

Jericho and Achor — Privilege and Responsibility.

Joshua 6 — Joshua 7.

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Part 1

The christian reader will do well to turn, first of all, to the two chapters named above, and give them a careful reading. They furnish a very striking and impressive record of the double effect of God's presence with His people. In chapter 6 we are taught that the Divine Presence insured victory over the power of the enemy. In chapter 7 we learn that the Divine Presence demanded judgment upon evil in the bosom of the congregation. The ruins of Jericho demonstrate the one; the great heap of stones in the valley of Achor attests the other.

Now, these two things must never be separated. We see them vividly illustrated in every page of the history of God's people, both in the Old and in the New Testament. The self-same Presence that secures victory demands holiness. Let us never forget this. Yea, let us keep it ever in the remembrance of our hearts. It has an individual as well as a collective application. If we are to walk with God, or, rather, if He is to walk with us, we must judge and put away everything inconsistent with His holy presence. He cannot sanction unjudged evil in His people. He can pardon, heal, restore, and bless; but He is intolerant of evil. "*Our God is a consuming fire.*" "The time is come that judgment must *begin* at the house of God."

Should the thought of this discourage or depress any true-hearted child of God, or servant of Christ? Certainly not. It should neither discourage nor depress, but it should make us very watchful over our hearts, very careful as to our ways, our habits of thought and conversation. We have nothing to fear while God is with us, but He cannot possibly sanction evil in His people; and every true lover of holiness will heartily bless Him for this. Could we possibly desire it to be otherwise? Would we wish the standard of holiness to be lowered at all? God forbid.

All those who love His name can give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness, and rejoice in the truth that holiness becometh His house forever? "Be ye holy, for I am holy." It is not by any means on the pharisaic principle, wrapped up in the words, "Stand by thyself; I am holier than thou." Thank God, it is not this. It is not a question of what we are, but of what *He is*. Our character and conduct are to be formed by the truth of what God is. Marvellous grace! Precious privilege!

God must have His people like Himself. If they forget this, He will surely remind them of it. If He, in infinite grace, links His name and His glory with us, it behoves us to look well to our habits and ways, lest we bring any reproach on that name. Is this legal bondage? Nay, it is the holiest liberty. We may rest perfectly assured of this, that we are never further removed from legality than when treading that path of true holiness which becomes all those who bear the name of Christ. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

This great truth holds good at all times. We see it in the ruins of Jericho. We read it in the valley of Achor. What was it that caused the frowning walls and towering bulwarks of Jericho to fall down at the sound of rams' horns and the shout of the people? The presence of Jehovah. And it mattered not if it was but the city of Jericho or the whole land of Canaan, before that invincible Presence.

But what means the humiliating defeat before the insignificant city of Ai? How comes it to pass that the hosts of Israel, so recently triumphant at Jericho, have to flee ignominiously before a mere handful of men at Ai? Ah, the answer tells a sorrowful tale! Here it is; let us harken to it, and ponder it in the deepest depths of our heart. Let us seek to profit by it. Let us be solemnly warned by it. It has been written for our admonition. The Holy Ghost has taken the pains to record it for our learning. Woe be to the one who turns a deaf ear to the warning voice!

"But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against" — whom? Achan merely? or his household, or his family, or his tribe? Nay, but "against the children of Israel"! The whole assembly was involved in the evil. How was this? The Divine Presence imparted a unity to the whole assembly; it bound them all together in such a manner as to involve all in the sin of the one. It was one assembly, and hence it was impossible for any one to take independent ground. The sin of each was the sin of all, because God was in their midst, and He could not countenance unjudged evil. The whole congregation was involved, and had to clear itself of the evil ere Jehovah could lead it on to victory. Had He allowed them to triumph at Ai, it would have argued that He was indifferent to the sin of His people, and that He could give the sanction of His presence to "an accursed thing," which were simply blasphemy against His holy name.

"And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai" — more easily said than done — "and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few" — yet quite too many for Israel with an Achan in the camp. "So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men; and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water. "And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads."

Here was a strange and unlooked-for experience. "And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast Thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?"

Joshua, that beloved and honoured servant of God, did not see, did not understand, that it was the very glory of that "great name" which necessitated the defeat at Ai, just as it had achieved the victory at Jericho. But there were other elements in that glory besides power. There was holiness, and that holiness rendered it impossible for Him to lend the sanction of His presence where there was unjudged evil. Joshua should have concluded that there was something wrong in the condition of the people. He ought to have known that the hindrance was with Israel, and not with Jehovah. The same grace that had given them victory at Jericho would have given it at Ai, if things were right. But, alas, they were not right; and hence defeat, and not victory, was the order of the day. How could there be victory with an accursed thing in the camp? Impossible! Israel must judge the evil, or Jehovah must judge Israel. To have given them a victory at Ai would have been a reproach and a dishonour to the One whose name was called upon them. The Divine Presence absolutely demanded judgment upon the evil; and until that was executed, further progress in the conquest of Canaan was out of the question. "Be ye clean that

bear the vessels of the Lord." "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever."

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? *Israel hath sinned*" — not merely Achan — "and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. *Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies*, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you."

This is peculiarly solemn. The whole congregation is held responsible for the evil. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Unbelief may inquire how all are involved in the sin of one; but the Word of God definitely settles the question — "*Israel hath sinned*" — "*they have taken*" — "*they have stolen*" — "*they have dissembled.*" The assembly was one; one in privilege, one in responsibility. As such, the sin of one was the sin of all, and all were called upon to clear themselves thoroughly by putting away the accursed thing from among them. There was not a single member of the large congregation who was not affected by Achan's sin.

This may seem strange to mere nature, but such is the solemn and weighty truth of God. It was true in the assembly of Israel of old, and assuredly it is not less true in the Church of God now. No one could take independent ground in the assembly of Israel; how much less can he take it in the Church of God? There were over six hundred thousand people who, to speak after the manner of men, were wholly ignorant of what Achan had done; and yet God's word to Joshua was, "Israel hath sinned." All were involved; all were affected; and all had to clear themselves ere Jehovah could again lead them on to victory.

The presence of God in the midst of the assembly formed the unity of all; and the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church of God, the body of Christ now on the earth, binds all up in one divine, indissoluble unity. Hence, to talk of independency is to deny the very foundation-truth of the Church of God, and to prove beyond all question that we understand neither its nature nor its unity as set forth on the page of inspiration.

And if evil creeps into an assembly, how is it to be met? Here it is: "Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you." Were they one in privilege? Were they one in the enjoyment of the glory and strength which the Divine Presence secured? Were they one in the splendid triumph at Jericho? Who would deny all this? Who would wish to deny it? Why, then, seek to question their oneness in responsibility — their oneness in respect to the evil in their midst, and all its humbling consequences?

Surely, if there was unity in anything, there was unity in everything. If Jehovah was the God of Israel, He was the God of all, the God of each; and this grand and glorious fact was the solid basis both of their high privileges and their holy responsibilities. How could evil exist in such an assembly, and a single member be unaffected by it? How could there be an accursed thing in their very midst, and a single member not be defiled? Impossible. We may reason and argue about it until the tongue cleaves to the roof of the mouth, but all the reasoning and argument in the world cannot touch the truth of God, and that truth declares that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

But how is the evil to be discovered? The presence of God reveals it. The self-same power that had levelled the walls of Jericho, detected, revealed, and judged the sin of Achan. It was the double effect of the same blessed Presence, and Israel was called to share in the one as well as in the other. To

attempt to separate the two is folly, ignorance, or wickedness. It cannot be done, and ought not to be attempted.

Part 2

We must ever remember, that, in the history of God's ways with His people, privilege and responsibility are intimately bound up together. To talk of privilege, or think of enjoying it, while neglecting the responsibility, is a gross delusion. No true lover of holiness could think for a moment of separating them; nay, he must ever delight in strengthening and perpetuating the precious link.

Thus, for example, in Israel's case, who could estimate aright the high privilege of having Jehovah dwelling in their midst? By day and by night, there He was, to guide and guard, shield and shelter them; to meet their every need, to give them bread from heaven, and bring them forth water out of the rock. His presence was a safeguard against every foe; no weapon formed against them could prosper; not a dog might move his tongue against them; they were at once invulnerable and invincible; with God in their midst they had nothing whatever to fear. He charged Himself with all their wants, whether great or small. He looked after their garments, that they might not wax old; He looked after their feet, that they might not swell; He covered them with the shield of His favour, so that no arrow might touch them; He stood between them and every foe, and flung back in the enemy's face every accusation.

Thus much as to the high privilege. But mark the corresponding and connected responsibility. See how both are indissolubly bound up together in the following weighty words: "For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee: *therefore shall thy camp be holy; that He see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.*"

Precious privilege! Solemn responsibility! Who would dare to dissolve the hallowed connection? Had Jehovah deigned to come down into their midst, and walk with them, and tabernacle among them? Had He, in infinite grace, condescended to be their travelling companion? Was He there for the exigence of every hour? Yes, blessed be His name. If so, then what did His presence demand? We have seen something of what His presence *secured*; but what did it *demand*? Holiness!

Israel's whole conduct was to be regulated by the great fact of the Divine Presence in their midst. Not only their great public national institutions, but their most private habits, were to be brought under the controlling influence of Jehovah's presence with them. He regulated what they were to eat, what they were to wear, how they were to carry themselves in all the scenes, circumstances and relationships of daily life. By night and by day, sleeping and waking, sitting in the house or walking by the way, alone or in company, He looked after them. Nothing was to be allowed in any wise inconsistent with the holiness and purity which became the presence of the Holy One of Israel.

Was all this irksome? Were the privileges irksome? Was it irksome to be fed, clothed, guided, guarded, and cared for in every possible way? Was it irksome to repose beneath the overshadowing wings of the God of Israel? Surely not. Why, then, should it be irksome to keep their persons, their habits, and their dwellings clean? Must not every true heart, every upright mind, every tender conscience, accept as thoroughly the responsibility which the Divine Presence necessarily involves as the privileges which it infallibly secures? Yea, rather must we not rank the very responsibility itself among our richest and rarest privileges? Unquestionably. Every true lover of holiness will esteem it a signal mercy — a very high order of blessing — to walk in company with One whose presence detects and condemns every form of evil. "Thy testimonies are very sure; holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever."

The foregoing train of thought will enable us in some measure to understand the history of Achan, in Joshua 7 — a history solemn and impressive in the highest degree — a history which utters in our hearing, with deepest emphasis, words which our careless hearts are only too ready to forget, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." Had Achan remembered this, it would have taught him the holy necessity of nipping in the very bud the covetousness of his heart, and thus have spared the whole assembly the humiliating defeat at Ai, and all the consequent sorrow and discipline. How terrible to think of one man, for the sake of a little personal gain, which at best could last but for a moment, plunging a whole congregation into the deepest trouble! and, what was worse than all, dishonouring and grieving that blessed One who had deigned, in His infinite goodness, to take up His abode in their midst!

How well it would be if each one of us, when tempted to commit any secret sin, would just pause and ask himself the question, "How can I do this thing, and grieve the Holy Spirit of God who dwells in me, and bring leaven into the assembly of God's people?" We ought to remember that our private walk has a direct bearing upon all the members of the body. We are either helping or hindering the blessing of all. We are none of us independent atoms; we are members of a body incorporated by the presence of the Holy Ghost; and if we are walking in a loose, carnal, worldly, self-indulgent spirit, we are grieving the Spirit, and injuring all the members.

"But God hath tempered the body together . . . that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12: 24-26).

It may seem hard, to some, to grasp this great practical truth — hard to see how our private condition and conduct can affect our fellow-members; but the simple and obvious fact is, we must either admit this, or maintain the unscriptural and foolish notion that each Christian is an independent person, having no connection with the whole body of believers. If he be a member of a body, all the members of which are bound together, and linked with the Head by the personal indwelling of the Holy Ghost, then, verily, it follows that his walk and ways affect all his fellow-members just as really as, if any member of the human body suffers, all the other members feel it. If there is anything wrong with the hand, the foot feels it. How is this? Because the head feels it. The communication, in every instance, is with the head first, and from the head to the members.

Now, though Achan was not a member of a body, but merely of a congregation, yet we see how his private conduct affected the whole assembly. This is all the more striking, inasmuch as the great truth of the one body was not unfolded, and could not be until — redemption being a grand, accomplished fact — the Head took His seat on the throne of God, and sent down the Holy Ghost to form the body, and link it, by His personal presence and indwelling, to the Head in Heaven. If the secret sin of Achan affected every member of the congregation of Israel, how much more (may we not say?) doth the secret sin of any member of the body of Christ affect all the members thereof!

Let us never forget this weighty truth. May we keep it ever in the remembrance of our hearts, that so we may see the urgent need of a careful, tender, holy walk; that we may not dishonour our glorious Head, grieve the blessed indwelling Spirit, or injure the feeblest member of that body of which, by the sovereign grace of God and the precious blood of Christ, we form a part.

But we must call special attention to the way in which the sin of Achan was traced home to him. It is all most solemn. He had little idea whose eye was resting upon him when he was carrying on his secret wickedness. He would, no doubt, think himself all right, and very successful, when he had the

money and the garment safely hidden in his tent. Fatal, guilty, wretched treasure! Unhappy man! How dreadful is the love of money! How terrible is the blinding power of sin! It hardens the heart, deadens the conscience, darkens the understanding, ruins the soul, and in the case before us brought defeat and disaster upon the whole people of which he formed a part.

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" There is a time for lying on the face, and there is a time for standing on our feet; a time for devout prostration, and a time for decided action. The instructed soul will know the time for each.

"Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them; for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: *thou canst not stand before thine enemies*, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you."

How peculiarly solemn is all this! how very arresting! how soul-subduing! God's people — those who bear His name, and profess to hold His truth, who stand identified with Him in this world — must be holy. He cannot lend the sanction of His presence to that which is unholy or impure. Those who enjoy the high privilege of being associated with God are solemnly responsible to keep themselves unspotted from the world, else He must take down the rod of discipline and do His strange work in their midst. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord."

"Thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you. In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the Lord taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the Lord shall take shall come by households; and the household which the Lord shall take shall come man by man."

Ah, this was coming to close quarters! The sinner might seek to persuade himself that discovery was impossible; he might cherish the fond hope of escaping amid the many thousands of Israel. Miserable delusion! He might be sure his sin would find him out. The self-same Presence that secured individual blessing, secured with equal fidelity the detection of the most secret individual sin. Escape was impossible. If Jehovah was in the midst of His people to lay Jericho in ruins at their feet, He was there also to lay bare, in its deepest roots, the sin of the congregation, and to bring forth the sinner from his hiding-place to bear the penalty of his wickedness.

How searching are God's ways! First, the twelve tribes are summoned, that the transgressor might be manifested. Then, one tribe is fixed upon. Nearer still! the family is fixed upon! and yet nearer! the very household is actually singled out; and, last of all, "*man by man*"! Thus, out of six hundred thousand people, the all-searching eye of Jehovah reads the sinner through and through, and marks him off before the assembled thousands of Israel.

"And it shall be that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.

"So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: and he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: and he brought his household man by

man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken "

"Our God is a consuming fire." He cannot tolerate evil in the ways of His people. This accounts for the solemn scene before us. The natural mind may reason about all this — it may marvel why the taking of a little money and a garment from amid the spoils of a doomed city should involve such awful consequences and entail such a severe punishment. But the natural mind is incapable of understanding the ways of God.

And may we not ask the objector, How could God sanction evil in His people? How could He go on with it? What was to be done with it? If He was about to execute judgment upon the seven nations of Canaan, could He possibly be indifferent to sin in His people? Most assuredly not. His word is, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities." The very fact of His taking them into relationship with Himself was the ground of His dealing with them in holy discipline.

It is the height of folly for man to reason about the severity of divine judgment, or the apparent lack of proportion between the sin and the punishment. All such reasoning is false and impious. What was it that brought in all the misery, the sorrow, the desolation, the sickness, pain, and death — all the untold horrors of the last six thousand years? What was the source of it all? Just the one little act — as man would call it — of eating a bit of fruit? But this little act was that terrible thing called sin — yea, rebellion — against God!

And what was needed to atone for this? How was it to be met? What stands over against it as the only adequate expression of the judgment of a holy God? — What? The burning in the valley of Achor? Nay. The everlasting burnings of hell? Nay; something far deeper and more solemn still. What? The cross of the Son of God! The awful mystery of the death of Christ! — that terrible cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Let men remember this, and cease to reason.

Part 3

It is always well for the Christian to be able to give a calm and decided answer to the objection which infidelity is sure to offer to the actings of divine government. The answer is this: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" If the creature is to be allowed to judge the Creator, there is an end of all government in the vast universe of God. Hence, when we hear men daring to pronounce judgment upon the ways of God, and undertaking to decide what is or what is not fit for God to do, this grand preliminary question invariably suggests itself, "Who is to be judge?" Is man to judge God? or is God to judge man? If the former, there is no God at all; and if the latter, then man has to bow his head in reverent silence, and own his utter ignorance and folly.

The fact is, if man could fathom the government of God, he would no longer be man, but God. What contemptible folly, therefore, for a poor, shallow, ignorant, short-sighted mortal to attempt to pronounce an opinion upon the profound mysteries of divine government! His opinion is not only utterly worthless, but, in the judgment of every truly pious mind, positively impious and blasphemous — a daring insult offered to the throne, to the nature and to the character of God, for which he will, most assuredly, have to answer before the seat-seat of Christ, unless he repent and find pardon through the blood of the cross. The foregoing line of thought has suggested itself in connection with the solemn scene in the valley of Achor. The unbelieving mind may be disposed to start an objection on the ground of the apparent severity of the judgment; to institute a comparison between the offence and the punishment; to call in question the equity of Achan's children being involved in their father's sin.

To all this we simply reply, "Are we competent to judge?" If any one thinks he is, it is tantamount

to saying that God is not fit to govern the world, but should give place to man. This is the real root of the whole matter. Infidelity wants to get rid of God altogether, and set up man in His place. If God is to be God, then, most certainly, His ways, the actings of His government, the mysteries of His providence, His purposes, His counsels and His judgments must lie far beyond the range of the greatest human or angelic mind. Neither angel, man nor devil can comprehend Deity. Let men own this, and hush into eternal silence their puny, ignorant, and contemptible reasonings. Let them take up the language of Job when his eyes were opened: "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak: I will demand of Thee, and declare Thou unto Me. I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." When the soul gets into this attitude, there is an end of all infidel questions. Till then there is little use in discussion.

Let us now turn for a few moments to contemplate the solemn scene in the valley of Achor; and let us remember that "whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning." May we learn to watch with holy jealousy the incipient workings of evil in our hearts. It is on these men ought to sit in judgment, and not on the pure and perfect actings of divine government.

Joshua's address to Achan is solemn, weighty, and powerful: "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me."

Here is the all-important matter. "Give glory to Jehovah, God of Israel." All hinges upon this. The Lord's glory is the one perfect standard by which all is to be judged — the perfect gauge by which everything is to be measured — the perfect touchstone by which all is to be tried. The one great question for the people of God in all ages and in all dispensations is this: *What is suited to the glory of God?* In comparison with this, all other questions are less than secondary. It is not a question of what is suitable to us, or what we can tolerate or agree with. This is a very minor consideration indeed. What we have ever to look to, and think of, and provide for, is the glory of God. We have to ask ourselves the question, in reference to everything that comes before us, "Will this comport with the glory of God?" If not, let us, by His grace, fling it aside.

Well would it have been for Achan had he thought of this when his eye rested on the cursed treasure! What misery it would have saved him! What sorrow and trouble it would have saved his brethren! But, alas, people forget all this when lust dims the eye and vanity and folly possess the heart! and onward they go until the heavy judgment of a holy, sin-hating God overtakes them. And then, forsooth, men presume to comment upon such judgment as unworthy of a gracious and beneficent Being. Ignorant presumption! They would fain have a god of their own imagination, one like themselves, who can make light of sin and tolerate all sorts of evil. The God of the Bible, the God of Christianity, the God of the Cross, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, does not suit such infidel reasoners. Their deep heart-utterance to Him is, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."

"And Achan said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: when I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it."

Here the dark, defiling stream is traced up to its source in the heart of this unhappy man. Oh, how

little did he think whose eye was resting on him during the entire progress of this melancholy and disastrous affair! He thought of but one thing, namely, the gratification of his covetousness. He saw, he *coveted*, he *took*, he *hid*; and there, no doubt, he thought the matter would end. He would have his treasure, and no one would be the wiser.

But, ah, the eye of Jehovah, the God of Israel, was upon him — that holy eye, from which no secret thing is hidden, which penetrates the depths of the human heart and takes in at a glance all the hidden spring of human action. Yes, God saw it all, and He would make Israel see it, and Achan also. Hence the lamentable defeat at Ai, and all that followed.

How perfectly solemn! — the whole assembly involved in shameful defeat and disaster — Joshua and the elders of Israel with rent garments and dust upon their heads, prostrate on their faces from morning till evening! And then, the divine challenge and rebuke! the solemn muster of the hosts of Israel, tribe by tribe, family by family, household by household, man by man!

And why all this? Just to trace the evil to its source, bring it out, and have it judged in the sight of every creature. All created intelligence must be made to see and confess that the throne of God can have no fellowship with evil. The same power that had levelled the walls of Jericho, and executed judgment upon its guilty inhabitants, was to be manifested in detecting Achan's sin, and in evoking from the very depths of his convicted heart the confession of his terrible guilt. He in common with all his brethren, had heard Jehovah's solemn charge, "And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed when ye take of the accursed thing, and make" — not merely any one individual's tent, but — "*the camp of Israel* a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the Lord: they shall come into the treasury of the Lord."

All this was plain enough. No one could mistake it. It only needed an attentive ear and an obedient heart. It was as plain as the commandment delivered to Adam and Eve amid the bowers of Eden. But Achan, like Adam, transgressed the plain and positive command. Instead of hiding it in his heart, that he might not sin against God, he trampled it under his feet, that he might gratify his sinful desire. He fixed his covetous gaze upon the accursed thing, in itself nothing but a wretched pile of dust, but, through Satan's power and Achan's erring heart, turned into an occasion of sin, shame, and sorrow.

O how sad, how sorrowful, how terrible a thing it is to allow the poor heart to go after the wretched things of this world! What are they all worth? If we could have all the garments that were ever made in Babylon; all the gold and silver that ever issued from the mines of Peru, California, and Australia; all the pearls and diamonds that ever glittered on the kings, princes and nobles of this world — could they give us one hour's true happiness? Could they send a single ray of heavenly light into the soul? Could they impart to us one moment's pure, spiritual enjoyment? Not they. In themselves they are but perishable dust, and when used of Satan a positive curse, misery, and degradation. Not all the riches and material comforts which this world could offer are worth one hour's holy communion with our heavenly Father and our precious Saviour. Why should we covet this world's wretched wealth? Our God will supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Is not this enough? Why should we put ourselves within the range of Satan's power by setting our hearts upon the riches, honours, or pleasures, of a world which is ruled by the arch-enemy of God and of our souls? How well it would have been for Achan had he rested content with what the God of Israel had given him! How happy he might have been had he been satisfied with the furniture of his tent, the smile of Jehovah, and the answer of a good conscience!

But he was not; and hence the appalling scene in the valley of Achor, the record of which is

enough to strike terror into the stoutest heart. "So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the Lord. And Joshua, and *all Israel* with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day. And *all Israel* stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor (that is, trouble), unto this day" (Joshua 7: 19-26).

How deeply solemn is all this! What a warning note it sounds in our ears! Let us not attempt, under the false influence of one sided notions of grace, to turn aside the holy edge of such a passage of Scripture. Let us read with earnest attention the inscription on that awful monument in the valley of Achor. What is it? "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." And again, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy." And further, "Our God is a consuming fire."

Weighty, solemn, searching words these! — much needed, surely, in these days of flippant, easy-going profession, when the doctrines of grace are so much on our lips, but the fruits of righteousness so little seen in our lives. May we learn from them the urgent need of watchfulness over our hearts, and over our private life, that evil may be judged and nipped in the bud, so that it may not bring forth its sad, shameful and sorrowful fruit in our practical career, to the gross dishonour of the Lord and the grievous sorrow of those with whom we are linked in the bonds of fellowship.

Part 4

There is a very interesting allusion to "the valley of Achor" in Hosea 2 at which we may just glance in passing, though it does not connect itself with the special line of truth which we have had before us in this series of papers.

Jehovah, in speaking of Israel, by His prophet says: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and *the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there*, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" (ver. 14-15).

What touching grace shines in these words! "The valley of Achor" — the place of "trouble" — the place of deep sorrow and shame — the place of humiliation and judgment — the place where the fire of Jehovah's righteous wrath consumed the sin of His people — there shall be "a door of hope" for Israel by and by; there, too, she shall sing as in the days of her youth. How wonderful to hear of songs of praise in the valley of Achor! What glorious triumphs of grace! What a bright and blessed future for Israel!

"It shall be *at that day*, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi [my husband] and shalt call me no more Baali [my lord]. For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name *And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever*; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies: I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord."

From this digression to "the valley of Achor" in the future, we now return to our special theme; and in so doing we shall ask the reader to turn with us, for a few moments, to the opening chapters of

the Acts. Here we find the same grand results of the presence of God in the midst of His people as we have seen in the opening of the book of Joshua; only in a much more glorious manner, as we might expect.

On the day of Pentecost, God the Holy Ghost came down to form the assembly, and take up His abode therein. This great and glorious fact was grounded on the accomplishment of the work of atonement, as attested by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His glorification at the right hand of God.

We cannot attempt to unfold this truth in all its bearings in this brief article; we merely call the reader's attention to the two practical points which have been before us — namely, the privilege and responsibility connected with the Lord's presence in the midst of His people. If He was there to *bless* — as He most surely was — He was also, and quite as surely, there to *judge*. The two things go together, and we must not attempt to separate them.

And first, then, we see the effect and blessings of the Divine Presence in the assembly: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need." The blessed effect of the realized presence of the Holy Ghost was to bind their hearts together in a holy and loving fellowship; to cause them to let go earthly things, and to lead them to merge their personal interests in the common good.

Precious fruits! Would that we saw more of them! No doubt times are changed; but God is not changed, and the effect of His realized presence is not changed. True, we are not in Acts 2. Pentecostal times are passed away; Christendom has lapsed in complete failure; the professing Church has hopelessly fallen. All this is sadly true; but Christ our Head abides in all His living power and unchangeable grace. "The foundation of God standeth sure" — as sure, as safe and as solid to-day as it was on the day of Pentecost. No change here, blessed be God; hence we may say, with all possible confidence, that where His presence is realized, even though it be only by "two or three" gathered to the name of Jesus, there the same lovely fruits will be found. Hearts will be knit together; earthly things will be surrendered; personal interests will be merged. It is not a question of throwing our goods into a common heap, but of the grace which once took that special form, and which at all times would lead us, not merely to surrender our possessions, but ourselves, for the good of others.

It is a very grave mistake indeed for any one to say, or to think, that because we are not in Pentecostal times we cannot count on the presence of God with us in the path of holy obedience to His will. Such a thought should be judged as sheer unbelief. We are certainly shorn of many of the Pentecostal gifts, but we are not bereft of the Giver. The blessed Comforter abides with us; and it is our happy privilege to be in a position in which we can enjoy His presence and ministry.

The thing is *to be* in that position; not merely to *say* we are in it, to boast of being in it, but *really* to be in it. We may well apply here the pointed question of the blessed apostle, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say" he is on divine ground, if he be not really there? Assuredly it profits nothing.

But let us not forget that although we are not in Acts 2, but in the Second Epistle to Timothy; although we are not in the refreshing scenes of Pentecost, but in the "perilous times" of "the last days," yet the Lord is with those "who call on Him out of a pure heart," and His presence is all we want. Let us only trust Him, use Him, lean upon Him. Let us see to it that we are in a position in which we can count on His presence — a position of entire separation from all that He judges to be "iniquity" — from the "dishonourable vessels" in "the great house," and from all those who, having a form of godliness, deny the power thereof.

These, we may rest assured, are the absolutely essential conditions on which the Divine Presence can be realized by any company of Christians. We may come together, and form ourselves into an assembly; we may profess to be on divine ground; we may call ourselves the assembly of God; we may appropriate to ourselves all those passages of Scripture which only apply to those who are really gathered by the Holy Ghost in the name of Jesus; but if the essential conditions are not there; if we are not "calling on the Lord out of a pure heart"; if we are mixed up with "iniquity"; if we are associated with "dishonourable vessels"; if we are walking hand in hand with lifeless professors who deny in practice the power of godliness — what then? Can we expect to realize the Lord's presence? As well might Israel have expected it with Achan in the camp. It cannot be. In order to reach divine results, there must be divine conditions. To look for the former without the latter is vanity, folly, and wicked presumption.

We are not now treating, or even touching, the great question of the soul's salvation. This, precious and important as it is to all whom it may concern, is not at all our subject in this series of papers on "Jericho and Achor." We are dealing with the solemn and weighty question of the privilege and responsibility of those who profess to be the Lord's people, gathered to His name; and we are specially anxious to impress upon the mind of the reader that, notwithstanding the hopeless ruin of the professing Church, its utter failure in its responsibility to Christ as His witness and light-bearer in the world, yet it is the happy privilege of "two or three" to be gathered in His name, apart from all the evil and error around, owning our common sin and failure, feeling our weakness, and looking to Him to be with us and bless us according to the unchangeable love of His heart.

Now, to those thus gathered, there is no limit whatever to the measure of blessing which our ever gracious and faithful Lord can bestow. "He has the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars" — the fullness of spiritual power, ministerial gift and authority for His Church. Such is His style and title in addressing the church at Sardis, which, we believe, prophetically sets before us the history of Protestantism.

It is not said, as in the address to Ephesus, that He "holds the seven stars in His right hand." There is a grave difference as to this; and it is our bounden duty to recognize both the difference and the cause. When the Church began, on the day of Pentecost, and during the days of the apostles, Christ, the Head, not only *possessed* all spiritual gift, power and authority for His Church, but was owned as the *actual administrator* thereof. He held the stars in His right hand. There was no such thing known or thought of as human authority in the assembly of God. Christ was owned as Head and Lord. He had received the gifts, and He dispensed them according to His sovereign will.

Thus it should ever be. But, alas, man has intruded upon the hallowed sphere of Christ's authority. He presumes to meddle in the appointment of ministry in the Church of God. Without so much as a single atom of divine authority, without any ability whatsoever to impart the necessary gift for ministry, he nevertheless takes upon himself the solemn responsibility of calling, appointing, or ordaining to the ministry in the Church of God. As well might the writer of these lines undertake to appoint a man as an admiral in Her Majesty's fleet, or a general in her army, as for any man, or body of men, to appoint a man to minister in the Church of God. It is a daring usurpation of divine authority. None can impart ministerial gift, and none can appoint to any branch of the ministry but Christ, the Church's Head and Lord; and all who undertake to do so will have to account to Him for so doing.

It may be that many who thus act, and many more who sanction or are identified with such acting, are not aware of what they are doing; and our God is gracious and merciful in bearing with our feebleness and ignorance. All this is blessedly true; but as to the principle of human authority in the

Church of God, it is utterly false, and should be rejected with holy decision by every one who loves, reverences and adores the great Head of the Church and Lord of the assembly, who, blessed be His name, still has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. He has them now just as positively as in apostolic times; and all who take their true place, the place of self-judgment and humiliation; all who are truly own our common sin and failure, our departure from first love, first principles; all who really, in true humility of mind, look to Christ alone for all they want; all who, in real earnestness of heart and godly sincerity, bow to His Word and confess His name — all such will assuredly prove the reality of His presence; they will find Him amply sufficient for all their need. They can count on Him for the supply of all ministerial gift, and for the maintenance of all godly order in their public reunions.

True, they will feel — must feel — that they are not in the days of Acts 2, but in the days of 2 Timothy. Yet Christ is sufficient for these, as He was for those. The difficulties are great, but His resources are infinite. It were folly to deny that there are difficulties; but it is sinful unbelief to question the all-sufficiency of our ever-gracious and faithful Lord. He has promised to be with His people right on to the end. But He cannot sanction hollow pretension, or proud assumption. He looks for reality, for truth in the inward parts. He will have us in our right place, owning our true condition. There He can meet us according to His infinite fullness, and according to the eternal stability of that grace which reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

But oh, let us never forget that our God delights in uprightness of heart and integrity of purpose. He will never fail a trusting heart; but He must be trusted really. It will not do to speak of trusting Him while in reality we are leaning on our own appliances and arrangements. Here is precisely where we so sadly fail. We do not leave room for Him to act in our midst. We do not leave the platform clear for Him. Thus we are robbed and that to an extent of which we have little idea, of the blessed manifestation of His presence and grace in our assemblies. His Spirit is quenched and hindered, and we are left to feel our barrenness and poverty, when we might be rejoicing in the fullness of His love and in the power of His ministry. It is utterly impossible that He can ever fail those who, owning the truth of the condition earnestly look to Him. He cannot deny Himself; and He can never say to His people that they have reckoned too largely on Him.

It is not that we are to look for any special display of power in our midst, anything that might attract public attention, or make a noise in the world. There are no tongues, no gifts of healing, no miracles, no extraordinary manifestations of angelic action on our behalf. Neither are we to look for anything similar to the case of Ananias and Sapphira — the sudden and awful execution of divine judgment, striking terror into the hearts of all, both inside and outside the assembly.

Such things are not to be looked for now. They would not comport with the present condition of things in the Church of God. No doubt our Lord Christ has all power in Heaven and on earth, and He could display that power now just as He did in Pentecostal times, if it so pleased Him.

But He does not so act, and we can readily understand the reason. It is our place to walk softly, humbly, tenderly. We have sinned, and failed, and departed from the holy authority of the Word of God. We must ever bear this in mind, and be content with a very low and retired place. It would ill become us to seek a name or a position in the earth. We cannot possibly be too little in our own eyes.

But at the same time we can, if in our right place, and in a right spirit, fully count on the presence of Jesus with us; and we may rest assured that where He is — where His most gracious presence is felt — there we may look for the most precious results, both in the way of binding our hearts together in true brotherly love, in causing us to sit loose to all earthly possessions and earthly ties, in leading us forth in grace and kindness toward all men, and also in putting away from among us all who would

defile the assembly by unsound doctrine or unholy morals.

P.S. — It is of the utmost importance for the Christian reader to bear in mind that, whatever be the condition of the professing Church, it is his privilege to enjoy as high communion and to tread as high a path of individual devotedness as ever was known in the very brightest days of the Church's history. We must never draw a plea from the condition of things around us for lowering the standard of individual holiness and devotedness. *There is no excuse for continuing a single hour in connection with anything that will not stand the test of Holy Scripture.*

True, we feel the condition of things — cannot but feel it: would we felt it more! But it is one thing to feel it, and go through it with Christ, and another thing to sink under it and go on with the evil, and give up in despair.

May the Lord, in His infinite grace, produce in the hearts of all His people a more profound and influential sense of their privileges and responsibilities, both individually and collectively, that thus there may be a truer and brighter testimony for His name, and a devoted band of worshipers, workers and witnesses gathered out to wait for His coming!