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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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LAUGHTER

There are some who, if they do not look upon laughter as being actually sinful, certainly regard it as most unbecoming in a child of God. Personally, we do not agree with such a concept, though we are far from being advocates of frivolity and lightness in a saint. It is said, on good authority, that there are more than one hundred muscles in the face which are never exercised except by a hearty laugh. If, then, it be wrong to do so, why did the Creator place those muscles there? But we are not left to form our own opinion or indulge in speculation on the subject, for God's Word plainly avers¹ there is "a time to laugh" (Ecc 3:4), which shows that on certain occasions it is both right and proper to do so. Yet since those words are preceded by "a time to weep," we learn there is a balance to be preserved there too. No doubt a person's temperament has not a little to do with it, for some are more emotional and demonstrative than others. So, too, have our circumstances and experiences: "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance" (Pro 15:13). How close is the sympathy between the soul and the body, though composed of such different elements! A man's countenance is normally the index of his spirit. If the spirit be oppressed, sadness will be reflected in the face; but if the heart be joyful, our features will reveal it.

"Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed" (Gen 17:17). The occasion was a noteworthy one. More than twenty years had passed since the Lord said unto the patriarch "unto thy seed will I give this land," and the only child he had was Ishmael by Hagar. He was then almost a hundred years old, and his wife not much younger. But now God appeared unto him again and declared, "I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her." Blessed is it to behold his reactions to that startling announcement, and to note the double response which he made thereto. First, Abraham "fell on his face": he prostrated himself before the Lord in reverential worship, which teaches us that the higher the favour which God bestows upon us, the lower is the place we should take before Him. Second, "he laughed" or gave vent to his joyful gratitude. In the light of Romans 4:19-22, it is clear that his was the laughter of *faith*. Refusing to consider the formidable obstacles which to sight and reason stood in the way of the fulfillment of the divine promise, he counted upon God's sufficiency, and gave Him glory. His laughter was that of delight and hope, or confident expectation, for it was not the joy of fruition, but of expectation. Nor was it merely the joy of having a son, but because therein he would receive an earnest of Messiah's advent, for it was then that by faith and hope, he saw Christ's day "and was glad" (Joh 8:56).

"Therefore Sarah laughed within herself" (Gen 18:12) when she heard the angels renewing God's promise unto her husband. This points a marked contrast with what we have just looked at, and shows how one believer differs from another, even when the bond of union between them is a most intimate one. Instead of believing God and relying upon His omnipotence, she was occupied with the apparent impossibility of the thing promised, dwelling upon the fact that she was now many years past the age of child bearing. She deemed it something incredible, as being contrary to nature, and therefore unbelief rather than faith was exercised by her. Thus hers was the laughter of *doubting and distrust*. Well did Martin Luther (1483-1546) point out, "If you would believe, you must crucify the question 'how?'" Because her laughter was from weakness and not from scorn, the Lord smote her not, as He did Zacharias (Luk 1:20). But even though God did not quench the smoking flax, He rebuked her, asking, "Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" Yet instead of acknowledging her fault, she denied it—so reluctant is the believer to confess his sins. But later, as it is blessed to learn, her confidence in God was renewed, for we are told, "Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised" (Heb 11:11). Thus, though faith ultimately triumphed over unbelief, yet in her case it did not act so promptly as Abraham's.

"Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep" (Luk 6:25). The laughter which Christ here denounced was no mere facial one, but a state of heart which lived only for the present, and had no serious concern for the future. It was His censure of those who go giddily and gaily along the broad road that leads to destruction (Mat 7:13). In the light of the immediate context, the reference is to those who rejoiced in the abundance of their worldly possessions, and found their delight in making gods of their bellies. But the words will warrant-ably admit of a wider application, taking in all those who make a trade of any form of self-gratification and self-jollification. This then is the laughter of *insecurity*, for the pleasures of sin are but "for a season," and a very brief one at that. This is but a sensual laughter or joy, which issues

¹ **avers** – declares to be true.

in endless grief, unless they heed that injunction, “let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to heaviness” (Jam 4:9). If your joy gives place to godly sorrow, it will result in that which no earthly possessions or outward comforts can supply; namely, serenity of mind and contentment of heart. “The end of *that* mirth is heaviness” (Pro 14:13), the outcome of *this* sorrow is “salvation not to be repented of” (2Co 7:10).

There is a natural laughter, which is innocent and harmless; a carnal laughter, which is sinful and injurious; a spiritual laughter, which is God-pleasing and beneficial. There is also a divine laughter, which is terrible and disastrous. To such David referred: “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh” (Psa 2:4), which is the laughter of *derision* against those who think to defy Him with impunity. And again God says, “I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh” (Pro 1:26), which is the laughter of divine *retribution*. He has “called”—by His Word, His providences, His ministers, and their own consciences—but they “refused” to heed Him. They were neither melted by the abundance of His mercies nor awed by the terribleness of His threats. They respected not His Law, and had no heart for His Gospel. But though He bears with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, He has appointed a day when they shall be made to reap as they have sown. As they scorned His messengers when they warned of the wrath to come, so shall He turn a deaf ear then to their cries for mercy, and righteously laugh at their calamity. Oh, that none our readers may ever be the objects of it.

“I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?” (Ecc 2:2). Those were the words of one who was granted the opportunity and afforded the means, of gratifying every carnal desire and of obtaining every object which the natural heart and eye can covet—only to prove from experience that all were but “vanity and vexation of spirit.” There is no real or lasting happiness in anything which money can purchase. The void within the human heart cannot be filled by the objects of time and sense. For one to pursue the shadows and miss the substance; to devote himself to the things which perish with the using, yet be indifferent to those which are eternal; to seek his delight in gratifying the lusts of the flesh and neglect the welfare of his soul, is naught but a species of insanity. “For as the crackling of thorns under a pot [noisy, but of brief duration], so is the laughter of the fool” (Ecc 7:6).

“All they that see me laugh me to scorn” (Psa 22:7). This is one of many instances where the word “all” in Scripture cannot be taken absolutely, for certainly Christ’s mother, the women who accompanied her to the cross, and the beloved John who beheld Him there, are to be excluded. Rather does it signify “all” *classes*: not only the Roman soldiers who jeered at the Saviour, but the Jews as well; and not merely the common rabble, but the chief priests and scribes, elders, and rulers—they now rejoiced in their success and were loudest in reviling Him. The blasphemous ridicule of our blessed Lord was general: all kinds of men were unanimous in their wicked laughter, and vied with each other in insulting Him. So far were they from pitying Him, they added to His afflictions with their ribaldry, making jest of His very sufferings. Horrid humanity! Fearful impiety! None should ever doubt the total depravity of man, as they see here to what unspeakable depths of iniquity he sinks when the restraining hand of God is removed from him. The spectator of the dying Redeemer’s agonies exerted the utmost of the venom of their hearts upon Him. *Diabolical* laughter was this.

“When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter” (Psa 126:1-2). The return of the Jews to Jerusalem was the fulfillment of God’s promises through the prophets and the answer to the prayer of Psalm 106:47. It had been effected in such an extraordinary manner and so suddenly (Ezr 1:1-6) that it seemed more like a pleasant dream than a reality. They were overwhelmed with gladness, theirs being the laughter of *joy*. As good old Matthew Henry (1662-1714) says, “Providence piped to them, and they danced.” In its spiritual application, this finds its fulfillment in the hour of conversion, when the heart is made to rejoice “with joy unspeakable.” Likewise when a believer is recovered from a season of backsliding, and the spirit of heaviness is displaced by the garment of praise. Corporately, when the churches are granted a time of reviving after a season of deadness, such as obtained in the days of Whitefield (1714-1770) and may yet in ours.



EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

10. Walking in the Light (1:7)

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

Our present verse, especially its closing portion, is probably the best known and most frequently quoted in all the epistle, yet our familiarity with its language is no proof that we rightly understand its meaning, still less that it calls for no careful study and prayerful pondering. It is only when we come to inquire closely into its terms and the relation of one clause to another that we discover the verse is not quite so obvious and simple as we thought. As it be slowly and thoughtfully examined, the following questions suggest themselves and call for answer:

Why is this statement made in the hypothetical form—“but if”?

What is signified by “walking in the light”?

How are we to understand the amplifying “as He is in the light”?

Who is the “one with another” between whom there is fellowship?

Is the “cleansing” here judicial or experimental,² or does it include both justification and sanctification?

Does the present tense “cleanseth” oblige us to regard it as a process?

What is the exact relation of the final clause to the preceding ones—is the “cleansing” conditional upon our “walking in the light”?

It should be obvious to any careful reader that several of these questions can only be satisfactorily answered by pondering the two verses which immediately precede our text. If it be detached therefrom, we are likely to misapprehend both its force and its terms. We shall, therefore, quote the same (1:5-7):

“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: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

Those three verses are, in turn, an amplification of “truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (verse 3). There the general fact was stated; here details are entered into. First, the essential nature or character of the One with whom fellowship is enjoyed is described. Then we are shown the characters of those who are debarred from such a privilege. Here we are informed who are the ones that have fellowship with God, and how that fellowship is established and maintained.

“But if...”

Such is the transcendent excellency of God that none can hold converse or have fellowship with Him save those who are partakers of His nature and are being conformed unto His holy image. “If, therefore, our conversation be in darkness; if we wallow in the mire of untamed, unmortified lust, whatever our evangelical profession may be, or howsoever we may fancy ourselves entered into a fellowship with the Father by the means of the Mediator, it is but a lying imagination—for how can there be communion between two natures so different, between light and darkness, purity and impurity, heaven and hell, God and the devil? But if our conversation [manner of life] be agreeable to Gospel precepts, we have then fellowship with

² **experimental** – through personal experience; experiential.

Him” (Charnock).³ Here then is the reason why verse 7 opens with the word “but”—because it presents a contrast with those described in the preceding one. Here, too, is the answer to our first question above: both verses are introduced by an “if” because it is the testing of profession which is in view: in the former, it is shown to be worthless, false; in the latter, genuine and valid. By it each reader should honestly measure himself.

The particular characters set over against each other in verses 6 and 7 are the same as those referred to in John 3:19-21 by Christ: evil-doers who hate the light; truth-doers who welcome it—with the latter there is a concord between profession and performance, with all its blessed consequences. “In the context the apostle speaketh of communion with God. Now communion with God we cannot have till we be reconciled to Him by Christ, and none can be looked upon as reconciled to Him by Christ but those that endeavour conformity to God in purity and holiness” (Manton).⁴ In verse 6 the hypocrite is exposed and condemned; in verse 7 the real Christian is identified and confirmed. He furnishes evidence that he is in fellowship with God and has a saving interest in the cleansing blood of Christ, and *that* by the character of his walk. Thus the “if” is used in our present verse, as in the foregoing, to substantiate the truth contained in the assertion. So far from weakening the statement or rendering it doubtful, it makes it more positive and unequivocal—that is why instead of saying “ye,” the apostle employed “we,” thereby including himself. “There can be no walking with God, who is light, but as we renounce and avoid every false way; and walk in truth, in the light of it, and under the sacred energy of the same” (S.E. Pierce, 1746-1829).

“Walking in the light”

Coming now to our second question, What is signified by “walking in the light?” There is less need for us to dwell at length upon this, since we entered so fully in our last upon walking in darkness. First, it necessarily presupposes regeneration, for certainly one cannot walk in the light unless he first be in the light, and this none are until they be born again. Then they are effectually called and brought “out of darkness into God’s marvelous light” (1Pe 2:9). Then they are made “light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8), and therefore is it said of them, “Ye are all the children of light and the children of the day: we are not of the night nor of darkness” (1Th 5:5). But, second, they give proof of this by acting accordingly, just as those who “are darkness” love darkness, walk in darkness, and produce “the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph 5:11). Thus to “walk in the light” imports much more than the sphere in which the believer lives; namely, the manner in which he conducts himself there. He is not only in the light positionally, but he walks in it practically. In other words, his external conduct reflects his internal condition. As his character corresponds to the nature of God, so his character is exhibited by his conduct. The tree is known by its fruits.

There is a light to which the Christian is journeying—the realm of unclouded glory (Pro 4:18; Col 1:12). There is a light by which he walks—that of God’s Word (Psa 119:105; Pro 6:23). There is also a light in which he walks—the highway of holiness (Joh 8:12). To “walk” connotes not an occasional step, but an habitual course. A person’s “walk” is a figurative expression which signifies the general tenor of his life. “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly” (Psa 1:1)—whose ways and works are not regulated by carnal policy and self’s interests. “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2Co 5:7)—with our hearts engaged with the perfection of an invisible God and our wills subjected to His. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). Again, to “walk in the light” is to live in separation from the world, with our affections set upon things above, laying up our treasure there. Darkness is the principle which actuates and governs the world, for it is inveterately opposed to the Father (1Jo 2:16), and he who will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God (Jam 4:4). Thus it is clear that the fellowship with God estranges its subjects from the world. The Christian belongs to another sphere and manifests it by his deportment.

³ **Stephen Charnock** (1628-1680) – Puritan divine, English Puritan Presbyterian clergyman, born in London. He studied at Cambridge, ministered in Southwark, and then completed his studies at Oxford. In Ireland in 1656 he became chaplain to the governor. He became widely known for the skill by which he discharged his duties. He began a co-pastorship at Crosby Hall in London in 1675. He is best known for his work, *The Attributes of God*.

⁴ **Thomas Manton** (1620-1677) – Nonconformist Puritan preacher. Graduated from Oxford and preached until forbidden by the Act of Uniformity of 1662. From 1662 to 1670 he preached in his own house, but was finally arrested and imprisoned for six months. Subsequently became preacher for London merchants in Pinners’ Hall. James Ussher called him “one of the best preachers in England.” Appointed as one of three clerks at the Westminster Assembly. Born in Lawrence-Lydiat, county of Somerset, England.

We must be careful not to restrict the idea of “walking in the light” unto our external actions. God ever looks first upon the heart and desires truth “in the inward parts” (Psa 51:6). He will not tolerate dishonesty and cannot be imposed upon by any species of deception. The Holy One allows neither insincerity nor concealment from those with whom He communes. Two cannot walk together except they be agreed, and there is a radical lack of agreement if we distrust God or hide anything from Him. Light is clear and transparent, and to walk in it means that we are open and candid with Him. There must be complete frankness in all of our dealings with God. If I turn a blind eye to something suspicious in myself, or shrink from meeting a brother or fellow creature because I have an uneasy feeling that he has just cause of complaint against me, then I am seeking shelter from the darkness. But if I genuinely desire that my secret sins should be discovered to me, if I daily measure myself by God’s pure truth and judge myself in the light of His holiness, if I sincerely pray “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psa 139:23-24), then do I truly love the light and hate all shams.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light.”

The apostle explains what he intends in the first clause by drawing an illustration from the One who is Himself light and dwells in eternal purity and glory. The self-same Model is here presented to us by the apostle as his Master set before him and his fellows: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mat 5:48). Nothing short of absolute perfection is the standard at which we ever must aim. But does not our present verse speak of something more than aim—even actual realization? Certainly. Yet it is that of likeness and not of sameness; or, rather, not of sameness in degree. As John Trapp (1611-1669) so well expressed it, “We walk in the light as God is in the light for quality, but not for equality.” We are indeed being conformed to His image, and bear His likeness, yet fall very short of His stature. As Spurgeon (1834-1892) pointed out, “I can walk in the light of the sun, though I cannot dwell in it; and I can walk in the light as God is in the light, though I cannot attain to the same measure of excellence, purity, and truth in which the Lord Himself resides.”

“We have fellowship one with another.”

It strikes the writer as passing strange that any Christian should have difficulty with those words. In view of the ones immediately preceding, surely their meaning is plain. If we be walking in the light as God is in the light, it follows as a certain fact that we have fellowship with Him and He with us. We are one with Him in nature, in love of the truth, in delighting in holiness. Those who are born of God are as truly attracted unto Him as the babe is to its mother. If we be walking with God, then His secret is with us (Psa 25:14) and our secret is with Him. He opens His heart to us, and we open our hearts to Him. He sups with us, and we with Him (Rev 3:20). Yet our fellowship with God is neither perfect nor constant in this life, any more than our walk is. A godly walk both fits us for, and evidences we are in, communion with God. The previous verse, where the opposite is stated, removes all uncertainty: “If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie...But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.”

“Cleansing”: judicial or experimental?

“*And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son [namely, the Son of Him with whom we have fellowship] cleanseth us from all sin.*” Cleansing from sin is a sacrificial term, which can best be understood in the light of the Old Testament types, particularly that of Leviticus 16:30, “For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins.” That cleansing was effected by the shedding of blood. It was in nowise subjective, or something wrought within them, but instead a work done *for* them. It was not a matter of purifying their hearts, but of annulling their guilt and putting away their sins judicially from “before the Lord.” The blood of atonement not only propitiated God, it purged the people—freed them from God’s wrath, rendered them meet to worship Him. Again, in Numbers 35:31-33, we read of Israel’s land being “cleansed” by the penalty of the Law being enforced and guilt thereby expiated.⁵ The “land” signifies the people who resided there; when the claims of divine justice and holiness had been met, sin was not imputed or charged to them.

Though the blessings of justification and sanctification ever accompany each other, yet they must not be confounded, but considered distinctly. Justification has to do wholly with the legal side of our salvation.

⁵ **expiated** – wiped out.

It consists of absolution from our sins, and being declared righteous by God on account of the perfect obedience of Christ being reckoned to the believer. Sanctification has to do more with the experiential and practical side, the fitting or rendering us meet⁶ for God's presence, and where that is in view, the operations of the Spirit and the water of the Word are mentioned. That, too, is equally a fruit of the redemptive work of Christ, which procured for His people the gift of the Spirit. But what we have here in our text is judicial only. First, because as a fact no believer is cleansed from all sin in this life in any other way. Second, because the cleansing is by blood, and that always respects the objective side of things: see Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5.

"When he had by himself purged [or "made a cleansing of "] our sins" (Heb 1:3, and cf. 9:26). It is the blood which gives us title to enter into the holiest (Heb 10:19)—"sanctified" by blood occurs only in Hebrews 10:10; 13:12, in its sacrificial sense, of setting us apart before God in all the acceptableness of Christ's perfect oblation.

If the cleansing be a judicial one, relating to our justification, why is it spoken of in the present tense?

First, to set forth the eternal efficacy of Christ's blood, which may be considered distinctly as shed, as pleaded, and as applied or sprinkled (1Pe 1:2). As Charnock so well put it, "The blood of Christ cleanseth, not hath cleansed or shall cleanse. This denotes a continued act. There is a perpetual pleading of it for us, a continual flowing of it to us. It is a fountain set open for sin (Zec 13:1). There is a perpetual stream of virtue from this blood, as there is of corruption from our nature. It was shed but once, but it is applied often, and the virtue of it is as durable as the Person whose blood it is." We do not immediately enter into the whole good of Christ's redemption at the hour of conversion (Rom 8:23). As there are blessings procured for us by Christ that await us in the future, so there are others which are received by us gradually in this life. Our cleansing is one of them. Sin ever defiles, no matter who commits it. Some say, Though God sees sin in His children, He no longer sees sin *on* them. But He does, and deals with them accordingly. He no longer imputes it to their eternal condemnation, but He notices it to their temporal chastisement (Psa 89:30-33).

Second, our cleansing, even judicially, is in fact continual. This is denied by some on the ground that it is dishonouring to the sacrifice of Christ, bringing it down to those offered under the Law, which produced only a temporary remission. But such an objection is pointless. It is true that at conversion all our previous iniquities are blotted out, but to speak of God's forgiving us our future sins before they are committed is senseless; "having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col 2:13) is quoted by these Antinomians,⁷ but that refers to all pre-conversion ones, or, as 2 Peter 1:9 styles them, "purged from his old sins." Until fresh sins are committed, further guilt accrues not, and therefore cannot be removed until it is there. We will say nothing further upon this point now, as it will come before us again (D.V.)⁸ when considering the ninth verse. Rather let us thank God that the cleansing blood is ever available for sinful creatures, and plead it in all our approaches unto Him. Christ's blood is called "a new way" in Hebrews 10:20, and the word signifies "newly slain"—as suited to us today as when shed on the cross.

"And the blood...cleanseth us from all sin."

When taking up the second half of our verse, honest Spurgeon said, "I have been driven to this text, and yet I have been afraid of it." After pointing out that it had very often been handled out of its connection, he added the following.

"I do feel that it is essential to the Christian ministry not to pick passages out of God's Word and rend them away from the context, but to take them as they stand. God's Word must be taken as God speaks it: we have no right to divide the living child of divine truth and detach the second half of our verse from the first half, or wrest it to make it mean other than it does. According to the text, special pardon of sin is the peculiar privilege of those who walk in the light as God is in the light; but it is not the privilege of anyone else. Only those who have been brought by divine grace from a state of nature into a state of grace, and walk in the light, may claim the possession of perfect cleansing through the blood of Christ."

⁶ **meet** – fit; suitable.

⁷ **Antinomian** – from the Greek *anti* - against, and *nomos* - law; antinomian basically means "against law." It generally means one who holds the theological view that God's Law has no place in the life of a believer.

⁸ **D.V.** – Latin: *Deo Volenti*, literally "as God wills."

Manton, too, wavered in determining whether our walk in the light is an evidence of a saving interest in Christ's blood or necessary thereunto, and declared, "It is best to say, It is both a sign and a condition without which we cannot have benefit by Christ's death; but the first condition is faith; next, love and holiness, to continue our interest in this privilege."

In the first three verses John testified that the apostles had fellowship with the Father and His Son, and declared this in order that "*ye also may have fellowship with us.*" But who are the "ye?" The children of God, those redeemed by Christ. But how are such to be identified? In verses 6 and 7 he tells us: not every one who professes to participate in this privilege, but those whose practice accords with their profession. Thus, in the clear light of the whole context, the *first* design of John in here linking together walking in the light and cleansing by the blood is to assure the hearts of believers: they may know their interest in the latter by their sincere endeavours after a more constant subjection to the truth and a closer fellowship with God. As Charnock said, mutual fellowship between God and us "is a certain proof that we are interested in the expiatory virtue of the blood of Christ."

Second, it is intended to humble us. Our walking in separation from the world and enjoying fellowship with God is no ground for boasting, for they are impossible apart from Christ's sacrifice—we owe them to His blood, and are here reminded of our complete dependence upon it.

But, *third*, the second half of the verse is brought in for our instruction. "Nothing is said about Christian experience as a means of cleansing. What, says one, do not the first sentences of the verse imply that? Assuredly not. If I walk in the light as God is in the light, what then? Does my walking in the light take away my sins? Not at all. I am as much a sinner in the light as in the darkness, if it were possible for me to be in the light without first being washed in the blood. Well, but we have fellowship with God, and does not that take away sin? Beloved, do not misunderstand me. No man can have fellowship with God unless sin be taken away; but his fellowship with God does not take away his sin—not at all. The whole process of the removal of sin is here: the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin. I beg to repeat: neither our walking in the light, nor having fellowship with God, cleanses us from sin: these go with the cleansing, but they have no connection as cause and results." (Spurgeon).

Fourth, the closing words of our text are designed for the comfort of the Christian. The more he walks in the light, the more are the hidden things of darkness (the corruption of his heart) revealed and exposed. The greater the sinner he comes to perceive himself, the more highly he prizes the atoning and cleansing blood of Christ, and the more completely does he rest his soul on its sufficiency and plead its virtues before God. Likewise, the closer he be admitted into fellowship with God, the more conscious does he become of those things in his heart and life which are out of harmony therewith, and beg Him for Christ's sake to enable him to mortify and put them away. And when painfully aware that sinful conduct has broken his fellowship, he mourns over the same, acknowledges it to God, and betakes himself again to that fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness, that the hindering cause may be removed and communion restored. The farther a Christian proceeds on the path of holiness, the viler he becomes in his own eyes, and the deeper his appreciation of Christ's sacrifice.

Our present verse emphasizes the enormity of sin: so exceedingly sinful is it that the blood of God's Son must be shed in order for its removal. It teaches us the defiling effects of sin: it pollutes and renders us filthy. Then let us never think lightly of it, for naught but the blood of Christ can remove its horrible stains. Here too we behold the sufficiency of Christ's atonement: it has made satisfaction unto God both for our original and personal sins. No sin a Christian ever commits is too black or crimson for it to be blotted out. The precious blood of Christ is of enduring virtue and perpetual efficacy—ever available for the befouled believer. But faith must lay hold of it, and there must be a return to walking in the light, in order to be sprinkled from an evil conscience. "Walk in the light because we are cleansed from our sin; but we are also cleansed from our sin because we walk in the light" (Levi Palmer).

Our title for a sermon on verse 7 would be: Walking in the light, washed by the blood. 1. A definite contrast (with verse 6)—pointed by the "But." 2. A spiritual performance: walking in the light. 3. A blessed privilege: mutual fellowship between God and us. 4. A gracious provision for failures: the cleansing blood.



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

62. *Makkedah (Mortification, 10:17-27)*

Let us remind the reader once more that Israel's conquest and occupation of the land of Canaan present to us a typical picture of the Christian's warfare and present enjoyment of his spiritual inheritance. That warfare is many-sided, and constitutes one of the principal parts of the "service" in which the Lord requires His people to be engaged, and which renders all their other actions unacceptable unto Him while it be disregarded. Alas that we are living in a day of such gross darkness and crass ignorance that comparatively few, even in Christendom, have any scriptural concept of the kind of enemies which the saint is called upon to conquer, or the nature of that work in which he ought to abound. The worst of his foes is neither the world nor the devil, but rather "the flesh." It is not external temptations but *inward lusts* that constitute his gravest menace and greatest danger. It is the subduing of those "fleshly lusts, which *war against* the soul" (1Pe 2:11), the resisting of his inbred corruptions, which the believer is to be constantly occupied with—for while they be neglected, all his other efforts to please God are in vain. "From whence come wars and fightings among you [Christians]? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (Jam 4:1).

It is the mortification of their lusts and the cultivation of their graces which is the lifelong task that God has set before His children. The greater part of the New Testament consists of the epistles, which are addressed directly to the saints, and they will be searched in vain for any exhortation which bids them preach to others, engage in evangelistic activities, or do "personal work." On the other hand, those epistles will be found to abound in such injunctions as "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God... Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Rom 6:13; 13:12); "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2Co 7:1); "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:22-24); "Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2Pe 3:14).

There is the scriptural answer to the oft-raised question, What can I do for the Lord in return for all He has done for me? How can I best express my gratitude for His wondrous mercy? By keeping "thy heart with all diligence" (Pro 4:23), for true godliness is not so much a thing of the head, or of the hand, but of *the heart*. Therein lies the "sphere of his service." There he will discover more than enough to keep him diligently engaged the remainder of his days: to transform a barren wilderness, or rather a neglected field (Pro 24:30-31), into a garden for his Master to delight in; to root out the weeds and burn up the thorns and thistles, and to replace them with fragrant flowers and luscious fruits—for only then will he be able to say, "Let my Beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits" (Song 4:16). But alas, pride and the restless energy of the flesh cause him to be occupied with the gardens (souls) of his fellows, instead of working out *his own* salvation with fear and trembling (Phi 2:12). It is much easier to preach unto others than to gain the mastery over sinful self. It is greatly to be feared that many a Christian has cause to say, "They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept" (Song 1:6).

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness" (Col 3:5). Here is the duty enjoined, the great task assigned. The tense of the verb expresses continued action, that which is to be our daily concernment and practice, and not merely by fits and starts. The evil lusts here named are termed "members" because indwelling sin is compared with an organism—"the old man" (Eph 4:22), "the body of this death" (Rom 7:24). In addition to our natural bodies, there is a body of corruption, which wholly compasses the soul—"the body of the sins of the flesh" (Col 2:11). "Your members which are upon the earth" is added to prevent our supposing that the reference is to a mortifying of our physical bodies, for external macerations⁹ are of no avail. It is our depraved nature which uses these lusts, as the natural body does its members. Sin is very much alive in the Christian, for the flesh or evil nature is ever opposing the spirit (Gal 5:17), and he is called upon to employ

⁹ **macerations** – wearing away.

no half measures in resisting the same. Corrupt propensities are to be dealt with unsparingly, sinful desires sternly denied, evil thoughts rejected with abhorrence.

Dangerous enemies are not to be handled gently, and sin is to be shown no mercy, but is to be so striven against that we earnestly seek to slay it. "Mortify" means put to death, destroy. Extinguish all lustings after earthly and carnal things which are opposed to the spiritual and heavenly life which we have in and from Christ. Yet the term is not to be understood absolutely, in the sense of slaying so as to deprive of the being of sin; but rather to render it useless. In Romans 4:19, we read of Abraham that "he considered not his own body now *dead*," yet it was not so absolutely; but its natural vigour was greatly abated. Hence Hebrews 11:12 speaks of his being "as good as dead." As John Owen (1616-1683) well expressed it, "To mortify signifies a continued act, in taking away the power and force of anything, until it ceases to be dead unto some certain ends or purposes." The flesh cannot be subdued without our doing violence to its affections, and the figurative expression of "mortifying" is used to denote the painfulness and troublesomeness of the task. But however unpleasant the duty, we only make more pain for ourselves if it be neglected. Neglect weakens and wastes indwelling grace, for it is impossible for sin and grace to be strong in the soul at the same time.

Now it is *this* aspect of our spiritual warfare which is in view in Joshua 10:17-27. In the slaying of those five kings, we have shadowed forth the Christian's obligation to mortify his lusts and render impotent the sin which indwells him. There are several respects in which those kings typed out¹⁰ the believer's corruptions. *First*, they belonged to an alien race, being Amorites: so, too, the lusts of the flesh are not a part of man's original nature. *Second*, they sought to slay the Gibeonites, who were a figure of young converts: in like manner, the flesh is hostile to the spirit. *Third*, they were defeated by the men of Israel: thus also is the saint frequently given the victory over his temptations. *Fourth*, they hid in a cave: after their temporary defeat, our lusts cease their raving and we are granted a respite. *Fifth*, they were then rendered helpless by Joshua's orders (verse 18), as our passions are when Christ rebukes them and bids them be still. *Sixth*, they were taken out of their concealment and brought before Joshua, teaching us that Christ alone can deal effectually with our enemies. *Finally*, the captains of Israel were bidden to place their feet upon the necks of these kings, after which they were slain.

In the preceding articles on Joshua 10, we have already covered, from the historical standpoint, the first five of the above points, and we must now consider more distinctly their typical significance ere turning to the final ones. The great work of mortification in which God calls His people to engage consists of a constant endeavour to subdue the ragings of indwelling sin, in order that they may serve and glorify Him. Sin is an active principle, ever inclining us to evil—"warring against" the new nature (Rom 7:23), hindering us from that which is good, drawing off the heart from holy duties or distracting us in them—and therefore it is to be steadfastly resisted. Complete exemption from its power is not attainable in this life, but its influence over us may be greatly diminished. Mortification is to be extended unto every internal disposition which is evil, as well as unto our external acts—refusing to hearken to their solicitation and denying them that food on which they could feed (Rom 13:14), vigorously opposing them as water is cast upon fire. We are to aim at extirpating¹¹ not only those gross sins which are condemned by men, but even those which are condoned and admired by the world.

When the five kings had met with a summary defeat at Gibeon, they "fled, and hid themselves in a cave" (10:16). Similar is the experience of the believer when the Lord has granted him a notable victory or a blessed season of revival in his soul; his heart rests sweetly on Christ and inward peace is now his portion. Nevertheless, though quiet, his enemies have not ceased to be, and therefore he needs to make close inspection within, and deal with what will again cause him trouble if it be left to itself. Thus we are told that Joshua was informed, "The five kings are *found* hid in a cave" (verse 17), which implies that a diligent search had been made for them. Israel's leader then gave orders for great stones to be rolled upon the mouth of the cave, and men set before it "for to keep them" (verse 18). Such is our responsibility: to use every means appointed by God for the subduing and suppression of our lusts, and preventing their breaking forth into renewed activity. Said the apostle, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1Co 9:27). Said the Psalmist, "I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word" (119:101).

¹⁰ **typed out** – portrayed in a figure; represented.

¹¹ **extirpating** – totally destroying; pulling up by the roots.

“Then said Joshua, Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out those five kings unto me out of the cave. And they did so, and brought forth those five kings unto him out of the cave: the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon” (10:22-23). The opening word of those verses is both important and significant, for it not only indicates the connection between them and verse 21, but also serves to intimate and introduce a prophetic picture of things to come. *First*, there has been “a very great slaughter” of the Lord’s enemies (verse 20), as there will be at the close of this world’s history (2Th 1:1, 7-9; Rev 19:11-15). *Second*, “all the people returned to the camp to Joshua at **Makkedah**” (verse 21)—a blessed foreshadowing of the entire Church being gathered around the antitypical Joshua after their warfare is accomplished. *Third*, “none moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel” (verse 21): in like manner will the supremacy of Christ and His redeemed be recognized and owned in the great day to come (1Co 6:2-3; Rev 2:26). *Fourth*, Joshua did not personally fetch these kings out of their hiding place, but called upon others to bring them before him: so before Christ “shall *be gathered* all nations” (Mat 25:32)—by “the holy angels” of verse 31, the “reapers” of Matthew 13:30.

Those kings had thought more of their own skins than of the welfare of their men. They had fled for their lives and sought refuge from their pursuers. But in vain—impossible to evade the vengeance of God. Their place of concealment was soon discovered, and, at the time which best suited Joshua, they were brought before him and dealt with as they deserved—those who foment war rarely escape the worst of its consequences. No further respite was allowed them: these kings, who had determined the destruction of the peaceful Gibeonites, must now appear before Israel’s commander. Awful and solemn moment was that: an illustration of what shall take place at the final assize,¹² when the wicked will have to stand before and be judged by the great Joshua. They who made lies their refuge shall then be exposed. They who sought shelter in a nominal profession and mingled with the people of God shall then be openly discovered. None can be concealed from the eyes of Omniscience, none escape His tribunal. “Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies” (Psa 21:8), and then will they prove what a fearful thing it is to “fall into the hands” of the One they opposed.

In Joshua’s requiring the kings to be brought before him, the Christian is taught that he must (in prayer) bring all his foes—be they inward lustings or outward temptations—to the Saviour, for it is not by his own strength he can vanquish them. Next, “Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said unto the captains of the men of war which went with him, Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings.” And we are told, “They came near and put their feet upon the necks of them” (verse 24). Very striking is this, and most important the spiritual instruction contained therein. Being dealt with in this manner betokened that these kings were in complete subjugation unto the people of God. And *that* is the attitude which faith is to take unto all its enemies, regarding them as foes already defeated—not by himself, but by his victorious Head; and, as a member of His body, sharing therein. Christ has gloriously prevailed over sin and Satan, and it is the Christian’s privilege to appropriate the same unto himself. Has not God promised him, “Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet” (Psa 91:13)? That is realized each time the saint treats with contempt and abhorrence the evil solicitations of Satan and his agents.

What we have just said ought to be the constant and uniform experience of the believer. That it is not so is due in part to his failure to plead daily the promise of Psalm 91:13, and count upon the Lord making it good more fully unto him. God has “put all things under his [Christ’s] feet” (Eph 1:22), which is explained by, “Thou hast put all things *in subjection* under his feet” (Heb 2:8); and by Joshua’s bidding his captains place their feet upon the necks of these defeated kings, we are thereby shown that our Saviour would have His people bring into subjection their spiritual enemies and share in His triumph over them. He would have them plead before God the efficacy of His sacrifice, and beg Him to grant them a deeper acquaintance experientially of its cleansing virtues. Is it not written, “they overcame him [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 12:11)? And so shall we, if we trust in its sufficiency—not only to put away our sins from before God, but also to enable us to prevail over them in our present warfare. Christ has made believers “*kings and priests unto God*” (Rev 1:6); then let them earnestly seek grace to act as such, having dominion over themselves, ruling their spirit (Pro 16:32; 1Co 6:12).

“And Joshua said unto them, Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the LORD do to all your enemies against whom ye fight” (verse 25). The ultimate and complete victory of

¹² **final assize** – the Last Judgment; an “assize” was a provincial court in England.

the believer is infallibly certain. “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (Rom 16:20). The juxtaposition of those two things should be carefully noted, the second one intimating that the first statement is made for the express purpose of quickening us to fight the good fight of faith. The issue¹³ of that fight is not left in the slightest doubt. The members of Christ’s body must be partakers of the victory of their Head. In emphasizing the prediction of Genesis 3:15, too little attention has been given to the promise of Romans 16:20. Christians have to do with a foe that was completely defeated at the cross, for through death Christ annulled him who had the power of death (Heb 2:14) and spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them (Col 2:15). Those consolatory declarations are made to encourage us to resist the devil, regarding him as a foe already conquered, as one who has no claims upon us, as one whom at the close, God will tread under our feet; and the extent to which we *appropriate* “the [available] grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” will be the measure in which we shall tread him underfoot *now*.

“And afterward Joshua smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening. And it came to pass at the time of the going down of the sun, that Joshua commanded and they took them down off the trees, and cast them into the cave wherein they had been hid, and laid great stones in the cave’s mouth, which remain until this very day” (verses 26-27). The mightiest of those who have rebelled against God and persecuted His people will yet be treated with the utmost ignominy and summary judgment. Hanging them upon trees demonstrated that they were accursed of God (Gal 3:13). “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished. Their wisest counsels prove a snare to entangle them, their most valiant and vigorous exertions expose their weakness and end in disgrace and dismay, their choicest blessings are changed into a curse and their secret retreats become their prisons or their graves! Kings and mighty captains, who are disobedient to God, will at last be treated as arch-rebels, to be distinguished only by the deepest infamy and heaviest vengeance; and all the Israel of God will join the triumph of the Captain of their salvation in trampling upon the necks of their proudest opposers, exclaiming, ‘So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord’ (cf. Psa 149:6-9)” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).



¹³ **issue** – result; what comes forth from some endeavor.

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

4. *Its Consequences, Part 2*

When Adam and Eve, by an act of wilful transgression, broke the condition of the covenant under which they had been placed, they incurred the double guilt of disbelieving God's Word and defying His will. Thereby they forfeited the promise of life and brought upon themselves the penalty of death. That one act of theirs completely changed their relation to God and, at the same time, reversed their feelings toward Him. They were no longer the objects of His favour, but instead the subjects of His wrath. As the effect of their sinfulness and the result of their spiritual death, the Lord God ceased to be the object of their love and confidence, and had become the object of their aversion and distrust. A sense of degradation and of God's displeasure filled them with fright and inspired them with an awful enmity against Him. So swift and so drastic was the change which sin produced in their relations and feelings toward their Maker, that they were ashamed and afraid to appear before Him; and as soon as they heard His voice in the garden, they fled in horror and terror, seeking to hide from Him among the trees. They dreaded to hear Him pronounce formal sentence of condemnation upon them, for they knew in themselves that they deserved it.

Each action of our first parents after the fall was emblematic and prophetic, for it shadowed forth how their descendants too would conduct themselves. *First*, upon the discovery of their nakedness, or loss of their original purity and glory, they sewed themselves aprons of fig leaves in an attempt to preserve their self-respect and make themselves presentable to one another. Thus it is with the natural man the world over: by a variety of efforts he seeks to conceal his spiritual wretchedness, yet at best his religious exercises and altruistic performances are but things of time, and will not endure the test of eternity. *Second*, Adam and Eve sought to hide from the One they now feared and hated. So it is with their children. They are fallen and depraved; God is holy and righteous; and despite their self-manufactured coverings of creature-respectability and piety, the very thought of a face-to-face meeting with their Sovereign renders the unregenerate uneasy. That is why the Bible is so much neglected—because in it *God* is heard speaking. That is why the theatre is preferred to the prayer meeting. Proof is this that all shared in the first sin and died in Adam, for all inherit his nature and perpetuate his conduct.

[*Thirdly*,] how clearly did the actions of the guilty pair make evident the serpent's lie. The more closely verses 4 and 5 be scrutinized in the light of the immediate sequel, the more will their falsity appear. The serpent had assured them, "Ye shall not surely die," yet they had done so spiritually, and now fled in terror lest they lose their physical lives. He had declared that they should be advanced—for that was the evident force of his "your eyes shall be opened"; instead, they had been abased. He had promised that they should be increased in knowledge, whereas they had become so stupid as to entertain the idea that they could conceal themselves from the omniscient and omnipresent One. He had said they should "be as gods," but here we behold them as self-accused and trembling criminals. Well do we ever bear in mind the Lord's pronouncement concerning the devil: "He is a liar, and the father of it" (Joh 8:44)—the perverter and denier of the truth, the promoter and instigator of falsehood of every kind throughout the earth, ever employing dissimulation and treachery, subtlety and deception to further his evil interests.

Behold the terrible consequences of listening to the devil's lies. See the awful ravage which sin works. Not only had Adam and Eve irreparably damaged themselves, but they had become fugitives from their all-glorious Creator. He is ineffably pure, and they were polluted, and therefore sought to avoid Him. How unbearable the thought to a guilty conscience that the unpardoned sinner will yet have to stand before the thrice Holy One! Yet he *must*; there is no possible way in which any of us can escape that awful meeting. Writer and reader must yet appear before Him and render an account of their stewardship, and unless we fled to Christ for refuge, and had our sins blotted out by His atoning blood, we shall hear His sentence of eternal doom. Then seek Him while He may be found in mercy; call ye upon Him while He is near in His gracious overtures of the Gospel, for "How shall we escape" the lake of fire if we neglect so great salvation (Heb 2:3)? Assume not that you are a Christian, but examine well your foundations; yea, beg God to search your heart and show you your real condition. Take the place of a hell-deserving sinner and receive the sinner's Saviour.

In the verses that follow, we may discover a solemn shadowing forth of the day to come. "And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" (Gen 3:9). It was the divine Judge summoning him to an account of what he had done. It was a word designed to impress upon him the guilty distance from God to which sin had removed him. His offence had severed all communion between them,

for “what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2Co 6:14). Observe well that the Lord ignored Eve and confined His address to the responsible head! God had plainly warned him about the forbidden fruit, “In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” And *death*, my reader, is not annihilation, but alienation: as physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, so spiritual death is the separation of the soul from the Holy One, “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you” (Isa 59:2). Such is the terrible plight of us all by nature—“far off” (Eph 2:13)—and unless divine grace saves us, we shall be “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2Th 1:9).

“And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden [which suggests that He was now seen in theophanic manifestation],¹⁴ and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself” (verse 10). Mark how utterly unable sinful man is to meet the divine inquisition. He could offer no adequate defence. Hear his sorry admission, “I was afraid”: his conscience condemned him. Such will be the woeful plight of every lost soul when, brought out from “the refuge of lies” in which he formerly sheltered, he now appears before his Maker—destitute of that righteousness and holiness which He inexorably requires, and which we can obtain only in and from Christ: filled with horror and terror. Weigh well those words, “I was afraid, because I was naked.” His apron of fig leaves was of no avail! Thus it is even now when the Holy Spirit convicts a soul. The garb of religion is discovered to be naught but filthy rags when one is given to see light in God’s light; the heart is filled with fear and shame as he realizes he has to do with One before whom all things are naked and opened (Heb 4:13). Have *you* passed through any such experience?—seen and felt yourself to be a spiritual bankrupt, a moral leper, a lost sinner? If not, you *will* in the day to come.

“And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked?” (verse 11). To which inquiry Adam made no reply. Instead of humbling himself before his aggrieved Benefactor, the culprit failed to make answer. Whereupon the Lord said, “Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?” It is striking to notice that God made no reply to the idle and perverse excuses which Adam had at first proffered. They were unworthy of His notice. If the words of Adam in verse 10 be carefully pondered, a solemn and fatal *omission* from them will be observed: he said nothing about his sin, but mentioned only the painful *effects* which it had produced. As another has said, “this was the language of impenitent misery.” God therefore directed him to the *cause* of those effects. Yet observe the manner in which He framed His words. The Lord did not directly charge the offender with his crime, but instead interrogated him: “Hast thou eaten?” That opened the way and made it much easier for Adam contritely to *acknowledge* his transgression. But alas, he failed to avail himself of the opportunity and declined making broken-hearted confession of his iniquity.

God did not put those questions to Adam because He desired to be informed, but rather to provide him with an occasion penitently to own what he had done; and in his refusal to do so, we behold the *fourth* consequence of the fall, namely *the hardening of the heart* by sin. There was no deep sorrow for his flagrant disobedience, and therefore no sincere owning of the same. To the second inquiry of God, the man said, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” Here was the *fifth* consequence of the fall: *self-justification* by an attempt to excuse sin. Instead of confessing his wickedness, Adam sought to mitigate and extenuate it by throwing the onus upon another. The entrance of evil into man produced a dishonest and disingenuous heart; rather than take the blame upon himself, Adam sought to place it upon his wife. And thus it is with his descendants. They endeavour to shelve their responsibility and repudiate their culpability by attributing the wrongdoing to anyone or anything rather than themselves. Ascribing their sins to the force of circumstances, an evil environment, temptations, or the devil.

But in those words of Adam, we may behold something still more heinous, and a *sixth* consequence of his fall, namely a blasphemous *impugning of God Himself*. Adam did not simply say, “my wife gave me of the tree, and I did eat,” but “the woman whom *thou* gavest me.” Thus did he overtly reproach the Lord. It was as though he said, Hadst Thou not given me this woman, I had not eaten. Why didst Thou put such a snare upon me? Behold here the pride and stoutheartedness which characterizes the devil, whose kingdom has now been set up within man! So it is with his children to this day. That is why we are enjoined: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (Jam 1:13). It is because the depraved mind of the fallen creature is so prone to think that very thing and seek shelter therein. If God had not ordered His providences, I had never been so strongly tempted; if He had disposed things differently, I should not have been enticed, still less overcome. Thus do we, in our efforts at self-vindication, cast reflection on the ways of Him who cannot err.

¹⁴ **theophanic manifestation** – God making Himself visible to man in a form he can understand.

“The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD” (Pro 19:3). This is one of the vilest forms in which human depravity manifests itself: that after deliberately playing the fool, and discovering that the way of transgressors is hard, we murmur against God instead of meekly submitting to His rod. When we pervert our way—through self-will, carnal greed, rash conduct, hasty actions—let us not charge God with the bitter fruits thereof; since we are the authors of our misery, it is but reason that we should fret against *ourselves*. But such is the pride of our hearts, and unsubdued enmity against God, that we are fearfully apt to fret against Him, as though He were responsible for our troubles. We must not expect to gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles (Mat 7:16)! Charge not the unpleasant reaping on the severity of God, but upon thine own perversity. Say not, God should not have endowed me with such strong passions if I may not indulge them. Ask not, Why did He not give grace so that I would have resisted the temptation? Impeach not His sovereignty; question not His dispensations; harbour no doubts about His goodness. If you do, you are but repeating the wickedness of your first father.

“And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” He indeed recited the facts of the case, yet in so doing made it worse rather than better. He was the woman’s head and protector, and therefore should have taken more care to prevent her falling into evil. When she had succumbed to the serpent’s wiles, so far from following her example, he should have rebuked her and refused her offer. To plead we were allured by others is no valid excuse; yet it is one commonly offered. When Aaron was charged with making the golden calf, he admitted the fact, but sought to extenuate the fault by blaming the congregation (Exo 32:22-24). In like manner, the disobedient Saul sought to transfer the onus unto “the people” (1Sa 15:21). So too Pilate gave orders for the crucifixion of Christ, and then charged the crime upon the Jews (Mat 27:254).

Finally, we behold here yet another [*seventh*] consequence of the fall: it produced *a breach of affection* between man and his neighbour—in this case his wife, whom he now loved so little as to thrust her forth to receive the stroke of divine vengeance.

“And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done?” Behold here both the infinite condescension of the Most High and His fairness as Judge. He acted not in high sovereignty, disdainful to parley with the creature; nor did He condemn the transgressors unheard, but gave them opportunity to defend themselves or confess their crime. So it will be at the Great Assize: it will be conducted in such a manner as to make it transparently evident that every transgressor receives “the due reward of his iniquities,” and that God is clear when He judges (Psa 51:4). “And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (verse 13). Eve followed the same course and manifested the same evil spirit as her husband. She humbled not herself before the Lord, gave no sign of repentance, made no broken-hearted confession. Instead, there was a vain attempt to vindicate herself by casting the blame upon the serpent. Idle excuse was that, for God had capacitated her to perceive his lies and rectitude of nature to reject them with horror. Equally useless for her children to plead, “I had no intention of sinning, but the devil tempted me,” for he can force none, nor prevail, without our consent.

Standing before their Judge self-accused and self-condemned, He now proceeded to pronounce sentence upon the guilty pair. But before so doing, He dealt with the one who had been instrumental in their fall. “And the LORD God said unto the serpent, because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Observe that no question was put to the serpent; rather did the Lord treat with him as an avowed enemy. His sentence is to be taken literally in its application to the serpent, mystically in relation to Satan. “The words may imply a visible punishment to be executed on the serpent, as the instrument in this temptation; but the curse was directed against the invisible tempter, whose abject, degraded condition, and base endeavours to find satisfaction in rendering others wicked and miserable, might be figuratively intimated by the serpent’s moving on his belly, and feeding on the dust” (Thomas Scott).

The Lord began His denunciations where sin began—with the serpent. Each part of the sentence expresses the fearful degradation which should henceforth be his portion. First, he was “cursed *above all cattle*”—the curse has extended to the whole creation, as Romans 8:20-23 makes clear. Second, hereafter it would crawl in the dust: from which it is to be inferred that originally it stood erect—compare our remarks on 3:1. Third, God Himself now put an enmity between it and the female, so that where there had been intimate converse, there should now be mutual aversion. Fourth, passing from the literal snake to “that old serpent, the devil,” God announced that he should ultimately be crushed—not by His hand dealing immediately with him, but by One in human nature, and what would be yet more humiliating, by the *woman’s*

Seed. Satan had made use of the weaker vessel, and God would defeat him through the same medium! Wrapped up in that pronouncement was a prophecy and a promise, yet let it be carefully noted that it was in the form of a sentence of doom on Satan, and *not* a gracious declaration made unto Adam and Eve—intimating that *they* had no personal interest therein!

The sentences pronounced upon our first parents need not detain us, for their language is so plain and simple that they call for neither explanation nor comment. Since Eve was the first in the transgression, and had tempted Adam, she was the next to receive sentence. “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception: in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee” (verse 16). Thus was she condemned to a state of sorrow, suffering, and servitude. “And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it *all* the days of thy life [definitely precluding the idea that, later, God saved him!]; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee....In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (verses 17-19). Sorrow, toil, and sweat were to be the burden to fall most heavily upon the male. Here we behold the *eighth* consequence of the fall: *physical suffering* and death—“unto dust shalt thou return.”

“And Adam called his wife’s name Eve [that is “living”]; because she was the mother of all living” (verse 20). This is manifestly a detail communicated by God to Moses the historian, for Eve gave birth to no children until after she and her husband had been expelled from Eden. It seems to be introduced here for the purpose of illustrating and exemplifying the concluding portion of the sentence passed upon the woman in verse 16. As Adam had made proof of his dominion over all the lower creatures (1:28) by giving names to them (2:19), so in token of his rule over his wife, he bestowed a name upon her. “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins and clothed them” (verse 21). With what design we are *not told*: so that each reader is free to form his own opinion. In the face of everything that makes directly against any such theory, many have supposed these words intimate that God now dealt (typically, at least) in mercy with the fallen pair, and that emblematically they were robed in Christ’s righteousness and covered with the garments of salvation. To the contrary, this writer sees therein the *ninth* consequence of the fall: that man had thereby *descended to the level of the animals*—observe how in Daniel 7 and Revelation 17, where God sets before us the character of the leading kingdoms of the world (as *He* sees them): He employs the symbol of beasts!

“And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil” (verse 22), which is obviously the language of sarcasm and irony. See the one who vainly imagined that by defying Us he should “be as gods” (3:5), now degraded to the level of the beasts! “Therefore the LORD God *sent* him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken,” i.e. bade him leave the garden. But as Matthew Henry intimates, such an order did not at all appeal to the apostate rebel. “So he *drove out* the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (verse 24), thereby effectually preventing his return. Therein we behold the *tenth* consequence of the fall: man *an outcast from God*, estranged from His favour and fellowship, banished from the place of delight, sent forth a fugitive into the world. Observe how this closing verse corroborates our interpretation of verse 21. The Lord does not drive from Him any child of His! And this is the *finally recorded* act of God in connection with Adam! As He cast out of heaven the angels that sinned, so He drove Adam and Eve out of the earthly paradise, in proof of their abhorrence to Him and alienation from Him.



INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 3: Essential Requirements for Preachers

Our last article dealt with some of the more elementary yet essential qualifications which must needs be found in any who would enter into the spiritual meaning of Holy Writ. It was therefore suited to all the people of God in general. But in this, we propose to treat of those things which have a more particular bearing upon those whom God has called to preach and teach His Word: those whose whole time and energies are to be devoted unto seeking the spiritual and eternal welfare of souls, and the better equipping of themselves for that most blessed, solemn, and important work. Their principal tasks are to proclaim God's Truth and to exemplify and commend their message by diligently endeavouring to practice what they preach, setting before their hearers a personal example of practical godliness. Since it be the truth they are to preach, no pains must be spared in seeing to it that no error be intermingled therewith, that it is the pure milk of the Word they are giving forth. To preach error instead of truth is not only grievously to dishonour God and His Word, but will mislead and poison the minds of the hearers or readers.

The preacher's task is both the most honourable and the most solemn of any calling, the most privileged and at the same time the most responsible one. He professes to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, a messenger sent forth by the Most High. To misrepresent his Master, to preach any other Gospel than His, to falsify the message which God has committed to his trust, is the sin of sins, which brings down upon him the anathema of heaven (Gal 1:8), and will be visited with the sorest punishment awaiting any creature. Scripture is plain that the heaviest measure of divine wrath is reserved for unfaithful preachers (Mat 23:14; Jude 1:13). Therefore the warning is given, "be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (Jam 3:1) if unfaithful to our trust. Every minister of the Gospel will yet have to render a full account of his stewardship unto the One who he claims called him to feed His sheep (Heb 13:17), to answer for the souls who were committed to his charge. If he fails to diligently warn the wicked, and he dies in his iniquity, God declares "his blood will I require at thine hand" (Eze 3:18).

Thus the chief and constant duty of the preacher is to conform unto that injunction, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2Ti 2:15). In the whole of Scripture, there is no exhortation addressed to preachers which is of greater importance than that one, and few equal. Doubtless that is why Satan has been so active in seeking to obscure its first two clauses by raising such a cloud of dust over the last one. The Greek word for "study" here signifies "give diligence": spare no efforts, but make it your paramount concern and constant endeavour to please your Master. Seek not the smiles and flatteries of worms of the earth, but the approbation¹⁵ of the Lord. That is to take precedence of everything else: unless it is, attention to the second thing mentioned will be in vain. Entirely subordinate all other aims to commending *thyself* unto God—thine heart and character, thy dealings with and walk before Him, ordering all thy ways according to His revealed will. What are your "service," your ministrations, worth, if He be displeased with *thee*?

"A workman that needeth not to be ashamed." Be conscientious, diligent, faithful, in the use you make of your time and the talents God has entrusted to you. Give unremitting heed to that precept, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Ecc 9:10)—put your very best into it. Be industrious and assiduous,¹⁶ not careless and slovenly. See how well you can do each thing, and not how quickly. The Greek word for "workman" is also translated "labourer," and in twentieth-century English might well be rendered "toiler." The ministry is no place for triflers and idlers, but for those who are prepared to spend and be spent in the cause of Christ. The preacher ought to work harder than the miner, and to spend more hours per week in his study than does the man of business in his office. A workman is the very opposite of a shirker. If the preacher is to show himself approved unto God and be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, then he will have to labour while others sleep, and do so until he sweats mentally.

"Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed *unto thyself*, and unto the doctrine; *continue* in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1Ti 4:15-16). This is another part of the mandate which Christ has laid upon His offi-

¹⁵ **approbation** – praise (cf. Rom 2:29).

¹⁶ **assiduous** – careful and persistent; diligent.

cial servants, and a most comprehensive and exacting one it is. He requires them to put their hearts into the work, to give the whole of their thoughts to it, to lay themselves completely out in it, to devote all their time and strength thereto. They are to keep clear of all secular affairs and worldly employments, and show all diligence in the task assigned them. That it is an arduous task appears from the different designations given them. They are called “soldiers” to denote the exertions and fatigue which attend the proper discharge of their calling; “overseers and watchmen” to intimate the care and concern which accompany their office; “shepherds and teachers” to signify the various duties of leading and feeding those committed to their charge. But first and foremost, they are to take heed to their *personal* growth in grace and piety, if they would minister effectually unto others.

Particularly does the minister need to attend unto this injunction “take heed unto thyself” in his study of the Scriptures, reading them devotionally ere he does so professionally; that is, seeking their application and blessing to his own soul before searching for sermonic materials. As the saintly James Hervey (1714-1758) expressed it, “Thus may we always be affected when we study the oracles of truth. Study them, not as cold critics, who are only to judge of their meaning, but as persons deeply interested in all they contain—who are particularly addressed in every exhortation and directed in every precept, whose are the promises, and to whom belong the precious privileges. When we are enabled thus to *realize and appropriate* the contents of that invaluable Book, then shall we taste the sweetness and feel the power of the Scriptures. Then shall we know by happy experience that our divine Master’s words are not barely sounds and syllables, but that they are spirit and they are life.” No man can be constantly giving out that which is fresh and savoury, unless he be continually taking in. That which he is to declare unto others is what his own ears have first heard, his own eyes have seen, his own hands have handled (1Jo 1:1-2).

The mere *quoting* of Scripture in the pulpit is not sufficient—people can become familiar with the letter of the Word by reading it at home; it is the *expounding and application of it* which are so much needed. “And Paul, as his manner was...reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead” (Act 17:2-3). But to “open” the Scriptures helpfully to the saints requires something more than a few months’ training in a Bible institute, or a year or two in a seminary. None but those who have been personally taught of God in the hard school of experience are qualified so to “open” the Word, that divine light is cast upon the spiritual problems of the believer, for while Scripture interprets experience, experience is often the best interpreter of Scripture. “The *heart* of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips” (Pro 16:23), and that “learning” cannot be acquired in any of man’s schools. No one can learn what humility is by means of the concordance, nor secure more faith by studying certain passages of Scripture. The one is acquired through painful discoveries of the plague of our hearts, and the other is increased by a deepening acquaintance with God. We must ourselves be comforted of Him before we can comfort others (2Co 1:4).

“To seek after mere *notions* of truth, without an endeavour after an experience of its power in our hearts, is not the way to increase our understanding in spiritual things. He alone is in a posture to learn from God, who sincerely gives up his mind, conscience, and affections to the power and rule of what is revealed unto him. Men may have in their study of the Scriptures other ends also, as the profit and edification of *others*. But if this conforming of their own souls unto the power of the Word be not fixed in the first place in their minds, they do not strive lawfully, nor will they be crowned. And if at any time when we study the Word, we have not this design expressly in our minds, yet if upon the discovery of any truth, we endeavour not to have the likeness of it in our own hearts, we lose our principal advantage by it” (John Owen). It is much to be feared that many preachers will have reason to lament in the day to come: “They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept” (Song 1:6)—like a chef preparing meals for others and himself starved.

While the preacher is to ponder the Word devotionally, he is also to read it *studiously*. If he is to become able to feed his flock with “the finest of the wheat” (Psa 81:16), then he must needs study it diligently and daily, and that to the end of his life. In this, at least, the writer (by grace) practices what he teaches, for though he burns not so much midnight oil as he did forty years ago, yet he has never relaxed, and works now as hard as ever—ten years have passed since he had even a half-day’s holiday, nor has he suffered any perceptible ill effects from such close application. Of course not. It is dishonouring to God and His Word to imagine that anyone will be injured by too much examination of it. Alas, that so many preachers abandon their habit of study as soon as they are ordained! The Bible is an inexhaustible mine of spiritual treasure, and the more its riches are opened to us (by hard digging), the more we realize how much there is yet

unpossessed, and how little we really understand what has been received. "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1Co 8:2).

The Word of God cannot be understood without a constant and laborious study, without a careful and prayerful scrutiny of its contents. This is not to say that it is recondite and obscure. No, it is as plain and intelligible as in the nature of things it can be, adopted in the best possible manner to give instruction in the holy and profound things of which it treats. But none can be instructed by the best possible means of instruction who will not take pains with the same. Promise of understanding is made not to the dilatory and indolent, but to the diligent and earnest, to those who seek for spiritual treasure (Pro 2:3, 5). The Scriptures have to be searched, searched daily, persistently and perseveringly, if the minister is to become thoroughly familiar with *the whole* of what God has revealed, and if he is to set before his hearers "a feast of fat things" (Isa 25:6). Of the wise preacher it is said, "he still taught the people knowledge, yea, he gave good heed, and sought out," even "sought to find out acceptable words" (Ecc 12:9-10), as if his whole soul was engaged in the discovery of the best mode as well as the best substance of instruction.

No preacher should be content with being anything less than "a man mighty in the scriptures" (Act 18:24). But to attain thereunto he must subordinate all other interests. An old writer quaintly said, "The preacher should be with his time as the miser is with his gold—saving it with care, and spending it with caution." He must also remind himself constantly *whose* Book it is he is about to take up, so that he ever handles it with the utmost reverence, and can aver "my heart standeth in awe of thy word" (Psa 119:161). He must approach it in lowly-mindedness, for it is only unto such that the Lord "giveth more grace" (Jam 4:6). He must ever come to it in the spirit of prayer, crying "that which I see not teach thou me" (Job 34:32): the enlightening grace of the Spirit will often open mysteries to the meek and dependent which remain closed to the most learned and scholarly. A holy heart is equally indispensable for the reception of supernatural truth, for the understanding is clarified by the purifying of the heart. Let there also be a humble expectation of divine help, for "according unto your faith be it unto you" holds good here too (Mat 9:29).

It is only by giving heed to the things which have been pointed out in the preceding paragraphs that the necessary foundations are laid for any man's becoming a competent expositor. The task before him is to unfold, with clearness and accuracy, the Word of God. His business is entirely exegetical—to bring out the true meaning of each passage he deals with, whether it accords with his own preconceptions or no. As it is the work of the translator to convey the real sense of the Hebrew and Greek into English, so the interpreter's is to apprehend and communicate the precise ideas which the language of the Bible was meant to impart. As the renowned Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) so well expressed it, "An expositor should be like the maker of a well: who puts no water into it, but makes it his object to let the water flow, *without* diversion, stoppage, or defilement." In other words, he must not take the slightest liberty with the sacred text, nor give it a meaning which it will not legitimately bear; neither modifying its force nor superimposing upon it anything of his own, but seeking to give out its true import.

To comply with what has just been said calls for an unbiased approach, an honest heart, and a spirit of fidelity on the part of the interpreter. "Nothing should be elicited from the text but what is yielded by the fair and grammatical explanation of its language" (Patrick Fairbairn, 1805-1874). It is easy to assent to that dictum, but often difficult to put it into practice. A personal shrinking from what condemns the preacher, a sectarian bias of mind, the desire to please his hearers, have caused not a few to evade the plain force of certain passages, and to foist on them significations which are quite foreign to their meaning. Said Martin Luther, "We must not make God's Word mean what *we* wish. We must not bend *it*, but allow it to *bend us*, and give it the honour of being better than we can make it." Anything other than that is highly reprehensible. Great care needs ever to be taken that we do not expound our own minds instead of God's. Nothing can be more blameworthy than for a man to profess to be uttering a "Thus saith the Lord" when he is merely expressing his own thoughts. Yet who is there who has not, unwittingly, done so?

If the chemist is required by law to follow exactly the doctor's prescription, if military officers must transmit the orders of their commanders verbatim or suffer severe penalties, how much more incumbent is it for one dealing with divine and eternal things to adhere strictly to his text book! The interpreter's task is to emulate those described in Nehemiah 8:8, of whom it is said, "They read in the book in the law of the LORD God distinctly, and *gave the sense*, and caused them to understand the reading." The reference is unto those who had returned to Palestine from Babylon. While in captivity, they had gradually ceased to use Hebrew as their spoken language, Aramaic displacing it. Hence there was a real need to explain the

Hebrew words in which the Law was written (cf. Neh 13:23-24). Yet the recording of this incident intimates that it is of permanent importance, and has a message for us. In the good providence of God, there is little need today for the preacher to explain the Hebrew and the Greek, since we already possess a reliable translation of them into our own mother tongue—though occasionally, yet very sparingly, he may do so. But his principal business is to “give the sense” of the English Bible and cause his hearers to “understand” its contents. His responsibility is to adhere strictly to that injunction, “let him speak my word faithfully, What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD” (Jer 23:28).

