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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow in their influence upon God's people around the world, through their clarity, careful exposition, and Christ-centeredness.

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FOR EVER

The term “for ever” and its variants occur very frequently in the Bible—one of the many marks by which it is distinguished from the writings of men. Necessarily and obviously so. Man is but of yesterday, a creature of time; and though he is endowed with an immortal soul, his interests are confined to temporal things, and his energies are devoted almost entirely to the acquirement and enjoyment of the same. With very rare exceptions, until he be quickened by the gracious power of God, the outlook of man is limited to the present. Hence, it is that his writings are confined to those subjects pertaining unto things of time and sense; and if he should turn his thoughts unto “the great beyond,” it is but to dream or indulge in idle speculations. But not so of the One who gave us being: of Him it has to be said, “From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psa 90:2). He is the unchanging I am, “which art, and wast, and art to come” (Rev 11:17). This excellency of His being is clearly reflected in His Word, for it reveals to us those counsels which He made before the foundation of the world, and acquaints us with things after it is finished. The Bible treats of everlasting realities, and makes known to us our eternal interests and destinies.

The certainty of the divine decrees: “The counsel of the LORD standeth *for ever*, the thoughts of his heart to all generations” (Psa 33:11). There is no if or but, peradventure or perhaps, about them: all the divine counsels are inviolable and infallibly sure. At the close of time, it will be clearly demonstrated before an assembled universe that the whole of God’s will was fully accomplished: “There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the LORD, *that shall stand*” (Pro 19:21). Man’s purposes are like himself—fallible and fickle: but God’s are firmer than a rock, for they are formed by infinite and immutable wisdom. It cannot be otherwise, for “he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth” (Job 23:13). With Him there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam 1:17). None can bribe or induce Him to alter one detail of His eternal plan. No unforeseen contingency can arise, for “known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Act 15:18). His power is invincible, and therefore, it is impossible for any to thwart Him. He “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11), so that none of the devices of His enemies can prevent Him—if they could, He would not be the supreme and universal LORD of all.

The perfection of the divine workmanship: “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be *for ever*: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him” (Ecc 3:14). God’s works are like Himself—incapable of improvement, perfect. “O LORD, how great are thy works!” (Psa 92:5). The execution of them may be opposed (as Saul “kicked against the pricks” Act 26:14), but they cannot be obstructed by any created power. Since there be no deficiency in them, nothing needs adding; since there be no superfluity, nothing taken away. “And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing” (Psa 64:9). While the immediate reference in Psalm 33:11 was to God’s decrees, this one is to the execution of them. His covenant is “ordered in all things, and sure” (2Sa 23:5). The work of Christ is a “finished” one, so that none can add to or diminish from it. God’s promises are all “Yea” and “Amen.” His sentence of justification will never be reversed. Pardoned sins will never be remembered by Him. The miracle of regeneration is durable. The graces which God works in us “abideth” (1Co 13:13). Well may we exclaim, “Marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well” (Psa 139:14).

The immutability of the saints’ standing: “For by one offering he hath perfected *for ever* them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14). That is a wondrous and blessed statement, yet one which the faith of few of God’s people lays hold of. It makes known the present and perpetual acceptance of the Church unto God. It tells of what the efficacious sacrifice of Christ has secured for all His people: not merely the putting away of their sins, not only obtaining for them immediate access to God, but also securing such a perfect standing before Him that they may draw near in full confidence. All the excellence of Christ’s oblation is upon them. His infinite merits have been imputed to them, and therefore, does God view them with the utmost complacency and delight. The word “perfect” here means “completed or consummated” and refers not to anything subjective, but objective. Likewise, “sanctified” here signifies not an experiential but a relative one, having the force of “hallowed.” As another has said, “The sanctification of Hebrews 10 is as complete and permanent as the justification of Romans 5, admitting of neither addition nor diminution.” This sacrificial “perfection” of Christians is irrevocable and cannot be lost, for it rests on something *outside* of themselves. “Perfect for ever”: contrary to all our sense of unworthiness and unfitness for such blessing and glory, it must be *believed* if our hearts are to be kept in peace. Yet, while rejoicing in the same, we

shall be for ever humbled by the remembrance that it is all of grace and gift, and that we have no part in it except as the objects of God's love and the recipients of His favour. Let us rest on the finished work of Christ and express our gratitude in lives which honour Him.

The permanency of the mediatorial office: "Thou art a priest *for ever* after the order of Melchizedek" (Psa 110:4). Only in the God-man is the chasm between the creature and the Creator bridged; and therefore, His mediatorial office is to be exercised not only throughout this time-state, but *eternally*. That office is threefold: prophetic, priestly, and kingly. No doubt, there will be a great change of method in the exercise of that office in heaven; yet exercised it will be. Though the knowledge of His glorified saints will be vastly increased, they will not be infallible, but in need of teaching still; and as Revelation 7:17 assures us: "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall *feed* them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." Though sinless, perfectly holy, yet the merits of Christ are the foundation of their eternal standing before God; and they will still need the great High Priest to present their praises unto God. As for His kingship and government of them, even on the new earth, it is "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev 22:1): "God is supreme, but the Lamb administers the power and authority of the throne"—Walter Scott (1796-1861). "Christ shall be the means and way of communications between God and His glorified saints for ever"—John Owen (1616-1683).

The durability of the divine clemency: "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth *for ever*" (Psa 136:1). This injunction is repeated in the two following verses, so that we have therein a call to laud the Triune Jehovah; and in each instance, for the same reason. Special thanks are due unto Him for His perpetual benignity unto them, for even at the Redeemer's return, this characteristic will be exercised by Him—"Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude :21); "The Lord grant unto him that he may find *mercy* of the Lord in *that day*" (2Ti 1:18). No less than twenty-six times in this psalm occurs the refrain, "For his mercy endureth for ever." Numerous examples of the same are cited: in putting forth His power in cleaving a way through formidable obstacles for the deliverance of His people, in providing for them in their wilderness journey, and in giving them a rich heritage.

The utter hopelessness of the lost: "To whom is reserved the blackness of darkness *for ever*" (Jude :13). This in nowise clashes with the foregoing, but rather supplies a confirmation, for the separation and banishing of the wicked unto their own place is an act of mercy unto the saints. Equally so is it an act of divine justice on the wicked: since they "loved darkness rather than light" (Joh 3:19), it is fitting that the darkness should be their final and dismal abode. This "blackness of darkness" seems to be a parallel expression with the "outer darkness" of Matthew 8:12—remotest from God, who is the Fountain of light. Thus, it expresses first their eternal exile from God—"punished with everlasting destruction *from* the presence of the Lord" (2Th 1:9). Second, as "light" is a figure of life and blessing, so is darkness of wretchedness and woe. Third, the utter remedilessness of their condition—unrelieved by a single ray of hope: after millions of years, their suffering no nearer an end than it was at the outset. "This is the hell of hell, that, as the torments thereof are without measure, so without end"—Thomas Manton (1620-1677).

The perpetuity of the saints' bliss: "I will dwell in the house of the LORD *for ever*" (Psa 23:6). This is in marked and blessed antithesis from the "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2Th 1:9), which constitutes the doom of the lost. Their respective portions are contrasted at every point. The wicked enjoy "the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb 11:25); we shall participate in those "pleasures at God's right hand," which are "for evermore" (Psa 16:11). Agents of Satan seize their souls at death; ours are carried to heaven by the angels. They shall be raised "to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan 12:2); we in "honour and glory" (1Pe 1:7). To them it shall be said, "Depart from me, ye cursed" (Mat 25:41); to us, "Come, ye blessed of my Father" (Mat 25:34). They "shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev 20:10); we shall "ever be [for ever] with the Lord" (1Th 4:17; Rev 22:5).



THE EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

6. Fullness of Joy (1Jo 1:4)

“And these things write we unto you, that your [or ‘our’] joy may be full” (1Jo 1:4). For the benefit of your preachers (and also those of God’s people who desire to form the habit of *studying* Scripture more closely), we may say that we began our own examination and meditation of this verse by framing the following questions, and then seeking answers thereto: (1) Exactly what is referred to by the “these things”? (2) Why the “we write” rather than the “I write,” as in 1 John 2:1, 12, 26? What is the connection between the “these things” and the fullness of “joy”? (4) What is the nature of the joy here spoken of? (5) Is a fullness of it attainable in this life? (6) Are we to read it as “that *your* joy may be full” or “*our* joy,” as in the R.V.¹ and in Bagster’s *Interlinear*? The results of our own searchings and ponderings will now be set before the reader, though we shall not adhere strictly to the order of those six queries. Personally, we have found that by means of such interrogations, we are enabled to make a more definite approach to a verse, and thereby, obtain something better than a general and vague idea of its contents.

“And *these things* write we unto you.” We believe there is a twofold reference. As the opening word indicates, the principal allusion is unto that which immediately precedes. Here again the link connecting one verse with another is quite evident, and the order of their contents corresponds exactly with Christian experience. First, a setting forth of God’s Son as incarnate, and our saving apprehension of Him as such by His revelation unto the soul as “the Word of life”: for as it is rationality and the exercise thereof which fits men to be companionable with one another, so it is our being made recipients of a spiritual life which capacitates us to have intercourse with God. Second, the actual enjoyment of intimate fellowship with the Triune God in and through the Mediator, and with all His children, as the consequence. Third, fullness of joy as the outcome. Thus, the former stands related to the latter as does cause to effect, the tree to the fruit, the means to the end. And here, too, the one is commensurate with the other: as the measure of our fellowship with the Father and the Son determines the measure of our communion with fellow saints, so in proportion to the constancy and depth of this fellowship in its three forms will be the degree of our joy.

More closely still, verse 4 intimates one of the essential characteristics of the communion referred to in verse 3: that it is a fellowship *of joy*—the sharing together of a mutual delight. Thus, we see once more the deep importance of paying close attention to the immediate context, that we may be better enabled to follow the order of thought and development of the subject under discussion. It is by observing the precise relation of one verse to another that much light is cast upon the whole, and the significance and perspective of each detail is more clearly perceived. But more largely the words, “And *these things* write we unto you” must be regarded as including all that follows, for not only do verses 5-7 show that the subject of fellowship is there still under discussion, but John’s specific design in writing this epistle was to lead God’s children into a deeper and fuller experiential fellowship, with the resultant happiness inseparable therefrom. The whole contents of this epistle are to be regarded as a making known of the various *means* which promote both our fellowship with God and the increase of our joy in Him; and a setting forth of the different things which *hinder* the same.

John’s purpose in saying, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not” (1Jo 2:1) was to warn against what would—if allowed and unrepented of—break their fellowship and quench their joy. When he exhorts them, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (verse 15), he is telling us that any undue familiarity with those who are God’s enemies, or any inordinate affection for the creature, is inimical to our communion with and delighting ourselves in Him. Likewise, his “These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you” (verse 26) signifies that they must ever be on their guard against false prophets, lest their joy be blighted by erroneous teaching. Fellowship with God must not be looked for *outside* the way of His assignment or the order which He has appointed: therefore, we must earnestly avoid all tampering with sin, deny our curiosity to hear or read the proponents of strange doctrine, and flirt not with the world. Finally, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1Jo 5:13) was but a repetition in thought, though varied in language of verse 4, for there can be no fullness of joy while the soul is in a state of uncertainty of its acceptance in the Beloved.

¹ R.V. – Revised Version translation of the Bible, completed in Britain in 1885.

“And these things write *we* unto you.” It will be remembered that John had employed the plural number throughout verses 1-3, for he was not only relating the special privileges which had been enjoyed by the twelve, but was speaking there as their mouthpiece. He longed that all of God’s children should (so far as their case admitted) enter into the same free and familiar intercourse with God in Christ. “That ye also may have fellowship with us” (1Jo 1:3) imported that ye may enter more fully into an experiential knowledge of the truth set forth in verses 1-2, and thereby participate in the ineffable joy which comes through a believing apprehension of it; for Christian “fellowship” consists of association of heart, attachment to the same objects, and having together thoughts, affections, hopes, and joys in common. Thus it was at the beginning, and has (in varying degrees of intelligence) continued throughout this age. “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized... And they continued stedfastly in the *apostles’* doctrine and fellowship” (Act 2:41-42). Moreover, the saints are “built upon the foundation of the apostles [compare Revelation 21:14] and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph 2:20), which means that the doctrine which the apostles taught, and which is embodied for us in their writings, is the basis on which the Church rests.

Observe two things in the last-quoted Scripture. First, the plural number used again. The Church is not built upon Peter, as Rome erroneously insists, but, doctrinally considered, rests upon the teaching of the whole of the apostles—who were also “prophets,” i.e. endued with the gift of divine utterance. But second, the Lord Jesus is the “chief corner stone” (1Pe 2:6), for the entire validity and efficacy of the apostles’ testimony lay in the name of Him whose witnesses they were. In his second epistle, Peter said, “I now write unto you... That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of *us* the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (2Pe 3:1-2). Though each of them wrote on different subjects, with a particular end and design, they were all inspired by the one Spirit. Characteristically speaking, Paul was the apostle of faith, Peter of hope, John of love, James of good works, while Jude warned against apostasy or the abandonment of such. Being of one heart and soul, having the same desire and mission, it was fitting for any one to speak in the name of them all, using the term, “*we*.” They proclaimed the same Gospel and bore witness to the excellence of the same Christ. Their aim was ever the same: to make Him known and gain unto Him a glorious name. Whenever they wrote, it was in order to build up the saints. In their doctrine, they differed not one iota.

The fountain from which all spiritual joy proceeds is that blessed One who is set before us in the foregoing verses. As He expressly declared, “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Joh 4:14). It is in intimate contact and converse with Christ that real communion with Him consists and satisfaction is found: in seeing, hearing, *handling* Him—we can only “handle” one who is near and dear to us. It is by having the mind engaged with His perfections and beauty, meditating thereon and reveling therein, that the heart is drawn out to Him. Nothing so warms and nourishes a Christian’s soul as a believing and adoring contemplation of the One who loved him and gave Himself for him. We should therefore see to it that, above all else, a realization of Christ’s surpassing love is kept fresh in our hearts; for this, in turn, will move us to seek yet closer and more constant fellowship with Him. That was the source and spring of Christ’s own joy—His absorption with the Father’s love unto Him: “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand” (Joh 3:35). Note how frequently He dwelt upon the Father’s love: John 5:20; 15:9; 17:23-24.

Fullness of joy is something which all men desire, but which very few attain unto. Nor is that difficult to explain: they seek it in the wrong place. Alas, that many of God’s people are so often guilty of making the same mistake. In the pride of their hearts, they want to find something of self to rejoice in; yielding to a spirit of legality, they look for happiness in their own experiences or attainments. But that is to miss the substance and chase the shadows. As it is with our natural eyes, so with our spiritual: they are designed to look at external objects and not internal ones. “Rejoice in the Lord,” and that “alway” (Phi 4:4), is the delightful task which faith is to engage in. All real happiness is bound up in Him. Every other joy but that which issues from fellowship with the Lord is but a counterfeit one. That is sensual, as the rich fool’s “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry” (Luk 12:19); this is spiritual. The one is superficial and temporary; the other, solid and lasting. The former comforts only in health and during a season of prosperity; whereas, the latter sustains upon a bed of pain, cheers the soul in times of affliction, yea, enables its possessor to exult at the prospect of death.

Now this joy is not to be regarded as a luxury, but rather as a spiritual necessity. We are obligated to be glad in God. It is something more than a sacred privilege, namely, a bounden duty unto which we are expressly commanded: "But let all those that put their trust in thee *rejoice*: let them ever shout for *joy*, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be *joyful* in thee" (Psa 5:11). "Be *glad* in the LORD, and *rejoice*, ye righteous: and shout for *joy*, all ye that are upright in heart" (Psa 32:11). "*Rejoice* in the Lord alway: and again I say, *Rejoice*" (Phi 4:4). "*Rejoice* evermore" (1Th 5:16). If we do not give unto Him, who is so excellent in Himself and so gracious and beneficial unto us, that esteem which rises to the degree of rejoicing in Him, then we sadly fail in rendering to Him that honour which is His due. Our thoughts and valuation of Him are utterly unworthy, unless they bring us so to delight ourselves in Him as to fill us with joy. While we seek God's favour in Christ, live in obedience to His will, and rest in His love, we are warranted to keep a holy feast continually.

It is certainly not the revealed will of Christ that His followers should walk through this world in a spirit of dejection: rather are they a reproach unto Him if they do so. One chief reason why the Lord Jesus uttered His high priestly prayer in the presence of His disciples was that they might be filled with comfort and good cheer: "These things I speak in the world, [in order] that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves" (Joh 17:13). He was about to leave them and return to the Father, and He would dispel their sorrow and fill them with holy gladness by apprehensions of *His* joy. And of what did *that* consist? First, the realization that He had glorified the Father in the place where He had been so grievously slighted (verse 1). Second, that He had "finished the work" given Him to do (verse 4). Third, that He was about to return to that ineffable glory which He had with the Father "before the world was" (verse 5). Christ was rejoicing at the prospect before Him, and He would have His disciples make His joy theirs. We are to rejoice in a triumphant Saviour who completed the work of our redemption. We are to rejoice in the blessed fact that the head once crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now. The knowledge of this should banish all gloom and fill us with joy unspeakable.

But more. By giving us the wondrous privilege of hearing His prayer in John 17, Christ has made it known that *His* changed position has made no alteration in His attitude toward *us* that His love for His people has not diminished in the least. By His generous act on that memorable occasion, Christ assured His disciples (and us) that when He entered into His well-earned reward and took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, His thoughts would still be engaged with His redeemed. They were inexpressibly dear unto Him—as the Father's gift to Him, and as the travail of His own soul. Their names were inscribed upon the palms of His hands, yea, upon His very heart. He could not forget them: rather would He occupy Himself on high by constantly pleading their cause. If our hearts are suitably affected with the amazing fact that our great High Priest "ever liveth to make intercession for [us]" (Heb 7:25), we cannot but be full of joy. A considerable part of our happiness is to contemplate Christ's joy in us! He rejoiced in His people before the world was made (Pro 8:29-31), He rejoices now in and "over them to do them good" (Jer 32:41), and He will express it even more abundantly when He brings them Home unto Himself.

Further. The joy of the Christian will be promoted and increased by observing the various things for which Christ here petitioned the Father in John 17, for in them we discover what are the desires of His heart unto "his own." First, He prayed for their preservation: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me" (verse 11). Second, He sought their jubilation: "That they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves" (verse 13). Third, for their emancipation from sin: "That thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (verse 15), so that none of them should be overwhelmed by it. Fourth, for their consecration: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (verse 17), that they may grow in grace and adorn their profession. Fifth, for their unification: "That they all may be one" (verse 21), which will be fully realized when "we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). Sixth, for their association with Himself: "That they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am" (verse 24). Seventh, for their eternal gratification: "That they may behold my glory" (verse 24). Since all these requests will be granted (Joh 11:42), what cause have we constantly and fervently to rejoice!

Yet further. Christ has made most gracious provision for the joy of His people in the gift of the Comforter. When His disciples were dismayed and dejected at the prospect of His departure, we find that again and again, He reassured and cheered them by the promise of the Holy Spirit. "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (Joh 14:18), which He did in a most blessed manner on the day of Pentecost. Then it was that their "sorrow" was "turned into joy" (Joh 16:20). The Comforter is here not only to convict of

sin and bring souls unto repentance, but, following that operation, to fill them with gladness and to experience “joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 14:17). This He does by opening and blessing the Word, by taking of the things of Christ and showing the same unto them, by witnessing with their spirits that they are the sons of God, by producing in them the spirit of praise. The blessed Spirit uses the words of Christ, especially those of John 17, to work upon the renewed mind, giving it some blessed apprehensions of the joy of which Christ is both the object and the subject, of the joy which comes from Him and centres in Him, bringing us into communion with the same and making our souls realize the satisfying portion we have in Him.

A word now on the *nature* of this joy. That is the more necessary since not a few are apt to naturalize and carnalize the same, regarding it as a mere spirit of elation or happy feeling of exhilaration. Instead, it is a heavenly grace, a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), and therefore, something spiritual, supernatural, and divine. God is alike its Author, Object, and Maintainer. As the peace which He gives “passeth all understanding” (Phi 4:7), so the joy He communicates is said to be “unspeakable” (1Pe 1:8)—not only excelling sense, but beyond full comprehension. It is an elevation of soul after the Lord and of things above. It is a delighting ourselves in God, for since all happiness be the enjoyment of the chief good, then all felicity is bound up in Him. Joy is heaven begun in the saint, for his blessedness here and hereafter differs not in kind, but only in degree. It is therefore a joy which is pure and unalloyed. As spiritual love is far more than a sentiment, as God’s peace is more excellent than mere placidity or tranquility of mind, so the joy which Christ imparts to the believer is vastly superior to any natural emotion. It is a state of exultation, a complacency of heart, a full satisfaction of soul as it feasts upon a perfect Object.

Spiritual joy results from the heart’s being engaged with the LORD: “And my soul shall be joyful in the LORD: it shall rejoice in his salvation” (Psa 35:9). “Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee...My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips” (Psa 63:3, 5). We rejoice that all our sins are forgiven, that we are accepted in the Beloved, that we are made the friends of God, that our names are written in the Lamb’s book of life, that we have a building of God eternal in the heavens. Such a joy is something to which the natural man is a total stranger: “Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that *their* corn and *their* wine increased” (Psa 4:7)—the love of God and His goodness to us in Christ affords a pleasure and a satisfaction which no creature can. Spiritual joy is a very different thing from mere exuberance of spirits or ecstatic feelings, being entirely a holy and supernatural experience. No matter what may be his circumstances in this world, the Christian has ground and matter for rejoicing at all times, and is called upon to do so “evermore,” being assured “your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you” (Joh 16:22).

In view of what has been pointed out in the last two paragraphs, the Christian reader should more readily perceive the radical difference there is between natural hilarity and spiritual joy. The former is incapable of rising above the woes of earth. It wanes in the presence of life’s hardships. Its bloom departs when the sun of prosperity is beclouded. It cannot survive the loss of health or of loved ones. Vastly different is the joy of the Lord. It is restricted neither to surroundings nor temperaments, and fluctuates not with our varying moods or circumstances. Nature may indeed assert itself, as Christ wept by the grave of Lazarus, yet its possessor can say with Paul, “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2Co 6:10). When the hurricane lashes the surface of the sea, the heart of it is undisturbed. Grace enables us to “glory [even] in tribulations” (Rom 5:3). While the bodies of the martyrs were burning at the stake, hallelujahs were on their lips. Joy is quite consistent with godly sorrow, for each fresh discovery of the worthlessness of self should lead us closer to God.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

58. Deliverance

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psa 46:1). In the heyday of youth, “while the evil days come not” (Ecc 12:1), those words mean comparatively little unto us. As the sunshine of prosperity is enjoyed, our minds do not dwell upon the shelter provided for the storm. Nevertheless, God has ordained that, sooner or later, each of His children will be devoutly thankful that such a verse is in His Word, and give them to prove experientially the verity and preciousness of it. Then it is, but only then, we discover that “trouble” is a *blessing* in disguise—as the dark clouds pour down showers which refresh the parched earth. It is true that trouble does not always issue in conscious and manifest blessing, but in such case, the fault is ours. Many of the troubles which people impiously ascribe to “bad luck” or “misfortune” are brought upon themselves by hurried decisions or foolish conduct. But if the Christian will place the blame where it belongs, confess to God the sinful failures which have occasioned his trouble, and beg Him graciously to sanctify the same unto him, his prayer will be answered, and he too will learn that the divine Workman can bring good out of evil.

It is very blessed to observe the climacteric emphasis in Psalm 46:1. First, what God is in Himself: “Our refuge and strength”—the One to whom we may turn for succor and shelter; the One whose grace is sufficient (2Co 12:9) for every need. Second, what He is unto His people in trouble—namely a real “help,” for He is no “fair weather friend,” but One who may confidently be counted upon in the day of adversity and affliction. Third, this is amplified thus: He is not only a “help,” but a *present* one: not one who is far distant, but by our side—“closer than hands or feet.” And to make it still more emphatic and impressive, “a very present help,” added the Psalmist—as Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) expressed it, “More nearly present than the trouble itself.” For, mark it well, it is not merely that the LORD is a very present help “in time of trouble,” as so many misquote it, but “in trouble” itself. Thus, His assistance may be counted upon with absolute certainty. He is a very present help in trouble to enable us to bear it, to sustain us under it, to comfort us in it, to bring us through it, yea, to sanctify the same unto us. Thus have His people, in all ages, abundantly proved. He was “a very present help in trouble” unto Jacob when He subdued the enmity of Laban and Esau, to Joseph in Egypt, to the widow of Zaraphath, to Daniel in the lions’ den. And He is the same today!

No matter how cautiously we plan or discreetly we act, there is no escaping trouble in some form or other, for man is “born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). How can it be otherwise: myself a fallen and erring creature, dwelling in a world which lieth in the wicked one? But let not that fact sour or dismay you: rather use it for obtaining personal proof of the validity and value of the divine assurances. Trouble is sent not to drive us from God, but to draw us *to* Him. Emulate the Psalmist: “In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord” (Psa 77:2)—not took matters into his own hands, seeking to put right what was wrong, for that ends in making bad matters worse. The believer’s duty and privilege is clear: to appropriate and plead that precious promise, “And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psa 50:15). Follow not the vain policy of the world in attempting to forget your trouble, or drown it in pleasure, or grit your teeth and make the best of a bad job. No, make the living God your recourse: count upon His lovingkindness and tender pity, bear in mind His mighty power and infinite resources, so that nothing is too hard for Him.

Does the reader say, *I have* called upon the LORD again and again, but He has not removed my trouble, or even mitigated it? Nor has He promised to do so. But in Psalm 50:15, He says, “I will deliver thee,” and is not that the same thing? No, certainly not; rather is it something much better. There is something worse, something to be far more dreaded than “trouble,” namely, the sinful way in which we are so prone to act while under it. The promise is, “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver *thee*”—not “from it,” but *from thyself*. Call upon Me humbly, trustfully, perseveringly, and I will “deliver thee”—from open rebellion against Me, from a suicide’s grave, from sinking into utter despair. But more, “And thou shalt glorify me,” by meekly and patiently enduring what I have appointed thee, by leaning harder upon Me, and by thus improving the trouble. This is both our duty and privilege: “Wherefore glorify ye the LORD *in the fires*” (Isa 24:15). To glorify Him should ever be our aim, whether in health, or on a bed of suffering. Let not the afflicted saint give way to self-pity and regard himself as “the victim of circumstances,” but seek

grace to rise above and be victor over them. "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart" (Psa 27:14).

Trouble is not always in consequence of our wrongdoing or injudicious conduct. So far from it, it may be caused by fidelity to Christ, thereby stirring up against us the enmity of Satan. Such was the case of the Gibeonites. A short time after they had made peace with Joshua, entered into a league with him, and as he had appointed them to be servants "for the altar of the LORD" (Jos 9:7), five kings of the Amorites determined to destroy them, and "they and all their hosts...encamped before Gibeon, and made war against it" (Jos 10:5). Whereupon we are told, "And the men of Gibeon sent unto Joshua to the camp to Gilgal, saying, Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us: for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us" (verse 6). Most commendable was such an action. In the hour of their need, they turned unto the one who had so graciously spared their lives and entered into a covenant with them: they confided in his sympathy and counted upon his ability and willingness to come to their aid. Thus it is that Christians should ever do with the antitypical Joshua: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1Pe 5:7).

That appeal of the Gibeonites unto Joshua may be typically regarded as the prayer of believers unto the LORD. Considered thus, it contains valuable instruction for us. First, observe the place which they took: "Thy *servants*"—they acknowledge themselves to be. Such language breathed a spirit of dependence, disowning any might or sufficiency of their own. This is what becomes *us* as we approach the Mercy Seat—taking the place of confessed weakness, coming as empty-handed beggars. Second, they acquainted Joshua with the desperateness of their situation, spreading their case before him. Such is ever our privilege: to unburden our hearts unto Him who alone can afford us real relief. Third, they made known their request: "Save us, and help us." Logically, those clauses should be reversed, but a burdened and agitated heart pays little attention to its phrasing when dire calamity prompts the cry for deliverance. Fourth, this appeal was couched in terms of urgency: "Slack not thy hand...for all the kings of the Amorites...are gathered together against us." That was not the language of dictation or of impatience, but a cry of distress, and an appeal unto the relation which now obtained between them and Joshua, for subservience is entitled to protection.

But there was one word in their appeal which perhaps some of our readers would deem unsuitable for use in a prayer unto God: "Come up to us *quickly*" begged the Gibeonites. Let God's Word determine, for to it, we must ever turn for instruction and guidance. Before referring thereto, let us bear in mind that the situation in which those men were placed was no ordinary one, but rather were they in extremity, so that unless effectual help reached them promptly, it would be too late. Thus, we are not about to turn unto the Scriptures for something which will supply us with a general rule to direct us on all occasions, but rather, to ascertain whether there are any prayers to God recorded therein which intimate that it is permissible for His people to employ the language of importunity when, to them, their case appears desperate. Undoubtedly there are, not only in a single passage, but in many: "Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily" (Psa 31:2), cried David. And again, "Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation" (Psa 38:22)—he entreated that the help might not be long in coming. "But I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God" (Psa 70:5)—a desperate case calls for timely aid.

God's time is always the best time, yet when we are sorely pressed, we *may* beg Him to act on our behalf without delay. "Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth" (Psa 143:7). When our case is critical, we may plead its urgency. "O my God, make haste for my help" (Psa 71:12). Such a cry was evoked by the sore pressure of affliction, and it shows that if real necessity justifies it, we may be urgent with God, though never out of willfulness. At a time when the enemy had come in like a flood and the cause of God was languishing, and His people were in sore straits, we find that Asaph prayed, "Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent ['meet'] us: for we are brought very low" (Psa 79:8): thus in dire distress, it is permissible for us to ask for speed on God's part. What is still more pertinent to this particular point is the example of our Saviour, for in the Messianic Psalms, we find that He cried, "O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me" (Psa 22:19, and compare 40:13). And again, "In the day when I call answer me speedily" (Psa 102:2).

"So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour" (Jos 10:7). Joshua did not send a messenger to the hard-pressed Gibeonites telling them that they must fight their own battles or proffer the excuse that his hands were already too full for him to intervene on their behalf. Nor did he raise an objection against the hard journey which such an undertaking would involve. Not thus would he mock those who were looking to him for deliverance. Instead, he responded promptly and readily to their pressing request. Therein, we see again how blessedly Joshua prefigured the

Saviour. As we read through the four Gospels, we find that the Lord Jesus never failed to answer an appeal for help, whether that appeal came from Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, saint or sinner. He was just as willing to heal the servant of the Roman centurion as He was the mother-in-law of His apostle, and to grant the request of the poor leper as to raise Lazarus. Nor did He refuse to give an interview unto Nicodemus because he sought Him by night, or turn a deaf ear to the dying thief when He was experiencing the pains of crucifixion. And, my reader, He is the same today as He was yesterday (Heb 13:8): vastly different in the position He occupies, but *unchanged* in His readiness to succor the needy.

Though we are very familiar with what has just been pointed out, and freely acknowledge the preciousness of the same, yet every one of us needs to be reminded of it, especially when we are hard pressed. Not only are we ever prone to give way to an evil heart of unbelief, but when sore trouble comes upon us, we are likely to be so occupied with *it* as almost to lose sight of our blessed Lord. One reason why He sends or permits the trouble is that we may be drawn closer to Him, and prove more fully His sufficiency to help us, no matter what straits we may be in. As He never turned a deaf ear to any cry of distress during the days of His flesh, nor refused to undertake for anyone who sought His help, neither will He do so now that He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. As He promptly delivered Peter when he cried, "Lord, save me, [I perish]" (Mat 14:30), so will He still thrust forth His mighty hand and rescue any believer who, fearful that he may be drowned in a sea of troubles, calls upon Him for relief. The Gibeonites did not appeal in vain to the captain of Israel in their emergency, nor will the Christian if he trustfully petitions the antitypical Joshua.

"So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour" (Jos 10:7). This shows that he had "learned his lesson" or had profited from his previous failure (Jos 7:3-6), for now he employed at least the major part of his forces and accompanied them in person. We say, "at least the major part of his forces," for it is most unlikely that he would leave the camp, with all the women and children, entirely undefended. Thus, this is probably one of the many instances in Scripture where the word "all" is *not* to be taken absolutely, without qualification, but would here signify battalions of the men of war from all the tribes. Herein we see Joshua fulfilling his covenant engagement, for when those Gibeonites threw in their lot with the people of God, they came under His protection—compare Ruth 2:12. And a courageous enterprise it was—very different from the former ones. On earlier occasions, at Jericho and at Ai, it was but a single enemy which he had to engage, but here, it was the massed forces of no less than five kings which he had now to encounter; and they had the great advantage of being stationed in the heights unto which he must ascend. Typically, Joshua was here a figure of the good Shepherd going forth to rescue His imperiled sheep, and in the "all the people of war with him," we behold the plenitude of Christ's resources (Mat 28:18).

"And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee" (Jos 10:8). We are not told that Joshua "asked counsel of the LORD" on this occasion, nor is it at all likely that he did so. There is no need for any to inquire what be God's will for him when his path of duty is clearly marked out before him, as was the case here. They having owned his dominion and submitted to his yoke, Joshua was now under definite obligation to go to the assistance of the Gibeonites—as the government is to safeguard its loyal subjects. Nevertheless, it is more than probable that Joshua's heart was lifted up to God as he prepared for his arduous and dangerous undertaking, seeking wisdom from Him, and making request for Him to grant him success in the same. Not only is this to be inferred from all that is recorded of the general tenor of his pious life, but had Joshua now gone forth in a spirit of independence and self-sufficiency, we can scarcely conceive of the Holy One, under such circumstances, vouchsafing him such a word as this. In appearing unto Joshua at this time, the LORD intimated His approval of Israel's sparing the lives of the Gibeonites (Jos 9:18-20), and of their venturing to deliver them from their enemies; and accordingly, He gave him this message of encouragement and assurance.

"Fear them not." Very gracious was this. The LORD would have the heart of His servant in perfect peace from the outset, and thus be the better prepared for the forthcoming battle. Fear is due to unbelief, through being occupied with the puny might of those who are arrayed *against* us, instead of our faith being fixed upon the almightiness of the One who is *for* us. But the LORD did more than barely exhort His servant to banish from him the spirit of trepidation, giving him an all-sufficient reason why tranquility of mind should now possess him: "*For* I have delivered them into thine hand." Thus here, too, we are taught that perfect peace of heart is the fruit of the mind's being stayed upon JEHOVAH. "I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength" (Isa 12:2): the latter is ever the consequence of the for-

mer—when we resolve to make Him our confidence, none will affright us. In His “There shall not a man of them stand before thee,” there was a *renewing* of the original promise which the LORD had made unto Joshua in 1:5. “God hath spoken once; *twice* have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God” (Psa 62:11)—alas, most of us are so dull of hearing that the message has to be repeated much oftener than “twice” before we *really* believe it.

“Joshua therefore came unto them suddenly, and went up from Gilgal all night” (Jos 10:9). First, we should observe that the assurance which the LORD had just given Joshua was not perverted by him into an excuse for slackness on his part, but very much the reverse. Instead of reasoning that since victory was certain, there was no need to exert himself and his men unduly; rather were they thereby stimulated to self-sacrificing effort. He did not wait until the morning before starting out on the hard and hazardous mountain climb, but, setting aside his own comfort, journeyed all through the night. Second, therein we behold the merciful response which he made unto the urgent request of the Gibeonites, “Come up to us quickly, and save us” (verse 6). He delayed not, but promptly hastened to their relief. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out, “If one of the tribes of Israel had been in danger, he could not have shown more care and zeal for its relief than here for Gibeon, remembering then, as in other cases, that there must be one law for the stranger that was proselytized, as for him that was born in the land.” Third, he came upon the enemy “suddenly,” when they were least expecting it, probably before day had broken and ere they had made their dispositions and taken their places, thereby throwing them into instant confusion and consternation.

“And the LORD discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Bethhoron, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah” (Jos 10:10). If more of the servants and soldiers of Christ were willing to lose a night’s sleep in His cause, particularly in efforts to help their distressed brethren, we should oftener behold the LORD baring His mighty arm, showing Himself strong on their behalf. Observe how jealous the Holy Spirit ever is in guarding the divine glory! Joshua was unquestionably an able strategist, and those under him were “mighty men of valour” (verse 7); and no doubt, they acquitted themselves well on this occasion; yet that also was of God, and therefore, the honours must be ascribed unto Him. Not only spiritual gifts, but physical powers, natural aptitudes, mental endowments, military skill and success, are all bestowed upon men by their Maker—“What hast thou that thou didst not receive?” (1Co 4:7). This is not sufficiently recognized by us: if it were, there would be less of idolatrous hero worship.



THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

3. *Its Imputation*

We are now to consider the bearing which Adam's sin had upon his posterity, and the different effects which it entailed and produced—though the latter will come before us in another article (D.V.), wherein we shall treat more specifically with the consequences of the Fall. What we are here to examine particularly requires us to turn unto and look more closely at what was briefly alluded to in the March issue—namely, that in Eden, Adam acted not simply as a private person, the results of whose conduct affected none but himself, but rather that he transacted as a public person, so that what he did directly concerned and judicially involved others. Adam was very much more than the father of the human race: he was also their legal agent, standing in their stead. His descendants were not only in him seminally as their natural head, but were in him also morally and legally as their moral and forensic head. In other words, by divine constitution and covenant arrangement, Adam acted as the federal representative of all his children. By an act of His sovereign will, it pleased God to ordain that Adam's relation to his natural seed should be like unto that which Christ sustained to His spiritual seed—the one acting on the behalf of many.

The whole human race was placed on probation in the person of its legal representative and covenant head. This is a truth of great importance, for it casts light not only upon much in Scripture, but upon human history too. While Adam retained the approbation of God and remained in fellowship with Him, the whole of his constituency did likewise. Had he survived the appointed trial, had he faithfully and fitly discharged his responsibility, had he continued in obedience unto the LORD God, then *his* obedience had been reckoned to *their* account; and they had entered into and been fellow partakers of the reward bestowed on him. Contrariwise, if the head failed and fell, then all his members fell in and with him. If he disobeyed, then his disobedience was charged unto those whom he represented; and the frightful punishment pronounced upon him fell likewise on those on whose behalf he transacted. Justice required that the whole human race should be legally regarded and dealt with as sharing the guilt of its representative, and subjected to the same penalty as was inflicted upon him. In consequence of this arrangement, when Adam sinned, we sinned; and “therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (Rom 5:18).

Instead of placing each member of the human race on probation separately and successively, it pleased God to put the whole of them on formal trial once and for all in the person of their head. Probably, it will make it easier for the reader to grasp the nature of Adam's legal relation unto his descendants if we make use of a simple contrast and analogy, which have been employed by other writers on this subject. God did not treat with mankind as with a field of corn, where each stalk stands on its own individual root; but rather, He has dealt with our race as with a tree—all the branches of which have one common root. While the root of a tree remains healthy and unharmed, the whole of it flourishes. But if an axe strikes at and severs the root, then the whole of the tree suffers and falls—not only the trunk, but *all* the branches, and even its smallest twigs wither and die. Thus it was in connection with the Eden tragedy. When Adam's communion with his Maker was broken, all his posterity were alienated from His favour. This is no theory of human speculation, but a fact of divine revelation: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12).

Adam, then, occupied a unique position. At his creation, all his unborn children were germinally created in him. Not only so, but God entered into a solemn covenant with him in their name. The entire human family was represented by him and stood in him before the LORD. The future well-being of his progeny was suspended on his conduct. He was therefore placed on trial, to show whether he would promote the interests of his Creator, or refuse to be subject to His government. Some test must needs be given him in order for the exercise of his moral agency and the discharge of his responsibility. He was made to love and serve God, being richly endowed and fully capacitated thereunto. His supreme blessedness and continued happiness consisted in his so doing. In what follows, we shall submit scriptural proof that Adam *did* transact on the behalf of his descendants, and so stood in their stead before the divine Law that what *he* did was, in effect, what *they* did. Or, as Thomas Manton (1620-1677) expressed it, “We saw the forbidden fruit with his eyes, gathered it with his hands, ate it with his mouth; that is, we were ruined by those things as though we had been there and consented to his acts.”

We propose to show, first, that Adam was the federal head of the race. Second, that he entered into a covenant with God on their behalf. Third, that the guilt of his original sin was divinely imputed to his de-

scendants. Concerning the first, we shall confine ourselves unto two proof texts: "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is *the figure of him* that was to come" (Rom 5:14). That is truly an astonishing statement. Occurring in such a setting, it is really startling and should at once arrest our attention. With what accuracy and propriety could it be said that the father of our fallen race foreshadowed the Lord Jesus? Adam, when tempted, yielded and was overcome; Christ, when tempted, resisted, and overcame. The former was cursed by God; the latter was owned by Him as the One in whom He was well pleased. The one is the source of sin and corruption to all his posterity, but the other is a fount of holiness unto all His people. By Adam came condemnation; by Christ comes salvation. Thus, they are as far apart as the poles. Wherein, then, was Adam a "figure" of the coming Redeemer?

The Greek word for "figure" in Romans 5:14, signifies "type"; and, in the scriptural sense of that term, a type consists of something very much more than a casual resemblance between two things or an incidental parallel between them. There is a *designed* likeness, the one being divinely intended to shadow forth the other. From all eternity, it was foreordained that the first man should prefigure the incarnate Son of God. Again we ask, In what particular respect? Certainly not in his conduct. Nor in his natural constitution, as consisting of spirit and soul and body—for in that matter, all who lived before Christ was born might as properly be called figures of Him. The whole context makes it clear that it was in the *official position* which he occupied that Adam was a type of the Lord Jesus—as the federal head and legal representative of others. If Romans 5:12-19 be read attentively, it will be seen that all through it, the fact which is there given the greatest prominence is that of the one acting on behalf of the many, the one affecting the destiny of the many. What the one did is made the legal ground of what befalls the many. As the disobedience and guilt of Adam entailed condemnation for all who were legally one with him, so the obedience and righteousness of Christ has secured the justification of all in whose place He served as surety.

The other passage by which it may be proved that Adam sustained the relation of federal head to his posterity is 1 Corinthians 15:45-49: "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit...The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven...And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." Here again, despite marked contrasts between the type and the Antitype, there is that which is common to both of them. A mundane origin had the one; the other's was celestial. The former was but a man; the latter was "the Lord." The first Adam was made "a living soul"; the last Adam is a quickener of others. In the one, "all die"; in the other, "shall all be made alive" (verse 22). But that which marked each alike was his *representative character*—he was the head of an appointed seed, communicating his distinctive "image" to them. Adam is designated "the first man," not simply because he was the first in order—like the first day of the week—but because he was the first to act as the legal representative of a race. Christ is called "the second man," though He lived so long afterward, because He was the second to sustain a federal relation to an appointed seed; and called "the last Adam," because there is to be no further covenant head.

We turn next to show that a *covenant* was entered into between the LORD God and Adam. Our first appeal is unto Genesis 2:16-17, but before considering that passage, let us remind the reader of the extreme brevity of the early chapters of Genesis, and that more is definitely implied by their contents than is distinctly expressed. Let us also point out what are the principal elements in a covenant. A covenant is a formal compact and mutual arrangement between two or more parties, whereby they stand solemnly bound unto each other to perform the conditions contracted for. On the one side, there is a stipulating of something to be done; on the other side, a restipulation of something to be done or given in consideration thereof. There is also a penalty included in the terms of the agreement, some evil consequence which shall result unto the party who violates or fails to carry out his engagement. That penalty is added as a security. Where it is not expressly stated, it is implied by the promissory clause, just as the promise is to be necessarily inferred from a mention of the punishment therein (compare Genesis 31:43-53; Mat 26:14-16).

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:16-17). Here are all the constituent elements of a covenant. First, here are the contracting parties: the LORD God and man. Second, here is the condition defined and accepted. As the Creator and Governor of His creatures, it behoved God to exercise His authority; owing his being to Him, Adam was in duty bound to comply, and as a sinless and holy person, he would heartily consent to the stipulation. Third, there was a penalty prescribed, which would be incurred if Adam failed to carry out his

part of the compact. Fourth, there was by clear implication a promise made and reward assured—"do this, and thou shalt live"—to which Adam was entitled upon his rendering the obedience required. Where there is a stipulation and a restipulation between two parties, and a binding law pertaining to the same, there is a covenant (compare Genesis 21:22-32).

Adam was placed not only under divine Law, but under a covenant of works. The distinction is real and radical. A law requires obedience, and a punishment is threatened, in proportion to the nature of the offence, in case of disobedience. A subject is bound to obey the law, but he cannot be justly deprived of that which he has a natural right to, except in case of disobedience. On the other hand, while obedience to the law gives him a right to impunity, yet nothing more; whereas a *covenant* gives a person the right, upon his fulfilling the conditions thereof, to the reward or privilege stipulated therein. A king is not obliged to advance a loyal subject unto great honour; but if, as an act of favour, he has promised to elevate him upon his yielding obedience in some particular instance, then he would have a right to it—not as yielding obedience to a law, but as fulfilling the terms of a covenant. Thus, Mephibosheth had a natural and legal right to his life and to the estate which had descended to him from his father, because he had lived peaceably and had not rebelled against David. But *this* did not entitle him to the special favour which the king conferred upon him, of sitting at his table continually (2Sa 9:13). *That* was the result of a covenant between David and Jonathan, in which David had promised to show kindness unto his house after him (1Sa 20:11-17, 42).

We consider that it should be obvious to the thoughtful reader that Adam had the promise of life upon his performing the condition agreed, for "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" necessarily implied the converse—if thou eatest not thereof, thou shalt surely live. Just as "Thou shalt not steal" inevitably requires, "Thou shalt act honestly and honourably," and as "Rejoice in the LORD" includes "Murmur not against any of His dealings with thee," so according to the simplest laws of construction, the threatening of death as the consequence of eating affirmed the promise of life unto obedience. This is an essential feature of a covenant—a reward guaranteed upon the fulfillment of its terms. Let it also be duly noted that the threat denounced in Genesis 2:17 not only signified God's intention to punish sin, but was also designed as a motive unto obedience; and therefore, it included in it a promise of life upon man's maintaining his integrity. Again, had Adam been given no such promise, then he had been *without* a well-grounded hope for the future, for the hope which maketh not ashamed is always grounded upon the divine promise (Rom 4:18-20). Finally, Romans 7:10 expressly states that the commandment was "*to life*"—adapted to and setting before its complier such a prospect.

A few words need to be said here upon *the nature of* that "life" which was promised unto Adam. In his original state, he was already possessed of spiritual life: what then did the reward consist of? Two different answers have been returned by the best of the theologians. First, that it was the *ratifying* of the life which he then had. Adam was placed on probation, and it was his response to the test that had been given him which would determine whether or not he remained in the favour of God, in communion with Him, and continued to enjoy his earthly heritage; whether they should be *confirmed*, and would then become the inalienable portion both of himself and his posterity. Such was the view long entertained by this writer. But of late, we incline much more to the second alternative—namely, that by the "life" promised Adam, we are to understand a yet higher degree of happiness than he then possessed, even heavenly blessedness. Those benefits which Christ came into the world to procure for His people—and which are assured to them by the Covenant of Grace, are, for substance, the same as those which man would have enjoyed had he not fallen. This we consider is clear from those prophetic words of Christ: "I *restored* that which I took not away" (Psa 69:4); and again, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save *that* which was lost" (Luk 19:10). He came to secure "eternal life" (with all that that means), and therefore, *that* had been man's portion had he maintained his integrity.

The same may also be concluded from the nature of that "death" denounced in Genesis 2:17. When God said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely *die*," something far more dreadful than the loss of physical or even spiritual life was involved, even the "second death"—namely eternal punishment and suffering in the "lake of fire" (Rev 20:14-15). Contrariwise, the "life" promised included more than physical immortality or even the confirmation of spiritual life, even everlasting life, or unclouded fellowship with God in heaven for ever. We also concur with many able expositors that Romans 8:3-4 treats of the same thing. "The law" there looks back to that which was written on man's heart at the beginning—of which the Sinaitic was but a transcript. The statement that the Law was "weak through the flesh" alludes to the defectability of Adam. What the Law "could not do" with *such* material was to produce an indefeasible

righteousness. Therefore, God, in His sovereign grace, sent His own incarnate Son—impeccable and immutable—to make full atonement for the guilt of His people and bring in an “everlasting righteousness” (Dan 9:24) for them. In a word, Christ performed that perfect obedience which the first man failed to render, and thereby obtained for all His seed the award of the fulfilled Law.

What has last been pointed out should remove any misconception that the view we have just propounded derogates in the slightest degree from the glory of the Saviour. Romans 8:3-4 is treating of something far more essential and weighty than whether or not Christ, by His infinite merits, obtained for us something more than we lost in Adam: undoubtedly He did—our *establishment* in righteousness, our glorification, etc. Rather does that passage intimate what was the highest motive and ultimate end which God had before Him when He foresaw, foreordained, and permitted our fall in Adam. *Christ* is the grand Centre of all the divine counsels, and the magnifying of Him their principal design. Had God withheld Adam from sinning, all his race had been eternally happy. But in that case, Adam had been their saviour and benefactor, and all his seed had gloried *in him*, ascribing their everlasting felicity to his obedience. But such an honour was far too much for any finite creature to bear. Only the Lord from heaven was worthy of it. Accordingly, God designedly made the flesh of the first man “weak” or mutable, and suffered his defection, in order to make way for His laying our help “upon one that is *mighty*” (Psa 89:19), that we might owe our endless bliss unto Him! Moreover, that obedience which Christ rendered to the Law magnified it and made it infinitely more honourable than could the conformity to it of any mere creature.

Returning now to the scriptural evidence that God entered into a covenant with Adam. In Hosea 6:7, we read that God complained of Israel, “But they *like men* [*‘Adam’*] have transgressed *the covenant*: there have they dealt treacherously against me” (margin)—the Hebrew word for “men” there is Adam, as in Job 31:33. Adam, then, *was* placed under a covenant, the requirement or condition of which was his continued subjection unto God—whether or not the divine will was sacred in his eyes. But he failed to love God with all his heart, held His high authority in contempt, disbelieved His holy veracity, and deliberately and presumptuously defied Him. Thereby he “transgressed the covenant” and “dealt treacherously” with his Maker. In like manner, did Israel centuries later transgress the covenant which they entered into with the LORD at Sinai, preferring their own will and way, lusting after those false gods which He had forbidden under pain of death. Finally, let it be pointed out that the fact of Adam’s having stood as the covenant head of his race is conclusively demonstrated by the penal evils which come upon his children in consequence of his fall. From the dreadful curse entailed upon all his descendants, we are compelled to infer the covenant relationship which existed between him and them; for the Judge of all the earth, being righteous, will never punish where there is no crime. “In Adam all *die*” (1Co 15:22), because in him, all *sinned*.



PRIVATE JUDGMENT

Part 2

Each one of us is directly responsible to God for the use he makes and the compliance he renders to His Word. God holds every rational creature accountable to ascertain from His living oracles what is His revealed will, and to conform thereunto. None can lawfully evade this duty by paying someone to do the work for him. Whatever help may be obtained from God's ministers, we are not dependent on them. To understand and interpret the Scriptures is not the prerogative of any ecclesiastical hierarchy. We have the Bible in our own mother tongue. The Throne of Grace is available, whither we may turn and humbly make request, "Teach me, O LORD...thy statutes...Give me [good] understanding...Make me to go in the path of thy commandments" (Psa 119:33-35). We have the promise of Christ to rest upon: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God" (Joh 7:17). Hence, there is no valid excuse either for spiritual ignorance, or for misconception of what God requires us to believe and do. Unto His children, God has graciously imparted His Spirit that they may "*know* the things that are freely given to us of God" (1Co 2:12). Yet it is only as God's Word is personally received into the heart that it "effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1Th 2:13).

There is an urgent *need* for each person who values his soul and its eternal interests to spare no pains in making himself thoroughly familiar with God's Holy Word; and prayerfully endeavouring to understand its teaching, not only for the pressing reason stated above, but also because of the babel now obtaining in Christendom—and particularly in view of the numerous emissaries of Satan who lie in wait at every corner, ready to seduce the unwary and the indolent. As pointed out in our last, the conflicting teaching which now abounds in the churches renders it all the more imperative that each of us should have strong and scripturally formed convictions of his own. Our Lord has expressly bidden us, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Mat 7:15). That solemn warning points a definite duty, and also implies our being qualified to discharge the same. That duty is to examine closely and test carefully by God's Word all that we read and hear from the pens and lips of preachers and teachers; and that, in turn, presupposes we are well acquainted with the Word, for how else can we determine whether an article or a sermon be scriptural or unscriptural?

There is nothing external by which perverters of the truth may be identified. Not only are many of them men of irreproachable moral character and pleasing personality, but they appear to be deeply devoted unto Christ and His cause. Nor are they few in number, for we are told that "many false prophets are gone out into the world"—a statement which is prefaced by "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but *try* the spirits whether they are of God" (1Jo 4:1): that is, diligently weigh their teaching in "the balances of the sanctuary." These seducers of souls profess to be real Christians, and are often to be met with even in the circles of the orthodox. Though at heart ravening wolves, they are disguised "in *sheep's* clothing"—pretending to have a great love for souls, they ensnare many. They feign to be the very opposite of what they are: for instead of being the servants of Christ, they are the agents of Satan "transformed as the ministers of righteousness" (2Co 11:15). Therein lies their "cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph 4:14) people by "good words and fair speeches"; and thus, delude the "hearts of the simple" (Rom 16:18).

Having shown the very real *need* there is for each person to form his own judgment of what God's Word teaches, we now turn to consider his God-given *right* to do so. This is plainly signified or clearly implied in many passages: "Hear my words, O ye wise men; and give ear unto me, ye that have knowledge. For the ear *trieth* words, as the mouth tasteth meat" (Job 34:2-3). Upon which the Puritan, Joseph Caryl (1602-1673), very pertinently asked, "You will not swallow your meat until you have chewed and tasted it, nor should you swallow words until you have tried them. Why else have we ears to hear? Why are we trusted with reason to judge things with, or with rules to judge them by? There is no greater tyranny in the world than to command men to believe (with implicit faith) as others believe, or to impose our opinions and assertions upon those who hear them and not give them liberty to try them." Allow none to dictate to you, my reader, upon spiritual matters. He that is called in the Lord is "the Lord's freeman"; and hence it follows, "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men" (1Co 7:22-23).

"Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom 14:5). In order to ascertain the precise scope of those words, we must examine the setting in which they occur. They were first addressed to the saints at Rome, who were composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, between whom there were differences

of opinion upon minor matters. Though these Jews had heartily received Christ as their promised Messiah and Saviour, they clung to the idea that the Levitical law—with its distinction of clean and unclean meats and the observance of certain fasts and festivals—was still binding upon them. Not only did they contend zealously for the same, but they were strongly desirous of imposing them on their fellow Christians, whom they regarded as proselytes to Judaism. On the other hand, not only had the Gentile believers not been brought up under the Mosaic rites, but they were convinced that the ceremonial observances of Judaism had been annulled by the new and better dispensation which had been inaugurated by the Lord Jesus. This difference of opinion, with each party holding firm convictions thereon, menaced the unity of their fellowship and the exercise of brotherly love unto each other. The one needed to beware of looking upon the other as being lax and of a latitudinarian spirit, while the latter must refrain from viewing the former as being bigoted and superstitious.

Nothing vital was at stake—any more than there is today when the wearing of jewelry and the use of tobacco are questions agitated in some Christian circles. But since the peace of the Roman assembly was being threatened, and a spirit of intolerance had begun to obtain, through failure of each party to allow full liberty of conscience unto their brethren, it was needful that the apostle should deal with this situation and give such instruction unto each as would prevent these differences of opinion upon non-essentials of faith and practice leading to a serious breach of the peace. Accordingly, Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit so to counsel them as to give forth at the same time teaching which is most valuable, essential, and pertinent to similar cases in all generations. This he did by laying down broad and general principles which it behoves all Christians to be regulated by; nay, we cannot disregard them without sinning, since they are clothed with divine authority. While human nature remains as it is, and while differently constituted minds do not view things uniformly, if Christian charity is to be exercised and harmony prevail among God's people, it is most necessary that they understand and practice those principles.

First, we are exhorted, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him" (Rom 14:3). Therein both parties are forbidden to give place unto unbrotherly thoughts and sentiments. Second, they were asked, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand" (verse 4). This is tantamount to saying that it is the height of arrogance for any Christian to ascend the tribunal of judgment and pass sentence of condemnation upon a brother in Christ. Third, it is admitted that "one man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike," and then follows, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (verse 5). *There* is the charter of Christian liberty: let none allow himself to be deprived of it. Those words cannot mean less than that every Christian has the God-given right to think for himself, to form his own opinion of what Scripture teaches, and to decide what he considers is most pleasing and honouring unto God.

Note well how emphatic and sweeping are the words of Romans 14:5, "Let every man": not only the preacher, but the private member too. "Be fully persuaded": not coerced, nor uncertain, as he will be if, instead of forming his own opinion, he heeds the confusion of tongues now abounding on every side. "In his own mind": neither blindly following the popular custom, nor yielding to the *ipse dixit* of others. Where doubtful things are concerned, each one should turn to the Scriptures for guidance and carefully examine them for himself, and then act according to his best judgment of what they require him to do. It is an obligation binding on each of us to be regulated by what appears to be the revealed will of God. This is what constitutes the very essence of practical Christianity: the personal recognition of Christ's property in me and authority over me, and in and over my brethren. I am neither to exercise dominion over them, nor submit to theirs over me. Let us seek to help each other all we can, but let us leave Christ to *judge* us. He only has the capacity as He only has the right to do so. Perform what you are assured to be your duty and leave others to do likewise: thereby the rights of the individual are preserved and the peace of the community promoted.

Different opinions on minor matters are to be expected, but that is no reason why those holding the same should not dwell together in amity and enjoy communion in the great fundamentals of the faith. If one is satisfied that certain "days" should be observed, that he had *divine* warrant to solemnly celebrate "Christmas" or "Easter," then let him do so. But if another is convinced that such "days" are of human invention and devoid of divine authority, then let him ignore them. Let each one act from religious conviction and suffer not the fear of censure from, or contempt of, others to deter him; nor the desire to ingratiate himself in the esteem of his fellows induce him to act contrary to his conscience. Each Christian is responsible

to believe and act according to the best light which he has from God and continue to examine His Word and pray for more light. The dictates of conscience are not to be trifled with, and the right of private judgment is ever to be exercised by me and respected in others. Thereby the Christian duty of mutual forbearance is alone maintained and a spirit of tolerance and charity exercised.

“I speak as to wise men; *judge ye* what I say” (1Co 10:15). In those words, the apostle called upon the saints to decide discreetly if what he had further to advance on the subject condemned them for continuing to feast in idol temples. He was treating with whether or not such an action came within the scriptural definition of idolatry. In terming them “wise men,” he intimated that they were well able to weigh an argument, and therefore, it was their duty to examine carefully and ponder prayerfully what he said. In his “judge ye,” he signified his desire for them to be personally convinced, from the exercise of those spiritual “senses” which pertain to all the regenerate (Heb 5:12-14). “Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God [with her head] uncovered?” (1Co 11:13). Not only would Paul have them obediently submit to the divine requirements, but also perceive for themselves what would be becoming, appealing to their sense of propriety, adding, “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?” (verse 14). Again, “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge” (1Co 14:29). Once more, they were called upon to exercise their own judgment—in this case, whether the messages given out by those claiming to be “prophets” were really the oracles of God.

Now, this right of private judgment, and the duty of each person to determine for himself what God’s Word teaches, is categorically *denied by Rome*, which avers that “ignorance is the mother of devotion,” and that the highest form of service is that of “blind obedience.” The Papacy insists that the Church is absolutely infallible in all matters of Christian faith and practice, and is the divinely authorized interpreter of the Rule of Faith. During Session IV, the Council of Trent (1563) decreed that “No one, relying on his own skill, shall, in matters of faith and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, wresting the sacred Scripture to his own senses, presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church—whose it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures—hath held and doth hold; or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.” This was ratified and repeated in the *Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council* (chapter 2): “We, renewing the said decree, declare this to be their sense, that in matters of faith and morals, appertaining to the building up of Christian doctrine, that is to be held as the true sense of Holy Scripture, which our holy mother Church hath held and holds, to whom it belongs to judge of the true sense of the Holy Scripture; and therefore that it is permitted to no one to interpret the sacred Scripture contrary to this sense.”

Nor has the arch-deceiver and enslaver of souls receded one hair’s breadth from that position since then. The following propositions were *denounced* by the Papacy: “It is profitable at all times and in all places for all sorts of persons to study the Scriptures, and to become acquainted with their spirit, piety, and mysteries” (Proposition 79). “The reading of the Holy Scriptures in the hands of a man of business and a financier [Act 8:27-28] shows that it is intended for everybody” (Proposition 80). “The Lord’s day ought to be sanctified by the reading of books of piety, and especially of the Scriptures. They are the milk which God Himself, who knows our hearts, has supplied for them” (Proposition 81). “It amounts to shutting the mouth of Christ to Christians, and to wresting from their hands the Holy Bible, or to keeping it shut from them, by depriving them of the means of hearing it.” Those, together with many other similar postulates, were “condemned to perpetuity” as being “false and scandalous” in his “bull” (a Papal decree to which is affixed the Pope’s seal)—Unigenitus by Clement XI, issued on September 8, 1713.

In 1824, the encyclical epistle of Pope Leo XII complained of the Bible societies, “which,” it said, “violate the traditions of the Fathers and the Council of Trent, in circulating the Scriptures in the vernacular tongues of all nations.” “In order to avoid this pestilence,” said this poor creature, “our predecessors have published several constitutions...tending to show how pernicious for the faith and for morals is this perfidious instrument”—i.e., the Bible society. In those countries ruled by the emissaries of the Vatican, God’s Word has ever been, and still is, withheld from the people; and they are forbidden to read or hear it read under pain of the Pope’s anathema. All known copies of it are seized and committed to the flames. At this very hour, the Lord’s people in Spain are being persecuted for their loyalty to the Bible. So would they be in all English-speaking countries today if the Romanists could secure full temporal power over them. The Lord mercifully grant that such a catastrophe may never again happen.

Ere passing from this aspect of our subject, let us briefly notice one verse to which appeal is made by Romanists in support of their contention that the laity have no right to form their own views of what God’s

Word teaches: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (2Pe 1:20). On the basis of those words, it is insisted that the Bible must be *officially* interpreted, and that "holy mother Church" is alone authorized and qualified to discharge this duty and to render this service. But that verse affords not the slightest support of their arrogant claim. Those words, as their context clearly shows, treat of the *source* of prophecy and *not* its meaning. The very next sentence explains what is signified by verse 20: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Thus, verse 20 manifestly imports, Be assured at the outset that what the prophets delivered proceeded not from their own minds. The Greek word for "private" is never again so rendered elsewhere in the New Testament, but is translated scores of times "his own." Consequently, the "interpretation" has reference to what was *delivered* by the prophets, and not to the explication of it: had the "interpretation" which the prophets delivered issued from themselves, then they *had been* "by the will of man," which the next verse expressly denies (verse 21).

Taking verses 20 and 21 together, nothing could more emphatically affirm the absolute inspiration of the prophets. They spoke from God, and not from themselves. The *force*, then, of verse 20, is that no prophetic utterance was of human origination. It is the divine authorship of their words, and not the explanation of their messages, that is here in view—the act of *supplying* the prophecy, and not the explaining of it when supplied. So far from lending any colour to the view that there inheres somewhere in the Church and its ministers an authority to fix the sense of Holy Writ, this very verse, as it is rendered in the Authorized Version, obviously refutes the same, because for any man—be it the Roman pontiff or a Protestant prelate—to determine the meaning of God's Word *would be* of "private interpretation"! Alas, that is the very thing which has happened throughout Christendom: for each church, denomination, party, or "circle of fellowship" puts its own meaning on the Word, and in many instances, *contrary* to the truth itself. Let the Christian reader be fully persuaded that there is nothing whatever in 2 Peter 1:20 which forbids him weighing the words of Scripture, exercising his own judgment, and under the guidance and grace of the Holy Spirit, deciding what they signify.

Not only is private judgment a *right* which God has conferred upon each of His children, but it is their bounden *duty* to exercise the same. The Lord requires us to make full use of this privilege, and to employ all lawful and peaceful means for its maintenance. Not only are we responsible to reject all erroneous teaching, but we are not to be the serfs of any ecclesiastical tyranny: "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Mat 23:8-9). Those words contain very much more than a prohibition against according ecclesiastical titles unto men; yea, it is exceedingly doubtful whether such a concept is contained therein; rather is Christ forbidding us to be in spiritual *bondage* to anyone. In verse 2, He had stated, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat": that is, they have arrogated to themselves the power of religious legislation and demand entire subjection from their adherents. In the verses that follow, our Lord reprehended them for usurping authority and setting up themselves as demagogues: in view of which the Lord Jesus bade His disciples maintain their spiritual liberty, and refuse all allegiance or subservience to any such tyrants.

