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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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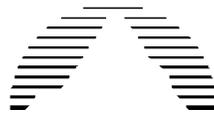
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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HIS PRESENCE

“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Mat 28:20). In their first and primary sense, those words are addressed to the *ministers* of Christ, the ones (and the only ones) He has called, commissioned, and qualified to preach His Gospel, make disciples, baptise the same, and instruct them in the Faith. The fact that their Master declares He will be with such “unto the end of the world” is a clear intimation that He will provide and maintain a succession of Gospel ministers unto the end, that the forces of evil will *never* succeed in banishing the Gospel from the earth! “Lo, I am with you always”: it is of incalculable benefit for the servant of Christ to appropriate those words, bear them constantly in mind and mix faith with them. There are many occasions when he needs their bracing influence, as there will be seasons when they should have a sobering effect upon him. Let him ever seek to conduct himself, both in public and private, as in the immediate presence of his Master. Let him draw strength and comfort from Exodus 3:12; Acts 18:9-10; 2 Timothy 4:16-17.

Yet let it be pointed out that it would be quite wrong to *restrict* those precious words of Christ to preachers. When comparing Scripture with Scripture, we find that they certainly have a wider application, that they belong equally unto *all* the members of the household of faith; Hebrews 13:5-6 makes that sufficiently clear. There the apostle quotes that wondrous promise which God gave originally unto Moses (Deu 31:8) and then to Joshua (Jos 1:5): “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”; and then informs us that it is the privilege of faith for all Christians to take that promise unto themselves: “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is *my* helper.” Christ is present with each of His own. Those words of Matthew 28:20 express one of the marvels of His theanthropic Person: though His humanity is now localized in heaven, yet His divine presence fills heaven and earth. It is His *favourable* presence which is with His people. It is one of the grand blessings of redemption that the Redeemer is never absent from the redeemed. This is one of the “exceeding great and precious promises” of our Lord (2Pe 1:4), which is our privilege and advantage to live upon.

This inexpressibly blessed fact of the Lord’s abiding presence with His own is far too little apprehended by any of them. O to enter this new year with the realization that the one who loved me and gave Himself for me accompanies me into it! Then why should I fear what may lay ahead of me in 1948? Whatever may be my circumstances, whatever changes I may pass through, whatever I may be called upon to bear, Christ Himself will be my constant companion! But only *faith*—not imagination or feelings—will be able to realize and appreciate His presence. Literally the Greek reads, “Lo! I am with you all the days,” which, personally, we much prefer to “always.” No fair-weather friend is Christ. He is with us in cloudy days equally as in sunny ones. What comfort, peace, strength, and joy that fact must bring to the one whose faith lays hold of it! It can never be ill with the one with whom Christ is, no, not in the worst condition of outward trouble. Rather must it be *well* with him, for the Lord is “a very present help in trouble” (Psa 46:1).

That opening, “Lo!” is designed to arrest attention and evoke wonderment. It is usually translated, “Behold,” but seven times over in Matthew’s Gospel, it is rendered, “Lo”: the references are Matthew 2:9; 3:16-17; 24:23; 26:47; 28:7, 20; and all of them are connected more or less directly with our blessed Lord. “Lo!”—mark it well, carefully consider, joyously contemplate. “Lo!”—be astonished, be awed, bow in worship at this amazing fact. “I”—the eternal Lover of your souls, the One who bore your sins in My own body on the tree, the risen Redeemer who now liveth to make intercession for thee. “I”—the Maker of heaven and earth, the Lord of angels, the Beloved of the Father—“am with you”: not only at God’s right hand, but by your side too. “Am with you”: not only have I commissioned My servants to edify you, My angels to serve you, but Myself in person am present with you. “All the days”: not merely an occasional visitor, but an abiding friend! “Even unto the end” of our earthly pilgrimage. No wonder that such a statement is prefaced with “Lo!”

“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end” (Mat 28:20). *That* includes everything. *That* is saying all that can be said. That is a promise which comprehends all other promises. It is far more than though He said, “Thy sins be forgiven thee,” or “Peace be unto thee,” or “Be of good cheer.” In those, there is but a *single* good, but in Christ Himself, we have *all* good! “Lo! I am with you”: therefore, protection, sustenance, strength, comfort, and everything you can desire is available. Whatever real good you covet is contained in that word! O what a difference it will make in our experience if we journey through all the days of 1948 realizing that Christ is ever by our side! What can there be to fear? “When thou passest through the waters, I will be *with thee*; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou

walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa 43:2). He is indeed *Emmanuel*—"God with us." "The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psa 46:11).

Is not our failure to realize the favourable presence of our divine Redeemer the main cause of our slackness in communion and carelessness in our walk? Does not that failure explain our weakness, irresolution, timidity? Christ is present to counsel, to direct our way, to shelter, to energize, to comfort. Then make use of Him: draw from Him, lean upon Him. Does He not say, "Fear thou not; for I am *with thee*: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa 41:10)? Then conduct yourself accordingly, Christian reader. Memorize that wondrous statement: meditate upon it until its sweetness fills your soul. Recall it every time a fresh difficulty, trial, or emergency is presented. Look away from the threatening storm and your own weakness, unto that all-sufficient Saviour who is by your side. And as the final crisis approaches, exclaim, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art *with me*; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psa 23:4).

Faith's consciousness of Christ's presence will have, first, a *restraining* and deterring effect. If I realize that Christ is with me, shall I go to the movies or the dance hall? Second, a *cheering* effect, counteracting the depressing state the world is now in. Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth, but be thou occupied with the perfections of that blessed One who is at thy right hand. Third, a *strengthening* influence. Here is a Refuge into which we may flee at all times, an almighty Friend to turn unto for all we need. Fourth, a *comforting* power. A reader may recently have suffered a sore bereavement, the removal of a loved and lifelong partner. What solid consolation is there here: he or she has gone, but "Thou remainest" (Heb 1:11)! Fifth, how this should *endear* Christ unto us: "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (Joh 13:1), and He evidences His love unto them *thus*. He thinks so much of them, He will not leave them. Surely such love must beget love.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

49. 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, Part 3

There is more difference of opinion among sermonizers and commentators on *this* prayer than any other in the New Testament. It is not easy to make a translation of the Greek into simple and intelligible English, as appears from the additions made in our Authorized Version, for the insertion of the italicized words quite alters the scope and meaning of its clauses. Even where there is substantial concurrence as to the best English rendition, expositors are far from being agreed as to the precise significations of its several petitions. We have, therefore, proceeded more slowly in our own attempt to open its contents, taking as our foundation the rendering of *Bagster's Interlinear*, which in our judgment is as close and literal an equivalent of the original as can be given: "For which also we pray always for you, that you may count worthy of the calling our God, and may fulfil every good pleasure of goodness and work of faith with power, so that may be glorified the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and of [the] Lord Jesus Christ."

First, we have carefully considered the *occasion* of this prayer or what prompted it, as its opening, "For which also ['Wherefore also'—Authorized Version] we pray" requires us to do. We have pointed out that such an investigation takes us back to verse 4, where reference is made to the "persecutions and tribulations" which those saints were enduring, and reminded the reader that the Thessalonians were being so sorely oppressed by their enemies that Paul had sent Timothy "to establish...and to comfort" them concerning their faith, and to urge them "that no man should be moved by these afflictions" (1Th 3:2-3). In what follows from verse 4 of 2 Thessalonians 1, the apostle had sought to strengthen them by setting forth various considerations for their encouragement. In addition thereto, he assures them that he specially remembered them before the Throne of Grace, earnestly supplicating God on their behalf. The "Wherefore [for which cause] also we pray *always* for you" shows, second, the *importunity* of this prayer. He frequently interceded for them, which expressed both his deep affection and real concern for them.

Third, coming now to its *petitions*, we expressed the conviction that the principal blessing for which the apostle here made request was that further supplies of *persevering grace* should be granted these saints. We conclude thus, first, from the situation they were in: a sorely tried one. Second, because that was what they particularly needed in order to "count [them] worthy of this calling" of God—i.e. conduct themselves suitably to their procession. Third, because the "[that you may] fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power" was the task allotted *them*, and for the performance of which divine enablement was absolutely essential. Fourth, it was thereby they would glorify "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Fifth, because on any other analysis of this prayer, its concluding words would be a redundancy. But if *their* perseverance was what the apostle had before him, then "according to the grace of our God" would remove from them all ground of boasting and place the crown of honour where it rightly belonged. There is a holy balance between the truth of God's effectual preservation of His people, and the imperative necessity of their continuing in faith and holiness.

Personally, we find it enables us to obtain a better understanding of the apostle's scope by regarding this prayer (and each of his others) as an *implied exhortation*, for the chief reason why his prayers are recorded is that those for whom he prayed (and we who are informed of his petitions) might seek to realize in their own experience and walk the blessings which he sought from God on behalf of His children. In other words, those things for which the apostles made request are what God *requires from* His people, yet which they are unable to accomplish in their own strength. While there be nothing meritorious in them, yet the exercise of their minds graces is as necessary as the exercise of their minds and muscles, and is essential for the adorning of the Gospel and the glorifying of their Master. Consequently, we behold in this prayer, as everywhere in the Word of Truth, a striking and a blessed union of divine operations and Christian activities, of God's free grace and infinite power, and of our perseverance in duty and attainment of blessedness; there is a suitable concurrence of both ends and means, of the exercise of divine sovereignty and the discharge of human responsibility. Never let us put asunder what God has joined together.

"That our God would count you worthy of this calling" (2Th 1:11) is the first petition in the prayer we are now pondering. Since we have previously devoted several paragraphs to a consideration of its meaning, we must abbreviate our present remarks upon it. The "calling" has reference to that operation of divine grace by which they had been brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light and made the willing

subjects of the kingdom of His dear Son, and which entailed that henceforth they must make personal holiness their trade or avocation. The petition was to the effect that they should be brought to *highly esteem* such a vocation—notwithstanding the bitter opposition it met with—and be stirred up to meetly discharge their responsibilities in connection with the same. Paul prayed not that they might be delivered from their “persecutions and tribulations” (2Th 1:4), but rather that they should be divinely enabled to hold out steadfast under the same, and so quit themselves as the followers of Christ that He would not be ashamed to own them as His brethren. Paul’s yearning was that by their *becoming conduct*, they should clearly evince themselves to be among the effectually called of God.

“And fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness” (2Th 1:11) is the second petition. The reference is clearly unto of the divine excellencies, for God is expressly mentioned at the end of the preceding clause. The “good pleasure” of God signifies His most free will, His entire independency, that He acts without any restraint, being a law unto Himself. His “goodness” is His benignity and kindness. God has an absolute power and sovereign right to dispose as He will of all creatures, not only as to their temporal, but eternal concerns (Mat 20:15). That sovereign will is the sole cause why He passes by some and chooses others (Rom 9:18). But that absolute will of God is sweetly tempered with goodness or rich favour unto His own elect. He has a gracious good will unto them at all times. As the self-inclination which is in God to promote His people’s welfare is free, it is called His “good pleasure”; and as it moves Him to bestow benefits upon them, it is termed His “goodness” or benignity. All that the saints receive from Him proceeds from the good will which He bears them; and therefore, all the praise for the same belongs alone unto Him.

It is to be duly noted that those words, “fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness,” do not form part of a doctrinal statement in which is affirmed the certainty of the divine purpose; but instead, describe a duty incumbent upon Christians, but for which divine grace needs to be sought. It is therefore requisite that we call the reader’s attention to a simple but necessary distinction. As there is a *twofold* “will” of God referred to in Scripture, namely, His secret and revealed will—the former being the principle from which He works and which is invincible, the latter being the rule by which we are required to walk and which is never perfectly performed by any man (Dan 4:35; Rom 9:19; and contrast Joh 7:17; Luk 12:47); and as there is a twofold “counsel” of God—the one referring to His eternal decree and the other unto His advice to us (Isa 46:10; Act 4:28; and contrast Pro 1:25; Luk 7:30); so there is also the “good pleasure” by which *God* always acts (Eph 1:9) and the “pleasure” of God by which *we* are called to act (Psa 103:21). It is the latter of which our present verse speaks: the apostle prayed that these saints might be granted hearts framed unto an entire obedience to the divine statutes.

It is blessedly true that God does fulfil every good pleasure of His goodness in and through His people, yet it is equally true that they ought to aim at and rest content with nothing short of *their own* fulfilling of every divine precept which has been given them. The divine statutes are not only clothed with God’s authority, which we disregard at our peril, but they are also expressions of His goodness, which we ignore to our loss. God manifests His “goodness” unto us in many ways, not least in His commandments, which are designed for our welfare: “The Sabbath was made for man” (Mar 2:27)—because he needed it, for his benefit. They who, like the prophet, follow their own inclinations, rather than God’s instructions “forsake their own mercy” (Jon 2:8). A life of obedience is not only our duty but our comfort: the divine wisdom has so determined that whatever promotes His glory shall also advance the good of His people. Therefore, as He has inseparably connected together sin and misery, so He has holiness and happiness. “Great peace have they which love thy law” (Psa 119:165). “He that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Pro 29:18). “But the way of transgressors is hard” (Pro 13:15), but wisdom’s are “ways of pleasantness” (Pro 3:17).

“And fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness.” Again, we observe what an exalted standard of conduct the apostle (by necessary implication) here set before the saints. God requires His people to “be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1Pe 1:15)—in thought, word, and deed. Nothing less than complete conformity to the rule God has given us must be our aim and earnest endeavour. No dispensation is granted for us to pick and choose out of the Scriptures what we like best and pass by the rest. The divine promises must not be esteemed above the precepts. It is at this very point the emptiness of so many professors stands revealed. They are like backsliding Ephraim, of whom it is recorded that he “loveth to tread out the corn,” but would not “break his clods” (Hos 10:11). How many who call themselves “believers” affect the privileges of Christianity, but disdain its duties; are all for saving grace, but nothing for the grace which teaches us to *deny self*. God requires that our obedience should not only be diligent, but universal. Said the Psal-

mist, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto *all* thy commandments" (Psa 119:6): until we do so, we have cause to hide our faces in confusion.

But like everything else in the Christian's life, obedience unto God is a *growth*: not in the spirit of it, not in a sincere desire, and determination to please God—for that is common to all the regenerate—but in an actual performance. Light as well as love is necessary thereto, and that comes to him gradually as he is able to bear it—"more and more unto the perfect day" (Pro 4:18). Increased wisdom is required in order to make a right use of the light—to know when to speak and when to be silent, etc.—and that is largely a matter of experience. As babes in Christ are unable to feed upon the food of which the fully grown partake, so there are tasks performed by the latter of which the former are as yet incapable. Mark then the nice discrimination in the apostle's language: That you may "fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness." He did not employ the verb *teleioo* which means "to accomplish," but *pleroo* which signifies "to bring to completion." Paul had reference to a process which is performed gradually or by degrees. The same word occurs again in Acts 12:25; 14:21-22, etc. The goal was that they "might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:10), thus performing all those duties He had assigned them.

Increased *grace*, as well as light and wisdom, is essential for a fuller obedience, and it was for *that* the apostle here made supplication. Once more we call attention to the *breadth* of his requests. It was for a full supply of enabling grace unto His people that he now besought God. No niggardly petitioner was he. Eyeing the good will which God bears His children, Paul hesitated not to "open thy mouth wide" (Psa 81:10) when seeking favours for them—which, so far from being presumptuous, was honouring unto God and an availing himself of his rightful privilege. This feature, as we have seen, is a very prominent one in all his prayers; so here. It was though he called to mind the example of the man after God's own heart who asked, "Deal *bountifully* with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word" (Psa 119:17). That was the very thing the apostle was here doing: beseeching God that He would impart to the Thessalonians a plentiful supply of grace, that they might be spiritually vigorous and lively, and this in order that they should "keep [His] word," for to have the heart furnished for full obedience unto God's "good pleasure" is what a renewed soul deems to the best "bounty."

Let us not be stumbled, then, by the exalted standard of holiness which God has set before us; but rather be encouraged by the apostle's precedent, and seek from Him full supplies of grace to fit us for the performing of our duty. If we be believingly occupied with "the goodness" of our God, we shall not be afraid to ask and look for bounteous blessings from Him. As one truly said, "We may be too bold in our manner of approach to God, but we cannot be too bold in our expectations from Him." God is able—God is willing—to do for us far more "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph 3:20). The straitness is always in ourselves and never in Him: in the narrowness of our faith and not the breadth of His promises. "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have *abundance*" (Mat 25:29)—plead that word before Him. "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2Co 9:8). Ponder well that threefold "all"! What further inducements do we require to approach the Throne of Grace with "large petitions"? If your need and longing be great, see to it that your expectation is equally so.

It is neither honouring to God nor good for himself that the Christian should be contented with a little grace. These Thessalonians were not only regenerate persons, but they had attained to a considerable degree of eminence in faith and holiness; nevertheless, Paul prayed that such further supplies of grace be vouchsafed them that they would be enabled to "fulfil *all* the good pleasure of his goodness"—i.e. measure up to the whole revealed will of God. Rest not satisfied with the assurance that you have enough grace to take you to heaven, but seek that measure of it which will not only be for your comfort on earth, but for the glorifying of your Saviour while you be left in this scene. "Covet earnestly the best gifts" (1Co 12:31). Pray for enlarged affections and expectations. Beg God to deal with you not according to your ill deserts, but according to the largeness of His liberality, seeking from Him that "good measure" which is "pressed down, and shaken together, and running over" (Luk 6:38). Above all, plead the Redeemer's worthiness. God never denies those who make *that* their all-prevailing plea, for there is infinitely more merit in Christ's sacrifice than there is demerit in you and all your sins!

"And the work of faith with power" (2Th 1:11) is the third petition, or thing which God required from the saints and which the apostle asked for them. A notional and nominal faith, which is without good works, is a dead and worthless one; but a spiritual faith which produces fruit unto God's glory is a living

one. The faith which God communicates to His elect is a vital and operative principle; and therefore, it has an office to discharge, a duty to fulfil. These words, “the work of faith,” are to be understood in precisely the same way as that little-understood expression, “the work of the law” in Romans 2:15. The “work of the law” in that verse is not to be regarded as a principle of righteousness operating within the unregenerate Gentiles (a manifest absurdity), but as the design and function of the law. Its “work” is to prohibit and promise, to threaten or assure, of reward. The “work of the law” refers not to the conduct it requires from us, but to what the law itself *does*—accuses or acquits. So the “work of faith” refers to neither God’s quickening of faith nor its fruits through us, but to the task allotted it. It is not the invigorating of faith by God’s Spirit which is here in view, but that function which God has assigned faith, that office which it is fitted to perform.

In his sermon on these verses, even J.C. Philpot (1802-1869)—who was all at sea on the preceding petition (understanding it to refer to an experience of heart in which we are passive, rather than to our active obedience)—said on these words: “By ‘the work of faith’ we may understand two things: 1) the operation of God upon the heart, whereby from time to time, faith is raised up and brought into living exercise upon the things of God; and 2) the work which faith has to do when thus raised up and strengthened in the soul”—so that in the latter part of his definition, he conceded what other hyper-Calvinists denied. There are two sorts of works required of and ascribed to faith—namely, those which are internal, and those which are external. The former consists of the mind’s assent unto the truth, the will’s consent to what is there enjoined, and the heart’s reliance upon the promises of God and a resting the whole soul on Christ, confiding its eternal interests unto Him. The external work of faith consists of an open confession of Christ, boldly owning His ways before a world which despises them, and a ready obedience to the will of God in forsaking sin and walking in the path of His commandments, to the producing of practical holiness; and therefore, our obedience is designated “the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26).

While not inclined to altogether exclude the internal work of faith, we think it is obvious, both from what precedes and follows, that the external work of faith is chiefly in view—the honouring of Christ before men. It is the products of the work of faith which make it evident to our fellows, for a holy walk brings more glory to Christ than a log of frothy talk; steadfast perseverance in duty in a time of persecution is more pleasing to Him than showy performances in a day of peace. Furthermore, in a time of acute suffering, the saint will find it easier to determine his spiritual case by the exercises of his grace objectively than subjectively. “The drift of his prayer is that God would enable them to ride out the storm of those troubles which came upon them for the Gospel’s sake. And a Christian, in judging his condition, will discover it better in the external acts of faith than in the internal”—Thomas Manton (1620-1677).

“And the work of faith *with power*”—namely, the power of God in enabling faith to fulfil its functions. As the faith here spoken of is of God, so it is dependent upon God. Does faith support the soul under heavy trials? Then it is, because it is sustained by the omnipotent One. Does it perform duties which are contrary to the dictates of carnal wisdom? Then it is, because faith is energized by divine power. Does it choose a path which is hateful to flesh and blood? Then it is, because faith is strengthened by the might of its Giver. Does faith, in the midst of the most painful and bewildering situation, aver “though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15)? Then it must be because the Almighty is its maintainer. Nevertheless, it remains that if our faith be small and feeble, the fault is entirely ours. God has expressly bidden us, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph 6:10); and therefore, it is both our privilege and duty to ask and expect Him to make good in us that which He requires from us. Surely that is evident from the Lord’s rebuke to His disciples: He had not reproved them for their fear and unbelief (Mat 8:26), unless *they* were responsible to maintain it in healthy vigour.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

29. *The Passover*

It is most blessed to observe how Israel conducted themselves upon their first entrance into the promised land, for therein is manifested not the workings of nature, but the fruits of divine grace. After God had wrought so signally for them at the Jordan, they did not rush ahead and seek to immediately possess their inheritance. The miraculous dividing of its waters so that they passed through dryshod must have greatly dispirited the Canaanites, and thus have prepared the way for an easy triumph for the invaders. It had been natural, yea, what all military men would call "good policy" for Israel to have made the most of this terror by striking a heavy blow at once, pressing on with might and main before the enemy could recover himself, and so carry all before them in one swift campaign. But God's people follow not the ways nor employ the devices of the world. They are a "peculiar people" (1Pe 2:9): distinct and separate from the unregenerate, acting not by carnal wisdom and expediency, but regulated by spiritual considerations. "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa 28:16) is one of the principles by which they are required to act, for "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong" (Ecc 9:11).

Instead of immediately assaulting Jericho, the children of Israel pitched their tents at Gilgal and tarried there for a season. Exemplary restraint was that, and one which we do well to take to heart in this feverish age of mad speed. This tarrying in the camp at Gilgal was the more noteworthy when we bear in mind the very lengthy interval which had elapsed since their exodus from Egypt, during which they were prevented from reaching their goal and realizing their eager expectation. Yet there was something far more praiseworthy than self-discipline which marked their conduct on this occasion: they had the glory of God before them. They eyed His authority, and respect for His institutions, and acted in faith and obedience to His appointments. That should ever be what marks God's people, collectively or singly. It is neither the first business of the church to "win the world for Christ," nor of the individual Christian to seek the salvation of his relatives and companions; rather, it is to "shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1Pe 2:9) by our entire subjection to His Word. God has nowhere promised to *use* those who make not conscience of obeying Him in all things.

The appointments of God and not the attaining of their own desires were given the pre-eminence. First, Joshua had, in submission to the Lord's requirement, circumcised all those male Israelites who had been born in the wilderness. We have previously shown that the non-observing of that rite during those thirty-eight years was due to no sinful neglect, but was owing to the apostasy of their fathers at Kadesh-barnea, in consequence of which Jehovah declared, "ye shall know my breach of promise" (Num 14:32-34); and therefore, were their children denied the token or "token of the covenant" (Gen 17:11). But the miraculous passage of the Jordan demonstrated that Israel was once more restored to the divine favour, that He had resumed His covenant relationship with them, that in emerging from the river of death, judgment was behind them; and therefore, it was fitting that this second generation should now be given that mark which distinguished them from all other nations as bound by special obligation to serve their God. It was also observed how that the Lord's commanding Joshua to then circumcise the people presented a real test to his faith and obedience, severely handicapping for a few days his fighting forces; but counting upon God's protection, he confided in Him and triumphed over the trial.

Second, we are told, "And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover" (Jos 5:10). Appropriately did Matthew Henry (1662-1714) point out, "We may well imagine that the people of Canaan were astonished and that, when they observed the motions of the enemy, they could not but think them very strange. When soldiers take the field, they are apt to think themselves excused from religious ceremonies (they have not time or thought to attend to them), yet Joshua opens the campaign with one act of devotion after another. What was afterwards said to another Joshua might truly be said to this: 'Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at' (Zec 3:8); and yet indeed he took the right method." And, my reader, if *we* be actuated and regulated by a concern to the glory of God, worldlings will wonder at us. It cannot be otherwise, for the natural man acts only from a spirit of self-love and self-will, and his end is self-pleasing and self-advancement. Thus, if he beholds any denying self, subordinating their interests to the honouring of God, he marvels at such conduct. Unless, then, *we* be "wondered at," yea, sneered at and regarded as crazy, it is because we have "left our first love" and become conformed to this world.

Israel's keeping of the Passover was, like the circumcising of the people, an act of *obedience* unto the Lord: in fact, the one could not be without the other, for it had been expressly laid down that "no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof" (Exo 12:48). For that very reason, this ordinance had not been observed while the nation lay under the wrath of God. They *had* kept it on the first anniversary of the event which it commemorated (Num 9:5), but not during the next thirty-eight years. God had said, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them" (Amo 5:21-22)—language which not only applied to the prophet's own day, but also had special reference to their sojourn in the wilderness as verse 25 evinces. But now the Lord had resumed His covenant relations with Israel, and they had attended to the matter of circumcision; it was in order, yea, requisite, for them to do so. They had been strictly enjoined, "And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service" (Exo 12:24-25).

In previous articles, we have noted that this particular generation under Joshua was not only vastly better than the one which preceded, but also far more spiritual than any that followed it. This was exemplified in the willingness of their adults to be circumcised without any demur. It appears again in what is now before us. The Lord had particularly said unto Moses almost a year after their leaving Egypt, "Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season" (Num 9:2), as though to intimate, otherwise His command in Exodus 12:24 had not been complied with. But on this occasion, no mention is made of God's reminding them of their duty. We are told, "And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover" (Jos 5:10). And that is not all which is stated: "On the fourteenth day of the month," which is something more than a mere narration of a historical fact—it tells us that they kept the Passover "at his appointed season." Nor is that all: it is added "at even," which was as the Lord required. How the Spirit delights to notice and record the *details* of obedience! The Israelites did not tamper with this divine ordinance and change it to a morning observance to suit their own convenience, as a compromising Christendom has done with "the Lord's *supper*." Unless we conform strictly to the letter of the divine precept, it is not "obedience," but "will worship."

Israel's act of keeping the Passover was not only one of obedience, but also of *commemoration*. "And this day shall be unto you for a *memorial*; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations...And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses...It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD" (Exo 12:14, 26, 27, 42). This feast, then, was appointed to celebrate the great goodness of the Lord unto His people and their deliverance both from death and from the house of bondage. It was designed to keep before their minds the blessed provision He had made for them in the night of their deepest need, a provision all sufficient. It was to express anew their gratitude unto God for His distinguishing favour: the original "sacrifice" was expiatory, but the memorial of it was eucharistic. It was intended to signalize those perfections of God which had been exemplified on that never-to-be-forgotten night.

The Passover had demonstrated in unmistakable manner the *sovereignty* of God, when He had "put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel" (Exo 11:7); that is, between the reprobate and His own elect—no lamb was provided for the former! It had manifested the *grace* of God. By nature, the children of Israel were no better than the Egyptians, nor in conduct, as is clear from Ezekiel 20:6-9; 23:3. It was out of His mere good pleasure and unmerited favour that the Lord exempted Israel from the destroyer (Exo 12:23). It displayed the *righteousness* of God, which announced that He "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exo 34:7). They were flagrant sinners and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23): death must do and did its work in their households, too, when the sacrificial lamb was slain. It revealed the amazing *mercy* of God in providing that substitute. It placated the *wrath* of God: He said to the avenging angel concerning Israel's firstborn, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom" (Job 33:24), illustrating that basic principle, "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb 9:22). It testified the *faithfulness* of God: "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exo 12:13), and He did. It made known His *love*, which had chosen Israel to be His favoured people (Deu 10:15).

Again, the Passover was not only commemorative, but *anticipative*: it memorialized what was past and also foreshadowed what was to come. The institution and ritual of the Passover furnished one of the most striking representations of the person and work of Christ to be met with anywhere in the Old Testament.

That it was a type thereof is clear from 1 Corinthians 5:7, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." Here then is our authority for regarding the contents of Exodus 12 as shadowing forth the cross-work of the Saviour; and it is this which invests that chapter with such deep interest. The Passover was the first of those annual "feasts" which God appointed unto Israel, for it sets forth the grand truth of redemption, which is the foundation blessing of believers, the fountain from which all others flow; and the Passover was kept upon Israel's entrance into Canaan to signify that their possession of the inheritance—no less than their deliverance from Egypt—was owing to the merits of the blood of the Lamb. Christ Himself observed it, saying to His apostles, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Luk 22:15). In the light of these facts, it becomes us to give our best attention to the teaching of Scripture thereon.

Observe first, the *occasion* of its institution. It was at the close of God's judgments upon Egypt. He had declared, "About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that *is* behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel" (Exo 11:4-7). Note carefully the exact wording of verse 5: it was not "all the firstborn *of* the land of Egypt shall die," but "all the firstborn *in* the land of Egypt"—and that necessarily included Israel's equally with Egypt's. Yet in verse 7, the Lord said He would "put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel," so that the latter should be wholly exempt from judgment. That is what infidels would term, "a flat contradiction," but the Christian knows there is none in the Word of Truth. What, then, is the explanation?

Each of those divine declarations was literally accomplished: all the firstborn in the land of Egypt died; nevertheless, the firstborn of Israel were delivered from the angel of death. But how could that be? Surely both could not take place! Yet they did, and therein, we have a blessed illustration of the contents of the Gospel. It was the question of *sin* which was here raised and dealt with by God—consequently both parties were equally involved in His righteous judgment. The Israelites were not only sinners by nature, but practice; not only sins of infirmity, but high-handed sins of idolatry (Lev 17:7; Josh 24:14). Divine holiness can never ignore sin no matter where it be found: when the angels sinned, God "spared them not" (2Pe 2:4). Justice must be satisfied; sin must pay its wages. A reprieve is out of the question. Then must guilty Israel perish? It would seem so. Human wisdom could devise no way of escape. But divine wisdom did, and without compromising righteousness. How? By means of a *substitute*: sentence of death was executed on an innocent victim, because guilt had been legally transferred unto it. A lamb was provided for Israel, and it died in their stead.

Observe next, *the nature* of this transaction: "It is the LORD'S passover" (Exo 12:11). Those words bring before us a fundamental aspect of truth which is much neglected in evangelical preaching. Gospellers have much to say upon what Christ's death accomplished for those who believe on Him, but far less upon what it effected *Godwards*. Yet that is clearly brought out in the first direct mention of the "lamb" in Scripture: "God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (Gen 22:8). It was not simply that God would "provide a lamb," but that He would provide *Himself* one! The antitypical Lamb was appointed and supplied to glorify God, to vindicate His throne, magnify His Law, and satisfy His justice and holiness. The life and death of Christ brought infinite glory to God though not a sinner had been saved thereby. The two leading aspects of Christ's atonement—Godward and usward—were shadowed again in the ritual for the day of atonement: "And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot *for the LORD*, and the other lot for the scapegoat" (Lev 16:7-8)—Israel's substitute, which bore away their sins into a place uninhabited. Christ must first be "the Lord's passover," accepted by Him, before He could be "our passover" (1Co 5:7)—received by us.

Consider now *the substance* of God's gracious provision for Israel, namely, "the lamb." Though we cannot dwell upon details, we will furnish a broad outline for the benefit of young preachers. How well fitted was a lamb to be an emblem of the Saviour is at once apparent: so gentle and innocent, so mild and harmless, neither hurting others, nor seeming to have the capacity to resent an injury; useful in life (its fleece), valuable for food when killed. (1) The Passover lamb was taken "out from the sheep" (Exo 12:5). "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren" (Deu 18:18). Christ, according to His humanity, was "made of the seed of David" (Rom 1:3). "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and

blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same” (Heb 2:14). (2) It was taken from the flock (not on the first, but) “in the tenth day of [the] month” (verse 3). The Son of God did not become incarnate as soon as sin entered the world, but when “the fulness of the time was come” (Gal 4:4), after forty centuries of human history had passed: after man had been *fully tested* (10 is the number of his responsibility) and his *probation* (which 40 signifies) was completed—10 x 10 x 40.

(3) “Your lamb shall be without blemish” (Exo 12:5, and compare Lev 22:21-22). Nothing but a perfect sacrifice could satisfy an infinitely perfect God. One who had any sin in him could not make atonement for sinners. But where was such a one to be found? Nowhere among the fallen sons of men. That lamb “without blemish” pointed to the immaculate purity of Christ (Heb 7:26-27; 1Pe 1:19). (4) “A male of the first year” (Exo 12:5): it was not to be too young or too old, but was to die in the fullness of its strength. So Christ died neither in childhood nor in old age, but in the prime of manhood—He was cut off “in the midst of [His] days” (Psa 102:24). (5) “And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month” (Exo 12:6). For four days, the lamb, separated unto sacrifice, was kept tethered, apart from all others, during which time it could be fully inspected to perceive its flawlessness. Antotypically, that may be taken two ways: on the principle of “each day for a year” (Num 14:34; Eze 4:6)—before His public ministry began (which lasted between three and four years), the Father bore testimony to the perfection of the Lamb (Mat 3:17); taking it literally, during His last four days, Christ was under the closest scrutiny of men, and even His judge confessed, “I find no fault in him” (Joh 19:4, 6).

(6) The lamb must be slain: “The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening” (Exo 12:6). That is very striking. It was not Moses and Aaron, or the Levites, who slew it, but the entire people as represented by the heads of every household. Nor was it only the chief priests and elders who were responsible for the slaying of Christ; for when Pilate decided the issue as to whether Barabbas or Christ should be released, he did so on the popular vote of the common people, who *all* cried, “crucify him” (Mar 15:6-15). In like manner, it was the sins of each believer individually (Gal 2:20) and of the Church corporeally (Eph 5:25), which necessitated the death of Christ. It is also very remarkable to observe that though many thousands of lambs were slain that night, it was said, “Israel shall kill *it*”—not “them”! “There was only one before God’s mind—the Lamb of Calvary” (Urquhart). (7) Its blood must be applied: “And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts,” etc. (Exo 12:7). Mental assent to the Gospel without a personal receiving of Christ avails not to deliver from judgment: there must be an appropriation of Christ, “faith in his blood” (Rom 3:25). A Saviour accepted, not a Saviour provided, actually saves.

(8) The sprinkled blood gave security. “When he seeth the blood...the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in” (Exo 12:23). And why? Because death had already done its work *there!* God’s eye was not on the house or its inmates, but on the atoning blood. (9) “And the blood shall be to you for a token” (Exo 12:13)—i.e. “a token for good” (Psa 86:17). It was to assure their hearts, as the “token” given to Rahab (Josh 2:12) was a guarantee of her preservation. God would have the hearts of His people in perfect peace, even while hearing the cries of the stricken Egyptians. No harm should befall them, and no fear or distress while they rested on His sure promise! It is most important for the believer to distinguish between the foundation of his security and the basis of his peace: that which provided safe refuge from judgment was the slain lamb and its sprinkled blood; that which afforded a sure stay for the heart was the Word of One who cannot lie. (10) “And they shall eat the flesh in that night” (Exo 12:8). This was God’s gracious provision for those within the house. Eating speaks of fellowship. It is Christ as the food of His people, feeding by faith upon Him for strength and sustenance of soul.

(11) It must be “roast with fire” (Exo 12:8). “Fire” here, as throughout, speaks of the wrath of a sin-hating God. The “roasting” of the lamb was a solemn figure of Christ suffering what was due to His people when He passed under and endured the awful wrath of God, as He was “made a curse” (Gal 3:13). It is that which explains the deeper meaning of His cry, “I thirst”: it was the effect of agony of soul as He endured the fierce heat of God’s wrath. “Nor sodden [boiled] at all with water” (Exo 12:9) tells us nothing was allowed to hinder the direct action of “fire” on the Sinbearer: God “spared not his own Son” (Rom 8:32). (12) “With bitter herbs” (Exo 12:8) or remorse of conscience. The Christian cannot have “the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phi 3:10) without remembering it was *his* sins which made them needful. (13) “And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded...and your staff in your hand” (Exo 12:11). Fellowship with Christ can only be had as we maintain our pilgrim character. (14) “Neither shall ye break a bone thereof” (Exo 12:46, and see Joh 19:33-36)!

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

13. *The Holy Bible, Part 5*

For the benefit of new readers, we would say that in the preceding articles of this series, we have presented a portion of that abundant evidence which makes it unmistakably manifest that God has given us a clear revelation of Himself: in creation, in the constitution of man (physical, mental, and moral), in His government of this world (as evinced in the annals of history), in the advent to this earth of His incarnate Son, and in the Holy Scriptures. In our last, we based our first argument that the Bible is an inspired communication from God on the fact that man is in urgent *need* of a written revelation because his own faculties—especially as he is now a fallen and sinful creature—are insufficient as a guide to virtue and eternal happiness. Second, that there is therefore a *presumption in favour* of the Bible's being a revelation from God, since man urgently needs such and God is well able to supply it. Since all nature evinces that a merciful Creator has made suitable provision for every need of all His creatures, it is unthinkable that this supreme need of the highest of His earthly creatures should be neglected. To continue:

3. *Its own claims.* These are unambiguous, positive, decisive, leaving us in no doubt as to what the Scriptures profess to be. The Bible declares that, as a Book, it comes to us from God Himself. It urges that claim in various ways. Its very names proclaim its source. It is repeatedly denominated, "The Word of God." It is so denominated because as we express our thoughts and make known our intentions by means of words, so in His Book, God has disclosed *His* mind and declared His will unto us. It is called, "the book of the LORD" (Isa 34:16), because He is its Author and because of the divine authority with which it is invested, demanding our unqualified subjection to its imperial edicts. It is termed, "the scripture of truth" (Dan 10:21), because it is without confusion, without contradiction, without the slightest admixture of error: infallible—in every verse, every word, every letter inspired, divine. It is designated, "the word of life" (Phi 2:16), because it is invested with the very breath of the Almighty, indelible and indestructible, in contradistinction from all the perishing productions of man. It is entitled, "the oracles of God" (Rom 3:2), because in it, God Himself is the speaker.

The Bible proclaims itself to be a divine revelation, a direct and inerrant communication from the living God, that He "spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began" (Luk 1:70). They announce that "the law of the LORD is perfect" (Psa 19:7)—without flaw or blemish; that "the word of God is quick, and powerful" (Heb 4:12)—living, pungent, dynamical; that "the word of the Lord endureth for ever" (1Pe 1:25)—surviving all the passages of time, withstanding all the efforts of enemies to destroy it. They affirm themselves to be "*the* holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation" (2Ti 3:15). The article there is emphatic being used to distinguish the Sacred Writings from all others, to aver their excellency and eminency over all the writings of men. The Holy One is their Author, they treat of the holy things of God, and call for holy hearts and lives from their readers; and just so far as our characters are formed and our conduct regulated by their precepts, will the fruits of holiness appear in our lives.

The instruments which God employed to bring to us the Word were themselves conscious of and frankly owned to the fact that they were but His mouthpieces or penmen. Again and again we find them avowing that truth. "Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD" (Jos 24:2). "The LORD spake thus to me" (Isa 8:11). "Hear ye...for the LORD hath spoken" (Jer 13:15). "Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken" (Amo 3:1). "The mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it" (Mic 4:4). Said the royal Psalmist, "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue" (2Sa 23:2). So, too, when the apostles quoted a passage from the Old Testament, they gave their testimony to the same truth. When Peter addressed the disciples, he said, "this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake" (Act 1:16). "Lord, thou art God...Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said" (Act 4:24-25). "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers" (Act 28:25). Whoever were the human spokesmen or writers, the language of the Scriptures is the very words of God.

Not once or twice, but scores of times, there are passages which, without any preamble or apology, aver "Thus saith the Lord." In the Bible, God is the Speaker. Chapter after chapter in Leviticus, it opens with "And the LORD spake...saying," and so it runs to the end of the chapter. Moses was but a scribe; God, the Author of what is recorded. The question of inspiration is, in its ultimate analysis, the question of revelation itself. If the book be divine, then what it says of itself is divine. The question is one of *divine* testimony, and our business is simply to receive that testimony—without doubting or quibbling, with

thankful and unreserved submission to its authority. When God speaks, He must be heeded. "If at this moment yonder were opened—the curtained canopy of star-sown clouds rolled back; if amid the brightness of light ineffable, the Dread Eternal were Himself seen rising from His throne, and heard to speak in voice audible, it could not be more potent, more imperative, than what lies now before us upon inspiration's page"—G.S. Bishop.

God requires us to receive and accredit His Word, and to do so on His own *ipse dixit*. All faith rests on testimony; and the testimony on which faith in the Scriptures reposes is amply sufficient to support it, for it is divine. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater...he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son" (1Jo 5:9-10). If the witness of men of respectability and integrity be received in the judicatories of all nations, then most assuredly, the witness of God is infinitely more worthy of our acceptance. The best of men are fallible and fickle, yet in matters of the greatest importance, their testimony is credited—the affairs of the world would soon come to a standstill if it were not so. Then with how much more confidence may we receive the testimony of Him who is infallible and immutable, who can neither deceive, nor be deceived! How unspeakably dreadful the alternative: if we believe not God's record, that is virtually giving Him the lie, and regarding Him as a false witness! May the reader be delivered from such wickedness.

4. *No other explanation is even feasible.* Whence comes the Bible is a question deserving of the very best attention of every serious mind. The subjects of which it treats are of such tremendous importance, both to our present welfare and our future felicity, that the question of its derivation calls for the most diligent examination. The Bible is here, and it must be accounted for. It holds a unique place in the literature of mankind, and it has exerted an unrivalled influence in moulding the history of the world; and therefore, it calls loudly for an adequate rationale to be given of its origin. Only three explanations are possible: the Bible is either a deliberate imposture, manufactured by wicked men; or it is the product of deluded visionaries who vainly imagined they were giving forth inspired messages from heaven; or else it is what it claims to be: an infallible and authoritative revelation from God Himself unto the sons of men. Between those three alternatives, every thoughtful investigator of the matter must choose. If he ponders carefully the first two, and tests them by the evidence adduced in favour of the Bible's being a divine communication, he should have no difficulty in perceiving they are not only inadequate, but utterly absurd.

It is proverbial that "water will not rise above its own level," as it is self-evident that no cause can produce any effect superior to itself. Equally incredible is it that wicked men should bring forth a Book which has done far more than all other books combined (except those drawn from the Bible) in promoting morality and producing holiness. Grapes do not grow upon thistles! To aver that the Bible was produced by evil men is refuted by the very character of its teachings, which uniformly condemn dishonesty and declare that, "all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Rev 21:8). It is thoroughly irrational to suppose that the authors of the most impious and gigantic literary fraud ever imposed upon mankind (if such it be) should invent for themselves such a fearful doom as that! It must also be remembered that some of the penmen of the Bible laid down their lives for a testimony to its verity; but the annals of history contain no record of men willingly suffering martyrdom for a known lie, from which neither they nor their families received any advantage.

Another class of sceptics dismiss the Bible as the fanciful flights of poets, the ravings of mystics, the extravagancies of enthusiasts. Much in it is no doubt very beautiful, yet it is as unsubstantial as a dream, with no reality corresponding thereto, and those who credit the same are living only in a fool's paradise. They say that, If there be a God, He is so absolute and transcendent, so remote from this scene, as to take no personal notice of our affairs; that it is both unphilosophical and a slur on His greatness to affirm (as the ancient Psalm does), "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him" (Psa 103:13). Thus, we are asked to believe that mystics and fanatics have invented a god with tenderer and nobler attributes than the real God has. But to say that fancy has devised a superior god than actually exists is the acme of irrationality. Were it possible for us to choose what kind of excellencies deity should possess, would we not include among them pity linked with infinite power, using that power as its servant to tenderly minister unto the suffering?

Surely, this is the most amazing chimera that has ever been invented: that men have endowed God with grander qualities than He really possesses, that they have predicated of Him a perfection which He is incapable of exercising. Rather must we affirm that that wondrous statement, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting

life” (Joh 3:16), is a revelation which opens to us a new moral kingdom, a kingdom of unimaginable benignity and grace. The message of redemption is a divine light breaking in upon us from above, a revelation that proves itself. That God should send here His own Son clothed with our humanity, to seek and to save rebels against His government, to suffer in their stead, and by His death [to] make full atonement for their sins, to provide His Spirit to conform them to His image, to make them His joint heirs and sharers of His eternal glory—is a concept which had never entered human heart or mind to conceive. Yet it *is* worthy and becoming of our Maker. The Gospel is the noblest force which has ever touched human character.

As another has pertinently asked, “Is it a dishonour to God that, being great, He stoops to us? Does it make Him less? Is it a reproach to Him that He gives Himself to us? Would it be more for His glory if He mocked us? It is this very wedlock of the wisdom that planned the heavens, the measureless power that guides the stars, with the tenderness that stoops to the whispered prayer of a child, that counts the tears of a widow, that hears the sighs of the prodigal, which makes the unconceivable greatness of God. It completes the mighty curve of His attributes. And is it credible that we can conceive this amazing greatness and yet God not be capable of it?...The Bible represents God as saying, ‘my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts’ (Isa 55:8-9). And this *ought* to be true! The realities of God ought to be nobler than the dreams of men. It would be the perplexity and despair of man if this were not so”—William Henry Fitchett (1841-1928), *The Unrealised Logic of Religion* (1905).

Equally false is it to assert, as some ignorant infidels have done, that we owe the Bible to *the Church*. It is an indubitable historical fact that the larger part of the Bible was in known existence more than two hundred years before the dawn of the Christian era, and every doctrine, every precept and promise contained in the New Testament is based upon that earlier revelation. Such was the sufficiency of the Old Testament Scriptures that Paul could say they were “able to make thee wise unto salvation” (2Ti 3:15). While it be true that Christian churches existed before the New Testament was *written*, yet it must be borne in mind that there was the *spoken* Word by Christ, and His apostles ere the first of those churches was formed. On the day of Pentecost, the Old Testament was quoted and expounded, the revelation of God in Christ was proclaimed, and it was upon the acceptance of that Word that the New Testament came into being. Thus the fact is that the Word created the Church, and not vice versa. It was only after some of the apostles had died and others were engaged in extensive travel that the need arose for the permanent embodiment of the final portions of God’s revelation, and this was given gradually in the New Testament. From that time until now, the written Word has taken the place of the original spoken Word.

For centuries before the inauguration of Christianity, the Jews held the books which comprised the Old Testament as being the genuine productions of those penmen whose names they bear, and they were un-animously considered by them—without any exception or addition—to have been written under the immediate direction of the Spirit of God. Those books of the Old Testament had been preserved with the utmost veneration and care, and at the same time, had been jealously guarded from any spurious or apocryphal writings. It is a fact well authenticated that, while the Jews of Christ’s day were divided into numerous sects, which stood in the most direct opposition to one another, yet there was never any difference among them respecting the divinity and authority of the sacred writings. Josephus appealed to the public records of different nations and to many historical documents existing in his day, as indisputable evidence, in the opinion of the Gentile world, of the verity and fidelity of those portions of Israel’s history to which he referred. Even to this day, the bulk of the religious Jews retain an unshakable conviction of the divine origin of their religious laws and institutions. Yet their own Scriptures record their unparalleled hardness of heart, resistance to the light God gave them, and their rejection and murder of their own Messiah—things which would have been accorded no place in a spurious production.

That *the Jews* did not manufacture the Old Testament—on which the New is largely based—is apparent from other considerations. The immense disparity between the Old Testament as a book and the Hebrew people as a nation shows that the knowledge of God and of divine things contained in the former—but wanting in the latter—came *ab extra*, that it was communicated from on high. One has but to read the writings of Flavius Josephus (AD 37-100), the Jewish Targums and Talmud, or the Kabbala,¹ to

¹ **Targums, Talmud, Kabbala** – *Targums*: translations of the Hebrew Scriptures into Aramaic. *Talmud*: a body of ancient Jewish literature consisting of two parts, the Mishnah (the text of oral laws and traditions edited by Rabbi Ha-Nasi A.D. 135-220) and the Gemara (commentaries on the Mishnah by the interpreters of the Law). *Kabbala*: a set of Jewish esoteric teachings meant to ex-

recognize at once the vast difference there is between them and the Holy Scriptures. That might be illustrated at great length, from many different angles, but we will confine ourselves to a single feature, and treat of it in a way that the ordinary reader will have no difficulty in following us: the extreme *exclusiveness* of the Jews, and then call attention to a number of passages in the Old Testament which cannot possibly be accounted for in the light of that dominant national characteristic.

There has never been another people so outstandingly clannish in sentiment and so provincial in outlook as the Jews: nor had any other equal reason for so being. God dealt with them as with no other nation: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amo 3:2). "He hath not dealt so with any nation" (Psa 147:20). He forbade Israel to have anything to do with the religion of other nations, prohibited all marriages with them, and the learning of their ways. Yet they carried the spirit of bigotry and exclusiveness to an unwarrantable extent, far beyond the requirements of Scriptures. Their violent prejudice appears in that statement, "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (Joh 4:9), in Peter's reluctance to go unto Cornelius, and the unwillingness of the Christian church at Jerusalem to believe the grace of God extended to the uttermost part of the earth. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the teaching of the Old Testament was very far from inculcating that the Israelites must confine their benevolent affections within the narrow bounds of their own twelve tribes. No spirit of bigotry breathes in the sacred songs sung in their temple.

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among *all nations*. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth" (Psa 67:1-4). "All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name" (Psa 86:9). "O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth. Sing unto the LORD, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among *the heathen*, his wonders among all people. . . Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts" (Psa 96:1-3, 8). Who, we ask, put such words as those into the psalmist's mouth? Who caused them to be given a permanent record on the sacred scroll? Who preserved them intact for the thousand years which followed till the advent of Christ, during which interval the Jews were possessed of most fanatical egotism and the bitterest hatred of *the Gentiles*!

The same striking feature appears even in the Pentateuch.² "And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage" (Deu 26:5-6). The whole of that remarkable passage (verses 4-10)—which Israel were required to recite before God at one of their most solemn acts of worship—should be carefully weighed. What could more effectually repress their national pride than that confession? But who instructed them to make such a humble acknowledgement of their lowly origin? Who bade them utter this perpetual avowal of their base beginnings? But more: it was on the very basis of their lowly origin and the sore oppression their fathers had suffered in a foreign land that a number of most *un-Jewish* laws were framed—laws which bade them pity and relieve the stranger. If that fact be critically pondered, it should be evident that such precepts could not have originated from such a bigoted and hard-hearted people.

Those precepts were quite contrary to flesh and blood. It is natural for sinful men to strongly resent harsh treatment, for the memory of it to cherish rancour and malevolence, to feed the spirit of revenge, so that if the positions should be reversed, they would "get their own back." Instead, we find the Mosaic Law enjoining the very opposite, inculcating the warmest and purest benevolence toward the wretched and defenceless of other nations. "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exo 22:21). Yea, more: "But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt *love him* as thyself" (Lev 19:34). Now my reader, what explanation can possibly account for such benign statutes?—statutes which were repeatedly flouted by Israel! Who was it that originated and inculcated such unselfish tenderness? Who taught the haughty Jews to return good for evil? Who but the One who is both "no respecter of persons" (Act 10:34) and who is "very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (Jam 5:11).

plain the inner meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures, in the relationship between an eternal/infinite Creator and the mortal/finite universe (His creation).

² **Pentateuch** – the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures written by Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy.

ENJOYING GOD'S BEST

In the January and February 1946 issues, we wrote two short articles entitled, "Enjoying God's Best" and "Missing God's Best"; and it must be confessed that we were rather surprised at receiving no criticisms, or at least questions, from some of our Calvinistic readers, for we felt it would be very difficult for them to "harmonize" their contents with what they had been taught. That is not said in any invidious or satirical spirit, for some of our closest and warmest friends are Calvinists, nor is the writer in the least afraid or ashamed to avow himself one, yea, a *high* Calvinist—though not a "hyper." There is a very real difference between the two, though few today are aware of it. A "high" Calvinist not only believes in the absolute sovereignty of God, in His having predestinated everything which comes to pass in time, in the unconditional choice of His people in Christ from all eternity, in particular redemption, in the invincible operations and effectual call of the Holy Spirit, but he also believes that God made choice of His elect irrespective of or without any foreview of their fall in Adam; and thus, he is a "supralapsarian" regarding God's act as influenced by nothing outside of Himself.

But a "hyper" Calvinist is one who goes beyond the teaching of Scripture—from which alone the great Reformer formulated his theology—resorting to reasoning and philosophizing upon various aspects of truth, which leads to his repudiating other aspects thereof. He makes an idol of "consistency"—i.e. what appears to be consistent to *his* mind. He attempts to square everything by the rule of logic. Since he finds that Scripture teaches particular redemption, that Christ obeyed and suffered only in the stead and on the behalf of God's elect, he regards the "free offer" of the Gospel to all who hear it as "contradictory." Since fallen man be totally depraved, dead in trespasses and sins, utterly incapable of performing a spiritual act, he deems it "inconsistent" to exhort and call upon the unregenerate to repent and believe in order to their salvation. Since God be absolute sovereign, working in men both to will and to do of His good pleasure, bestowing or withholding as He pleases, he cannot see how that man is, at the same time, fully responsible for all his actions. Often he fails to perceive the connection which God has appointed between means and ends.

In like manner, since God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, to speak of an enjoying of His best (rather than His second or third best), and *missing* His best—strikes him as meaningless, if not erroneous, expressions. Before proceeding farther, let us explain what we intend by "enjoying God's best." We mean (as we wrote two years ago) for the saint to have daily communion with God, to walk in the light of His countenance, for His Word to be sweet unto our taste, light to our understanding, and strength to the inner man. It is for prayer to be a delight, for answers of peace to be received without intermission, for the channel of supplies to remain unchoked, open. It is to have the mind stayed upon Him, to have a conscience void of offence, to have full assurance of our acceptance in Christ. It is for our graces to be kept healthy and vigorous, so that faith, hope, love, meekness, patience, and zeal are in daily exercise. And such *should be* the experience of every Christian.

By God's "best," we mean a personal experience of His approbation, a manifest enjoyment of His favour in grace, in providence, and in nature. It is not to be limited unto the receiving of His special favours in a spiritual way, but includes as well His interpositions on our temporal behalf. It is to have the blessing of the Lord upon our lives, in all their varied aspects and relations, upon the soul and body alike. It is to enjoy the sense of His approval, and have Him showing Himself strong in our behalf. Though it does not mean that such a one will be exempted from the ordinary vicissitudes and trials of life, but rather that such will be sanctified unto him and result in increased blessing, for they not only make a way for God to put forth His power in delivering him from them or elevating his heart above them, but they also serve for the developing of his graces and provide opportunities for him to "glorify Him in the fire"; nevertheless, it *does* mean that such a one will escape those troubles and afflictions in which the follies of so many Christians involve them: it does mean that he will be immune from those sore chastisements which disobedience and a course of backsliding necessarily entail.

Before considering those just requirements of God which must be met, if we are to enjoy His best, let us point out that the particular aspects of truth which is here engaging our attention concerns not the divine decrees, but rather, the divine *government*: for the one consists solely for the exercise of God's sovereign will, whereas the other is concerned also with the discharge of our responsibility. In no sense whatever is there the slightest failure in God's accomplishment of His eternal purpose—either as a whole, or in any of

its parts. But in many respects, God's people fail to possess their possessions and enjoy those privileges and blessings to which the blood of Christ entitles them. This subject presents no difficulty to the writer, except the findings of suitable language to accurately express his thoughts; nor should it to the reader. The formation and the effectuation of God's eternal decrees are in no wise affected by man: he can neither delay nor hasten the same. But the present government of this world by God *is*, in large measure, affected and determined by the actions of men (His own people included), so that in this life, they are, to a very considerable extent, made to reap according as they sow—both in spirituals and in temporals.

It is not sufficiently realized that the Bible has far, very far, more to say about this *present life* than it has about the future one, that it makes known the secrets of temporal felicity, as well as everlasting bliss. Granted that the latter is of immeasurably more importance than the former, yet the one is the prelude to the other; and unless God be our satisfying portion here, He certainly will not be so hereafter. In their zeal to tell men how to escape from hell and make sure of heaven, many evangelical preachers have had all too little to say upon our conduct on earth; and consequently, many who entertain no doubts whatever that they will inhabit a mansion in the Father's house, are not nearly so much concerned about their present walk and warfare as they should be; and even though they reach their desired haven, such slackness results in great loss to them now, and will do so for ever. The teaching of Holy Writ is the very reverse of the plan followed by many an "orthodox pulpit": it not only gives much prominence to, but in Old and New Testament alike, its main emphasis is on our life in *this* world, giving instruction how we are to conduct ourselves here and now.

In like manner, there has been a grievous departure from the Analogy of Faith in the presentation of the attitude of God and His conduct towards men. Few indeed who have stressed the sovereignty of God have given even a proportionate place to His governmental dealings—either with nations or with individuals, the elect or the reprobate. Yet for every passage in His Word which speaks of God's eternal counsels, there are scores which describe His time dealings; and for every verse which alludes to God's secret or decretive will, there is a hundred which describe His revealed or preceptive will. Blessed indeed is it to ponder God's predestinating grace; equally important is it that we study those principles which regulate His providential dealings with us. The governmental ways of God—that is, His dealings with us in this life, both in our spiritual and temporal affairs—are determined by something more than an arbitrary sovereignty. God has established an inseparable connection between our conduct and its consequences, and He acts in such a way toward us as to make manifest the pleasure He takes in righteousness, and to give encouragement to those performing it; as He evidences His displeasure against the unrighteous and makes us to smart for the same.

It is a very great and serious mistake to conceive of the sovereignty of God as swallowing up all His perfections, and to attribute all His actions unto the mere exercise of His imperial will. Holy Writ does not; nor should we do so. Instead, much is said therein of God's acting both in mercy and righteousness, for *they* are the chief principles which regulate His governmental ways. It is true that mercy is shown by mere prerogative (Rom 9:18), but not so with righteousness. God can no more suspend the operation of His righteousness than He can cease to be. "For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness" (Psa 11:7); "The LORD is righteous in all his ways" (Psa 145:17); "Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne" (Psa 97:2). It was predicted of the Messiah that "righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins" (Isa 11:5); and we are told that since He loved righteousness and hated iniquity, "therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Psa 45:7). Alas that so many have completely lost the balance between God's sovereignty and God's righteousness. It is His *righteousness* which regulates all His dealings with the sons of men now, as it is "he [who] will judge the world in righteousness" (Act 17:31) in the Day to come. It is His righteousness which *requires* God to punish vice and reward virtue; and therefore, does He bless His obedient children and chasten His refractory ones.

The central thing which we wish to make clear in this article and to impress upon the reader is that God has established an inseparable connection between holiness and happiness, between our pleasing of Him and our enjoyment of His richest blessing; that since we are always the losers by sinning, so we are always the gainers by walking in the paths of righteousness; and that there will be an exact ratio between the measure in which we walk therein and our enjoyment of "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb 12:11). God has declared "them that honour me I will honour" (1Sa 2:30), and *that* expresses the general principle which we are here seeking to explain and illustrate—namely, that God's governmental dealings with us are regulated by our attitude toward Him and our conduct before Him: for in proportion as we honour the Lord,

so will He honour us. But suppose we fail to honour God, suppose we do not obtain from Him that grace which He is ever ready to give unto those who earnestly seek it in a right way—what then? Why, we shall not enter into His best for us; we shall miss it. For as the same verse goes on to tell us, “and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (1Sa 2:30).

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for *then* thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Jos 1:8). That expresses in plain and simple language the basis on which we may enter into and enjoy God’s best for us. The believer is not to be regulated by his own inclinations or lean unto his own understanding; he is not to be governed by any consideration of expediency or the pleasing of his fellows, but seek to please God in all things, being actuated by a “thus saith the LORD” in everything he does. Nothing less than full and constant obedience to God is what is required of him. However distasteful to the flesh, whatever sneers it may produce from professing Christians, the saint must rigidly and perpetually act by the rule that God has given him to walk by. In so doing, he will be immeasurably the gainer, for the path of *obedience* is the path of *prosperity*. Conformity unto the revealed will of God may indeed entail trial; nevertheless, it will be richly compensated in this life, both in spiritual and temporal bounties.

It cannot be too strongly insisted upon that the path of God’s precepts is the way of *blessing*. Though the treading thereof incurs the frowns of the profane world, and the criticism of not a few in the professing world, yet it ensures the smile and benediction of our Master! Those words, “for then thou shalt make thy way *prosperous*” (Jos 1:8), are from the mouth of “the God of truth” (Isa 65:16) and are to be received by us without the slightest quibbling, and treasured in our hearts. The “prosperity” does not always immediately appear, for faith has to be tried and patience developed; yet in the long run, it will most surely be found that in keeping the divine commandments, “there is great reward” (Psa 19:11). So Joshua found it: he adhered strictly to the divine Law, and God crowned his labours with success; and that, dear reader, is recorded for our encouragement. Yet if we would prosper as Joshua did, then we must act as he did! That conditional promise made to Joshua was very far from being a special one made to him only—rather does it belong equally to every servant and child of God, for His governmental ways have been the same in all dispensations. From the beginning of human history, it has always been true; and to the very end of history, it will continue so to be, that “no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psa 84:11).

Long before Joshua was born, Elihu had affirmed, “If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures” (Job 36:11); and centuries after Joshua’s death, the Holy Spirit declared through Zechariah, “Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper?” (2Ch 24:20). Nor is there any justification to insist that such statements pertained only to the Mosaic economy. If we unhesitatingly apply to our own day that precious word in Isaiah 1:18, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa 1:18), is it honest to refuse taking unto ourselves the very next verse, “If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land” (Isa 1:19)? The principles which regulate God’s providential dealings with His people are in no way altered by any change made in the outward form of His kingdom upon earth. The teaching of the New Testament is equally express: that “godliness is profitable unto *all* things, having promise of the life that *now is*, and of that which is to come” (1Ti 4:8); yet the fulfilment of that promise is conditional upon our keeping of the divine precepts, upon our personal piety.

There is a definite *proviso* on which we are warranted to hope for an enjoyment of God’s best. That was announced by Joshua and Caleb when they said unto Israel, “If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us” (Num 14:8). That term, “delight,” has no reference there unto that divine love unto the souls of believers which is the source of their salvation, but rather to His complacency in their character and conduct. So also is it to be understood in the words used by David when he was fleeing from the conspiracy of Absalom: “Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation: But if he thus say, I have *no delight* in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him” (2Sa 15:25-26). David certainly could not mean by that language, If God have no love for my soul, I am willing to be forever banished from Him; for such submission is required of none who lives under a dispensation of mercy. Rather did he signify, If God approve not of me as I am the head of His people, let Him take away my life if that so pleaseth Him.

As we must distinguish between the twofold “will,” the twofold “counsel,” and the twofold “pleasure” of God (see the “Prayers of the Apostles” article in this issue), so we must distinguish between His eternal love for and His present delight in us, between His acceptance of us in Christ and the acceptableness of our character and conduct unto Him—it is the *latter* which determines His governmental smile upon us. If any reader deems that distinction an artificial and forced one, then we ask him, Is no differentiation to be made between those words of Christ unto the Father, “Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (Joh 17:24) and His declaration, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life... This commandment have I received of my Father” (Joh 10:17-18)? Is not one of the Father’s love of Christ’s person, and the other His approbation of His obedience? So again, must we not avoid confounding “I have loved thee with an everlasting love” (Jer 31:3) and “For the Father himself loveth you, *because* ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God” (Joh 16:27)? Of Enoch, it is said, “before his translation, he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Heb 11:5); whereas of Israel in the wilderness, He declared, “I was grieved with that generation” (Heb 3:10)!

It must not be inferred from what has been said above that the one who walks in the paths of righteousness brings God into his debt or that he merits favour at His hands. Not so, for nothing that we can do profits *God* anything; and if we rendered perfect obedience unto His every precept, we had merely performed our duty and rendered unto God what is His rightful due. On the other hand, it is very plain that *we* profit from and are the gainers by our obedience. Scripture has not a little to say upon the subject of *rewards*. It goes so far as to teach that the joys of the future will bear a definite relation and proportion to our conduct in the present, such as obtains between sowing and reaping (Gal 6:7-8). If then the future rewarding of the saints according to their work (Rev 22:12) clashes neither with the grace of God nor the merit of Christ, then the *present* rewarding of them cannot do so, for no difference in place or condition can make any difference as to the nature of things. Deity does not hesitate to take as one of His titles, “the LORD God of recompences” (Jer 51:56), and many are the passages which show Him recompensing righteousness even in this world.

