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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

SWEET THINGS*New Year Message: to be read January 1, and...*

One of the accompaniments of the new birth is a spiritual palate, which enables one to savour the things that be of God. At regeneration, its favoured subjects receive not only eyes which are capable of seeing objects imperceptible to the natural man, and ears which hear the voice of God as He speaks to the soul, but also a new sense of taste, whereby things which were formerly insipid are now relished, and what before was agreeable is now loathed. An illustration of this is found in connection with the manna. The bread from heaven which God so graciously provided for His people during their wilderness journeyings was unto the children of Israel “like wafers made with honey” (Exo 16:31), but unto the “mixed multitude” which accompanied them from Egypt, it was very different (Num 11:4-6). It is because the unregenerate *lack* a spiritual palate that they enjoy not that which is so desirable unto the children of God. Hence, it is not surprising that they regard the testimonies borne by Christians unto the sweetness of God’s Word as a species of fanaticism. “The full soul loatheth an honeycomb” (Pro 27:7): they who are full of self and the world find the honeycomb of the Gospel nauseating unto them.

“And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a sweet savour” (Gen 8:20-21). This is the first time the word “sweet” occurs in the Bible, and as might well be expected, it speaks loudly to us of Christ, for that which Noah had offered unto God upon the altar was a prefiguration of Him. As Thomas Scott (1747-1821) pointed out, “The smell of burning flesh could in itself be no more pleasing to God than the blood of bulls or of calves; but as it typified the sacrifice of Christ and expressed Noah’s faith and grateful love, the Lord accepted it.” As a figure of His Son’s death, Noah’s offering was a fragrant odour and perfume unto God. Proof of that is found in “Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmell-

ing savour” (Eph 5:2). As fragrant scents regale and refresh our senses, so did the sacrifice of Christ content God and give Him infinite pleasure. He was well pleased with Christ’s sacrifice because of the dignity of the Offerer, because of the spotless purity of His offering, because of the graces exercised by Him therein—His obedience to God (Phi 2:8), faith in God (Heb 2:13), love to God (Joh 14:31); and because it brought more glory unto Him than sin has dishonoured Him.

“And the LORD showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet” (Exo 15:25). Shortly after crossing the Red Sea, Israel met with a very disappointing and painful experience. They went for three days “and found no water”—adumbrating the fact that this scene affords nothing which can refresh the souls of God’s children. Like the Psalmist, he says, “my soul thirsteth for thee...in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is” (63:1). Presently the Israelites reached a place where there *was* a stream, but only to discover that they “could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter” (verse 23). A sore trial, a real test, was that! Three days’ journeying in the hot and sandy desert without finding water, and now that water was reached, it was undrinkable. How that shadows forth the inexperienced believer seeking some satisfaction from the things of this life, only to find them “bitter”! Alas, like we so often do when our carnal hopes are dashed, Israel murmured. Whereupon Moses cried unto the Lord, and He graciously “showed him a tree” which when cut down and cast into the bitter waters made them sweet. It was an emblem of the Tree of Life—the person (Psa 1:3; Song 2:3) and work (1Pe 2:24) of Christ. Just in proportion as the saint regards his bitter trials and afflictions as so many opportunities for him to enter into “the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phi 3:10) will they be made sweet to him.

“My meditation of him shall be sweet” (Psa 104:34). Holy meditation is a most important means for promoting growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. God has so constituted us that, in the ordinary way of operation, the heart is affected as objects are set before the mind and subjects pondered: as thought is set in motion, the affections are stimulated—“While I was musing the fire burned”! The more the believer thinks upon the love of God, the more is the holy spark within him fanned into a flame. Some of our readers are unable, through ill health and age, to attend the preaching of the Word, and others have no access to any place where they could hear the unsearchable riches of Christ extolled; but they may in private have the most blessed communion, by engaging their hearts with Him. He is the One in whom all our joys centre, and if we would become better acquainted with “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord,” then we must be more frequent in devout contemplations of Him. Ponder the perfections of His person, the glory of His mediatorial office, His finished work, His intercession, and your heart will be warmed, gratitude deepened, assurance increased, closer conformity to Him desired; and *He* will be honoured.

“How sweet are thy words unto my taste” (Psa 119:103): not only pleasant to the ear, but delicious to the palate. Note how comprehensive is this eulogy: “David loved them each one individually, and the whole of them as a whole...he makes no distinction between promises and precepts, doctrines and threatenings: they are all included in God’s words, and all are precious in his esteem” (Charles H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892) None but a child of God could use such language, because none but he has a spiritual taste. But we may be yet

more discriminating: only the Christian when in communion with God can truthfully make such an assertion. Thus that testimony supplies a criterion by which the believer may ascertain his spiritual condition. If this be our case, it indicates that the soul is in a healthy state. When it be otherwise with us, it is because our palate has been vitiated by the world and the flesh; and when such be the case, though the Word be read, it will be done formally and indolently, without mixing faith with it, with no personal appropriation, and therefore without joy. Where the Word be truly precious unto the heart, there is an inward experience, a spiritual relishing of it, which cannot be conveyed unto others by words.

“I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste” (Song 2:3). That is the testimony borne to Christ by the Church collectively, and by each saint individually who is enjoying communion with Him. In comparison with the lofty palm and the majestic cedar, the apple tree is of small dimensions and mean appearance. As such, it is a figure of Him who laid aside His glory and assumed a lowly place in this world. But the fruits of His abasement and sufferings are inexpressibly precious to the believer. As the sin-burdened soul comes to Christ for rest, he finds Him to be the Man that is “as the shadow of a rock in a weary land,” and declares: “Thou hast been... a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat” (Isa 32:2; 25:4), for He interposed between him and the fiery wrath of God. Christ has not only shadow to shelter, but also fruit to refresh. The fruit of His work: reconciliation to God, the gift of His Spirit, etc. The fruit of His lips: words of counsel, intimate communications. The fruit of His personal perfections. These are highly prized by the believer, and as he feeds and feasts thereon, he finds them most delectable. They are sweet to him because a miracle of grace has prepared his appetite to receive and welcome them.

“Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely” (Song 2:14). That is Christ’s commendation of and invitation to His spouse. Most blessed is it to observe not only that this is a term of endearment, but that the form assumed by the Spirit when He came on Christ (Mat 3:16) is the emblem here chosen by Christ to represent those whom the Spirit indwells—“My dove.” First, He says, “Let me see thy countenance”: whether it be wet with the tears of godly sorrow or shining with joy. Second, “Let me hear thy voice,” in confession, prayer and praise. Third, He declares that her voice is sweet and her countenance comely unto Him. Christ takes great delight in His blood-bought people and will have them make very free with Him. What marvellous condescension on His part! What encouragement for us to lift up our heads, come boldly to His throne, pour out our hearts before Him. Christian reader, your voice is not only pleasing to Him when you are singing His praises, but it is also music as you pour out the grief of a contrite heart. Fear not to tell Him your secrets. Let Him also hear you commending Him to others.

Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are *unto God* a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, *and* in them that perish” (2Co 2:14-15). Those words ought to be of great cheer unto many a despondent servant of His who is cast down because his preaching appears to be fruitless. Whether men listen or not, the proclamation of that name which is above every name is a continual incense before God! However unacceptable his ministry be unto a dead church, if the minister faithfully preach the person and

work of Christ, it is “a sweet savour unto God.” Let the realization of this comfort and nerve afresh. If you be setting forth the glories of His Son, it is sweet to the Father.

If the Christian reader is spared, and spends more time than previously in feeding on God’s Word, meditating on Christ, feasting on His perfections, then 1952 will be a *sweeter* year unto him.

EXPOSITION OF JOHN’S FIRST EPISTLE

24. *The Family Delineated (2:13-14)*

“I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.”

In the verses before us the saints are viewed according to their several levels in the school of Christ, and the excellences ascribed to them correspond with and are proper to their stages of growth. In addressing the “fathers,” they are viewed not according to their age, but to their spiritual development. That which is here predicated of them is “ye have known him that is from the beginning.” We think “that is” should be deleted, for this supplement inserted by the translators is quite unnecessary, the reference being to the One spoken of in the opening verse of our epistle. They had known Him from the beginning of their spiritual history, from the day when Christ had first been graciously revealed in them (Gal 1:16). Doubtless some of them had personally seen and heard Christ in His incarnate state at the commencement of the Christian era. That which distinguished them from the young men and babes was that they had acquired a deeper, fuller, and richer acquaintance with Him. In their earlier days they were occupied with His work, what He had done and obtained for them. Later, they were more taken with their exploits and achievements, what His grace and strength had enabled them to accomplish. But now it was Himself that engaged their hearts and minds: the wonders and perfections of His blessed person which enthralled them.

“I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phi 3:8) is the language and longing of a “father.” That which characterizes such is a clearer insight into the marvels and mysteries of His ineffable¹ person, of His manifold glories, of His distinctive offices. They know Him as the God-man Mediator. They appre-

¹ **ineffable** – indescribable; incapable of being expressed.

hend something of His covenant engagements, and of His prophetic, priestly and kingly functions. They discern Him to be the Centre of all the divine counsels (Eph 3:11), the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of every creature (Col 1:15). They know Him as “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1Co 1:24), and as the One in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen (2Co 1:20). They know Him as the Head of the Body the Church (Col 1:18), yea, as “the head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:22), angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him (1Pe 3:22). They not only know Him as a personal and all-sufficient Saviour, but they have gone on to apprehend what He did for God and what He finds in His Son, as the One who magnified His law and made it honourable, glorifying Him in this very scene where He has been so grievously dishonoured: the One of whom the Father says, “Mine elect, in *whom* my soul delighteth” (Isa 42:1).

“*I write unto you, fathers*”: the reference is to all that he says in this epistle. Though they had known Christ from the beginning and had so grown in grace and in the knowledge of Him, yet what he wrote was as much needed by them as by their younger and more immature brethren. No child of God ever gets beyond the need of instruction, exhortation and comfort in this life. The very fact that the fathers are so well acquainted with Christ should make them the more amenable and receptive to the apostle’s message. They had proved what a good master the Lord Jesus is to serve: how patiently He had borne with their dullness, how graciously He had pardoned their sins, how faithfully He had supplied their every need; and therefore they ought the more readily to attend unto the words of His servants. The proved goodness of Christ should engage them to lively gratitude, fervent love, and devoted obedience. They should be examples unto and the guides of their juniors. They must not abate in their zeal or entertain the idea that it was permissible to be less diligent and earnest than formerly, still less be puffed up with their attainments, but rather pray and strive to continue “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10).

“*I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.*” This second class comprised those who had emerged from their spiritual infancy, though they had not arrived at that maturity of growth the fathers had attained unto. What is here predicated of them has sorely puzzled not a few, yet if it be regarded in the light of the general analogy of faith, and more particularly with respect to John’s style of making abstract and absolute statements, it should present no serious obstacle. Whatever difficulty is here presented, let us be careful to avoid increasing the same by reading into it what is not there. The apostle did not say the young men had overcome the flesh. It is a most significant fact, and one which needs to be kept in mind that while this epistle speaks of overcoming “the wicked one,” and of overcoming “the world” (5:4), it makes no mention of believers overcoming their evil nature. They are indeed bidden to mortify their corruptions (Col 3:5), and in varying measures all the regenerate do so, for the grace of God effectually teaches its recipients to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Ti 2:12); but nowhere does Scripture affirm that any saint “overcame the flesh.”

Thus, “ye have overcome the wicked one” is not to be understood absolutely and unqualifiedly, but relatively and within certain limits. These “young men” had successfully encountered the first temptations and trials, which attended enlistment under the banner of

Christ and their consequent separation from the world, so that Satan had been unable either to drag them down into his evil ways or to shut them up in the dungeon of despair. As they had continued following on to know the Lord, they had received many setbacks and been sorely wounded in their conflict with the powers of evil, yet Satan had been foiled in his efforts to induce them to give up the fight. That leads us to point out that the Lord's people are far more aware of their defeats than they are of their frequent overcomings. Nor is the reason of that hard to discover. As we are naturally far more conscious of a painful illness than of our good health, so the Christian's falls are more evident to him than are his victories—the more so since the latter be gained while his eyes are fixed on Christ rather than on himself.

Satan never succeeds in prevailing finally or totally over any child of God. He is bent on the destruction of all the saints, but in no case can he accomplish his full desire—the intercession of Christ prevents him from so doing. In every instance those words of His hold good, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Nevertheless, that does not release us from the necessity of taking unto us the whole armour of God, or from the duty of unremitting watchfulness. Our very striving against the devil is one degree of conquest. God does indeed postpone the full and ultimate victory, yet if we continue to resist the devil we are not overcome by him. When he gains a temporary advantage over us, causing us to disgrace our profession and dishonour the name of Christ, he strives his utmost to drive us to abject despair, or to persuade us that we have committed the unpardonable sin; but if a sense of our failure drives us to our knees in humble and sincere confession to God, then we defeat his hellish designs. Poor Peter failed sadly in the high priest's palace, and experienced an awful fall; nevertheless, when he went out and wept bitterly he overcame the wicked one.

This overcoming of the wicked one by the saints—for the experience is by no means restricted unto the "young men" class—is in fulfillment of the terms of Genesis 3:15, for it is to be carefully observed that that remarkable prophecy is concerned not only with the serpent and the Saviour, but also with their respective seeds. The members of Christ have fellowship, in their measure, with the Head, both in His sufferings and in His victories. As it was not the serpent alone (though chiefly, and as the instigator of others) who bruised Christ's heel, for both Jews and Gentiles were gathered together against Him (Act 4:27), so it is not Christ alone (though He pre-eminently and His seed subordinately) who obtains conquest over the devil. Thus the triumph of the Captain of our salvation over the arch-enemy of God and His people is twofold: personal and immediate, mediate and instrumental—in and by His soldiers, for He loves to have them share with Him in all things. Believers overcome the wicked one not only representatively in their Head, but personally through His strength, and therefore the glory is still His. In this respect also they are "pre-destinated to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29).

Far too little thought has been devoted to the terms of Genesis 3:15, in their application unto the children of God. While the Redeemer Himself be its prime subject, His redeemed are by no means to be excluded. They certainly have part in the conflict and are bruised in the heel by the serpent, and to them also extends the promise of bruising his head. This is confirmed by the fact that the "enmity" exists not only between Satan and Christ, but also between their respective seeds. This is according to the promise of "if we suffer, we shall

also reign with him" (2Ti 2:12). Their victory is set forth in the New Testament in very language drawn from Genesis 3:15. When the seventy, as representatives of all Christ's ministers, said, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name," He replied, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luk 10:17-19). To the saints Paul wrote, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan [more completely] under your feet shortly" (Rom 16:20): it is indeed God who treads him down, but it is under their feet he is trodden.

"I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." This accords with and is the fulfillment of the covenant promise: "all shall know me, from the least to the greatest" (Heb 8:11). It is at this point that experiential Christianity begins: an apprehension of the Father's love in Christ, the realization that He so loved them as to give His only begotten Son for them. It is their privilege, wisdom, and comfort to know God as "Father." It was His grace that chose them in Christ, His Spirit who was sent to seek them, His power that begat them. In natural life the very first thing which babes and little children discover is an acknowledgment—in their infantile way—of their parents, owning them by their names ("papa and mama") in distinguishing them from others. And thus it is spiritually: the spirit of adoption is given them "whereby they cry, Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15). The distinguishing act of babes in Christ is to own God as their Father, expressing in their way their attachment to Him, their delight in Him, their dependence upon Him, lisping out His name in their praises and petitions before the throne of grace. None can approach Him with any confidence or freedom until they know God in this relation—their Father, because the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 14 the apostle changes from his threefold "I write" of verse 13 and twice uses "I have written." Why such repetition? For the purpose of emphasis: to make clear his warm affection for them, his deep concern for their spiritual welfare, and to emphasize the privilege and honour conferred upon them. At least six different explanations have been given of the change of tense, only two of which strike us as being feasible. The first is that John here contemplated his epistle from two different mental standpoints. Originally, his mind dwelt upon what he was engaged in penning (1:4); later, he contemplated his completed production (5:13). It was as though he said, I am telling you this and that; afterwards, remember what I told you. Second, that John was pondering a changed situation. He was then in the body, though very aged, and could not be here much longer. Soon his what "I wrote" would become what "I have written." Considered thus, there is a pathos in it which is quite affecting: I write to you as a dying man; treasure what I wrote as my last charge to you.

"I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him from the beginning" (verse 14). They knew Him so as to approve of Him, trust in Him, and make Him their All in all. Theirs was not a bare theoretical and historical knowledge, but a spiritual and saving one, an experiential and heart-affecting knowledge, which receives the truth not only in the light of it but in the love of it (2Th 2:10). Their knowledge is more deeply rooted (Col 1:23) than is that of the babes or young men. It is more influential (Phi 1:9): their love is more stable (Eph 3:18): they are more settled in the truth against error (Eph 4:14). They are more prudent, having learned to moderate their affections and activities within the bounds

of sobriety (Ti 2:2). Nevertheless, despite their maturity of knowledge and experience, they require to be written unto, needing the same counsels, admonitions and encouragements as did their juniors. As one quaintly said, "The oldest Christian needs to go to heaven with the Bible in his hand." They are not yet out of the reach of temptations, and need to beware lest a sense of security begets carelessness. Their responsibility is greater too: to see that the purity of the Gospel is preserved and discipline in the churches maintained.

"I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (verse 14). In making that statement the apostle was certainly far from seeking to flatter them, for he did not say "ye have made yourselves strong." No, he was simply making a sober statement of fact. In so doing he first gave honour unto the Holy Spirit, for their state and achievements were the results of His operations in them. Second, he was giving expression unto his own personal joy: it was a matter of delight to him that they had, by the grace of God, emerged from a state of infantile weakness, and had reached this state of health and vigour. Third, it was said by way of encouragement to them. If on the other hand it be our duty to rebuke and reprove what is evil in fellow Christians, it equally becomes us to recognize and own whatever good is in them. A word of cheer and stimulus is often a real help. If there be a time to "break down," there is also a time to "build up" (Ecc 3:3). Paul did not hesitate to tell the Thessalonians "your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth" (2Th 1:3).

But what are we to understand by "ye are strong"? Relatively. Through using the means of grace, by increased spiritual knowledge, by appropriating the strength which is in Christ Jesus (2Ti 2:1), through exercising the graces of the new man, by improving (profiting from) the varied experiences through which they had passed, and by the assisting operations of the Spirit, they had developed from babes into a higher spiritual stature and were better able to use their spiritual muscles. It is written, "They that wait upon the LORD [which refers not so much to an act, but is descriptive of an attitude taken by all the regenerate who are in a healthy condition] shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint" (Isa 40:31). It is indeed true that the believer's strength, like his righteousness, is in the Lord, yet as there is an imparted righteousness (1Jo 2:29), so also a communicated strength. David acknowledged, Thou "strengthenedst me *with* strength in my soul" (Psa 138:3), so that he was no longer feeble in himself. There is such a thing as outgrowing spiritual babyhood and weakness, though not continued dependence upon the Lord. There is such an experience as going on "from strength to strength" (Psa 84:7) and being able to do all things through Christ strengthening us (Phi 4:13). But as increasing holiness is accompanied by increased realization of our filthiness, so increased strength makes us more conscious of our weakness.

"And the word of God abideth in you." Though we would not exclude a reference here to the personal Word Himself (Joh 1:1; Rev 19:13), yet we consider that it was the written Word, which John had primarily in view. It was by Christ living in them, putting forth His life and light in their souls, that they were strengthened. Nevertheless, it is by means of the written Word, by faith and meditation thereon as it abides in our renewed minds and hearts, that Christ lives and dwells in us. Hence that designation of the Scriptures when

Paul exhorted the Colossians, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” (Col 3:16). The two cannot be separated: it is by the written Word that Christ indwells the believer, as it is Christ who teaches how to use the Word. Thus this second clause is first of all explanatory of the preceding one, making known to us the principal means and source of the strength of these young men; as it also serves to define the nature of their strength, as inherent, something within themselves. It is by means of the pure milk of the Word that the babe in Christ grows (1Pe 2:2). It is by that Word—through faith’s exercise, and meditating thereon, and the Spirit’s blessing—that the believer is quickened (Psa 119:25, 28, etc.). And it is by that Word abiding in him that he becomes strong, that the faculties or graces of the new man are developed and energized.

“*And the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*” Thus the second clause is linked with both the former and the final ones, casting light upon each. It was by means of the Word of God dwelling in them that they were strengthened, and equally so was it the means of their overcoming the wicked one. The question “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” receives answer “by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psa 119:9). So, too, David declared, “By the words of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer” (Psa 17:4)—so blessedly exemplified by his greater Son in His conflict with the devil (Mat 4). The Word of God is expressly designated “the sword of the Spirit,” for it is the one offensive weapon given us to be used against the enemy (Eph 6:16-17).

“*And the word of God abideth in you*” may also be regarded as being itself the grand proof that they had “overcome the wicked one,” for he had not been able to take away the good Seed sown in their hearts—as in the case of the wayside hearer (Mar 4:15; Joh 5:38), nor had he succeeded in inducing them to sell the truth. In view of what follows in 1 John 2:18-26, we consider that the principal meaning of “ye have overcome the wicked one” in verse 14 is that they had withstood his attempts to poison their minds with fatal error.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

76. The Levites, Part 2

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle. And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel” (Num 3:5-9). Those verses are exceedingly rich in their spiritual and typical teaching. First, we note that the Levites are viewed as God’s property, for He it is who here appoints them to their privileged position. Second, that they are given to Aaron. As the high priest of Israel, Aaron is manifestly a figure of

our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, unto whom God has bestowed his elect. Thus we find the Redeemer declaring, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me" (Joh 6:37); and saying to the Father Himself, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me" (Joh 17:6) as an expression of His love unto the Son: gave them to be His bride. Then how deep must be Christ's interest in them, for they are His peculiar portion and inheritance for ever. This is recorded for our comfort.

"Present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him." Very wonderful and blessed is that. Levi, who was previously "joined" to Satan, and serving his own lawless passions, is now joined to the high priest and called upon to minister unto him. Now that is precisely how the case stands between the High Priest of our profession and the Church collectively, and every believer individually. That is clear from the words of 1 Corinthians 6:17, "But he that is *joined to* the Lord is one spirit." From that amazing and glorious fact, the Holy Spirit insists upon two things. First, entire separation from the evil lusts and ways in which we formerly walked; second, devotion of our entire beings unto Him to whom we are joined. Holy separation from evil and devotion unto the person and cause of Christ go together, and both of them are the result of our oneness with Him. Immediately after that statement, "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," follows the exhortation "Flee fornication....What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." And again, "For he that is called in the Lord...is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men" (1Co 6:17-20; 7:22-23).

How solemnly heart-searching is that! How it demonstrates that high privileges involve deep obligations! We have been joined to Christ and presented to Him that we may minister unto Him; and His unalterable requirement is "be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD" (Isa 52:11). "Who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" (Psa 24:3-4). The same too is the teaching of the New Testament: "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity....If a man therefore purge himself from these [vessels of earth and dishonour], he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use" (2Ti 2:19, 21). It is only by walking in the light as He is in the light that we can have fellowship with Him who is light. Yet, as the next verse reveals, that does not signify a state of sinless perfection, for none has ever attained that in this life. But it does mean that none can have fellowship with the Holy One while sin is cherished, allowed, and unconfessed. It is only in the constant exercise of self-judgment and acknowledgment of our iniquities that real communion with the Lord can be maintained and enjoyed.

"Present them before Aaron the priest, that they may *minister unto him*." How little is that apprehended by the Lord's people today. They are living on so low a plane that their thoughts rarely rise above the level of *their* being ministered unto *by Him*. They realize little of their priestly standing, and enter still less into its holy privileges. It is to no separate class, but to all who come unto Christ, that it is said, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an *holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." It is not merely to ministers of the Gospel, but to all who believe, that it is said, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood" (1Pe 2:5, 9) Now it is as

priests that believers have “liberty to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus” (Heb 10:19), for none else in Israel were permitted to pass beyond the outer court, and only the high priest into the holy of holies. But Christ opened a new and living way for His redeemed into the very presence of God Himself, the antitypical Aaron being over the house of God, and therefore are we invited and bidden to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith”: that is in complete confidence in the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning sacrifice and entire dependence upon His merits.

But, alas, far too little do any of us “enter into the holiest of all,” and it is to be feared that not a few of the Lord’s people rarely if ever *consciously* enter into it, because they realize neither their priestly standing in Him who entered by His own blood nor their privilege as blood-sprinkled worshippers. Certain it is that we have no right esteem of God, of Christ, of ourselves, or of anything else, unless we are habitually coming to Christ, offering up spiritual sacrifices to Him. It is true that our bodies are still “without,” on earth: but *in spirit* all true worship is “within.” It is the glorious right as well as the precious privilege of believers to “enter into the holiest” now, into heaven itself; and that not at certain favoured seasons only, but always, because our High Priest “continueth to make intercession for us” (Heb 7:24-25). His unailing merits secure our uninterrupted acceptance, and that demands perpetual prayer and praise: hence we are bidden to “pray without ceasing” and to “give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:20).

We dwell the longer on this most important and exquisitely lovely type because so few of the saints enter into the substance of it in their spiritual experience. The Levites may be regarded from two separate viewpoints: personal and official, according as they represent believers and as they adumbrated the ministers of God. In this article, we confine ourselves to the former. First, the divine command was “Bring the tribe of Levi near.” Second, “and present them before Aaron.” Third, “that they may minister unto him.” Each of those is to be pondered separately, and the order of them duly noted, for we cannot minister acceptably unto God in Christ until faith has firmly and intelligently grasped the fact that we *have been* “made nigh” by the atoning blood of Christ and presented in all His acceptableness unto God. One of the chief hindrances against priestly and joyful ministry unto Him is the lack of personal assurance of our reconciliation to God and acceptance in His Beloved. None can enter the holiest with any liberty of spirit while uncertain of their standing and state before God. Until we apprehend the blessed reality that we are “dead indeed unto sin” (Rom 6:11) and have “risen with Christ” (Col 3:1), the spirit of bondage will fetter our hearts and stifle the voice of praise.

What are the “spiritual sacrifices” which believers are to offer? The Scriptures leave us in no doubt. During the Old Testament, they were of two kinds: sin offerings and thank offerings. Now the former are no longer required, for the all-sufficient antitypical one has been made by Christ; nevertheless, the *evangelical elements* which pertained to the sin offerings are required in us today. The kind of sacrifices offered then and now correspond to the nature of the two priesthoods. Since Christians are not “under the law of a carnal commandment,” nor made priests by external consecration, but by the inward anointing of the Spirit, their sacrifices are not material ones, but spiritual, of the heart. They are called “the freewill [voluntary] offerings of my mouth” (Psa 119:108), and those may all be summed

up under prayer and praise. That the former *is such* is clear from, "Let my prayer be set before thee as incense: and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Psa 141:2).

Thomas Manton (1620-1677) pointed out that there are three things of an evangelical character in those who of old offered the sin offerings which were acceptable to God, and these things are required of Christians now. First, brokenness of heart, for when a Jew brought a beast to be slain and burnt with fire, he was to consider, This is *my* case: I deserve to be consumed by the wrath of God. That sense of ill-desert ought to have place in our consciousness whenever we bow our knees: the realization that our sins have forfeited all blessing, that we might justly be damned to all eternity. Hence we are told, "The sacrifices of God [those He accepts] are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psa 51:17).

Second, the presentation of a beast for sacrifice implied an eyeing of the Redeemer, by virtue of whose oblation we are accepted with God, for every one who came with his sacrifice was to lay his hand upon its head, identifying himself with the same and putting his sins thereon (Lev 16:21), to shadow forth the fact that Christ bore the iniquity of all His people. Thus, in prayer, we should turn the eye of faith unto Him who "hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:2).

Third, in bringing an offering, there was implied a renewing of the covenant: "Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" (Psa 50:5). As the beast offered was dedicated to God, so the offerer was to dedicate himself. And *we* are exhorted, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom 12:1). Those three things should mark our daily prayers: penitent confession, pleading Christ's merits, devoting ourselves to God.

Thank offerings are expressions of appreciation unto our Benefactor for His benefits, for the undeserved favours we receive from Him—all given for Christ's sake. We pray out of a sense of need; but we praise out of loving hearts, from a sense of gratitude. In prayer, we come as beggars, to *receive* something; but in praise, we *bestow* something, giving God the glory due unto His name. "By him [Christ] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually" (Heb 13:15). In the context, it is said, "we have an altar" (verse 10): what use are we to make of Him? The answer is, offer sacrifices thereon. Jesus has sanctified His people with His own blood (verse 12): what is to be our response? To separate ourselves from all opposed to Him, and to draw nigh unto God as joyous worshipers. The worship which Christians present to God is the sacrifice of praise, for nothing is more pleasing to Him than the adoration of a grateful heart: "whoso offereth praise glorifieth me" (Psa 50:23). And have we not abundant cause to praise Him, especially for Christ?

"Let us [not "render" but] *offer* the sacrifice of praise." Christ has made His people "kings and priests unto God" (Rev 1:6), and here they are called upon to exercise their priestly functions. Here we are instructed how to make a right use of our "Altar": that we are not only made partakers of its blessings, but are to discharge its obligations by bringing sacrifices thereto. When the worshiping Israelite of old approached the tabernacle, he came not empty-handed. Nor should we approach God in Christ empty-hearted. As the Jew was required to bring an offering free of any physical defect, so we should bring to God of our

very best: “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and *all* that is within me, bless his holy name.” We should resolve with David, “Therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy: I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD” (Psa 27:6). Nor is that to be done on the Sabbath only, but as Hebrews 13:15 tells us, “continually”—on all occasions. We should be more in praising God than in petitioning Him, for we have more cause to do so.

Returning to our type, very blessed but very searching are those words concerning the Levites and the high priest: “that they may minister unto him. And they shall keep his charge.” Utterly worthless are all our devotions unless they be rendered unto Christ; valueless our most zealous service if it be not performed unto Him. “Ye have done it unto me...ye did it not to me” (Mat 25:40, 45) is the *test* of all our service value. And yet how much of our apparent Christian service is nothing more than self-service or man-service! Oh, what an evil nature still clings to us, and how much of the flesh mingles itself with our “holy things”! How prone is the best of us (*if* there be any best among us) to exalt self and please men in the very act of apparently serving Christ! And if, for a moment, there be single-hearted devotion unto Him, how soon we give place to the thought of how *we* appear and what our fellows think! Nothing is owned of God in service save that which is done unto Christ: “whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17).

“And they shall keep his charge, *and* the charge of the whole congregation.” That added sentence gives further force to what has just been pointed out, for it leads us in the same direction—away from self and mere man-pleasing, ministering unto the Lord’s people. The ministry of Christ and of His Church constitutes but one service, and that because of the vital union of believers to their Head. “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom 12:4-5). “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is *Christ*” (1Co 12:12): that is, the Head and the members constitute one (mystical) Christ. And the gifts which He has bestowed on His servants are “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). Thus Christ’s gifts are not bestowed for self-exaltation, but for the common good of His saints—for “the whole congregation.”

“Before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle.” That is equally searching, for “*before* the tabernacle” is equivalent to saying that the service of the Levites must be performed as in the presence of JEHOVAH Himself and under the eye of the high priest. Not only is all service to be done unto Christ, because we are His, but we are ever to keep in mind that the eye of Him “whose we are, and whom we serve” is constantly upon us. He notes every act of service as to the matter and manner and motive of it. He discerns *the kind* of service: He is looking on, and saying, “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience.” He perceives the *manner and motive* of service, and says, I know how “thou...hast borne, and hast patience, and *for my name’s sake* hast labored, and hast not fainted” (Rev 2:2-3). He sees whether there is flagging in labour because the “first love” has been left. He graciously owns even a “little strength” and tenderly cares not to put “any other burden” than we can bear. Oh to be able to say with Paul, “we speak before God in Christ; but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying” (2Co 12:19).

Equally blessed, but still more searching, is the final word of Numbers 3:5-9, concerning the relation of the Levites unto Aaron: "they are *wholly* given unto him." Such is also the case with all believers in regard to Christ. They are wholly His by the Father's donation (Joh 17:6). They are wholly His by redemptive purchase: "ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (1Co 6:19-20). They are wholly His by the Spirit's regenerating power: for "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1Co 6:17). They are wholly His by their own act of surrender to Him: they "gave their own selves to the Lord" (2Co 8:5). What claims He has then to our entire devotion! And how the recognition thereof should regulate our lives, our worship, our service! The love of Christ constraining all our actions: the pleasing of Christ actuating all we do: the glorifying of Christ being our constant aim. Just so far as we truly apprehend His claims will each of us say with His forerunner, "He must increase, but I decrease" (Joh 3:30).

DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

9. Its Ramifications, Part 3

So important do we deem what was touched upon at the close of our last, and so little is the same apprehended and understood today, that we are here adding a few words thereon. The popular idea which now prevails is that nothing is sinful save an open and outward transgression, but such a concept falls far short of the searching and humbling teaching of Holy Writ. It affirms that the source of all temptation lies within fallen man himself. It is the depravity of his own heart which induces him to listen to the devil or be influenced by the profligacy of others. If this were not so, then no external solicitations unto wrongdoing would have any force, for there would be nothing within him for them to excite, nothing to which those solicitations correspond or over which they could exert any power. An evil example would be rejected with abhorrence if we were pure within. There must be an unsatisfied lust to which temptation from without appeals. Where there is no desire for food, a well-spread table allures not. If there be no love of acquisition, gold cannot attract the heart. In every instance, the force of temptation lies in some propensity of our fallen nature.

Herein lies the uniqueness of the Bible; to wit, its exalted spirituality, insisting that any inward bias, the least gravitation of the soul from God and His will, is sinful and culpable, whether or not it be carried out into action. It reveals that the first stirring of sin itself is to draw away the soul from what it ought to be fixed upon, by an irregular craving for some foreign object which appears delightful. When our native corruptions are invited by something external which promises pleasure or profit, and the passions are attracted by the same, then temptation begins, and the heart is drawn out after it. Since fallen man is influenced most by his lusts, they sway both his mind and his will. So powerful are they that they rule his whole soul: hence it was that the apostle said, "I see another *law* in my members" (Rom 7:23), for it is imperious, dominating the entire man. It is because their lusts are so violent that men are so mad upon sinning: "they weary themselves to commit iniquity" (Jer 9:5). James 1:14-15 traces out the origin of all our sinnings, and to it we now turn.

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Those words show that sin encroaches upon the spirit by degrees, and describe the several stages before it be consummated in the outward act. They reveal that the procreating cause of all sin lies in every man's soul, namely his lusts; that he has within himself both the food and fuel of it. Rightly did Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) declare, "You can never come to see how deeply and how abominably corrupt creatures you are until God opens your eyes to see your lusts." The old man is "corrupt *according to* the deceitful lusts" (Eph 4:22). Lust is both the womb and the root of all wickedness which there is upon earth. Says the apostle to God's people, "having escaped the corruption that is in the

world through lust" (2Pe 1:4). "The corruption": that wasting and destroying blight which is upon all mankind. "Which is in the world": like poison in the cup, like dry rot in wood, like a pestilence in the air—inherent, ineradicable. It taints every part of man's being, physical, mental and moral; and all his relations of life, whether in the family, society, or the State.

"Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust." when men are tempted, they usually seek to cast the onus upon God, the devil, or their fellows; whereas the blame rests entirely upon themselves. First, their affections are removed from what is good and they are incited unto wrongful conduct by their corrupt inclinations, being attracted to a bait which Satan or the world dangles before them. "Lust" here signifies a yearning for or longing to obtain something, and it is so strong as to draw the soul after a forbidden object. The Greek word for "drawn away" means forcibly impelled: the impetuous violence of the desire which covets some sensual or worldly thing demands gratification. This is nothing but a species of self-will, a hankering after what God has not bestowed, arising from discontent with our present condition or portion. Even though that longing be a fleeting and involuntary one, yea, against our best judgment, nevertheless it is sinful, and when allowed produces yet deeper guilt.

"And enticed." The drawing away is by the irregularity and vehemence of the craving, the enticement is from the object contemplated. But that very allurement is something for which we are to blame. It is because we fail to resist, abominate and reject the first rising of unlawful desire, and instead entertain and encourage it, that the bait appears so attractive. The temptation promises pleasure or profit, which is "the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:13) at work, which beguiles us. Then wickedness is sweet in our mouth, and we hide it under our tongue (Job 20:12). "Then when lust hath conceived": anticipated delight is cherished, and in view thereof, the mind fully consents. The sinful deed is now present in embryo, and the thoughts are engaged in contriving ways and means of gratification. "It bringeth forth sin" by a decree of the will: what was previously contemplated is now actually perpetrated. Rightly did Manton say, "Sin knows no mother but our own heart." "And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death": it is paid its wages and made to reap what was sown, damnation being the ultimate outcome. Such is the progress of sin within us, and such its several degrees of enormity.

4. *Corrupted conscience.* If there be one faculty of man's soul more than any other which may be thought to have retained the original image of God upon it, it is surely the conscience. Such a view has indeed been widely held. So decidedly were they of this opinion that not a few of the most renowned philosophers and moralists have contended that conscience is nothing less than the d

ivine voice itself speaking in the innermost chamber of our being. But without in any wise minimizing the great importance and value of this internal monitor, either in its office or in its operations, it must be emphatically declared that such theorists err, that even this faculty has not escaped from the common ruin of our entire beings. This is evident from the plain teaching of God's Word thereon. Scripture speaks of a "weak conscience" (1Co 8:12), of men "having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1Ti 4:2), and says that their "conscience is defiled" (Ti 1:15), that they have "an evil conscience" (Heb 10:22). Demonstration thereof is made in what follows.

They who affirm that there is something essentially good in the natural man, insist that his conscience is an enemy to evil and a friend to holiness. They point out and stress the fact that the conscience produces an inward conviction against wrongdoing, a strife in the heart over sin, with a reluctance to it. They call attention to Pharaoh's acknowledgment of sin (Exo 10:16), and that Darius was "sorely displeased with himself" for his unjust act in condemning Daniel to be cast into the lions' den (Dan 6:14). Some have even gone so far as to affirm that the opposition to greater and grosser crimes which is found at first in all men differs little or nothing from that conflict between the flesh and the spirit described in Romans 7:21-23. But such a sophistry is easily refuted. In the first place, while it be true that fallen man possesses a general notion of right and wrong, and is able in some instances to distinguish between good and evil, yet while he remains unregenerate that moral instinct never causes him to delight cordially in the former or really to abhor the latter; and in whatever measure he may approve of good or disapprove of evil, it is from no consideration for *God* therein.

Conscience is only able to work according to the light it has, and since the natural man cannot discern spiritual things (1Co 2:14), it is useless in respect to them. How feeble is its light! It is more like that of a glimmering candle than the rays of the sun—merely sufficient to make the darkness visible. Owing to the benighted condition of the understanding, the conscience is fearfully ignorant. When it does discover that which is inimical, it does so feebly and ineffectually. Instead of directing, it mostly confuses. How manifest is this in the case of the heathen! Conscience gives them a sense of guilt and then puts them upon practicing the most abominable and often inhuman rites. It has induced them to invent and propagate the most impious misrepresentations of deity. As a salve to their conscience, they often make the very objects of their worship the precedents and patrons of their favourite vices. The fact is that conscience is so sadly defective that it is unable to perform its duty until God enlightens, awakens, and renews it.

Its *operations* are equally faulty. Not only is conscience defective in vision, but its voice is very weak. How strongly it ought to upbraid us for our shocking ingratitude unto our great Benefactor! How loudly it should inveigh against the stupid neglect of our spiritual interests and eternal welfare. Yet it does neither the one nor the other. Though it offers some checks upon outward and gross sins, it makes no resistance to the subtler and secret workings of indwelling corruption. If it prompts to the performance of duty, it ignores the most important and spiritual part of the same. It may be uneasy if we fail to spend the usual amount of time each day in private prayer, but it is little concerned about our reverence, humility, faith and fervour therein. Those in the prophet's day were guilty of offering unto God defective sacrifices, yet conscience never troubled them over the same (Mal 1:7-8). Conscience may be very scrupulous in carrying out the precepts of men or our personal predilections, and yet utterly neglect those things which the Lord has commanded: as the Pharisees would not eat food while their hands remained ceremonially unwashed, yet disregarded what God had enjoined (Mar 7:6-9).

Conscience is woefully *partial*: disregarding favourite sins and excusing those which most easily beset us. All such attempts to extenuate our faults are founded upon ignorance of God, of ourselves, of our duty; otherwise, conscience would bring in the verdict of guilty. Conscience often joins with our lusts to encourage a wicked deed. Saul's told him

that he ought not to offer sacrifice till Samuel came, yet to please the people and prevent them from deserting him, he did so. And when that servant of God reproved him, the king sought to justify his offence by saying that the Philistines were gathered together against Israel, and that he dared not assail them before making supplication to God, and added: "I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering" (1Sa 13:8-12). Conscience will strain to find some consideration which will appease itself and then approve of the evil act. Even when rebuking certain sins, it will find motives and discover inducements thereunto. Thus, when Herod was about to commit the dastardly murder of John the Baptist, which was *against* his convictions, his very conscience came to his aid, and urged him forward by impressing on him that he must not violate the oath which he had taken before others (Mar 6:26).

Conscience often ignores great sins while condoning lesser ones, as Saul was hard upon the Israelites for a breach of the ceremonial law (1Sa 14:33) but made no scruple of slaying eighty-five of the Lord's priests. Conscience will even devise arguments which favour—yea, which warrant—the most outrageous acts, and thus it is not only a corrupt lawyer pleading an ill cause, but a corrupt judge which justifies the wicked. Thus those who clamoured for the crucifixion of Christ did so under the pretext of its being orderly and necessary: "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God" (Joh 19:7). Little wonder that the Lord says of men that they "call evil good, and good evil;...put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (Isa 5:20). Conscience never moves the natural man to perform duties out of gratitude and thankfulness to God. It never convicts him of the heavy guilt of Adam's offence which is lying upon his soul, nor of lack of faith in Christ: suffering sinners to sleep in peace in the midst of their awful unbelief. But theirs is not a sound and solid peace, for there is no reason or ground for it; rather is it the false security of stupidity. Says God of them, "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness" (Hos 7:2).

Its accusations are ineffectual, for they produce no good fruit, yielding neither meekness, humility, nor genuine repentance, but rather a sensible dread of God as a harsh Judge or hatred of Him as an inexorable Enemy. Not only are its accusations ineffectual, but often they are quite erroneous. Because of the darkness which is upon the understanding, the moral perception of the natural man greatly errs. As Thomas Boston (1671-1732) said of the corrupt conscience, "So it is often found like a mad and furious horse, which violently runs down himself, his rider, and all that come in his way." A fearful example of that appears in our Lord's prediction in John 16:2, which received repeated fulfilment in the Acts: "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service." In like manner, Saul of Tarsus, after his conversion, acknowledged: "I verily thought within myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Act 26:9). What a putting of "bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" were those cases! A most unreliable guide is the unrenewed conscience. Strict Romanists deem it a greater sin to eat meat on a Friday than to commit a breach of the moral law.

Even when the conscience of the unregenerate is awakened by the immediate hand of God and is smitten with deep and painful convictions of sin, so far from its moving the soul to seek the mercy of God through the Mediator, it fills him with shuddering and dis-

may. As Job 6:4 declares, when the arrows of the Almighty are within him, the poison thereof drinks up his spirit, and the terrors of God set themselves in array against him. Hitherto such a one had gone to great pains to stifle the accusations of his inward judge, and now he would fain do so, but cannot. Instead, conscience rages and roars, putting the whole man in a dreadful consternation, as he is terrified by a sense of the wrath of a holy God and is fearful of the fiery indignation which shall devour His adversaries. This fills him with such horror and despair that instead of turning to the Lord, he endeavours to flee from Him. Thus it was in the case of Judas, who, when he was made to realize the awful gravity of his vile deed, went out and hanged himself. That the chargings of sin within the natural man cause him to turn from rather than unto Christ was demonstrated by the Pharisees in John 8:9, who, "being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one"!

5. *Disabled will.* We have left this until the last because the will is not the lord but the servant of the other faculties, executing the strongest conviction of the mind or the most imperious behest of our lusts, for there can be but one dominating influence in the will at one and the same time. The excellency of man's will consisted, originally, in following the guidance of right reason and submitting to the influence of proper authority. But in Eden, man's will rejected the former, and rebelled against the latter, and in consequence of the fall, his will has ever since been under the control of an understanding which prefers darkness to light and of affections which crave evil rather than good. And thus it is that the fleeting pleasures of sense and the puny interests of time excite our wishes, while the lasting delights of godliness and the riches of immortality receive little or no attention. The will of the natural man is biased by his corruptions, for his inclinations gravitate in the opposite direction to his duty, and therefore he is in complete bondage to sin, impelled by his lusts. It is not merely that the unregenerate are unwilling to seek after holiness; they inveterately hate the same.

Since the will turned traitor to God and entered the service of Satan, it has been completely paralysed unto good. Said the Saviour, "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (Joh 6:44). And why is it that he cannot come to Christ by his own natural powers? Because not only has he no inclination to do so, but the Saviour is an object that repels him: His yoke is unwelcome, His sceptre repulsive. In connection with spiritual things, the condition of the will is like that of the woman in Luke 13:11—she "was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself." If such be the case, then how can man be said to act voluntarily? Because he freely chooses the evil, and that because "the soul of the wicked *desireth* evil" (Pro 21:10), ever carrying out that desire except when prevented by the divine government. Man is the slave of his corruptions, born like a wild ass's colt: from earliest childhood he is averse to restraint. The will of man is uniformly rebellious Godward: when Providence thwarts his endeavours, instead of bowing in humble resignation, he frets with disquietude and acts like a wild bull in a net. Only the Son can make him "free" (Joh 8:36), and there is "liberty" only where His Spirit is (2Co 3:17).

Here, then, are the ramifications of human depravity. The fall has blinded man's mind, hardened his heart, disordered his affections, corrupted his conscience, disabled his will, so that there is "no soundness" in him (Isa 1:6), "no good thing" dwelling in his flesh (Rom 7:18).

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 17

23. *The law of order.* God's Word is like His works: designed disposition and minute precision characterizing it throughout. If "to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven" (Ecc 3:1) in the natural world, assuredly the same holds good in connection with the spiritual realm and all that pertains thereto. Even those who make no claim to being Christians recognize and acknowledge that "order is heaven's first law." God is a God of order, and most unmistakably is that fact displayed all through Holy Writ. Everything therein is methodically arranged and in its proper place: change that arrangement and confusion and error at once ensue. Thus it is of deep importance that we pay close attention to *the order* in which truth has been set forth by the omniscient Spirit. The key to many a verse is to be found in noting the position it occupies, its coherence with what precedes, its relation to what follows.

Whether its contents be considered historically, doctrinally, or typically, Genesis must open the Word, for it is the book of *beginnings*. It has been aptly called "the seed-plot of the Bible," for in it is to be found in germ form almost everything which is afterwards more fully developed in the books which follow. Doctrinally, its theme is that of divine election, which is the *first* act of God's grace unto His people. Then comes Exodus, which treats of redemption by purchase and power (Exo 6:6; 15:13). The third book, as might be expected, views God's people as on resurrection ground, being not so much doctrinal as experiential in its character. Leviticus shows what we are redeemed unto, having for its theme fellowship and worship: its key is hung on the door—the Lord speaking out of the tabernacle (1:1). The fourth book deals with the practical side of the spiritual life, tracing out the history of the believer in this world—for four is the number of the earth. "The wilderness" (1:1) is a symbol of the world in its fallen condition, the place of testing and trial. Its subject is the walk and warfare of the saints.

The positioning of those four books clearly manifests *design* in the divine workmanship, and teaches us the order in which the truth should be presented. An equally striking illustration is seen in the juxtaposition and order of the last two books of Solomon, for the theme of Ecclesiastes is unquestionably: "No satisfaction to be found under the sun," while that of the Canticles tells of "full satisfaction in the Son": over the one may be inscribed: "Whosoever drinketh of this water [the cisterns of the world] shall thirst again"; over the other: "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst" (Joh 4:14). In 11 Timothy 3:16, Paul informs us that the Scriptures are profitable "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," and that is the very *order* which he has followed in his epistles. For Romans is a doctrinal treatise, the Corinthian epistles a reproof of disorders in the assembly, Galatians a correcting of erroneous teaching, and Ephesians describes that walk which alone is worthy of a child of God.

Not only are the books in the Bible unerringly positioned, but the contents of each are arranged in logical and necessary sequence. Thus it is intensely interesting to mark how that each of the patriarchs in Genesis shadowed forth some distinct and fundamental truth

concerning the believer. In Abraham, we have illustrated that of divine election and effectual calling. In Isaac, we have portrayed divine sonship (by a supernatural birth) and the life of submission to God's will. In Jacob, we have pictured the conflict between the flesh and the spirit: the two natures in the believer, intimated by his dual name. Jacob—Israel. In Joseph, we have exemplified the grand truth of heirship: following a season of trial, made ruler of Egypt. Thus the historical order is also the doctrinal and experiential, progressive and climacteric. The five great offerings of Leviticus 1-5 typify as many distinct aspects of the person and work of the Lord Jesus, and invaluable instruction is to be obtained by pondering the sequence of them.

Psalms 22, 23, and 24 present us with a significant and blessed triad, especially as Christ is seen in them. In the first, we behold Him suffering for His people; in the last we see Him as the King of glory receiving a royal welcome into heaven, and are furnished with a delineation of the characteristics possessed by those whom He fits to dwell with Him there; while in the central one, we are shown how graciously He ministers to and provides for His sheep (whom He is leading to the celestial fold) during the interval they are left on earth. In Psalm 22, we behold the "good Shepherd" (Joh 10:11), in 23, the "great Shepherd" (Heb 13:20), in 24, the "chief Shepherd" (1Pe 5:4). Again, if it be essential to the believer's comfort that, finding Romans 7 accurately describes his spiritual experience, his faith should lay hold of the divine assurances of Romans 8. It is equally necessary that preachers not only hold fast to the absolute sovereignty of God in election and reprobation, as set forth in Romans 9; but that they also proclaim the free offer of the Gospel to all men and enforce their responsibility to accept that offer, as presented in Romans 10.

What has been exemplified in the above paragraphs applies not only in the general, but is equally true in detail. For example, *the arrangement* of the ten commandments of the moral law (which comprehend the sum of righteousness) is profoundly significant. They were written on two tables of stone, to intimate that they fall into two distinct groups. The first four concern our responsibility *Godward*, the last six of our obligations *manward*. Vain is it to pretend that we are sincere worshipers of God if the duties of love unto our neighbours be neglected; equally worthless is that profession of piety which, while abstaining from crimes against our fellows, withholds from the Majesty of heaven the honour and glory which are His due. Again, the five exhortations contained in Psalm 37:1-7 are arranged in logical and inevitable order. We must cease from fretfulness and envy if we would trust in the Lord, and we must trust in Him before we can delight in Him, and that is necessary in order to a confident committing of our way unto Him, and a resting in and waiting patiently for Him.

The *order* of the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-11 is full of valuable instruction, and we miss much by failing to attend closely thereto. In the first four, we are shown the heart-exercises of those who have been awakened by the Spirit. First, there is a sense of need, a realization of their nothingness and emptiness. Second, there is a judging of self, a consciousness of guilt and sorrowing over their lost condition. Third, an end of attempting to justify themselves, an abandonment of all pretences to personal merit, a taking of their place in the dust before God. Fourth, the eye of the soul is turned away from self to Another: they are conscious of their dire need of salvation. The next four describe the fruits found in the regenerate. Thus, in those beatitudes, Christ gives the distinguishing birth-

marks of those who are the subjects of His kingdom, and makes known the ones on whom God's benediction rests.

What anointed eye can fail to see the perfect order of the model prayer Christ has given His disciples? In it, He has supplied a simple but comprehensive directory: revealing how God is to be approached by His children, the order in which their requests are to be presented, the things they most need to ask for, and the homage due unto Him. Every aspect of prayer is included: adoration, supplication, argumentation. Every clause in it occurs in the Old Testament, denoting that our prayers must be scriptural if they are to be acceptable (1Jo 5:14). Its petitions are seven in number, showing the completeness of the outline here furnished. All its pronouns are in the plural, teaching the Christian that the needs of his brethren and sisters, and not merely his own, should be before him when he bows at the throne of grace.

Let the student pay close attention to the order followed in these additional examples, which we leave him to work out for himself. The miracles of Christ in Matthew 7 and 9. The seven parables in Matthew 13. The sevenfold result of justification as set forth in Romans 5:1-11. The seven graces of 11 Peter 1:5-7, the presence and cultivation of which enables the saint to make his calling and election sure both to himself and his fellows, for the "these things" of verse 10 are those mentioned in verses 5-7. Everything in Scripture is according to definite design.

The special design of Luke was to set forth the perfections of our Lord's humanity, and it is very blessed to trace out the different passages in his Gospel where Christ is seen as *a Man of prayer*. "It came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened" (3:21). Luke is the only one who supplies this significant detail, and a most precious one it is. The Saviour's baptism marked the end of His private life, and the beginning of His official mission. And here we learn that He was in the act of devotion at the very outset of His public ministry. He was engaged in dedicating Himself unto God, seeking grace for the stupendous work that lay before Him. Thus the first sight which the multitude had of Him was in prayer! "And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed" (verse 16). This occurred just after His miracles of mercy, when there went "a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him." His response to this show of popularity was striking, and full of instruction for His servants. He retired from the acclaims of the masses, and got alone with God. Again, "He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" (Luk 6:12). This followed immediately after the scribes and Pharisees were "filled with madness" against Him, and right before He selected the twelve. Our Redeemer made no attempt to fight His enemies, but retired to commune with the Father. Before calling the apostles, He spent the night petitioning God.

"And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am?" (Luk 9:18). This was just following His feeding of the multitude: after engaging in public duty, He withdrew in order to private devotion. We may infer from the question which He asked His disciples that the unbelief of men was beginning to cast a shadow upon His soul, and that He now sought relief and strength from above. "And went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion

of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening” (Luk 9:28-29). It was while engaged in prayer that Christ was transfigured—how significant, and instructive! “And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray” (Luk 11:1). This is one of the passages (see also the Messianic Psalms) which gives us some insight into the nature of His supplications. As they heard *Him*, the disciples felt they knew nothing about prayer! “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon...I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” (Luk 22:31-32). There we behold Him as the great High Priest making intercession for one of His own. And He “kneeled down and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done” (Luk 22:41-42). There is the climax of prayer: complete surrender to and acquiescence in the divine will.

In the seven miracles recorded in John’s Gospel, we may discern a striking order of thought as they portray Christ communicating *life* to His people. In His turning of the water into wine at the Cana marriage feast (Joh 2:6-11), we are shown, symbolically, our *need of life*—Christ supplying what was lacking. In the healing of the nobleman’s son (Joh 4:47-54), who was “at the point of death,” we have pictured the *bestowment* of life. In the healing of the impotent man (Joh 5:3-9), we behold the *power* of life, enabling a helpless cripple to rise up and walk. In the feeding of the multitude (Joh 6:11), we see how graciously Christ *sustains* our life. In His going to the fearful disciples on the storm-swept sea, we witness Him *defending* their lives, delivering them from danger. In the response made by the blind man whose eyes Christ opened (Joh 9:7, 38), we learn what is to be *the occupation* of life—he worshipped Him: in this way, supremely, we are to employ the new nature. In the raising of Lazarus from the sepulchre (Joh 11:44), we have *the consummation* of life, for the resurrection of the saints is the prelude to their eternal felicity.

The teaching of our Lord concerning the Holy Spirit’s operations within and toward the saints follows an instructive and a climacteric order. First, He made mention of being “born of the Spirit” (Joh 3:6, 8), for *quickening* is His initial operation upon the elect. Second, by means of figurative language (cf. Joh 3:5), He spoke of the Spirit’s *indwelling*: “the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Joh 4:14). Third, He declared that there should be a *breaking forth* of the same, and a refreshing of others: “out of his belly [or innermost part] shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit” (Joh 7:38-39). Fourth, He promised that the blessed Spirit should be theirs *permanently*: “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (Joh 14:16). Fifth, He announced that the Spirit would fully *instruct them*: “He shall teach you all things” (Joh 14:26). Sixth, He declared that the Spirit should both testify of Him and equip them to *testify unto Him*: “But when the comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness” (Joh 15:26-27). Seventh, Christ asserted that the Spirit should *magnify Him*: “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” (Joh 14:14), making Me altogether lovely in your eyes.

OUR ANNUAL LETTER

“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1Co 1:31). That is a proposition which ought to be perfectly obvious, for we have nothing good, either natural or spiritual, but what we have received from Him; therefore the praise is due entirely unto Him. But how humbling to realize that such a self-evident statement occurs each time in the form of an exhortation, and that addressed not to men at large but to the people of God! How it indicates what a vile nature still clings to the saint, since he needs to be warned against self-gratulation! That vanity of which all of us are so full needs to be beaten down. God has done that very thing, as the context of our opening verse plainly demonstrates. He has singled out the most unlikely and unlovely objects to be His saints and servants—“that no flesh should glory in his presence” (verses 26-29)—that there might be no pretence for boasting. He has further willed and worked to that end by causing the whole of our salvation to be in and from Christ, making Him to be our “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (verse 30).

Oh, the horrible workings of pride, which is ever ready to ascribe unto the creature that which is due to the Creator alone. Boasting ill becomes a beggar who is entirely dependent upon the divine charity. In 11 Corinthians 10:17, our exhortation occurs again, and here it has a particular application to preachers. Paul had occasion to make reference to his own experiences and labours: he not only did so reluctantly and with reserve, but kept before him this injunction, “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” This shows that ministers of the Gospel need to be especially careful not to glory in their performances, but instead to give thanks to God for their success: all must be credited to His enablement and blessing. They must not glory in their abilities, attainments or achievements, but only in the Author and Giver of the same. yet how difficult it is for any of them to recount what the Lord has been pleased to work by and through them without the flesh rising up and claiming part of the honours. Everything must be traced back to God’s sovereign goodness: to His special favour, His all-sufficient grace, His unceasing faithfulness, His longsuffering to usward. Even when our duty has been performed, we are but “unprofitable servants” (Luk 17:10)!

“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” are the words that ring in our ears, and it is with them before us that we now desire to write. This issue of the “Studies” completes not only another year, but another decade—the third in its history. Thirty years is quite a slice out of the average span of life, and it is no easy task to continue writing day by day, month by month and year by year for many of the same readers. Very few realize the vast amount of time and labour which is involved in composing a monthly magazine of this size and character. Every article has hours of hard work in it, for we do not just scribble down the first things that enter our mind. Moreover, writing sixty articles each year for several hundreds who have had at least half, and probably fifty who possess the whole, of the previous

volumes, and to prepare fresh articles for *them*, would be impossible unless the Word of God were inexhaustible. Yet to do so requires *increasing* thought and study in order to bring out of the divine treasury things new and old. To maintain the standard we have set before us keeps us busy the year round, night as well as day.

As we review this somewhat lengthy ministry, we cannot but marvel at the sovereign and abounding grace of God which has supported and sustained, which has directed and enabled us to compose no less than *two thousand* different articles of varying lengths, averaging four pages each. But those bare figures can convey only a faint idea of the immense amount of toil involved in their preparation, or the strain on our devoted wife as she has typed out the same amid her domestic duties. Truly we serve a great God, and He is greatly to be praised, for during the whole of these thirty years, the Editor has not had to spend a single day in bed, nor has his wife either for over twenty years past. We have looked definitely to the Lord for the needed health and strength, and He has never failed us. Though we both had the flu early this year, by the divine mercy, we were enabled to fight it on our feet, and perform our daily duties.

It should be quite obvious from what has been said above, that we have no time available for visiting friends or receiving callers, nor is it possible for us to send private letters every month or so to our readers. We try to write at least once a year to all, and devote several hours a week endeavouring to aid quite a number of young preachers. But we have only one pair of hands and eyes, and are quite unable to meet the desires of some who appear to imagine that we have as much leisure for correspondence as they have. When any require spiritual counsel, or would like us to elucidate anything not clear in our articles, we welcome the opportunity to write to such—though we have no time to spare for controversy. One reason for our remaining in this “out-of-the-way” (but delightful) place is that we may prosecute our study and work *in quietness* without interruption. We trust that friends will understand our position and realize that the hour we might spend in entertaining, or in writing them an extra letter, is used in preparing a message for over a thousand readers.

We desire neither to be unsociable nor to live the life of a hermit, but we are “not our own,” and are resolved by grace to devote the whole of our energy in an endeavour to feed Christ’s lambs and sheep. We highly value such a privilege and honour, and are jealous of anything which tends to encroach upon the same. We are deeply thankful that the Lord has brought us apart from “the strife of tongues,” and has so graciously provided us with a “peaceable habitation” (Isa 32:18). Not that we urge anyone else to follow our example. Others must take their place on the firing line, and each soul should seek to perform his or her duty in whatever position Providence has assigned them. Ours is to seek to send forth messages which, under God, will strengthen the hands of the same, and to pray for those who are bearing the heat and burden of the day. Let God’s people be much in supplication for His servants in these perilous times, for many of them are encountering strong opposition and subtle temptations to compromise, while others are greatly discouraged by the coldness and indifference of their hearers.

During the past ten years, spiritual conditions in Christendom have not shown any improvement: rather have they markedly deteriorated. Nevertheless, our circulation, though still a very small one when compared with that of more popular religious magazines, *has*

increased fifty per cent! Considering the nature of the articles which appear in these pages, that is surely *the Lord's doing*, and it is marvellous in our eyes. It might well be thought that the Depravity articles—so unpalatable to the flesh—would have retarded the gradual enlargement of our coast during the last few years, but, instead, that enlargement has steadily accelerated during the past twenty-four months of their insertion. Is not this another demonstration that God honours those who honour Him by withholding nothing that is profitable (Act 20:20) from their hearers or readers? Let young preachers note this, and take courage.

During the whole of these thirty years, we have never been in debt a penny, and have paid every bill within forty-eight hours of its reception. Nor have we ever made any appeal, directly or indirectly, for funds. There was not the slightest need to do so. As Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) rightly said, "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supplies." We have no denomination or organization behind us, no "sustentation fund" to draw upon. But what is infinitely better, we have the living God to look to, and He has promised to supply all our need. He does more: once again (despite increased costs of publishing), we have a surplus, which we shall use this year in sending to the Trinitarian Bible Society, the Scripture Gift Mission, for the circulation of God's Word, and to the *Gospel Magazine* (69 Fleet Street, London, E.C.4). Will kind friends note that by the goodness of God, our personal needs are fully provided for, so please *refrain* from sending money for our own use.

Once more we would heartily thank our prayer-helpers for their support, and ask for a continuance of their petitions while it pleases the Lord to keep us in this service. "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory" (Psa 115:1).

With Christian love, yours by divine mercy,
A. W. and V. E. Pink

PS.—"Studies" will cost us 1/- more next year, but through the generosity of a few friends the 1951 bound volume will be available for regular readers at a price below cost: 7/6 (\$2) post paid. ☞