

Vol. XXIX

September, 1950

No. 9

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“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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TEARS

Tears are one of the many consequences of sin, for there is no weeping in heaven, nor could we conceive of there being any upon earth had man preserved his pristine purity, for holiness and happiness are inseparable. Nevertheless, it is evident that when God made man, He did so with the preview of his fall. "Evident" we say, for the provision of a tear-duct to the eye shows that it was designed, among other things, for weeping. And what a marvelous production is the human eye, not only in the delicacy and complexity of its mechanism, but also in its manifold uses and services. That small but expressive organ can glow with pleasure, flash with anger, stare in wonderment, shrink with horror, and be so suffused with the tears of sorrow as to pour out a rivulet of grief. Nor is it wrong to weep at certain times. Nay, God has bidden us do so: "Weep with them that weep" (Rom 12:15), though that is not to be restricted to the literal and outward act. Nor is weeping necessarily a mark of weakness or effeminacy, for the God-man wept. Weeping is a merciful provision of the Creator's, for it has been rightly termed "nature's safety valve." As might well be expected, much is said in the Bible about weeping, for the Word of God is intensely human. To a few of its references we now turn.

"And Hezekiah wept sore" (2Ki 20:3). The context informs us that he was "sick unto death," and that the LORD had sent Isaiah to him, saying, "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die" (verse 1). Whereupon the king of Judah "prayed unto the LORD" (verse 2), reminded Him that he had walked before Him in truth and with a sincere heart, and sealed his plea with tears. The prophet was then authorized to return and tell Hezekiah, "Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have *seen thy tears*: behold, I will heal thee" (verse 5). Thus, his were the tears of *supplication*, and they were effectual. There is nothing in Scripture which warrants the idea that it was the fear of death which so distressed the king; rather is there reason to believe that it was the circumstances of his family and the state of his nation which so deeply affected him. At that time, he had no son, and he grieved at the prospect of his branch of David's family becoming extinct. Probably his kingdom was then being threatened by the Assyrians, and there was need of a God-fearing and capable commander for such an emergency. Much might be written on this remarkable and mysterious incident, but the one thing we would here stress is the *prevalency of tears*. Has not many a sorely tried saint reason to acknowledge that "the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping" (Psa 6:8)—that when words failed him, his tears spoke effectually unto God?

"And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews" (Est 8:3). This was the third time she petitioned the king, as a reference to Esther 5:3 and 7:2 shows, but on neither of the former occasions did Esther give way unto tears. But the situation which now confronted her was critical and urgent. Yet it was not in connection with herself personally; it was the fate which threatened her nation that moved Esther so deeply. This is blessed to behold. Though so highly elevated as to be now the king's consort, she forgot not the misery of her people, but used her influence on their behalf. An edict had gone forth for the destruction of the Jews (Est 3:9-11), and Esther said unto the king, "For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people?" (Est 8:6). Thus, hers were the tears of *earnest entreaty*, and as the tear-watered supplication of Hezekiah was effectual before the LORD, so the unselfish and pathetic weeping of Esther prevailed before the king, for we read that he said to her, "Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring" (verse 8); and the wicked edict was cancelled.

"Therefore thou shalt say this word unto them; Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease: for the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach, with a very grievous blow" (Jer 14:17). Here is a call to weeping not for an individual, nor yet for his nation, but for the languishing cause of God. It was tears of *lamentation* which were enjoined in view of the sad state the Church was then in. Israel had sinned grievously and the rod of divine chastisement lay heavy upon her. No longer did she enjoy God's smile of approbation; instead, His judgments were her portion, and her enemies prevailed over her. She was not to harden her heart or be stoically indifferent, but make conscience of her iniquities and bewail the dishonour done her God. In like manner, His people today should take to heart the present state of things in Christendom, and the reproach it brings on the name of Christ. What a desolate state the LORD's vineyard is now in! How many a golden candlestick has been removed! What a feeble

glimmer is cast by the remaining ones! The glory has departed, the power and blessing of the Spirit is withheld. If the cause of Christ be dear unto us, we shall weep over and mourn for its grievous condition.

“And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment” (Luk 7:37-38). A remarkable scene is here presented to us. Our blessed Lord was the guest of a critical and self-righteous Pharisee—the very last place where we should expect to find such a woman as this one had been! Ah, but “a friend of publicans and sinners” (Mat 11:19; Luk 7:34) was the magnet. Indifferent to the cold and contemptuous glances which she must have known would be cast at her, she could not be restrained from seeking out the One who had won her heart and blotted out her iniquities. Taking her place at Christ’s feet betokened her complete subjection to Him. Her tears were those of *contrition*, though joy inspired them too: godly sorrow for having sinned against and grieved such a One, joy in the assurance that He loved her. Kissing His feet expressed her affection. Wiping them with her (long!) hair—the woman’s “glory” (1Co 11:15)—signified that she would henceforth devote herself to His honour. The anointing of His feet was an act of worship and adoration.

“Jesus wept” (Joh 11:35). The shortest and, in some respects, the most wonderful and blessed verse in the Bible. What an awe-inspiring spectacle does it present to us—the Lord of glory shedding tears! What a mysterious phenomenon—the Maker of heaven and earth weeping! The more so since the Prince of life knew that in a few minutes, He would raise Lazarus! Why then did He weep? Because God’s Son had been made like to His brethren “in all things” (Heb 2:17), partaking of their susceptibilities and emotions. As the perfect Man beheld the grief of the friends and sisters of Lazarus, He could not but be deeply moved and weep with them. His tears on this occasion were those of *compassion*. It was the great High Priest of His people giving proof that He was touched with the feeling of their infirmities. We believe that as the Lord Jesus stood by that grave, He looked down the centuries and beheld each Christian home visited by death, and His weeping at Bethany assures bereaved saints that He sympathizes deeply with them and stands ready to pour the balm of Gilead into their sore hearts.

“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared” (Heb 5:7). Those were the tears of *anguish*, telling us of the severity of the Saviour’s sufferings. The “days of his flesh” signifies the whole period of His humiliation. The “strong crying and tears” indicates the extent to which Christ felt the terrible burden laid upon Him. He was no stoic, but felt intensely, both in body and soul, the fearful curse of the Law and the outpoured wrath of God. They were part of the “roaring” predicted of Him in Psalm 22:1. No human mind can conceive the terribleness of the conflict through which the Saviour passed and the “travail of soul” which He endured. He sought deliverance “from *death*” and not from dying, for He had received commandment to lay down His life (Joh 10:18), and therefore, He prayed, “O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul” (Psa 116:4). He was “heard”; His prayers and supplications were answered. God’s response thereto was seen in raising Him from the dead.

“Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews...by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Act 20:19, 31). Those were the tears of *ministerial love and urgency*. No merely professional or perfunctory service was that rendered by the apostle. He had such a love for souls as made him say, “I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Gal 4:19). No wonder the Lord gave him so many “seals” to his ministry! Let each servant of Christ who reads these lines search his heart in the light of Acts 20:19, 31, and ask himself whether the *absence* of such “tears” be the explanation of the barrenness of his ministry. It is written, “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy” (Psa 126:5); and perhaps the day to come will show that the latter is in exact proportion to the former.



THE EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

9. *Light and Darkness (1:5-6)*

“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1Jo 1:6). In those words, we have: (1) A lofty averment¹—claiming to have fellowship with God. (2) A flat contradiction—walk in darkness. (3) A solemn indictment—such are denounced as liars. (4) A sweeping inclusion, the “we” taking in the apostles themselves—if the cap fitted, they too must wear it.

Context

The *connection* between this verse and the one immediately following, with verse 5 may be readily perceived. John was writing on the subject of fellowship, and having described the character of the One with whom that fellowship is had, he makes application of his “message” unto two radically different classes, which together make up what is known as Christendom, or “the kingdom of heaven” in the parables of Matthew 13 and 25:1-10—which includes tares as well as wheat, bad fish as well as good, foolish virgins as well as wise ones. The first class comprises those who have a name to live, but are dead; the second, those who actually possess spiritual life. More specifically, the relation of verse 6 to verse 5 is that here we behold the Light detecting and exposing what is contrary thereto. Since in God there be no darkness at all, true piety is to be distinguished from its counterfeit by a walking in the light. By this criterion or test must we judge all who claim to hold converse with God: their characters must harmonize with His.

In verse 6, John was not referring to the unregenerate as such, but to unrenewed *professors*, who boasted of their enjoying communion with the triune God. It was not the openly wicked and profane which he had in view, but those who unwarrantably bore the name of Christians, those who were in church fellowship. In his day, as now, there were in the Christian assemblies those who were born of God, and those who were not so. This is clear from those mentioned in 1 John 2:19: “They went out from us, but they were not of us”—originally, members; later, apostates. Jude also refers to certain men who “crept in unawares,” “ungodly men [who were] turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude :4). Hence, there was a real and pressing need for lip profession to be *tested* by the character of the daily life. This is done here by immediately following up the statement in verse 5 by a solemn warning against self-deception, insisting that fellowship with God is to be gauged by conformity unto Him in holiness and righteousness.

So far as we can discern, the apostle’s *design* in the words before us was at least threefold. First, to stir up the saints themselves, and prevent their becoming careless and remiss. The apostle here warns them of how much need there was to watch their own hearts and to be circumspect and strict of their walk, avoiding everything which had a tendency unto sin, since *that* would interrupt their holding and maintaining communion with their heavenly Father. As the Psalmist declared, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psa 66:18): when I cherish that which is evil, the Holy One will not connive² at my sin. “If thou listen to the devil, God will not listen to thee”—Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892). Second, to convict and undeceive the deluded, that the ignorant and erring might discover their perilous state, and be led to cry unto God for a real work of grace to be wrought in them. Third, to unmask hypocrites, and thereby prevent the children of God being imposed upon by those who had nothing in common with them; and to separate themselves from all such false pretenders.

In seeking a closer view of our present verse, we not only need to attend to the context, but also to bear carefully in mind John’s peculiar *style*. We made a brief reference to this in the introductory article, when calling attention to the *abstract* (and absolute) character of many of his statements. Thus, in 1 John 1:3, he declared “truly our fellowship *is* with the Father”—not “ought to be,” taking no notice of the things which hinder and break it. So it is here: he speaks of that which characterizes a person, and not of something which is exceptional. There are none on earth who enjoy unbroken and unclouded fellowship with God. Only One could say, “I have set the LORD always before me” (Psa 16:8). In like manner, there has never been a saint who walked uninterruptedly in the light, who never deviated from the paths of righteousness. None but Christ could aver, “I do always those things that please him” (Joh 8:29). He alone ever practiced

¹ **averment** – assertion as a fact.

² **connive** – to shut one’s eyes to a thing that one dislikes.

what He preached and perfectly exemplified what He taught; hence the unique emphasis of “mighty in deed *and* word before God and all the people” (Luk 24:19), and “all that Jesus began both to *do* and teach” (Act 1:1).

1. A Lofty Avowal

“If we say that we have fellowship with him.” Here is a lofty avowal supposed. “If we say” is a common mode of speaking in Scripture to express a definite affirmation or profession, as in “but now ye say, We see” (Joh 9:41). “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?” (Jam 2:14); “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar” (1Jo 2:4)—where in each instance, as here, the declaration is proved to be an idle boast. It is a bare assertion without any corresponding reality. There is a radical difference between profession and possession. To “have fellowship with God” presupposes regeneration and reconciliation unto Him. To state that we have fellowship with God is tantamount to claiming that we are His children, to be partakers of the divine nature, to be delivered from this present evil world (Gal 1:4), and that we belong to that company whose desire and determination it is to please and glorify Him. To have fellowship with God means that our affections are set upon things above (Col 3:2), that we bask in the light of His countenance.

2. A Flat Contradiction

“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie.” Obviously, the first task before the expositor here is to give a *correct* definition or explanation of what it means to “walk in darkness”; and strange as it may sound (heretical to some ears), that is not necessarily the same thing as a *scriptural* one. There are many terms and expressions in God’s Word which are used by no means uniformly; and it is the interpreter’s duty to ascertain by a careful study of its setting, and then demonstrate to the reader, what is its precise meaning in any given instance. Thus, in Isaiah 50:10, the words, “walketh in darkness” are found; yet their force there is quite different from that in our present text, and they respect very diverse characters. Let us, then, examine closely its language. In Scripture, a man’s “walk” refers not to any single act, or even habit, but rather to the general tenor of a person’s behavior—the regular course followed by him. “Walking” is a voluntary act (Pro 2:13), a continuous action (Isa 65:2), and a progressive action (2Ti 3:13). A man’s walk reveals the state of his heart, being a practical expression of what he is.

Whatever that term may signify in other passages, to “walk in darkness” certainly does not here mean to be in doubt about our spiritual state, or to be totally lacking in assurance of our acceptance with God; nor even a deep depression and despondency of soul. It is indeed desirable for the saint to know he has passed from death unto life (Joh 5:24) and to have the Spirit bearing witness with his spirit that he is a child of God (Rom 8:16), as it is also both his privilege and duty to “rejoice in the Lord alway” (Phi 4:4). Yet though he may lack both the one and the other (and such is to be greatly deplored, and never excused), the absence thereof is no proof that he is not a Christian. No, something very much graver than that is here in view. While “the darkness” has reference to the *realm* inhabited by this class, nevertheless, it is also their *activities* in that realm which the apostle had before him. In general terms, to walk in darkness is to order our lives in opposition to the revealed character and will of Him who is light. It is expressive of being in a state of nature and acting accordingly.

More specifically, to walk in darkness is the condition of all the unregenerate, for they are total strangers to God and His so-great salvation. “For [we] *were* sometimes darkness” (Eph 5:8) describes our fearful state by nature. By his fall, man was deprived of the favour of God, the Spirit of God, the image of God in his soul, and darkness became his element. Second, to walk in darkness is to be under the curse of God, for when Christ was made a curse for His people (Gal 3:13), there was “darkness over all the land” (Mat 27:45) for the space of three hours. Third, to walk in darkness is to be under the control of Satan, for salvation is a being turned “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Act 26:18; cp. Col 1:13). Fourth, to walk in darkness is to be completely under the dominion of sin (Pro 4:18-19). To walk in darkness is to tread the broad road which leads to destruction (Mat 7:13), and the one who does so ends by being “cast...into outer darkness” (Mat 22:13).

To walk in darkness is to conduct ourselves *unholily*, to follow steadily a course of self-pleasing, for “the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph 5:11) are the products of the flesh. It is not simply to be betrayed by the force of temptation into inconsistent actions, but the ruling principle and power of our lives is the very reverse of godliness, demonstrating such to be complete strangers to a work of divine grace. “Darkness” here has reference to the dominion and power of sin, with its awful effects upon the character and

conduct of the unregenerate. Even though the grosser forms of sin appear not in the life, yet enmity against God rules the heart, regulates the thoughts and affections, and determines the motives. And though the ungodly may have little or no cognizance of the same, yet all these things are “naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). As the best fruits of grace are produced by the Spirit in the heart and are known and valued only by the Lord, so it is with indwelling sin—its principal and vilest productions are not seen by our fellows.

Again, to walk in darkness is explained both by the contents of the preceding verse and the antithesis pointed in the following one. “Light” is transparent and translucent, open and clear, and it is so always and everywhere; whereas darkness is characterized by the opposite properties—it conceals, disguises, distorts. By his apostasy from God, man lost that element of simplicity and openness in which he was created. Moreover, the clear and bright sunshine of the countenance of Him who is light became intolerant to the fallen creature—man fled and hid himself from God. Hence, it is that insincerity and deceitfulness that mark the natural man. He is not honest, either with himself or in his dealings with God. He tries to make himself out to be other than he is. “Men loved darkness rather than light...For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (Joh 3:19-20).

Finally, let it be pointed out that to walk in darkness includes living under fundamental *error* concerning spiritual and eternal things. Every doctrine of men—everything which is contrary to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, derogatory to the honour and dignity of Christ, or which is opposed to the free grace of God in election, effectual calling, final perseverance, and the inculcation of true piety—is sinful in the sight of God and morally evil in us. He has not given His Word for us to pass judgment upon, but to receive into our minds with all submissiveness. There can be no fellowship with God but in the belief and practice of the truth. While we are walking in the reception and influence of anything contrary to divine revelation, we can have no communion with Him, for we are in the darkness of error. Every part of the truth is like its Author: light, pure, holy, and perfect. His doctrine is “according to godliness” (1Ti 6:3), promoting and increasing it, supplying motives thereunto. But error is pernicious, and its words “eat as doth a canker” (2Ti 2:17).

3. A Solemn Indictment

“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie.” Surely that is self-evident. Not only is the latter manifestly inconsistent with the former, but the two things are utterly irreconcilable. Purity and impurity are opposites. They are radically and essentially distinct. They are contrary in their nature, their properties, and their tendencies. Sin and holiness are diametrically antagonistic to each other. Truth and error can never agree: there can be no such thing as walking in the truth, and at the same time living in that which is flatly contradictory thereto. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord?” (2Co 6:14-15). None whatever: they are the avowed enemies of each other. To make the claim that I am enjoying fellowship with God, and at the same time for me to be ruled by Satan, acting in self-gratification, and taking pleasure in the ways of sin, is not only a patent absurdity and an empty pretence, it is also a manifest falsehood—a wicked lie.

Such glaring hypocrisy calls for strong denunciation. Very different was John from our mealy-mouthed men who gain a reputation for being “gracious” at the expense of fidelity. John did not merely say that this class of Christian professors erred or were “labouring under a delusion,” but spoke plainly and called them what they were. He was the apostle of love, and here gave proof thereof, for love is *faithful*. False pretences need to be dealt with sternly and their dishonesty condemned. The apostle used great plainness of speech, yet no more so than the case called for. It was not only that their lips were uttering what was untrue, but they were acting an untruth; their very lives were a falsehood, and therefore they were not to be spared. To be guilty of making such an outrageous claim is to traduce the character of God, for He holds no intercourse with the unholy; is to repudiate the truth, for such have no access to God; and is grievously to dishonour the cause of Christ.

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” By putting those verses together, not only is the proposition in the latter more self-evident, but the needs be for the former becomes plainer. At first sight, it seems strange that John should announce so formally and emphatically such elementary truths. Surely, if there be anything which believers are clear upon it is the character of God, and that *it* precludes such an incongruity as is here refuted. Why then com-

mence therewith right after the introductory verses? Because one of the chief designs of this epistle is the testing of Christian profession. Because there were, and have been ever since, many in Christendom who came under the description of verse 6. And because there is still a sad tendency remaining in real Christians *practically* to deny this proposition: to act deceitfully, to trifle with sin, fellowship the unfruitful works of darkness, and yet suppose they are in communion with God—which is virtually saying that He is *not* light.

The love of approbation³ is the native trend of the human heart. Each person desires to be well thought of by his fellows, and the vast majority pose as being better than they are. Fear of censure and the contempt of others is another powerful motive which induces many to act the part of hypocrites, and such needs to be unsparingly mortified by the saint, for the extent to which he yields thereto makes him untruthful, and effectually hinders him from walking with the Holy One. Thus it is that so many of the unregenerate apply for Church membership: they profess the truth of the Gospel, but are strangers to its power. Many of them claim to have not only fellowship with God, but an exalted type and high degree thereof. They have much to say about the grace of God, but little or nothing of His holiness. They extol the imputed righteousness of Christ, but give no evidence of being recipients of His imparted righteousness. They prate about their peace and joy, but their daily lives are not ordered by the precepts of the Word. Their walk gives the lie to their profession.

4. A Sweeping Inclusion

“If *we* say”: John here includes himself! Were we, the apostles of Christ, to be found walking in darkness and at the same time asserting that we have fellowship with God, we should brand ourselves as liars. The “if” does not signify that such a thing was possible; rather, John was pointing out what was utterly impossible. The apostles *had* fellowship with God and gave clear proof of the same. The blessed effects thereof were felt in their souls and appeared in their lives. It preserved them from sin, and deepened their hatred of it. It is impossible to have fellowship with God and not become increasingly conformed to Him. If it be true that “he that walketh with wise men shall be wise” (Pro 13:20), how much more so will walking with God deliver from folly! If evil communications corrupt good manners, then certainly, divine communications will correct evil manners. Fellowship with God requires oneness of nature, and walking with Him produces sameness of character. Fellowship with God ever issues in spiritual fruitfulness. Thus, it is the wisdom and duty of each of us to test himself by this rule, and then measure his associates thereby.

“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and *do not* the truth.” John here denounces such a sham, exposes its base inconsistency, and denies that such have any intercourse with Him who is light. “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amo 3:3). Neither can one walk with God without being radically influenced thereby. “What God communicates to us is not a base fiction, for it is necessary that the power and effect of this fellowship should shine forth in the life: otherwise our profession of the Gospel is fallacious”—John Calvin (1509-1564). Yet the spirit of self-deception and hypocrisy prevails to such an extent that our churches are filled with those of high pretensions whose walk is entirely inconsistent therewith—they have no true sight of themselves or sense of their peril. Their practice demonstrates the falsity of their profession. They “*do not* the truth”; they act not in accord with its holy requirements—they are not vitally influenced thereby. Christianity does not consist in “saying,” but in *being*.

Unspeakably solemn is what has been before us. We are plainly warned that “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Pro 30:12), and if I really value my eternal interests, I shall seriously inquire, Do I belong to that company? Remember that self-love works presumption. Take nothing for granted; refuse to give yourself the benefit of any doubt. If you honestly desire to know the truth about yourself, then pray sincerely and earnestly, “Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart” (Psa 26:2). No matter how well instructed your mind, or what be your happy feelings, measure yourself by this unerring rule. Truth is not only to be believed and loved, but practised. It is at *this* point that graceless professors are to be distinguished from the regenerate. The one who hears Christ’s sayings, but does them not, is building on the sand (Mat 7:26). The one whom He owns as a spiritual kinsman is he who *does* the Father’s will (Mat 12:50). Those whom Christ pronounces blessed are they who “hear the word of God, and *keep* it” (Luk 11:28). “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (Jam 1:22).



³ **approbation** – warm approval; liking; praise.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

61. *Makkedah (10:13-21)*

“And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies” (Jos 10:13). Therein demonstration was made of the absolute supremacy and invincible might of JEHOVAH. Three great miracles were wrought that day by the LORD on behalf of His people, for they are explainable by naught but divine causation. First, there had been the great hailstones that God had cast down from heaven, and which were remarkable for their magnitude, their efficacy, and their discrimination—more of the Amorites dying from them than by the sword of Israel, and so directed that none of the latter were even injured by them. Second, the sun standing still in mid heaven, and remaining so for almost “a whole day.” Third, the staying of the moon in her course, for it is to be noted that Joshua (as the type of Christ) had addressed her *directly*: “Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon” (verse 12)—evidently, he did not believe that the two bodies acted so automatically in conjunction that it was unnecessary to give distinct command unto the latter, for in such case, he would have spoken only to the sun. It was therefore a different and additional miracle that the moon also “stayed,” as is further evident by the Holy Spirit’s separate mention of each in verse 13.

It is exceedingly solemn to observe that these extraordinary displays of God’s power were *judgments* upon the Canaanites, and that like the great deluge in the days of Noah, the destruction of the cities of the plain by fire from heaven, and the fearful plagues upon Egypt, the miracles of Joshua 10 were interpositions of JEHOVAH for the express purpose of destroying the wicked. This presents to us an aspect of the divine character that, in the vast majority of pulpits, has been deliberately ignored and suppressed for the past fifty years—until the Deity of Holy Writ is now, even in Christendom, “the unknown God” (Act 17:23). Those miracles make it clearly evident that God’s holiness is as real as His grace, His justice as His mercy, His wrath as His love—and they require to be given equal prominence in the preaching of those who profess to be His ministers. They *were so* by the divine Preacher: neither prophet nor apostle spoke so plainly or so frequently as did Christ upon the fearful portion awaiting the lost—such expressions as, “the wrath of God” (Joh 3:36), “the damnation of hell” (Mat 23:33), “the furnace of fire: [where] there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Mat 13:50), the “worm [that] dieth not, and the fire [that] is not quenched” (Mar 9:44, 46, 48) were upon His lips much oftener than “the love of God” (Luk 11:42; Joh 5:42).

It is lamentable and patent dishonesty of so many pulpits during the past two or three generations that is so largely responsible for the moral corruption of our nation today. Of old, the LORD complained of those in Israel whose “lips should keep knowledge” that “ye have not kept my ways, but have been *partial* in the law” (Mal 2:7, 9), and thus has history repeated itself. Instead of declaring “all the counsel of God” (Act 20:27), unfaithful men dwelt only on those portions of the truth which made for their own popularity, deliberately omitting whatever would be unpalatable to their unregenerate hearers. Such a one-sided portrayal was made of the divine character that the Most High was not held in awe; the moral Law was relegated unto the Jews, so that sin became to be regarded lightly; and the soothing opiate that “God loves everybody” took away all fear of the wrath to come. Thousands of thinking men forsook such an effeminate ministry, and those who continued under it were lulled soundly asleep. The children of the former, for the most part, grew up entirely godless; while those of the latter believed in a “god” which is the figment of a sickly sentimentality. And, my reader, where there is no reverence of God and respect for His Law, there will never be genuine regard for human law.

In consequence of such widespread perfidy⁴ on the part of the “churches,” and the disastrous effects thereof upon the community, an insulted and incensed God is now dealing with Christendom—not in grace, but in judgment! Never was an error so plainly exposed as “Dispensationalism” has been during our lifetime. So far from the “silent heaven” of Sir Robert Anderson (1841-1918) and his school, the heavens have been thundering loudly. Instead of this Christian era differing from all previous ones, by an exemption from open displays of God’s anger, it has been, and still is, marked by such with increasing frequency and severity. True, the Day of Salvation has not yet expired, the way of deliverance from the everlasting burning is still available for every individual who accepts the free offer of the Gospel; nevertheless, God has a controversy with those who have slighted His authority and ignored the claims of His righteousness. It is an

⁴ *perfidy* – betrayal.

obvious fact that His judgments have fallen the heaviest upon those parts of the earth which have enjoyed the most spiritual light, but deliberately closed their eyes to it. He has ceased using the “still small voice” of winsomeness, and has been speaking loudly in the earthquake and the fire (1Ki 19:11-12).

“And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel” (Jos 10:14). Those words supply definite confirmation of our remarks upon verse 12, that these miracles were wrought by God in answer to the supplication of His servant—he had at first addressed himself unto the LORD in private; and then, in the hearing of Israel, to the luminaries of heaven. Therein we behold the amazing condescension of the Most High, that he deigns not only to listen to the voice of His creatures, but also to respond to their appeals. It should be pointed out that, as so often in Scripture, the language of this verse is relative and not absolute—both before and since then, God has often listened to the voice of man, but not to the extent of altering the movement of the whole planetary system. In this extraordinary instance, we may perceive how, once more, the LORD made good His promise to Joshua in 3:7, and, as the man whom He delighted to honour, further “magnified him in the sight of all Israel.” The final clause of the verse tells us why JEHOVAH so acted on this occasion—to make it still more evident that He was the Captain of Israel’s armies, and that when He laid bare His mighty arm, none of their enemies could stand before Him. These supernatural phenomena must have made a deep impression upon the surrounding nations, especially those given to the study of astronomy.

“And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal” (Jos 10:15). This verse is by no means free of difficulty, for in view of what is recorded in verses 17-20, it would appear that both Joshua and his men remained for some time in the vicinity of Gibeon; while verse 21 is still more definite—“And all the people returned to the camp to Joshua at Makkedah.” Moreover, as Thomas Scott (1747-1821) pointed out, “It is most unlikely that Joshua would march his army twenty or thirty miles in the midst of victory”—especially after marching all the previous night and being so strenuously engaged that supernaturally prolonged day. The absence of the word “Then” at the beginning of the verse precludes the necessity of our understanding it to mean that they returned *immediately* unto “the camp to Gilgal”; and since identically the same statement is made in verse 43, we regard this in verse 15 as being said by way of anticipation and not as something then accomplished. Ultimately they returned there: to acquaint the congregation with their victory, to render public thanks to God, and to resume and complete their preparations for the northern campaign (Jos 11:1-7). Note well the “all Israel with him” (Jos 10:43), which was yet another miracle—not one had been killed by the hail or slain by the Canaanites!

“But these five kings fled, and hid themselves in a cave at Makkedah” (Jos 10:16). These were the same kings mentioned in verse 3, who had determined upon the destruction of Gibeon. That very morning they had proudly stood at the head of their armies, only to see them utterly routed and almost annihilated, not only by the sword of Israel but also by the artillery of heaven. The tables had indeed been turned with a vengeance, as the opening “But” of the verse is designed to emphasize. Instead of seeking to rally the remnants of their armies and leading their men in a final stand, they were panic-stricken, and ignominiously took to their heels in an attempt to preserve their own lives. They must have realized that more than human forces were arrayed against them, and, filled with terror, they sought to escape the avenger. Doubtless, they cherished the hope that the darkness which was due would aid their escape, and they must have been utterly dismayed by the supernatural prolongation of the daylight. They had travelled quite a distance from Gibeon, but the relentless chase of those who sought their death still continued (verse 10).

The “cave” incidents recorded in the Scriptures are of considerable variety. The first one noticed was the place of unmentionable degradation on the part of Lot and his daughters after their merciful deliverance from Sodom (Gen 19:30-38). The next is where Abraham honourably purchased the field of Ephron, wherein was a cave which became the burial place of his wife Sarah (Gen 23:17, 19), as another was the temporary sepulcher of Lazarus (Joh 11:38)—not so the Saviour’s, whose holy body was laid in a new tomb “hewn out in the rock” (Mat 27:60). In the cave of Adullam, David and his loyal followers found asylum from the murderous designs of Saul. At a later day, another cave provided shelter for fifty of the LORD’s prophets, when Obadiah hid them from the wicked Jezebel (1Ki 18:4), to which allusion is made in Hebrews 11:38. The final reference is in Revelation 6, when in the great Day of the Lamb’s wrath—of which Joshua 10 provided a faint adumbration,⁵ for in that day, too, the heavenly bodies shall be affected—the kings of the earth and the great men shall hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains,

⁵ **adumbration** – exhibiting a slight resemblance.

and shall say unto them, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6:12-17).

"And it was told Joshua, saying, The five kings are found hid in a cave at Makkedah" (Jos 10:17). We may perhaps connect this verse with the fifteenth, and understand by its language simply that Joshua had *planned* to return at once unto Gibeon. Before actually carrying out his design, apparently, he determined to make sure that vengeance had been executed upon the ringleaders of the unprovoked attack upon Gibeon. The fact that Joshua was here told that these kings were "found" suggests that he had given instructions to make search, and ascertain whether the five kings were among those captured, or if their corpses could be identified upon the field of battle. Whether it was some of his own men who had succeeded in locating the fugitives, and now acquainted Joshua with their hiding place, or Canaanitish traitors who had observed their taking refuge in this cave, and desired to ingratiate themselves with Joshua by turning "informers," we know not. The bare fact alone is stated: their attempt at concealment had failed. It is to be borne in mind that they were endeavouring to escape not only the sword of Israel, but the vengeance of God—for "the LORD fought for Israel" (verse 14)—and concealment from *Him* was impossible.

"And Joshua said, Roll great stones upon the mouth of the cave, and set men by it for to keep them" (Jos 10:18). Observe the collectedness of Israel's leader even in the heat of battle. Instead of being elated and excited by the tidings he had just received, or perturbed because it conflicted with his intention of returning forthwith to Gibeon, he calmly gave orders which would effectively prevent the escape of the kings, securing them in the cave until such time as would be convenient for them to be brought before him and dealt with as they deserved, for the next two verses indicate that information had also just been received that Israel's task on this occasion had not yet been completed. "The kings escaped the hailstones and the sword, only to be reserved to a more ignominious death; for the cave in which they took shelter became first their prison and then their grave"—T. Scott. Very similar was this to the case of Pharaoh, who survived the ten plagues upon the land of Egypt, that he might be a greater and more notable memorial of God's wrath and power. Both instances supply illustrations of that solemn declaration, "The Lord knoweth how...to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2Pe 2:9).

"And stay ye not, but pursue after your enemies, and smite the hindmost of them; suffer them not to enter into their cities: for the LORD your God hath delivered them into your hand" (Jos 10:19). When directing the battle against the King of Ai, it appears that Joshua stood on some eminence where he could be seen by his men and from which he issued his orders (Jos 8:18, 26). But on this occasion, they were in a mountainous section of Canaan where the terrain was much more broken, which precluded such a policy. It is clear from verse 10 that after the principal engagement, the Amorites fled in several directions. Possibly, the main body of those who took to their heels had been slain, and Joshua concluded that the death-dealing hail had accounted for the remainder, and had therefore commenced preparations for the return to their headquarters. But the information he had recently received caused him to change his plans, and to issue the above order. His "stay ye not" implies that there had been a pause, and he now gave this word to stimulate his men unto a final effort. Well as they had done, and weary as they might be, this was no time to relax or to sit down congratulating one another.

Note the argument made use of by Joshua as he here encouraged those under him to redouble their efforts and finish the work required of them: "For the LORD your God hath delivered them into your hand" (Jos 10:19). It may well be that they were reluctant to act so ruthlessly, and that there was some doubt in their mind about pursuing so merciless a policy. Having completely defeated them in battle, and seen a still greater number killed by the hailstones, should not the remaining survivors be shown clemency? But neither Joshua nor those under him were free to please themselves in this matter: "And when the LORD thy God shall *deliver them before thee*; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them" (Deu 7:2—repeated in verses 16-23). That divine command was a general and not a universal one, being limited as to time ("when") and qualified by Deuteronomy 20:10-11. On each occasion, the task of Israel's army was to be regulated by that divine mandate. That it must be so in *this* instance was made unmistakably clear by JEHOVAH's words to Joshua in verse 8, "I have delivered them into thine hand"—and therefore, they must slay the Amorites without pity or respite.

"And it came to pass, when Joshua and the children of Israel had made an end of slaying them with a very great slaughter, till they were consumed, that the rest which remained of them entered into fenced cities" (Jos 10:20). The closing words of this verse make it clear that, notwithstanding the extremely heavy

losses which the Amorites had sustained, some of them succeeded in making good their escape. That some of them *would do so* was intimidated by Joshua's "smite the hindmost" in the preceding verse. It was too late then to round them all up: only the laggards in the rear could be overtaken. So it is in the spiritual warfare of the Christian: even after his greatest victories, some of his enemies still survive. In view of God's dealings with Israel, we need not be surprised at this, for at a later date He told them, "I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not" (Jdg 2:21-22).

"And all the people returned to the camp to Joshua at Makkedah in peace: none moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel" (Jos 10:21). That "*all* the people returned to the camp" shows that none of the Israelites had been slain by the enemy. So it is spiritually. Whatever buffetings the believer endures, none of his graces can be destroyed by Satan. That the men of Israel returned to the camp to Joshua in peace shows how the saint should conduct himself when he has been granted success over his foes, namely, seek and enjoy communion with the antitypical Joshua. That none moved his tongue against them demonstrates how fully the fear of God had fallen upon the Canaanites: so awed were they that none dared to curse their victors, or utter a word of reproach against them.



THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

4. *Its Consequences*

The key which opens to us the mystery of human depravity is to be found in a right understanding of the relations which God appointed between the first man and his posterity. As the grand truth of redemption cannot be rightly and intelligently apprehended until we perceive the *federal connection* which God ordained between the Redeemer and the redeemed; neither can the tragedy of man's ruin be contemplated in its proper perspective, unless we view it in the light of Adam's apostasy from his Creator. He was the prototype of all humanity: as he stood for the whole human race, so in him God dealt with all who should issue from him. Had not Adam been our covenant head and federal representative, the mere circumstance that he was our first parent would not have involved us in the legal consequences of his sin, nor would it have entitled us to the legal reward of his righteousness had he maintained his integrity and served his probation, by rendering to his Maker and LORD that obedience which was His due and which he was fully capacitated to perform. It was the divinely constituted *nexus* (connecting principle or tie) and *oneness* of the first man and all mankind in the sight of the Law, which explains the latter's participation in the penalty visited upon the former.

In the previous articles of this series, we dwelt at some length upon the *origin* of human depravity, and the divine *imputation* of the guilt of Adam's transgression unto all his descendants. We are now to consider the consequences entailed by the Fall. Abominable indeed is sin, fearful are the wages it receives, dreadful are the effects which it has produced. Therein we are shown the Holy One's estimate of sin, the severity of His punishment expressing its hatefulness unto Him. Conversely, the dire doom of Adam makes evident the enormity of his offence. That offence is not to be measured by the external act of eating the fruit, but by the awful affront which was offered against God's majesty. In his single sin, there was a complication of many crimes. There was base ingratitude against the One who had so richly endowed him, and discontent with the goodly heritage allotted him. There was disbelief of the holy veracity of God, a doubting of His Word, and a believing of the serpent's lie. There was a repudiation of the infinite obligations he was under to love and serve his Maker, a preferring of his own will and way. There was a contempt of God's high authority, a breaking of His covenant, a flying in the face of His solemn threat. The curse of heaven fell upon him because he deliberately and presumptuously defied the Almighty.

Very much more was included and involved in Adam's transgression than is commonly supposed or recognized. Three hundred years ago, that profound theologian James Usher (1581-1656) pointed out that it had wrapped up in it "the breach of the whole Law of God." Summarizing in our own language what the Bishop of Armagh (i.e., James Usher) developed at length, Adam's violation of all the Ten Commandments of the moral Law may be set forth thus. The first commandment he broke by choosing him another "god" when he followed the counsel of Satan. The second, in idolizing his palate, making a god of his belly by eating the forbidden fruit. The third, by believing not God's threatening, therein taking His name in vain. The fourth, by breaking the sinless rest in which he had been placed. The fifth, thereby dishonouring his Father in heaven. The sixth, by slaying himself and all his posterity. The seventh, by committing spiritual adultery, and preferring the creature above the Creator. The eighth, by laying hands upon that to which he had no right. The ninth, by accepting the serpent's false witness against God. The tenth, by coveting that which God had not given to him.

We by no means share the popular idea that the LORD *saved Adam* very soon after his fall, but rather take decided exception thereto. Negatively, we cannot find anything whatever in Holy Writ on which to base such a belief; positively, much to the contrary. First of all, it is clear that his sin was not one of "infirmity," but instead a "presumptuous" one, pertaining to that class of willful sins and open defiance of God for which no sacrifice was provided (Exo 21:14; Num 15:30-31; Deu 17:12; Heb 10:26-29)—and therefore, an unpardonable sin. There is not the slightest sign that he ever repented of his sin, or record of his confessing it to God—on the contrary, when charged with it, he attempted to excuse and extenuate it. Genesis 3 closes with the awful statement: "So he *drove out* the man." Nothing whatever is mentioned to his credit afterwards: no offering of sacrifice, no acts of faith or obedience! Instead, we are merely told that he knew his wife (Gen 4:1, 25), begat a son in his own likeness, and died (Gen 5:3-5). If the reader can see in those statements any intimations or even indications that Adam was a regenerated man, then he has much better eyes than the writer—or, possibly, a more lively imagination.

Nor is there a single word in his favour in the later Scriptures; rather is everything to his condemnation. Job denied that he covered his transgression or hid his iniquity in his bosom "as Adam" did (Job 31:33). The Psalmist declared that those who judged unjustly and accepted the persons of the wicked should "die like men [Adam]" (Psa 82:7), for the Hebrew word there rendered "men" is *Adam*! In the New Testament, he is contrasted in considerable detail with Christ (Rom 5:12, 21; 1Co 15:22, 45-47), and if he were saved, then the antithesis would fail at its principal point. Moreover, such a glaring anomaly is quite out of keeping with what is revealed of God's justice—that the great majority of those whom he represented should eternally perish, while the responsible head should be recovered. In 1 Timothy 2:14, specific mention is made of the fact that "Adam was not deceived," which emphasizes the enormity of his transgression. In Hebrews 11, the Holy Spirit has cited the faith of Old Testament saints, and though He mentions that of Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc., He says nothing about Adam's! His being *omitted* from that list is solemnly significant. Thus, after his being driven out of Eden, Scripture makes no mention of God having any further dealing with Adam!

Before taking up the consequences upon the descendants of Adam's defection, we will consider those which fell more immediately upon him and his guilty partner. These are recorded in Genesis 3. No sooner had he revolted from his gracious Maker and Benefactor than the evil effects thereof became apparent. His understanding, originally enlightened with heavenly wisdom, became darkened and overcast with crass ignorance. His heart, formerly fired with holy veneration toward his Creator and warm with love to Him, now became alienated and filled with enmity against Him. His will, which had been in subjection to his rightful Governor, had cast off the yoke of obedience. His whole moral constitution was wrecked, had become unhinged, perverse. In a word, the life of God had departed from his soul. His aversion for the supremely excellent One appeared in his flight from Him as soon as he heard His approach. His crass ignorance and stupidity were evinced by his vain attempt to conceal himself from the eyes of Omniscience. His pride was displayed in refusing to acknowledge his guilt; his ingratitude when he indirectly upbraided God for giving him a wife. But let us turn to the inspired account of these things.

"And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Gen 3:7). Very, very striking is this. We do not read of any change taking place when Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, but as soon as Adam did so, "the eyes of them *both* were opened." This furnishes definite confirmation of what we dwelt upon in the preceding articles. Adam was the covenant head and legal representative of *his wife*, as well as of the future children which were to issue from them. Therefore, the penalty for disobedience was not inflicted by God until the one to whom the prohibition had been made violated the same, and then the consequences thereof began to be immediately felt by both of them.

But what is meant by "the eyes of them both were opened"? Certainly not their physical eyes, for those had previously been open—thus we have here another intimation that we must not slavishly limit ourselves to the literal meaning of all the terms used in this chapter. The answer, then, must be the "eyes" of their understanding; or, more strictly, those of their *conscience*—which sees or perceives, as well as hears, speaks, and chastises. In that expression, "the eyes of them both were opened," is to be found the key to what follows.

The result of eating the forbidden fruit was not the acquisition of supernatural wisdom, as they fondly hoped, but a discovery that they had reduced themselves to a condition of wretchedness. They knew that they were "naked," and that in a sense very different from that mentioned in Genesis 2:25. Though in their original and glorious state they wore no material clothing, yet we do not believe for a moment that they were without any covering at all. Rather do we agree with G. H. Bishop that they "were not without effulgence shining from them and around them, which wrapped them in a radiant and translucent robe, and in a certain lovely way obscured their outlines. It is contrary to nature, and it is repugnant to us, that anything should be unclothed and absolutely bare. Each bird has its plumage and each animal its coat, and there is no beauty if the covering be removed. Strip the most beautiful bird of its feathers, and, though the form remain unchanged, we no longer admire it. We conceive, then, that artists are wholly at fault and grossly offend against purity, when they paint the human form unclothed, and plead as an excuse the case of Adam in Eden. Could the animals in all their splendid covering coats have bowed down as to the vice-regents of God (Gen 1:28) before beings wholly unclothed? Should Adam, the crown and king of creation, be the only living thing without a screen? Impossible. To the spiritual sense, there certainly is a hint of something about our first parents that impressed and overawed the animal creation. What was that thing? What, but that shining forth like the sun, which describes the body of the resurrection (Dan 12:3)? If the face of Moses so

shone by reflection that the children of Israel were afraid to come nigh him, how much more must the (unimpeded) indwelling Spirit of God in Adam and Eve have flung around them a radiance which made all creation do them reverence at their approach—beholding in them the image and likeness of the LORD God Almighty, glorious in brightness, shining like a sun?”

Supplementing the above, let it be pointed out that of the LORD God, it is said, “Thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment” (Psa 104:1-2)—and man was made, originally, in His image! God “crowned him with glory and honour,” and made him “to have dominion over the works of [His] hands” (Psa 8:5-6); and accordingly, covered him with bright apparel, as will be the ultimate case of those recovered from the Fall and its consequences, for “they are equal unto the angels” (Luk 20:36)—compare “two men stood by them in shining garments” (Luk 24:4). Further, the implication of Romans 8:3 is irresistible: “God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.” Note how discriminating is that language: not merely “in the likeness of the flesh,” but literally, “sin’s flesh.” Upon those words Robert Haldane (1764-1842) rightly remarked, “If the flesh of Jesus Christ was the likeness of sinful flesh, there must be a difference between the *appearance* of sinful flesh and our nature or flesh in its original condition when Adam was created. Christ, then, was not made in the likeness of the flesh of man before sin entered the world, but in the likeness of his fallen flesh.” And since Christ *restored* that which He took not away (Psa 69:4), then its resurrected state shows us its primitive glory (Phi 3:21).

Following the statement, “the eyes of them both were opened,” we would naturally expect the next clause to read, “and they *saw* that they were naked,” but instead it says, “they *knew* that they were naked”—something more than a discovery of their woeful physical plight being included therein. The Hebrew verb is rendered “know” in the vast majority of references; yet eighteen times, it is translated “perceive” and three times, “feel.” As the opening of their eyes refers to those of their understanding, so we are informed of what they now discerned, namely, the loss of their innocence. There is a nakedness of soul, which is far worse than an unclothed body, for it unfits it for the presence of the Holy One. The nakedness of Adam and Eve was the loss of the image of God, the inherent righteousness and holiness in which He created them. Such is the awful condition in which all of their descendants are born. That is why Christ bids them, buy of Him “white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear” (Rev 3:18). The “white raiment” is “the robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10)—the “wedding garment” of Matthew 22:11-13, without which the soul is eternally lost.

“They knew that they were naked.” As G. H. Bishop expressed it, “Their halo had vanished, and the Spirit of righteousness who had been to them a covering of light and purity withdrew, and they felt that they were stripped and bare.” But more: they realized that their physical condition imaged their spiritual loss. They were made painfully conscious of sin and its dire consequences. This was the first result of their transgression: a guilty conscience condemned them, and a *sense of shame* possessed their souls. Their hearts smote them for what they had done. Now that the fearful deed of disobedience had been committed, they realized the happiness they had flung away and the misery into which they had plunged themselves. They knew that they were not only stripped of all the bliss and honours of the paradise state but were defiled and degraded, and a sense of wretchedness possessed them. They knew that they were naked of everything that is holy. They might now be rightly termed, “Ichabod,” for the glory of the LORD had departed from them (1Sa 4:21). Such, my reader, is ever the effect of sin: it destroys our peace, robs of our joy, and brings in its train a consciousness of guilt and a sense of shame.

There is, we believe, a yet deeper meaning in those words, “They knew that they were naked,” namely a realization that they were exposed to the wrath of an offended God. They perceived that *their defence* was gone. They were morally naked, without any protection against the broken Law! Very striking and solemn is this. *Before* the LORD appeared unto them, before He said a word or came near to them, Adam and Eve *knew* the dreadful state they were now in, and were ashamed! Oh, the power of conscience! Our first parents stood self-accused and self-condemned! Before their Judge appeared on the scene, man became, as it were, the judge of his own fallen and woeful condition. Yes, they knew of themselves that they were disgraced: their holiness defiled, their innocence gone, the image of God in their souls broken, their tranquility disrupted, their protection against the Law removed. Stripped of their original righteousness, they stood defenceless. What a terrible discovery to make! Such is the state into which fallen man has come—one of which he is himself ashamed!

And what did the guilty pair do upon their painful discovery? How did they now conduct themselves? Cry unto God for mercy? Seek unto Him for a covering? No indeed. Not even an awakened conscience

moves its tormented possessor to turn unto the LORD, though it *must* do its work ere the sinner flies to Him for refuge. A lost soul needs something more than an active conscience to draw him to Christ. That is very evident from the case of the scribes and Pharisees in His very presence, for "being convicted by their own conscience, [they] *went out* one by one" (Joh 8:9). Instead of a convicted conscience causing them to cast themselves at the feet of the Saviour, it resulted in their leaving Him! Nothing short of the Holy Spirit's quickening, enmity-subduing, heart-melting, faith-bestowing, will-impelling operations brings anyone into saving contact with the Lord Jesus. He does indeed wound before He applies the balm of Gilead, make use of the Law to prepare the way for the Gospel, break up the hard soil of the heart to make it receptive to the Seed. But even a conscience aroused by Him, accusing the soul with a voice which cannot be stilled, will never of itself bring one into "the way of peace" (Luk 1:79).

No, instead of betaking themselves to God, Adam and Eve attempted by their own puny efforts to repair the damage they had wrought in themselves. "And they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Gen 3:7). Here we see the second consequence of their sin: a worthless expedient, a futile attempt to *conceal their real character* and hide their shame from themselves and their fellows. As others have pointed out, our first parents were more anxious to save their credit before each other than they were to seek the pardon of God. They sought to arm themselves against a feeling of shame and thereby quieten their accusing conscience. There was no concern at their unfitness to appear before *God* in such a plight, but only that they might stand unabashed before each other! And thus it is with their children to this day. They are more afraid of being *detected* in sin than of *committing* it, and more concerned about appearing well before their fellows than about obtaining the approbation of God. The chief object which the fallen sons of men propose unto themselves is to quieten their guilty conscience and to stand well with their neighbours! And hence, it is that so many of the unregenerate assume the garb of religion.

"And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden" (Gen 3:8). Here was the third consequence of their fall: *a dread of God*. Up to this point, they had been concerned only with their own selves and wretchedness, but now they had to reckon with Another. It was the approach of their Judge. Apparently, they saw not His form at this moment, but heard only His voice. It was to *test* them. But instead of welcoming such a sound, they were horrified, and fled in terror. But whither could they flee from *His* presence? "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him?" (Jer 23:24). In the attempt of Adam and Eve to seclude themselves among the trees, we behold how sin has turned man into an utter fool, for none but an imbecile would imagine that he could conceal himself from the eyes of Omniscience.



INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 2

In our last, we sought to show the *need for* interpretation, that it devolves upon us to ascertain the import of what is meant by every sentence of Holy Writ. What God has *said* to us is of inestimable importance and value, yet what profit can we derive therefrom unless its *significance* is clear unto us? The Holy Spirit has given us more than a hint of this by *explaining* the meaning of certain words. Thus, in the very first chapter of the New Testament, it is said of Christ, “They shall call his name Emmanuel, which *being interpreted* is, God with us” (Mat 1:23). And again, “We have found the Messiah, which is, *being interpreted*, the Christ”—margin, “the Anointed” (Joh 1:41). Again, “And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, *being interpreted*, The place of a skull” (Mar 15:22). Yet again, “Melchisedec, king of Salem...first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace” (Heb 7:1-2). Those expressions make it clear that it is essential that we should understand the sense of each word used in the Scriptures. God’s Word is made up of words, yet they convey nothing to us while they remain unintelligible. Hence, to ascertain the precise import of what we read should be our first concern.

Before setting forth some of the rules to be observed and the principles to be employed in the interpretation of Scripture, we would point out various things which *require to be found in the would-be interpreter himself*. Good tools are indeed indispensable for good workmanship, but the best of them are to little purpose in the hands of one who is unqualified to use them. Methods of Bible study are only of relative importance, but the *spirit* in which it is studied is all important. It calls for no argument to prove that a spiritual book calls for a spiritually-minded reader, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God...neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1Co 2:14). God’s Word is a revelation of things which affect our highest interests and everlasting welfare, and it demands both implicit and cordial acceptance. Something more than intellectual training is required: the heart must be right as well as the head. Only where there is honesty of soul and spirituality of heart will there be clearness of vision to perceive the truth. Only then will the mind be capable of discerning the full import of what is read, and understand not only the bare meaning of its words, but the sentiments they are designed to convey—and a suitable response be made by us.

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

Since the imagination of man—like all the other faculties of his moral being—is permeated and vitiated⁶ by sin, the ideas it suggests, even when pondering the divine oracles, are prone to be mistaken and corrupt. It is part of our sinful infirmity that we are unable of ourselves to interpret God’s Word aright; but it is part of the gracious office of the Holy Spirit to guide believers into the truth, thereby enabling them to apprehend the Scriptures. This is a distinct and special operation of the Spirit on the minds of God’s people, whereby He communicates spiritual wisdom and light unto them, and which is necessary unto their discerning aright the mind of God in His Word, and also their laying hold of the heavenly things found therein. “A distinct operation” we say, by which we mean something *ab extra* or over and above His initial work of quickening; for while it be a blessed fact that at regeneration, He has “given us an understanding, that we

⁶ **vitiated** – made ineffective.

may know him that is true" (1Jo 5:20), yet more is needed in order for us to "know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1Co 2:12). This is evident from the case of the apostles, for though they had companied and communed with Christ for the space of three years, yet we are informed that, at a later date, "Then opened he their understanding, that they *might understand* the scriptures" (Luk 24:45).

How what has been just alluded to should impress the Christian himself with the need for holy caution when reading the Word, lest he wrest its contents unto his own injury! How it should humble him before its Author and make him realize his utter dependence upon Him! If the new birth *were* sufficient of itself to capacitate the believer to grasp divine things, the apostle had never made request for the Colossian saints that they "*might be* filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col 1:9); nor would he have said to his son in the faith, "the Lord give thee understanding in all things" (2Ti 2:7). There never was a more foolish notion or pernicious idea entertained than that the holy mysteries of the Gospel so lie within the province of human reason that they may be known profitably and practically without the effectual aid of the blessed Spirit of truth. Not that He instructs us in any other way than by and through our reason and understanding, for then we should be reduced to irrational creatures; but that He must enlighten our minds, elevate and direct our thoughts, quicken our affections, move our wills, and thereby enable our understandings, if we are to apprehend spiritual things.

Nor does the Holy Spirit's teaching of the individual Christian by any means set aside or render him independent of making diligent and conscientious use of the ministry of the pulpit, for that is an important means appointed by God for the edifying of His people. There is a happy medium between the attitude of the Ethiopian eunuch who, when asked, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" replied, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Act 8:30-31), and the wrong use made of "Ye need not that any man teach you" (1Jo 2:27)—between a slavish reliance upon human instruments and a haughty independence of those whom Christ has called and qualified to feed His sheep. "Yet is not their understanding of the truth, their apprehension of it, and faith in it, to rest upon or to be resolved into *their* authority, who are not appointed of God to be 'lords of their faith' but 'helpers of [their] joy' (2Co 1:24). And therein depends all our interest in that great promise that we shall be 'all taught of God' (Joh 6:45), for we are not so, unless we do learn from Him those things which He has revealed in His Word"—John Owen (1616-1683).

"And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD" (Isa 54:13; cp. Joh 6:45). This is one of the great distinguishing marks of the regenerate. There are multitudes of unregenerate religionists who are well versed in the letter of Scripture, thoroughly acquainted with the history and the doctrines of Christianity, but their knowledge came only from *human* media—parents, Sunday school teachers, or their personal reading. Tens of thousands of graceless professors possess an intellectual knowledge of spiritual things which is considerable, sound, and clear; yet they are not divinely taught, as is evident from the absence of the fruits which ever accompany the same. In like manner, there are a great number of preachers who abhor the errors of Modernism and contend earnestly for the faith. They were taught in Bible institutes or trained in theological seminaries, yet it is greatly to be feared that they are total strangers to a supernatural work of grace in their souls, and that their knowledge of the truth is but a notional one, unaccompanied by any heavenly unction, saving power, or transforming effects. By diligent application and personal effort, one may secure a vast amount of scriptural information and become an able expositor of the Word, but he cannot obtain thereby a heart-affecting and heart-purifying knowledge thereof. None but the Spirit of truth can write God's Law on my heart, stamp His image on my soul, sanctify me by the truth.

Here, then, is the first and most essential qualification for understanding and interpreting the Scriptures, namely *a mind illumined by the Holy Spirit*. The need for this is fundamental and universal. Of the Jews we are told, "But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart" (2Co 3:15). Though the Old Testament be deeply venerated and diligently studied by the "orthodox" section, yet is its spiritual purport unperceived by them. Such also is the case with the Gentiles. There is a veil of *ill-will* over the heart of fallen man, for "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom 8:7). There is a veil of *ignorance* over the mind. As a child may spell out the letters and learn to pronounce words the sense of which he apprehends not, so we may ascertain the literal or grammatical meaning of this Word and yet have no spiritual knowledge of it; and thus belong to that generation of whom it is said, "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive" (Mat 13:14). There is a veil of *prejudice* over the affections. "Our hearts are overcast with strong affections of the world, and so cannot clearly judge practical truth"—Thomas Manton (1620-1677). That which conflicts with natural interests and calls for the

denying of self is unwelcome. There is a veil of *pride* which effectually prevents us seeing ourselves in the mirror of the Word.

Now, that veil is not completely removed from the heart at regeneration; hence, our vision is yet very imperfect, and our capacity to take in the truth unto spiritual profit is very inconsiderable. In his first epistle to the Corinthian church, the apostle said, "And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1Co 8:2). It is a great mercy when the Christian is made to realize that fact. So long as he remains in this evil world and the corrupt principle of the flesh continues in him, the believer needs to be led and taught by the Spirit. This is very evident from the case of David, for while he declared, "I have more understanding than all my teachers" (Psa 119:99), yet we find him praying to God, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law... Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes... Give me understanding" (Psa 119:18, 33-34). Observe that the Psalmist did not complain at the obscurity of God's Law, but realized the fault was in himself. Nor did he make request for new revelations (by dreams or visions), but instead for a clearer sight of what was already revealed. Those who are the best and longest taught are always readiest to sit at the feet of Christ and learn of Him (Luk 10:39).

It is to be duly noted that the verb in Psalm 119:18 literally signifies, "uncover, unveil mine eyes," which confirms our opening sentence in the last paragraph. God's Word is a spiritual light, objectively; but to discern it aright, there needs to be sight or light, subjectively—for it is only by and in His light that "we see light" (Psa 36:9). The Bible is here termed God's Law, because it is clothed with divine authority, uttering the mandates of His will. It contains not so much good advice, which we are free to accept at our pleasure, but imperious edicts which we reject at our peril. In that Word are "wondrous things" (Psa 119:18), which, by the use of mere reason, we cannot attain unto. They are the riches of divine wisdom, which are far above the compass of man's intellect. Those "wondrous things" the believer longs to behold or clearly discern, yet is he quite unable to do so without divine assistance. Therefore, he prays that God will so unveil his eyes that he may behold them to good purpose, or apprehend them unto faith and obedience, i.e., understand them practically and experientially in the way of duty.

"Behold, God exalteth [elevates the soul above the merely natural] by his power: who teacheth like him?" (Job 36:22). None; when He instructs, He does so effectually. "I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go" (Isa 48:17)—*that* is what His "teaching" consists of, a producing of pious conduct. It is not merely an addition being made unto our mental store, but a bestirring of the soul unto holy activity. The light which *He* imparts warms the heart and fires the affections. So far from puffing up its recipient, as natural knowledge does, it humbles. It reveals to us our ignorance and stupidity, shows us our sinfulness and worthlessness, and makes the believer little in his own eyes. The Spirit's teaching also gives us clearly to see the utter vanity of the things highly esteemed by the unregenerate, showing us the transitoriness and comparative worthlessness of earthly honours, riches, and fame, causing us to hold all temporal things with a light hand. The knowledge which God imparts is a *transforming* one, making us to lay aside hindering weights (Heb 12:1), to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts," and to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Ti 2:12). "Beholding... the glory of the Lord," we are "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2Co 3:18).

The very character of divine teaching demonstrates how urgent is our need of the same. It consists very largely in overcoming our native antipathy for and hostility to divine things. By nature, we have a love of sin and hatred of holiness (Joh 3:19), and that must be effectually subdued by the power of the Spirit ere we desire the pure milk of the Word—observe what has to be laid aside before we can receive with meekness the ingrafted Word (Jam 1:21; 1Pe 2:1). Though it be *our* duty, only *He* can enable us to perform it. By nature, we are proud and independent, self-sufficient, and confident in our own powers. That evil spirit clings to the Christian unto the end of his pilgrimage, and only the Spirit of God can work in him that humility and meekness which are requisite if he is to take the place of a little child before the Word. The love of honour and praise among men is another corrupt affection of our souls, an insuperable obstacle to the admission of the truth (Joh 5:44; 12:43), which has to be purged out of us. The fierce and persistent opposition made by Satan to prevent our apprehension of the Word (Mat 13:19; 2Co 4:4) is far too powerful for us to resist in our own strength; none but the Lord can deliver us from his evil suggestions and expose his lying sophistries.⁷

⁷ **sophistries** – elaborate and devious argumentations.

Second, an impartial spirit is required if we are to discern and apprehend the real teaching of Holy Writ. Nothing more beclouds the judgment than prejudice; none so blind as those who will not see. Particularly is that the case with all who come to the Bible with the object of finding passages which prove “our doctrines.” An honest heart is the first quality the Lord predicated of the good-ground hearer (Luk 8:15); and where *that* exists, we are not only willing, but desirous, to have our own views corrected. There can be no advance made in our spiritual apprehension of the truth until we are ready to submit our ideas and sentiments unto the teaching of God’s Word. While we cling to our preconceived opinions and sectarian partialities, instead of being ready to abandon all beliefs not clearly taught in Scripture, neither praying or studying can profit the soul. There is nothing which God hates more than insincerity; and we are guilty thereof if, while asking Him to instruct us, we at the same time refuse to relinquish what is erroneous. A thirst for the truth itself, with a candid determination for it to mould all our thinking and direct our practice, is indispensable if we are to be spiritually enlightened.

Third, a humble mind. “This is an eternal and unalterable law of God’s appointment, that whoever will learn His mind and will, as revealed in Scripture, must be humble and lowly, renouncing all trust and confidence in themselves. The knowledge of a proud man is the throne of Satan in his mind. To suppose that persons under the predominancy of pride, self-conceit, and self-confidence can understand the mind of God in a due manner is to renounce the Scripture, or innumerable positive testimonies to the contrary”—J. Owen. The Lord Jesus declared that heavenly mysteries are hid from the wise and prudent, but revealed unto babes (Mat 11:25). Those who assume an attitude of competency, and are wise in their own esteem, remain spiritually ignorant and unenlightened. Whatever knowledge men may acquire by their natural abilities and industry is nothing unto the glory of God, nor to the eternal gain of their souls, for the Spirit refuses to instruct the haughty. “God resisteth the proud” (Jam 4:6)—“He draws up against him, He prepares Himself, as it were, with His whole force to oppose his progress. A most formidable expression! If God only leaves us unto ourselves, we are all ignorance and darkness; so what must be the dreadful case of those against whom He appears in arms?”—John Newton (1725-1807). But, blessed be His name, He “giveth grace unto the humble”—those of a childlike disposition.

Fourth, a praying heart. Since the Bible be different from all other books, it makes demands upon its readers which none other does. What one man has written, another man can master; but only the Inspirer of the Word is competent to interpret it unto us. It is at this very point that so many fail. They approach the Bible as they would any other book, relying on a closeness of attention and diligence of perusal to understand its contents. We must first get down on our knees and cry unto God for light: “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies...give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments...Order my steps in thy word” (Psa 119:36, 73, 133). No real progress can be made in our apprehension of the truth until we realize our deep and constant need of a divinely anointed eye. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally” (Jam 1:5). It is because they make use of that promise that many a Christian ploughman and simple housewife is taught of the Spirit, while prayerless scholars know not the secret of the Lord. Not only do we need to pray “that which I see not teach thou me” (Job 34:32), but request God to write His Word on our hearts (2Co 3:3).

Fifth, a holy design. Many are deceived in this matter, mistaking an eagerness to acquire scriptural knowledge for a love of the truth itself. Inquisitiveness to discover what the Bible says is why some read it. A sense of shame to be unable to discover its teaching prompts others. The desire to be familiar with its contents so as to hold their own in an argument moves still others. If it be nothing better than a mere desire to be well versed in its details which causes us to read the Bible, it is more than likely that the garden of our souls will remain barren. The inspiring motive should be *honestly examined*. Do I search the Scriptures in order to become better acquainted with their Author and His will for me? Is the dominating purpose which actuates me that I may grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord (2Pe 3:18)? Is it that I may ascertain more clearly and fully how I should order the details of my life, so that it will be more pleasing and honouring to Him? Is it that I may be brought into a closer walking with God and the enjoyment of more unbroken communion with Him? Nothing less is a worthy aim than that I may be conformed to and transformed by its holy teaching.

In this article, we have dealt only with the elementary side of our subject—nevertheless, of what is of basic importance and which few attend unto. Even in the palmy⁸ days of the Puritans, John Owen had to

⁸ **palmy** – prosperous; flourishing.

complain, "The number is very small of those who diligently, humbly, and conscientiously endeavour to learn the truth from the voice of God in the Scriptures, or to grow wise in the mysteries of the Gospel, by such ways as wherein alone that wisdom is attainable. And is it any wonder if many, the greater number of men, wander after vain imaginations of their own or others?" May it not be so with those who read this article.

