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall *live* by them” (Rom 10:5).

It has not been sufficiently recognised that the converse of “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23) is “the award of obedience is life”! The first man violated the Law, and therefore, suffered its penalty; but the last Man fulfilled the Law, and therefore, obtained a right to its reward. Christ found the Commandment “ordained to life” (Rom 7:10); and it was for that life (the reward of the Law) He “asked” (Psa 21:4), and which He received (Heb 7:16) after He had vanquished death. Christ “reign[s] in life” (Rom 5:17), in “justification of life” (Rom 5:18; and compare Isa 50:8 and 1Ti 3:16). Christ now “liveth unto God” (Rom 6:10); and He does so as the last Adam, as our Representative. Christ’s life in law is also that of His people: “Christ, who is our life” (Col 3:4). Christ is the sole fountain of life, the source from which our life—both legal and spiritual—flows. It is for this reason that the scroll on which the names of God’s elect is inscribed is called, “the Lamb’s book *of life*” (Rev 21:27). It is the Mediator’s book for “the Lamb,” which is always expressive of Christ as the Priest and sacrifice of His people; and it is His mediatorial life which He shares with us.

The antithesis of sin is righteousness—for as sin is the transgression of the Law (1Jo 3:4), so righteousness is “rightness,” or measuring up to the standard of right, and therefore, consists of fulfilling the Law. And since the God-man Mediator perfectly obeyed it, we are told that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom 10:4). Now just as sin and death cannot be separated, so righteousness and life are indivisible. A further appeal to Romans 5 establishes that: “They which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of *righteousness* shall *reign in life* by one, Jesus Christ...by the *righteousness* of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of *life*...That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by [‘in’] Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 5:17-18, 21)—in each case, it is a premial life, or one of reward from the Law. “Christ, who is our life” (Col 3:4): apart from Him, we have no standing before the Law, no title to its award; but being federally and judicially one with Him, then that which was due Him in return for His perfect fulfilment of the Law’s requirements is due those whom He represented.

Far too little attention has been paid to the first member in the antithesis presented in Deuteronomy 28—namely, that “all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be...Blessed shalt be...Blessed shalt be...Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out” (Deu 28:2-6)—which is set over against: “But...if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments...that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee” etc. (Deu 28:15). Just as surely as the Law pronounces a curse on those who break it, so the Law pronounces a blessing on those who keep it: the curse is death, and the blessing is life; and that blessing, the God-man Mediator obtained as the Surety of His people. As Christ is objectively and by imputation “our righteousness,” so He is objectively and by imputation “our life.” By Christ, those who are reconciled to God have life in law; and that is the foundation of all the other results or consequences of their restoration to His judicial favour.

2. *Pardon from God.* “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2Co 5:19). The trespasses of God’s penitent and believing people are not charged against them, because His wisdom discovered a way by which He might be fully recompensed for the wrong which our sins did unto His majesty—by imputing them to our Substitute and exacting vengeance upon Him for the same. Our iniquities were laid upon Him; and because of them, He suffered “the just for the unjust” (1Pe 3:18). That which was the ground of reconciliation was likewise the ground of the pardon of our iniquities: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7). Remission was the ransom-price which Christ paid unto God’s justice; and therefore, a principal part of our reconciliation is the remission of our sins. Remission of sins means that the guilt and condemnation of them is cancelled, and therefore, that we are released from the penalty and punishment of them; and that, because the punishment was borne by Christ and God’s wrath appeased.

Now observe how inseparably connected is the pardon of the believer's sins with his possessing a life in law before God. As we have shown above, obedience to the Law (in the person of our Surety) is righteousness; and where there is righteousness, the Law bestows *blessing*, as surely as it pronounces a curse on all unrighteousness. Now, what does the blessing of the Law consist of? Negatively, that it has naught against us; and where that be the case, none can truly "lay any thing to [our] charge" (Rom 8:33). Positively, that it pronounces us righteous; and as such, entitled to this award and blessing. Hence, we are told, "*Blessed* is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. *Blessed* is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity" (Psa 32:1-2). Yet we need to be on our guard against drawing a false inference from this: As Christians, we still transgress, and therefore, need to beg for daily forgiveness, as well as for daily bread, as Matthew 6:12 plainly shows. As Christ is required to ask and sue out the fruits of His mediation (Psa 2:8), so we are enjoined to humbly sue out our right of forgiveness (Jer 3:12; 1Jo 1:9).

3. *Peace with God*. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1). This verse has been commonly misunderstood, through supposing the "peace" there mentioned to be that which is subjective, rather than objective. The verse is not speaking about that peace of conscience when assured of Divine forgiveness, when the burden of our sins is removed and left at the foot of the cross, nor to that "peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Phi 4:7) that keeps the hearts and minds of God's children when they are "careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication" let their "requests be made known unto God" (Phi 4:6); but to "peace with God." It is not a state of mind, but a *relation* to the Lawgiver which is in view. It is not tranquility of heart, but that relation which arises from the expiation of sin and consequent justification. "Peace with God" means that He no longer regards us as His enemies in the objective sense of the term, but are now the objects of His favour: It is that state of things which ensues from the cessation of hostilities. It means that the sword of Divine justice, which smote our Shepherd (Zec 13:7), is now forever sheathed.

"Peace with God" means that we are no longer the objects of His displeasure, and therefore, that we no more have any cause to dread the Divine vengeance. If due attention be paid to the first clause of Romans 5:1, there should be no difficulty in understanding the second: the illative "therefore" pointing the connection. In the previous chapters, the apostle had proved that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23), that they are guilty and under the condemnation of His Law. They are, therefore, viewed by Him as "enemies" (Rom 5:10); and as such, they are "without strength" (Rom 5:6) or ability to help themselves. In blessed contrast therefrom, in Romans 5:1-11, the apostle described at length the glorious status and state of those who are justified by faith. Justification imports the forgiveness of sins (Rom 4:5-7), and that imports "peace with God"—that He is reconciled to us, that He no longer frowns, but smiles upon us. To "peace with God" is added "through our Lord Jesus Christ"—*not* "by the operation of the Holy Spirit," as *had* been the case, if peace of conscience had been in view. As Christ is "our life" (Col 3:4) objectively and legally, so He is "our peace" (Eph 2:14) objectively and legally.

Just as spiritual life wrought in our souls through regeneration is the consequence of the legal life which we have in Christ, so inward peace—or the purging of our consciences from dead works—follows from the peace which Christ made by "the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20), though the measure of our inward peace is largely determined by the daily exercise of our *faith* (Rom 15:13). Here again, we may perceive how intimately one result is linked with another. The antitypical Melchizedek is first "King of righteousness," and then "King of peace" (Heb 7:2). "The work of righteousness shall be peace"—that is, the mediatorial work of Christ shall produce "peace with God"; "and the effect of righteousness [as it is apprehended by faith] quietness and assurance for ever" (Isa 32:17). "We have peace with God" because "the chastisement of our peace [Hebrew "peaces"] was upon him" (Isa 53:5): Peace here and hereafter—objectively and subjectively—with God and in the conscience, the whole corrective or punishment which produced them was laid upon Christ. "By submitting to those chastisements, Christ slew the enmity and settled an amity between God and man...and God not only saves us from ruin, but takes us into friendship...Christ was in pain, that we might be at ease" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

