

Scripture Truth



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Holy Splendour
Not male and female?

John and the Family of God
Suffering – The lessons of 1 Peter
The Flood and the Noahic covenant

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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Christ in the midst

We praise You, our God and our Father,
for favour abundantly shown
when those who belong to You gather
Your glory and grace to make known.

Though gift may be feeble and falt'ring,
and spirits by problems oppressed,
Christ's presence is everything-alt'ring,
and those who came burdened, leave blessed.

Your presence, O Lord, at our meeting
we crave, more than gift or man's skill:
without it the hour's self-defeating,
and hearts leave unsatisfied still.

You met us, Lord, while we were sinners,
that day when You died on the tree;
in faith we are utter beginners,
yet You meet with the two and the three.

We worship You, God and our Father,
made right by "the blood of Your Own";
no other resort would we rather
than where Christ lifts hearts to Your throne.

Holy Splendour

J.T.Mawson

I had been sighing over the dull, drab, ordinary sort of Christian living that seems to characterize the most of us who profess the Name of the Lord, and praying that there might be revived in our souls a holy enthusiasm for Him and His interests. But by what means could this be brought about? That was the question which exercised my mind through a somewhat sleepless night. I believe I got the answer to the question at the dawn, for just as the grey light of morning came softly stealing through my eastern window, Psalm 110 came with peculiar force to my mind. I had just at hand the *New Translation*, by J. N. Darby, and I found in verse 3 a description of the very condition of things for which I was longing.

“Thy people shall be willing [or, shall offer themselves willingly] in the day of thy power, in holy splendour: from the womb of the morning [shall come] to thee the dew of thy youth.”

This will be literally fulfilled in the day of the Lord’s millennial power, but it should have a not less blessed fulfilment in us who know the glory of the Lord now.

I had a spiritual vision of the saints of God, wholly separated unto the Lord, yielding themselves with a glad and willing obedience to Him and His cause, like an army, triumphant and well equipped, shouting its enthusiasm for its King. I saw the saints as a company of Nazarites, such as the Nazarites in Israel once were. “Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire” (Lamentations 4:7, KJV). This surely is the meaning of the words, “Thy people shall offer themselves willingly ... in holy splendour.”

True Nazariteship, true sanctification of body, soul, and spirit *unto the Lord*: this is holy splendour, the only splendid thing in the eyes of heaven in this tawdry and sordid world. It is this “holy splendour” that we must seek after. Nothing less than this will wholly please the Lord: without it we have left our

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first love, and we are neither cold nor hot (cp. Revelation 2:4; 3:15). The very thought of the possibility of it makes the heart glow, and quickens prayer that it might be so.

Holy splendour is the full and glad acknowledgement of the Lord's absolute right to possess us wholly.

Let us consider this “holy splendour”; it is not the doing of doughty deeds, the winning of wonderful victories over mighty foes. It may lead to that, surely, but it is the full and glad acknowledgement of the Lord’s absolute right to possess us wholly. It is that of which Paul speaks, “a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master’s use” (2 Timothy 2:21). When Mary in silence and self-forgetfulness poured her spikenard upon the feet of her Lord, it was holy splendour; when there was forced from the heart of Paul the cry, “The love of Christ constraineth us,” and, again, “for me to live is Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:14; Philippians 1:21), it was holy splendour. When any soul can truly sing,

“Thine, Jesus, Thine
for ever to recline
on love eternal, fixed and sure.
Yes, I am Thine, for evermore
Lord Jesus, I am Thine.”¹

that soul is coming to the Lord in holy splendour .

When Mary poured her spikenard upon the feet of her Lord, it was holy splendour.

But these who thus come to the Lord for His joy and use are “from the womb of the morning” (Psalm 110:3). They are children of the day, they do not belong to the night, therefore they are not to sleep as do others, but must watch and be sober (cp. 1 Thessalonians 5:5-6). They are like an army, alert, well disciplined, and watchful. And they are wonderfully accoutred, for the Scripture says, “Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation” (v.8). Behold this

¹ Albert Midlane, 1825-1909. The context of the entire hymn helps explain why Mawson cited it: see Hymnary.org. (Ed.)

army, standing ready for service or for the homecall, girt in these heavenly graces: as the light of heaven shines upon them do they not appear in holy splendour? This was my vision; this is the “army with banners” beautiful in the eyes of the Lord.

*Never yet did any soul become subject to the Lord
except as He became its sole Object.*

But how can this be not a vision merely, but a great spiritual reality? There is only one way. Never yet did any soul become *subject* to the Lord except as He became its sole *Object*. So our Psalm begins, “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” These are familiar words. They are quoted three times in the New Testament, plainly showing the immense importance of them. They were quoted by the Lord Himself to the Pharisees when in His patience with them He asked, “What think ye of Christ?” (Matthew 22:42-44). This declaration of the Eternal God plainly shows what HE thinks of Christ. Herein is found His answer to all the contempt and hatred that men heaped upon Him. It is God’s answer to the cross. The One who was thorn-crowned and crucified is now sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

*He is not only the Man,
infinitely delightful to God,
but He is Himself the Lord,
God and man in one Person.*

But there is more in it than that. It means that though He was despised and rejected of men, and though it is still the day of His reproach, He is yet to be triumphant over every foe. But there is more even than that, for He is addressed as “the Lord”. He is not only the Man, infinitely delightful to God, but He is Himself the Lord, God and man in one Person. Could we possibly consider Him coming

“... from Godhead’s fullest glory
down to Calvary’s depth of woe”,²

² Robert Robinson, 1735-90.

and going back again to the glory from whence He came – without being profoundly moved towards Him? His humiliation and suffering and death, His resurrection and ascension and glory – and the love that lay behind it all – claim us for Himself alone, and as we consider Him we shall most certainly desire to be “unto the Lord,” and so be true Nazarites (see Numbers 6). We shall willingly yield ourselves to Him “in holy splendour”!

But there is more. It is well to reach that point in our soul’s history when we make a definite decision to be wholly for the Lord; but to carry out that decision is utterly beyond us, if we have no strength but our own. And hence there is a wonderful provision for us. Read the 4th verse of our Psalm, “Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek” (Darby Trans.).

Have we considered our Lord in this character? It will be well worth our while to do so. He has become, through His suffering, the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). He can maintain us in the holy splendour of our willing obedience to Him. If we look to Him He becomes our strength in weakness, He can preserve our devotion to Himself, whiter than milk, purer than snow, more ruddy than rubies, and bright as the sapphires that shine in the city of God. When weary and like to faint in the conflict, He brings forth the bread and wine to refresh us as Melchisedek did for Abraham in the days of old. He can never fail, and we may rely upon Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy (cp. Jude 24). To Him be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

From *Scripture Truth*, vol. XIV (1922), pp. 169-170.

*If we look to Him
He becomes our strength in weakness,
He can preserve our devotion to Himself,
bright as the sapphires that shine in the city of God.*

Suffering

The lessons of 1 Peter

David Taylor

We speak often of the sufferings of Christ, but it is also very good for us to consider the subject of suffering in relation to ourselves. We all come up against it in our lives, either personally, or at very close hand. British people are reputed to deal with suffering with a “stiff upper lip”, but if you look at the Scriptures you meet a very different approach. We shall find, in the passages in 1 Peter that we shall consider, that the suffering is linked with glory. It is this particular link that I wish us to think about.

Every chapter of First Peter includes a section on suffering. The epistle seems to have been written to believers who had been scattered as a consequence of the persecution in Jerusalem (see Acts 8:1; 11:19). They were indeed strangers where they were now settled; however when they are addressed in 2:11 of the epistle as “strangers and sojourners” (Darby Trans.), this is because, as being in Christ, they were still absent from the “inheritance” reserved in heaven for them (1:4). In this epistle their sufferings are viewed from this perspective.

Words meaning “suffering” occur some 21 times in 1 Peter, and are found in every chapter – both the sufferings of Christ and sufferings afflicting believers. We cannot divorce our study of the suffering of believers in this epistle from the great matter of the suffering of Christ. In this epistle suffering *with* Christ is central. Christ suffered at the hand of God for us and our sins. We can never share in these sufferings. But the Lord also suffered at the hands of men on account of righteousness, and this we can share in (4:13). Yet here too there is a difference. 1 Peter 2:21 speaks of His “example, that ye should follow his steps” (KJV). Some translate, “... follow *in* his steps”. But this we can never do. What He felt, even in suffering at the hand of men, we can never feel. Nevertheless, we should seek to follow His steps when we suffer, and to imitate how He acted when suffering at the hands of men (v.23). Paul speaks of suffering with Him that we might be glorified with Him (Romans 8:17).

In every chapter we also find reference to the Appearing of Christ. Our suffering has always to be considered in the light of the glory that is in prospect – not just glory for us, but glory for the Lord. Finally, the will of God is also mentioned in four places in this epistle (2:15; 3:17; 4:2, 19). Our suffering looks very different when viewed from that perspective. Hudson Taylor was once asked, “What is your greatest mission in life?” His reply was, “Submission – to

*Our suffering has always to be considered
in the light of the glory that is in prospect.*

the will of God.” From this perspective, I think we will find suffering to be more of a blessing to us, rather than, as it has sometimes seemed from our own perspective, a frank nuisance.

The subject of suffering is obviously intensely personal to ourselves, and intensely practical. But whenever we study it we should also think of our prayer-responsibilities towards believers going through deepest distress. Do we remember our ill and bereaved brethren before the Lord? And how about persecuted brethren in many places abroad? There is a wind of change, too, blowing over our own land. The words of the hymn, “This world is a wilderness wide”, may have seemed a bit unreal to younger people in decades past; now the reality of them is being forced upon us.

Many brethren are “passing through the mill”. Neither the man of John 9 nor Lazarus in John 11 suffered because of personal sin, but that God might be glorified. Our consideration of sufferings should encourage us to realise that the consequences in our souls of sufferings gone through with Christ are things that He can bring forth in the day of glory. God never works in us to break us down, but rather to bring out our faith more brightly.

We find different aspects of suffering in each of the five chapters of Peter’s First Epistle. In 1:3-8 it is in relation to the trial of our faith; in 2:11-23 in relation to “conscience toward God” – especially due to unrighteous demands made in a workplace. 1 Peter 3:13-18 considers suffering “for righteousness’ sake”; whereas 4:12-16 considers suffering for the name of Christ. Finally, suffering in 1 Peter 5:8-11 comes from the attacks and tactics of the enemy – the devil himself.



Let us therefore firstly consider the lessons of 1 Peter 1:3-8. This passage tells us of an inheritance *reserved* for us in heaven. All our trials here are against the

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backdrop of “the glory ready to be revealed in the last time”; indeed Peter mentions the inheritance *before* he proceeds to strengthen them regarding their trials. But, meanwhile, we are preserved “by the power of God, through faith” (vv.5-6). The link between the sufferings and the glory is *faith*: suffering here is viewed as the trial of faith.

In later chapters of this epistle Peter will focus on suffering for Christ; but here his focus is somewhat wider; he writes of “manifold [or, “various”] trials” (see Darby Trans.). War and natural disasters, as well as illness, bereavement, and family sorrows, affect Christians alongside their neighbours, but they test the Christian regarding his or her faith. All the sufferings common to man (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:13) are designed in the Christian’s case to bring out the preciousness of what God has done in him. It is often said that the silver refiner refined it till he could see his own reflection in the metal. Christ refines us through suffering in order to be able to see in us the reflection of His own face. Suffering should never turn us away from God, but bring us *toward* Him. Satan *tempts* to destroy; God *tests* to bring out His own work in us.

Suffering can be a very lonely place. But David said, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me” (Psalm 23:4). Paul had the same experience (2 Timothy 4:16-17). Nothing eases suffering like knowing that the Lord has comforted us in it from His word. Suffering should lead us to prayer, and the Lord will often answer our prayers by His word.

Let us now turn to 1 Peter 2:11-23. We see here how suffering may come to us simply for living “as pilgrims and strangers”. We live in a world that is against God. And if we are faithful, we will suffer. I sometimes wonder (I write carefully), why we don’t suffer more than we do? When men saw the perfection that was in Christ, they hated Him for it. Are we like enough to our Lord to be hated for it? The persecution comes because we are Christians, and do not participate in the fleshly things that the world delights in (v.12). This is an acute issue, particularly for young Christians today. Our conduct should be both “honest” [i.e., honourable] and characterised by “good works”, so that “...whereas they speak against you...they may... glorify God in the day of

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visitation.” Note the timing: the full impact of our Christ-imitating conduct *now* will not be realised until the judgment day.

A particular sub-section (vv. 18ff) concerns servants (strictly, house-servants), and here Peter addresses the matter of suffering *in the workplace* on account of a Christian conscience (v.20). The boss may ask us to do things, or display attitudes, that are not in accord with God’s mind. Such suffering is acceptable, or commendable, to God; indeed, we were “called to it” (cp. v.21). We are called to great and glorious things, but we are called to this too. We can recollect the situation of the three Hebrew civil servants when commanded to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s image (Daniel 3:2-6).

On the other hand, there is a right way of confronting these difficulties. When Daniel and his three friends were required to eat food that doubtless had been offered to idols, they suggested an alternative diet (Daniel 1:12). They were not going to defile themselves, but they offered the chief eunuch an alternative – in the faith that it would “work”. There was a determination in their heart; but if they could get around the obstacle, they would.

It is particularly in *this* connection – workplace situations – that Peter adds, in v.21, “Christ also suffered for us, leaving an example...” From the way in which Christ suffered from the world while *resisting* it, we observe the character of God in both holiness and grace. “Who did no sin... when he suffered he threatened not...” (vv.22-23). Similarly with the servants whom Peter here addressed. If they followed Christ’s steps in the way they reacted to their unjust treatment for “doing well”, Christ would be seen. This is a deep lesson; indeed all suffering by believers is the opportunity for Christ to be seen. This is what is commendable to God (v.20).

We find a vivid example of this (albeit not in a “workplace situation”!) in Stephen’s prayer as the rocks were raining down upon him: “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:60). He was following his Lord’s steps.

When we turn, thirdly, to 1 Peter 3:13-18, we find the subject of suffering *for righteousness* (v.14). Often Christian employees suffer for not consenting to wrong, but in this section the suffering is for positively doing good. Witnessing at work is an example. A Christian nurse prays with a patient who has

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He was following his Lord’s steps.*

consented to it; others get wind of it, and she loses her job. Or in some countries even possessing a Bible can be an offence. Such “righteous acts” lead to interrogations, and such interrogations could be brutal in Peter’s time. Nevertheless believers were to be “ready to give an answer [as to the reason for their hope] *with meekness and fear*” (v.15, Darby Trans.). We are *not* to “trade insults”.

The key to right *action* in the first place, and also to right *reaction* to the objections of others, is found in the same verse, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts”. If we are doing this we will neither dishonour Him in what we do, nor in the way that we respond to objections and abuse. And a promise is concealed in this command. The words “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts” allude to Isaiah 8:13-14, where the LORD in effect says to Isaiah and his disciples, “If you sanctify me, I will be a sanctuary to you.” Christ Himself will be our hiding-place.

In this passage too – in relation to suffering for righteousness’ sake – Peter cites the example of the sufferings of Christ (3:18ff), as he had done already in relation to unjust treatment of servants in 2:18ff. “For Christ also suffered for sins” (3:18). These sufferings are certainly sufferings we can neither have part in, nor even enter into. Yet the fact is that *He, supremely, “suffered for righteousness”* when He suffered for sins. If we keep *that* fact before us, it will be a powerful lever to *our* “suffering for righteousness” in far smaller ways.

To turn now to the fourth passage – 1 Peter 4:12-16. This concerns suffering for the *name* of Christ, i.e., suffering as a *Christian* (vv. 14, 16). This is the spirit of the martyrs, both ancient and modern, who were and are willing to suffer for Christ, come what may. Christ Himself “witnessed a good confession” (1 Timothy 6:13) before Pilate. And in this sense, we can be “partakers of [His] sufferings” (1 Peter 4:13).

These various categories of suffering of course overlap. Explaining why we refuse to do wrong, or persist in doing right (2:20; 3:14), will involve the name of Christ, and this will be what people oppose. And when we confess His name we confess His Lordship, to which all authority in this world must take second place – even now (Acts 4:19). Confessing His name does something more as

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This involves being constantly self-controlled.*

well. We are also acknowledging Christ as King before the day of His manifest glory. We do it "...that, when his glory is revealed, [we] may be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:13). This thread runs through all the "sufferings" passages in this epistle. And yet something even more is also promised for *now*: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy [or, "blessed"] are ye, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you" (4:14). This was exemplified in Stephen (Acts 6:15; 7:55, 56).

Finally: 1 Peter 5:8-11 concerns suffering caused by the devil's attacks, for he is walking about "as a roaring lion... seeking whom he may devour". His great aims are to tempt us so that we dishonour the One who died for us, and to make us question our faith. Lions mainly roar to mark out their territory. Every time a sinner is saved the devil has lost territory, and he hates that, and roars. We are not alone in being attacked by the devil: it is happening throughout the world (v.9).

And we are not to flee the devil, but to resist him (v.9; cp. James 4:7). This involves being constantly self-controlled, and constantly watchful, lest we dishonour Christ; and being steadfast in the faith – in that which is revealed to us of Christ – so that the doubts the devil sows can be dismissed.

And Peter emphasises that we will not be long in the arena in which the devil can attack us (v.10). We will only "suffer a while". We are briefly exposed to him here for training, not for defeat, in order that we might be perfected, stablished, strengthened, settled for that day. This puts our sufferings here in perspective. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh in us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4: 17). Beyond the suffering-time, there is the scene of glory. In that day He is going to be "glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe" (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

From a Bible reading in Bradford led by David Taylor in October 2013. Many brothers also contributed.

*We are briefly exposed to the devil here for training,
not for defeat,
in order that we might be perfected for that day.*

Not male and female?

Galatians 3:28

Theo Balderston

This famous verse should be interpreted carefully.

“There is no Jew nor Greek; there is no bondman nor freeman; there is no male and female for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28, Darby Trans.).

This famous verse should be interpreted carefully. It is commonly interpreted as if it read, “There are both Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female.” But Paul didn’t write that. He wrote, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female...” (ESV).

Strange. For there certainly were Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, and men and women all around as Paul penned these words. Why deny it?

He denied it because he was writing about what makes it possible for us to inherit the blessings and promises spoken to Abraham (Galatians 3:8, 14, 29). We do not inherit them because we are Jew or Greek, bond or free, or even children of Adam (“male and female”), but because we are baptized into Christ (3:27). If we compare this phrase with Romans 6:3-6, penned by the same apostle, we realise that “being baptized into Christ” means being baptized to His *death*. The previous national identity of those who have been justified by faith in Christ has gone before God, their social status has gone, even their sex has gone despite this having been given by God Himself. Instead they have “put on Christ.” God sees them as “in” Christ *risen*. Therefore Galatians 3:28 does not simply mean that salvation crosses all

The previous identity of those who have been justified by faith in Christ has gone before God. God sees them as “in” Christ risen.

national, social, and gender boundaries. It means that we receive the blessings of Abraham only because God views us as He views His own Son according to His Manhood – as dead and risen in Him, and *outside* of all these “identity markers.”

This comes very clearly into view in the final negative: “...not male and female”. Paul certainly did *not* write, “both male and female”. He could, indeed, have written, “neither male *nor* female”, in parallel with what he had just written concerning Jew, Greek, slave, free. But in fact he went further: he wrote, “not male *and* female” (see translation above; KJV, NKJV, etc., are in error here). “Male and female” occurs also in Genesis 1:27 & 5:2 (and in the Lord’s allusion to 1:27 in Matt.19:4, etc.). By using this phrase Paul draws attention to the fact that the first creation was not complete without the complementarity of man and women (Genesis 2:18ff). But by writing “*not* male and female” Paul states that this male-and-female order is *revoked* in Christ. We come into a new-creation order (cp. Galatians 6:15), where we all only relate to each other as we are in relationship with Christ – and that is identical for all of us.

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this most radical of statements.*

However it is necessary to qualify this most radical of statements. We are in that new order, but the degree to which this fact can now be acted upon differs in each of these cases. As regards the Jew-gentile distinction, this has disappeared in all spheres of life during this gospel-day (but not for ever: see Galatians 6:16; Isaiah 49:23, etc.). As regards the slave-free distinction, however, this did still operate in the sphere of household and work (1 Timothy 6:2) – and in a broader sense believers might still be employees of those whose brothers or sisters they are in Christ. But what about the “not male and female”? It would be very wrong to disregard this distinction even in the sphere of Christian relationships. Paul directed Titus as to how he should instruct older men and women and younger men, *but not younger*

women; that task was delegated to the older women (Titus 2:2-6). On the day of our resurrection we shall solely relate to each other through our relationship with Christ, and then there indeed will be “not male and female”; but now our relationship in Christ is not the only thing that characterises our relationship with the opposite sex. A Christian husband does not relate to other Christian women at all as he relates to his wife, and a Christian married to an unbeliever is as much married as one married to a believer. The Christian man regards himself as one with all Christian women in Christ, but only *exceedingly circumspectly* does he act upon that fact. Similarly, Galatians 3:28 does not override what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 11:4, 5; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:8-13.

In short, we belong in two creations.

In short, we belong in two creations. We are still children of Adam: unless the Lord comes first we will all die. We have to honour God according to our relationship to Him as creatures of His first creation, even though our new creation also completely changes the relationships we had with everybody “according to the flesh” (2 Corinthians 5:16).

*It is extremely important
to have clarity on these points.*

It is extremely important to have clarity on these points – now, more than ever. Those “Christian feminists” who have used the “not male and female” clause in Galatians 3:28 to campaign against all they thought “patriarchal” in home, workplace, and church, are going to have to do a lot of “rowing back” if they are to take a stand against the threatening “transgender revolution”, which is designed to deny and defy the verities of our createdness. If “Christian feminists” do not take this stand, they deny God as Creator.

John and the Family of God

Part 2. John's Epistles

Brian Donaldson

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons [or, “children”] of God!” (1 John 3:1, KJV; Darby Trans.). To God, we are now “family” through the work on the cross of His beloved Son. What an amazing thought! It is perhaps nowhere more clearly worked out than in John’s Gospel, and particularly in his epistles.

In an earlier article we thought about the fact of “Family Relationship” within the very Godhead – a relationship of everlasting love between the Father and the Son (John 3:35; 14:31).¹ We also thought about how we are brought to enjoy eternal life through believing on the Son, and become “children of God” (John 1:12, Darby Trans.) – though, of course, “children” in a wholly distinct sense from the “Sonship” of the Son. The Son brings us to the Father. This is the foundation of the family of God. These are the most prominent truths in the Gospel of John. We finally noted, however, from the Lord’s own example on the cross (John 19:25-27), that earthly family relationships are not to be neglected just because we now belong to a greater, wonderful, divine family.

John also wrote three epistles which teach us much about “the family of God”. In his First Epistle he much emphasises the relationship of love that should bind the children of God to each other (2:7-11; 3:10-23; 4:7 – 5:3). He exemplifies this “family love” in often referring to his readers as his “little children” (see 2:1, 13, 18, 28, 3:7, 18, 4:4, 5:21) – a lovely touch showing how he viewed the believers as “family” for whom he had a heart of love in his pastoral care. As we seek to meet and work together in the Lord’s service, there will always be little things that arise, but if we seek to resolve these things in the same way as we do with members of our own families, how many difficulties we may avoid!

However John commences his First Epistle not with the theme of *love*, but with the theme of *light*. (This was also how he commenced his Gospel – 1:5, 9). The primary relationship of the “children” in the family of God is “with the Father and with His Son” (1 John 1:3), and if we do not “walk in the light” this relationship is spoiled (1:6). Therefore he instructs us that we are to “walk in the light”. John’s Gospel emphasises that those who have the Son have life

¹ See “John and the family of God, Pt. 1”, by the same writer, in *Scripture Truth*, October 2018, pp. 325-328.

John commences his First Epistle not with the theme of love, but with the theme of light.

(John 3:16, 36; cp. 1 John 5:12), but here in his First Epistle we now see that those with life have to walk in the *light*, not in the darkness.

John seems to emphasise that *how* we walk is a matter of *where* we walk. John talks in black and white terms, with no shades of grey. We live in a day where there seem to be shades of grey and uncertainty in everything and everywhere we look, but not with John. Our conduct should reflect the fact that we are people “in the light”. Many things in this world are darkness as far as God is concerned, and we should not walk in them. In fact John says that if we continue in darkness then we are liars and don't have the truth (1:6).

“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1:5). But we remain sadly capable of sin. 1 John 1:8 – 2:2 addresses this hard fact. How, then, are we going to remain “in the light” of such a God? Firstly John states that, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves”; equally, “If we say we have not sinned we make God a liar (1 John 1:8, 10) – for the epistle to the Romans clearly tells us that “all have sinned” (3:23). So although those who have accepted Christ as Saviour and Lord have been forgiven their sins past, present, and future, there still also needs to be an ever-present awareness of times when we fall into sin. But there has been provision made for this. We are told in 1 John 2:1 that “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” This simply means we have someone who acts and pleads for us in the presence of God the Father, One who Himself was “the propitiation for our sins”. He has done what no ordinary advocate could do. By shedding His blood on the cross, He, the “righteous” One, has made it possible for God to express what is in His heart towards us, namely, forgiveness. Therefore, “If we confess our sins [God] is faithful and just to forgive us” (see 1 John 1:9), and the relationship is restored. However, we have not to live carelessly, treating sin lightly on the grounds that confessed sin will be forgiven. Rather “he that saith he abideth in him, ought himself so to walk, even as he [i.e., the Lord Jesus Himself] walked” (1 John 2:6). In our earthly families, how happy it is when the children “behave themselves”. So it is in the divine family when we, as little children, “walk as He walked”.

Unconfessed and persistent sin will deaden our relationship with our Father in practical terms, and affect our relationships with each other. So will worldliness. John now moves on to this topic (2:13ff). He now divides his

*Unconfessed and persistent sin
will deaden our relationship with our Father.*

“children” (2:1) into three groups (v.13) and particularly addresses the “young men” on this subject (vv.14-17). Describing them as those who are “strong and have overcome the wicked one” (v.14), he tells them not to love the world nor the things in it. This, again, is a danger that the family of God needs to be very aware of: “the world” can easily ruin our Christian walk. John mentions three aspects of the world that first reared their heads in the garden of Eden, and have been wrecking lives ever since. They are “the lust of the flesh”, “the lust of the eyes”, and “the pride of life”. How often do things go wrong because we felt we wanted something, we saw something, and we felt that in some way we were entitled to it!

Sin that stops us from walking in the light, lack of love for one another, and worldliness – all three harm the family of God, as well as harming ourselves. So also do people who seek to spread wrong thoughts about Christ. John uses the strongest language possible to show how dangerous it is to deny the very basis of the faith, namely, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (1 John 2:22;23). Christ means “God’s anointed King”, and some false teachers in John’s time evidently denied that “the man that is called Jesus” (cp. John 9:11) was that King. John emphasises the wrongness of this by referring to these people as antichrists and liars (1 John 2:18, 22). How sad that in our day “Christ” has become a word of blasphemy! The most important, powerful name in all of creation, being taken blasphemously on the lips of those who will one day be subject to His righteous judgement, seems extraordinary.

Only very ignorant people will deny that “a man that is called Jesus” lived approximately two thousand years ago; and the teaching of a non-human “Christ” is rare or non-existent. However in various ways during the past century many who claim to be Christians have denied “the doctrine of Christ”

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(see 2 John 9), i.e. the truth about the Lord Jesus. John says that his “little children” should not be seduced by them. So, let us in our day have the same diligence to ensure we are not ensnared by those who still come and say the same untruths. It is interesting to note that this particular instruction is to the “little children” (1 John 2:18), but we all do well to be aware of it. This term for “little children” here seems to be different to the general term with which he refers to all those under his pastoral care, but the same as that in 2:13. Here we have more the thought of the youngest and most immature, spiritually speaking. How easy it is for those young in the faith to be misguided and turned aside!

As already said, in his second epistle John continues to emphasise the need to guard against those who do not abide in “the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9). It is interesting to notice that this letter is written to “the elect lady and her children” (v.1). Is this “lady” a person, or is John using the word “lady” to address an entire church? Various reasons have been put forward for both views, but it is not a matter of great importance, and it is perhaps simplest just to read it as a personal letter. Whichever is the case, the sentiment expressed by John is still powerful: he rejoiced greatly in the fact that “her children” were “walking in the truth”(v. 4). It should be the desire of each and every one of us who holds the truth of God, that our “children” – whether our natural children or younger believers under our care – be also found walking in the truth. This can only be achieved by two things, namely, teaching, and living out, the truth. So our responsibility is initially to our own children, then to the children of God in our local fellowship, then finally widening out to all the family of God.

In this short letter, John once again gives very straight and unequivocal instruction as to how we should deal with those who teach fundamentally wrong things about Christ. We are not to invite them into our house or bid them God's speed (v.10). This seems harsh language from someone with so much love in his heart and with a desire to encourage us in the family of God. It underlines the fundamental importance of holding the truth of all that John has brought to our attention so far. We have thought a lot about light, and life, and love, and now perhaps truth is more to the fore. It is clear from John's writings that all four of these things are vital if we are to have “full joy” – as he refers to it in 1 John 1:4. We need to ensure that all these things are held and demonstrated in equal measure.



John's third epistle is addressed to the well-beloved Gaius (3 John 1). What a wonderful way to address a brother in Christ! This is the love of the family of God. The Lord said when He was here that it would be by the way His people loved each other, that others would know that they were His disciples (see John 13:34-35). It is little surprise, therefore, that with this attitude it could be said that these early Christians "turned the world upside down" (see Acts 17:6). How much the world we live in now still needs this type of love to be shown! Like the "elect lady" of 2 John 1, Gaius also "walked in the truth", and John was much encouraged by this (3 John 3-4). Perhaps John wrote to Gaius because, if he had written his letter to the church as such, it might have been suppressed by Diotrephes (vv.9-10).

Diotrephes and Demetrius have similar-sounding names (vv.9-12). But they were completely opposite in their characters, and we should aim to be like one of them and avoid being like the other. Diotrephes was full of his own importance, and sought to lord it over the children of God. Demetrius, by contrast, was filled with the truth and had a good testimony from all people. Diotrephes discouraged the family of God by "casting out" "the brothers"; Demetrius encouraged the family of God by his godliness.

Do we hold the precious truths regarding the family of God that John has brought to our attention: that our "being family" flows from the eternal relationship of the Father and the Son, and from the Father giving His only Son to die for us; that we are to "walk in the light" in terms of our practical conduct in order not to impair our relationship with God; to "love one another"; to "love not the world"; and to reject the doctrines and persons of those that deny the vital truths concerning our Lord Jesus? Then surely our legacy will be that of Demetrius and not Diotrephes. We will encourage the family of God to operate as it ought to.

May the Lord help us to appreciate more the wonder of the fact that we have been brought into the family of God, and so enable us to be a blessing to our fellow members in His family.

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What a wonderful way to address a brother in Christ!

The Flood and the Noahic Covenant

F.B.Hole

Continuing a series on Genesis that commenced in July 2017.

How widespread was Noah's Flood? The fact that "all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered" (7:19, KJV) seems to indicate that it was universal. Moreover the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep (7:11) very possibly involved great changes on the surface of the earth: in other words, the configuration of continents, mountains, seas, etc., may have been very different before the Flood than after.

The flood waters that brought destruction upon the world of the ungodly also had the effect of lifting the ark up above the earth (Genesis 7:17). God's word as to the end of all flesh coming before Him (6:13) was fulfilled, for now all were either covered in the waters of judgment, or safe in the ark as it rode between the waters surging from beneath and descending from above. Noah and his family were out of sight in the ark; a figure of the new place which is ours in Christ Jesus, How thankful we should be that judgment fell, not upon us, but on our gracious Saviour!

The Scripture is also explicit as to the duration of the Flood ((7:11 – 8:14). The tremendous rain lasted for forty days and forty nights. The waters prevailed from the seventeenth day of the second month to the seventeenth day of the seventh month, when the ark grounded on the mountains of Ararat (Genesis 8:4). On the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains were seen, and on the first day of the first month of a new year the waters had vanished from the face of the earth (8:13). God remembered Noah and all that were alive with him in the ark, and He stopped the waters and sent the wind which commenced the process of drying up the waters (8:1). On the 27th day of the second month the earth was sufficiently dry for the occupants of the ark to go forth from it – one year and ten days after the onset of the Flood (8:14).

But before that happened, Noah did something to inform himself about conditions outside. He could not see anything through the only window – in the roof. So he sent out a raven, then a dove. The former feeds on carrion and other unclean things; the latter is a clean feeder. When first released there was plenty to attract the raven, but as yet nothing for the dove. On the first occasion Noah sent the dove out, she "found no rest for the sole of her foot" (8:9). As yet the whole scene was a waste of death and corruption. On the second occasion the dove returned with "an olive leaf plucked off" (v.11, KJV), i.e., not a leaf that had been drifting among the debris but plucked off a living tree. Here was the first evidence of life appearing above the waters of death.

Let us remember that fallen human nature feeds on what is unclean, as does the raven. Only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6), and therefore, like the dove, feeds only on what is clean. If we recognize this we shall be very careful as to that on which we feed our minds. It has been well said that for spiritual growth we must “starve the raven and feed the dove”.

Noah did not go forth from the ark until God told him to do so. He went out as he came in, under direct instruction from God (Genesis 7:1; 8:15-16). And now we discover why the clean animals were taken into the ark in sevens, but the unclean only in twos.

True, it is an unclean world still – alas! – and hence unclean animals easily thrive, so that one pair would suffice for them, as against three pairs of the clean. But why the odd one in the seven? Because one of each was to be offered in sacrifice as a burnt offering at the very start of the renewed earth (8:20). The LORD knew that the Flood had effected no change in human nature. Even in Noah and his family human nature was the same after the Flood as before it. Verse 21 emphasizes this; and hence from the outset the new world could only continue on the basis of sacrifice.

In this sacrifice of Noah’s we have the third type in Genesis of the death of Christ. The first type, in Genesis 3:21, set it forth as providing a covering for the guilty sinner. The second – Abel’s offering in 4:4 – set sacrifice forth as the basis of approach to God. Now we have it as presenting a “sweet savour,” or, [lit.] “a savour of rest” (8:21) to God – that in which He finds His rest and delight; and the excellence of this “sweet savour” provides for the offerer the ground of his acceptance. It is not difficult to discern an orderly progression in these three types. When awakened to our sinful state, the first thing we were conscious of needing was a covering – the root meaning of “atonement” – before the eye of a holy God. That was good, but we could not endure to be permanently at a distance. We must have a basis of approach to God – as Abel did. And even more than this; we must be in full acceptance to be thoroughly at rest there. If God finds “a savour of rest” in the death of Christ, we find there our rest too.

The promise which closes chapter 8 was based upon Noah’s sacrifice. God knew what man would again prove himself to be, but He guaranteed that there should be no further judgment of the sort just executed. The Flood had been of such magnitude that for just over a year seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and even day and night, had been obliterated. This was never to

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*The penalty of death for murder
was instituted by God Himself.*

occur again (v.22). Indeed verses 8-17 of chapter 9 show that God established a definite covenant to this effect, the token of which is the rainbow. This covenant, made with Noah and all creation, was unconditional. It was a covenant of promise, not depending on any faithfulness of the creature. It was something new. The words, “ I do set my bow in the cloud” (v.13) clearly imply that a rainbow had never before been seen by mankind, This would appear strongly to support the inference that until the time of the Flood no rain had fallen on the earth, but it had been watered by mist (cp. 2:5, 6).

On the basis of Noah’s sacrifice, too, Noah and his sons were blessed and made especially fruitful, so that mankind should multiply rapidly on the renewed earth; and their dominion over the beasts of the earth was emphasized (9:2). Moreover man was now given animal food for his sustenance as well as vegetable (v.3).

And, yet further, in the new regime the sanctity of human life was clearly stated in connection with a primitive form of government. Murder had filled the earth before the flood (4:23; 6:13), yet from the time of Cain any human vengeance had been forbidden (4:15). But now God would require the blood of man’s life at the hand of the slayer, and He would authorize mankind – Noah in particular, no doubt – to be the executor of His judgment (9:5-6). The penalty of death for murder was thus instituted by God Himself, and that from the very start of the postdiluvian age, and not merely as enacted in the law of Moses centuries later. It is of universal validity. Efforts recently made to overturn the Divine enactment are significant, especially if taken in connection with efforts to overturn other basic enactments as to marriage, parental responsibility, etc.¹ The end of the age is marching upon us.

From Noah’s three sons all mankind on the earth have sprung – as 9:18-19 emphasize. Nations have become a good deal intermingled, but the three strains – Semitic, Japhetic and Hamitic – can still be discerned. We may say then, that after the Flood mankind was given under Noah a fresh start. But, as under Adam so again, failure and sin rapidly supervened.

We have had abundant testimony to the fact that Noah was a godly man who found grace in the sight of the LORD, and he lived for no less than 350 years after the Flood (6:8; 9:28-29). Yet the one and only thing on record concerning him in all those years is that he planted a vineyard, made wine, was trapped into self-indulgence, and became unconscious in drunkenness! (9:20-21) The man most

¹ Words more prophetic than the writer could have imagined! [Ed.]

responsible now to control others lost control of himself. The age of patriarchal government broke down at the outset, even in the hands of a godly man.

This sad episode revealed the character of Ham, and apparently also of Canaan, the son of Ham. Shem and Japheth acted with due respect to Noah, both as their father, and as their ruler (in the new conditions) whereas this respect was absent with Ham (9:22-23). Disrespect of authority, whether parental or governmental – since both were originally instituted of God – is a very grave sin. It leads ultimately to the setting aside of the authority of God, who instituted it. It is only as we give these considerations due weight in our minds, that we see how justified was the solemn curse pronounced by Noah when he realised what had happened.

When we come, in verses 25-27, to this curse, we find it fell upon Canaan without any mention of Ham. This, we think, indicates two things. First, that Noah's sad lapse occurred some time after the flood; sufficient years having elapsed for Canaan to have been born and to be associated with his father in the matter of v.22, and for the curse to fall on him rather than his father. We must also bear in mind that in uttering it Noah spoke as a prophet, and the subsequent history of Canaan and his descendants fully justified his solemn words. The next chapter gives us the sons of Canaan, and their lands (10:15-19). Centuries later these nations had become so abominable in their gross sinfulness that God issued an edict of extermination against them, and sent Israel to inhabit their land (cp. Leviticus 18:28; Deuteronomy 9:5). Only Israel's failure saved the Canaanites from being completely wiped out.

Another descendant of Ham was the forceful Nimrod who founded a kingdom, the beginning of which was Babel (Genesis 10:8-11). This happened, we judge, before Noah's long life ended; and if any kingdom existed, it should have been his. The power that should have been vested in Noah was taken by Nimrod, and prostituted to the ends of serving himself and his own renown. With this there began the founding of cities to serve as centres of human influence. Nimrod's action, in short, represented the setting-aside of the primitive patriarchal government instituted of God, by brute-like, human force in self-aggrandisement. The results of this abide in the earth to this day.

From *Scripture Truth* 36 (1948-50), pp. 108-112, edited, abridged, and omitting some uncharacteristic, regrettable sentences.

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The Beatitudes

Part 2 Matthew 5:7 – 11

Theo Balderston

The beatitudes are probably the best-known sayings of Jesus, along with John 3:16. In fact among the wider public with some knowledge of Christianity they are probably better known. However John 3:16 was spoken to a sinner who needed to be born again – albeit a leading rabbi of his time – but the beatitudes were spoken to disciples who had quite recently left “home and toil and kindred” to follow Him (Matthew 4:20, 22). Others may have overheard the beatitudes (7:28-29), but they were addressed to disciples.

These disciples would certainly be aware of the Lord’s message, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (4:17, NKJV). Many commentators and preachers misunderstand the meaning of “at hand” in this declaration. It differs depending on whether the phrase is being used in a *spatial* or a *temporal* sense. If someone is “at hand” in a spatial sense, it is virtually the same as saying that they are present. But if someone is “at hand” in a temporal sense, it means that they are not present, though certainly coming very soon. This is the sense in which the Lord meant “at hand” in Matthew 4:17.

And the second, third, and fourth beatitudes imply that the kingdom was not present, though imminent. The answer to the “mourning” of the second beatitude – “They shall be comforted” lies in the future. “Meekness”, in the third beatitude, strongly alludes to Psalm 37:11, and indicates a submissiveness to circumstances which is motivated by patient waiting for the Lord’s intervention – that has not yet happened. The “hungering and thirsting after righteousness” in the fourth beatitude implies that the “righteousness” in question is not a present experience.¹

In these circumstances “meekness”, as just defined, could readily turn to apathy if not accompanied by “hungering and thirsting after righteousness”. But, in turn, that hungering and thirsting could well express itself very harshly if not accompanied by *mercy*. Some of the twelve had been Zealots (Luke 6:15); with such a background they needed the fourth beatitude to be tempered by both the third and the fifth. This brings us to the fifth beatitude.

Blessed are the merciful (Matthew 5:7). This is the first beatitude to focus on an action, rather than an inner disposition. The best aid to understanding “merciful” is its usage in Matthew’s Gospel itself. The appeal of the father of the troubled boy in Matthew 17:15 was for the Lord to show compassion, or pity.

¹ For a fuller treatment of the first four beatitudes, see *Scripture Truth*, October, 2018, pp. 329-335.

Matthew 9:13 indicates that the sense of undeserving can also be present in the verb. The two blind men of Matthew 9:27 recognised that One so great as the Son of David was under no obligation to heed their cries for healing, and so appealed to His quality of mercy. Similarly Bartimaeus and his companion (20:30f), and, to an even greater degree, the woman of Matthew 15:22. Matthew describes her ethnicity as Canaanite, emphasising that she belonged to a race that in the covenant had been divinely marked out for extinction (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:22-26). The unforgiving servant had had undeserved mercy shown to him but would not extend the same to his own debtor (Matthew 18:33).

When the kingdom comes in power righteousness will have a judgmental side to it (e.g. Isaiah 1:24-31; Amos 9:1-4), as the Lord Himself completely confirmed (Luke 19:27). Indeed this is an aspect that God may exercise even during this present age (Matthew 22:7). Judgment would be right in its place; *but it was not a character that the disciples were to display* (Luke 9:55). Those who will compose the kingdom must emulate the compassionate, merciful spirit in which the Lord Jesus Himself came abundantly at His first advent. True, he denounced the Pharisees (especially in Matthew 23), but His only judgmental *act* during His earthly life was accompanied by a remarkable act of mercy (Matthew 21:12-14). Paul regarded himself and his converts as those who had “obtained mercy” (Romans 11:30; 1 Corinthians 7:25; 2 Corinthians 4:1; 1 Timothy 1:13,16). How much the more fitting that we show mercy. This raises questions. Should a Christian be a judge? Yet many occupations have a quasi-judicial side to them; e.g., teaching. The Christian should always remember this beatitude. In private life it is often just at the time when we should be showing mercy that we feel most justified in not showing it.

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For they shall obtain mercy. A theme running through the OT is that Israel on the “last day” will need mercy. See especially Hosea 1:6-7; 2:23; 14:1-9; also Deuteronomy 32:36ff. The Lord instructs His disciples here to reflect now the quality that they themselves will rely on, on the last day (cp. 2 Timothy 1:18). What, then, about the unmerciful believer? The parable of the unjust steward has an uncompromising conclusion (Matthew 18:34). This is a question that runs right through the beatitudes and will be considered at the end.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (5:8). “The phrase “pure in heart” is identical in formation to “poor in spirit” in the first beatitude. Just as the phrase “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3) does not negate the bodily hunger of

those who followed the Lord (Luke 6:21), so, *in its context*, “pure in heart” did not negate the Law’s demand for outward purification. The adjective *katharos* (pure) appears very frequently in the Septuagint of Exodus (later chapters) and Leviticus. The Lord judged the hearts of the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 15:7-9; and in the denunciations of Matthew 23. The outside could not be clean if the inside was not clean (23:26). But of course, for those whom God sees as dead and risen with Christ, these bodily requirements have passed away (Colossians 2:20-22).

The obvious parallel to this sixth beatitude is Psalm 24:3-5, “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD, or who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart...” Yet Proverbs 20:9 asks, “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” In Jeremiah 17:9, the LORD says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?” On the other hand David wrote, “I shall behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psalm 17:15, RV), and “the upright shall behold his face” (Psalm 11:7).²

Various commentators tone down the pureness of heart required by this beatitude. One of them thinks that it implicitly contrasts pureness with duplicity of heart, and what it demands is the intention to be sincere. But in my view that lowers the standard: there can be much impurity of heart that is not intentionally deceitful.

This sixth beatitude is the last of five that address the inward attitude of the disciple (the others being the first four). One might wonder on the one hand why it is detached from the others; and on the other why it is not the final beatitude, since both the quality itself – pureness of heart – and the reward for it – seeing God – might seem to reach a peak beyond that reached by all the rest. A possible answer is that pureness of heart is a necessary corollary of showing mercy – the fifth beatitude. Without it, showing mercy in certain situations could readily degenerate into condoning wrongdoing. I should show mercy to a drug addict. But I should be careful never to drop into the line of thought that condones the abuse of the body, not to speak of the criminality, that drug-taking involves.

But another answer to the question why this sixth beatitude is not the last might be that the beatitude concerning peace-making comes seventh because the “happiness” that is its reward is even higher than the promise of seeing God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God (5:9). This is the second beatitude to focus on an action. The “happiness” promised peacemakers is that of partaking of the character of God Himself. In the idiom

² Though KJV, NKJV, REB translate, “His countenance shall behold the upright.” Text as in RV, NASB, ESV, NRSV.

The “happiness” promised peacemakers is that of partaking of the character of God Himself.

of the Hebrew Scriptures, “son of” frequently means, “possessing the same characteristics as.” But what exactly is meant by “peace-making”?

Reconciliation of warring kings was surely something out of the reach of the humble disciples, and the Lord who said that He had not been made an arbiter between a man and his brother (Luke 12:13-14) is unlikely to have been making the resolving of inter-personal disputes the highest duty of His followers (not but that, where we can do this, it is worth doing). Rather, the best hint as to the meaning of “peace-making” in this verse seem to come from Matthew 10:6-13, especially v.13. By preaching the kingdom the disciples would be proclaiming the amnesty of God towards His sinning people; they would be “preaching peace” (Isaiah 57:15-19). Taking the matter beyond what the disciples could have understood as they heard the beatitudes, evangelism is peace-making between sinful man, at enmity with God, and the God whose disposition of peace towards man has expressed itself in the cross (Colossians 1:20). The prophecy of the proclamation of peace in Isaiah 52:7 is followed by “the chastisement of our peace” in 53:5. Viewing the matter beyond the bounds of Israel, God was in Christ reconciling *the world* to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19-21). God in Christ is the great Peace-maker; evangelists reflect this wonderful characteristic of God Himself.

Seven would make a complete number of beatitudes, but there is an eighth. “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake*” (Matthew 5:10). The eighth beatitude comes back round to the first in the sense that both promise the same “happiness” – “Theirs is the kingdom of God” (Matthew 5:3, 10). But this time this “happiness” is promised on the basis of something done *to* the disciple – persecution. In this verse the persecution envisaged is for “*righteousness’ sake*”; in the next verse – which blesses the disciples anticipatively on account of the persecution that they will experience – their persecution is for *Jesus’ sake*. It seems that verse 10 considers a more general grounds of persecution than verse 11. The inference lies near at hand, that the disciple who practices the first seven beatitudes will meet up with persecution. There are of course many aspects to persecution for righteousness’ sake (see 1 Peter 2:19-21; 3:14), but this way of looking at it seems best to fit the context. “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

The promise in this eighth beatitude is for those who [lit.] “have been persecuted” – “practically, ‘those who bear the wounds of persecution’”. It contemplates its addressees as on the brink of the kingdom. In practice the

*All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus
will suffer persecution*

disciples did not suffer such persecution until after Pentecost. This beatitude must therefore look forward to that epoch when each day is lived on the brink of the kingdom, because its disciples “know not when the Master of the house is coming” (Mark 13:35). But it will also apply to yet another day, when there will be another martyr company, all of whom will also reign with Christ, and to whom this beatitude also applies (Revelation 20:4).

The Lord came into the circumstances of a broken covenant, in order to proclaim in grace a kingdom that Israel could enter simply by repentance (Matthew 4:17). Israel – as a nation – refused to enter – even after Pentecost (Acts 7:54ff), and God has been calling gentiles “to His own kingdom and glory” by the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:12). The beatitudes therefore address us. They set out the character of those who, through Christ, will reign in that kingdom (Matthew 5:3, 10; cp. Rev. 1:6); and this character is centred in the *heart*.

Before the cross the disciples embodied that character very patchily. Peter did mourn his own sin (Luke 5:8); similarly, surely, Matthew (Matthew 9:9-12). The disciples were enabled to show mercy as they evangelised (Mark 6:13). Yet they hardly exhibited poorness of spirit when quarrelling about who should be the greatest (Matthew 20:21; Luke 22:24). The “Boanerges” did not display meekness in relation to the Samaritan villagers, neither did the disciples in the garden (Mark 3:17; Luke 9:54; 22:38, 49; John 18:10). And Peter did not “learn himself” till the cross; nor, indeed, did the other disciples (Matthew 26:75; Mark 14:29-31, 50).

Once the Lord had died, risen, and ascended, and the Holy Spirit had been sent, it was different. The same Peter as had no doubt joined in the competition about who was the greatest, simply called himself a “fellow-elder” in 1 Peter 5:1. John learned not to call down fire from heaven, but quietly to remain as a brother of his addressees “in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:9). Yet we can be sure that in them, too, the flesh lusted against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17), and that there were times when they fell short of the beatitudes. So with ourselves. As a standard against which to measure ourselves, the beatitudes pinpoint our failures. But they express the character we have been promised as born-again believers. Someone who possesses none of the qualities in the beatitudes surely cannot (yet) be truly an heir of the kingdom. Let us, rather, by grace and prayer earnestly seek, day by day, the power to express them more fully. For the much that remains imperfect, we must rest on “the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1).

God, Israel, Idolatry and Christ

A Brief Exposition of Isaiah 40 to 57

by **Hamilton Smith**

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Written in 1941, but never before published in book form!

This volume consists of a verse-by-verse study of chapters 40 to 57 of the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah. Emphasis is placed on the dispensational approach to its interpretation, distinguishing prophecies as already fulfilled, or yet to be so. The focus of chapters 40 to 48 is seen as the issue of idolatry; and that of chapters 49 to 57 to be the coming of Jesus as the humble servant of God, to be followed by his future return to rule. Throughout the exposition valuable practical lessons are drawn for Christians today.

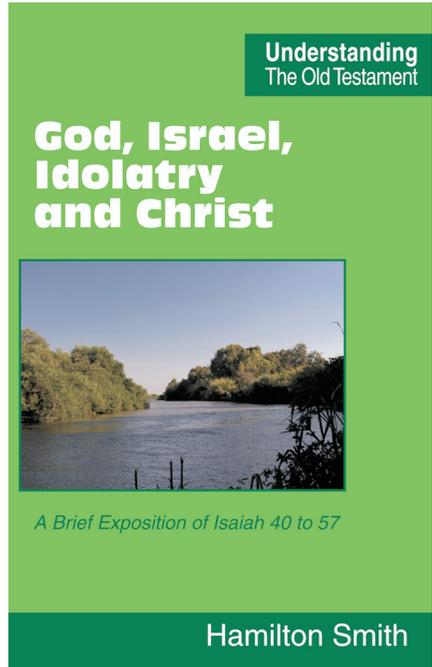
From the editor's foreword:

The year was 1941 and Hamilton Smith took up a consideration of the later chapters of the prophecy of Isaiah.

What light did the prophecy cast on the events taking place as he wrote? And what did the future hold? Europe was engulfed in war. Jews were suffering unprecedented persecution and they possessed no homeland.

Isaiah's message was a stern one: he conveyed the reasons for God's displeasure with Israel; and yet, beyond all the consequences of failure, the prospect of a regathered nation, safe in the homeland of God's provision, shone through, but only to be enjoyed when the Messiah comes to rule.

In preparing the text for publication some further scripture references have been added because not all today are as familiar with the Bible as Hamilton Smith's generation. The sources of general quotations have been identified where possible, and some contemporary anachronisms have been clarified for today's reader. Otherwise the text has not been changed.



Clothing

Of all the creatures God has made
there is but man alone
that stands in need to be arrayed
in coverings not his own.

By nature, bears, and bulls, and swine,
with fowls of every wing,
are much more warm, more safe, more fine,
than man, their fallen king.

Naked and weak, we want a screen,
but when with clothes we're decked,
not only lies our shame unseen,
but we command respect.

Rich garments must be worn to grace
the marriage of the Lamb;
not nasty rags to foul the place,
nor nakedness to shame.

Robes of imputed righteousness
will gain us God's esteem;
no naked pride, no fig-leaf dress,
how fair soe'er it seem.

A sinner clothed in this rich vest
and garments washed in blood
is rendered fit with Christ to feast,
and be the guest of God.

Joseph Hart (1712-68)